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From My Garden by H.E. Bates

A friend of mine gaily conceived the notion of going on a sort of 'Grand Tour' of some of the more renowned gardens of Britain, thus hoping to derive for himself no little pleasure, some knowledge and even inspiration. Alas for his aspirations! He returned home much depressed, convinced as he looked at his own garden (by no means small or modest as it is) that there was nothing for it but, in his own words, 'to dig the whole blooming thing up and start again.'

I, on the other hand, constantly derive much pleasure and profit from looking at gardens that blossom under more favourable conditions, both financial and otherwise, than my own. I never fail to extract pleasure and knowledge from, for instance, Mr Christopher Lloyd's garden at Northiam, in Sussex, where his splendid shrub-herbaceous border is a model of its kind. And I get nothing but delight from the garden lovingly made, many years since, by Captain Collingwood Ingram at Benenden in Kent, where there is a really choice display of shrubs, foremost among them many rhododendrons and azalea hybrids, most of them of the owner's raising. The same is true of Mr Maurice Mason's garden near King's Lynn, a truly noble 30 acres giving a home to thousands and thousands of plants collected from all over the world, from Japan to Guatemala, New Zealand to the Andes, Persia to the Himalayas and from among the cannibals of New Guinea. It is Mr Mason's proud boast that he has never either bought a plant or sold one; though I would be prepared to bet that, like Captain Ingram, he had had a good many pinched from him by predatory visitors.

Orchids are Mr Mason's great speciality and of these he has some 4,500 species; he also has some 2,500 bromeliads and an uncountable number of sub-tropical and tropical climbers. As if all this were not enough he has a vast collection of orchid hybrids, doubtless the largest in this country, and another 7,000 species of all kinds in his garden outside. A great many of these things he has collected on long and hazardous expeditions of his own, and one of his many distinctive feats was to discover that the kind of *Begonia Rex*, most unfortunately named Iron Cross (if ever you heard of a grimmer name for a plant), was not in fact a hybrid, as had always been supposed, but a species from Singapore. It is known now, thank heaven, by the infinitely nicer and more appropriate name of *Begonia Masoniana*.

That this country is prodigiously rich in great private gardens, from Bodnant in North Wales to Stourhead in the West Country, and in points north, south, east and west, is evident to anyone who travels more or less extensively about it. But we are also blessed with great gardens and estates that are truly ours, the property of the people and the State. If you have never been to the Forestry Commission's Pinetum, also near Benenden in Kent, then you have an arboricultural treat in store. It has a richer sister of more varied character at Weston Birt in Gloucestershire, where the crowning glories come from the remarkable collection of maples, which burn like Indian encampment fires through

Our favourite novelist talks about some of the gardens he has visited



Not My Garden This Time!

I have constantly wondered why. I am now assured on some authority that this middle section of Maggiore is not only of very great depth but is also warmed by a kind of miniature gulf stream. This story may be apocryphal, but, if true, it might well account for the almost sub-tropical air of the site on which Villa Taranto stands.

It is certain that this air has had a consistent appeal for those seeking a milder climate ever since Roman times and it is equally certain that the gardens of Villa Taranto reflect that air in their luxurious grandeur. Magnolia, rhododendrons, azaleas, wisteria, roses, dogwoods (the loveliest of them, *Cornus florida rubra*, is a celestial sight in spring, when the gardens also display no less than four million tulips)—are of supreme loveliness. Yet the garden, which now belongs to the Italian Government, was first created only in 1932 by a Scotsman, out of what was virtually scrub wasteland. It is, I think, open every day but spring is surely its best time, when one shrub alone (and there are thousands of them), *Acer japonicum purpurci*, is worth the visit.

Also created by a Scotsman, William Reid, is the botanical garden on the island of Madeira. Standing high above the town and harbour it commands a great view of the South Atlantic and within its own confines is rich with things temperate, tropical and sub-tropical, as only Madeira can be. Slightly higher up the mountain side stands the wholly enviable Quinta Palheiro, where the spring mimosas are as tall as oaks and where again one shrub alone, the gloriously scented *Michaelia doltsopa*, like a floppy white magnolia—a family to which in fact it is related—is worth a visit. Save your pennies, win the pools, rob a bank or something and go and see it for yourself. □□

Readers who are interested in visiting gardens can refer to Gardens of England and Wales. At booksellers, 3s, or by post, 4s, from The National Gardens Scheme, 57 Lower Belgrave Street, London SW1.

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