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MR. F. KINGDON WARD is a collector; but with a difference. There are collectors whose acquisitions mean nothing at all, either in value or interest, to the rest of the world, but of Mr. Kingdon Ward it may be truthfully said that he is, even though in a limited way, a benefactor of mankind.

For twelve years Mr. Kingdon Ward has collected plants. Quietly, and without any of that journalistic trumpeting which heralds ocean flights, he has penetrated into the wilder parts of China, Tibet, Assam, Burma and Indo-China, often at great risk, simply in order to observe, record and collect plants of which there were no specimens in cultivation.

As a result of that work he has introduced into cultivation about 500 plants, of which, according to himself, one has achieved any fame at all—the so-called Tibetan blue poppy, *meconopsis Baileyi*; though at least two others, *Gentiana Sino-ornata*, the lovely autumn gentian, and *Primula Florindae*, the yellow bog-primula, have achieved something more than an academic reputation.

All these expeditions have been confined to what is, botanically, a small corner of the world. For there are no fewer than 200,000 species of flowering plants known in the world today, and of that number 60,000 are native to South America alone. Thus, though Mr. Kingdon Ward is a specialist, it is evident that he could not well be otherwise.

And in *THE ROMANCE OF GARDENING* (London: Cape. 7s. 6d.) he explains why he is a specialist and how he specializes. Not that his book belongs to that category of specialist horticultural literature in which "chrysanthemums may now be stopped back to the third bud." He does not retail advice, knowing that plants in cultivation are more fickle than the English climate itself; and he never overrides us with knowledge, though his knowledge of rare plants must be as great as that of any collector alive. He is, moreover, a very provocative writer, and at times a very bad one, shooting out his words like a clumsy literary blunderbuss as he aims criticisms at preservation societies, flower shows, hybridizers and whatever horticultural institutions or men seem to him to deserve a critical peppering.

He writes not only of many thrilling and fascinating searches for rare plants on the edge of the world, but of English gardens also, and of unexotic, back-garden but everlastingly lovely, plants, such as primroses and snowdrops and marigolds and daffodils, which will go on giving joy to gardeners long after his own Himalayan notholirions and aeschynanthus and paphiopedilums have ended their uncertain existence here. He is a specialist, but he is also catholic. He hunts rarities, but he is not above humble things. He records the collection of new plants, banana-yellow rhododendrons, moonstone galtherias, exquisite new asters and gentians and lilies, the mere account of which will give every ambitious gardener a heartache of longing. Finally, he has included in his book sixteen illustrations of flowers which most of us may never see, growing naturally in places which most of us can never visit—provocative glimpses of a remote and, but for him and his fellow explorers, an inaccessible and incredible world.

H. E. BATES