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# Books of the Day

## Anglicus to Aspidistra

By H. E. BATES

THE history of gardening books is long. If the translation of *Liber de proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomaeus Anglicus which appeared in English c. 1495 is considered as the first English printed book containing definite botanical information, then the length of this rich and fascinating side-stream of literature, which has never yet dried up, is four centuries and a half. If European literature is for a moment taken into account, then the great *Herbarius zu Teutsch* lengthens it by ten years, having been published in Mainz in 1485. Both this book and the *Latin Herbarius*, which preceded it by a year, were, though not strictly gardening books, illustrated by woodcuts depicting flowers with rare charm and accuracy. These pictures, copied and in some cases altered with whimsical disregard for Nature, formed the basis of almost all plant-figures for another half-century, and were not outrivalled until a finer period of botanical illustration began with the *Herbarium vivae eicones* of Brunfels in 1530 and the work of Leonhart Fuchs, to whom we owe the word fuchsia, twelve years later.

It appears possible that the work of Brunfels and Fuchs was influenced by greater artists. One has only to look at Dürer's study of columbines, drawn in 1526, to see a masterpiece of most delicate reality; about the same time Leonardo da Vinci, who died only eleven years before Brunfels's work was finished, was also drawing flower-pictures of great beauty; and such artists could hardly have failed to interest and influence the botanical illustrators of the time. Subsequently many early English works on horticulture and botany derived their illustrations, directly or indirectly, from these early Continental classics. The pictures for the 1551 *Herball* of William Turner, the Father of English Botany, are, for example, mainly derived from Fuchs; as, indirectly, are those of Henry Lyte's *A Nievve Herball*, 1578.

Contemporary with Turner and Lyte came Thomas Hyll, who issued, in 1563, what appears to be the first book in English devoted properly to gardening art: "A Most Briefe and Pleasaunt Treatyse, Teachynge How to Dress, Sowe and Set a Garden." Of Hyll's immediate successors the most notable are William Lawson, who, besides *A New Orchard and Garden*, had the distinction of publishing, in *The Country Housewife's Garden*, 1617, the first gardening book for women; Gervase Markham, an early literary racketeer who in Ben Jonson's view was "a base fellow," thanks apparently to a habit of re-issuing unsold copies of old books under new titles; and, of course, Parkinson and Gerard.

Parkinson and Gerard are generally considered to be the peaches of the 17th century orchard, and Gerard's *Herball* (1597) has long been known, sopped up and accepted as an authority by a large public. The dry truth is that Gerard himself was something of a racketeer. The *Herball* in the first place is not an original work, but a translation of a Continental work, Dodoe's *Pemptades* of 1583, the English translation of which was begun by a certain Dr. Priest, who died before he could finish the work. By adopting it, completing it, altering

the arrangement, occasionally marrying the wrong description to the right wood-cut (L'Obel, invited by the printer to correct the work, did so in a thousand places), and, fibbing a bit in the foreword, Gerard passed off as his own a book that now fetches £40. Just over thirty years later Parkinson, who had a garden "well stored with rarities" in Long Acre, published an equally famous, much revered but scientifically rather shaky work in *Paradisi In Sole Paradisus Terrestis*: or A Garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers which our English ayre will permit to be houssed vp.

In general a great fuss is made of the old-time charm of Parkinson and Gerard; but in my view they are more than matched by a writer whose contribution to gardening literature was delayed in appearance for three hundred years. It was not until 1932 that a manuscript came into the hands of Messrs. Davis and Orioli in the ordinary way of business and proved, on examination, to be a seventeenth-century gardening book of the first class. Few of us will ever afford *Paradisi In Sole*; many of us can, thanks to an odd turn of fate, get *The Garden Book of Sir Thomas Hanmer*, reprinted from the MS. of 1659 (Gerald Howe, £1 is.). The work, in every sense a personal record, is addressed to those who "amongst the innocent ones . . . have in all ages delighted themselves with beautiful gardens," and deals with those flowers which, in defiance of every fashion, including the painful practice of weaving *God Save Their Majesties* in

carpet-beds on the sea-front at Eastbourne, have remained for centuries secure in the common affection. Hanmer's chief joys are beare's eares (auriculas to us), tulipes, and irises, of which his list is the earliest catalogue extant. Since Hanmer's book was never published in his time, it is, however, unillustrated.

Illustration came to be the glory of gardening books throughout the eighteenth century. The colours of *The Flower Garden Displayed* (Furber, 1734), *The British Herbal* (John Edwards, 1770), *Eden* (John Hill, 1757), *The Compleat Florist* (Carwitham, 1747) and books of their kind,

no v enchant and seduce all botanical collectors. The early nineteenth century continued this elegant tradition of colouring. In France Redouté was painting, and publishing (1817-1824) the unsurpassed *Histoire des Roses*, preceded by *Les Liliacées* (1802-1816) with 486 plates in colour. Redouté's pictures, like those of Provost's *Collection des Fleurs et des Fruits*, were reproduced by a process of engraving which, for fidelity of results, is considered not to have been superseded. Today the *Histoire des Roses* is a collector's piece: but it is worth mentioning that the first of the new King Penguin Books (1s.) is devoted to a history of the rose and that its 16 plates are miniature, and excellent, reproductions from Redouté's famous work.

In England, only a little earlier, began a most remarkable not-out innings. In 1787, first in monthly and then in quarterly parts, its copperplates coloured entirely by hand, *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* began a career which has not yet been interrupted. Moreover, until 1920, it continued to be issued by its original publishers, Reeve & Co., who still exist and who still maintain to perfection the tradition of hand-colouring and botanical accuracy which made Curtis's famous and ultimately, I need hardly say, as near unobtainable as matters—the present price for Curtis, complete, being in the region of £300.

After the fashion of Curtis there continued throughout the whole nineteenth century a most brightly-dressed parade of Botanical Magazines, Floral Cabinets, Aids to Botany, Treasuries of Botany, Arts of Floriculture and Pomology, the best of which



Title-page from *The Grete Herball* (1526), reproduced from *Herbals*, by Agnes Arber, by kind permission of the Cambridge University Press.

grow increasingly valuable. Gentility, elegance and a certain exoticism were the watchwords; later the stove-plant was a prevailing emblem. For half a century names like Paxton and Sweet and Andrews maintained the delicate tradition; but as taste declined and gardening became, for the well-to-do, more and more of a circus in which fat and flamboyant species were expensively nurtured, exhibited and revered solely because of tropical oddity or rarity, it became the tendency, in hand-colouring, to lay on nightmare colours with the white-wash brush. Yet the picture is unfair. Throughout Victorian times the dusty golden and mulberry auriculas, broken Dutch tulips, fringed polyanthus primroses, all so dear to Hammer two hundred years before, continued to repeat a restrained motif of colour as delicious as that on a Rockingham tea-service. Those to whose affection these and other old-time flowers are dear should get Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell's *Old Fashioned Flowers* (Country Life, 15s.), where they are handled with proper poetry and understanding.

Most of these lavishly adorned Victorian manuals contained advice, often pompous, sometimes excellent, but never revolutionary. It was not until 1883 that the revolution came, and with it the book that remains, in spite of its crusty pugnacity and its author's astounding moral excursions into literary criticism, probably the most-thumbed testament in modern gardening. The book was *The English Flower Garden*; the revolutionist, William Robinson. The manner in which Robinson lambasted about him with liverish disrespect for contemporary taste, ruggedly insisting on a new set of articles for a new era of English gardening, makes him the Cobbett of English garden literature. His book can, of course, still be obtained, and must remain of immense practical and artistic use for a very long time.

Robinson was followed by Gertrude Jekyll: in my view the greater personality. An artist by temperament, as well as training, Miss Jekyll was guided by much the same principles as Robinson; but she wrote better, and her taste, her eye for colour and her gardening style were a shade or two finer. Of her books *Wall, Water and Woodland Gardens* (15s.), *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (15s.), and *A Gardener's Testament* (10s. 6d.) are still in print with Country Life. In the same spirit that inspired Robinson, the breakaway from formality, unnaturalness, patterns, exoticism, came Reginald Farrer, whose *English Rock Garden* (Jack, 3 guineas) is probably still the standard work in spite of its wine-purpled prose, some inaccuracies and some flippant prejudices against many lovable flowers.

Farrer was a traveller who plant-hunted with great success in China. In 1899 another young man, E. H. Wilson, was commissioned by Veitch, the Exeter nurseryman, to go to China in the same capacity. Wilson subsequently introduced sixteen thousand specimens to the world's herbariums, and brought home more than one thousand species previously unknown to civilisation. Something of Wilson's story is told in *Aristocrats of the Garden* (Williams and Norgate, 15s.).

This rapid introduction of exciting new species, together with the Jekyll-Robinson revolt and later one other important factor, gave to twentieth-century gardening and to post-Great War gardening in particular an immense impetus. The other factor was the Building Society. A million married couples began to buy their own homes, and in thousands of new pink suburban streets began an era of proud horticultural activity: touched in many cases, by the bitterest rivalry. Newspapers, not slow to realise that in the common desire to cultivate the brussel-sprout and the dahlia to greater perfection than the next door neighbour there existed a vast new sales potentiality, cashed in and printed lavish weekly articles of gardening advice. The B.B.C. introduced Mr. Middleton.

Countless simple and inexpensive handbooks have taken care of this public. But the intermediate public, which is not and cannot afford to be specialist but which likes gardening and

flowers for their own sake, has been very soundly catered for by Dents with what is probably the best one-volume all-round gardening book of the day. *The Wright Encyclopaedia of Gardening*—ordinary edition 15s., abridged version 2s. in *Everyman*—contains information on everything from lice to lilies, and is as essential as a spade. At its price there is, I think, nothing to compete with it; but for the gardener who wants elbow-room Macmillan publish what is possibly the most comprehensive horticultural work of all. With 4,000 engravings, 96 full-page illustrations, 3,676 pages of text, *The Standard Cyclopaedia of Horticulture*, by Professor L. H. Bailey (Macmillan, three guineas), is a massive three-decker which probably contains all the ordinary gardener needs to know on earth.

Out of the ordinary gardener springs the specialist, who fixes his passion on individual species. In Victorian times it was the fuchsia, the auricula, the pelargonium, the picotee. Today, in a constantly enlarging list of flowers which have their own societies, the rose is still incontestably the most popular flower in England. Though the great standard work used to be *The Genus Rosa*, by Ellen Wilmott, another Victorian revolutionary, it is now a little out of date and is remaindered at about a third of its original twenty-five guineas. There are some rose-lovers, myself among them, to whom this slight antiquity would not matter; and they, too, will be happy with *Old Garden Roses*, by E. A. Bunyard (Country Life, 15s.). The prettiest book on roses is, however, *Roses of the World in Colour* (Cassell, 21s.), giving hundreds of incomparable colour-plates of the modern rose.

There remains the Digging for Victory campaign. Since that also means cooking for victory, it is well to mention the standard books on herbs: *A Modern Herbal*, by Mrs. M. Grieve (Cape, 42s.), to which those in search of history may add *Herbals*, by Agnes Arber (Cambridge), an admirable, unselfish work backed by some almost acid scholarship. Here, too, is the place to recommend Mr. Miles Hadfield's *The Gardener's Companion*, a departmental store of information, with E. A. Bunyard's plea for the growing of more epicurean vegetables taking first place for sense, wit and imagination. A perusal

of Bunyard will do much to remove the stain of greens and potatoes from the character of English cooking.

Finally, a word of comfort to "those among the innocents" who have no gardens. They have been charmingly catered for in *Room and Window Gardening*, by W. P. Wright (Dent, 5s.). Here they can instruct themselves in the cultivation of the tub, the roof, the hanging basket, the old bath-tin behind the area railings, the window-box of shells and virgin cork. All else failing, they will even find some indication as to the culture of that evergreen emblem that is still, to some, the heaven of horticultural ambition: the largest aspidistra in the world.

#### RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- The Standard Cyclopaedia of Horticulture*, by Prof. E. H. Bailey (Macmillan, £3 3s.).  
*The Wright Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (Dent, 15s.).  
*A Gardener's Testament*, by Gertrude Jekyll (Country Life, 10s. 6d.).  
*Roses of the World in Colour* (Cassell, 21s.).  
*A Book of Roses* (King Penguins, 1s.).  
*Garden Colour*, by Margaret Waterfield (Dent, 18s.).  
*Old Fashioned Flowers*, by Sacheverell Sitwell (Country Life, 15s.).  
*The English Flower Garden*, by William Robinson (Murray, 15s.).  
*The English Rock Garden*, by Reginald Farrer (Jack, £3 3s.).  
*A Modern Herbal*, by M. Grieve (Cape, 42s.).  
*The Garden of Today*, by Avray Tipping (Martin Hopkinson, 7s. 6d.).  
*Room and Window Gardening*, by W. P. Wright (Dent, 5s.).  
*Early Vegetables Under Glass and The Garden Frame*, by J. S. Dakers (Cassell, 2s. 6d. each).  
*The Gardener's Companion*, by Miles Hadfield (Dent, 7s. 6d.).



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