



THE PLEASURES OF THE GARDEN.

THE enjoyment which we all derive from our occasional visits to the various botanical and public gardens that are growing up around our principal cities, no less than in the neighbourhood of the metropolis itself, is confessedly great. Yet even to the uninitiated in such matters it is scarcely less interesting to watch, in the genial month of May, the strenuous effort that Nature makes to show off to advantage, in our own less ambitious territories, the beautiful varieties of shrubs and flowers which time and care have made common amongst us.

Many of them, are far more beautiful, and were once as rare as the exotics we go so far to see and which are destined, in their turn, to descend into common life; yielding their 'vantage ground to newer and more *recherché* favourites. Where is the habitation, not actually within the walls of a town, that cannot boast a plot of ground at once the care and pride of its owner, and affording almost as much pleasure to the passer-by as to the actual cultivator. No sooner does spring come forth with its balmy airs and inspiring sunshine, than many a glimpse may be caught through the bowery palisades of the enclosures, of fair amateurs at their pleasant labours, busily trimming up bed and border, and doing full justice to the first fruits of the floral year. The garden itself may be limited to a few rods, or may extend over as many acres: each in its measure is delightful, and we cannot look upon the smallest space thus carefully tended, and wonder at the warm admiration expressed by foreigners for our domestic pleasure-grounds. Royal and public gardens of stately dimensions and high cultivation, are to be met with wherever a Royal residence exists; but our foreign neighbours speak truly in admitting that they are still centuries behind us in

the elegant decoration of that "foot of earth" that makes the modest homestead beautiful. It is only in our native land that the territory of the ladies habitually extends beyond the precincts of the house; with us the flower department is their own especial *apanage*: and hence the beauty and taste of its arrangement, and the superior skill and knowledge of our own fair countrywomen.

Who has not had the happiness, at one time or other, of being called upon to assist at a family council on the manner in which the new garden should be laid out; or smiled good-humouredly to himself at the suggestions dictated by the various tastes of different members of the conclave. One amiable ignoramus, enamoured of certain vague descriptions of the hanging gardens of Babylon, thinks nothing short of them could equal the stately "pleasaunces" of our ancestors, and grows eloquent upon broad terraces, formal walks, and shady alcoves; each dedicated to some divinity, "heavenly or terrene." He appears, however, quite to have overlooked the want of harmony between his favourite style and a mansion scarcely six months old. Another less ambitious copyist, fresh from Trentham Hall and its manifold attractions, and himself a lover of trim prettiness, demands a French *parterre*. It should be, he thinks, a *parterre* of embroidery, consisting of arabesque or scroll-work figures, with paths or groundwork scarcely less elaborate, formed of different coloured materials, as sand, gravel, powdered brick, or even pebbles. Failing this, he generously offers to compound for the "*parterre de compartimens*," where, reversing the general order of things, the accessory, turf, is chosen to exhibit as a principal; cut and arranged in geometrical forms, marked out by miniature shrubs, and surrounded by a second border of gay flower-beds. But the true lover of nature and taste here steps in and protests equally against both extremes; the space to be dealt with is not extensive enough for the one or sufficiently diminutive for the other. Finally, the matter is turned over to the ladies, who, wisely adapting the end to the means, resolve that the garden shall be

essentially English; that the beautiful green turf, which no climate save our own can mature, shall "shine conspicuous," and clothe the earth like nature in her full dress; and that groups of rich flower-beds shall show like bright jewels on its bosom.

No sooner are the preparatory operations of clearing and levelling performed by subordinate hands, than an animated and busy season ensues. The boundary walls must be clothed with trees as speedily as possible, to veil the glaring limits of the domain, and hint of something like nature extending far beyond them. Trees and shrubs of rapid growth are hastily put in to serve a temporary purpose, but are intended to yield their places to the more *élite* of their brethren, when these shall have attained to sufficient maturity. The true artist can always see the flower in the bud, and admits, for a permanency, only those species that assimilate well together, or offer a striking contrast in form and colour. The lilac and laburnum may stand side by side, for the one is erect and bowery, the other fragile and drooping; whilst the mingling flowers present an harmonious contrast. The red hawthorn and white syringa may bloom in close proximity. The Judas-tree may unite its clusters of pink blossoms with the buds of the double cherry, and add beauty to each other as well as to the scene. The whole family of the rhododendron, or rose-bay, is welcome, from whatever clime it may come: America, Europe, Asia, even to the Himalaya Mountains, all contribute many varieties of this beautiful flowering shrub, which has been found more widely diffused than perhaps any other. The sumach, so ornamental in the autumn, when its leaves assume a beautiful shade of purplish red, and its berries show like coral; the daphne, with its fragrant flowers and poisonous fruit—so general a favourite, that the French call it *bois-joli*, the Italians the fair plant, the Germans silky bark, and the Spaniards the lady laurel; the hardy American azalea, and the graceful fuschia, with a host of others, are in due degree collected together to furnish a perfect whole.

Then the more essentially decorative features of the garden afford endless food for thought and discussion; as it is here the evidences of taste will be most perceptible. Can a fountain be introduced sparkling and dancing in the sunshine, for a centre ornament? or must we be contented with a bowery temple of the weeping ash, or a picturesque sun-dial wreathed with ivy? Shall the flower-beds, in outline, be fanciful or geometrical, few and far between, that the claims of the smooth lawn to admiration may not be interfered with, or so numerous as themselves to form the prominent features? On these important questions, as on most others, much may be said on both sides. At length number and form being decided, the nature of the plants which are to occupy the different beds comes under consideration. Shall each be filled with various flowers, or present a clustering mass of uniform colour? The latter style, as most fashionable, is selected, and, as far as may be, carried into execution; certain beds of pansies and hyacinths must exhibit varieties of shade, but at any rate the species is the same, so the unities are fortunately preserved. Due regard is of course paid here, as elsewhere, to favourable contrasts; the brilliant scarlet verbena, and the useful white petunia, form charming *vis-à-vis*: the delicate blue nemophila consorts equally well with the yellow calceolaria; the heliotrope and mignonette almost mingle their fragrance, and by virtue thereof find prominent places, notwithstanding their neutral tints. It is to be lamented that as the gayest birds have the hoarsest notes, so the sweetest flowers wear the saddest livery; but there is certainly no lack of brilliancy in the general effect, when lobelias, salvias, pelargoniums, tigredas, and other gay floral treasures are judiciously distributed.

Red roses, used to praises long,
Contented with the poet's song—
The nightingale's being over;
And lilies white, prepar'd to touch
The whitest thought, nor soil it much,
Of dreamer turned to lover.

Deep violets are liken'd to
The kindest eyes that look on you,
Without a thought disloyal;
And cactuses a queen might do,
If weary of a golden crown,
And still appear as royal.

Pansies for ladies all. I wis
That none who wear such brooches miss
A jewel in the mirror;
And tulips, children love to stretch
Their fingers down, to feel in each
It's beauty's secret nearer.

Love's language may be talk'd with these—
To work out choicest sentences
No blossoms can be meeters;
And, such being used in Eastern bowers,
Young maids may wonder if the flowers
Or meanings be the sweeter.*

No sooner is the attention lavished on the garden rewarded by some faint promise of future perfection, than its owners become sensible of the necessity for resting-places, whence its budding beauties can be admired with ease and comfort. All that fantastic family of garden seats, of which gigantic mushrooms and china sofas may be cited as examples, are repudiated by the amateur of taste; mushrooms have been too long consecrated to the fairies, to serve with propriety as lounges for any ladies of a less ethereal character; porcelain seats are devoted by our preconceived prejudices to the sole use of the mandarins of the Celestial Empire, and never look at home except in a Chinese garden, or on the china plate where we first made their acquaintance. But against

the root-house, moss-house, or rustic seat, covered or uncovered, no such objection can be raised; they are indigenous to the country, and in harmony with the scene around. During the warm days of summer, it may be, indeed, decided that nothing can be so delightful as to repose beneath some weeping birch, whose veil-like branches, stirred by every breath, sweep the ground around us. But such trees are, unfortunately, not always to be met with; and some cool nook, to serve as shelter from the fervour of a midsummer's sun, becomes an absolute necessity. The design is sketched out. If for a root-house, fantastic and massive-looking roots of trees are pressed into the service; a lighter style characterises the wood-house, formed of the unbarked branches of the pine, which, even in decay, gives forth its sweet resinous odour; the alcove-like moss-house is also a favourite with those who have no insuperable objection to insects. Each and all have charms for their fair architects, who act not infrequently as builders also, and will, no doubt, prove the scenes of many pleasant reminiscences of busy, by-gone hours.

Whatever may be the interest felt by the moderately enthusiastic amateur in watching the rise and progress of the garden generally, it is certainly equalled by that of the flower fancier, who, having fixed his or her affections on some individual species, awaits the result of the many experiments which are intended ultimately to produce a completely perfect flower of its kind. Earth, air, fire, and water are called upon to minister in due proportion to the well-being of the plant; and many are the dangers and contingencies to be dreaded, and, if possible, guarded against. Insects too small to be seen by the naked eye may come in battalions, "feed on it's damask cheek," and destroy it. A night too cold or a day too warm, at a particular stage, may check or force its delicate nature too much, and the care of months may be thrown away. But when a really perfect whole is produced—a tulip, for instance, with cup-shaped flower, well rounded at the base, the inside ground colour, clear and bright in the centre, with all the marks sharp and distinct—who but a genuine *connoisseur* can fully appreciate the delight of the triumph? What signify now the constant care and attention which have been necessary to induce it to "break" into such clear and brilliant colours? Grown at one time in soil poor and arid, and allowed scarcely enough water to keep it alive, then suddenly transferred to the richest mould, abounding in food and moisture; no trouble has been spared; but look at the result, and say if the cost transcend such rich reward. The owner at least feels himself amply repaid for all his watchful anxiety.

Nor are the pleasures of the garden strictly confined within its limits; additions and improvements are always going on, which require the amateur to wander far afield. The shrubbery demands the heath and broom from the commons; the rock-work needs the presence of certain wild flowers to spring up between the rugged flints, and hide its masonry. What pleasant Gays are thus consumed during the early spring in searching among the tangled woods for the shy plants that nestle there—the delicate wood-sorrel, the primrose, lily of the valley, nest orchis, mouse-tail, and a thousand others. But, though every care be taken to give them shade, and reconcile them to their new homes, unhappily, they seldom take kindly to the change, and fresh specimens are in constant requisition. New wants lead to new discoveries, and novel phases of enjoyment spring from sources little thought of by the uninitiated.

To how many persons, and under what varying circumstances, has the garden in all ages afforded almost unmixed delight. Not to revert to that of Eden, and the stately bowers of Solomon, one sect of the Greek philosophers found its best school beneath its shades. Poets of all ages have sung its praises, and not a few have been indebted to it for their best inspirations. Petrarch, in one of his letters, lamenting the irruption [of the river Sorgue, writes, "The Muses and the Naiads still battle for the garden I love so well." And then among the moderns, who cannot fancy the scene of Dryden's "Flower and the Leaf;" or imagine Pope writing his "Rape of the Lock" beneath the shade of his grotto at Twickenham; his eyes resting dreamily on the silent waters of the Thames, seeming to gaze, but seeing nothing but the sweet picture his fancy had conjured up to people its shores?

To a garden and its multiplied employments are we probably indebted for much of the poetry of Cowper. In its light labour, so graphically described by himself, was to be found the exercise and excitement necessary to keep in something like health his sensitive nature. How many pilgrim feet (especially from the Far West) have sought as a shrine the garden he sang so well, and felt the ground sacred that his hand had tilled, though little beside the bare locality remained to whisper of its whereabouts.

Men, too, made of far "sterner stuff" have been scarcely less alive to the influence of a garden. How gratefully does Johnson record the days of pleasant labour he had spent in the arbour at Streatham. The most pathetic page of Gibbon is the one in which he describes the sensations he experienced in his summer-house at midnight, when he wrote the last line of his great work on ages and empires long passed away. He describes the feelings with which he paced the alleys of his garden that night, under a cloudless moon, and how his happiness had been associated with that labour, and had been affected by its termination.

Again, to the sick and the sorrowful how often has the garden been felt as a "city of refuge," affording at once solace and repose; for, poor as it may seem to the healthy and the happy as a substitute for the broad face of nature, the subdued in spirit have often found within its narrow limit space and verge enough for the gratitude such brief glimpses of nature has called forth. The associations connected with gardens also are almost always pleasant ones, and sometimes may be counted holy, for many have found in them their best oratories.

The calm retreat, the silent shade
With prayer and praise agree,
And seem by THY sweet bounty made
For those who worship Thee.

* MRS. BARRETT DROWNING.