

HARDY PRIMROSES.

(With Coloured Plate of Lady Madeline Tylour.)



THE pretty purple variety of the common primrose here figured is the brightest in colour, and best as respects the profusion of its flowers, of the whole of this interesting family. Hitherto amateurs have paid but little attention to the hardy primroses as garden flowers, although when a rambler amongst the "ferny coombes" and copses of the West of England happens to light on a great field of primroses of all colours, which make a sort of gigantic painter's palette in the wilderness, the discovery surprises, delights, and makes a lasting impression on the memory. Many such a wild primrose garden have I seen on the red soil in Devonshire, and never on any other soil or in any county the equal of them, although the primrose is a sportive plant in all parts of Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall. Probably some of the most remarkable displays of this kind are those on the spacious lawns in the park at Bicton, and I could tell of one who, when riding about there in search of beautiful trees, with which, of course, the place abounds, came upon a patch of pink and purple primulas covering a space equal in extent to the garden in Finsbury Square, and instantly dismounted to roll over them, to the astonishment of a staid company, and the violation of all the proprieties. Perhaps to some of our readers—aye, and perhaps to not a few—the mention of purple and pink primroses may suggest that we have got hold of something of an imaginative or apocryphal character. If such there be, we assure them we are dealing with matters of fact, and might say very much, and to the purpose, too, on the variability of the primrose, and the important subject it *might* offer to collectors of native varieties and the raisers of hardy novelties.

The common primrose, *Primula vulgaris*, is chiefly distinguished from other European primulas, such as the cowslip, polyanthus, and auricula, by the production of solitary flowers, other nearly-related primulas producing their flowers in umbels of many flowers on one stalk. The common primrose of agricultural lands is well-known by its elegant tuft of deeply-wrinkled leaves and pale creamy-yellow flowers. It is usually met with on shady banks where ferns delight to dwell, and makes a conspicuous feature in the lovely herbage of the woodside and the skirts of the coppice in the early months of the year. In this, which we may designate its normal form, it is a valuable garden plant; and not a few lovers of gardens are like Lord Bacon, in that they have taken care to have their homely retreats pleasantly besprinkled with "prime-roses, violets, anemonies, and early tulippas." But the primrose in this normal form is a wilding; it is when it appears with double flowers, or with single flowers of some remarkably attractive hue, as in the case of the primrose here figured, that it acquires distinction as a garden plant. Now there are not less than twenty named and very distinct varieties of hardy primroses, all of them forms of *P. vulgaris*, in

cultivation. We have lately seen fifteen varieties in flower at the Hale Farm Nurseries, Tottenham, where hardy flowers obtain better attention and are grown in greater quantity and variety than in any other nurseries in the country.

The whole of these are beautiful, and form a most interesting collection, and any amateur might be proud to possess them as adornments of a half-shaded border, where they could stand for years undisturbed to attain to full development. But particularly lovely are the double crimson, the double white, the double lilac, and the double yellow. The flowers of these are perfect rosettes, which are set amidst the bright-green wrinkled leaves in a manner which we must be permitted to describe as "artistic," although it is the work of an Almighty hand, and the flowers belong more especially to the garden that the Lord hath planted. The single varieties are less captivating when inspected closely, for their flowers have not the exquisite finish of form which characterizes the double ones; but they make amends by the profusion of their flowers and the consequent bold display of colour. Amongst the twenty, there are two that must have pre-eminence for richness of colour and their peculiar fitness to be employed as bedding plants in the spring-garden. One of these is called *Lilacina*, the colour being a lovely shade of mauvy lilac. The other is *Lady Madeline Taylour*, here figured, the whole stock of which is in the possession of Mr. Cannell, nurseryman, of Station Road, Woolwich, who is now offering it for sale for the first time.

A group of beds near the windows of the house might be charmingly dressed with these hardy primulas as bedders, for they could all be transplanted to a shady part of the kitchen-garden when their flowering was over, to make room for the usual summer bedders. As we have named two as particularly beautiful, we must add that, as in furnishing a group of beds, two colours will not be sufficient, the following may be added with safety, as they flower profusely:—Single white, single yellow, single rose, and single purple. The double-flowering varieties are not adapted for bedding, but as hardy border flowers they are of the highest value; and those who love this class of plants should secure all the sorts there are in the market.

As to cultivation, it may be said they need none. A rather heavy, damp soil and a partially shaded situation are conditions favourable to their proper development. They will never make much progress in a hot, dry soil, or in a position peculiarly exposed to the meridian sun. The best season for transplanting and dividing them is the month of September; but they may be removed and divided any time, if they are handled with care, and have a little watching afterwards, until they have recovered from the operation. S. H.

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LADY MADELINE TAYLOR.