



PORTRAIT OF JOHN PARKINSON  
From the "Theatrum Botanicum," of 1640

## Elizabethan Flower-Gardens

BY EDMUND GOSSE

IN an essay which is one of the most brilliant of our little classics, Bacon devotes himself to the subject of this paper. But that which he described was not so much what existed in his day as what his imagination created as the unattainable perfection. In exquisite language he described what a garden should be. In the following remarks not a single observation has been borrowed from Bacon, partly because his essay is purely idealistic, and partly because everybody is acquainted with it. What I have tried to do is, by the collation of many more prosaic but less hackneyed sources of information, to gain an impression of what gardens really were, and what they contained, at the close of the sixteenth century.

The love of our Tudor monarchs for flowers and gardens was pronounced, and it received a strong forward impulse during the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth. That sovereign had an impassioned fondness for decking herself with blossoms, and she evidently liked the places where they grew. When

Spenser desired to celebrate her as "Eliza, Queen of the Shepherds," he painted her in the midst of one of the orchard enclosures of the period, where sweet-scented flowers sprang thickly out of the grass under laden fruit-trees:

See where she sits upon the grassy green,  
O seemly sight!  
Yclad in scarlet, like a Maiden Queen,  
And ermines white;  
Upon her head a crimson coronet,  
With daffadils and damask-roses set;  
Bay-leaves between,  
And primeroses green,  
Embellish the sweet violet.

It was not, however, until the close of Queen Elizabeth's reign that the flower-garden began to flourish in England with a separate dignity. We have to persuade ourselves of this fact when we read about horticulture in our early writers. When we learn that Sir Nicholas Bacon laid out elaborate gardens around his magnificent mansion at Gorhambury, where "satyrs and wild beasts had lately frolicked," we must think of them as or-

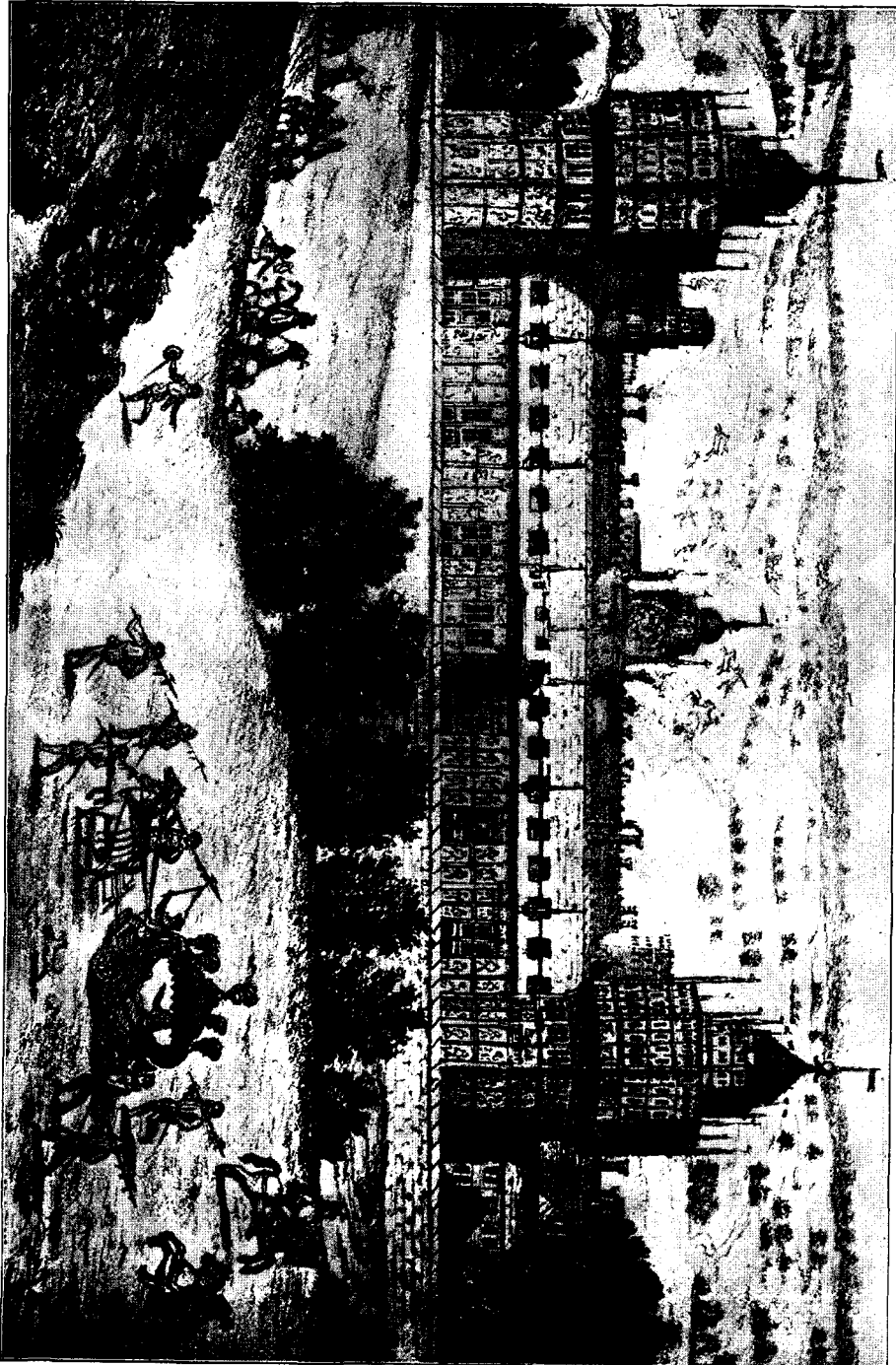
chards and kitchen-gardens. We know that in the Queen's locked garden at Havering-atte-Bower there were only trees, grass, and sweet herbs, or if flowers, then flowers by accident and as it were on sufferance. When James I., on his southern progress in 1603, arrived at Theobald's, he "went into the labyrinth-like garden to walk, where he recreated himself in the meander's compact of bays, rosemary, and the like, overshadowing his walk." This was evidently a herb-garden arranged as a maze, after the plan which we may still see in Lawson's *New Orchard and Garden*.

There were little shut-in gardens such as that in which the Princess walked when she was confined to the Tower in 1564. Few flowers could grow in such places. The type of these earlier enclosures seems to have been the Apothecaries' Garden in Paris, which was founded by Nicolas Houel. It will be found that flowers, as such, without regard to their properties and medical uses, are very much neglected in the old botany-books. All the gardeners of the reign of Elizabeth pinned their faith on the Herbals published by William Turner, Dean of Wells, who had—as it is amusing to know—a garden of his own at Kew, and on the translations of Dodonæus. In Turner and in Dodonæus you shall search in vain for any definite recognition of the flower-garden. It was the same in France, and for a still later period. Even the famous gardens of Vauquelin des Yveteaux, close to Paris, were said to contain more melons than tulips, and more cabbages than hyacinths. La Fontaine's "amateur de jardinage, demi-bourgeois, demi-manant," was not a horticulturist in our modern sense; he had a *jardin-potager*, a kitchen-garden.

It was the eccentricity of the English and their love of bright colors which freed them from this bondage. The English gardeners, we are told, early pleased their own fancy. The fairest buildings of the mansion were those which faced the flower-plots, and our Tudor ladies liked to see these massed with bright colors. Our best sources of information about English gardens before the transition are *The Country House-Wife's Garden*, published in 1617, by Gervase Markham, and a book issued in 1618 by

William Lawson, who had been a gardener in the north of England since 1570. These writers lament the smallness of gardens, which were fenced or walled in such a way that they must often have been dark and gloomy. The English had not adopted the extravagant fancy of the Flemish, nor the exuberance of the Italians, except in some pompous places like Nonsuch and Kenilworth. To a suggestion that some nobleman should lay out a circular garden in emulation of that which was then famous in connection with the University of Padua, a great English gardener offered a positive refusal. All English gardens had to be four-square; within them each separate plot was a quadrangle, and in the old-fashioned style the plots were invariably bordered with privet, sage, gooseberry-bushes, or what were called "raisins"—that is to say, red or white currants. The general effect, therefore, must have been exactly like that of a well-kept kitchen-garden at the present day.

Lawson recommends eight ways of laying out the interior of the square plots which have just been described. You might choose the cinquefoil, the flower-de-luce, the trefoil, the fret, the lozenge, the crossbow, the diamond, and the oval, and Lawson gives careful diagrams to enable you to choose which pattern you prefer and to copy it. It is Markham who warns you against giving too much prominence to mere flowers, and bids you remember that "daffadown-dillies are more for ornament than use, so are daisies." This was true, of course, even in an age when the water of daffodils was recommended both for inward and outward diseases. One curious feature of the old gardens was the presence of "seats" or masses of camomile, penny-royal, mint, and violets. In large gardens, too, it was usual to build somewhere near the centre what were called "mounts," of stone or wood, covered with earth and turf. These would have a winding path or steps by which they might be climbed, and they were often of considerable altitude, "whence you may shoot a buck" in the woods outside the garden wall. The Elizabethans, too, liked to have a fountain and arbors in their garden, and they regarded it as really incomplete if it did not include a



NONSUCH PALACE, IN SURREY

From a drawing, dated 1582, by G. Haughton





PORTRAIT OF JOHN PARKINSON

Holding a "murrey bear's ear," or auricula, in his hand. From an engraving of 1629

walking in the garden at Wanstead, and she was completely taken by surprise. Several of Ben Jonson's entertainments were prepared for performance on the terraces in front of great country mansions; Pan would descend from amongst the cherry-trees, and Panchaia be discovered rising out of a scented mass of carnations. We have said that the old gardens were small, but towards the close of the sixteenth century the architects grew much more ambitious. When Elizabeth visited Cowdry in the course of the hot summer of 1591, she expressed a wish to dine in the garden. This was successfully managed, although a table forty-eight yards long had to be set to receive the company.

The first man who defended the flower-garden as having an independent right to exist was John Parkinson. Until his time everybody had made excuses for the cultivation of flowers, as if they were an agreeable but frivolous addi-

maze. There was generally round the whole place a brick wall some twelve feet high.

All was very simple. England seems to have escaped the bad taste of the Low Countries, where armies on the march, stags hunted by hounds, and geese or cranes in flight were presented in hedges of yew and box. Parallelograms, and quincunxes, and cascades worked by hydraulic power, were not in the taste of the Tudor country gentleman. A certain amount of innocent mystification was cultivated. Sir Philip Sidney arranged his masque of "The May-Lady" to encounter Queen Elizabeth as she was

tion to the serious business of fruit-trees, medicinal herbs, and kitchen produce. Parkinson, who was born in 1567, was an apothecary by trade, and he had a garden in Long Acre, where nothing greener or fresher than coach-builders' showrooms is cultivated now. He was the earliest to lay down that there were four kinds of horticultural enclosures, namely, of pleasant and delightful flowers, of kitchen herbs and roots, of simples, and of fruit-trees, and that the first of these must be held to be no less honorable than the others. He probably had a considerable share in getting the deliberate flower-garden introduced, perhaps about 1595,

and he was much interested in its forms and definition. A great deal of thought had to be expended upon bordering; it was usual to edge the grass-plots with thrift, and when flowers were first grown in open beds germander was used to border them. This was a little shrub, *Teucrium*, from the rocky shores of the Mediterranean, with grayish-violet blossoms; it could be trained to make a dwarf hedge, and it had a pleasant faint scent. Germander, however, soon went out of fashion, because it was found difficult to keep it neat and trim. Great value was then set on strongly perfumed plants, such as lavender, marjoram, thyme, and sage, for borderings. But when Parkinson wrote his *Paradisus in Sole*, a generation later, the latest invention for edging beds was white or bluish pebbles set up in lines.

The Elizabethans liked their flowers to have a very full scent. There seems to be evidence that they valued this quality even more than brilliant color. Hyacinths, which were called "jacinths," were looked askance at, at first, because they had little odor; probably they smelt like the wild bluebells of our English woods, with an indistinct and slightly mawkish perfume. Their scent was doubtless the prime reason of the extreme popularity of pinks and carnations,—gillyflowers, as they were called,—"July-flowers." William Lawson dubs the carnation "the King of Flowers," and Parkinson admits that of all blossoms it is the one which English people love the most. Much praise of "the great old English Carnation, which for his beauty and stateliness is worthy of a prime praise," we read in the *Paradisus in Sole*, and the woodcut of "him" which we reproduce displays a magnificent double clove, the sweetness of which must have pierced the senses almost like a pain. Parkinson describes more than fifty distinct varieties of this exquisite and odorous flower, the multiplication of which testifies to its extreme popularity among our Elizabethan forefathers. The vogue of the carnation lasted on into the next century. In his 1633 edition of Gerard's *Herbal* Thomas Johnson says that the gilly-flowers of his time were "of such various colors, and also several shapes, that a great and large volume would not suf-

fice to write of every one at large in particular." Nicholas Leate, of whom we shall presently have more to say as one of the greatest benefactors the English garden ever had, imported "yellow sops-in-wine," which were large cloves, from Poland. The garden of Mrs. Tuggy in Westminster, which was famous for the profusion of the flowers it contained, was particularly well stocked with the varieties of the carnation.

About thirty species of rose were known to the Elizabethan gardeners, and most of them did particularly well in London, until in the reign of James I. the increasing smoke of coal fires exterminated the most lovely and the most delicate species, the double yellow rose. Things rapidly grew worse in this respect, until Parkinson, in despair, cried out, "Neither herb nor tree will prosper since the use of sea-coal." Up to that time in London, and afterwards in country places, the rose preserved its vogue. It was not merely grown for pleasure, since the petals had a great commercial value; there was a brisk trade in dried roses, and a precious sweet water was distilled from the damask rose. The red varieties of the rose were considered the best medicinally, and they produced that rose syrup which was so widely used both as a cordial and as an aperient. The fashion for keeping potpourri in dwelling-rooms became so prevalent that the native gardens could not supply enough, and dried yellow roses became a recognized import from Constantinople. We must think of the parlors of the ladies who saw Shakespeare's plays performed for the first time as all redolent with the perfume of dried, spiced, and powdered rose-leaves.

At the close of the sixteenth century there was a heroic effort made by the gardeners of England to extend the dominion of their art, and to take in new forms of beauty. The admirable John Gerard, writing in 1597 from his "house in Holborn in the suburbs of London," takes the widest view of his business as a herbalist. Although his pains, he says, have not been spent "in the gracious discovery of golden mines, nor in the tracing after silver veins," he has devoted a laborious life to the enriching of his country with other treasure, a

wealth of herbs and flowers. "And treasure I may well term them," he continues, "seeing both kings and princes have esteemed them as jewels." This conquest took the form of a general introduction of what were called "outlandish" flowers, exotic varieties which it was found would thrive and blossom freely in English open gardens. The result was nothing less than a revolution in English horticulture. A prime mover in this, if he was not positively its originator, was a Turkey merchant named Nicholas Leate, who, about 1590, being a member of the court of the Levant Company, began to make use of his opportunities to import from the East a great many varieties of handsome flowers, which had up to that date been unknown to English herbalists, or merely thought of as rarities of botanical interest.

Nicholas Leate employed collectors in Syria and Turkey, and in many other countries, to supply specimens; we read of beautiful things that were sent home by his "servant at Aleppo." He greatly enlarged our British flora. Fritillaries, tulips, flower-de-luces, and anemones were among these novelties, and were all styled "outlandish" flowers. Among still later new forms, which attracted the enthusiasm of gardeners in the reign of James I., were "double red Ranunculus, far excelling the most glorious double anemone," the Marvel of Peru, the Laurustinus, and the Sable Flag, a large black iris. The mode of dealing with these "outlandish" flowers was little understood at first. Parkinson, in the *Paradisus*, warns "all gentlemen and gentlewomen" to be as careful in planting out their "tulipas" and double daffodils "as they would be with so many jewels." The first tide of importation from the East brought with it an enormous variety of anemones or "wind-flowers," and there was a rage for them something like the tulip-madness of half a century later. This was the moment when all the fine new flowers were coming, like a flight of brilliant birds, out of Asia. Even a very plain kind of chrysanthemum, brought from Ceylon, began to be cultivated in English gardens about 1600.

The introduction of "outlandish" plants was, it would seem, the signal for

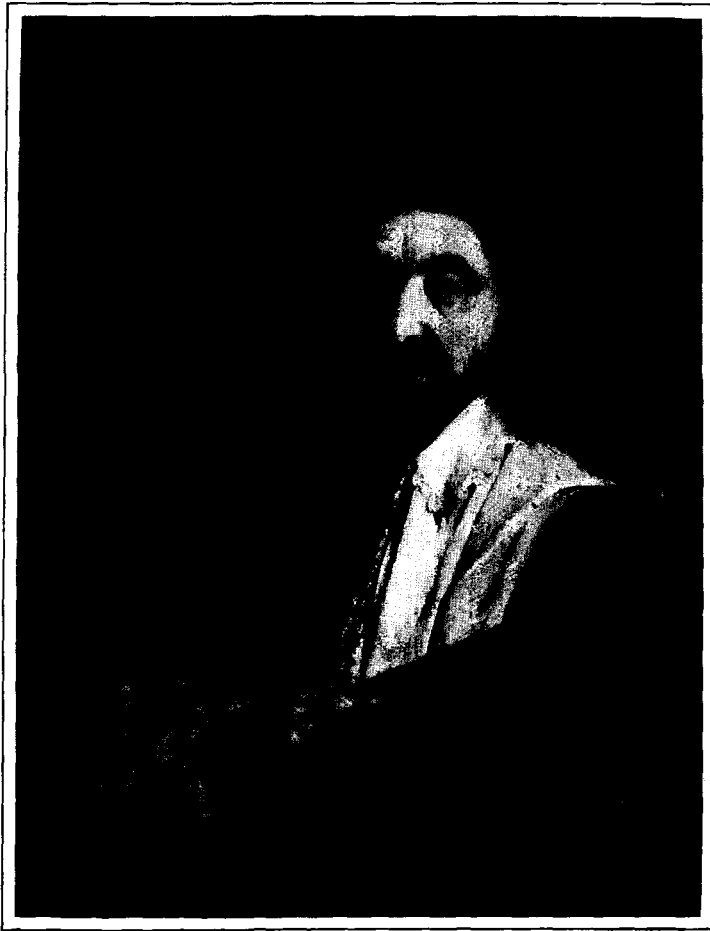
a widespread revival of interest in flowers that were grown purely for ornament. In the first place, it led to a sharp division between the orchard or kitchen-garth and the flower-garden proper. The beautiful bulbs from Syria or Poland could not be planted in a rough bed among cabbages, or scattered about under cherry-trees; they must have special treatment and a suitable home of their own. What began to be formed, for the first time, was what Parkinson calls "a garden of delight and pleasure" in which "beautiful flower-plants" were "severed from the wild and unfit." Then followed another stage; "the wonderful desire that many had to see fair, double, and sweet flowers, transported them beyond both reason and nature." The mania for splendid impossibilities, gorgeous abnormalities, blooms that had never been met with or dreamed of, seized the English gardeners. Rules and directions were published, showing how yellow flowers could be made white and red ones blue. This was the moment when the too famous green carnation should have been devised, if it never was carried out.

Following that rage for strong perfume which has been already mentioned, the gardeners of the beginning of the seventeenth century pretended to give artificial scents to plants. They made slits in the bark of trees and soaked them in musk or cinnamon, that the leaves of those trees might bud out scented. They bruised cloves and balsam gum with rose syrup, and poured the mixture about the roots of plants. They mixed the chemical oil of amber with the lees of red wine and steeped seeds in it. White lilies were to be turned into scarlet ones by rubbing cinnabar between the rind and the small buds growing about the root. There were even wilder schemes than these: you should graft a white damask rose upon a stalk of broom, and so get yellow roses; you should open the top of a tulip bulb and pour in verdigris, that the blossom may be green. Parkinson, who wrote with authority when all this madness was passing away, is most sarcastic at the expense of his contemporaries who indulged in these strange vagaries. But Parkinson himself had his frail points, fine botanist and highly experienced gardener as he was, for he





TITLE-PAGE OF JOHN PARKINSON'S "PARADISUS IN SOLE," 1629



PORTRAIT OF JOHN TRADESCANT  
Painted in 1652

attributed the doubling of flowers to the changes of the moon and to the conjunction of the planets.

Among the early English gardeners no one exceeded in zeal and knowledge the family of the Tradescants, with whom gardening rose to be a more exact art than it had hitherto been. It is curious that so many of the most famous gardens of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age were in London; John Tradescant's was in South Lambeth, and was of a great size. At his death it was said to be the finest in England, but it had retained a good deal of the old, herbalist character. It was mainly a medicinal and botanical garden. The acacia is reported to have grown in it before that

tree was known elsewhere in England. Lilac, which was popularly named "blue pipe-tree," and other blossoming shrubs were introduced by the Tradescants. All these English botanists looked up to Mathias de Lobel, the great French gardener, after whom *lobelia* is named, as their master in the art of horticulture. After the death of John Tradescant in 1638, a curious monument to his family of great gardeners, with symbolic representations of the things they loved, was erected in Lambeth Church. It soon fell into disrepair, and was barbarously restored, until its appearance was entirely changed. But its original features are preserved in a rare contemporary etching by Hollar.



## Editor's Easy Chair.

IT is only a few months since we were imagining in this place the conversation of an agreeable and intelligent group of people about the still recent book of M. Metchnikoff (the successor of Pasteur in Paris) on *The Nature of Man*. The attentive reader will not have forgotten that the talk turned upon M. Metchnikoff's theory that the obvious wrong done to man by his creator in making him mortal, while implanting in him the fear of death here and the hope of life hereafter, might be repaired by a reasonable effort on man's own part to live on earth from a hundred to two hundred years, or at least long enough to wish not to live any longer. This process M. Metchnikoff called developing the instinct of death, and he alleged the example of several scriptural personages in reaching as great an age and even greater, though whether they were willing to go when they had got to it, was, we believe, not clearly ascertained. One of our imaginary conversationalists was a lady whom we made acutely observe that it was rather inconsistent of M. Metchnikoff to quote the Bible statistics of longevity while he ignored the Bible's authority on the point of a life after death, a thing which he decided to be scientifically impossible. But in spite of this lady's criticism we hope the reader was not left without some interest in M. Metchnikoff's ingenious theory, or that he did not wholly fail to form a resolution of living in his own case to a patriarchal age, or at least till he had developed an instinct of death which should gladden him in dying, say, at the age of Old Parr.

Now, however, comes another sage, if he is not rather a wit in the guise of a sage, and tells us, in quitting his chair of medicine at Johns Hopkins University, in order to take the chair of Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, that no very great things have been done in this world by men over forty years old, and as for men over sixty, they are no good at all, practically speaking. We take the rude telegraphic version of Dr. William Osler's farewell address, and we have no

doubt that the words of this report lack the qualifications which gave them quite another tenor as he spoke them. We are quite sure that even if they gave his belief exactly, he was not justly represented in being made to applaud the late Anthony Trollope's fantastic notion of a "college into which men retired at sixty for a year's contemplation before a peaceful departure by chloroform." In this passage we recognize the heavy tread of the newspaper humorist, rather than the delicate-footed irony of a gentleman who at Dr. Osler's age of fifty-six goes from a place where he is self-confessedly useless to cumber another with the indefinite dotage of a man sixteen years past the probability of valuable achievement. Distinctly, we think there are two Dr. Oslers in the telegraphic report, and not both of an equally subtle playfulness.

We are glad that the real Dr. Osler need not be taken very seriously, whichever he should be, on a point involving much painful personal feeling for people over forty who should suppose him in earnest. Between him and M. Metchnikoff, if they should suppose him in earnest, too, their case would be hard. The one invites them to live on to a hundred and fifty or two hundred years, in order to develop their instinct of death; and the other bids them get them to a Trollopean college, and take chloroform, if they would not continue to draw old-age pensions through interminable years, with the probability of being able to make no return to the community which they burden. Clearly they cannot be counselled by both of these sages, or jokers, and which shall they trust?

What concerns us much more nearly than his sayings about men over forty, is Dr. Osler's plea for those who are yet

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,

and with whom we shall always rank ourselves. Let others go dote with the elders; we are for youth and golden joys, and we find ourselves almost passionately moved by what Dr. Osler says in behalf of the young men now mostly playing polo, or