Blossoms of Joy

REFLECTIONS ON THE LOVE OF GARDENING

These notes are written for those who love gardens as I do, but not for those who have a professional knowledge of the subject; and they are written in the hope that it may not be quite impossible to convey to others some little of the delight, which grows (more certainly than any bud or flower) from the possession and management of a garden. I cannot, of course, by any words of mine, give the hot glow of colour from a bed of scarlet Ranunculus with the sun full upon it, or bring out the delicious scent of those double Tuberoses, which did so well with me this autumn; but I can at least speak of my plans and projects, tell what I am doing, and how each month I succeed or fail,—and thus share with others the uncertainty, the risks and chances, which are in reality the great charm of gardening. And then, again, gardening joins itself, in a thousand ways, with a thousand associations, to books and literature, and here, too, I shall have much to say. Lancashire is not the best possible place for a garden, and to be within five miles of a large town is certainly no advantage. We get smoke on one side, and salt breezes on another, and, worst of all, there comes down upon us every now and then a blast, laden with heavy chemical odours, which is more deadly than either smoke or salt. Still we are tolerably open, and in the country. As I sit writing at my library window, I see, beyond the lawn, field after field, until at last the eye rests on the spire of a church three miles away. A long red-gabled house, with stone facings, and various creepers trained round it,—a small wood (in which there is a rookery) screening us from a country road, and from the west,—lawns with some large trees and several groups of evergreens,—and the walled garden, the outer garden, and the orchard;—it is to these that I invite you. Exclusive of meadow-land there are only some four acres, but four acres are enough for many gardening purposes, and for very great enjoyment. These are certainly what the American poet Bryant calls "the melancholy days, the saddest in the year." The late autumn flowers are over;—the early spring ones are still buried under the soil. I could only find this morning a single blighted monthly Rose, a Wallflower or two, an uneasy-looking Polyanthus, and some yellow Jasmine against the house—and that was all. Two days of early frost had killed the rest. Oddly enough, however, a small purple flower caught my eye on the mixed border; it was a Virginian Stock,—but what it was doing at this unwonted season who can say? Then, of course, the Arbutus is still in bloom, as it has been for the last two months, and very beautiful it is. There is a large bush of it just as you enter the walled garden, and, though the pink clusters of blossom are now past their best, they are more welcome than ever in the present dearth of flowers. Can any one tell me why my Arbutus does not fruit? It has only borne one single berry in the last four years; and yet the Arbutus fruits abundantly in other places in Lancashire, and at Lytham, close to the sea, I saw clusters of berries only the other day. Sometimes I fancy there is a better chance of the fruit setting if the pollen is from another tree, and I have lately planted a second Arbutus for the experiment.

I am very fond of the Arbutus; it carries me back to the days of Horace, for we remember how his goats, wandering along the lower slopes of Lucretilis, would browse upon the thickets of Arbutus that fringed its side. Lastly, the Chrysanthemums are in flower, though not in the inner garden. Some I have tended and trained, and they are now looking handsome enough in the porch and vestibule of the house. Some I have planted, and allowed to grow as they like, in front of the shrubbery borders; these have failed very generally with me this year—they look brown and withered, and the blooms are small, and the stems long and ragged, while many have entirely disappeared. The best of them all is Bob, with his bright, red, merry face, only surpassed by a trained Julia Lagravière in the porch. Another favourite Chrysanthemum of mine is the Fleur de Marie, with its large white discs, all quilled inside and feathered round the edge. Fastened up against a wall, I have seen it, year after year, a mass of splendid snowy blossom. The Chrysanthemum has three merits above almost every flower. It comes in the shortest and darkest days; it blooms abundantly in the smoke of the largest cities; it lasts longer than any flower when cut and put into water. If flowers have their virtues, the virtue of the Chrysanthemum is its unselfish kindliness. In the outer garden, we have been busy with the fallen leaves, brushing them away from the walks and lawn, leaving them to rot in the wood, digging them into the shrubbery borders. This work is finished now, and we have swept up a great stack for future use at the end of two years. The Beech and the Oak leaves we (in opposition to some authorities) hold to be the most valuable, but of course we cannot keep them distinct from the rest. These fallen leaves—of which we make our loam for potting purposes—what endless moralities they have occasioned! The oldest and the youngest poets speak of them. It is Homer, who compares the generations of men to the generations of the leaves, as they come and go, flourish and decay, one succeeding the other, unresting and unceasingly. It is Swinburne, who says in his poems— "Let the wind take the green and the grey leaf, Cast forth without fruit upon air; Take Rose-leaf, and Vine-leaf, and Bay-leaf Blown loose from the hair." During this open weather we have been getting on with our planting. Those beds of Rhododendrons just under the drawing-room windows have become too thick. They are all good sorts—John Waterer, Lady Emily Cathcart, and the rest—and must have sufficient room. We move a number of them to the other side of the house, opposite the front door, where till now there has been a bed of the common Rhododendrons, and this in turn we plant as a fresh bed elsewhere. There will be now some space to spare in the hybrid beds, and I shall plant in them a number of roots of the Lilium candidum—the dear old white Lily of cottage gardens. They will come up each year from between the Rhododendrons, and will send their sweet subtle odour through the open windows into the house. And as I write I am told of a recipe showing how, in the Wortlore of old, the firm white petals were esteemed of use. You must gather them while still fresh, place them unbroken in a wide-necked bottle, packed closely and firmly together, and then pour in what brandy there is room for.

In case of cut or bruise no remedy, I am told, is more efficacious, and certainly none more simple. The weather is still mild and open. We have had three days' sharp frost, but it soon passed, and, while it lasted, it spared even the Chrysanthemums. "Bob" looks better than ever. During the frost was the time to look over the Apple-room, the Mushroom-bed, and the Log-house. The Pears we are now using are the Winter Nelis, which I believe is known also as the Bonne de Malines. It is a capital Pear at this season of the year, and in these parts, and trained on my south-west walls, bears well, though the trees are young. I only planted them some four years ago, and, as all the world knows,— "You plant Pears For your heirs." The Mushrooms are late this year; the spawn appeared less good than usual, and I expected a total failure, but, after all, there is promise of a dish for Christmas Day. I do not care to grow Mushrooms when the green vegetables are in full glory but now they are very welcome. As for the Log-house, it is full. We have cut down several trees, and huge Yule logs lie in heaps, ready for the hall fire. We shall want them before the winter is over. If Horace had to say to Thaliarchus in Italy (this is Lord Denman's version) — "Dissolve the cold, while on the dogs With lavish hand you fling the logs,"— surely in these northern latitudes, and in this dearth of coal, the advice is doubly seasonable. And then a log fire is so charming. It does more than warm and blaze—it glows and sparkles. But Mr. Warner, the American, has just given us in his Backlog Studies long pages about wood-fires, and I need only refer to that very pleasant little book. One quotation, however, I will give:— "We burn in it Hickory wood, cut long. We like the smell of this aromatic forest timber and its clear flame. The Birch is also a sweet wood for the hearth, with a sort of spiritual flame, and an even temper—no snappishness. Some prefer the Elm, which holds fire so well; and I have a neighbour who uses nothing but Apple-tree wood—a solid, family sort of wood, fragrant also, and full of delightful associations. But few people can afford to burn up their fruit-trees." But besides the dead wood, we have just cut our fresh Christmas boughs. Up against an outhouse I have an immense Ivy, almost as large as one you see growing up some old castle: it spreads along the wall, covering it all over on both sides; then it climbs up a second wall at right angles to the first, and throws its trailing branches down to the very ground: and now they are one mass of blossom. It is from this ivy that we gather our best Christmas greenery; but there are also cuttings from the Box, Yew, and Holly;—and one variegated Holly has been beautiful, for its mottled leaves have in some sprays become of a perfectly clear and creamy white—the colour of fine old ivory. Mistletoe does not grow with us, and we have to buy it in the market of our town. By the way, how strangely the idea of an English Mistletoe bough now associates itself with that very uncomfortable Italian story of the bride and the oaken chest. How curious, too, that, in this country at least, the memory of poor Ginevra is due not to Rogers's poem, but to Haynes Bayly's ballad.

To-morrow will be Christmas Eve, and to-morrow (so the legend says), in the vale of Avalon,—at the old abbey, where King Arthur was buried and St. Dunstan lived—"outbuds the Glastonbury Thorn"—the sacred Thorn, which sprang from the staff St. Joseph planted there. Unhappily no such Thorns grow in my Lancashire garden. Gardening Blunders—The Walled Garden and the Fruit Walls—Spring Gardening—Christmas Roses—Snowdrops—Pot Plants. What wonderful notions some people have about gardens! In a clever novel I have just been reading, there occurs this description:—"The gardens at Wrexmore Hall were in a blaze of beauty, with Geraniums and Chrysanthemums of every hue." In the published letters of who was formerly United States' Minister here, there is something still more marvellous. He had been staying with Lord Palmerston at Broadlands in the end of September, and he speaks of "the glowing beds of Roses, Geraniums, Rhododendrons, Heliotropes, Pinks, Chrysanthemums." I shall have to make a pilgrimage to Broadlands. Meanwhile, why should we not more often bed out Chrysanthemums in masses, as in the Temple Gardens? A "winter garden" is generally nothing more than a garden of small evergreens, which, of course, is an improvement on bare soil, but which is in itself not singularly interesting. Since last I wrote, we have had storms of wind and rain, and some little snow and frost, but the weather has, on the whole, been very genial for the time of year. I have finished my planting, and am now busy re-sodding the grass terrace which runs along the south and east of the house; the grass had become full of weeds, and in places was bare and brown. But my most important work has been within the walled garden. This garden is entered by a door in the south-east wall, and two walls, facing south-west and north-east, run at right angles to it. A thick hedge, guarded by wire netting to keep out the rabbits, is at the further or northwest side, and divides us from the home-croft. Along the south-east wall we have two vineries, and between them a small range of frames and hotbeds. Against the sheltered wall between the vineries we have a Magnolia grandiflora, which flowered with me last year; a Banksian Rose, which has done no good as yet; and a Général Jacqueminot, which is always beautiful. A Camellia (Woodsii), which flowered abundantly last spring, I have moved elsewhere, and have planted a Maréchal Niel in its place. Beyond the vineries on both sides are my best Peaches and Nectarines. On the south-west wall are Peaches and Nectarines, Apricots, Plums and Pears, and on the north-east Cherries and Currants. In front of the Vine border is a broad gravel walk, which reaches along the whole breadth of the garden, and on the other side of it are the flower-beds. There are about forty of them in all, of different shapes and sizes, and divided from each other by little winding walks of red Jersey gravel. As you come upon them all at once, but cannot see the whole at a glance, I have no temptation to sacrifice everything to monotonous regularity and a mere effect of colour. I take bed by bed, and make each as beautiful as I can, so that I have a constant variety, and so that at no season of the year am I entirely bare of flowers. Box hedges three feet high and some two and a half feet thick, and a screen of Rhododendrons, separate the flower garden from the kitchen garden, which is beyond;

and right through both flower garden and kitchen garden, from the front of the Vine border to the far hedge by the croft, we have just been extending a grass walk, and planting, along the part that skirts the kitchen garden, Pears, Plums, and (for sake of a very uncertain experiment) a Walnut and a Medlar. My spring gardening is on no great scale. A bed of mixed Hyacinths, another of single Van Thol Tulips, and another of Golden Prince Tulips, two beds of Wallflowers, one of red Daisies edged with white, and one of Polyanthus, are all I have at present planted. There will be more by and by. Meanwhile the spring flowers I really care about are those that come up every year on the mixed borders,—the outside borders of the flower garden. They are old friends that never fail us; they ask only to be left alone, and are the most welcome "harbingers of spring," bringing with them the pleasant memories of former years, and the fresh promise of the year that is to come. I never saw such Christmas Roses as I have just now. Clustering beneath their dark serrated leaves rise masses of bloom,—bud and blossom,—the bud often tinged with a faint pink colour, the blossom a snowy white guarding a centre of yellow stamens. I have counted from thirty to forty blooms upon a single root, and I sometimes think the Eucharis itself is not a finer flower. The Christmas Rose, the Helleborus niger, has been celebrated by Pliny, by Spenser, and by Cowley; but I confess my own favourite association with it is of a later date. I never see it without recalling the description poor Anne Brontë gives in her strange wild story of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. Just at the end, when Helen, after her sad unhappy life, is free at last, and wishes to tell Gilbert that what remains of her life may now be his, she turns to "pluck that beautiful half-blown Christmas Rose that grew upon the little shrub without, just peeping from the snow that had hitherto, no doubt, defended it from the frost, and was now melting away in the sun." And then, "having gently dashed the glittering powder from its leaves," she says, "This Rose is not so fragrant as a summer flower, but it has stood through hardships none of them could bear: the cold rain of winter has sufficed to nourish it, and its faint sun to warm it; the bleak winds have not blanched it, or broken its stem, and the keen frost has not blighted it. Look, Gilbert, it is still fresh and blooming as a flower can be, with the cold snow even now on its petals. Will you have it?" Nowhere in the whole of the Brontë novels (so far as I remember) is a flower described as this one is. It is suggestive enough of dark and drowsy winter, that the two flowers which most enliven it should bear the deadly names of black Hellebore and winter Aconite (though, indeed, the Eranthis is itself allied rather to the Hellebores than to the Aconites); as yet, however, my Aconites are still below the sod. It is St. Agnes's Eve, and never was there a St. Agnes's Eve so unlike that one which witnessed the happy adventure of young Porphyro. Then "St. Agnes' Eve; ah! bitter chill it was; The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold; The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass, And silent was the flock in woolly fold."

Now the weather is soft, and almost warm. I always seem to connect the idea of a Snowdrop with St. Agnes; and Tennyson speaks of "the first Snowdrop of the year" lying upon her bosom. This year our first Snowdrop appeared on the and now each day brings out fresh tufts on the herbaceous borders, where the sun strikes most warmly. Another week will pass, and, under the Lime trees which shade the orchard, I shall find other tufts of the double variety, planted in bygone years I know not by whom, and now springing up half wild and quite uncared for. And these Snowdrops gave me a hint a year or two ago. I found that my gardener was in the habit of throwing away his old bulbs—Hyacinths and Tulips—which had served their turn and lived their season. There was, of course, no good in keeping them for garden purposes; but this throwing them away seemed sadly wasteful. We now, therefore, plant them in the orchard grass, and each year they come up half wild like the Snowdrops, and each year they will be more numerous and more effective. But the best way of growing Snowdrops is, I believe, on a lawn itself. I have planted several hundreds of them in groups and patches, in a corner, where I can see them from the library window. The green spears are now piercing the grass, and in a few days there will be a broken sheet of snowy white, which will last for at least a fortnight, and which, from a distance, will seem like the lingering relic of some snowdrift still unmelted by the sun. By the way, was it not who spoke of the Snowdrop as "an icicle changed into a flower?" The conceit is not a particularly happy one, for the soft white petals have nothing in common with the hard sparkle of the icicle. We have not been fortunate this winter with the pot-plants which we require for the house. The Primulas have been singularly shabby. We had got some white sand from an excavation in the road near us, and it seems to have checked the growth of several of our plants. The Roman Hyacinths, too, have done less well than usual with us. There was a gummy look about many of the bulbs, which made us fear at the time that they were not properly ripened, and the result has proved that we were right. For dinner-table decoration can anything be prettier at this season than small Orange-trees—Japanese Oranges, I think they are—laden with their wealth of green and golden fruit? I have only just taken to them, and certainly I have seen nothing of the kind I like so well. III. Frost—The Vineries and Vines—Early Forcing—Orange-trees—Spring Work— Aconites—The Crocus.—We have had no morning so beautiful this winter. A clear, bright frost is in the air, and on the grass, and among the trees. Not a spray but is coated with crystals, white as snow and thick as moss; not a leaf of Holly or of Ivy but is fringed with frosted fretwork. There is not a breath of wind, and the birds, that were singing yesterday, have all vanished out of sight. It is wonderfully beautiful while it lasts, but it will be over before night. Meanwhile, I am thankful for any touch of frost, if it will only come now instead of later. It will help to kill some few of the eggs and larvæ, which, in the different form of noxious insects, will plague us through the summer.

It will keep back the fruit-tree buds, which are sadly too forward, and which will run a poor chance unless they are checked betimes. The Apricots especially look almost ready to open, and I can see colour even on the Nectarines. We are beginning to force our first vinery. The year before last we had renewed the Vine border, and last year we did not venture any forcing; this year I hope we may be repaid. Our Black Hamburghs are old Vines of rather a good sort, with fine large berries and very few stones. The Muscats—Canon Hall, Alexandria, and Troveren—are Vines which I planted some three years ago. In the same house there is also an old Syrian Vine, bearing big bunches, but otherwise worth but little. In the second vinery are Black Hamburghs again, Black Princes, Grizzly Frontignan, and a Sweetwater,—all old Vines; and to these I have added a, a Foster's Seedling, and a Madresfield Court. Both vineries are of old construction, with clumsy flues, and require a thorough re-arranging, which I must give them some day. Quite the best grape, so far as flavour goes, is, I contend, the Grizzly Frontignan, which has now comparatively gone out of fashion. The bunches, it is true, are not handsome, the berries are not large, and the colour is not good; but has any Muscat a finer or more aromatic flavour? It was Sir William Temple who first introduced it, and he speaks of it with pride as "the noblest of all Grapes I ever ate in England." The Sweetwater is of value in another way; it is of all Grapes the most grateful and refreshing to an invalid. Only the autumn before last I was asked by an old friend whether anywhere in our neighbourhood the Sweetwater was still grown. He had been very ill, and was longing for Grapes,—but the rich luscious Muscats, with their highlyflavoured and thickly-sugared juice, had been forbidden. He had searched in vain among the vineries of many great houses, where the Sweetwater has been long discarded, and it was a pleasant surprise to find that in my small vineries this once favourite old Grape could still be found. We are now bringing on our Strawberries; the Duc de Malakoff and Sir Charles Napier are the two we are forcing this year. Last year we had Oscar as well, but we found it a bad hanger, the first fruit damping away if it were not at once gathered. We are forcing also French Beans, Fulmer's Forcing,—and Tomatos, the Orangefield Dwarf. The prettiest thing in our vinery is a large Orange-tree, laden with last year's fruit, and soon to be covered with this spring's flowers. The fruit itself is only good for preserving, but it is wonderfully handsome, and no Orange-tree could be more prolific. Surely the old plan of having a separate Orangery is dying out in England, except of course in the very stately places. Thirty or forty years ago I think these Orangeries were more common in gardens of less pretension. I recall one, half green-house, half summer-house, with its large sashed windows opening to a lawn—windows round which a dozen creepers twined and blossomed;—inside stood the great Orange-trees in their huge tubs, waiting till the full summer, when they would be arranged along the broad terrace walk—in themselves beautiful, and calling up a thousand fragrant memories of Southern France and Italy. Now, I generally see trimmed Bays or Laurels arranged in porcelain pots, looking at once shabby and artificial.

Of course I do not suppose Oranges worth growing except (a rather large exception) for their beauty; with Lemons it is different—they are certainly worth growing, —but then they do best trained up against the back of a moderately heated house, and not moved out in summer. Since I wrote we have had the sharpest and keenest frost— sharper than we have had all the winter; and an east wind which at once dried and froze up everything. Now spring has come again, and (as Horace says) has "shivered" through the trees. The Elders are already unfolding their leaves, and a Lonicera is in freshest bud. I remember when, a few years ago, the American poet, was in England, he told me that he was often reminded by the tender foliage of an English spring of that well-known line of Watts, where the fields of Paradise "Stand dressed in living green;" and I thought of this to-day when I looked, as I remember he was looking, at the fresh verdure of this very Lonicera. But all things are now telling of spring. We have finished our pruning of the wall-fruit; we have collected our pea-sticks, and sown our earliest Peas. We have planted our Ranunculus bed and gone through the herbaceous borders, dividing and clearing away where the growth was too thick, and sending off hamperfuls of Pæony, Iris, Œnothera, Snowflake, Japanese Anemone, Day Lily, and many others. On the other hand we have been looking over old volumes of Curtis's Botanical Magazine, and have been trying to get, not always successfully, a number of old forgotten plants of beauty, and now of rarity. We have found enough, however, to add a fresh charm to our borders for June, July, and August. On the lawn we have some Aconites in flower. They are planted at the foot of two great Beech trees, and last year they lay there—a soft yellow light upon the grass. This year they are doing badly. I suspect they must have been mown away last spring before their tubers were thoroughly ripe, and they are punishing us now by flowering only here and there. I know no flower so quaint as this—the little yellow head emerging from its deeply-cut Elizabethan ruff of green. Then, too, the Crocuses are bursting up from the soil, like Byron's Assyrian cohorts, "all gleaming in purple and gold." Nothing is more stupid than the ordinary way of planting Crocuses—in a narrow line or border. Of course you get a line of colour, but that is all, and, for all the good it does, you might as well have a line of coloured pottery or variegated gravel. They should be grown in thick masses, and in a place where the sun can shine upon them, and then they open out into wonderful depths of beauty. I am afraid Dr. Forbes Watson's most charming book on Flowers and Gardens is too little known. No modern author, not even excepting Ruskin, has studied the form and the beauty of flowers so closely and lovingly as he has done, and he entirely bears out my view. He says— "This is one of the many plants which are spoilt by too much meddling. If the gardener too frequently separates the offsets the individual blooms may possibly be finer, but the lover of flowers will miss the most striking charms of the humbler and more neglected plant. The reason is this: the bloom, when first opening, is of a deeper orange than afterwards, and this depth of hue is seemingly increased where the blossoms are small from crowded growth.

In these little clusters, therefore, where the flowers are of various sizes, the colour gains in varieties and depth, as well as in extent of surface, and vividness of colour is the most important point in the expression of the yellow Crocus." Besides the clusters along the shrubberies and the mixed borders, I have a number on the lawn beneath a large weeping Ash; the grass was bare there, and, though this is hidden in summer by the heavy curtains of pendent boughs and crowding leaves, it was well to do something to veil its desolation in the spring. Nothing can be more successful than a mass of Crocus, yellow, white, and purple. I sometimes think that the Crocus is less cared for than it deserves. Our modern poets rarely mention it; but in Homer, when he would make a carpet for the gods, it is of Lotus, Hyacinth, and Crocus; and Virgil's bees find their honey among Cassia and Lime blossoms, and "iron-grey Hyacinths and glowing Crocus." Virgil speaks, too, of the scent of the Crocus (whatever that may be), and all Latin authors, when they wish to express a bright deep orange colour, call it the colour of the Crocus. Our cool vinery is now gay with stages of Narcissus, Tulips, and Hyacinths, which have been brought on in heat, and are well rewarding us for what care we have given to them. The Rookery—Daffodils—Peach Blossoms—Spring Flowers—Primroses— Violets—The Shrubs of Spring. We have a tradition, or, if you will, a superstition, in this part of the world, that rooks always begin to build on the first Sunday in March. Last year my rooks were punctual to a day. This year, although they began a day or two earlier, it was not till the morning of Sunday the that they showed real activity. Then the belt of trees which they frequent, and which for want of any better name we call "our wood," was all alive and clamorous. These rooks are only with us from March to the end of May, and then they are off again for the rest of the year to the woods which cluster thickly round the stately hall of the great nobleman of our county. But they never quite forget their nests among our Elms; and it is pleasant to see them in summer, and oftener still in late autumn, winging their way across the fields, and then wheeling down upon the trees. Who was it, who so happily applied to rooks the lines from the sixth Æneid, where Virgil, speaking of the descent of Æneas and his guide upon the Elysian plains, says "Devenere locos lætos, et amœna vireta Fortunatorum nemorum, sedesque beatas"? "And down they came upon the happy haunts, The pleasant greenery of the favoured groves— Their blissful resting-place." There are many secrets about the rooks which I can never solve. Why do they build in the Elm rather than the Beech? My best trees are Beeches, but there are only two nests in them, whereas in a single Elm there are no less than ten. Why, again, do the old birds prevent the young ones from building in some particular tree? Sometimes, no doubt, there may be an unhappy association of the past, as in a case mentioned in Hawthorne's English Note Book, where in a garden, which I took him to see, not very far from this, some nests were once destroyed in a clump of trees, and never since has nest been built there. Sometimes, I think,

because the rooks like to reserve certain trees as storehouses, from whence to gather their sticks. Again, how far is rook-shooting good for a rookery? It is commonly believed that, if a certain number are not shot, the rooks will desert. Is this so, and, if so, what should be the proportion? I have some sixty nests, and I wish to keep about this number. I have planted many wild Daffodils in the wood; they are now coming into flower, but they do not seem to flourish as they should. I am told that Daffodils do not do well under a rookery, but I hardly think this likely. If, as I said last month, the Crocus has been neglected by English poets, the Daffodil has no right to complain. Some of the most charming lyrics in the language are connected with this flower. Who does not remember Herrick's "Fair Daffodils, we weep to see You haste away so soon;" or Wordsworth's "Host of golden Daffodils Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze"? Jean Ingelow, too, in her Persephone, makes the Daffodil the flower which tempts the unhappy maiden from her companions as they ramble along the fields of Enna— "The Daffodils were fair to see, They nodded lightly on the lea, Persephone, Persephone! Lo! one she marked of rarer growth Than Orchis or Anemone; For it the maiden left them both And parted from her company. Drawn nigh she deemed it fairer still, And stooped to gather by the rill The Daffodil, the Daffodil." The end of the story we all know right well, for "Perdita" told us long ago how Persephone let her Daffodils all fall "from Dis's waggon." Again we have had frost and snow, and this time it has done us harm. The early bloom of the Apricot has turned black, and our chance of a crop rests with the later buds. However, there are plenty still; and now, in words familiar to half the children of England, "the crimson blossoms of the Peach and the Nectarine are seen, and the green leaves sprout." Here our promise is not so good, and we have nothing like the bloom of last year; in fact, a crop of Peaches and Nectarines in the open air is very uncertain in this Lancashire climate, and many of my neighbours have given in entirely, and have taken to glass-houses. I still go on; but certainly last year, in spite of the show of blossom, was not encouraging. Whether it is the increase of smoke or of chemical works I cannot say, but formerly wall fruit answered far better in these parts than it does at present. It is remarkable, however, that Sir William Temple, writing just years ago, objects to growing Peaches farther north than Northampton, and praises a Staffordshire friend for not attempting them, and "pretending no higher, though his soil be good enough, than to the perfection of Plums." We have been busy renewing the Box edgings to our flower-beds where it was required. Last year we had carelessly laid down salt on the narrow walks to destroy some weeds, and it has injured a good deal of the Box; some injury, too, has been caused by the growth of several strong plants, which got out of bounds and smothered it. Our garden is not a good spring garden. The soil is cold and heavy, and the delicate spring flowers do not thrive; but, on the other hand, no garden about is a better summer garden. It is a regular sun-trap,

and yet even in the hottest weather the plants keep fresh and unburnt. Meanwhile the white Scilla, the double Daffodil, the Arabis, and some others, are doing well enough. A bed of Daisies and another of Polyanthus are far from satisfactory. Hepaticas I have tried over and over again, and they always fail. In front of one of the beds of evergreens on the lawn I planted some double Primroses—yellow, white, red, and lilac; some of them are showing their blossoms, but they are not vigorous. By the way, I found it very difficult to get these Primroses, and had to pay what seemed an excessive price for them. They are, I fear, among the old neglected flowers, which we run a good chance of losing altogether, if gardeners will confine themselves entirely to bedding plants. There is a charmingly fantastic conceit in one of Herrick's poems, "To Primroses filled with Morning Dew." He thinks they may be weeping, because "Ye have not seen as yet The Violet." My Primroses at least have not this excuse, for we have Violets in abundance, and they scent all the air as we pass through the garden door. Even in winter a faint fragrance lingers among their leaves—a shadowy memory of a perfume, which haunts them even when no single flower can be found. Bacon says that "the flower which above all others yields the sweetest smell in the air is the Violet; specially the double white Violet which comes twice a-year: about the middle of April and about Bartholomew-tide." Where is the double white Violet grown now? One of the greatest floral heresies of modern days is as regards the Violet. Both Ruskin and Lord Stanhope have asserted that the Violet of the Greek and Latin poets was an Iris! If so, we are to believe that Athens was crowned with Iris; that the revellers at banquets decked themselves with wreaths of Iris; that wine was flavoured with Iris juice; and that a Violet is nowhere mentioned! Fortunately, however, Pliny makes it clear that there were Violets and Irises both, in old classic times; and the city of the Violet-crown is fragrant as of yore. Some of the flowering shrubs are now coming out and looking gay. There is the Mezereon with its upright shoots, all purpled over with their blossom; there is the Rhododendron dauricum with its beautiful lilac bloom; there, the oldest favourite of all, is the Pyrus japonica, with its bunches of cherry-coloured flowers, breaking out all along the hard-twisted branches. This Pyrus is no doubt most effective when trained up against a wall, and then, of course, it flowers earlier; but one bush of it is quite worth growing in any garden. The last bit of planting we have done this year is an addition to our floweringtrees. We have got two of the best Robinias—the glutinosa and the hispida—and I shall be much disappointed if they do not prove a great success. The Herbaceous Beds—Pulmonaria—Wallflowers—Polyanthus—Starch Hyacinths—Sweet Brier—Primula Japonica—Early Annuals and Bulbs— The Old Yellow China Rose. Is any moment of the year more delightful than the present? What there is wanting in glow of colour is more than made up for in fulness of interest. Each day some well-known, long-remembered plant bursts into blossom on the herbaceous borders, and brings with it pleasant associations of days that are no more, or of books that cannot die. It is, I think, Alphonse Karr who says we should watch closely and rejoice greatly over the slow procession of the flowers,

as one by one they appear, bloom, and fade; if we are past middle life, it is a sight which, at best, we can only see some twenty or thirty times again. The common double Daffodils are already past, but we have still the variety which, from its blended hues of dark orange and pale citron, the children call— as they call the wild Linaria—"the butter-and-egg flower." Here is the Saxifraga crassifolia, with its huge broad leaves and its thick spikes of pink bell-blossom. It is almost too coarse growing, however, for the border, and does better on a rude rockery, or rather "loggery," which I have elsewhere. Here is the Pulmonaria or Lungwort, with its varied bloom of red and blue, and with the white markings on its leaves, which were supposed to look like lungs, and from which it takes its name. This Pulmonaria is one of the large class of plants, which, it was believed, had a healing power, and indicated that healing power by the form of leaf, or root, or blossom. These herbs of grace—and it is doubtful whether any plant would be entirely excepted—bore about with them, plain for all to see, outward and visible signs of their secret and subtle virtue. Thus the Liverwort (Hepatica) had the shape of a liver in its leaves, the Eyebright (Euphrasia) looked up to you with an eye like your own—and each had potency of healing for that part of the human body, of which the image was expressed in its own frail form. Farther on are close green tufts of the Corydalis, with its delicate lilac flowers. Then come bushes of Wallflower of the richest red-brown colour—a colour like nothing else, and indeed without a name, that would convey the depth and beauty of the dark tawny hue. What a contrast to the little wild yellow flower, which draws its scanty life from the wall of some grey old castle like that of Conway! Few scents are more delicious than that of Wallflowers. Bacon says of them that they "are very delightful, to be set under a parlour or lower chamber window." It is an old controversy whether the Wallflower and the Gillyflower are the same; but it seems tolerably clear that the latter name was rather loosely used, and meant sometimes the Wallflower, but sometimes also the Stock or the Clove Carnation. The Polyanthus on the borders has done better than those on the separate bed; the pretty tortoise-shell blossoms (to use a good expression of Forbes Watson) are just now in full perfection, and I have also a perfectly white Hose-in-hose Polyanthus, which is really charming. There is a droll passage in one of Sterne's love-letters to his future wife, in which he says—and he means to be sentimental and pathetic— "The kindest affections will have room to shoot and expand in our retirement.—Let the human tempest and hurricane rage at a distance, the desolation is beyond the horizon of peace. [the lady's name was Lydia] has seen a Polyanthus blow in December! Some friendly wall has sheltered it from the biting wind.—No planetary influence shall reach us but that which presides over and cherishes the sweetest flowers." There is still one other flower of which I must speak. It grows so abundantly, it flowers so luxuriantly with me;—it comes up like a weed on almost every border, and I have given it one entire bed to itself. It is the Starch or Grape Hyacinth, known also, I believe,

as the Plum or Cluster Hyacinth. Its lower bells are of the darkest indigo, but towards the top it melts into the softest sky-blue tints, and when in masses it is beautiful. Ruskin says it is "as if a cluster of Grapes and a hive of honey had been distilled and compressed together into one small boss of celled and beaded blue." Upon the wall by the vinery a Corchorus (Kerria) japonica is laden with wreaths of golden blossom. An Almond-tree near the front door is just shedding its pink petals. The double Gorse will be in flower in a week. But after all there is no flowering shrub, which we care for more just now than the still unflowering Sweet Brier. Towards the end of the walled garden I have laid out a miniature herb garden, with its separate little beds for Thyme and Marjoram, and Sage and Borage, and the rest, and inclosed it within a hedge of Sweet Brier. This Sweet Brier is now in leaf, and, after rain especially, it fills all that corner of the garden with whiffs and snatches of sweetest perfume. The Sweet Brier is the true Eglantine of the poets, for though Milton seems to confound "twisted Eglantine" with the Honeysuckle, Shakspeare has it right, and Titania's bower is, as we all know, "Quite over-canopied with luscious Woodbine, With sweet Musk Roses, and with Eglantine." By the way, is the Musk Rose still found in English gardens, and what is it? Two years ago I got, with infinite trouble, a root or two, but they have died down again, and I begin to doubt whether I shall ever know its scent—a scent which Bacon says comes next to the Violet in perfuming the garden's air. The stages in the cool vinery are now gay with Spiræas and Cinerarias. The Lilies of the Valley are over, but they have done exceedingly well this year. I wonder whether the Trillium grandiflorum or Canadian WoodLily is generally known. I believe it to be hardy, but it was new to me, and I had grown it in a pot in the vinery, and a very pretty little flower it is, with its three green leaves, its three green sepals, and its three white petals. I have grown in the same way, for the first time, the Primula japonica, and surely nothing can be more beautiful than its five circles of crimson blossoms, one whorl above another. I have been so pleased with it, that I have just given orders for an entire bed of it to be made, which shall remain permanently, and between the plants I am dropping in Gladiolus bulbs, so that the bed will be in beauty for many weeks. As I have before explained, you can hardly see the various beds of my flowergarden at a glance, so that I can go to work independently of the effects of the colour produced by elaborate bedding out. To tell the truth, too, I am heartily weary of the monotony of modern gardens, with their endless Pelargoniums, Calceolarias, and Verbenas. Some few such beds I cannot of course dispense with, but I am always glad when I can reclaim a bed for permanent herbaceous plants, as in this case of the Primula japonica. Another bed, I trust, may be successful in another way—it is a bed of the blue Nemophila insignis. Two years ago I saw in the People's Garden at Dublin, in the beginning of May, two beds, which struck me as being almost the most effective in their colouring of any I had ever seen.

One was of Nemophila, the other of Virginian stock; one was a mass of the most brilliant blue, the other a blending of shades of tenderest lilac. The blooms were thick and close as possible, and the size of the flowers much finer than that of the ordinary spring-sown annuals. The manager of these gardens kindly explained to me his secret: the seeds were sown in autumn, pricked out in spring, protected during the early months, and then finally bedded out. Last year we tried with the Nemophila, but we were too soon, and the frost caught us and destroyed our plants. This year we are later, and, by giving some protection against cold and sun for a few days longer, I hope to reproduce what I saw in Dublin. Another year I may make trial of the Virginian Stock as well. The Hyacinth bed has done fairly well, but there were too many pinks among the spikes for it to be quite successful. The Van Thol Tulips are a terrible failure. Some mice got to the bed, and, though we have killed thirteen of them, they had already eaten away so many of the crowns that some dozen Tulips, appearing here and there, are all I have. The bed of Golden Prince Tulips is, however, doing better; this always seems to me a very handsome Tulip, and I sometimes fancy has a sweetness of scent beyond all other kinds—a something, which at times half reminds one of the odour of some Tea Rose. By the bye, I have had a Tea Rose in blossom in the vinery—of a sort I rarely see, and of which I really do not know the proper name. It used to grow over a cottage in Herefordshire, which I knew many years ago, and the Herefordshire nurseryman, from whom I got my standard, calls it "the old yellow China." Is this the right name, and is the Rose more common than I imagine? Its petals are loose and thin, and of a pale primrose colour, and before it is fully out it is at its best. Its leaves are large and handsome, and of glossy green. Its blossom has a certain half-bitter scent of Tea about it, to which the scent of no other Tea Rose can at all compare—it is so strong and aromatic. We gathered our first forced Strawberries on the 16th; our first forced French Beans on the, and our first Asparagus on. This is early for us, but we are having the finest weather. VI. Ants and Aphis—Fruit Trees—The Grass Walk—"Lilac-tide"—Narcissus— Snowflakes—Columbines—Kalmias—Hawthorn Bushes. May set in this year with (as Horace Walpole somewhere says) "its usual severity." We felt it all the more after the soft warm summer weather we had experienced in April. The Lilac, which is only due with us on the of May, was this year in flower on the of April. Green Gooseberry tarts, which farther south are considered a May-day dish, we hardly hope to see in this colder latitude for ten days later, and now these cold east winds will throw back everything. I have been going over the fruit walls. The Apricots have, after all, done fairly well, and, if they do not fall off at the "stoning," we shall have nothing to complain of. Peaches and Nectarines are even worse than I had feared. There was not much bloom to begin with; then what bloom there was has set but badly; and now my most promising trees are overrun with aphis and with ants.

We are doing everything that can be done to check the plague, but with only a partial success. I am told that ants do no harm, and, indeed, are useful as against the aphis. I do not know how this is. They seem to be most excellent friends, and the more ants there are the more the leaves curl up, and the more the aphis seems to thrive. Last year one Peach-tree was completely killed, and this year two of them are looking very miserable. There has been no want of care or attention, but the enemy increases faster than we can destroy it. Is it a disease (so to speak) in a particular tree, which spreads to other trees? Or is it a blight in the air, against which we cannot guard? And what remedy is there when we have used tobacco-powder and Gishurst Compound, and all in vain? Two Fig-trees against the wall, in the sunniest corners, are promising a full crop for this district; another Fig-tree of a smaller variety close by bears nothing. The old Arabic proverb, which Emerson quotes, that "A Fig-tree looking upon a Figtree becometh fruitful," has not held good in this case. Lancashire, of course, is not the climate for Figs, but I should doubt whether Fig-trees are anywhere so common in England as they were years ago, when Batty Langley of Twickenham wrote. He recommends them to be grown as dwarfs or standards as well as against a wall, and says they "are either white, black, yellow, grey, green, brown, purple, or violet-coloured, consisting of sixteen different kinds,"—but he adds that the white and the long purple do the best. The Pears against the wall have but little fruit, but the standards are setting well, and the Apples will not, I hope, have suffered from this spell of cold. The new grass walk, of which I wrote on as passing right through the garden, is shaded by some Apple-trees, and it is pleasant to see their flakes of rosy snow falling softly on the fresh green beneath. Between these old Apple-trees and the young standards I have planted, there was room, which I am making ornamental with cones of Scarlet Runners. We have some five circles on each side of the walk, and shall train up the bean tendrils by strings fastened to a centre pole, so that in summer we shall have a succession of tents of scarlet and green. I tried this method of training Scarlet Runners on a smaller scale last year. The effect was excellent. Then, too, close along the grass on either side I am planting a broad belt of Violets, so that this new walk will one day be the sweetest part of the garden. Lastly, to give colour to the end of the walk, where it is bounded by the hedge of the croft, I am sowing the large Everlasting Pea, and the strongest growing Nasturtium, that they may climb and trail among the Hawthorn and the clipped Beech. The outside borders and the lawn clumps are beautiful with flowering shrubs. No season is like "Lilac-tide," as it has been quaintly called, in this respect. Besides the Lilac itself, there are the long plumes of the white Broom, the brilliant scarlet of the hybrid Rhododendrons, the delicious blossoms, both pink and yellow, of the Azaleas, the golden showers of the Laburnum, and others too numerous to mention. A Judas-tree at an angle of the house is in bud. The Général Jacqueminot between the vineries has given us a Rose already.