

Harston House and Garden.

Our garden is not a memory - it exists - and yet I am going to end this book of memories by telling its story. It is the same garden and yet it is not the same as the one we walked through on that late Autumn morning when we first knew that it was likely to become ours. It is larger now than it was then, far more beautiful in its developed design and far more gay in colour. It is much beloved and valued in this year of grace 1941. Our social life has shrunk and so has our food. Our garden feeds and exercises our bodies, our minds are exercised by the skill it requires to work it and as to our souls, they are fed by its beauty. Therefore I will describe it and also tell about its despotic ruler, Ernest Northrop.

From the very first it showed signs of becoming an Alice-behind-the-looking-glass garden and it has become one. It is all in squares - or perhaps I should say in squares and oblongs. These are separated from one another, from the field and the road, by high and low walls, by palings, hedges and streams. I used to fancy that seen from above it was like a chess board and that if I went through it working in each square I might count myself at the end as Queen. But no! A certain little Pawn caught me up and is now its undoubted King.

Ernest, at eight years old, (only a few days after we had

settled in our house) began to work for the family. My mother gave him sixpence a week for fetching milk from the farm nearby and for meeting me, or any member of the family, in winter at the station with a lantern. The train from Cambridge arrived at 6.20. The station road was , and is, an avenue. It had only one house (and that was well behind trees) that could give a glimmer of light to the shadowed road and the path has a dangerous five-foot-deep ditch running by it. At the age of nine years old Ernest became boot boy and at the age of eleven he left school and was our garde, boot and pump boy. When he was sixteen Graham sent him to be trained at a horticultural school. After some years he returned to us as gardener. He is now over fifty years old.

During the last war he was called up. Graham got him into the Marines and he was sent off the Ascension Island - the land of turtles - and there he was made cook. He took his task seriously but his knowledge of cooking has not made ~~him~~ him popular with some of the queens of the kitchen. Luckily for us in these days he has a genius for growing vegetables. He has also a talent for growing geraniums which flourish under his care from eight inches to five feet eight inches high. He cannot believe that any war has the right to deprive him of the coke for his greenhouse to keep those geraniums alive during winter. He has no talent for teaching and young helpers not only worry him but he is bitterly resentful over their deficiencies. He has his elder brother as his helper who bears his dic-

tatorship remarkably well, He makes Eva feel very young. She works with me in the garden and when Ernest points with his finger rebukingly to a weedy bit in her bed and says "Look at that !" she feels like a fourteen-year-old gardening girl. It is no use for her to say "I have been busy typing for Miss Mary" (she has had to put many new frocks on this child of mine which is her nursling). No excuse is allowed for ~~neglect~~ neglecting a garden. Ernest is however very popular with the whole family - nephews and nieces and little great nephews and nieces. We all depend on him and trust him.

The garden~~x~~ was not so large in early days as it is now but it had much the same style. More squares and oblongs have been added to it. When a piece of pasture was taken up to extend and make a finish to the woodland walk there grew in the cleared soil a fine crop of henbane. Marston in the old days was a village where medicine plants were grown but it was not in the memory of the oldest inhabitant when grass did not cover our field. The seeds of the henbane must have lain dormant there for many long years. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

There are several small pieces of water in our garden. There is the fountain on the lawn, a round pool in the dell and a pond where moorhens nest and bring up their families. They sometimes help towards their upbringing by walking them through the vegetable plots and telling them the best stuff to eat which is our best stuff too. There is a very narrow stream running

through flower and kitchen garden and which forms in a corner beyond the orchard a water garden with a tiny round island in it. That is Helen's care and she looks after a little square toy garden near it also.

We each have our special square of the chess board - mine is the dell with its woodland, Eva's bits are the flower beds round the square lawns, my little helper, Raymond, the pawn, may be found in any square of the flower garden. He is too unimportant to be noticed by the King who has the vegetable and orchard squares and also the front and sides of the house which he makes glorious with geraniums. Sir Graham Greene K.C.B. the knight, goes zigzagging through all the squares.

I once, among other guests, stayed at a country house in Surrey. One day our host, - Lord Farrar - took us all to his big lawn. He gave us each a stick of a certain shape that he had cut from his hazel trees. He knew where an underground stream ran under his lawn. After we had been given a lesson in holding the stick Lord Farrar sent us across the wide space. I shall never forget my astonishment when the stick in my hand began to move "on its own" when I crossed the hidden stream. I started and uttered a cry. I was actually a dowser! Lord Farrar told us that he was interested in the subject of dowsing being himself a dowser. He made it a rule to test his guests to find out - roughly - the proportion of people who had the gift. As far as he had gone in his testing he thought it was

about one in twenty.

I find that my power is a useful gift. In the Spring I use it to find the metal corners of our tennis court for my stick is even more sensitive to metal than to water. Once, Helen and I (Helen is also a dowser) were asked to try and find the long forgotten position of a hidden well that tradition said had been in use in a certain field. We succeeded. I have found tools lost in the grass. I have found the exact place in a field where a ferret and a rabbit were locked together deep under the soil. The distressed owner was digging wildly and uncertainly. I found the spot by means of the metal collar of the ferret.

We have four wrought iron gates that have been designed by me and one designed by our architect and all made at the village smithy. Some of these gates connect the squares and some separate them from the field. I made a drawing for a sixth but the war began and put a stop to such a luxury. It saved me from hard work for I find that designing in iron is a strenuous job. Even with these five gates we are left with another eight, large and small. Some of the eight need renewing and making ornamental either in iron or wood and the old closed-in wooden entrance gates ought to be changed into open ones so that passers by could see Ernest's glowing banks of geraniums.

The village Smithy is on the other side of the road from the little gate at the end of the woodland walk. The blacksmiths

are brothers, Harry and Victor Lawrance. The Smithy is an old black shed. In front of it is a yard through which runs a casual sort of pathway leading through iron rods, old wheels and pieces of metal. Beyond these smaller obstructions lie huge pieces of machinery needing repair. When the yard is crossed it is pleasant to lean over the half door and watch the sparks fly from the red hot iron beaten on the anvil and, during a pause, have a talk with Harry - a fellow artist. Nowadays there seems no leisure for art talk except the very necessary art of cooking. Harry is not above receiving a present of some eating or cooking ~~at~~ apples and having a talk over the best sorts for he is a connoisseur in apples.

There are many apple and plum trees in the orchard of Harston House garden but no apples or plums appear to come to table. This is our ordinary conversation at meals :-

"Will you have some tart, Graham?"

Graham

"What is it made of?"

Mary

"Tower of Glamis".

Eva

"No Mary, I forgot what you asked me to bring in. It's Lord Derby".

or at tea time :-

Eva

"Shall I get out Diamond or Winesour jam, Mary?"

Helen

"Have'nt you got any sweeter jam, Mary? Monarch or Czar?"

Mary

"No All the Monarchs and Czars were finished off weeks ago".

An old walnut and an immense, but useless pear tree were growing in awkward places in the garden when we first came to "Arston House. My mother had them cut down. A craftsman in cabinet making turned the wood of the walnut into an armchair and the wood of the pear tree into a wardrobe. I know of no individual worker in wood now-a-days.

Three tall trees in our garden have been struck by lightning. A Wellingtonia, an Ash and a Birch. The first two have recovered. The birch is a great loss.

We have several trees and plants with interesting names. We have a Maidenhair tree, a Judas tree, a Caesalpinia which is the red dye wood tree that gives its name to Brazil, a Liquid Amber and a hornbeam. Among the fruit trees are mulberries and figs. A quince and a medlar make an archway over a path.

We have old roses some of which are seldom seen. Gloire de Rosamenes, dark red and sweet; an old fringed rose like a pale pink carnation not described in any catalogue; Bardou Job with straggly branches and floppy crimson petals; Hebe's Lip, a bush with little whittish blossoms edged with a rare tint of pink and two bushes of the real old moss. York roses and Lancaster roses go rampant in the shrubbery, an out-classed "Souvenir d'un Ami" climbs up to my window and an ancient Musk sweetens the door to the kitchen. A scientist, Dr. Hurst, who was studying the origin of modern roses went to Paris in order to see in the very full French collection some old roses among them the Musk. He failed to find it. I heard of his failure and let him

know that it grew here and he came and took its buds.

I like to have flowers ~~xixk~~ and shrubs with country names. I have Winter Sweet, Scarlet Lightning, Snow on the Mountain, Snow in Summer, Bachelor's Buttons, Bergamot, Mind-your-own-business, Jacob's Ladder, Solomon's Seal, The Burning Bush and I have just been given a plant of Moses in the Bullrushes. It was given me by a country man who said "Plant it in the shade, Dig a trench round it for water. Dont tell it that it has been transplanted and it will never know it". I have kept the secret. I have Love in the Mist, of course, which is sometimes called about here "Welcome-Husband-no-matter-how-drunk". I have Columbine which is called here "Grandmother's Bonnet". I have unfortunately lost "Lady Coventry's Needlework" which is difficult to get and I must buy, beg or steal "Queen Anne's Pincushion". For the sake of the chimes that sound in the name I mention Canterbury Bells.

During the last few years I have taken to growing lilies from seed. The bulbs when they develop are stronger than the bulbs I can buy. I do not mean that I grow Madonna Lilies from seed. When my Scarlet Chalcedonicum Major will condescend to give me seed I treasure it more than if it were grains of gold. In a wet season I hope for some from the flaming yellow and red Panther lily. The Tiger lily will only give me bublets. The Regal and the purple Martagon rarely fail to seed but the beautiful white Maragon is very shy. I have about 23 different sorts

of lilies. Some do well in one season and some in another.
As it takes four or five years before a seedling gives a flower
it requires faith to grow them in this way. I shall not see
all my seedlings in bloom but other people will. May my dear
garden flourish in the future under those other folk's care !