RESEARCH ON THE BOTANICAL GARDEN NEW ART AND INFLUENCES

CERCETĂRI CU PRIVIRE LA GRĂDINILE BOTANICE ŞI INFLUENȚELE ARTEI NOI

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Abstract: *It is perhaps rather fanciful, but the two "schools" of gardening, into one of which almost every garden since the memory of man rennet not to the contrary, until the nineteenth century, could be placed, can be traced back to the two distinct originals of our western Christian civilization. Until fairly recently most people in the western world were brought up if not on, at least more or less in touch with, the Bible; consequently, for most western men, Eden was the garden. Granted that no such place ever existed outside Jewish mythology, yet since a myth stands for something in the mind and soul of man, the nature of Eden is significant. And Eden was, clearly, an "English" garden.*

Key words: *natural garden, landscape, wilderness, paradise garden*

INTRODUCTION

This paradise was a natural garden of all manner of beautiful plants, a garden whose charm can only have depended on those plants (plate), on the lie of the land, and the disposition of pleasant waters. Whoever conceived the myth conceived an ideal, something which nature unaided does not accomplish but which man perceives to be possible. God had scattered his best work about the world; he made a good effect here, contrived a lovely view there, so disposed land, water and trees in some corners that the mysterious demands of the aesthetic sense were satisfied; but what God had not done was to combine deliberately in a single masterwork all the triumphs of form and color of which his art was

capable. Eden was a vision of such a masterwork conceived by a people who did not imagine that anything surpassing it was to be done by the introduction of man's own arts.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Hellenic concept of a garden seems to be very different. The description of Laertes' garden in the *Odyssey* at once suggests the neat order of a French fruit-and-vegetable garden. Here, if anywhere, is the origin of the regularity and rectangularity of the “Latin” garden. Now it has been very widely remarked by authors in many fields of literature that the English, in the development of their native Church, have shown a remarkable and perhaps unique sensibility to the feeling and ideas of the Old Testament people. The ideas and feelings of the ancient Israelites were never much to the taste of the Italians and French; the Christianity which appealed to them was neo-platonic, and was the New Testament as rendered into a kind of Hellenism. In England, possibly because of the unique quality of the English Bible, a far less impressive book in other European languages, the Jewish, as opposed to the Greek, kind of Christianity had a far greater influence. It is not enough to explain this by reference to the quality of the English Bible.

There is something in the English soul which rejoices in the works of nature, or as it would have been called until very recently, of God, more than in the works of man. Like W. S. Landor, Nature the English love, and after Nature, Art. The Greeks, and their spiritual heirs, never had any doubt that the setting for the good life is what man makes it; a house, a city, a garden which is itself a work of architecture. The English, like the Jews, have never been sure of this. For the English, the ideal remains to get back to the Garden of Eden, to Paradise. As will appear, the romantic desire for a paradise garden is not the only influence at work: the English have always looked with half an eye towards the Mediterranean; and in some periods of their history, with both eyes. And it is out of the tension between the two principal influences already referred to, and from the traditions arising from them, that the design and detail of the best modern English gardens have come.

The extreme case of the paradise garden should be Tresco Abbey, but excepting in certain of its points-of-view such as 1 lie one mentioned above, this is not the case. The vast range of exotic plants which flourish in

the halcyon climate of that Fortunate Island have been used with Imagination, but also with restraint, and what the Dorrien Smiths have planted is exotic wilderness. It is true that the romantic, the dream-like quality of that garden.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since time to time to the "paradise" garden, if only because the words "English garden" still convey to so many people outside Britain a certain type of eighteenth-century landscape garden, but also because it is the name I should like to attach to the exotically romantic garden which succeeded pure landscape, it may be as well to say a little more about what we have in mind here. Plate 112 is one of Edwin Smith's Bodnant photographs; and colour plate I he made in the Tresco Abbey gardens.

The Tresco example is the extreme case: a lily pool with a view of more garden beyond is common; the material in which this view has been made is exotic. In both cases the result is the same: a dream realized. It is the practice of garden critics writing about the eighteenth-century landscape gardens to refer to them in terms of such landscape painters as Claude and Poussin: not their state of mind and spirit, but rather that of the Douanier Rousseau is evoked by the paradise garden; there are no tigers, but the scene suggests that at any moment one will appear and that when he does he will be tame and friendly, as is fitting in a paradise.

The horticultural classicist will object that not even Rousseau should be mentioned; these gardens derive from a dream, no doubt, but a boyhood dream; they are out of Coral Island, or at best Robinson Crusoe. The fact is that the paradise-garden maker, and the critic with his aesthetic rules can each say to the other what the unhelpful local said to the stranger asking his way: "By rights you oughtn't to be starting from here."

CONCLUSIONS

Sheffield Park in a brave attempt by Edwin Smith to illustrate this point, should, I suppose, be composed of a flowerless evergreen or perhaps of a golden or silver-leaved bush. But the scale of this magnificent place is such that the use of a flowering shrub enhances the effect aimed at; it reinforces the seasonal change in the prospect by helping the spring sun to raise the whole scene in brightness and slightly sharpen the middle distances, throwing the foliage-haze into notice.

At the other extreme is the Laburnum Arch at Bodnant in flowering time; and, in the same category, there was the famous Punch Bowl in the Saville gardens at Windsor which many readers will recall with pleasure or revulsion. In these cases the temptation to push to the extreme the effects which our great wealth of plant material makes possible has been yielded to entirely. The result is overwhelming, very spectacular; it is, even, vulgar if you like. The merits of vulgarity in the garden are discussed in a later chapter. The tremendous impact of colours obtained at Bodnant has the merit of experiment from which may emerge rules, as ephemeral as those of the past but none the less useful for the present. One rule emerges at once: the Punch Bowl, and to some extent the crowding of intense colour in and about the Laburnum Arch at Bodnant, prove quickly fatiguing; which is never the case of a garden like Stourhead.

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