

## THE CONTRIBUTORS' CLUB

### DISCONTENT IN A GARDEN

OUR literature has recently been enriched by a fragrant phrase, 'Content in a Garden.' The words breathe of boxwood and of roses, but observation leads me to the opinion that the phrase, 'Content in a Garden,' is as fallacious as it is fragrant.

I write as one who has for unnumbered years lived with gardeners without becoming one. I have never planted or transplanted anything, or weeded anything, but I have been torn from many a book, wrenched away from performing many a charitable deed, caught back to earth when I was walking the sky on many a country ramble, by people who demanded that I stop, look, and listen to the doings of the dirt. Gardeners among my kinsfolk and acquaintance have grasped me by the inoffensive nape of my neck and incontinently thrust my nose into the mud in order that I might see therein an indiscernible green line of lettuce.

Now, unlike other germs, the horticultural bacillus is increasing in virulence. More people garden to-day than ever before in history. Against the spread of the epidemic I have exerted my personal influence and private eloquence, but so far with small effect. I have therefore resolved to appeal to a larger public and to raise in print my warning voice, pointing out the perils to poise and to peace inherent in any intimacy with the soil.

Theoretically, I should expect as much disquietude among gardeners as I have practically observed. They voluntarily expose themselves to disillu-

sion. Much may be said in favor of hitching your hopes to a star, but what about burying your hopes in sixty square feet of spring mud? The wise ancients always represented the devious ways of deviltry as taking place in the hidden bowels of the earth, yet the modern horticulturist is always expecting archangelic behavior from the blackest bit of mould into which he dares to delve. In the fifth act of *The Bluebird*, where the little unborn mortals are exhibiting their transcendent inventions, portentous with future disappointment, the preponderance of disillusion is given to the gardeners. The gardeners who are going to be born and the gardeners who have been born long enough to know better are alike in expecting their daisies to be big as cartwheels, their peas to be larger than grapes, their apples to rival melons, their melons to outstrip the pumpkin. Should an intelligent investor of his life's happiness bank all on the uncertain behavior of the weather and the weevil?

Intelligence, however, is not a quality to be looked for *a priori* in a gardener. What clearness of view could you expect from people who are continually curled into a ball tending sordid seedlings? Does one not shudder to mention the mental and moral disintegration risked by association with vegetables, — instance the gross irregularities of cucumbers and cantaloupes when they neighbor each other! Is there anything in the nature of the case that should make intimacy with cabbage-heads and beet-tops contribute to spiritual uplift? Yet such is the popular fallacy.

Passing from theory to experience, one finds the gardener of all men most dissatisfied. Live with a gardener, and then prove him-her (in a discussion of horticulture, I may be excused for Burbanking my pronouns) contented if you can! Often have I welcomed a roomful of visitors and launched them into spirit-warming talk, only to have them, at some unguarded allusion, make for the open, demanding the titles of the lady-roses at the windows, and pressing on into the private life of the spinach and the cucumber — conversation that leaves me out in the cold, for not even appendicitis can produce the clacking congeniality of comparing flower-beds. After the guests are gone, I am called upon to comfort my household horticulturists for envy implanted by boastful visitors; I am told that our peas and our pansies are not so large as we supposed. — and yet they tell me they are contented folk, these gardeners!

To me the gardening mania is but one more example of the modern unrest, so extensively advertised. True, there might be content in gardens if owners were ever satisfied with them as they are; but they are haunted by new combinations, new experiments. They are always wanting to paw their parterres to pieces and set them out anew. You no sooner get used to a garden than it is n't there. You try to follow a primrose path and you become entangled in blackberry bushes. You put forth your hand to pluck a violet and you prod up a radish.

Another form of restlessness exhibited by gardeners is their fret after fertilizer. They can never get enough, and they can never get the right kind. If only they could, their dreams might come true. Fertilizer becomes an obsession from which they never escape. If you take a gardener with you on a country ramble, he—she will be want-

ing to dig up the woodland loam to enrich the back yard. He—she will never see the white-dotting loveliness of old farms, without wanting to scoop whole barnyards into the picnic lunch-basket. If you are caught up to the sky on the wings of the sunset, you will be hauled down with the Whitmanesque appeal for your sympathy,

'Behold this compost ! behold it well !'

I have noted with pain the subtle disintegration of mind and character which awaits those addicted to horticulture. The utter uncertainty of the material with which they deal causes the sanest people to become superstitious, so that you will have them solemnly declaring that certain seeds must be planted at the waning of the moon. Sweet peas have some mysterious association with St. Patrick's Day. I am not sure whether some of my friends would not go the length of an incantation, or of a pact with Satan, to achieve a perfect cantaloupe.

You might expect the winter solstice, by its absence of stimulus, to repair the moral ravages of the summer, with its demoralizing sowing and reaping. On the contrary, when the winds of January whip the windows, out come the flower catalogues, those glowing monuments of false promise. Forgetful of last season's failures, the gardener's eyes, feasting on pictured roses, grow bright with delirium. In hectic rhapsody he whispers enchanted names — Fiery Cross, Phantom Blue, Sunnybrook Earliana, Arabis Alpina, Beauty of Hebron (this last a potato). By means of the flower catalogue is the gardener rendered perpetually credulous, only to be perpetually disillusioned — a hardy perennial of discontent. These same ornate annuals corrupt honest minds, so that you will discover gardeners practicing deception, concealing their bright flower-books in laps that

appear to be reading the war news, and you are constantly intercepting clandestine trips to the mail-box and the dropping therein of surreptitious mail-orders.

A love of gardening is the root of still another evil: misanthropy. Gardeners become suspicious of even their nearest and dearest; they bring monstrous accusations, charging them with rolling upon the asparagus bed, with blighting the strawberry blossoms, with devouring a ten-foot row of young onions. Cynicism extends even to the birds of the blue, so that for all their singing throats they are looked upon as marauders only, and cheery redbreast is despised for his delinquencies in regard to ripe cherries. Thus does the gardener, his soul buried fast in furrow and flower-bed, look askance at both man and nature. I ask, do any of the qualities he exhibits justify his pride in that gentle phrase, 'Content in a Garden'?

#### WHISKERS IN PEACE

WAR and whiskers have always alliterated; no defense or explanation need be offered for the *poilus*. Heroes and fighting men have been bearded since the beginning; in war the razor rusts.

But in peace the beard should be carefully appraised. Why do men wear beards? And in offering the question for sober thought I am revealing an important index of human nature. In running over the names of men whom I have known personally, the bearded and the shaven separate themselves easily. All the bearded have traits in common; the shaven show greater variety of characters, yet they are essentially different from the bearded, despite shaven chins.

It is not easy to express what I feel to be true of bearded men whose traits are so cleverly hidden, or betrayed, by the whisker as almost to defy words.

With or without the 'watery smile,' the educated whisker is of first importance. The educated whisker is not an unconscious growth; it is willfully cultivated and shows attention. Marks of distinction, upon examination, are sometimes found to reside wholly in the educated whisker; one often feels that the distinguished man, shorn of his beard, would be as commonplace as the rest of us.

A difficulty arises when one puts the very personal question: Is the whisker a sign of irrepressible manliness, or is it merely a decoration, an ornament? Is it, to change Shakespeare slightly, an excrescence of strength? An increment of valor? Judicious observation and experience lead me to think that this is far from being the case. My bearded friends are no braver than the shaven. Indeed — and here one goes deeper into the subject — I have noticed signs of extreme caution, of nervous withdrawal from difficulty, of actual timidity, among bearded men. Not always separable from the beard, however, I have also noticed signs of self-importance, assertion, even pomposity — qualities that not only do not preclude timidity, but are apt to arise from a constitutional sense of fear.

The most terrifying bearded man that I ever knew was an atheist and anarchist. His beard radiated with the violence of his ideas. The safe and sane avoided him, mothers forbade their daughters to receive him at the house. He rebuked church-goers by passing them in jacket and breeches, averting his gaze in contempt for silk hats and the conventional observance of the Sabbath day. He was a dangerous man; no man with such a beard could be persuaded or controlled. I never shared the common opinion, for his uncomfortable doctrines seemed to me to be merely sentimental. Years afterwards I found him married to a gentle