STUDY REGARDING THE WOODLAND GARDEN

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Abstract: *This study is attained by way of steps dominated by a trio of immense and beautiful trees, a Lucombe oak, an ilex (Quercus ilex) and a mighty beech tree which towers above the other two. As the Woodland is on the side of a hill, its three main paths are on three different levels. The lowest level is Rhododendron Walk, but it might almost as well be called Magnolia Walk, for M. campbelli and M. veitchii, both pink-flowered species, have been planted at this level. The campbelli was planted usual thirty years' interval. There too is the evergreen magnolia with enormous leaves, M, delavayii, whose flower seem to open principally and perhaps only at night.Elsewhere, the garden is very rich in magnolias, and among the species are to be found soulangeana in variety, hypoleuca, denudata, kobus, cordata, stellata, lennei and others.*

Key words*: gardens, woodland, stone arches, benches*

INTRODUCTION

In the planting of Rhododendron Walk the colour range was given careful forethought: it is limited to ivory and blue, with a very small touch of rose-pink here and there. There is a group of *Magnolia stellata* at the end of this Walk. The Rhododendron Walk turns at the end and leads round and up into Camellia Walk. To me the most attractive of the many camellias planted is *C. sasanqua*\ its flowers, white or pale rose-pink, are small, single, very simple, like wild roses; it has none of the opulence but ten times the grace of the C. *japonica* varieties. Botanical species camellias are elsewhere in the gardens, and Camellia Walk is mainly planted to C *japonica* varieties. But here are also *C. Xfarpan, C. xgauntletii* and C. X *williamsii* specimens. This Walk is an encouraging spectacle foruh the gardener with new plantings in mind; it is not yet thirty years old yet the camellias are up to fifteen feet tall and immensely bulky, and look as if they had been there for a century. The Walk borders are underplanted with *Cyclamen neapolitanum* naturalized.

A second turn and rise at the end of Camellia Walk leads into Spring Walk by way of a group of *Viburnum tomentosum mariesii.* From this Walk the most striking spectacle, away through the trees and other shrubs, is that of massed hydrangeas, very tall and flourishing, and for the most part blue. Hydrangeas at Dartington have provided an interesting garden experience: the soil tends to give pink, not blue flowers (it is well known, of course, that flower colour in this genus is never stable); but with constant mulching mainly with peat, the colour on the older plants becomes blue. No chemical means have been used to effect the change.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

More stone steps lead to the viewpoint called High Meadow. The focus of the vista which Mr Cane opened from this point is the Hall itself, a very long vista. The detail of the spot itself rests the eye after contemplation of this long perspective, notably in May and again in autumn: in May for the white cloud of crab-apple flower *{Mains hupehensis)*; and in autumn for the leaf colour - scarlet, gold, purple - of the Stewartias and a group of *Cercidiphyllum,* In midsummer the flowers of a *Magnolia watsonii* drench the air with their scent. Even from here, however, the real height of the hillside is not apparent; like all good English gardens, Dartington is a succession of surprises, of secrets suddenly revealed. From High Meadow you move out between two colossal beeches into what is

called the Upper Drive and across to The Glade, and it is from here that the fall of the land down to the Tiltyard and the Hall is suddenly revealed and you realize that you have been climbing all the way.

The descent, by way of the Glade itself, is one of the most successful features of the garden: particularly well-demonstrated, in some details of the plantings here, is the use of foliage to introduce colour in mass with, for example, the red and purple-leaved rhus varieties. Likewise, the use of a single exceptional tree or large shrub to throw a mass of others into relief by its difference, notably eucryphias and the great *Davidia vilmoriniana.*

It is a rule of good English gardening that although a path or walk be contrived principally for the purpose of displaying the plants which frame it and the view which they also serve to franje, it should have an object, and, as it were, a destination. The Glade at Dartington ends in an ancient terrace lined with the Spanish chestnuts we have already mentioned, trees which are not less than four centuries old and in the preservation of which all the skill which forestry can muster has been employed. Here on this terrace is placed a *Reclining Woman* by Henry Moore (plate 130). The work was completed in 1947 and the artist himself chose the site for it.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Mrs Elmhirst herself has best described the spectacle from any point in the neighbourhood of Moore's *Reclining Woman:* '. . . across the jousting ground, in a formal setting, stands the Great Hall. From the lowest level the ground builds up in tiers, rising from the Twelve Apostles to the wall of the Sunny Border, then, higher, to the bowling green and the old stone arches, and finally to the level of the Hall itself. Here and there a tree breaks the horizontal lines, like the Monterey on the terraces and the Scots pine above the bowling green, while on the left, mounting high, the old oaks and beeches provide protection from the north and west. A view of a different kind can be seen from the Bastion, just above the long flight of steps. From here the ground falls away to the parkland and over the hills towards the sea. The land in the distance seems to take the form of soft green waves.

The long flight of steps referred to in the above passage climb what is known as the Heath Bank. This was, in the making, one of the most troublesome parts of the garden; it was, through very long neglect, a jungle of scrub and bramble and small, unwanted trees. Percy Cane was responsible for the design of which the Heath Bank is the realization. The steps, cut in Cornish granite, are very wide and shallow, and on each side of them have been planted masses of heaths in the softer colours. Technically, the work gave trouble because heaths had to be found which would flourish in a soil not altogether suitable for many members of this family of plants. Among them the white-belled *Erica lusitanica* begins to flower in November, and the red JE. *mediterranea* does well. The rest are lower, spreading species and varieties which have covered the ground to provide shade for the roots of magnolias. Open to whoever wants to go in, it always does have people in it. To that extent it is a Latin garden but visually it owes everything to the English traditions listed above.

Another of the points we have tried to make in this book is that plantsman-ship, and gardening as one of the visual arts, are only with difficulty reconciled and that a plantsman's garden is too often simply a collection and not a garden at all. But the reconciliation has been accomplished at Dartington. The visiting gardener will find rarities: but they have never been planted to *epater* or in the spirit which animates the plant collector and spoils his garden. By way of example, if *Ilex camelliaefolia* has been planted rather than the common holly, it is because the composition calls for a broader-leaved, more substantial evergreen. Nothing is in the garden merely for the sake of having it there; in very few gardens have the rare and the commonplace been so successfully combined.

Although, then, Dartington Hall gardens represent a successful synthesis of the principal English gardening traditions, they are a paradise, in our especial sense of the word, only in certain parts; and this for obvious reasons; the spirit of the Dartington Hall community of people is very 'social'; the place is, after all, an *academe,* indeed, it is one of the few places to which the word can properly be applied. Its gardens therefore are bound to be open, to be unsecret, to be a setting for man in the style of the Italian or French garden, however English in design, in planting and above all in plantsmanship. And we have chosen to conclude the study of great gardens with these because they have a special significance for the future: for this is the kind of garden with which it is possible that today's and tomorrow's institutions, industrial, administrative, educational, even residential, could well surround themselves. It provides recreation not for one man or one family, like the great English gardens of yesterday, but for a working community of people who, despite jeers which one sometimes hears at Dartington's 'monasticism', are very much *dans le siecle.* It is, in short, in gardens like those of Dartington Hall that the traditions of the great English garden will, if at all, find their continuance.

It should be remembered, however, that the word 'English' in the above context and in the title of this book is not used geographically so much as aesthetically: it identifies a certain kind of garden, devised in England but which can perfectly well be made in a great many other countries. Since it is often said, and with some truth, that one of the influences which make the English garden what it has become is the peculiarly mild climate of the British Isles, it will be worth examining this statement, that English gardens can be and are made elsewhere than in Britain, in some detail.

First, as to places where the climate is obviously suitable for the creation of paradise gardens, the whole style and traditions of English gardening have been taken over with enthusiasm in Australia, and in New Zealand; particularly in S.W. Australia and in Tasmania is it possible, from the point of view of soil and climate, not only to make English gardens, but to do so more easily than in Britain. In the northern hemisphere the case is not quite so simple. In Europe the choice of plant material is very restricted by the fact that so much of the Continent is made of limestone; but although this entails losing the use of the calcifuge plants, it is still true that the English garden style can be practised, for after all it is successfully expressed in such gardens as Highdown, which we have dealt with and which is on the chalk. In North America limestone soils are much less common and calcifuge plants can be grown almost everywhere throughout that vast region. Of this matter of soil however it should be said, in general, that it need never be regarded as important when the question of the English style is being considered, simply because that style can be expressed in either lime-tolerant or lime-hating plants, although it is true that the best of the great paradise gardens are on acid soils; and that Dartington Hall, our 'type' of the future great garden, is at least on a neutral soil where califuge plants will grow and even flourish. And finally, on this subject, certain technical advances which it would not be convenient to deal with here seem likely to make it possible to grow the lime-hating plants in soils of high calcium content, within a few years.

British nurseries for the supply of ornamental plants, especially of ornamental trees and flowering shrubs, are more numerous and much richer in species and varieties than those of continental Europe or North America. No doubt they would welcome the export business which a further spread in the fashion for English gardens might lead to. And although the labour-and-wages revolution in the western world's economy immediately after the second world war seemed very likely to condemn the great garden to extinction not only in Britain but elsewhere, it is at least possible that the later, in fact the very recent, advances in horticultural mechanization may help to save the art of making them. The number of hands formerly needed to work a great garden and especially in the propagating department, was very great. Ten, twenty, as many as seventy gardeners might be

employed. But the simplification of styles in the romantic paradise gardens, and the use of power-driven cultivators, mowers, hedge-trimmers, trucks and barrows have together reduced the labour requirement to about one tenth of what it used to be. Greenhouse automation has been particularly helpful in this respect: in a modern propagating-house, heating, watering and ventilation are regulated by electronic devices; and the electronically controlled 'mist-propagation' system has almost eliminated the need for skill and at the same time greatly raised the yield of new plants at the propagating benches.

At the far end of the Sunny Border you go up a few stone steps to a paved terrace, and if you there turn left through a gap in a yew hedge you have a clear view over the heart of the gardens, the Tiltyard. This feature is unique: it has been dealt with by covering the whole area, base and terraces which provided the spectators with seats, with lawn. Above the terraces is a row of Spanish chestnuts planted *c.* 1560, lower four enormous London planes, and on the lower terrace but one a century-old Monterey pine. From the point-of-view of the Tiltyard more steps lead up to an ancient stone cider mill on which, *in* 1949, two granite swans were carved by Willi Soukop. You are then in the Dell where the predominant plant is *Azalea mollis,* and other azaleas, including Ghent Kurumes and Exbury hybrids. *Acer palmatum,* flowering cherries and a naturalization of daffodils have also been used.

Something should be said here, for the benefit of plantsmen, about the soil of Dartington Hall gardens, if only because it has not been allowed entirely to govern the choice of plants. There are both light and heavy soils within the area, and despite the presence of the leaf mould of many centuries, these soils are not acid; they apparently vary from something just on the acid side of neutral to something on the alkaline side. They overlie a kind of rotten slate locally known as shillet which, in certain conditions, gives excessively sharp drainage, while where it lies level it may cause water-logging. It is almost impenetrable to roots of anything less than forest trees, which has the curious advantage of keeping shrub roots on the surface where soil acidity can be controlled, though with much labour and difficulty.

The point we wish to make is that the soils of Dart-ington are not such as are considered suitable for the lime-hating ericaceous plants, or for camellias, or for many other plants which are nevertheless flourishing in it. We have experience of a neighbouring garden where this is also true; where, for example, rhododendrons do well, pieris, acacias, daboecias and so forth flourish, yet where the leaf mould, upon analysis, is neutral; or even slightly alkaline. The reason is not clear; on the whole we are inclined to think that it is owing to the limestone being present in an insoluble or inactive form. The difficulty is that authorities are not in agreement on the subject of why calcifuge plants are so; some hold that lime in the soil inhibits the intake of iron salts; others that though the iron is taken up it cannot be used by plants whose own acidity is too low.

At all events, gardening skill also has a lot to do with the success of calcifuge plants at Dartington: rhododendrons, for example, are not so much planted as set upon the surface of leaf mould and constantly mulched with peat and compost so that a topsoil is built round them, into which they root. The success is the more notable in that such difficult species as *Rhododendron falconeri* and R. *macabeanum* make fine specimens. Experience at Dartington has shown that rhododendron species differ very considerably in their tolerance of lime; in fact a useful monograph could be written on these differences. By way of example, R. *decorum* flourishes in parts of the garden which are death to other species.

But it is not soil conditions alone that have governed the choice of rhododendrons. Taste has rejected the flamboyant hybrids, and climate, together with much shade from trees, has made possible the planting of species or fine hybrids in the Edgeworthii series, for example, R. X 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam', R. *fragrantissimum* and R. X 'Princess Alice'. These appear to be tolerant of soil alkalinity nearly up to the neutral point. There is a fine

Dartington Hall form of R. *augustinh*' with flowers which are almost true blue; R. *williamsianum* flourishes and, in the series of large-leaved rhododendrons, R. *macabeanum* and *R. falconer,* whereas R. *sino-grande* does not seem happy.

CONCLUSIONS

When, however, we come to the matter of climate in relation to geography, the case is different. First, there is a very great number of plants commonly grown in English gardens which are not hardy in harsher climates. When dealing with the question of hardiness we have, of course, to consider winter climate first. The coldest month of the year in the northern hemisphere is January. The mean temperature for that month is above 4-4° C. for the whole of west Britain, and above 5 ° C. in the extreme south-west. The whole island has a January mean temperature above 3 • 5 ° C. with the exception of East Anglia and a part of east central Scotland. Now these conditions obtain on the Continent, in the Atlantic provinces of France, Portugal and Spain and on the west and south coasts of Italy and of Greece; and along the south coast of France. And in the mild winter belt of Portugal, France and Italy there are, in fact, a number of English gardens of the paradise type; the perfect climate for them is to be found in Portugal rather than in the other two countries, the high humidity of an 'Atlantic' climate having much to do with this.

Inland in western Europe, at low or moderate altitudes, the January mean temperature is below the freezing point but not extremely cold. Here the conditions exclude a large range of evergreens, but the fact remains that English gardens, only less rich in plant material, are quite feasible and are, in fact, to be found. In eastern Europe the winters become so severe that the plant material which can be used in the making of great gardens is much more restricted.

Winter cold is not by any means the only climatic consideration of importance, however. The paradise garden does not flourish in the absence of summer rainfall or where the summer temperatures and sunshine hours are very high, unless irrigation is practised (as it increasingly is, of course) and where the shade of trees can be provided. In the seventh and eighth centuries of our era the gardeners of the great centres of Arab civilization developed a form of water-and-shade gardening far more suitable for the hot and arid parts of both Eurasia and America. The conclusion here must be that in most of north-western Europe and perhaps a third of North America, English gardens can be made; and, indeed, have been made.

So much for the kind of soil and the kind of climate, and the kind of plants required for the creation of paradise gardens. Quite as important, no doubt, is the nature and temperament of the gardener. The horticultural genius of the Americans, of the Germans, of the Dutch, Italians and French, differs from that of the English; perhaps each people has one of its own. But there does seem to be some recognition of the peculiar excellence of the English kind of garden, since so many men and women of other lands look to England for a model. The 'ideal' English gardener is neither a plant-collector nor an architect; neither a mere naturalist nor a horticultural geometrician. He combines a feeling for design after Nature with a love and knowledge of plants; his object, in both his planting designs and his care of individual plants, and even in the restrained use of garden buildings, is a Nature perfected.

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