

SARAH WARNER BROOKS

A GARDEN WITH HOUSE
ATTACHED

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A Garden with House Attached

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24169788

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A Garden with House Attached

CHAPTER I

"A Garden with House Attached"

When, by an unlooked-for sequence of events, I became manager of "The Garden with House Attached" (as an important preliminary) along with "The Third Son"¹ I went over from Cambridge to take account of its possibilities. And here be it stated that from the time of his first trousers "The Third Son" had been my assistant gardener; and in all my horticultural enterprises, might still be counted in as "aider and abettor."

"Mother," said this astute young person – on our return from this inspection – "It is a big job; but there is yet another week of my vacation. Let us make a beginning."

In shaping the ground plan of this quaint old garden, its long-dead projectors had shown a capability which came within an ace of genius itself! Hence, so far as laying out went, there was

¹ A nickname suggested by this item in a bill of our German cobbler – which ran thus – "To souling shues for *Tird sun* 50 sense."

absolutely no call for improvement.

All had been so well and effectively outlined, that the landscape gardener himself must have approved.

The long South walk – leading past the front door of the "Mansion House" – passing orchard and kitchen garden on its way up the long, gradual ascent towards the western boundary of the estate, and then turning a corner, followed the low stone wall hedged with sturdy purple lilacs (free to all the country round) and making a second turn, skirted the low northern ledge, where in June the locust hangs its tassels of perfumed snow, and, in autumn time, the wild barberry perfects its coral clusters. There, all summer long, the wind blows cool and sweet, and, resting on low, mossy boulders, you may sight, on the left, Middlesex Fells, and, across the blue distance, glimpse Tufts College on its broad, grassy hill, with the Mystic River (if the tide be in) creeping leisurely between you and that ancient seat of learning.

Following the walk down the lazy declivity, you take a turn with it beneath two aged pines, with the big lily-of-the-valley patch nestling in their shade; and (hard by) the well-appointed triangular flower plot, from time immemorial "bedded out" with "The Lady's" house plants. Turning on your track, you take a stroll through "The Lover's Walk" – a little, lilac-embowered pathway – and turning, follow, past the back of the house, the long, rocky ledge, with its glorious crown of white lilac trees – their tall tops touching the very ridge-pole of the roof.

There orange toadstools, like fairy parasols, push up through

the damp mosses. There a giant Norway spruce drops its cones and spreads its brown carpet of needles; and in summer-time you may dream away the hours upon the cool stone steps and, harkening to an ancient pine singing its slow song, may

"Eat of the lotus, and dream, and forget."

The rough wagon road on the East takes you from the high road to the big old-fashioned barn, beneath whose eaves, year after year, the punctual swallow nests; while, high among the rafters within, immemorial pigeons rear their toothsome squabs.

The flower-borders of this garden – anciently edged with box (which, of late, gave up, piece by piece, the long struggles of existence) – had, no doubt, in their prime, been well worth seeing. Lovely blue-eyed Periwinkle yet wandered among the tangled shrubs. A persistent Day-lily and a stunted Flowering Almond still held their own; and in May-time a single root of double English Violet made shift to perfect a scented flower or two, – "dim, but sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes."

Thrifty old-time shrubs still flourished in the wide borders. Alicantus sent far and wide its fruity odor. Yellow Globe flowers straggled here and there. Waxberry bushes stoutly thrived, and, in early springtime, an aged Pyrrhus Japonica put on its blaze of scarlet bloom. Big domes of Tartarean Honeysuckle – all rosy pink with bloom – yet held their own. Creamy Syringas made sweet the summer air, and as for Lilacs (white and purple) they were like "the rats of Bingen," *everywhere*– dominating the entire grounds!

It was a blessed day for us all when, in the sixteenth century, this darling Persian shrub was introduced into English gardens. In Persia they called it the "lilag" (which means simply a flower) and from this we have our word *Lilac*. Surely, "by no other name" – save by the dear country one of *laylock*– would it "smell as sweet."

The native West Indian has a pretty superstition in regard to this familiar flower. He holds that lilac branches, when in blossom, if hung up around the room, protect from malignant influences. He believes that the "jumbies," or evil spirits, will not enter a house where there are lilac blooms. I like to borrow from the pagan this harmless belief; and, each morning throughout their flowering time, I cut big "bowpots" of blown lilacs, and setting them about the house, idly fancy that – thus kept at bay – no evil thing "with spell or charm" may enter the dear home. And, further to guard it, I have named our place "The Lilacs."

A garden is hardly complete without the restful shade of trees – the loveliness of interchanging sunshine and shadow.

Therefore was it good to find trees, many and thrifty, hobnobbing together in our new holding.

A big sturdy hornbeam, with song-birds nesting high among its branches, shaded the eastern lawn, while close beside the kitchen porch a graceful rose-acacia reared its slender trunk, and every May-time wove its garlands of rosy bloom.

All about us grew maple and ash trees. Tall pines to hold the song of the wind among their boughs. Spruces and Arbor

Vitæ (these absolutely upon their last legs, but still persistent), and, fairest of them all, two glorious tulip-trees towering upward, like sturdy masts, towards the blue heaven, flinging to the winds their high leafy boughs, like pale green pennants, picked out (in blooming time) with shapely miracles of color.

Here and there an apple or a pear tree had strayed from orchard to lawn; and in the very midst of things a huge cherry tree rendered its yearly tale of juicy blackhearts – enough and to spare for neighbors and robins, and for our own preserve jars. On a bleak northern rise behind the house, an ancient juniper (like another "Cleopatra's needle") stood slenderly against the sky – as perfect a pyramid as if shaped by the gardener's shears, instead of the keen-edged winter wind.

CHAPTER II

"The Man with the Hoe"

As before our advent at the "Mansion House" the man-of-all-work – after a long administration of its out-door affairs in the soft service of an easily-gratified mistress (the dear "Lady of the Wheeled Chair") had been abstracted from the family circle, the first step in our gardening was to call in the local "Man with the Hoe." This useful personage (let it here be said) was not – like Mr. Markham's terrible hero – "Brother to the ox." His "jaw" and "forehead" were all right, and, owing to the use of a hoe with proper length of handle, "The Weight of the Centuries" had not disturbed the contour of his back. One could not swear that he knew his "Plato" (alas, how few of us *do*!) and as to "The Swing of the Pleiades," it was not his immediate concern.

His it was, rather, to interest himself with the hoeing and edging of graveled walks, the weeding of kitchen and flower-gardens, the pruning of shrubs and vines, and the "making of two" lilies "grow where but one grew before." And so far from being (like Markham's man) "fraught with menace to the universe" *our* "Man with the Hoe" – in that small section of it within his immediate radius – was considered a positive *blessing*! Was it not on *his* good right arm that we – "the deserving poor" – to whom Providence had apportioned vegetable patches, flower-

borders, and bits of lawn with intersecting graveled paths, and denied the luxury of a resident "hired man" – depended for the presentability of our "outdoors"? Poor Millet! one fancies his astonishment at Markham's terrible presentation of his peasant model! Himself of their guild, he painted his brother peasants in all honesty; and being neither pessimist nor anarchist, but working simply from the standpoint of the artist, has so made them immortal.

But to return to our own undertaking – our first task was the dislodgment of the stubborn tangle of persistent thimbleberry vines, sturdy saplings of ash and chestnut, and long-established waxberries. This done, we made, on the south, facing the "king's highway" and near enough to give delight and perfume to the foot-passenger, a brand new flower bed. In the middle of each square of lawn a raised circle, edged with stone, was made for the spring hyacinths and tulips (these to be succeeded later with cannas and bright summer flowers). Relegating the kitchen garden to a less conspicuous place, we prepared the cabbage-patch for our little rose-garden. All this heavy work done – "The Man with the Hoe" was, for the time, discharged.

Our Cambridge home had, for nearly two decades, been the property of one who in the Harvard Botanical Garden had "a friend at court" and had thus found it possible to secure for his grounds many choice shrubs and hardy herbaceous plants. Himself a skilled and enthusiastic horticulturist – after twenty years of painstaking cultivation, his garden close, with its mellow

low-lying site and unobstructed southern exposure, had become a miracle of productiveness.

It had not, like the Medford garden, been "laid out." Flowers, fruit, and vegetables, were all in a riotous jumble; yet each the perfection of its kind. The marvel was that one small garden could carry such a load of growth!

Pears, early and late, of the juiciest and sweetest; big yellow quinces, currants, white and red, raspberries, thimbleberries, and blackberries by the bushel! And (crowning glory of all) a huge gravenstein with fruit fair as the famous golden apples tended by the "Daughters of the Evening Star." To this garden, for many years, my good husband had devoted his leisure hours. Two years before our removal to "The Garden with House Attached" he had left us for the far-off Unknown Land; and it was therefore with tender touch that we uprooted the shrubs and plants of his care – together with the flowers that *I* had tended. The cold frame was full of thrifty seedlings – Primroses, Iceland poppies, and other beauties. In the open, there were Lilies, Peonies – rose-pink and creamy white – big Drummond Phloxes, and Roses *ad infinitum* – two heaped cartloads in all – carried over by "The Third Son," and before the earliest frost, so well bestowed by his able hands, as to have rooted themselves in the mellow soil of the new garden.

Not one of these succumbed to the perils of transplantation – not even the five-year-old peach tree, whose certain dissolution all had prophesied, but which bravely withstood the risk of

removal, and now, each spring, puts on its crown of pink splendor, which duly turns to juicy fruit beneath the sun that shines upon the grave of him whose hand, long years ago, planted its tiny stone.

Later on, we put in the tulip and hyacinth bulbs, and, when at last the entire garden, beneath its warm coverlet of dressing and leaves, composed itself for a long winter nap – like the poet's "goose-woman" – we

"Blessed ourselves, and cursed ourselves,
And rested from our labors."

CHAPTER III

The "Lady's" Conservatory

Meantime, the dear "Lady" (who had anticipated our coming to the Mansion House, by a sudden resolve to commit her burden of housekeeping to younger and abler hands – and retain of her old establishment but a single personal attendant – as faithful friend, companion, and amanuensis) wheeled into the very thick of action – had watched with anxious eyes this removal of ancient landmarks – this general upheaval of things. An almost helpless invalid – wheeled daily through eight patient summers into her beloved garden – she had sat with her beautiful silver hair arranged in careful curls, a big white sun-bonnet shading her kind old face, to receive her friends (both gentle and simple) with a cordial hospitality, and an old-time courtesy in fine keeping with herself and her surroundings.

Innately conservative, the Lady was scarce in touch with innovation of any sort. A passionate lover of flowers, but scantily endowed with horticultural talent, and without a spark of creative genius, she smiled with dubious complacency on this awful devastation – comforting herself with the sweet anticipation of spring tulips and summer roses, in her very own garden! Dear Lady – her absolute trust in my gardening ability was indeed touching! One must "live up to the blue china" of one's

reputation; so I did my very best; and when all was done, and the out-door darlings nestled safely beneath their winter coverlet, came the pleasure of looking after the house-plants – (by this time well-recovered from the vicissitudes of repotting and removal) and the bestowal of each in its winter quarters; and this leads me to a description of "The Conservatory."

In a warm southwestern angle of "The Mansion House" there nestled a narrow piazza-like structure – opening, by long French windows, from both drawing and sitting room, and leading by a short flight of steps into the old garden.

This erection – having been enclosed by sash-work of glass – and furnished with rugs, a big easy chair, a round table, and a penitential hair-cloth sofa, and supplied with rocking chairs, was, when the temperature permitted, the favorite lounging place of family and guest.

Though warmed only by the sun, it had always been known as "The Conservatory" (probably because herein every autumn, the Lady's geraniums and fuchsias, taken in from the early frost, stood on the corner table, recovering from the fall potting on their way to winter quarters on the broad ledge of a sunny south window of her own bed chamber). Through the winter this unwarmed place was neither available for plant or man.

Long before the possibility of ever moving to the Mansion House had entered my head, I had looked upon this conservatory with loving eyes, and, in fancy, pictured it, warmed and filled all winter long with lovely flowering plants.

A Conservatory had been the dream of my life! And when *this* fell to my lot, and, abolishing the stuffy cylinder stoves that had, heretofore, warmed the Mansion House, we put in a big furnace, I had directed the leading of a roomy pipe to this glass-enclosed quarter, and the out-door work well over, I pleased myself with arranging this new winter home for my darlings. The light sashes – warped by Time – had become "ram-shackly." I wedged them securely, and stuffing gaps with cotton batting carefully listed the outer door against

"The west wind Mudjekeewis,"

and when all was done delightedly watched the vigorous growth of my well-housed darlings. Alas! short and sweet was my day of content.

One fatal January night the mercury dropped suddenly to zero, and (as luck would have it) the furnace fire followed suit, and, in the morning, I awoke to find my precious plants stark and stiff against the panes.

We promptly showered them with ice-cold water ("a hair of the dog that bit you" advises the old proverb). In vain! The blighted foliage stood black and shriveled in the morning sunshine!

"All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't bring Humpty Dumpty up again!"

All that could be done was to clip away the frost-bitten members, mellow the soil, and await a fresh supply of sap from

the uninjured roots.

As a matter of course the slowly recuperating plants could no longer be left to the random winter gambols of tricky "Mudjekeewis," but must be relegated to the old-time safety of window-seat and flower-stand.

Thus ended my day-dream of a conservatory!

Under this dispensation I consoled myself by nursing the invalids back to health and comparative prosperity, and, in late February, they amply repaid my care by abundant leafage and wealth of bloom.

Meantime, the Freesias, and Narcissi, the Hyacinths and Tritelias, came one after another from the dark cellar, to sit in the sun, and cheer our wintry days with odor and bloom, and give delight to the dear invalid Lady.

And here let me say that of all winter gardening I have found the house cultivation of bulbs most interesting and repaying.

First there is the eager looking over the autumn catalogues and the well-considered selection of your bulbs. If your purse is long enough to warrant it, you may put on your list the costly *named* varieties of your favorite colors among the hyacinths; if otherwise, you may still have the satisfaction of making a dollar or two go a long way; since after putting on your list a few choice bulbs, you get, at the department store, oceans of five-cent hyacinth bulbs, and, taking your chance as to color, have the added pleasure of the surprises thus secured.

As the other desirable bulbs are comparatively inexpensive,

you can finish your list from the catalogue, and thus have as many as you desire.

The *Oxalis* has, presumably, been saved over from last winter's stock, and so, too, have the best of the *Freesias*. These are, no doubt, well-started about the first of September.

Early in October some of the newly bought *Freesias* and some of all the other bulbs may be planted. The remainder may be potted in instalments, two or three weeks apart, the *last* as late as December. You may use for hyacinths, at a pinch, quite small pots – say four-inch ones; but success is more certain in the five or six-inch sizes. The smaller bulbs may be planted in clumps in such sized pots as you like, about two inches apart. You may use prepared soil furnished very reasonably by the florist, or, if preferred, prepare it yourself after this formula: one-half mellow garden loam, one-quarter well-rotted cow manure, and for the remainder use leaf-mold, well-pulverized peat, and a good trowel-full of fine beach sand. Bulbs, though needing rich food, should never come directly in contact with their manure supply.

In potting the larger bulbs leave about quarter of an inch above ground, but entirely bury the smaller ones.

The big bulbs should be pressed firmly down, as they have a way of working up from the covering soil.

Water well, and set in a cool, dark cellar. The *oxalis* and *freesia* sprout more quickly, and must not be left to send long pale shoots up in the dark, but the hyacinths and narcissi, though promised in six weeks, are often two months, and even longer, getting ready

to come into the light.

This should be done with caution, as they must first be greened in a shaded window, and not until later exposed to the direct beams of the sun. They may be given water in moderate supplies, and I have sometimes found a weekly allowance of "Bowker's Flower Food" desirable.

My own selection of house bulbs usually comprises oxalis, freesia, the narcissi, hyacinth, and tritelia; many other desirable ones are to be had, but with a good supply of the above-named varieties, including a generous number of such inexpensive bulbs as the Paper-white Narcissus, and the Yellow "Daffies," one may count on a sweet succession of bloom from Christmas to May-time.

In this connection I add a reprint of a paper long ago published in the "American Garden."

It was originally prepared by me for the "Cambridge Plant Club," whose members were so kind as to assure me that they found it helpful and entertaining. It was copied from the "Garden" by the *Cambridge Tribune*, but may, nevertheless, be new to the present reader:

CHAPTER IV

The House Garden. The Selection, Arrangement, and Culture of House Plants

Apart from that æsthetic satisfaction which house plants afford, the principle of growth, which they exemplify, has its own strong and almost universal attraction. Thus it is that we behold in dust-blurred windows of squalid tenements rows of dented tomato cans, desolately holding their stunted geraniums, fuchsias, and other feeble bits of greenery. Such half-pathetic attempts at floriculture are, indeed, "touches of nature" that "make us kin" to the forlorn inmates of these shabby, ill-conditioned dwellings who, amid poverty and its possible degradation, have still courage for, at least, *one fine endeavor*.

The sole purpose of this paper is to impart some simple knowledge gained through a long and earnestly-loving experience in the beautiful art of plant-culture. Our first step is the choice of our plants; and we shall do wisely to select such as will best accommodate themselves to the somewhat adverse conditions of furnace-heated and gas-lighted rooms such as most of us occupy. First and foremost in our collection should stand sweet-scented plants; not only because these impart to our rooms

a delicious air of summer, and etherealize the atmosphere of our homes, but also because of their sanitary value, medical authority having distinctly declared that the perfume of growing flowers, exhaling on the in-door air, tends to neutralize fever and other disease-germs. For delicacy of perfume and continuity of bloom the heliotrope may take the first rank among odorous house plants. Its very name – derived from two Greek words, Helio, the sun, and trope, to turn – is charmingly suggestive of summer-time. The plant does not belie its name. It cannot have too many sun-kisses. As a cut-flower it is perishable and unsatisfactory, but its growing bloom lasts long, and holds its odor even in decay; it is delightful up to its very last breath.

To secure good winter bloom from the heliotrope, begin in early summer with the plant while in the ground, and by repeated pinching-back make it sturdy and robust. This done, choose some cloudy afternoon, about the middle of August, for potting. Your soil should be thus prepared: one-third good loam, one-third leaf-mold, and one-third well-rotted manure; a few pinches of soot may be added, and enough white sand mixed through the whole to keep it light and dainty. Pot carefully, and with as little root disturbance as may be. Water thoroughly, and keep the plant in shade until its leaves recover their tone. After this it may stand in the sun, if given plenty of water, for a week or two, while the buds get under way.

Be sure to house before the faintest suspicion of frost, as this sun-lover is extremely tender, and the slightest nipping harms it.

Give it a southern exposure in your room, and place close to the glass; and if you have not a double window, leave the fly-screen in to save the leaves and blossoms from immediate contact with frosty panes. A heliotrope should never once become wholly dry, and should have a weekly drink of manure-water, which must be about the color of moderately strong coffee. For insect pests, dust the leaves with a light feather-brush, and then wash thoroughly. This process must be repeated as often as the insects appear.

The odorous sacred lily of China we all, no doubt, grow yearly in water, with a bottom layer or two of pebbles. It is well to make incisions lengthwise of the bulb with a sharp knife before planting, and there should be lumps of charcoal among the pebbles to keep the water sweet. A single bulb, thus treated, will give one seven flower-stalks. The old-fashioned plant, the calla, though less common than it was twenty years ago, if grown in an artistic vase and given an entire window, is beautiful.

It has been said of the calla that "it needs water like a mill, heat like a furnace, food like an army, and absolute rest during the summer." "Keep its feet in water," says the florist. In its native habitat it is in water to the depth of a foot or more, in broad open sunlight, and in soil as rich as decayed vegetation can make it. Soon after flowering season the water subsides, and the soil becomes as dry as it is possible to get in the tropics. Here, nature teaches us how to cultivate the calla. The canna thrives admirably as a house plant, and has a happy way of accommodating itself to circumstances, which makes it especially desirable for decorative

effect. In a sunny window it will flower all winter if given abundant heat. In a north window of the same room it will give one beautiful foliage, and it will, "at a pinch," take a back seat and hold its own in the shade, grouped with the statuary and screens, where, with its large, handsome leaves, it will impart to the drawing-room a certain air of oriental languor and magnificence. The canna should be lifted early in September and placed in rich loam, in a large, well-shaped pot or vase, and kept for a week or two in the open, in partial shade, and well watered. It must be carefully housed before the lightest frost appears. Its vigor and beauty are increased by the addition of wood soot to the soil.

All the begonias thrive well as house plants. My experience with the new and choice varieties has not been sufficient to enable me to give valuable advice in regard to their culture. I had formerly supposed that a north window might suit a begonia. It was a mistaken impression. The plant, I find, needs sunlight and a warm atmosphere. It must be regularly and carefully watered, and I have found it best to give the small-leaved begonia its water from the saucer. The smooth-leaved begonias are said to affect a Sunday morning cup of coffee by way of gloss to their foliage. I have seen a superb one thus treated, but have never tried the experiment. The plant likes an occasional watering with soot tea while making its summer growth in the garden.

The coleus, as a window plant, affords fine color effects, but the plant is too tender to be agreeable for house-culture. It requires an invariably high temperature, a fair amount of

sunlight, regular moisture, and very rich soil. This given it will grow superbly, but if overtaken, in some unguarded hour, with the slightest chill, it loses its beauty and vigor. The house coleus is almost sure to become infested with mealy-bugs. These may be picked off, and thereafter the plant should be given a careful wash of kerosene water, which must be repeated as often as the pests appear. The formula for this spray, which is used for roses at Mount Auburn, was thus given me by an expert. It is simply one wine-glass of kerosene oil to a gallon of water.

Ferns, as decorative plants, are beautiful and easily grown, though all do not succeed with the maidenhair. All ferns should have an abundance of light, but not too much sun. I have found an eastern exposure the very best possible. Ferns should be placed in the full light of a window, given a high temperature and watered evenly, but not too much. The soil should be partially renewed annually, and care should be taken with the roots, which do not like disturbance; especially is this to be observed with the maidenhair, which, if possible, should *never* be transplanted, and should have its stated period of entire rest, during which it should be kept almost dry. The fuchsia is, properly, an outdoor bloomer, but with care can be brought to flower in winter. To this end, pinch back in summer, and in September house, and place in a north or east window. Give much light, water freely with warm water, and give liquid manure and soot tea about twice a week. If given an entire window both flower and foliage will be superb, with this treatment. Time would fail me

to enumerate all the desirable plants for house-culture; there is the orange tree, the costly palm, the delicate asparagus, the achyranthes, anthericum, and curculigo, the aspidistra, cyclamen, and many more equally beautiful and practicable, and last, but not least, the inevitable rubber plant, a little stiff and heavy perhaps, but as a single plant decidedly effective. In arranging a table or stand of mixed plants, care should be taken to give each its proper growing place without marring the general effect. Heliotrope, that ardent sun-lover, should have the front row, close to the window-glass. Beside it should sit a begonia or two, and some flowering geraniums. A petunia and a bridal-rose might come next – the petunia twined among the others to hide its scraggy limbs. A nicotiana, well in the light, might make the evenings sweet with its perfume, and if the room be not over-warm, a pot of mignonette might sweeten the air by day, and at night be removed to cooler quarters. In the "middle aisle" an achyranthes or two may stand with sunlight sifting through its fiery leaves, which have thus all the color-effect of blossoms without their perishability. Further back, anthericum may flourish, with curculigo spreading queenly its fluted palm-like leaves, and always craving moisture. And in the "pauper's pew" Wandering Jew will contentedly sit, like charity, kindly covering the entire defects of staring pots that needs must hold its betters; and on the floor, at the foot of all, aspidistra may seem to "choose darkness rather than light." If you need a growing amaryllis or two to eke out your foliage display, they will take a

shady place, though to bring them into flower you need a strong, steady sunlight.

Nicotiana, or tobacco plant, is another fragrant and desirable plant. It thrives in about the same soil as the heliotrope, but needs an entirely different exposure, being one of the few plants that flower perfectly in a sunless window. Experimenting with the nicotiana as a house plant, I found that in a south window the plant was not robust, was scant of bloom, and the flowers quite perishable in comparison with the blossoms in a north window, where the plants grew to a height of more than five feet, and, together, produced one hundred and fifty-six flowers. Through the entire winter no ray of sunlight reached them. They were trained on stout strings quite close to the glass of a double window, kept moist, and given an even temperature of from sixty-five to seventy degrees, and were watered well with liquid manure.

At evening the blossoms expand, and all through the night it is as if the room were

"Perfumed from an unseen censer, swung by angels."

Among the sweet-scented tribe mignonette ranks high as an out-door plant, and as a window bloomer it is exquisite. It rarely outlives transplanting, but may be sown in pots about mid-summer, and pinched back for the house. Another method is to obtain the plant from the florist when in bud. The cost is trifling, and if kept cool and in a sunny window, it will continue in bloom for weeks. Mignonette needs much sunlight, but not too high a

temperature, and the plant is much weakened by a single day's omission in watering.

Another – now almost obsolete – fragrant house plant is the night-blooming jasmine. Its odor is peculiar and intense, and – as its name implies – is only emitted by night. Its foliage is not especially delicate, but nothing can be more dainty than its slender spikes of pale, greenish-white bloom. It is a thrifty plant, making in a single summer a growth of five or six feet. It is a shrub, but one could fancy that, ages ago, it must have been a "sport" of a climber, so slender and rapid is its habit of growth. After flowering-time, which begins late in July and continues until late in October, it drops most of its foliage, which is soon replaced by young, delicate shoots and fresh leaves and buds.

The *Daphne odora*, which combines in its small clusters of bloom the exquisite perfume of many sweet flowers, may not be lightly passed by. It is not an easy plant to manage, and often drops its buds just as they seem ready to open. By placing it in the sunny window of a cool room, and watering evenly and not too copiously, it may be brought into flower; and then nothing can be finer than its fragrance.

The more homely and familiar hyacinth is not only delightful in form, color, and odor, but may be recommended as a "safe investment," as it seldom fails to flower and needs comparatively little care.

The *mahernia* is another desirable fragrant plant. It is very effective in a hanging-basket. It comes in flower about the first

of February, and its tiny yellow cups are brimful of delicious odor. A home-bred mahernia makes fine foliage, but seldom blooms abundantly; it is, therefore, best to procure the plant from the florist when fully budded. It will then flower well in a sunny window, and for three or four weeks one's room will be as sweet as summer. The wax-plant, though properly a summer blooming plant, sometimes flowers in winter. Its blossoms are very odorous, especially by night, and in structure and color they are exquisite. It is a long-lived plant, easily raised and tended, and, being a climber, may be tastefully trained on a trellis, where, with its glossy, rubber-like leaves, it is very effective. The petunia, as a window plant, blooms freely, and the white variety is fragrant – especially by night. The plant is rather ungainly in its habit of growth. To conceal its scragginess of structure twine its stems among other foliage on your stand, and place it close to the glass, and you will find it pretty and effective. And now that sweet-smelling plants are under consideration, may I not give you the details of an experiment with the common lilac as a house plant? It was made some fifteen years ago, and before I had the slightest knowledge of lilac-forcing, which is now quite common among our florists.

Early in December a stout, low bush of the hardy purple variety was, with the aid of a pickaxe, dislodged from the frost-bound earth, and with its frozen ball of sod still adhering, thus treated: a large nail-keg, having an auger-hole in its bottom on which some bits of crock were strewn, was filled to about half

its depth with warm stable manure; on this the dry leafless bush, with its frozen soil, was set, and the keg filled in with mellow loam. After a good watering, the keg was placed in a deep pan, which was then filled with boiling water, and the whole set near a huge hall stove. The hot water was daily renewed at the bottom, and before many days leaf and flower-buds began to swell on the hard, bare stems of the bush. When these were well formed and the tiny buds quite distinguishable among the pale green foliage, the lilac was removed from its dim corner beside the stove, and given an entire east window in the long hall, where the temperature ranged from forty to sixty, and sometimes as high as seventy degrees. In about two months from the time of housing fourteen large and perfect clusters of pearl-white lilacs rejoiced our eyes. These blossoms were far more delicate in odor than out-door lilacs, and made a delightful atmosphere of spring-time in the homely old farm-house which was then our dwelling-place. We had, too, the novel pleasure of surprising our friends with clusters of fresh lilac in February.

French florists, who give much attention to lilac-forcing, lay great stress upon the necessity of keeping the bush in the dark in order to bleach the flowers – white lilacs being most marketable, and the common purple lilac most available for forcing on account of its superior vitality. Fortunately I stumbled upon the right treatment, and mine seemed to come white of their own sweet will.

For a hanging-basket use the oxalis, of which there are many

beautiful varieties. It flowers abundantly, but as the season advances, must be stimulated with repeated applications of liquid manure and soot tea, that its foliage may not lose its vigor and become straggly. Wandering Jew, though structurally coarse, is a good hanging plant, and will accommodate itself to any exposure, really doing its very best in a north window. Ivy geranium is another hanging plant, beautiful in structure, and with its double rose-pink blossoms, as in the improved varieties, most fair to see. It demands strong food, much moisture, and oceans of sunlight. Madeira vine and German ivy both make effective hanging-baskets. The latter is too alluring to the green fly to make its house-culture easy or satisfactory. Smilax, if trained on strings, in a sunny window, is exquisitely delicate, and its blossom is odorous. The English ivy, as in-door greenery, is delightful. I have attempted its culture, but my experience being but a series of ignoble defeats, is not commendable. I wish it were! The odious scale has at last compelled me to abandon the field. I must also confess to repeated failure with in-door geraniums. Mine have not bloomed well, and a geranium without its blossoms is a poor affair (not including the scented varieties). Last autumn, after having tried many methods with many kinds, I turned over a new leaf in geranium culture. All my best geraniums were consigned to an upper room, where no furnace heat could reach them, and where, in cold nights, the temperature falls perilously near to freezing point. The plants have a southern window, and through the day the room is

moderately warmed from the ascending heat of the kitchen. Geraniums (and fuchsias and nasturtiums as well) have taken kindly to this low temperature, the geraniums blooming as finely as in the open during summer. Many of us have, no doubt, seen floating about in print, the little story of that pot of geranium which was the sole bequest of a dying man to his family, who carefully tended this precious, though not pecuniarily valuable legacy. When spring came the pot was reverently committed to the cemetery lot to summer close beside the grave of the buried husband and father. On removing it in autumn, the plant was found to have outgrown its quarters, and was tenderly dislodged for repotting. To the great surprise of these good people a hollow false bottom was found in the original pot, and on its removal a little fortune in bank notes was disclosed, which, as the story ran, had obligingly kept themselves intact for the heirs in this odd storing-place. This tale has been cited of late by a scientific floriculturist, as evidence of the deplorable ignorance of the common mind in regard to absolutely necessary conditions for growth demanded by a plant. "A geranium," he authoritatively tells us, "cannot exist without drainage, hence an account which asserts that one has for months survived the ordeal of a tight-bottom pot can have no foundation in fact." So we have been taught, but, alas for the infallibility of time-honored theories! In the material world new discoveries are continually upsetting old conclusions; and we are now told that our geraniums and fuchsias have a natural affinity for tight-bottomed tomato cans!

The finest geranium in my present collection has the proud distinction of growing in a water-tight lard kettle. Though a young and blooming plant, it was held in light esteem by its owner because of a vicious tendency to magenta, and in the autumn, no pot being at hand, was given this apparently thin chance of survival. Not only has it carried its buds and blossoms straight on through the entire winter, but it has graciously overcome its perversity in the matter of color, changing from a glaring magenta to a deep and lovely rose. In the same group is a large white geranium three years old, which, after blooming all summer in the garden, has never once, throughout the winter, been out of bud and blossom. This well-behaved plant grows in an old butter tub which stands squarely on its "own" sound "bottom," unmutilated by gimlet or auger. The plant had, in late winter, ten clusters of bud and bloom, while its small neighbor of the lard kettle had six. A nasturtium, in the same window, flowers abundantly, and a fuchsia beside it is a paragon among plants. All these have had weekly applications of manure water and soot tea, and have not been kept over-wet. Especially is this true of the geraniums – which may, perhaps, partly explain their dispensing with drainage. The finest hyacinth I have ever grown in the house perfected in a handleless fancy pitcher which had no outlet at the bottom. Having no pot of the right size, some lumps of charcoal were thrown into this make-shift affair, the soil tossed in, and the bulb, not without serious misgivings, carefully planted. It flowered late, but its foliage was abundant and its

bloom exquisite. It gave me five perfect rose-colored spikes. These all, in common with my other plants (excepting ferns and aspidistras) were well fed with liquid manure and soot tea, and, in potting, a little wood ashes was added to the soil.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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