

GREEN FINGERS

*Quips and Tips
for a Good
Gardener*

BY
REGINALD ARKELL



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GREEN FINGERS



“A LOVESOME THING—GOD WOT!”

GREEN FINGERS

A PRESENT FOR A GOOD GARDENER

by
REGINALD ARKELL

pictured by
EUGÈNE HASTAIN



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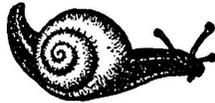
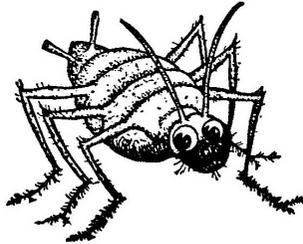
To My Landlord

I'LL tell you a rather remarkable thing:
The wall of my garden belongs to the King.

And, would you believe it, the rent that I pay,
Is merely a trifle of twopence a day.

My garden, I have to admit it, is small;
But you *should* see the roses I grow on the wall.

RICHMOND.
August, 1934.



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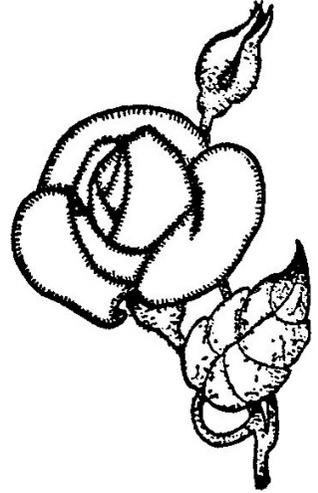
“*Green Fingers*”

THIS book is meant for people who
Can always make their gardens do
Exactly what they want them to;
Who search their borders every night,
And catch their slugs by candle-light;
Who always start at crack of dawn
To dig the plantains from their lawn;
Whose paths are *always* free from weeds;
Whose plants are *always* grown from seeds;
Who are *most* careful not to prune
That standard rose a day too soon;
Who are *quite* rude to men who sell
Tobacco plants that have no smell;
In fact, to all of you, I mean,
Whose fingers are reputed green
Because you keep your borders clean.



We Grow the Same Roses

WHAT is a nation?
Just the same
Old garden with
A different name.
It may be here,
It may be there;
We grow the same roses
Everywhere.
It doesn't matter
What we do,
You are the same as me,
And I, as you.
It doesn't matter
If short or tall—
We grow the same roses
After all.



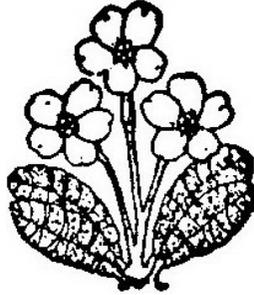
Though some are poor
And some are rich,
It doesn't matter
Which is which.
Though men are brave
And women fair,
We grow the same roses
Everywhere.
It doesn't matter
Where we sit,
Some choose the gallery
And some, the pit;
Some like the circle
And some a stall—
We grow the same roses

WE GROW THE SAME ROSES

After all.

English or Russian,
French or Scot;
We seem so different—
We are not.
And though we quarrel
Now and then,
We kiss and make it
Up again.
The earth was made
For every one;
We share the same old stars,
The same old sun.
It doesn't matter,
The world is small—
We grow the same roses
After all.

“Come down to Kew—”



YOU know, of course, that pleasant rhyme,
“Come down to Kew in Lilac-time”:
I often feel it isn’t fair
To other flowers growing there
So I intend to write a rhyme,
“Come down to Kew at *any* time.”

Come down to Kew, I mean to say,
When Bluebells paint the woods of May;
Come down to Kew, shall be my tune,
When Roses, rioting in June,
Usher the summer pageant in
Until the Autumn days begin.

Come down to Kew; though days are cold,
The leaves are yellow, brown and gold.
Come down to Kew, I mean to write,
And see the Winter Aconite;
Its little ruff is wet with rime—
Come down to Kew at any time.

Flowers of the Mind



*LAST winter, when I was in bed with the 'Flu
And a temperature of a hundred and two,
I was telling the gardener what he should do.*

You must keep the *Neurosis* well watered, I said.
Be certain to weed the *Anæmia* bed.
That yellow *Myopis* is getting too tall,
Tie up the *Lumbago* that grows on the wall.
Those scarlet *Convulsions* are quite a disgrace,
They're like the *Deliriums*—all over the place.
The pink *Pyorrhæa* is covered with blight,
That golden *Arthritis* has died in the night.
Those little dwarf *Asthmas* are nearly in bloom—

But just then the doctor came into the room.

Legend of Rosemary



THERE once was a lady, divinely tall,
Who lived high up in a castle wall,
And longed to be lord in her husband's hall.

A troubadour chanced to be passing by,
As the lady looked down from her casement high.

He stood at the foot of the castle wall,
And sang to the lady, divinely tall,
Who longed to be lord in her husband's hall:

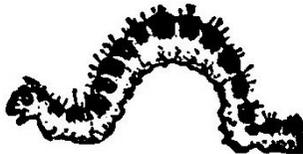
“A holy father, from over the sea,
Has brought me this cutting of Rosemary.

“Plant it carefully by the wall.
If it grows a tree, both healthy and tall,
You shall be lord in your husband's hall.”

The lady listened, and so it befell.
She wore the doublet and hose as well.

*And even to-day
There are cynics who say:
The wife who means to master her man
Will trot down the path with her watering-can—*

*And if you follow her, you will see
She always waters her Rosemary.*



A Nurseryman

THE Queen was in the garden,
A-smelling of a rose.
She started for to pick one,
To please her royal nose;
When up speaks the gardener:
“You can’t have none of those.”

The Queen was in the green-house,
A-looking at a grape.
She started to admire one:
Its colour, bloom and shape.
When up comes the gardener,
Before she could escape.

The Queen is in the parlour
A-slaming of the door;
And writing of a letter
Because she feels so sore:
“I don’t want no gardener;
So don’t come back no more.”

Bees

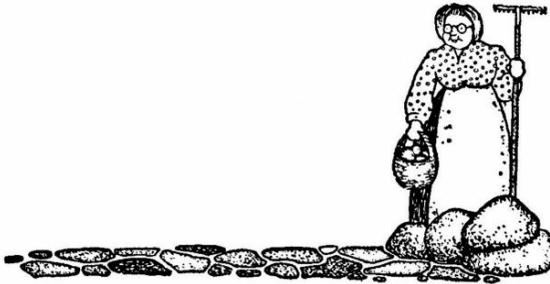
SOME men make money
As bees make honey;
They spend their lives
In filling hives—
I think that's funny.
I'm not a busy bee;
No honest toil for me,
And when my Banker,
Each time I meet him in the street,
Gets frank and franker,
He does not worry me—
I have a recipe;
I find some busy bee
Who has the sense to be
Friendly to me.

A Concrete Example

MY next-door neighbour, Mrs. Jones,
Has got a garden full of stones:
A crazy path, a lily pond,
A rockery, and, just beyond,
A sundial with a strange device,
Which Mrs. Jones thinks rather nice.

My next-door neighbour, Mrs. Jones,
Puts little plants between the stones.
They are so delicate and small
They don't mean anything at all.
I can't think how she gets them in,
Unless she plants them with a pin.

My next-door neighbour, Mrs. Jones,
Once asked me in to see her stones.
We stood and talked about a flower
For quite a quarter of an hour.
"Where is this lovely thing?" I cried.
"You're standing on it," she replied.



Green Fly



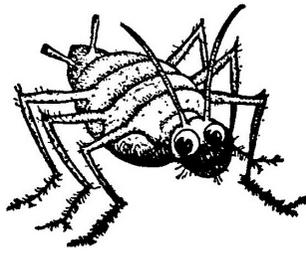
OF every single garden pest,
I think I hate the Green Fly best.
My hate for him is stern and strong;
I've hated him both loud and long.
Since first I met him in the Spring
I've hated him like anything.

There was one Green Fly, I recall;
I hated him the most of all.
He sat upon my finest rose,
And put his finger to his nose.
Then sneered, and turned away his head
To bite my rose of royal red.

Next day I noticed, with alarm,
That he had started out to charm
A lady fly, as green in hue
As all the grass that ever grew.
He wooed, he won; she named the night—
And gave my rose another bite.

Ye gods, quoth I, if this goes on,
Before another week has gone,
These two will propagate their kind,
Until, one morning, I shall find
A million Green Fly on my Roses,
All with their fingers to their noses.

I made a fire, I stoked it hot
With all the rubbish I had got;
I picked the rose of royal red
Which should have been their bridal bed;
And on the day they twain were mated
They also were incinerated.



The Passion Flower and the Pea

I THINK that I shall never be
So popular that I shall see
A Passion Flower named after me.

Though famous people of to-day,
Are honoured in this curious way.

In Carter's Catalogue, I see
That Mary Pickford is a Pea.

Jack Hobbs, Lord Beatty, Nurse Cavell,
And Sonny Boy, are Peas as well.

When they name something after me,
I only hope that I shall be
A Passion Flower and not a Pea.

My Gardener Complains

THE Missus seems
To think it fun
To work from dawn
To set of sun,
And do two jobs
Instead of one.

The Missus loves
To rush around,
And do each job
That can be found.
She covers quite
A lot of ground.

I can't think why
She works that way,
For, after all,
She gets no pay
And never has
A holiday.



The Lady with the Lamp

THERE is a lady, sweet and kind
As any lady you will find.
I've known her nearly all my life;
She is, in fact, my present wife.

In daylight, she is kind to all,
But, as the evening shadows fall,
With jam-pot, salt and sugar-tongs
She starts to right her garden's wrongs.

With her electric torch, she prowls,
Scaring the Nightjars and the Owls,
And if she sees a slug or snail
She sugar-tongs him by the tail.

Beware the pine-tree's withered branch,
Beware the awful Avalanche—
And Slugs, that walk abroad by night,
Beware my wife's electric light.



Sweet Pea Culture

PREPARE the ground in Autumn
And sprinkle lime about;
Give the soil time to settle
Before you plant them out.
The trenches should be three feet deep
And also two feet wide,
With bone-meal, soot and farm manure
Mixed with the soil inside.
You'll find that mid-September
Is the proper time to start:
Thin out the plants until they stand
Just half a foot apart.
Be careful how you drain the soil,
Put sand along each row—

*But, Gladys, she just shoves them in,
And, golly, how they grow!*



Unhappy Hampstead

I ALWAYS thought it was a pity
That dwellers in our garden city
Had not seen fit to emulate
The owner of some great estate
Who throws his garden open wide
That every one may walk inside.

So I suggested to some friends
That we should try to make amends:
It seemed the least that we could do,
To throw our gardens open, too;
And let the Garden City see
Just what a garden ought to be.

Two weeks before the fateful day,
My Calliopes passed away.
And e'er another week was past,
My pet Gloxinia breathed her last.
While, crowning tragedy of all,
The Flowering Peach began to fall.

*And so I fled—I could not face
Humiliation and Disgrace.*



The Ballad of the Buttercup

A MAN, as mad as any hatter,
Once said that mud is misplaced matter;
And he would argue, I suppose,
A weed is any plant that grows
Outside its own especial sphere—
I trust I make my meaning clear.

And you are wondering, no doubt,
What all this bother is about.
While walking down my garden way,
I found a buttercup to-day;
A lovely thing it was, indeed,
And yet, in theory, a weed.

“Alas, poor Buttercup,” I said,
“Already you’re as good as dead.
If Mary sees you, Buttercup,
Your number is distinctly up.
What can be done?” Just then, my wife
Swooped forward with her pruning-knife.

“Observe,” I cried, “dear wife of mine,
Observe this Lesser Celandine,
The fairest flower by poets sung,
In every land and every tongue . . .”
But Mary merely shook her head:
“It is a Buttercup,” she said.



Depression



*A GARDEN is a lovesome thing—
When it starts blooming in the Spring.*

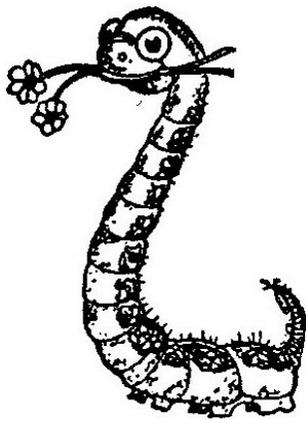
The daffodil, the snowdrop white,
The dainty Winter Aconite. . . .

And just as it is going strong,
The Woolly Aphis comes along.

Wire Worms and Weevils think it fun
To eat your annuals one by one.

Until the Caterpillars start
To break your horticultural heart.

*Go, take a flat or buy a yacht.
A garden is a lovesome thing—God wot!*



Rock Gardens

ROCK Gardens are really ridiculous things,
Like peaches with pepper and donkeys with wings.

You make out a list of the plants you must buy,
You stick them in pockets, and most of them die.

And if you are foolish enough to suppose
You can keep them alive with the aid of a hose—

What dire disillusion awaits you next day:
The water is certain to wash them away.



The Lady of Shalots

“HAVE you forgotten, Curly Head,
That night beside the Parsley Bed?”
“I have forgotten it,” she said.

“Do you recall the word you spoke
That night beneath the Artichoke?”
“Oh, that,” said she, “was just a joke.”

“Have you forgotten how you cried
Among the Onions?” I sighed.
“Well, do you blame me?” she replied.

I spoke of sympathetic scenes
Between the Parsnips and the Beans;
But when I called her my Shalot
And said what Celery I got—
She told me not to talk such rot.

*Ah, Kitchen Garden, soaked in rain
I ne'er shall see her like again.*

The Old Red Wall

THE old red wall
Seemed terribly tall
To children at their play;
Its top, so high
That it reached the sky,
Seemed ever so far away.
It was built of brick,
So terribly thick
That nothing could make it fall;
Each holiday time
We longed to climb
To the top of the old red wall.

The world seems strange;
The maps all change
And Empires pass away.
But the old red wall
Doesn't worry at all,
It dreams of a child at play.
And the child come back
On a well-worn track,
Has grown so terribly tall:
He can sit and sigh
For the days gone by
On the top of the old red wall.

The Gazebo



Visitor:

YOU see that summer-house, which stands
Across the road from “Happylands”?
I have been wondering a lot
About the chimney it has got.
Is it a summer-house, or not?

Rustic:

Well, now you mentions it to me,
That be a caution, so it be.
I’ve lived here eighty year or more
And never thought of that before.
It be a caution, to be sure.

Gardener:

The gazebo, Miss? They used to wait
For coaches that were always late,
On what was once a busy track,
And so it had a chimney stack—
Those coaching days are coming back. . . .

*And so they gossip and explain,
While I, behind the window-pane,
Search Memory’s ever-shifting sands
For laughing eyes and little hands—
The girl who lived at “Happylands.”*

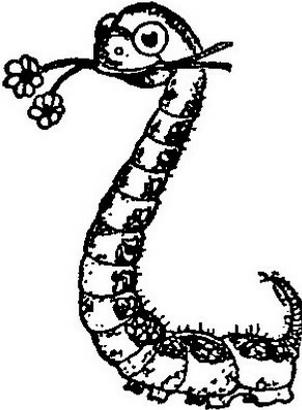


The Tomato Man

WHENEVER I met the Tomato Man,
I took to my heels and away I ran.
He used to stand at his cottage door
Oozing tomatoes from every pore.

I always felt that the back of his head
Was like a tomato—his cheeks were red,
And he smoked a pipe, when I stopped to talk,
That was rather like a tomato stalk.

Tomato Men are the same to-day;
You can always tell them a mile away:
They lean on the fence, they smoke a pipe
And are just a little bit over-ripe.



Mummy's Garden

MUMMY has a garden
That is all her very own;
She often goes to sit there
When she wants to be alone.
When she feels *un-so-ciable*,
She won't come out to play,
And if I try to peep at her
She makes me run away.



Mummy's little garden
Has an arbour and a seat.
Sometimes she lets me sit there
As a most *es-pe-cial* treat.
Nobody must talk to her
Until 'tis time for tea.
I wonder what she thinks about?
I wonder if it's me?



"I SAW NINE PESTS"

I Saw Nine Pests

AS I sat under a poplar tall,
I saw nine pests come over the wall.

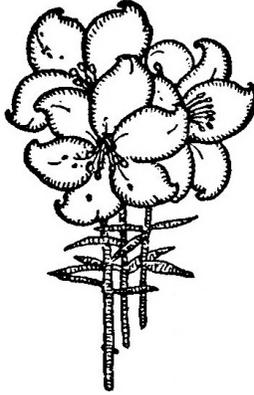
I saw nine pests come wandering by;
A slug, a snail and a carrot fly.

I saw nine pests descending on me:
Wire-worm, weevil and radish flea.

I saw nine pests, a depressing sight:
Pear midge, mildew and apple blight.

Nine garden pests came over the wall,
And the woolly aphis was worst of all.

Easter Day



THE Squire has got a greenhouse,
Where Easter lilies grow.
They stand beside the altar,
And make a lovely show.
While simple snowdrops that I send
Are hidden at the other end.

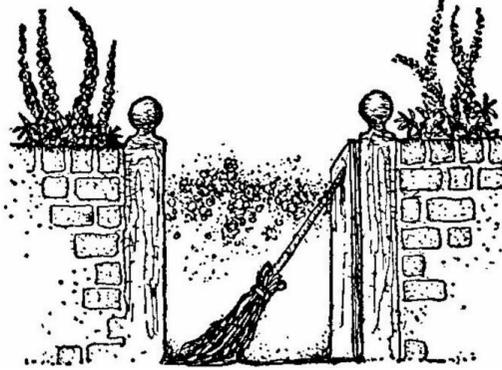
When I have got a greenhouse,
My flowers will be so fine,
The lilies at the altar
Will every one be mine;
And all the flowers that others send,
Will decorate the other end.

Life Begins at Twenty-one

WHEN my first book has been published, dear,
I'll take a cottage not far from here—
A little old place where roses climb
Smelling so sweet in the summertime;
And every morning, from ten till one,
I'll scribble, and when my work is done
We'll drift together, just me and you
(Bother the grammar), in our canoe.
I will paddle and you will steer
When my first book has been published, dear.



The Ever-open Door



GOOD gardeners all will deprecate
The man who shuts his garden gate.

My garden gate is open wide,
And *any one* can walk inside—

Except, of course, the ass who says:
“*My* lupins have been out for *days*.”

The Old House

THE old house stands to-day
As when you went away:
The shaded porch, the poplar tall,
The Hollyhocks along the wall.
The shrubbery,
With hammock swinging drowsily.
The writing on the window-pane:
“I go, but I return again.”
The corner, too,
In which the Christmas roses grew.
Nothing has altered, as you see,
Yet everything is changed for me.

A Garden Song



OLD-FASHIONED gardens, underneath the trees,
Cowslips and columbines are nodding in the breeze;
Lilac and lavender so sweet and shy,
Bring back the memories of days gone by.

Old-fashioned gardens, waking with the dawn,
Daisies and daffodils are laughing on the lawn;
Harebells and hollyhocks that grow so high,
Bring back the memories of days gone by.

God's Garden

A GARDEN is a funny thing;
However much you try,
Some plants will never seem to grow,
They fade away, and die.
I cannot say why this should be:
Some flowers will *never* grow for me.



I sometimes think, in Paradise,
That garden in the sky,
The borders will be full of blooms,
And none will ever die.
And in that garden I shall see
The flowers that would not grow for me.



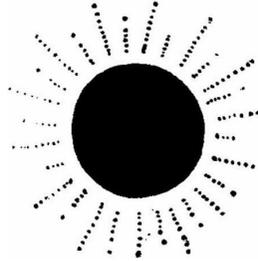
“NOAH WAS NEVER A GARDENER”

Sailors Don't Care

NOAH was never a gardener,
Or he would have said to Shem:
“When the animals walk in, two by two,
Be certain that Japheth and Ham and you
Stop those horrible wire-worm from getting through—
I couldn't be plagued with them.”

Columbus wasn't a gardener,
Or, standing on deck, one night,
He'd have turned his vessel the other way;
He wouldn't have gone to the U.S.A.,
And our orchards would never have known to-day
That foul American blight.

A Perfect Lady



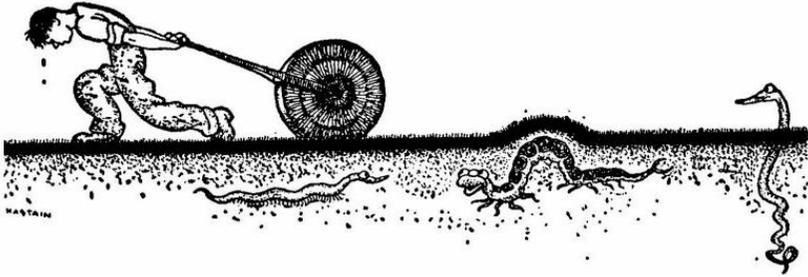
I KNEW a girl who was so pure
She couldn't say the word Manure.
Indeed, her modesty was such
She wouldn't pass a rabbit-hutch;
And butterflies upon the wing
Would make her blush like anything.

That lady is a gardener now,
And all her views have changed, somehow.
She squashes green-fly with her thumb,
And knows how little snowdrops come:
In fact, the garden she has got
Has broadened out her mind a lot.

The Old Lawn

MY lawn is very, very old;
Three hundred years, at least, I'm told.
It saw the Roundheads marching through,
And heard the cheers for Waterloo.

A man admired my lawn, to-day;
And how it laughed to hear him say:
"Your bit of turf looks nice and flat.
Next year, *I'll* have a lawn like that."

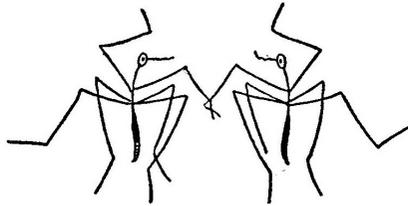


Bank Holiday
(AFTER BLAKE)

AND did the honeysuckle climb
On Eden's arbours, cool and green?
And was the lesser celandine
In Eden's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the yellow buttercup
And cowslip gild some golden glade?
And did the bluebell and the rose
Bloom in the garden He had made?

I will not rest by day or night,
Until the tripper's thoughtless hand
Has left some flowers for our delight
In England's green and pleasant land.

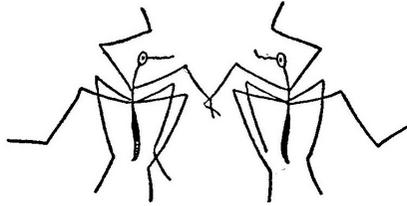


You Know this Woman

I KNOW a charming woman,
And every time she calls
She leaves my carpet on the floor,
My pictures on the walls.

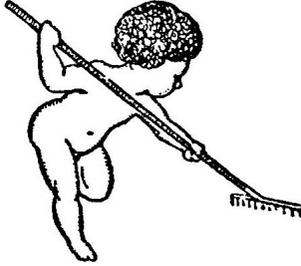
She doesn't steal my silver,
Or ask me for a loan;
She doesn't use my fountain-pen—
She *always* brings her own.

But shew her in your garden
The treasures you have got,
And, if you turn your head away,
She'll pinch the blooming lot.



When We were Boys

WHEN I was very young indeed
They always wanted me to weed
The garden path, and mow the lawn—
I started at the crack of dawn
And carried on till dewy eve:
Or, so I made myself believe.

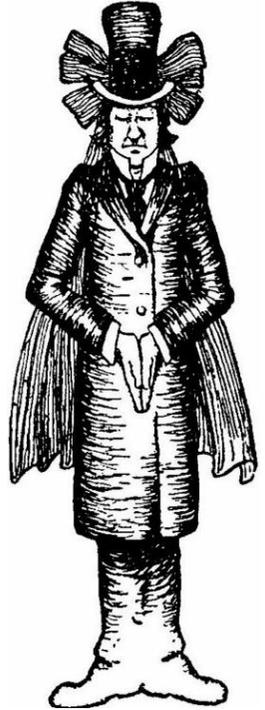


To-day, with my increasing weight,
My heart is in an awful state,
And stooping down to pull a weed
Might make me very ill indeed.
Such simple tasks, to tell the truth,
Are still the privilege of youth.

Graves in my Garden

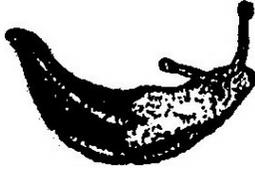
ONE day, in early Spring,
I placed a special order
For very special seeds
For a very special border;
Then wrote a label, with great care,
To tell me what the flowers were.

A month or two went by;
I saw with consternation
That not a single seed
Had arrived at germination.
And so the label I had penned
Became a tombstone in the end.



Martha and Mary

MARTHA had a garden,
And she tended it with care.
She took a pail and watered it,
Each slug or snail—she slaughtered it;
There were no green-fly there.
She scratched and scraped it with a hoe;
There were no seeds she didn't sow,
And yet her garden *wouldn't* grow.



Mary has a garden
Which is full of happy flowers.
She doesn't do a thing in it
But walk about and sing in it
For hours and hours and hours.
She never weeds and never hoes,
And yet her garden always grows—
Because she loves it, I suppose.

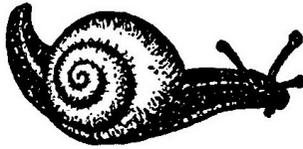


Warned Off

A NUMBER of people are perfectly willing
To show you their grounds if you pay them a shilling;
And, being a bit of a gardening fan,
I see all the gardens I possibly can.

I wander, with crowds of inferior vassals,
Through acres of gardens of Courts and of Castles;
And here is a point I can never make out:
The owner is seldom seen standing about.

I fancy I hear the head gardener say:
“Now, listen, I open the garden to-day,
And, as we are sure to be thick on the ground,
I can’t have the family hanging around.”



A Hymn of Hate

WHEN my work is ended,
And finished for the day;
When I've swep' the garden
And put my tools away;
Then the lady prowls around,
Sticking seeds into the ground.

When the sun starts shining,
Them seeds they germinates;
And up comes the rubbish
A proper gardener hates:
Nasty, stupid little seeds
Turning into horrid weeds.

First them filthy fox-gloves
Clutters up the view;
Stinking periwinkle
And creeping jenny too—
When the lady's back is turned,
All that lousy stuff gets burned.

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Mr. Gardener

HE always comes at crack of dawn
And always starts to mow the lawn
When you are only half awake—
“Oh, stop that noise, for goodness’ sake!”

You always pay him by the hour,
And if you want to pick a flower
To make a nosegay or a wreath,
He snarls at you and shows his teeth.

There are some things he likes to do,
And some he likes to leave to you—
While *he* is putting in the seeds,
You will be pulling up the weeds.

Mr. Gardener

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And always starts to mow the lawn
When you are only half awake—
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To make a nosegay or a wreath,
He snarls at you and shows his
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There are some things he likes
to do,
And some he likes to leave to you—
While *he* is putting in the seeds,
You will be pulling up the weeds.



The Lady Who Was Here Before

THERE are some people that I hate.
They gather round my garden gate,
Discussing, till I'm sick and sore,
The Lady Who Was Here Before.

They stand and whisper: "What a shame.
I'm thankful Mrs. What's-her-name
Is dead, poor dear, and doesn't know.
She used to love her garden so."

"They've thrown away those lovely rocks
She got from Cheddar—*and* the Box
She planted round her heart-shaped plots
Of Heartsease and Forget-me-nots."

"They've moved her Salpiglossis bed,
And planted Primulas instead.
They've put an ugly Poplar tree
Where that nice Privet used to be."

They'll get me so upset, some day,
That I shall spring at them, and say:
This is *my* garden. GO AWAY!

“Can You beat it, Cook?”

A FUNNY old man just knocked at the door,
I’ve noticed him hanging about before.
He said that he wanted to come inside,
And see the old garden—before he died.
Then he gives me a sort of worn-out look,
And he starts to cry—Can you beat it, Cook?

“Do you know the Master or Mistress?” I said.
“I don’t,” said he, with a shake of his head;
“I left the district some years ago,
There’s nobody left that I used to know:
But I thought, somehow, I would like to look
At the place again”—Can you beat it, Cook?

I just stood there, and I shook my head.
“The Master and Missus is out,” I said.
“As likely as not I should get the sack
If they found you about when the car came back.
You take my advice and you sling your hook.”
And sling it he did—Can you beat it, Cook?

Table Flowers



WHEN I select some special bloom
To decorate my drawing-room,
I wonder, in my artless way,
What all the other flowers say.

Do lesser blossoms, which remain
To face the sunshine and the rain,
Reflect with envy and with pride
Upon their fellow who has died?

It may be so. And yet, again,
Perhaps they sorrow for the slain,
And murmur, as I wander past:
“Poor Emily has gone at last.”

Tragedy at Kew

THERE was a Prince of Austria,
His coat was royal red;
The finest Prince of Austria
In all the tulip bed.
“Here stands a Prince of Austria,”
The name-plate *should* have said.

Alas, that Prince of Austria,
He stood, in sad disgrace.
They thought he was a Crimson King
When plotting out the place.
When the head gardener came along,
You *should* have seen his face.



Hibiscus

IF I could be a boy again;
A boy of eight or nine or ten,
Why then—

I'd buy a barge in Brentford town,
And on the river, old and brown,
Go floating down.

The tide would bear me on my way,
Until I came, at close of day,
To countries far away;

Where lovely girls their flowers would fling
While dancing round me in a ring—
And I would be their king.

Winter and Summer

IN winter, when she goes to town,
She dons a dainty silken gown.
Her heels are high as Babel's tower,
She is as fragrant as a flower.
While unconsidered moments pass,
She stands before her looking-glass,
To paint the lily, gild the rose
And put more powder on her nose. . . .

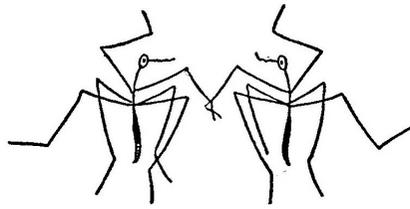
But when the sun is shining down,
She doesn't give a thought to town.
Wearing a cotton over-all,
She trains the roses on the wall.
Her shoes have got the flattest heels;
Beside the lily-pond she kneels,
And, as the golden moments pass,
She needs no other looking-glass.
She doesn't think about her clothes,
There is *no* powder on her nose. . . .

The Master and the Missus

THE Master knows his proper place,
And never picks a rose;
The Missus cuts a basketful
Beneath my very nose.
The Master, he's a gentleman
And knows his limitations;
The Missus, on the other hand,
Plays hell with my carnations.

The Master has the common sense
To leave a man alone;
The Missus muddles round the place,
As if it was her own.
The Master says: "Good morning, John;
I hope you're feeling nicely."
The Missus says: "Your time to start
Is eight o'clock, precisely."

It makes me go all hot and cold,
To think such things should be.
Why is it that the likes of her
Should rule the likes of me?
Why should she always make me feel
I has to beg her pardon
Each time she ever shoves her nose
Inside my kitchen garden?



Spring at Kew



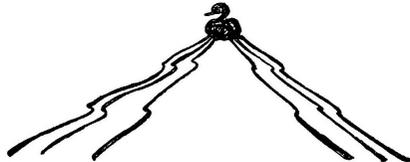
WHILE sitting by the lake at Kew;
A thing I very often do;
I thought that I would like to sing
A little song about the Spring:

*My dear, I bring to you
Forget-me-nots of blue;
No mournful lilies guard your sleep,
Nor rosemary, nor rue;
But early violets from the brake,
To greet you when you wake.*

I sang my little song of Spring;
I sang and sang, like anything;
Until a dabchick darted out
To see what it was all about.

*My dear, I place with care
Beside your pillow there
A daffodil from Carrow Hill,
None finer anywhere.
These cowslips hold the morning dew—
I picked them, dear, for you.*

The dabchick gave his tail a shake,
And hurried, with a widening wake,
Across the water, cool and green,
To tell his friends what he had seen.



What is a Garden?

*WHAT is a garden?
Goodness knows!
You've got a garden,
I suppose:*

To one it is a piece of ground
For which some gravel must be found.
To some, those seeds that must be sown,
To some a lawn that must be mown.
To some a ton of Cheddar rocks;
To some it means a window-box;
To some, who dare not pick a flower—
A man, at eighteen pence an hour.
To some, it is a silly jest
About the latest garden pest;
To some, a haven where they find
Forgetfulness and peace of mind. . . .

*What is a garden?
Large or small,
'Tis just a garden,
After all.*



Common or Garden

I HAVEN'T got a greenhouse;
I don't see why I should.
I can't afford a greenhouse;
I wouldn't if I could.
Why people build a greenhouse,
I've never understood.

You'll find inside a greenhouse
Each strange exotic thing
That shuns our English sunshine
And fears our English spring—
An oak without an acorn,
A lark that cannot sing.

I'd rather have the flowers
Our simple fathers knew,
Than these new-fangled blossoms
Of every shape and hue—
I'd rather have a skylark
Than a parrot at the Zoo.

The Débutante

MISS LETTUCE is a débutante,
Deserving of a ballad;
She does not quickly run to seed,
Is very popular indeed
In any social salad.
In June, when she is coming out,
Miss Lettuce can resist the drought.

Miss Lettuce has the biggest heart
In all the kitchen garden.
Be sure to pick her in her prime,
For if she isn't caught in time
Her heart is apt to harden.
You'll find her at her best, I mean,
When she is young, and fresh—and green.

“It isn’t Gardening!”

WE worshipped at the wicket,
Till the sporting legend grew
That the playing-fields of Eton
Paved the way to Waterloo;
And to say “It isn’t cricket”
Was the ultimate taboo.

To call a man a hero,
Just because he wields a bat,
Would savour in these testing times
Of talking through one’s hat.
Let’s say “It isn’t gardening”
And let it stop at that.

Christmas Roses

THE lawn is like a lump of lead,
Your garden has been put to bed
And you have locked the potting-shed.

The snow has just commenced to fall,
The world is wrapped in winter's pall.
There are no signs of life at all.

When, like a star which shines at night,
That miracle of green and white—
A Christmas Rose creeps into sight:

*A lonely herald of the Spring,
Of happy birds that nest and sing,
Of butterflies upon the wing,
Of fairies dancing in a ring—
And all that sort of thing.*



May



BETWEEN the lilac and the rose—
The drifting tide of blossom flows;
An ecstasy of pink and white
Scenting the quiet aisles of night
As though the branches of the trees
Had caught the foam of coral seas.

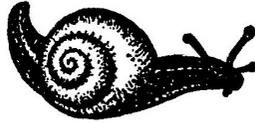
The world is young, both man and maid
March in its eager cavalcade.
In city street and scented lane,
The golden age is born again;
And there is happiness to win,
For summer is a-coming in.

Testimonial

THE Director of Kew
Is a gentleman who
Knows more about flowers than my grandmother knew;

And she, if the stories about her are true,
Knew more about gardens than *any one* knew.

This speaks rather well
For the gentleman who
Has charge of the wonderful
Gardens at Kew.



Plantains

SIR BUMPUS BULKELEY—

May his tribe decrease—

Awoke, one afternoon,

From dreams of peace;

To see a stranger

Looking through the gate

That kept the common herd

From his estate.

Sir Bumpus did not fly into a passion

(One deals with cads in quite another fashion);

He merely looked the fellow up and down—

(A common person, from the market town)

And said: "Excuse me, but may one elicit,

Without offence, the object of this visit?"

"Certainly," said the stranger, with a yawn.

"I stopped to count the plantains on your lawn."

Forget-Me-Nots



AT Kempsford in Gloucestershire
The Thames is small, but very clear;
Clear as crystal and so small,
It wouldn't float a boat at all.
Just a tiny, tiny stream,
Only old enough to dream.

Dreaming dreams of yester-year,
When some gallant cavalier,
Passing by the ford we knew,
Picked forget-me-nots of blue—
As *we* used to do.

The cavalier is dead and gone,
But still the stream goes dreaming on.

The New Garden

It is a most exciting thing,
To take a garden in the Spring;

To wonder what its borders hold;
What secrets lurk beneath the mould?

What kinds of roses you have got;
Whether the lilac blooms, or not?

Whether the peach tree, on the wall,
Has ever had a peach at all. . . .

It is a most exciting thing,
To take a garden in the Spring;

And live in such delicious doubt,
Until the final flower is out.

Give Me a Garden

“THE early Hopes which set our hearts astrir,
Turn Ashes,” said some old Philosopher:
“And, one by one, fade as the morning mist,”
Croaked, through his beard, that Ancient Pessimist.

It isn't true. When we were very small,
We loved a yellow Rose upon a wall;
The scent of Sweet Briar and of Mignonette—
We loved them long ago, we love them yet.

Some early hopes of ours, alas, are dead;
They turned to ashes, as the Cynic said:
But, planted in the country or the town,
You'll find a garden never lets you down.

Roses at Owlpen

1471

WHEN Margaret slept at Owlpen
On the Eve of Tewkesbury fight,
Roses grew in the garden,
Rose of red and white—
The red rose of Lancaster
And the Yorkist rose of white.

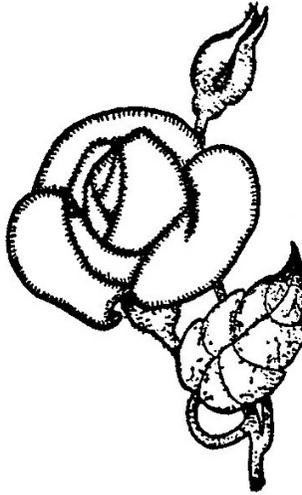
1934

Here, while the ghosts of Owlpen
Walk in the quiet night,
Roses bloom in the garden,
Roses of red and white—
The red rose of Lancaster
And the Yorkist rose of white.



Epigram

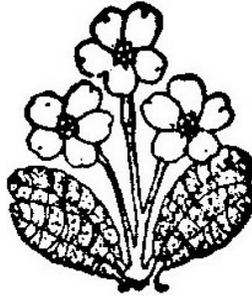
THEY have stolen the scent
From the damask rose;
It flatters the eye
And insults the nose.



Hatton Garden



IN Devonshire, the diamonds
That glisten on the grass
Are smaller than the diamonds
Behind these panes of glass.



You can keep your diamonds,
Which people place in pawn,
And I will have the diamonds
That laugh upon the lawn.



Recipe for Happiness

A GARDEN should be rather small
Or you will have no fun at all.

It should be sheltered from the cold:
As full of flowers as it can hold.

The sun-dial, standing on the lawn,
Should bear these words: I WAKE AT DAWN.

A sweetly scented border, set
With rosemary and mignonette.

A garden path of living green—
None of that crazy stuff, I mean.

If these instructions you obey,
You will be happy every day.

Snake's-head Fritillaries

IN Oxford meadows, long ago,
I wandered in a dream
Among those little purple flowers which grow
Beside that silver stream.

And, later, talking to a don
Of sad and solemn mien
I happened, idly, to remark upon
Wild tulips I had seen.

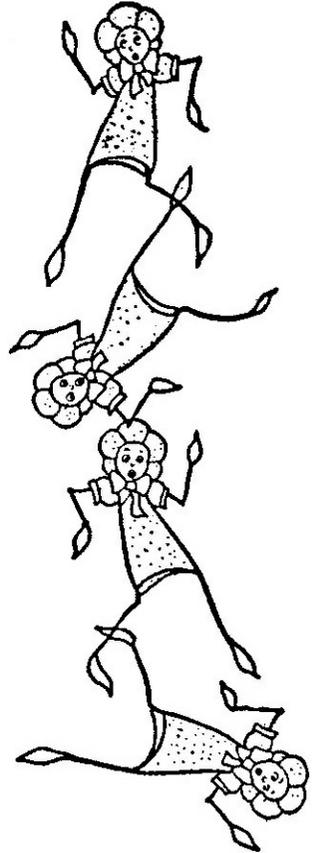
Alas, we are no longer friends,
Though he is living still:
There's a fritillary rough-hews our ends
Re-shape them how we will.

Children's Hour

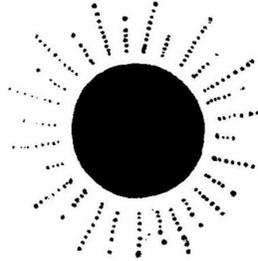
MRS. MYOSOTIS
Sits under the wall
In a little blue bonnet
And a green over-all.

She's like that old woman
Who lived in a shoe:
She has *so* many children
She doesn't know what to do.

Each in a blue bonnet
And a green over-all.
I'm sure we shall never
Find room for them all.
We shall have to throw some of them
Over the wall.



Drought



WHEN, with my garden hose,
I slake the sod,
I am as one of those
Who walk with God.

I am His April shower,
His summer rain;
I cause the drooping flower
To bloom again.

*O, thirsting sod,
Fear not that brazen sky;
I am your god—
Until His springs are dry.*

Those Latin Names

IT was a simple country child
Who took me by the hand:
Why English flowers had Latin names
She couldn't understand.
Those funny, friendly English flowers,
That bloom from year to year—
She asked me if I would explain,
And so I said to her:

ERANTHIS is an aconite
As everybody knows,
And HELLEBORUS NIGER is
Our friend the Christmas rose.
GALANTHUS is a snowdrop,
MATTHIOLA is a stock,
And CARDAMINE the meadow flower
Which *you* call lady's smock.
MUSCARI is grape hyacinth,
DIANTHUS is a pink—
And that's as much as one small head
Can carry, I should think.

She listened, very patiently;
Then turned, when I had done,
To where a fine FORSYTHIA
Was smiling in the sun.

Said she: "I *love* this yellow stuff."
And that, somehow, seemed praise enough.

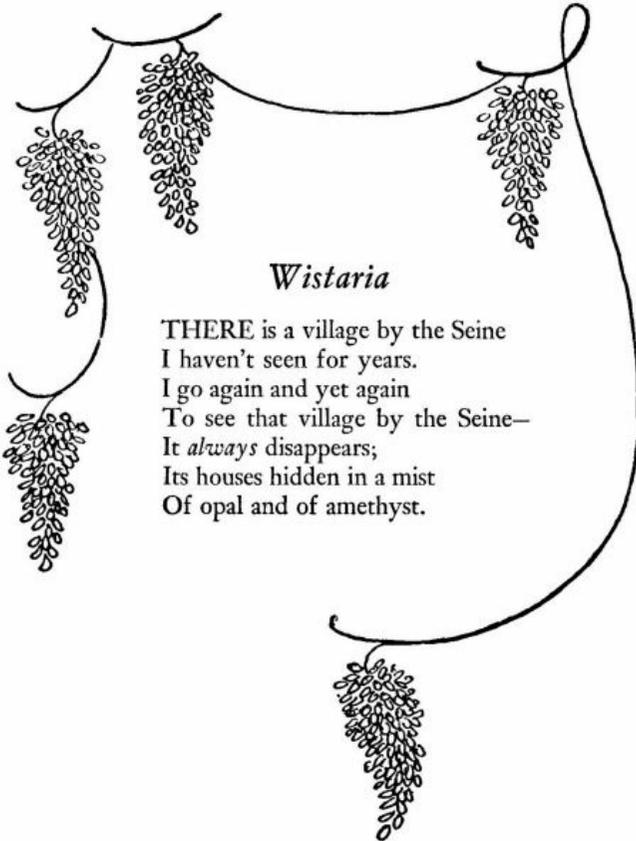
The Station-Master's Garden

OUR station-master's garden is particularly fine,
It's rather like those landscapes that they hang upon the line;
And all the railway passengers put out their heads and say:
"The station-master's garden's looking very bright to-day."

Our station-master's garden is the favourite on the rails,
And all the railway passengers to Paddington or Wales,
Smile across at one another, in their carriages, and say:
"The station-master's garden's looking very bright to-day."

Wistaria

THERE is a village by the Seine
I haven't seen for years.
I go again and yet again
To see that village by the Seine—
It *always* disappears;
Its houses hidden in a mist
Of opal and of amethyst.



Wistaria

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I go again and yet again
To see that village by the Seine—
It *always* disappears;
Its houses hidden in a mist
Of opal and of amethyst.



‘THE GARDEN OF EDEN WAS NOT A SUCCESS’

Single-handed

BEVERLEY NICHOLS
And Marion Cran
Hadn't been born
When the world began.

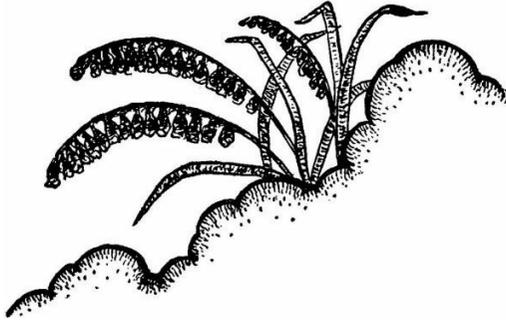
That is the reason,
I'm bound to confess,
The Garden of Eden
Was not a success.

The Twenty-first of May

*I HEARD an ancient gossip say:
Upon the twenty-first of May,
The man who owns a garden plot
Should count the blossoms he has got.
If he should find their number odd,
His crimes will cry aloud to God;
But if their number should be even,
Then all his sins shall be forgiven.*

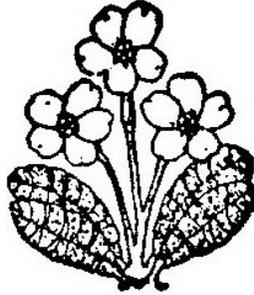
*But why the twenty-first of May
Should always be the vital day
That ancient gossip didn't say.*

Scilla Nutans



YOU'VE been, at Bluebell time, to Kew;
And, like the lady at the Zoo,
When first she saw a kangaroo,
You've said: "Of course, it isn't true."

Spring



THE Spring comes in
When no one is looking;
You're lying in bed
With a cold in the head,
Or you may be cooking;
Putting new covers upon the chairs—
When, suddenly, taking you unawares,
A thrush in the orchard starts to sing
And, once again, you have missed the Spring.



Jasmine or Jessamine?

I NEVER know which.
Jasmine sounds terribly, terribly rich.
And Jessamine, somehow, sounds terribly poor;
I picture her over a cottager's door,
Her head in the thatch and her feet in a ditch,
While Jasmine prefers a more orthodox pitch.
Jasmine or Jessamine?
I never know which.





“HE LIKES TO LIE AND SMOKE HIS PIPE”

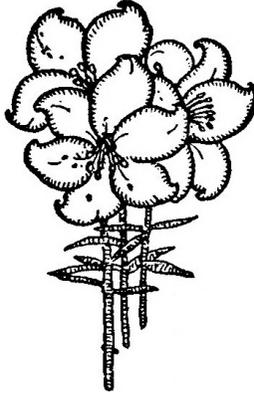
Any Husband

A HUSBAND is the sort of man
Who tries to help you all he can;
But, somehow, never quite succeeds
In doing what the garden needs.

He likes to lie and smoke his pipe,
And wonder if the pears are ripe;
Or else he'll smell the mignonette
Before he lights a cigarette.

But, ask him if he'll clear the dump,
Or carry water from the pump,
And he will find some fine excuse—
In fact, he's not the slightest use.

Almost Human



LUPINS, like lots of society leaders,
Are rather important and *very* gross feeders.

DAISIES are neat little servants in villas,
Who wait upon tulips, narcissi and scillas.

SNOWDROPS are choirboys—such emblems of purity
May lose this effect on approaching maturity.

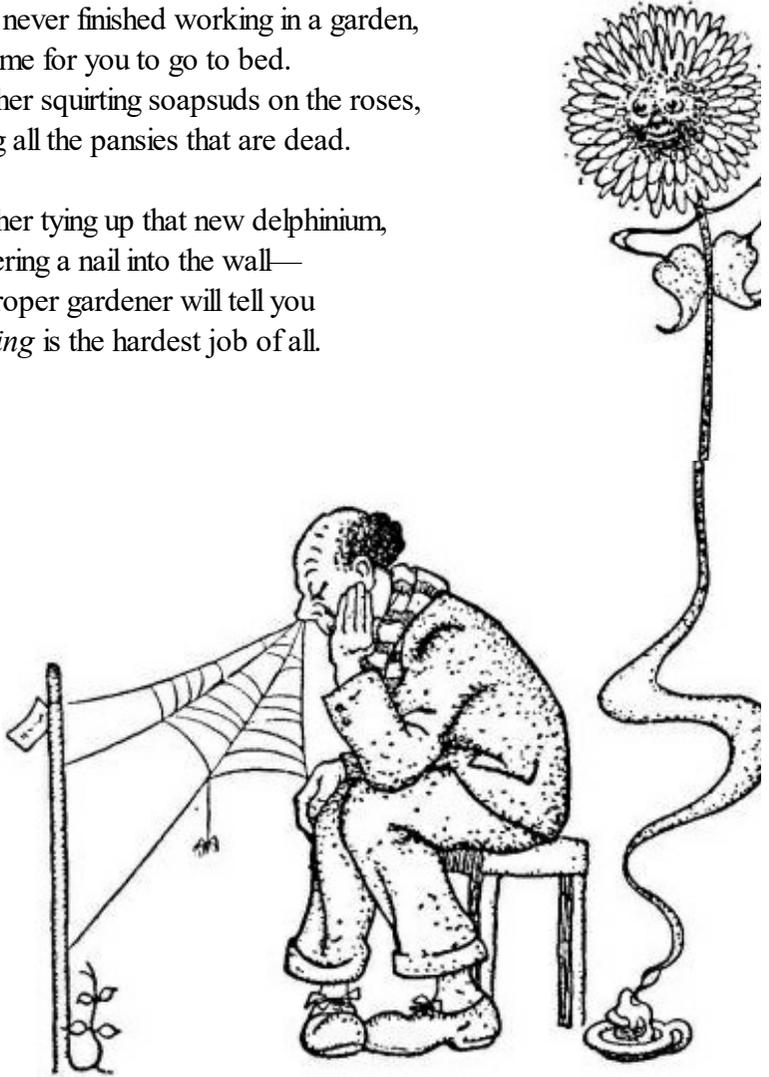
The POPPY—a flapper, who’s “almost a lydy,”
A bit highly-coloured and *very* untidy.

LILIES are like Miss Elizabeth Arden
(Or Helena Rubinstein—begging her pardon);
And WEEDS are the tramps in a gentleman’s garden.

Won by Waiting

YOU'VE never finished working in a garden,
Until 'tis time for you to go to bed.
You're either squirting soapsuds on the roses,
Or picking all the pansies that are dead.

You're either tying up that new delphinium,
Or hammering a nail into the wall—
But any proper gardener will tell you
That *waiting* is the hardest job of all.



Come into the Garden

THE band is playing a waltz refrain,
I hold you, dear, in my arms again.
And none will stare,
For none will care—
Each one is deep in his own affair.
The floor is right,
The band is right.
They have seen two lovers before to-night.

*Come into the garden,
Never mind the band;
Never mind the dancers,
They will understand.
There's a fellow feeling
Through the music stealing—
Come into the garden,
Never mind the band.*

Odd Man Out

ONE day, I was passing the snapdragon bed,
You will find in Hyde Park, when a snapdragon said:
“Well, here’s a ridiculous state of affairs,
These chaps are so anxious to charge for the chairs
That no one has noticed the stupid mistakes
This foolish and fat-headed gardener makes.”

I stopped, and addressing the snapdragon bed:
“Excuse me, but what is the matter?” I said.
“I may not be much of a gardening fan,
But tell me what’s wrong and I’ll help, if I can.
Your troubles can all be adjusted, no doubt.
Suppose you explain what you’re worried about.”

“The trouble is this,” a pink snapdragon said:
“We fellows are pink and this fellow is red.
If *you* were a snapdragon, what would you think
Of a blossom of red in a border of pink?”
The point was too clear to be argued at all,
So I threw the red snapdragon over the wall.

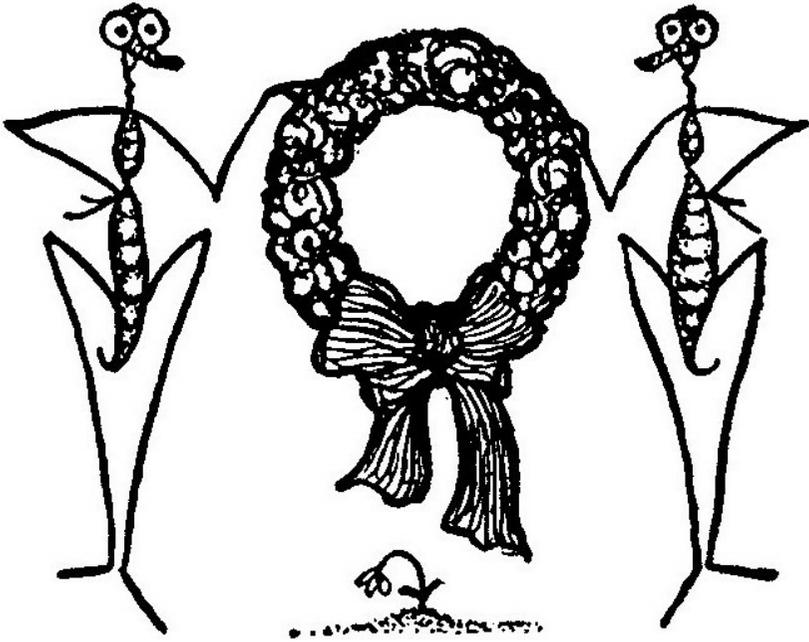
Prodigal in Perfume

SOME blossoms jealously refuse
To let their scent take wing;
You have to pick a damask rose
And hold it tightly to your nose
Before you smell a thing.

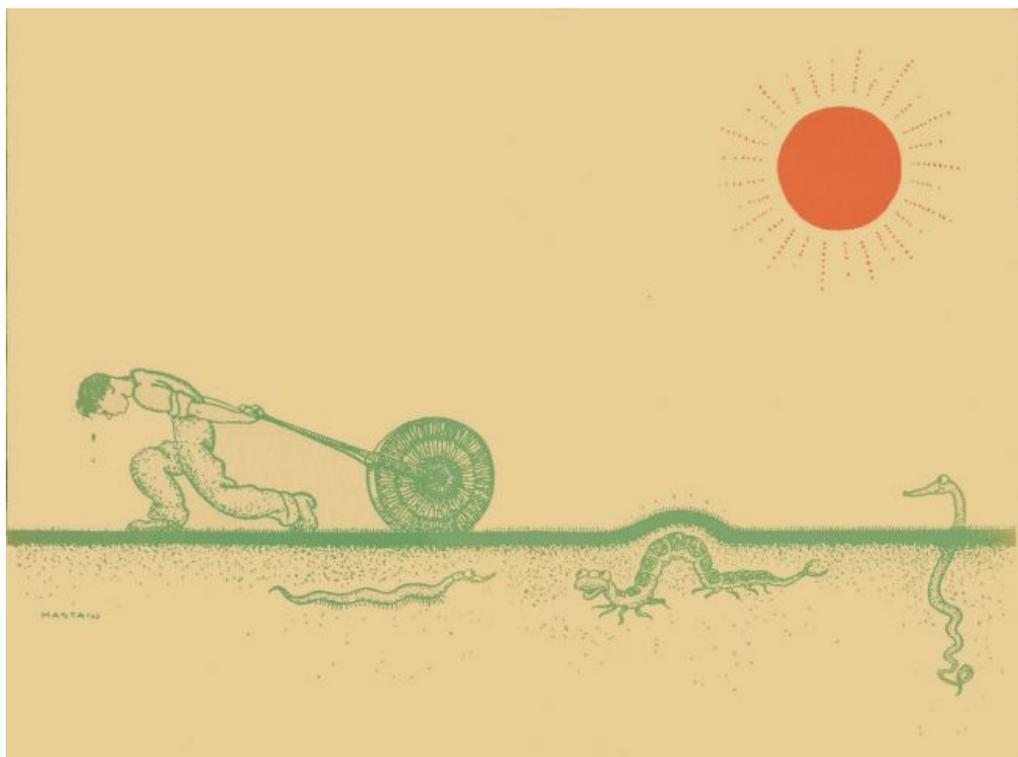
The scent of honeysuckle floats
Like music on the air.
It does not hold its perfume fast,
And, as you wander idly past,
It tells you it is there.



Epilogue



BEFORE you put this little book away,
Please promise me that you will never say:
“You should have seen my garden yesterday.”



TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Green Fingers: A Present for a Good Gardener* by Reginald Arkell]