

**THE FLOWERS
AND
GARDENS OF
MADEIRA**

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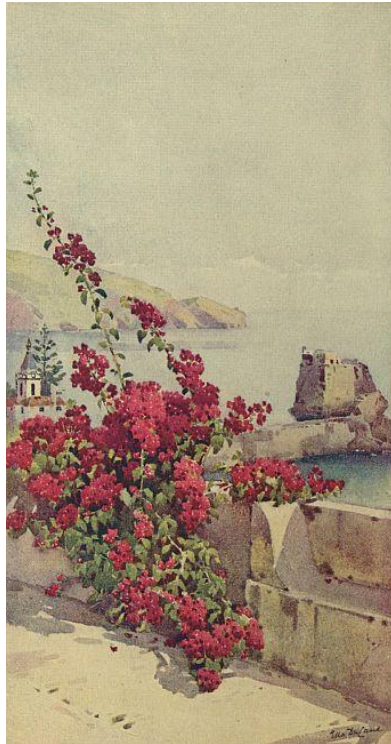
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THE FLOWERS AND GARDENS OF MADEIRA



LOO ROCK, FUNCHAL

**THE
FLOWERS AND GARDENS OF
MADEIRA**

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The very name of Madeira (or island of timber, as the word signifies) brings to the minds of most people a suggestion of luxuriant vegetation flourishing in a damp, enervating climate. Such, indeed, was my own mental picture of Madeira before my first visit to the island. I expected to find every garden with the aspect of a fernery, moisture dripping everywhere, and the hills clothed with the remains of the primeval forests. The latter might possibly still have existed had it not been for the zeal of the discoverers of the island in making use of their discovery from a utilitarian point of view, and cutting clearings for the cultivation of the rich and fertile land. In order to clear the ground of the forests, which we are told clothed the island to its very shores, the drastic measure of setting fire to it was resorted to: hence the destruction (as old historians assert that the fire raged for over two years) of all the forests on the south side of the island.

Some feeling of disappointment entered my mind when I first looked on the Bay of Funchal. As compared to the wooded appearance the north of the island presents, the south side, viewed from the sea, appears to have much less vegetation. Large stretches of pine woods, it is true, have been replanted, and though they are used for timber, and are felled before they attain any great size, regulations exist which oblige any person who cuts down a tree to plant another in its place. Though I

should imagine it is more than doubtful whether this regulation is carried out to the letter, the plantations are replanted, or the stock of timber would otherwise soon become exhausted. The fact that the south side of any island is naturally the most suited for cultivation has also led to the destruction of the woods, and on approaching the island it is very soon seen that every available inch of ground is cultivated in some form or another. The cultivation may take the form of some cared-for garden, where trees, shrubs, and creepers from the tropics may be flourishing side by side with more familiar vegetation, or may merely be the little terraced patch of ground surrounding the humblest cottage, where the harvest of the crop—be it sugar-cane, *batata* (sweet potato), or yam—is eagerly looked forward to, in order to eke out the very slender means of its habitants.

The feelings of Edward Bowdick, as described in “Excursions to Madeira and Porto Santo in 1823,” must often have been re-echoed by many a visitor who sees the island for the first time: “To those who have visited the tropics nothing can be more gratifying than to find the trees they have there dwelt on with so much pleasure, and which are decidedly the most beautiful part of the Creation; to be reminded of the vast solitudes, where vegetable nature seems to reign uncontrolled and untouched; to see the bright blue sky through the delicate pinnated leaves of the mimosa, whilst the wood strawberry at its feet recalls the still dearer recollection of home; to gather the fallen guavas with one hand and the blackberry with the other; to be able to choose between the apples and cherries of Europe (which are so much regretted) and the banana—it is this feeling which makes Madeira so delightful, independent of

its beautiful scenery and the constancy and softness of its temperature.”



A DRINKING FOUNTAIN

Any feeling of disappointment that the traveller may have experienced from his first cursory glance at the island must surely be quickly dispelled on landing, especially if this should be in the month of January, when, having left the snows and frosts of Europe behind, after travelling for four days he is basking in the almost perpetual sunshine of so-called winter in

Madeira. Lovers of flowers—and to those I most recommend a visit to the island—will find fresh beauties even at every turn of the street: the gorgeous-coloured creepers seem to have taken possession everywhere. Hanging over every wall where their presence is permitted will come tumbling some great mass of creeper, be it the orange *Bignonia venustus*, whose clusters of surely the most brilliant orange-coloured flower that grows completely smother the foliage; or the scarlet, purple, or lilac bougainvillea, whose splendour will take one's breath away, with its dazzling mass of blossoms. The great white trumpets of the datura, combined possibly with the flaunting red pointsettia blossoms, will quickly show the fresh arrival the bewildering variety of the vegetation—so much so that I cannot fail again to sympathize with Mr. Bowdick, who, writing on the subject, says: "The enchanting landscape which presents itself flatters the botanist at the first view with a rich harvest, and not until he begins to work in earnest does he foresee the labours of his task. What can be more delightful than to see the banana and the violet on the same bank, and the *Melia adzerach*, with its dark shining leaves, raising its summit as high as that of its neighbour, the *Populus alba*? It is this very gratification which occasions the perplexity, at the same time that it confirms the opinion, that Madeira might be made the finest experimental garden in the world, and that an interchange of the plants of the tropical and temperate climates might be made successfully after they had been completely naturalized there."

Since the above was written (1823) no doubt much has been done in the way of naturalizing plants from other countries, chiefly by the English, who are the owners of most of the

principal gardens in and around Funchal. Many a plant and bulb from the Cape has found a new home in Madeira, and has spread throughout the length and breadth of the island, straying from gardens until they have now become almost hedgerow flowers; while at a higher altitude than Funchal, plants from England and other parts of Europe have also found a new resting-place.

It is not only to lovers of flowers, who, should they become the happy possessors of a garden in Madeira, will find in it a never-ending source of enjoyment, but also to those who wish to explore the natural scenery of the island, that I heartily recommend a visit to Madeira. Probably no other island of its size has such grand and varied scenery. Being only some thirty-three miles long and fifteen across even at the widest part, most people look incredulous when told of the inaccessibility of some of the more remote parts of the island, picturing to themselves the possibility of seeing the whole island in one or, at the outside, two days by means of the now ubiquitous motor-car. These impatient travellers had better stay away from Madeira, for their motor-cars will be of no use to them, the gradients of the roads being too steep for any but the most powerful of cars, even if the roads themselves were not paved with the most unlevel cobble-stones. To anyone who has leisure to spend in exploring the island, merely for the sake either of admiring its scenery, or making a collection of the many ferns which adorn every nook and cranny of the deep ravines, I can promise ample reward; always supposing that they are sufficiently good travellers not to consider comfortable hotel accommodation as being an essential part of their expedition. Away from Funchal no hotels exist in Madeira;

but if it is the right season of the year, and a spell of fine weather is reasonably to be expected, tent-life must be resorted to, or the primitive accommodation afforded by the engineers' huts in various districts, or rooms in the most primitive of village inns.

Enthusiastic admirers of the scenery of Madeira have compared its grandeur to that of the Yosemite Valley in miniature: its mountain-peaks, it is true, only range from 4,000 to 6,000 feet, but the abruptness with which they rise gives an impression of enormous depth to the densely wooded ravines. In an article on Madeira written by Mr. Frazer in 1875 it will be seen that he also compared its scenery to some of the grandest mountain scenery in the world. Writing of an expedition to the north side of the island, he says: "The beauty of the scene culminated at the little hamlet of Cruzinhas, whence we looked into a labyrinth of dark precipitous ravines, formed by the gorges of the central group of mountains, whose peaks, fortunately unclouded for a time, resembled in their fantastic ruggedness those of the Dolomites; but their sides being densely wooded with the sparkling laurel, and the ravines themselves more tortuous, we, I need hardly say, reluctantly came to the conclusion that even the Dolomite gorges could not equal them. There was none of the splendid rock-colouring of the Dolomites, but for deep-wooded ravines of deep mysterious gloom, descending from pinnacled mountains, it is a great question whether the Tyrol must not yield to Madeira."

CHAPTER II

PORTUGUESE GARDENS

I HAVE often been asked whether the Portuguese have any distinctive form of gardening, and in answer I can only say that, though there is no attempt to compete with the grand terraced gardens of Italy or France, or the prim conventionality of the gardens of the Dutch, still the little well-cared-for garden of the Portuguese has a great charm of its own. Here, in Madeira, their gardens are usually on a very small, almost diminutive, scale, according to our ideas of a garden. In the mother-country, where they probably surround more imposing houses, they may attain to a larger scale, but of that I know nothing.

The love of gardening, unfortunately, seems to be dying out among the Portuguese in Madeira, and many a garden which was formerly dear to its owner, each plant being tended with loving hands, has now fallen into ruin and decay. The little paths, neatly paved with small round cobble-stones of a pleasing brownish colour, have become overgrown and a prey to the worst pest in Madeira gardens, the coco grass, which is enough to break the heart of any gardener once it is allowed to get possession; its little green shoots seem to spring up in a single night, and the labour of yesterday has to be again the work of to-day if the neat, trim paths so necessary to any garden are to be kept free from the invader. Or the box hedges, which were formerly the pride of their owner, have lost their trimness and regularity from the lack of the shears at the

necessary season, and the garden only suggests departed glories.

Luckily, a few of these gardens still remain in all their beauty, and the pleasure their owners display in showing them speaks for itself of their true love of gardening.

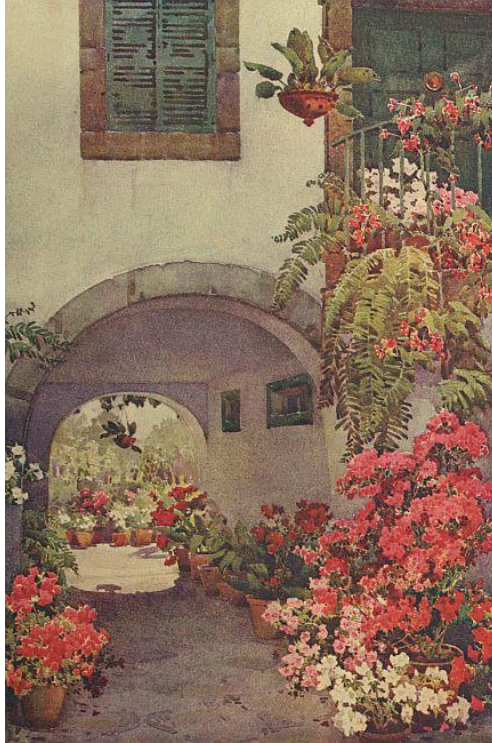
The plan of the garden is usually somewhat formal in design, and as a rule centres in a fountain or water-tank, which serves the double purpose of being an ornament to the garden and of supplying it with water. The entrance to the garden is certain to be through a corridor, with either square cement and plaster pillars, or merely stout wooden posts, which carry the vine or creeper-clad trellis. The beds are not each devoted to the cultivation of a separate flower, as would be the case in an English garden, but single well-grown specimens of different kinds of plants fill the beds. Begonias, in great variety, tall and short, with blossoms large and small, shading from white through every gradation of pink to deep scarlet, form a most important foundation for every Portuguese garden; as, from their prolonged season of blooming, some varieties seeming to be in perpetual bloom, they always provide a note of colour. Pelargoniums, allowed to grow into tall bushes, in due season make bright masses of colour, the velvety texture of their petals seeming to enhance the brilliancy of their colouring. Fuchsias in endless variety, salvias red and blue, mauve lantanas, scarlet bouvardias, and *Linum trigynum*, with its clear yellow blossoms, help to keep the little gardens gay through the winter months. The latter, though commonly called *Linum*, is a synonym of *Reinwardtia trigynum* and a native of the mountains of the East Indies.

Last, but by no means least in importance, come the sweet-smelling plants, essential to these little miniature gardens. *Olea fragrans*, or sweet olive, also called *Osmanthus fragrans*, must be given the palm, as surely its insignificant little greenish-white flower is the sweetest flower that grows, and fills the whole air with its delicious fragrance. *Diosma ericoides*, a well-named plant—from *dios*, divine, and *osme*, small—ought perhaps to have been given the first place, as it will never fail at every season of the year to bring fragrance to the garden. The tender green of its heath-like growth, when crushed, yields a strong aromatic scent, and no Portuguese garden is complete without its bushes of *Diosma*. If allowed to grow undisturbed, it will make shrubs of considerable size, and in the early spring is covered with little white starry flowers; but as it bears clipping kindly, it is especially dear to the heart of the Portuguese gardener, who will fashion arm-chairs, or tables, or neat round and square bushes, in the same way as the Dutch clip their yew-trees. Rosemary also ranks high in their affections, not only for its sweet-smelling properties, but also because it can be subjected to the same treatment. Sweet-scented verbenas are also favourites, and in spring the tiny white flower of the small creeping smilax suggests the presence of orange-groves by its almost overpowering scent.

Camellias, white and pink, single and double, are favourite flowers, but as a rule the shrubs are subjected to drastic treatment and cut back, so as to keep the plants within bounds and in proportion to the size of the garden. Here and there a leafless *Magnolia conspicua* adorns the garden with its cup-like blossoms in the early spring, and a few other shrubs are permitted within the precincts of the garden. *Franciscea*, with

its shiny green leaves and starry blossoms, shading from the palest grey to deep lilac, according to the time each bloom has been fully developed, should have been included in the list of sweet-smelling plants, as it has an almost overpoweringly strong scent. The bottle-brush, *Melaleuca*, with its strange reddish blossoms, showing how aptly it has been named, and the pear-scented magnolia, with its insignificant little brownish blossoms, are all favourite shrubs.

Various bulbous plants seem to have made a home under the shelter of their taller-growing companions, and in February, freesias, which in this land of flowers seed themselves, spring up in every nook and cranny; also the unconsidered sparaxis, whose deep red and yellow striped flowers are hardly worthy of a place. But the bright orange tritonias and deep blue babianas are highly prized, and in May the red amaryllis adorn most of the gardens, in company with the rosy-white *Crinum powellei*. The delicate *Gladiolus colvillei*, known in England as the Bride and under various other fancy names, open their pale pink-and-white spikes of bloom early in May. A few plants of carnations are treasured, as they are not easy to grow. Rose-trees are given a place, many being such old-fashioned varieties that I could not find a name for them; while the walls of the garden may be clad with heliotrope, which seems to be in perpetual bloom, or *Plumbago capensis*, whose clear blue blossoms cover the plant in great profusion in late autumn and spring. In summer the yellow blossoms of the *Allamanda Schottii* appear, and later in the year the waxy-white *Stephanotis floribunda* and *Mandevilleas* will all in turn be an ornament to the garden, though in the winter months their glossy green foliage will have passed unnoticed.



AZALEAS IN A PORTUGUESE GARDEN

I consider that *Azalea indica* is the plant which is most valued by the Portuguese. In the cared-for garden it is given a most conspicuous place, either planted in the open ground in partial shade, or more frequently kept in pots, and tended with the greatest care. In February and March through many an open doorway a glimpse may be caught of a group of gay-coloured azaleas, even in little humble gardens which at other seasons of the year are flowerless. The whole horticultural energy of the owner of the little strip of garden has been centred in the

loving care bestowed on his few treasured azaleas. A tiny plant, not more than a few inches in height, will be far more valued than its overgrown neighbour, if it should happen to be some new variety, possibly only bearing a few blossoms, but perfect in form, of immense size, single or semi-double, of a brilliant rose-red, clear pink, salmon colour, or pure white. The culture of azaleas does not seem to be peculiar to the natives of Madeira, as from Oporto come numerous sturdy little trees of all the most highly prized varieties. The effect of well-grown specimens in pots, arranged along the stone ledge of the garden corridor, or grouped round the stone or, more correctly speaking, plaster seat, which generally finds a place in all these gardens, is very pleasing, and well repays the care bestowed on the plants all through the heat of the summer months.

A corner of the garden must be devoted to fern-growing, without which no garden in Madeira is complete. In the gardens of the rich a little greenhouse, or *stufa* is considered necessary for their successful cultivation, but in many a shady, damp corner of a humble cottage garden have I seen splendid specimens of the commoner ferns grown without that most disfiguring element. Perfect shelter from wind and sun is, of course, necessary, and sometimes, where no other shelter is available, the dense shade of a spreading Madeira cedar-tree is made use of, and from its branches will hang fern-clad pots. Or a little arbour is formed of that most useful of shade-giving creepers, the native *Allegra campo*, or Happy Country. The plant is also sometimes called Alexandrian laurel, though for what reason it is hard to know, as it has no connection with the Laurel family, but is *Ruscus racemorus*. The plant throws up fresh shoots every winter, which in their early stages appear

like giant asparagus, and grow and grow until sometimes they reach fifteen or twenty feet in length before the fresh pale green leaves develop. By the spring the young leaves have unfurled, and provide a canopy of delicate green through the summer. The growth of the previous year can either be cut away, or if retained, in late spring, little greenish-white flowers will appear on the underneath of the leaves. The plant is a native of Portugal, but may be found in a wild state in Madeira. It is also known under the name of *Danæ racemosus*. One of the Polypodiums, called by the Portuguese *Feto do metre*, or Fern by the yard, seems to be first favourite, and splendid specimens are to be seen, each frond measuring one to two yards in length. *Gymnogrammes*, or golden ferns, are also much prized, and the *Asparagus sprengeri* has during the last few years found many admirers, with its long sprays rivalling in length the *Feto do metro*. *Adiantums* and all the commoner ferns are given a place, according to the taste of their owners.

I cannot close this chapter without a few words on the subject of the neat devices made by the Portuguese out of canes or bamboo, for training plants. In some instances it may be overdone, and one cannot always admire rose-trees trained on to bamboo frames in the shape of fans, crosses, or even umbrellas; but the little arched fences as a support to lower-growing plants are used with very good effect. I have copied the idea in England with some success for training ivy-leaved geraniums in large pots or tubs, by planting four rather stout bamboos or canes, two feet or more in height, in the pots, then slipping four pieces of split cane into the hollow ends, and either forming four arches, by inserting each end of the split length into the hollow, or else a pagoda-like effect can be made

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