

Arnoldia Reviews

Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles, by W. J. Bean.

The present generation of gardeners has grown up with two monumental reference works devoted to trees and shrubs: Rehder's "Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs," a one volume handbook for identification, and Bean's "Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles," a two (or three in later editions) volume compendium of descriptive matter. They are both monuments to the incredible energies of their respective authors. Both works were produced as a response to the large number of new woody plants that were introduced into cultivation from eastern Asia in the last part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries.

Rehder's "Manual . . ." was originally published in 1927 and issued in a revised edition by its author in 1940. Bean's "Trees and Shrubs . . ." was originally published in 1914 in two volumes, went through six editions in the author's lifetime, and was last issued three years after his death, in 1949, as a seventh edition in three volumes, edited from the author's manuscript. Economic exigencies required that the successive editions of Bean be issued with a minimum of alteration to the text of the original volumes, but with the new matter added as a supplementary volume.

Bean's "Trees and Shrubs . . ." was always a discursive and descriptive work. It described the forms cultivated in the British Isles, but made no real attempt to indicate diagnostic characters or to provide keys for identification. As such, Bean and Rehder were complimentary texts, for Rehder's "Manual . . .", despite its cryptic notes on flowering time and hardiness, is essentially a manual for identification.

For years there have been rumors that there was to be a new edition of Bean, and at last the first volume of the new edition is here. While in appearance it resembles the old Bean, there is much that is new. The entire text has been reset in a more modern type face. All of the descriptive material has been cast into one alphabet, and nomenclature and synonymy have been

brought up to date. Many of the species were known to Bean only as juvenile specimens — the new text brings his observations up to date by the incorporation of data on mature specimens. As much as possible of Bean's original text has been saved; the editing has consisted to a large extent of adding new observations.

The new seventh edition of Bean's "Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles" seems destined to take its place on the bookshelves of all who have a serious interest in growing trees and shrubs in the temperate zones. The editors are to be congratulated on producing a thoroughly up-to-date work that retains the flavour of the original; and the publisher is to be applauded for a fine job of book production. The reasonable price of about twenty dollars per volume is due to financial assistance from the Royal Horticultural Society and the Nuffield Foundation. We, the public, must be forever grateful to all concerned.

G. P. DEW.

W. J. Bean, *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*, London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., 1970. £8 net.

Hortulus, by Walahfrid Strabo, translated by Raef Payne

The book's white vellum binding and the gold letters *Walahfrid Strabo. Hortulus. 1510/1966* stood out among the dark volumes on the shelf.

I took it down and opened it to one of the middle pages:

Then my small patch was warmed by winds from the south
And the sun's heat. That it should not be washed away,
We faced it with planks and raised it in oblong beds
A little above the level ground. With a rake
I broke the soil up bit by bit, and then
Worked in from on top the leaven of rich manure.
Some plants we grow from seed, some from old stocks
We try to bring back to the youth they knew before.

I was in a dry dusty library but suddenly the warmth of the sun was on my face, I smelled the rich spring scent of manure, and felt damp crumbling soil between my fingers.

On the left-hand page the poem was in Latin, on the right in English. Each page was delicately imprinted with a pale green block print of a plant. I turned a few pages:

You have seen how ivy twines
Its leaves round a lofty elm, from the earth's bosom
Lapping its supple arms around the whole tree till it finds
A way to the very top, and hides all the wrinkled bark
With a mantle of green —

Who was Walahfrid Strabo? I turned to the front of the book. In the first twelve pages I found an account of this 9th century poet and monk by Wilfrid Blunt. The account of his life tells what is known historically about him, and includes footnotes of further historical information. Many of his writings were of religious subjects including a study of the growth of observances in the Church. His *Hortulus* seems to have been the only poem of nature that he wrote. Although the poem was written in the ninth century the manuscript lay undiscovered until 1509, when it was found and printed in Vienna in 1510. It has had an appeal to poets and gardeners ever since, and this volume includes a discussion of other manuscripts and editions of the poem which have appeared since medieval days.

After reading Walahfrid's life I turned again to the poem, and found, toward the front of the volume, twenty facsimile pages of the ninth century manuscript of the *Hortulus*, reproduced from La Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Even though I have forgotten the little Latin I knew, these pages, written in neat Latin calligraphy, produced the same feeling of excitement and history that I get from turning the crackling pages of an old book.

I turned to the beginning of the English translation and began to read: "Here begins the Book on the Cultivation of Gardens by Strabus (or Strabo). May it find favor." I was in a monastery garden, sharing with a 9th century monk the joys and sorrows of watching a garden grow. I rejoiced with him at the arrival of spring:

A purer air was now beginning to herald
Fine weather. Plants stirred in the zephyr's path
Thrusting out from their roots the slender tips
Which had long lain hidden in the earth's blind womb,
Shunning the frost they hate. Spring smiled
In the leaves of the woodland, the lush grass on the slopes
And the bright sward of the cheerful meadows.

When a dry spell threatened I hurried with him to bring water:

Should a dry spell rob the plants of the moisture they need,
My gardening zeal and fear that the slender shoots
May die of thirst make me scurry to bring fresh water
In brimming buckets. With my own hands I pour it
Drop by drop, taking care not to shift the seeds
By too sudden or lavish a soaking.

Together in the library, surrounded by old books, Walahfrid and I strolled down his garden path. It was a kitchen garden, as most northern European gardens were in the ninth century. Tansy, Betony, Celery; he admired each and gave directions for its use.

At the end of his garden stood the rose and the lily, and with words of religious mysticism he compared them to the symbols of the Church:

These two flowers, so loved and widely honored,
Have throughout the ages stood as symbols
Of the Church's greatest treasures; for it plucks the rose
In token of blood shed by the Blessed Martyrs;
The lily it wears as a shining sign of its faith.

I closed the book and put it back on the shelf. That evening as I turned the hose on my newly planted beds I thought of the monk in his monastery garden. Eleven centuries separate us, but we share the hopes and despairs of gardening.

Some plants we grow from seed, some from old stocks
We try to bring back to the youth they knew before.

H. R. G.

This edition of *Hortulus*, published by the Hunt Botanical Library, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is limited to 1500 copies. It can be ordered from Stechert-Hafner Service Agency, Inc., Box 2000, 260 Heights Road, Darien, Connecticut, 06820. The price is \$15.00.



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