GARDEN TALK.

A Book of Miscellaneous Chatter by an Englishwoman of Lucknow.*

WOMEN, it seems, are eager just now to hang their more discursive literary essays upon a sort of horticultural frame. They mingle their tender sprouts of feminine philosophy and sentiment with hard botanical names and quotations from quaint old writers upon rural arts and delights. They wreathe (as it were) a becoming background out of their gardens and trees and flowers, and please themselves with pretty posings amid the greenery. So cunningly environed, they talk of things in general much as a woman might who was puttering about her flower beds with a pair of scissors and a trowel—having along a mildly sympathetic and idly literary listener.

The gardens themselves are placed in all the corners of the earth. They are suburban gardens in Jersey, or German gardens, or Italian gardens, or Japanese gardens, or plain kitchen gardens, or they are gardens of the golden East. This book is all about an Indian garden in the tragic City of Lucknow, and contains, besides botanical and other details, interesting only to minds deeply "gardenized," a deal of characteristic woman's talk (all in minors) about many things infinitely disconnected. Much of it is good enough reading if the mood fits.

For instance, the lady of the book had an opposite neighbor who likewise owned a garden. The neighbor was, moreover, a young girl and pretty. The author names her Belinda and calls her "general and particular behavior most reprehensible" "even in the land where the 'compleat dangler' of both sexes has raised the art of flirtation to a science." Then proceeds:

> That art which "dallied with the innocence of love" is, of course, no new thing. We find archaic traces of it in the earliest Scripture history, and the practice was extensively in vogue in the courts of the Jewish sovereigns. But it was not till the middle of the seventeenth century that the tactics of the loafer on "the primrose path of dalliance" were epitomized into a word which has since become general in more languages than one. Lord Chesterfield, writing in The World (the ancient World, of course) about 1754, says that he "assisted at the birth of that most significant word, 'flirtation,' which dropped from the most beautiful mouth in the world." The owner of the mouth in question was the fair Lady Frances Shirley, and Lord Chesterfield, as every one knows, no mean judge, is supposed to have spoken from personal acquaintance with it.

Further in defense of the art thus ambrosially named:

> Without going so far as to say that a happy marriage depends upon broken hearts, I am quite aware that one cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. It is distinctly advisable that young people should not be obliged to marry in order to find out if they like each other.

In another place the gardener tells of a visit of the two greatest ladies of the station, whom an irreverent subaltern has dubbed (after mighty battleships of his Majesty) "Powerful" and "Terrible"; in another she relates how a small yet another she goes hunting for snipe dog of hers routed a "must" elephant, in with Capt. Sahib, (presumably her husband,) and thereafter sets forth minutely how small birds are to be skinned for mounting. Later she tells at equal length how to skin larger game, and talks about the heat and the rains and evil things that fly by night, and the virtues and shortcomings of Hindu servants; or she passes to the beauties and memories of India the Ancient or dwells upon certain incidents of the Mutiny. In the last connection is the tragic suggestion that (perhaps) many English girls and women who disappeared then were locked up in harems of good Moslems, and the author cites some vague stories of men who have seen men who have heard of such women who from withered brown anatomies peddle water from door to door.

Again the gardener forgets her beloved plants to speak of the polite art of handshaking, thus:

> The shake of the hand has become, I see, the shibboleth of society. It alters every season like the men's collars. By their shape ye shall know them. Masonic signs are nothing to it. After all, we merely substitute one social shackle for another. Bowing as a fine art went out with powder.

In yet another place is talk of melons with curious questions why the name of melon is one of reproach, from the day Homer's Thersites called the Greeks "pumpkins" till now the French military students at St. Cyr call their freshmen "melon" as ours at West Point call theirs "plebe."

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*MY GARDEN IN THE CITY OF GARDENS. A Memory, with Illustrations. 12mo. Pp. 286. New York: The John Lane Company.

The New York Times
Published: July 22, 1905