



THE GARDENS AT MYDDELTON HOUSE, WALTHAM CROSS.

Interview with Mr. E. A. Bowles.



IF only because of the reputation which Mr. E. A. Bowles has achieved in the horticultural world, the gardens at Myddelton House would be of exceptional interest. He has for some time been one of the most prominent members of the Royal Horticultural Society. He has not only a seat on the Council, but is vice-chairman of the Scientific Committee, and frequently presides at its meetings. On hardy plants there is no authority who is equal to him among amateurs, and he combines with the knowledge of a master of botany, an ardent enthusiasm and a charm of manner which are irresistible to all who have the pleasure of coming in contact with him. Myddelton House and its gardens have links with the historic past. Situated about equal distance from Enfield and Waltham Cross, they are still entirely in the country, surrounded by very attractive rural scenery. The mansion is substantial and commodious, but in no sense is it out of harmony with the extensive pleasure grounds, which, along with their old-world appearance, have every indication of being furnished according to the most cultivated present-day taste. If the grand old Cedar of Lebanon, a century old, with other venerable trees on the lawns, and the New River, made by Sir Hugh Myddelton in the reign of James I., intersecting the gardens, are evidence of antiquity, the various collections of plants, the flower beds, the borders, the pergolas, and the *tout ensemble* show, at a glance, that no effort is spared to turn to the best account modern methods.

The Rock Garden.

Paying my visit to the gardens on a brilliant afternoon in May, I had the double advantage of seeing them under the most favourable auspices, and of obtaining first-hand from Mr. Bowles the information I desired to possess. And, to commence, I inspected the rock garden, on which its owner has brought to bear all the resources of his skill. Mr. Bowles describes himself as more of a botanist than an artistic gardener, but from the outset I was impressed with the large proportion of rare plants and flowers which find a home in his domain. It is so in the rock garden, which contains innumerable treasures, many of them beautiful, some of them curious, but none of them ugly. Before I noted down a few varieties, I asked Mr. Bowles to tell me the plan of the rock garden.

"The idea, in planning it," he replied, "was to afford accommodation for plants which differ materially in their cultural requirements. As you see, it occupies a situation with sufficient slopes for the escape of surplus moisture. The general design is a series of valleys and ridges. The ridges are of moderate height, and enough rockwork has been used to keep the slopes in position, and to provide the conditions necessary for the successful cultivation of the residents."

"In addition to providing a remarkable choice of aspects, so as to enable you to give particular plants the sites most suited to them, I gather that one object in designing the rock garden was to arrange that the whole of the contents might easily be reached?"

"Yes; and also that their principal charac-

teristics might be seen from within a short range."

The Collection of Cytisus.

"When was the garden made?"

"Between fifteen and sixteen years ago. The upper part is the oldest. One of the collections of leguminous plants on high ground is that of *Cytisus*."

"What are your favourite varieties?"

"One of the prettiest is *C. cinereus*, and one of the sweetest in perfume *C. fragrans*, which is quite hardy. The latter has pale pink flowers, with the scent of the Hyacinth. The varieties



A PRETTY WALL SEAT AT MYDDELTON HOUSE,
WALTHAM CROSS.

on one of the ridges include *C. hirsutus*, *C. trifolius*, *C. sessilifolius*, *C. kewensis*—whose soft yellow flowers carpet the rocks—*C. austriacus*, *C. glabrescens*, *C. capitatus*, *C. sericeus*, and *C. decumbens*.

"You will notice that several plants are in groups," continued Mr. Bowles, "and that I have special corners of certain kinds. Here is a *Viola* corner, including a number of hybrids, one from Wisley. Another corner consists of *Geraniums*, such as *cinereum* (a charming dwarf Alpine), *Webbianum*, *argenteum*, *subcaulescens*, and an interesting one called *intermedia*, said to be a hybrid. Then there is a big corner of *Crocuses*, though these, of course, are now over."

The Value of Crocuses.

"I believe you have raised a great many seedlings?"

"Yes, I have devoted special attention to the cultivation of the *Crocus*, and I hope to make it

more popular than it is at present. It deserves to be a favourite flower, both because of its beauty, and because of the time it can be kept in bloom."

"How long does your flowering season last?"

"From August to April I am seldom without a *Crocus*. The cultivation is not difficult, and very far from expensive. *Primulas* are largely grown. One of the prettiest of the Sieboldi group is *Bruce Findlay*. In the small bog gardens, which have been recently added, a deeply coloured form of *Primula rosea* finds a congenial home."

Plants for the Bog Gardens.

"I should like to know the names of other plants that flourish most in the bog gardens."

"Amongst them may be mentioned the white form of *Erica tetralix* and *cineria*. *Rubus arcticus* fruits freely. The blue and white and rose forms of *Ramondia pyrenaica* flower well in the chinks of the stones. Alongside *Primula rosea* thrive *Pinguicula grandiflora*, *Lobelia syphilitica* (light blue), and *L. alba*, the white variety."

"I notice that you are rich in the possession of *Fritillarias*."

"Some of the varieties are rare, notably *F. gracilis*. Speaking of rare plants, here is a plant from the Falkland Isles in flower for the first time with me. It is *Sisyrinchium filifolium*. Near it are the dwarf *Willows*, *Salix herbacea* and *reticulata*, and the smallest form of the Cedar of Lebanon, *Comte de Dijon*. Another plant seldom seen is *Zanthorhiza apiifolia*, with its marvellous yellow root. Here is *Rubus nutans*, with flowers under the leaf. You may care to mention the specimen of *Asparagus acutifolius*, and another of *A. verticillatus*, which grows fifteen feet high each season, and bears a large crop of berries."

Special Treasures.

"I should like to mention any which you will kindly tell me are special treasures."

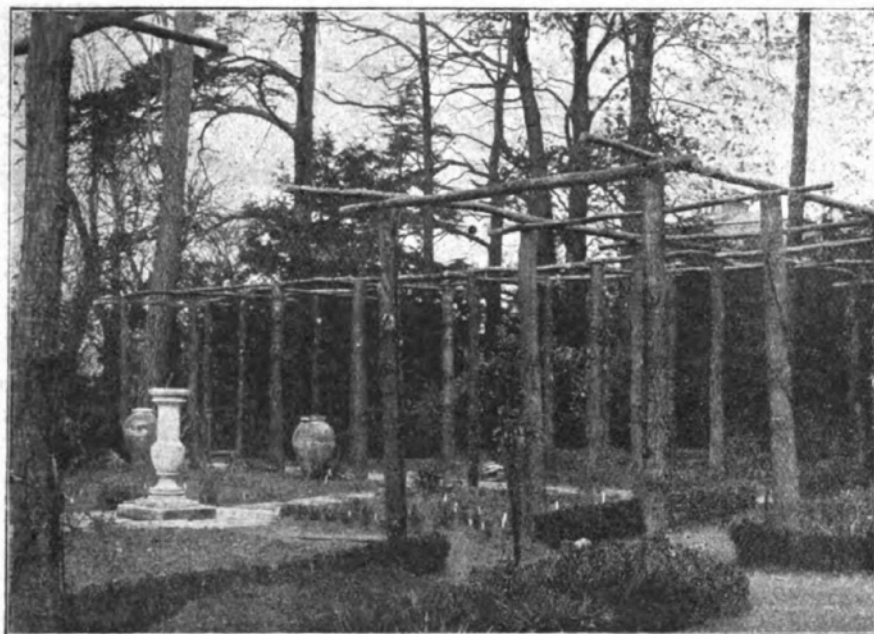
"I rather pride myself on my four yards of the dwarf *Almond*, *Amygdalus nanus*; and on my mass of *Gunnera manicata*, with leaves seven feet high. Then there is a plant whose leaves are used by the Japanese as umbrellas, *Petasites japonica gigantea*; and other treasures embrace *Eucommia almoides* (the hardy rubber-producing tree), a fine specimen of *Nandina domestica*, seven species of *Acanthus*, and the two hardy *Orange trees*, *Egle sepiaria*, about seven feet high, which were grown from the pips of *Oranges* ripened in the garden of Canon Ellacombe, at Bitton. I learnt gardening from Canon Ellacombe."

"And you have pursued it ever since?"

"As much as time and opportunity have allowed me. Of course, there are also in the rock garden more ordinary plants, such as *Epilobiums* of sorts, of which *hirsutum album* is one of the most useful; *Aubrietias* in great variety; and *Violas*, than which none is more valued than *V. gracilis*, both for fragrance, its velvet colour, and its white eye. There are also fine breadths of the most choice of the perennial *Candytufts*, which bloom profusely, and I set store by the lovely *Anemone sylvestris grandiflora*."

"You have a big collection of the outdoor Cacti just outside the rock garden?"

"Many species and varieties are represented in the collection of hardy Opuntias. Above the Cactus bank is a very old plant of Rosemary in upright form."



THE PERGOLA AT MYDDELTON HOUSE, WALTHAM CROSS.

"Perhaps you could indicate some of the best of the Opuntias?"

"The varieties of *O. camanchica* grow most freely, and are covered with flowers of varying shades of yellow and orange in July, followed by red fruits in the following spring. The dwarfed forms, such as *humilis*, *fragilis*, *arenaria*, *pachyarthra* and *rhodantha*, though they grow freely enough, are rather shy as to flowering. *Cereus paucispinus* gives the most brilliant flowers of all—of a dazzling scarlet, with bright green stigma. Other succulent plants, such as *Echeveria farinosa*, and *Agave Parryi* and *A. utahensis*, thrive well on this bank, with the protection of some old greenhouse lights placed overhead from November till the end of March. Several somewhat tender plants, such as *Heptacarpa scaposa*, *Vallota purpurea*, *Pancratium illyricum*, *Nerine undulata*, *Lycoris squamigera*, and *Hypoxis Roperi*, are quite happy at the base of the rocks."

Iris and its Cultivation.

Having observed clumps of *Lithospermum prostratum* var. *Heavenly Blue*; *Eryngiums*, of which a good many are self-sown, such as *E. serra* and *agarifolium*; *Gentiana kurroo*, which later on makes a beautiful border of blue; and striking clumps of *Potentillas fruticosa*, we made our way along the banks of the New River. These have been rendered extremely ornamental.

"Irises are a great feature on one of the banks," I remarked.

"One long bed is entirely filled with *Iris florentina* and a few clumps of *I. germanica*. The latter were added to give a little contrast in colour, as a group consisting exclusively of *I. florentina* looks rather pallid from a distance."

"One of the attractions of your gardens is, I think, the absence of uniformity?"

"I avoid it as much as possible. In addition to *I. germanica*, on the higher ground are a number of the best Bearded Irises now in cultivation. Their success emphasises the contention that they are singularly suitable for planting in hot, dry places, where the soil is very poor."

"Equally thriving appear to be your groups of

Iris pallida I see round the bend of the river."

"I am very fond of the varieties of *pallida*, but I also like certain of the yellow species, such as *I. flavescens* and *I. variegata*."

"Anything about their cultivation would be very acceptable."

whole of the 'beds have a groundwork of *Myosotis Warley Blue*, raised by Miss Willmott. I greatly admire this variety, because it is very free flowering, and also because the blooms are exceptionally large in size and rich in colour. You may like to know that the stone pillars near the Tulip beds are part of the balustrade of old London Bridge."

"How long do the Tulips continue in flower?"

"For about three weeks in May. Afterwards in the summer, *Pentstemons*, *Gazanias*, scarlet *Geraniums*, and a goodly number of succulent plants take their place, and this is the only part of the garden where I go in for formal bedding."

Sempervivums for the Rock Garden.

"Is that a collection of *Sempervivums* in pots on the wall of the terrace?"

"Yes. I have a large collection of *Sempervivums*, and am very fond of them for use in the rock garden, where they soon grow into large patches. *S. arachnoideum*, *Comollesii*, *rubicundum*, *triste*, *violaceum*, and *ciliatum* are especial favourites of mine."

We next spent some time in the frame grounds and greenhouses. In the latter are many rare plants which will hereafter be transferred to the rock garden; and amongst the contents of the greenhouses were varieties of *Richardias*, *Ceropegias*, *Phyllanthus*, *Mesembryanthemums*, and a number of *Agaves*, *Cotyledons*, and *Echeverias* for the terrace, to take the place of some of the Tulips. In a garden shut off from the kitchen garden by a trellis, through which we passed to another portion of the pleasure grounds, were *Viburnum Carlesii*, *Akebia quinata rosea*, *Cotoneaster angustifolia*, *Rubus deliciosus*, and *Smilax*; and we then explored a Japanese garden abutting the lawn.

The Japanese Garden.

"Here," said Mr. Bowles, "we have a collection of subjects suitable for a Japanese garden, although the garden itself is not worked strictly on Japanese lines. The collection includes a number of *Plantains*, the fastigate *Elder*, and the *Curly Nut* by way of contrast;



THE ROCK GARDEN IN EARLY MARCH AT MYDDELTON HOUSE, WALTHAM CROSS.

"I have always given a good deal of attention to May-flowering Tulips. Some beds contain only one variety, but others various shades of one colour. Nearly all belong to the Darwin section. The beds include one of *Europa*, two of *gesneriana*, and one of *Clara Butt*. The

Magnolia conspicua; *Hedera Russelliana*—one of the best of the dwarf trees—*Bamboos*, flowering *Cherries*, *Cornus Spathi*, and *Pyrus Niedwetskiana*."

Proceeding to the borders, I noticed groups of *Eremurus*, and Mr. Bowles said: "The

Eremurus does very well on this soil, and so do some varieties of Eucalyptus. One of the most decorative forms of Eucalyptus is cordata. I had several specimens of it that flowered regularly, but they were killed by the severe frost of December, 1908. In ordinary winters the variety will escape harm in a sheltered corner protected from the north and east. I planted my specimens in 1901, and exhibited flowers before the Scientific Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1905. It is one of the few fairly hardy species which retain broad and brilliantly blue leaves, when it grows to flowering size, and, although specimens may not last more than ten years, its beauty is great enough to entitle it to a place in any representative garden. I have now a young one raised from my home-saved seed."

The Pergola Garden.

"Have you any difficulty in your borders with Liliiums?"

"I have some trouble with *L. gigantea*, but *Henryii* does exceedingly well. *Kniphofias* and many tall-growing herbaceous plants flourish in the borders; but, as you can judge for yourself, they are grown quite informally."

"You have left till last one of the most



LUSTY GROWTH ON A ROCKER

pleasing features," I said, as we entered the pergola garden.

"This has just received an addition in the shape of a new south wall. The pergola itself, which is composed of Oak posts and cross-beams, is covered by many varieties of hardy Vines and climbers, and in the garden are a number of Rose Beds. The flat stone walk underneath is full of tiny plants, some of them very rare plants. Here, as in all other parts of the garden, my interest centres in the things that are not grown everywhere, and yet can be grown under ordinary conditions."

ALFRED WILCOX.