

place, and in George III.'s reign the gardens were much improved under the direction of the celebrated Sir Joseph Banks. In 1840 Queen Victoria relinquished her title to the gardens, which were taken in charge by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, and from that time to the present there has been nothing but progress and development in every department of these magnificent pleasure grounds. Under the loving care of Sir William Hooker (who was succeeded by his no less distinguished son, Dr. Joseph Dalton Hooker, F.R.S.), Kew Gardens have become the home of splendid specimens of the floral treasures of the world. The present Director is Mr. W. T. T. Dyer, F.R.S.

In popular estimation the chief glory of Kew is the *Victoria Regia*, one of the largest examples of the lily tribe. It is said to have been first discovered by Sir Robert Schomburgk, in British Guiana, in 1837. Drawings were exhibited and seeds repeatedly brought over; but as these did not germinate, the idea of a plant with leaves from 5 to 6 feet across, and flowers 15 inches in diameter, began to be reckoned as a mere travellers' tale! At length, however, in 1849, Dr. Rodic, of Demerara, sent fresh seeds to Kew, where the plant has since continued to flourish.

The Great Palm House was designed by the famous architect, Mr. Decimus Burton, and completed in 1848. The entire length of the structure is 362 feet, the centre is 100 feet wide and 66 feet in length. It is heated by six large boilers, with which a system of nearly 20,000 feet of hot-water piping is connected.

Near the Palm House is the Museum, which contains a large collection of fruits, seeds, and many curious and interesting vegetable products. Contributions have been gathered from all the quarters of the globe.

Every visitor to Kew should make a point of seeing the gallery of original paintings, presented by Miss North, a daughter of the late Mr. Frederick North, M.P. for Hastings. This lady travelled all over the world painting from nature the various beautiful flowers which attracted her attention. All the paintings are highly finished, and Dr. J.

Hooker, in the Preface to the Descriptive Catalogue, says:—

"Many of the views here brought together represent, vividly and truthfully, scenes of astonishing interest and singularity, and objects that are amongst the wonders of the vegetable kingdom; and these, though now accessible to travellers and familiar to readers of travels, are already disappearing, or are doomed shortly to disappear, before the axe and the forest fires, the plough and the flock, and the ever-advancing settler or colonist. Such scenes can never be renewed by nature, nor, when once effaced, can they be pictured to the mind's eye, except by means of such records as this lady has presented to us and to posterity, which will thus have even more reason than we have to be grateful for her fortitude as a traveller, her talent and industry as an artist, and her liberality and public spirit."

The stately Cedar trees, the Plane, the Turkey Oriental Oak, the "Weeping Willow," are here seen to perfection. The "Weeping Willow" is an off-shoot from that over Napoleon's tomb at St. Helena, and the general parent of all those bearing his name in this country.

The Orchid House, the Tropical Fern House, the Winter Garden, are each in their way unrivalled. Among the curiosities are two extraordinary specimens of the Old-man Cactus. Sir William Hooker thought these specimens were probably as much as a thousand years old!

We may add that the Botanic Gardens are open free to the public from one to six daily, and the Pleasure Grounds and Museums are open to the public every afternoon. Kew Gardens are ten miles from London by rail, and there are frequent trains from Waterloo Station and the Underground Railway. In the summer months many visitors prefer to go by boat, and steamers ply at regular intervals from all the Thames piers.

Kew Gardens, as a popular resort, seems to be increasing in favour. The number of visitors during last year shows an increase of 379,229 on the attendance for the preceding year, and is the largest as yet recorded, except for 1890, when it reached 1,839,966. The total number of visitors for the past year was 1,733,386 as compared with 1,354,157 in 1892.