

ROSEMARY IN HER GARDEN

Extracts from a Gardener's Diary
BY ANNIE MABEL SEVERS



JANUARY 1.—I intend to keep a record of all my garden work this year. It will keep me in touch with it when it is too wet and dreary to be out, and will be of use to me next year.

How I love my little oblong garden, with its tiny orchard at the end, and the row of fir trees along one side to keep off the cold winds that blow across from the North Sea! Since I have been left alone—father, mother, sister, all gone—my garden has been everything to me. Friends I have, and dear friends, too, among these kindly village people, but my garden and my little dwelling-house are my very, very own.

I heard a rumour to-day that the house adjoining mine has been let at last. I hope it is not true; though, if the garden were cultivated there would be fewer weeds to creep through the hedge and root themselves in my trim gravel walk, and less thistledown would float inconspicuously over my domain. Still, a tribe of noisy children running about next door would rob me of the seclusion and peace that I prize so highly, for at present, when I am at work in my garden, I am alone in a world of my own, as the two houses stand quite by themselves, and no friendly or unfriendly eye can overlook. I and my garden are enough for each other. I sometimes wish that the low privet hedge that separates the two gardens had been a stone wall or a wood fence; 'twould have cut me off more completely from any undesirable neighbours. But perhaps the new tenant will be a lonely old maid, as I am looked upon by the village people. I am only thirty, and sometimes when I am in my garden, wandering among my flowers in the spring time, I have fancies and follies enough in my head for a lassie of sweet and twenty! But enough of this for to-day. I will away out into my garden and weed and roll my paths before the snow comes. It has been a green Yule, but we must expect the opening month of the year to bring us winter weather.

February 20.—Have had a busy morning in the garden. The frost has gone at last and the high, cold winds have dried the ground so that I have been able to put in a row of early peas, also a few sweet peas, sown in groups at the south end of the garden. The ground is cold for them yet, but they are there ready for the sun's rays when they penetrate so far. My new neighbour, who has, I suppose, been busy putting his house to rights during the cold weather, was also in his garden. He seems to be living quite alone, and one of the village women who goes in to clean for him tells me "he manages wonderful!" He has bought the house, I hear, so he and I are likely to be neighbours for a long time to come. We have just exchanged a "good-morning," and a remark about the weather over the privet hedge. He is busy digging over his land; a hard piece of work, after it has been neglected so long, but he seems to know how to go about it. He is making a great heap of stuff to burn, and thoroughly trenching and manuring as he goes on. He looks to be a man of about forty; I saw his hair was quite grey at the temples as he raised his cap. If only he doesn't drink, or anything of that sort, he will be a quiet, inoffensive neighbour, and I might have had much worse. The snowdrops are nodding in the sun to-day, and a lark has been singing overhead.

March 18.—What a busy month this is, and a typical March it has been so far. The last few days of February were, indeed, "February fill-dyke," for, after a few sunny, mild days we had a heavy snow-storm. Then March came in like a lion, bringing a second edition of the storm. Now the snow has all disappeared, the crocuses are making the borders gay, and a "peck of March dust, which is worth a king's ransom," is whirling down the road. I have at last got a few early potatoes in, also cabbage and cauliflower plants. Have also made a sowing of broad beans, and another row of peas. In this northern climate, and so near the sea, it does not pay to sow many seeds till March has fairly gone. If it goes like a lamb, and April is fine, I shall have to be in the garden all day. The daffodils are beginning to nod their golden buds in front of the laurel hedge that screens my little front garden from the road, the wallflowers are giving promise of flowery sweetness, while the

flowering currant near the gate is a picture of glory when the morning sun shines on it.

My neighbour is still toiling, but has dug over nearly the whole of his wilderness. We have had one or two chats about gardening over the privet hedge. I have given him a few rooted cuttings of herbs for his herb bed. He seemed specially pleased with a rosemary plant—a favourite of his, he said. I felt so vexed with myself afterwards, it seemed so stupid to blurt out like a child: "Oh, that's my name." His face quite lighted up.

"I have never known anyone with that name before," he said. "Rosemary for remembrance."

I turned away abruptly and began hoeing at the other end of the garden. It will not do to have poetry as well as gardening talk over the hedge.

April 30.—What a glorious month this has been. It has seemed like the birth of a new world. The little bed under my kitchen window has been blue with violets; the scent of them is like elixir every time I go in and out. Surely they have never been of such heavenly blue or so sweet as this year. The wallflowers, too, are excelling themselves, while polyanthus and primroses are shining out of their green leaves as if with a smile of welcome to the spring. It is good to be alive and a garden lover in the spring time. I am often filled with a feeling of ecstasy when I am working among all the growing things. I am nearer to God in my garden than anywhere else, for there I am alone with Him, except for the choir of birds singing their glorious anthem of praise. Even the cuckoo seemed to be saying, "Amen," this morning.

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MAY 13.—My neighbour is more fortunate than I in one thing. He has a row of white and purple lilac bushes in the hedge at the other side of his garden, and they are heavy now with fragrant bunches of blossom. I was admiring them this morning when we exchanged our usual greeting over the hedge. This afternoon, when I was making my second sowing of carrots, I heard him call "Miss Rosemary." He has always called me that since the day I gave him the rosemary bush. He was at the hedge with a great armful of lilac.

"There," he said, "if this is in your room it won't be wasting its sweetness on the desert air."

"Lovely!" I exclaimed.

He smiled such a queer smile, and went off to his work, saying, "Yes, but I prefer rosemary."

Rosemary seems a poor favourite now that the spring flowers have come.

There is a wood at the top of a steep lane not half an hour's walk away. Here every May "the bluebells imitate the sky," and I always take a day's holiday to go and dream among them. Yesterday I set off early to spend my day in God's wild garden. A quick walk, full of anticipation, brought me to the edge of the wood; I passed through the gate, and was immediately in fairyland. Above was the delicate green of the trembling beech leaves; below, the fragrant carpet of blue, with green of grass and unfolding fern fronds straying over it. Did I say fairyland? Might I not better say a Temple of the Most High, wherein the soul might worship and lose itself in adoration, as the singing lark lost himself in the blue of the sky as I came up the road? And thousands of people will pay to-night to go and be entertained in vile atmospheres, while I have had this sweet world of beauty to myself for nothing.

June 30.—The month of roses has nearly passed, but the roses are not nearly over. The hedges in the lanes are garlanded with wild roses and honeysuckle; in the garden there is a wealth of blossom. There is plenty of work, too. I am fighting a determined war with weeds this year; it is not so hopeless a conflict now that the garden next door is getting into such good condition. The growing crops look well, and now the pea sticks are in, the garden has a more furnished look. I could almost write a book on "The Art of Pea-sticking!" My neighbour wanted to come and help me put them in, but I told him I had always done them myself, and needed no help. He seemed a bit huffy, I thought, at my refusal, and stalked away saying that I was very independent. He has never been into my garden yet.

July 16.—We had a gloriously wet day yesterday, and most acceptable, as the ground was getting parched and the labour of watering heavy. To-day I have been planting out, as fast as I could, cauliflower, savoy, and other greens. So hard did I work this morning that my neighbour called to me over the hedge not to overdo it. I took a long rest this afternoon in a deck chair on the gravel walk near my rose border. I have never enjoyed my garden as much as this summer. Nearly everything has done well, and already I am making plans and sowings for next year. To-night I went out in the garden in the dusk to hunt for snails, expecting them to be numerous after yesterday's rain. My neighbour was sitting in his garden, and when I appeared he came to the hedge at once, calling "Miss Rosemary."

I captured two particularly fine black snails that were making for my strawberry bed, then strolled across to the hedge.

"I'm busy," I said; "have you no slugs to catch?"

He laughed. "I'm lazy to-night. Let them feast on my lettuces if they like; I've far more than I shall ever eat!"

We stood talking for some time. The air was soft and sweet, and at the end of the garden a blackbird was giving out little sleepy trills. My heart seemed a-quiver. The beauty of the evening was affecting me strangely. I felt, too, that my neighbour was not untouched by the influences around us.

We were silent for a minute or two, listening to the blackbird which was getting sleepier every moment. Then I began to move away.

"Oh, don't go in yet," he said.

"The slugs—" I began.

"Never mind them to-night; it is too perfect an evening to think of anything so earthly."

I drew my gloves off meekly, and set down my murderous tin of salt and water.

"There," I said, "and how long do you want to keep me standing here?"

"I am wondering how long you are going to be before you invite me to your side of the hedge," he said. "So far all my hints have been in vain."

"I don't know," I stammered; "I didn't know you wanted to come."

"I either want to come on your side, or you to come on mine."

All of a sudden I began to tremble—why, I don't know.

"It's too late now," I said hastily, "you couldn't see anything."

"Come for a stroll to the top of the lane," he said, unexpectedly; "do, it's a shame to go indoors yet."

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HESITATED. A village is a very public place. All one's actions are noticed and talked over.

But it was nearly dark, and we were not likely to meet many people in the long, steep lane that led to my bluebell wood.

"All right," I said, "I'll meet you at the front gate."

We were very quiet at first as we walked up the lane in the gloaming. Then he began to talk in a quiet way that seemed to fit in with the still beauty of the night.

"You don't know what it means to me," he said, "to have someone to talk to like this. I have been a lonely chap all my life, for I have not the knack of making many friends. I think I am too old-fashioned. The world goes so fast nowadays, I don't feel as if I want to keep up with it; God and His beautiful world have quite satisfied me—till I knew you," he added after a pause.

By the time we had reached the top of the hill he had told me much of his history. He had had a motherless childhood, with a cold, self-contained father, then a strenuous business life, from which he had retired as soon as possible, sick of the competition and unreality of such a life.

"Now," he said, "I am happier than I have ever been in my life. I have enough for my simple wants, and am able sometimes to afford the luxury of helping others. I have my garden—and you," he added softly, "for I may count on your friendship, mayn't I? And above all," he said reverently, "I

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