



Many of the Gardens of Victoria are panoramic in extent—acres of dreamy Lotus Land.

THE GARDENS OF VICTORIA

Victoria, the Beautiful City of English Culture and Babylonian Magnificence

By ERNEST MCGAFFEY

ALL that remains of the celebrated Hanging Gardens of Babylon is a myth. Yet there must have been some haunting beauty to have carried even the legend of them down to these strenuous days. Modern gardens in many lands have flourished since that dim era, and the Gardens of the Tuileries, the Jardin des Plantes, the famous Kew Garden, and the Royal Botanical Garden are all household words in every land.

Nearly every city of modern times boasts of its parks and conservatories, and in some metropolises the culture of flowers and the love of the decorative in blossoms, shrubs, plants and tree-life is manifested in a very high degree. Perhaps in uniqueness and artistic effect there is no single city in the world which has made of its gardens such dreams of loveliness as Victoria, British Columbia, the capital city of the province, and Canada's most individualistic metropolis.

The mystery of the gardens is unsolvable. Analysis, demonstration, classification all elude one in wandering among their bewildering array of colours, shaded and divided with hedges and century-old oak, now pale with a myriad drift of sad lilies, tall and fair, now set on fire with a blaze of popped magnificence. All the unriddled charm of the flowers is here, hypnotic in its drowsy spell. The almost cloudless sunshine of the city, combined with the scent of the sea air drifting across, suggests an uplifting, a mirage of flight, as though these glorious gardens were suspended in space, the re-incarnation of the hanging gardens of Babylonian days.

No one can look on these gardens and not be moved to the soul with their beauty.

"For flowers have been known to heal
A common man's despair."

and the miracle of colour and perfume, the sweet purity of green leaf and tender bud are more than spoken words; more than music, or dreams.

It is doubtful if these places can mean as much to their builders as they seem. For to look on them long would be to linger in them constantly, lured by the lotus-eating enchantment of their exquisite environs. And you do not see many people in them. They are mainly alone, not empty, for such caskets could not be empty, and they have, indeed, a rare sense of solitude, as some marble statue might, at midnight, where the leaves lie furled and the plash of a fountain sounds faintly.

No two of these gardens are alike; and so they seem as separate individualities. Some peoples write books, some compose music, some paint pictures or model in clay or marble. Cultured as Victoria is, nothing more clearly shows its artistic taste than its gardens. You will see this in a thousand way so unobtrusive that the carelessness of apparent nature shows the preciseness of instinctive art in arrange-

ment, detail, space, modelling, colour-schemes, background, and infinite genius of loving sympathy.

The very lawns and hedges are thought out with a care and patience which bespeaks the artist. There are no false notes, no discords in these symphonies of colour. There is a blend of many beauties carried

to a harmonious whole, so that the entire effect is instantly and lastingly impressed on the spectator.

Everywhere the smaller gardens are seen, so that there is really an atmosphere of flower culture the whole city over. And it thus might seem as though the more stately ones were the outgrowth of a school of beauty, a classic advance from the beginnings of the little plots on the side streets to the wide and spangled radiance of the lawns stretching seaward and sunward in noon-day brilliance, for the sea reaches up longingly to many a cove and inlet where these gardens hang breathless in the spring and summer days, and the slant of the gulls' wings throw grey shadows down where the roses flash like jewels in a queen's diadem. Always there is the sense of an ocean nearness about these gardens, even when the sea is hidden beyond the far line of shelving downs or crested headland.

Variety is constantly apparent, as the seasons melt into one another. From the dainty hues of crocus and daffodil, the heavy perfume of the narcissus and the lily freshness of spring, the gardens flame into marvellous rose beds and ranks of roses, with sometimes a silent old gardener working among them.

"The rose in the garden slipped her bud
And she laughed in the pride of her youthful blood,
As she thought of the gardener standing by,
'He is old, so old, and he soon must die.'"

A man may stand midway of pastured blossoms, in a miniature sea of daffodils or tulips, surrounded on every side by the flowers.

Sheltered as these lovely gardens are from nearly every hint of wandering sea breeze or land zephyr, the ensemble presents a sense of luxurious quiet. The air is weighted with odour of rose and narcissus, of lilac and hyacinth as the days come in and go by. And steeped in the sunshine these cloistered spaces dream, unruffled by the challenge of the years. The song of a bird, an occasional soft-spoken voice among their blossoms, the glint of a stray band of lost ribbon, or the white hair of some ancient gardener might only hint of the outside world.

"The melancholy moonlight, sweet and lone,
That makes to dream the bird upon the tree,
And in their polished basins of white stone
The fountains tall to sob with ecstasy."



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