

# The Surroundings of a Canadian House

An Address delivered by Mrs. H. Dunnington-Grubb before the R.A.I.C. and O.A.A. Convention.

I HAVE chosen as my subject this evening, "The surroundings of a Canadian house," and the chief point which we will have under consideration will be, can we have a Canadian or national style of gardening?

I think that, although my time is short, I will just take a few minutes to quote from that memorable essay of Bacon's, on gardens:

"God Almighty first planted a garden, and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures, it is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of men, without which buildings and palaces are but gross handiworks, and a man shall ever see that when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely, as if gardening were the greater perfection."

The late John Sedding, an English architect much beloved—perhaps more artist than architect—said in referring to those lines that, "The praise of gardening can no further go. To say more were impossible; to say less were to belittle your subject."

Now, as you all know, there are two different styles of gardening. There is the architectural or formal style, and there is the landscape or natural style. And between these two widely divergent types we have innumerable shades and gradations combining in varying degree the principles of both.

What is the purpose of a garden? Is a garden to be considered in relation to the house as an integral part of the design which depends for its success upon the combined effect of the house and garden? Or is the house to be ignored and the garden treated as a separate unit?

The formal treatment is the extension of the principles which govern the design of a house to the grounds which immediately surround it. I say "immediately" advisedly.

Now although I am a strong advocate of the formal style of gardening, I believe that the garden should conform to the lines of the house; the garden is after all a setting for the building and many an excellent building has been marred by an unsympathetic setting. At the same time I hope before the end of my address to convince you that the oft-despised landscape school of gardening has given us very much which is beautiful both in our public and private gardens. We owe almost entirely to the landscape school our present public parks. We also owe very much that is beautiful in our private gardens.

I think it will help us to understand these two styles if I take you back a few centuries and

view historically the different agencies which have helped to make the gardens of to-day.

Gardens have ever been associated with buildings, and since we find that ancient Egypt produced the prototype of modern western architecture, we instinctively turn to the East to find the birthplace of gardening. We read that religious buildings preceded secular buildings in ancient Egypt. That is to say, the first buildings of any architectural pretensions were the tombs and temples. Now it was around these temples of ancient Egypt that we find the first gardens of which we have any definite record. Their purpose seems to have been chiefly utilitarian. They were strictly formal, rectangular, conforming to the lines of the very severe and simple buildings which they surrounded. Their purpose might have been two-fold. They were enclosed for the most part by hedges of Cypress. It may have been that these hedges and enclosures were to keep at bay the ever-advancing sands of the desert. Inside these barriers were small, absolutely formal gardens. Green turf, tanks of water, trees, arbors and trellises. The entrances to these temples were marked by sphinxes. Now the gardens, apart from any other purpose, were for the growing of plants to be used in religious ceremonies; therefore one may consider that some simple religious inspiration was at the back of these very early gardens.

As time passed and architecture advanced and there were, in addition to the temples, secular buildings of increasing grandeur, then we have gardens of pleasure in Egypt, more elaborate but still formal and conforming to the buildings they surrounded.

From Egypt the art of gardening spread next to Greece. There again the gardens were chiefly utilitarian. For the most part they were divided between the growing of vegetables and fruits for the purpose of food, and the other portion was very simple; it was formal in its outlay and used chiefly by the philosophers as open-air classrooms and lecture rooms for their students. It was in these gardens that the philosophers trained their students.

There is just one little point I might take time to mention. One feature of early Grecian gardens was the Hermes, the figure of the god of the fields on a tapering pedestal. As we know it now it is in stone. The original ones were carved in wood and were in reality a glorified surveyor's pole or stake, for these Hermes were set at the corners of the fields to mark the extent, and that was the origin of the tapering