

Poisoned bouquets

By Camilla Sykes

RICHARD GORER:

Living Tradition in the Garden
242pp. Newton Abbott: David and Charles. £4.50.

H. E. BATES:

A Fountain of Flowers
Colour plates by Patrick Matthews
91pp. Michael Joseph. £3.25.

Richard Gorer opens *Living Tradition in the Garden* with a scathing condemnation of two of the most beautiful of English gardens, Hidcote and Sissinghurst, dismissing them as examples of "exterior upholstery" achieved with "a catalogue and a bank balance". This sweeping statement displays an amazing ignorance of the facts: in the case of Sissinghurst there was no fat bank balance to draw on and the garden was built up slowly and lovingly over a long period; and although it is true that Lawrence Johnston was a rich man, he also possessed the artistic vision and the knowledge of plants which combined to create the Hidcote masterpiece, one which poor Mr Gorer is unable to appreciate. When the author is not thus off-loading his prejudices, he treats us to page upon page of extracts from familiar works by William Robinson, Shirley Hibberd, Gertrude Jekyll and other well-known writers; he is verbose and repetitions, and there is precious little sound gardening advice based on personal experience; all is conjecture and vague speculation.

However, the second half of the book, entitled "Plants", is of interest to the plant collector and the plant historian: the author

writes in detail and with knowledge on hybridizing, the great plant collectors, alpines, and rare shrubs. But this is mostly of academic interest since Mr Gorer's main concern is with rare unobtainable and extinct species, which are also the subject of most of the illustrations, and the general effect of the book is negative and uninspiring.

A Fountain of Flowers by H. E. Bates presents a refreshing and welcome contrast. A delightfully exuberant and infectious love of nature and an enthusiasm for the many varieties of plants growing in his own garden are conveyed to the reader in a generous outgoing way

which is irresistible. Here is much sound practical advice on planting and cultivation, based on the author's personal experience; good descriptions of plant discoveries and rare species; and, although this book is much shorter than the first one, it is infinitely more worthwhile: there are no lengthy extracts, no repetitions, and the author has no hobby-horse to ride. He gives us the best of his knowledge of the living plants of the gardens and countryside of England in the attractive style which has made his books so deservedly popular. The beautiful colour photographs by Patrick Matthews add to the charm of this delightful book.

Terrain in Spain

MARQUESA DE CASA VALDES:

Jardines de España

299pp including 523 illustrations
Madrid: Aguilar. 4,000 ptas.

Marquesa de Casa Valdés's *Jardines de España* is a fully documented record of gardens in every part of Spain. Tribute must be paid to the hard work, thoroughness and expertise obvious in this book which, because of its comprehensive nature, is difficult to place in any particular category. The author discusses fully the history of the gardens, tracing their origins from the Greek and Roman periods through the Arab occupation and its Islamic influences of France and Italy, on to the present day. But, because of the inclusion of so much historical archaeological and architectural

matter, the book cannot be treated as a handy guidebook.

There are some beautiful full-page colour-plates and some interesting garden plans. However, the author has not always been well served by the publisher; among the hundreds of smaller illustrations quality has been sacrificed to quantity and many of them show the blinding blue sky of the picture postcard. In contrast, some of the author's own photographs are much more true to nature and do not strain the reader's belief.

There is an excellent chapter on the botanical gardens of Spain and the great horticultural expeditions to the New World, delightfully illustrated with colour-plates from old botanical works. It is unfortunate that the exorbitantly high price of the book puts it beyond the reach of the garden-loving English tourist who spends his holidays in Spain. An abridged edition, at a reasonable price, would bring it within reach of the much wider public which it deserves.