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## Down The Garden Path<sup>1</sup>

reviewed by H. E. Bates<sup>2</sup>

It has been said that in England the love of flowers takes the place of art. If that is true there is certainly no knowing who next will turn out to be an artist. The butterfly-collared old gentleman regarding *The Times* with dismal ferocity in the corner of the morning railway-carriage may, for all one knows, be thinking with the tenderest longing of some minute Himalayan primula; the navy drilling out the bowels of Piccadilly, making the most diabolical racket in the world, may in imagination be gathering sweet-peas in his Pimlico back-garden; and that dim, mouse-like lady who nibbles her bun and butter in an A.B.C. may be a terrifying authority on the flora of the Andes. There is indeed no knowing at all who will turn out to be a gardener in England.

After Bernard Shaw I feel that perhaps Mr. Beverley Nichols is the last person I should have suspected of having gardening fever. One is in-

<sup>1</sup> *Down the Garden Path*, by Beverley Nichols, with decorations by Rex Whistler. (Large Crown 8vo. 7s. 6d. net)

<sup>2</sup> Author of *The Two Sisters*, *The Black Boxer* etc.

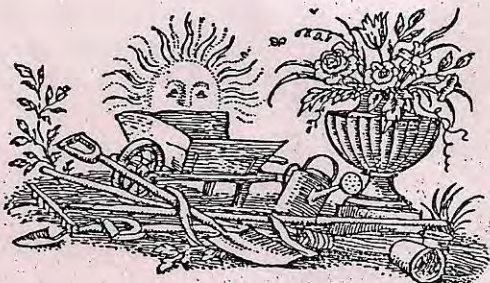
clined to think of Mr. Nichols as belonging to an artificial and sophisticated world in which the only flowers are hot-house orchids or imitation blooms of coloured glass. Indeed he might easily be the type of man who wouldn't know a cabbage from a primrose. Instead he turns out to be an artist. He exhibits suddenly the tenderest love for snowdrops and witch-hazel, daphnes and chionodoxa. He reveals himself as a grubber among weeds, the prey of nurserymen, a planter of woodlands, a fierce collector of rare and rarer and ever rarer blossoms. He knows the miracles that may come from a packet of seed. He has been guilty of making a rock-garden with all its stones pointing to heaven. He cannot resist the smell of the soil and the fascination of bursting blossoms. In short he is a lost man. And he has written a book about it.

I am a lost man myself. I too have gardening fever. And one day I also may have the courage to write a book on myself as a gardener. For gardeners have one trait, at least, in common: they must tell the world of their achievements. If they do not write books about their loves and deeds they hold flower-shows. If they do not hold flower-shows they brag to one another. If I were to meet Mr. Nichols I might say 'Have you got *Soldanella Alpina*? I've just raised it from seed. I'll give you half a dozen. It's a bit difficult.' To which he might reply devastatingly: 'Thanks awfully, but it's a positive weed in my place. I can't keep it down. But I say—have you *Meconopsis Baileyi*? I could spare you a couple. It's a lovely thing.' And I should get my revenge: 'It's very nice of you, but I've just pricked out a couple of hundred.'



All this is part of the gardener's enthusiasm. It springs from his simplicity and joy, for true gardeners are simple, joyful people. There is nothing like the joy of beholding a flower raised by one's own hand from seed. And appropriately Mr. Nichols' book is full of joy. It quivers and bubbles and brims over with the love and delight of flowering things. It is as full of fun and wit as Mr. Nichols' own daphnes are full of fragrance. In it one meets also not only flowers but people — principally those tiresome people who, for obscure reasons, persist in growing delphiniums twenty feet high, japanese lilies as easily as kidney beans, gentians that bloom like pansies. Mr. Nichols has met them and suffered. The boastful old lady who grows all those rarities he himself longs to grow but cannot, the simpering young thing who poses and blinks and blushes all over his flower-beds, the philistines who refer to his treasures as that stuff and those things — they are all here, drawn so wittily that the book will delight not only gardeners but even those who do not know a tulip from a rose.

I ought to add a word about the book itself. Mr. Rex Whistler's decorations give it the gay, rather eighteenth-century air of a neat spring flower-bed.



## Notes

IN the current issue of Mr. Robertson Scott's excellent quarterly, *The Countryman*, the editor devotes several pages to a well-deserved eulogy of the devotion with which Miss Florence White has worked for the preservation and development of the traditional standards of English cookery, in the home and hostelry, in town or country: 'a Briton in ten thousand,' he styles her. Her book, *Good Things in England*, is reviewed elsewhere in our pages, but we agree whole-heartedly with all that he says about the value of the work of the English Folk Cookery Association.

THE REV. J. C. HARDWICK, whose novel *The Professional Christian*, is reviewed on page 28, was born in 1885. He is, as he puts it himself, one of the forgotten generation which was obliterated by the War, and having through physical disability, escaped being involved in the massacre of better men, he spent the war years in a curacy in a well-to-do suburb of Manchester. Since life in the Church during those years was far more revolting morally than life in the trenches, Mr. Hardwick is still suffering from a *trauma* which perhaps reveals itself in the mordant pages of his novel. After the War, Mr. Hardwick became a Tutor in a Theological College in Oxford, filled with ex-service candidates for ordination. But now for some seven or eight years he has been vicar of a country parish in a Northern diocese — a parish where the horrors of suburban Church life are unknown. Thus he may be said to have enjoyed, or suffered, a fairly wide and varied experience of life