

ROSES.

BY THE REV. CANON ELLACOMBE.

IN a medical treatise of the fourteenth century the author begins his account of the rose in these words :

Of ye rose y^t springeth on spray,
Schewyth hys flowris in someris day,
It nedyth nojt try to discrie,
Eueri man knowyth at eye
Of his vertues and of his kende—

and I cannot do better than take his introduction as the introduction to this paper on roses. For I do not intend in it to give anything like a botanical description of the genus *Rosa*, or of its many species and varieties. I shall not attempt a scientific classification of the family ; I shall say little or nothing of the cultivation of the plant, or of the many ways by which from a few single types a multitude of hybrids has been produced, which are the admiration of all rose growers ; and there are many other points which, perhaps, I cannot leave quite untouched, but I shall do little more than glance at them. The rose has been so long admired and studied that it may seem a useless labour to attempt to find anything new ; and I do not claim to have found anything new. But the field is so large that, though the main harvest has been gathered in, there are many nooks and corners and unsuspected bypaths in which there may be found some gleanings worth gathering. And for these reasons my paper will have in it little method or order ; it will be but a hotchpot or *farrago*.

Something must be said about the early notices of the flower and its geographical limits ; but on both these points a very little will be sufficient. It is a matter of surprise to many that there is scarcely any notice of the rose in the Bible. The word exists in our English translation, but it is quite certain that the translation is not correct, except in the translations from the Greek in the books of Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom ; but in the two passages from the Song of Songs and Isaiah—the ‘ rose of Sharon ’ and ‘ blossom as the rose ’—the Hebrew clearly points to a bulbous plant, and the general opinion is that the plant meant is the *Narcissus Tazetta*. This is

the more remarkable because there is no reason for supposing that the Jews were different from all other Eastern nations in their admiration of the rose. And there are many wild roses in Palestine, some of which grow in great abundance ; Sir Joseph Hooker found and described seven species ; and our common cabbage and damask roses are cultivated everywhere. In Egypt no representative of the rose has been found on any of the monuments before the time of the Ptolemies ; and Dr. Bonavia has no record of it in his ' Flora of the Assyrian Monuments,' though we know from Herodotus that the Babylonians carried sceptres ornamented with an apple, or rose, or lily. When we come to the Greek writers we are astonished at the absence of allusions to the rose. In the Homeric writings we only meet with a notice of it as a colour adjective, ' the rosy-fingered morn,' or as used in ointments. Theophrastus, of course, gives a short botanical account of it. And it is the common custom with all writers on the rose to say that it was celebrated by Anacreon and Sappho, especially Sappho. Anacreon speaks of it with real admiration, but chiefly in connection with the worship of Aphrodite ; but there can scarcely be said to be any notice of the flower in the fragments of Sappho's poems that have come down to us, and it is one of the curiosities of literature how she has come to be reckoned as the chief poetess of the rose. There is good evidence that she was very fond of roses, but it does not appear from her writings. She uses rose-like as an epithet for a girl's arms, and just mentions Pierian roses—and that is all. How the mistake arose in English literature, and how it has been copied by one author after another, is told in a good article on ' Ancient Roses ' by the Rev. G. E. Jeans, of Shorwell, in the ' Quarterly Review ' for 1895. It is very much the same with Latin writers until the time of the Emperors. Then we have Horace, Vergil, Ovid, and more especially Martial, speaking in terms of admiration of the rose ; but it is nearly always connected in their minds with scenes of dissipation and revelry ; and in no case do we find anything in their writings that approaches to the loving admiration, or the almost passionate affection, that we find in all the mediæval and modern authors, not only of England, but of France, Italy, Germany, and, indeed, of all parts of the civilised world.

To us it is a very interesting question what roses our forefathers had in mediæval times, say from the end of the thirteenth century. We have in England seven good species of native roses ; and the introduction of damask roses into England in the reign of Henry VII.

has been recorded by more than one writer. Writers on English gardens have too readily admitted that until the arrival of the damask rose no exotic rose could be found in cultivation, which, of course, can only mean that before that time none but English roses were to be seen. But a very little experience in English literature would show that such could not have been the case. I think it impossible to give to any of our native roses, however beautiful and sweet, the passionate descriptions of the rose which we find in Gower, Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare. I cannot think that any of our native roses would be described as 'brode roses'—*i.e.* broad or large; or that their colour could be said to be

With colour reed, as welle fyned
As nature couthe it make faire,

with 'the freysshe bothum (*i.e.* bud) so bright of hewe'; and there are many such passages. And as to the scent, of none of our British roses could it be said:

The swote smelle spronge so wide
That it dide all the place aboute.

The question then comes, What were the roses that our forefathers grew and loved before the arrival of the damask rose? There are at least two well-known species which I am sure were in cultivation here at the end of the fifteenth century, and probably earlier. One is that universal favourite, the cabbage rose. It is the 'Provençal rose' of Shakespeare, more properly written Provence, or Provins; and the 'rose of Rhone' of Chaucer. Unlike the damask rose, there is no record of its introduction into England; and I think this by itself is a strong proof of its antiquity amongst us, and I suppose it to be the 'English red rose' described by Parkinson as amongst 'the most ancient,' rather variable in colour, but often of 'a red or deep crimson colour' and with a rich scent, so that when 'well dried and well kept it will hold both colour and scent longer than the damaske.' It is still a great favourite; but the true plant is very scarce, though it is found in most nurserymen's catalogues; but though the plants generally offered are very good varieties, the true plant is known by always having only one flower, and not a bunch of flowers, on a branch, the flower also being always nodding. The other old rose that must have been known long before Shakespeare's time is the York and Lancaster (*R. versicolor* of Parkinson); not the rose usually now so named, which is *R. mundi*, a fine rose and long established in English

gardens, but with coarse colouring and a rampant habit. The earlier rose is a compact bush with bunches of roses of different colours, some red, some white, some red and white ; or, as described by Shakespeare :

The roses fearfully in thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair,
A third, nor red nor white, had stolen of both ;

and he speaks of 'roses damasked red and white.' I am quite sure that in the account of the brawl in the Temple Gardens the red and white roses were intended to be growing on the same bush ; the passage will quite bear that interpretation. The whole scene is entirely of Shakespeare's imagination ; there is no other record of it ; and in spite of his grand contempt for correct chronology, I do not think he would put into a scene of the time of Henry VI. a rose of recent introduction ; and Chaucer speaks of 'floures partie white and red,' probably roses, and Spenser must surely have been thinking of this rose when he spoke of 'the red rose medled with the white one.'¹ Parkinson says that before the Wars of the Roses 'there was seene at Longleete a white rose tree to beare on the one side faire white roses, and on the other side red.' This must have been the same rose.

Very shortly after Shakespeare's death a grand rose came into English gardens, known as the yellow cabbage rose. It came from the East, and is still the finest of all double yellow roses ; but it is rather tender and is difficult to increase. Like the red cabbage rose, it does not hold its flowers upright ; they are always drooping, and never fully open, and so the scientific name for it is *R. hemispherica*. With these three fine exotic roses—and they had others, especially the musk rose—we may say that the gardens of our forefathers of three or four hundred years ago were by no means badly furnished with roses.

There are some points in the name and geography of the rose which are worth noting. The earliest European name for it is the Greek *rhodon* ; and almost all modern writers on it have followed Dr. Prior's lead, in his 'English Plant Names,' in saying that the same name, more or less changed, is to be found in all the different names which the plant now bears in different countries, and that they all have for their initial meaning the one word red. But

¹ For a further account of the York and Lancaster roses I may refer to my little book, *In a Vicarage Garden*, chap. xi., in which their history is more fully given.

Max Müller showed that this will not bear close inquiry, and that the root is to be found in an Aryan word signifying a flower or spray, thus marking it as *the* flower of the vegetable world, taking rank above all others. This high rank has been confirmed to it by the way in which so many plants, which are not roses at all, have yet taken the name to themselves, as giving them a place among the most beautiful flowers; such as the Christmas rose (*helleborus*), the Alpine rose (*rhododendron*), rose de Notre Dame (*pæonia*), water rose (*nymphæa*), the holly rose or sage rose (*cistus*), the Guelder rose, and others.

The geography of the rose is rather peculiar. As a wild plant it is found both in the Old and New Worlds, but with a limited range, being found chiefly between the twentieth and seventieth degrees of north latitude. Our little burnet rose is found as far north as Iceland; Hooker and Ball found our common dog-rose and the Ayrshire rose fairly abundant in Morocco; but the two most southern species are *R. Montezumæ* found by Humboldt in Mexico, and *R. sancta*, found sparingly in Abyssinia; both of these roses are found at high elevations, and neither of them is of much value from the gardening point of view. No wild roses have been found south of the Equator, but we should scarcely be surprised if one or more should be found in the high mountains of Central Africa.

I now come to some curiosities among roses, by which I mean peculiarities in certain species which are more or less abnormal. Among these curiosities I give the first place to one which, I think, deserves the first place, because it was noticed by so many of the old writers on roses. All rosarians know that the family of the roses has been arranged by botanists under several distinct groups, one of which, the group *Canineæ*, contains not only our dog-roses, which give the name to the group, but also the monthly, China rose, and others. They also know that all roses have five sepals and five petals. In the group *Canineæ* there is a peculiar arrangement of the sepals, which is found in a few roses of the other groups, but very sparingly and not quite constantly; in the *Canineæ* it is never absent. The arrangement is that of the five sepals two are always fringed by thin beards, two have no such fringes, and one has the fringe on one side only. This was noticed very early, and was recorded in these lines:

Quinque sumus fratres et eodem tempore nati;
Sunt duo barbati, duo sunt barba absque creati;
Unus et e quinque non est barbatus utrinque,

Of these lines there are many variants and many translations, from which I select this :

Five brothers we, all in one moment reared ;
Two of us bearded, two without a beard ;
Our fifth on one cheek only wears the beard.

I have not been able to trace this to its source ; and the oldest mention of it that I can find is in Fumarellus in 1557, in which he gives the lines, not as his own, but as a quotation. It is a pleasant puzzle to try and give a reason for this curious arrangement, and its origin ; but it is a puzzle that we cannot answer till we know more of the first surroundings and evolution of the rose, and these we probably never shall know. Sir Thomas Browne was attracted by it, and in his 'Garden of Cyrus' he seems to have made an attempt at an explanation, which is worth quoting :

Nothing is more admired than the five brethren of the rose and the strange dispose of the appendices, or beards, in the calycular leaves thereof. . . . For those two which are smooth and of no beard are contrived to lie undermost, as without prominent parts and fit to be smoothly covered ; the other two, which are beset with beards on either side, stand outside and uncovered ; but the fifth, or unbearded leaf, is covered on the bare side, but on the open side stands free and bearded like the other.

As a second curiosity among roses I take the green rose. I am bound to say that this rose meets with very little admiration ; the general verdict is, 'More curious than beautiful.' But I like the rose, and even admire it ; and to botanists it is extremely valuable, because it is one of the best proofs we have that all parts of a plant above the root are modifications of the same thing, and in the green rose every part may be called a leaf. It is a variety of the common China rose, and came to England about 1835, and is quite constant. It also gives a strong support to the view, held by many great botanists, that all flowers were originally green, and that the colours in flowers are analogous to the autumn tints of leaves ;¹ and in the green rose the flowers generally put on a reddish tint when they begin to fade. In this view the green rose, as we now have it, is a reversion to an older state of the rose, or, it may be, a continuance of an undeveloped rose. The late Sir James Paget made use of this view in suggesting 'an analogy between a

¹ The older naturalists knew nothing of this. Bacon says: 'The general colour of all plants is green, which is a colour no flower is of. There is a greenish primrose, but it is pale and scarce a green' (*Sylva Sylvarum*, 512).

green rose and a rickety child.'¹ His meaning is very clear, that 'both are examples of what are considered arrests of development. The roses do not attain the colour which we regard as characteristic of their most perfect condition; the animals do not attain the hardness of bone or the full size which we find in the best examples of their several races.'

Another great curiosity among roses is found in the Himalayan *R. sericea*. It is an essential character of all roses that they should have five petals; but this rose produces abundance of flowers, all with only four petals, with very few exceptions. It is impossible to account for this exception to the general rule; for though we may say that one petal is abortive, that is only explaining *ignotum per ignotius*.

One more curiosity may be mentioned. A few years ago there came from America a rose belonging to the *Polyantha* section, of which the peculiarity was that it would come into full flower three months after sowing. This is quite true; I have seen many flowers in June on plants of which the seed was sown in April. It is commonly called the annual rose, but it is a perennial, and has the quality of reproducing itself by self-sown seedlings, a very unusual thing in the rose family.

Many more curious or abnormal things among roses might be mentioned; but I must leave them for other points of interest. Roses have entered rather largely into place names and family names. Among place names, I suppose the most ancient is the Island of Rhodes, of which there is good evidence that the name came from the flower. The Rhone (*Rhodanus*) claims the same origin, but it is doubtful. France and Germany have many such names, as Rosières, Rosenberg, Rosendaal, Rosel, Rosello, Rosenheim, &c. Such names are abundant also in Italy, Spain, and Portugal; and from place names they have been adopted as family names.

If we can believe the records there seems to be no limit to the age or size of rose trees. The legend of the rose at Hildesheim, over which Louis le Débonnaire built the cathedral, is well known, and so is reputed to be 1,500 years old; but there can be little doubt that it has been constantly renewed by suckers. Joret gives an account of a gigantic rose at Worms, planted by a king's daughter on an island of the Rhine, which could shelter five hundred noble

¹ Address on Elemental Pathology at Cambridge, 1880. The quotation is from a letter to myself.

Connected with the scent of the roses, there was a very common belief in the Middle Ages that the rose was improved both in scent and vigour by being planted amongst garlic; the explanation being that the garlic, in order to increase its evil smell, drew from the ground all that was bad, leaving all that was good for the rose; or, as described by Bacon, 'The ancients have set down that a rose set by garlick is sweeter; which likewise may be, because the more fetid juice of the earth goeth into the garlick, and the more odorate into the rose' ('Syl. Syl.' 481). The old emblem writers seized upon this to point the moral that a good man may not only keep his goodness in the midst of evil surroundings, but even profit by them. Camerarius, in his Book of Emblems (1605), has a pretty plate of a vigorous rose growing amongst garlic (No. 53), and quotes from Plutarch as to the truth of the statement. I believe the rose gardeners of Grasse and Bulgaria are very particular in keeping the bushes free from everything near them; and I am sure that the garlic is so liberal in imparting its evil scent to everything it touches that if a rose in flower touched any of the garlic or onion family the petals that were so touched would be tainted. This, however, was the firm belief in the Middle Ages; and they had other curious practices, handed down from the Roman writers. Thus they followed Pliny's advice to burn their rose trees every year, much in the same way that gorse and heather are now sometimes burnt, and if carefully done, so that the roots are not burnt, the result might be the production of young, vigorous roots; but even those rosarians who cut down their roses to the ground-level every year would now prefer the use of the knife. In the same way they tried to make roses flower early by the use of hot water poured round the roots. Palladius, among others, recommended it, and his work on Husbandry was translated into English verse in 1420, and was a sort of handbook of farming and gardening to the Englishmen of that date. And this was his advice:

With crafte eke roses erly riped are;
Tweyne handbrede of aboute her rootes doo
A delvyng make, and every day thereto
Doo water warme.—St. 77.

For colour in roses we have red of all shades, white, and yellow. But we have no blue roses, and I am not anxious to see them. But Guillemeau, in 1800, gives a description of blue roses growing wild near Turin, but adds, *n'est pas très-commun*, and *ne jamais vu*. There is nothing impossible in such roses, though it is a common

belief that both blue and red flowers are never found in the same family. But there are abundant examples to the contrary; the pentstemons are a ready example, and our own British geraniums a still more ready one.

Considering the popularity of the rose, it is rather surprising that there is so very little folklore connected with the flower. The proverbial *sub rosa* connects it with secrecy, and so it is often seen carved on confessionals. In some parts of England and Scotland it is considered lucky to burn rose leaves; Gubernatis tells the legend of Satan's vain attempt to climb to heaven by means of the dog-rose, and that Judas hanged himself on one, so that the seeds are called *Judas-beeren*, and the whole plant is *sinistre et diabolique*; but I have found little beyond this.

And the rose has not very much of interest for the entomologist;¹ it is visited by very few large butterflies or moths, and the fertilisation is effected by beetles; so that it is rather curious that many of the old writers asserted that beetles had a great dislike to the rose; yet most of us are acquainted with the beautiful green rose beetle, which in some years is very abundant, but I have very seldom seen it of late years. But there is one piece of insect work on the rose always worth looking at, and formerly regarded with great veneration. This is the bedeguar, called in some parts by the pretty name of 'Robin redbreast's pincushions.' It is like a ball of moss, and is a gall produced by the little insect *Cynips rosæ*.

There is a large amount of literature connected with the rose. Of course, every writer on flowers was bound to mention it, but, as far as I know, the first book solely devoted to the rose is by a Spanish physician named Monardis. It was published at Antwerp in 1551, under the title of 'De rosa et partibus ejus,' and though a small book, chiefly concerned with the medical qualities of the rose, it is well worth reading, for the writer was an enthusiastic admirer of the flower; so that he sums up its virtues in the words, 'Inter medicinas benedictas benedictissima merito nuncupari potest.'² Since that time there has been an increasing production

¹ Keats, however, speaks of

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves—

but I am not aware that he was an entomologist.

² Monardis's name is preserved in gardens by the Oswego Tea, or Bergamot plant, *Monarda didyma*.

of books on the rose, so that in the 'Bibliografia de la Rosa,' by D. Mariano Vergara, published at Madrid in 1892, more than a thousand books are mentioned, and the number now is much larger. But in England the first book solely confined to the rose is Miss Lawrence's grand folio, 'A Collection of Roses from Nature,' 1780-1810, a beautiful book, now become rare and expensive. In 1819 appeared Dr. Lindley's 'Rosarum Monographia,' a perfect monograph of the family, which still holds the highest rank, but of which a new edition, brought up to date, is much to be desired.¹ It would be tedious to attempt to select the best books on roses from the large number now in existence; but no rosarian's library should be without 'Ros Rosarum,' by the Honourable Mrs. Boyle, and M. Joret's two books, 'La Rose dans l'Antiquité,' &c., and 'La Légende de la Rose.' The 'Ros Rosarum' is an excellent selection of the poetical notices of the rose from the earliest times and from all nations; while M. Thoret's books are full of curious points connected with the flower, also from the earliest times and from all civilised countries.

Want of space forbids my describing at any length the enormous increase in the species, hybrids, and varieties of the family which has taken place in European gardens during the last three hundred years. It will be sufficient to say that whereas in Shakespeare's day there were probably not more than forty or fifty that could be distinguished one from another, there are now grown in Monsieur Gravereau's garden at L'Hay, near Paris, nearly seven thousand, each with its different name; that was the number in 1902, and it increases every year. Yet the increase has not been uninterrupted; there was a time when the rose was almost discarded in European gardens for the tulip. Thomas Fuller, in 1663, puts this complaint into the mouth of the rose:

There is a flower, a Toolip, which hath engrafted the love and affection of most people into it. And what is the Toolip? A well-complexioned stink, an ill flavour wrapped up in pleasant colours. Yet this is that which filleth all gardens, hundreds of pounds being given for the root thereof, whilst I, the Rose, am neglected and contemned, and conceived beneath the honour of noble hands.

That has long been changed, and the increase in roses seems unlikely to receive another such check; though we are still a long

¹ It is an open secret that a book on the genus *Rosa* has been for some time in preparation, to be edited by Miss Willmott, F.L.S., with the assistance of Mr. J. G. Baker, F.R.S. When completed we have every reason to expect that it will be a complete and valuable history of the family. It will be published by Mr. Murray.

way from seeing the fulfilment of Mr. Rivers's prophecy, made more than fifty years ago, that 'the day will come when all our roses, even moss roses, will have evergreen foliage, brilliant and fragrant flowers, and the habit of blooming from June till November. This seems a distant view, but perseverance in gardening will yet achieve wonders.'

If I were to mention more curiosities connected with the rose I should make my paper unduly long. But one thing has always interested me, which I do not like to pass by altogether, and that is the different feelings about the rose that different nations have shown, and so far have shown something of their different characters. I may, perhaps, conclude by quoting what I have already written on this point, because I cannot put it shorter :

By the Greeks and Romans the rose was always connected with scenes of revelry and licentiousness ; French and English writers are entirely different. By French writers the rose is often made to teach the decay of beauty, but it is specially connected with female beauty. The French proverb says, 'Les dieux n'ont fait que deux choses parfaites ; la Femme et la Rose.' By English writers the lessons have a tone of sadness, and often almost of sternness. It is the thorns of the rose that seem most to have caught their attention. They love to point to the rose and its thorns as showing the treacherous character of all earthly pleasures ; but they love also to point to the thorns as forming only a part, and a necessary part, to perfect and protect the rich flower ; and so, while on one side the lesson is that no pleasure is without pain, *rosa inter spinas*, so on the other side there is the brighter lesson, that troubles lead to joy—*per spinas rosa, per tribulos cælum* (*In a Gloucestershire Garden*, p. 198).