he Algerian Iris

CULARIS, perhaps the loveliest of
rs, whether one sees it in its normal bl
ory-white, has taken so kindly to
is familiar to gardens all over
even naturalised in some places, b
grow well enough there are not a f
it does not flower so freely as it mig
ases the trouble usually is: (1)
insufficient sun, or (3) slugs.
this iris can scarcely be too poor,
ot-run which gets very dry in summ
of a south wall) suits it best, and
all the sun it can get. As for slu
very frequently the direct cause
ling the grassy tuft a highly desira
devour the buds before the latter ha
come flowers. A sprinkling of po
meta, among the leaves about once
a certain "cure".
iris for table decoration, Sir Arth
us that it should never be cut. T
pull the bud gently from its base; t
a greater length of "stalk," but
plant to produce further buds at t

M.

nter jasmine stood
, but glad of mood,
lden flowers for sign
uld come, and cowslips shine. . . .

NORA HOPPER

Lilies and Coal

By H. E. Bates

MY early recollections of anything to do with the soil are vivid. In the first I am a small boy in what seems to me to be a large ploughed field. Round my waist is tied a large sack apron, and I am walking with my legs wide apart, straddling a fresh-turned furrow. I am planting potatoes. A man with white hair is stitching in these potatoes with a plough drawn by a white horse. My hair is also white, and there are mountainous white April clouds in the sky.

In the second I am also a small boy, but, I think, still smaller. I am kneeling down in a back-garden that is walled-in by a factory. This time I am not planting potatoes, but pieces of wood. It is my impression that these pieces of wood will, in due course, turn into coal. I am digging with a coal-shovel, as though to make sure, and I cannot dig very deeply. The next day these pieces of wood are, to my disgust, still pieces of wood, and my faith in miracles is shaken. Later, my father takes me into the coal barn and shows me, imprinted on the coal, the golden impressions of prehistoric trees. "You see," he says, "coal does come from wood." I remain unimpressed. In this scene there is also a yellow rose, and a white, which I believe to be Frau Karl Druschki, and a row of madonna lilies, more magnificent than anything I have ever seen since. The garden is about ten feet square.

There is another impression. I am standing in this same garden, by a bush of Berberis Aquifolium, and I am on the point of saying something to someone. Suddenly what I am trying to say slips my memory;

it is there, in that maddening way we all know, and yet not tangible. For twenty-five years I have been trying to remember what this elusive thing was, though its importance cannot possibly have survived, and in my mind the prickled shining berberis leaves, with the green-yellow flowers, are associated with a feeling of frustration. I do not like B. Aquifolium to this day.

On the other hand I am deeply fond of the madonna lily. And now, in the best soil in Kent, in which I have grown Cheiranthus Allionii a yard in diameter and delphiniums of nine or ten feet, I cannot grow it. Fifty bulbs, planted with extreme care six years ago, have produced between them, perhaps, half a dozen flowers. Weak green shoots appear in the spring and die by midsummer. Imported clumps behave with false energy for a year, only in time to go the same way home. Yet my father grew magnificent lines of them, five or six feet high, by the wall of a factory. I have no doubt that I could grow the wretched B. Aquifolium to perfection. Who couldn't ?

It is my ambition to plant a lily-border. I visualise it stretching out to colossal distances ; it is open to the public ; delegates from the Botanical Research Departments of American universities come to visit it ; I toss lilies hither and thither, modestly swanking. So far my only approach to this Elysium is the fact that, last summer, I took first prize for lilies with a vase of L. regale at the local flower show. There were no other entries !

Denied the lilies, I have realised a lesser ambition. I have planted a rose-garden on what was formerly a builder's dumping yard and before that a stable yard. I should explain that my garden, in size about an acre, was carved by considerable sweat, pain and blasphemy out of a section of farm paddock. The stable yard

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was head-high in nettle and thistle. We toiled with pick-axes and crow-bars, had a bonfire which burned for five weeks. Now we have a rectangular lily-pond, adorned with blue-green cigar-shaped Irish junipers, a hedge of cupressus solidly emerald, a small court of old stable paving-stones, and two hundred and fifty roses, which are yet to give us their first summer. The total cost of the rose-garden, including vintage cow-muck, was about £10 or £11, the roses coming from a first-rate firm. They included twenty species, some hybrid perpetuals, and Frau Karl Druschki. It is my conviction that there are a million worse ways of spending ten pounds.

Of the rest of the garden the borders are the best feature. Fifty or sixty feet long, and twenty feet across at their widest, they give flowers of some sort from January to December, though I could not boast about them, and reach one peak of glory in June and July and another in late September. The pergola, good though it is, has a slight air of impermanence. One day I shall rebuild it. All pergolas should be built of stone or brick : I am convinced of its cheapness in the long run. At the back of the east border roses are grown on poles : two sorts, alternately, Crimson Rambler and the delicious François Juranville, both grown from cuttings and in their prodigality defying those who insist that roses on their own roots never flourish.

All of this garden, fashioned out of virgin wilderness, would not have been possible except by faith in seeds. By seed alone, with a small income, it is possible to grow a thousand wallflowers, and I confess I do not understand the mentality that buys them at five shillings a hundred. Almost everything from gentians to brooms, primulas to berberis, has attracted me from seed. Success, on the average, about 90 per cent : the 10 per cent failure due generally to stupidity or

laziness on my part, or to some form of cussedness on the part of nature.

Thus I am naturally grieved and angry when I see old ladies, generally at street markets, buying forced-up roots of pink and pansy at threepence a-piece, or proud city workers hurrying into Cannon Street Station with half a dozen precious sweet williams for the suburban garden at half a crown a dozen. They are the victims, if only they knew it, of daylight robbery. Patience and a few well-invested sixpences would enable them to stagger their various Laburnum Groves. On the other hand, there is a mentality which only rejoices in a garden that has been bought at exclusive prices and nourished with snobbery. "Ah! yes, that azalea. Didn't we get it from Chelsea, dear?" Knowing quite well they did.

So to the point of this intentionally uninformative article: that all gardening should be in essence quite simple, boastless, catholic, unsentimental, a medium of pleasant exercise for the spirit. Gardening that is aggressive or jealous, that competes or is confined to the growing, on a sort of pneumatic-tyre principle of puffing up one sort of flower and the man who grows it, seems to me bad gardening, and might just as well be, for all I care, crooning. Such a condition does not exclude real pride, a proper joy in the satisfaction of having raised, by one's own hand, some hitherto unknown species from the Himalayas or Peru. But even a large garden cannot grow everything, and there are even things, as witness madonna lilies, which small gardens can grow, and large gardens cannot. This reminds me that I have an aunt who grows, without knowing it, a vast clump of a rare black-stemmed variety of Lilium candidum. I must be nice to this aunt.

Lastly, there is a class of person who steals flowers.

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Primula

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In this respect I have something on my own conscience. I grow a deep-pink moss rose, a beautiful nameless variety, shapeless, old, faintly wine-scented. I notice that it grows with altogether improper luxuriance, always lusty. I stole it.

One day I shall steal some lilies.

Primula sertulum

This attractive little plant from China has one almost unique characteristic only to be found in a few other members of this huge genus. This is its habit of forming "runners" like a strawberry. From a single crown as many as fifteen to twenty new plants may be formed during a season by this method. The plant in appearance rather resembles P. capitata, but is smaller in all its parts. The leaves are pale green and the flowers are pale lilac, borne on short stalks in whorls with an elongated corrolla and small yellow eye. P. sertulum is not fastidious, a rich sandy loam in half shade (a westerly aspect suits it admirably), well drained, but not lacking in moisture in the summer, is best, but being of such small stature it may easily be smothered by its larger-growing compère, so I suggest keeping it in a corner by itself, where it may be carefully tended. Unlike most members of the genus, P. sertulum seldom sets seed, so the best means of propagation is by offsets, which, fortunately, it produces prodigiously.

RALPH ALDERSEY.