

## Foreign Correspondence.

### Bamboos in English Gardens.

DURING the last six or eight years considerable attention has been given by certain English and French horticulturists to the Bamboos that are sufficiently hardy to be cultivated out-of-doors in the warmer parts of the kingdom. Previous to this period Bamboos were practically unknown as ornamental plants for the garden, the only species grown generally being the plant then known as *Bambusa Metake*, while *Arundinaria Falconeri*, often erroneously called *A. falcata*, was cultivated in a few gardens where the conditions were exceptionally favorable. In 1866, Colonel Munro prepared a monograph of *Bambusaceæ*, and in his introductory remarks he stated that "a large number of Bamboos are now in cultivation, and, perhaps, twenty species at Kew alone. I am informed there are at least fifty in Paris. Few of these, perhaps of *Arundinaria* only, are hardy in England, or even in the warmer parts of Ireland." There has been a collection of hardy Bamboos at Kew for at least twenty years, and, according to a letter from the late Canon Ellacombe to Sir Joseph Hooker in 1879, he had then in his garden at Topsham, near Exeter, "flourishing most vigorously, a collection of twenty *Bambusæ*, all named by General Munro." Nothing, however, appears to have been done to prove the value of Bamboos for the outdoor garden until Kew, Mr. Mitford and Sir E. Loder took the matter in hand. The Kew collection was formed partly by purchase from the Japanese nurserymen, from Monsieur Marliac, of Temple-sur-Lot, and from the collection formed by the late Monsieur Lavallée at Chateau du Segrez, near Paris. A garden was made specially for them in a sheltered, picturesque position, and the collection, consisting of about forty sorts, was set out in groups and masses. At the same time Mr. Mitford had decided to make a feature of hardy Bamboos in his lovely garden at Batsford, near Stratford-on-Avon. He has always taken an interest in Kew, partly from his love of plants and also from his having held for some years the position of secretary to the minister in whose department the Royal Gardens are. Probably the collections at Kew and Batsford are equally rich in number of species and varieties of Bamboo, and the success met with in their cultivation in these two gardens appears to be on fairly equal lines. Mr. Mitford has utilized the resources of Kew in naming and working out the history, cultural requirements, etc., of Bamboos in a most interesting book,\* in which he states that the task of preparing it has not been an easy one, and would have been impossible but for the kindly help and encouragement which he received from Sir Joseph Hooker, Mr. Thiselton Dyer and several members of the Kew staff. The outcome of Mr. Mitford's thoroughness and perseverance in working up material for his book is a work of considerable value, both to botanists and horticulturists. It embraces all that is known of all the hardy Bamboos in cultivation in England; consequently it will be accepted as the recognized authority on all matters appertaining to these plants for some years at any rate.

The book is divided into chapters which treat upon the formation of the Bamboo garden and the positions and best time of planting for the plants; their propagation; the uses of and customs and superstitions connected with Bamboos; their classification according to easily recognized characters of habit, culm, leaf, sheath, etc.; description and history of each species; the future possibilities of these "Royal Grasses"; a plea for Bamboos ("Apologia

pro *Bambusis meis*"), and a list of the Japanese names of Bamboos, with their botanical equivalents.

Mr. Mitford is preëminently qualified to write about Japanese Bamboos from his having resided for some years in Japan. He is the author of *Tales of Old Japan*, described as "pictures of Japanese life and manners not worked out in the monotony of minute detail, but dashed in with bold, telling touches." His Bamboo book may be described as a happy combination of scientific accuracy, reliable practical directions, and a skillful, charming style. Even the descriptions of the species are drawn up in such a way as to interest even readers who know nothing of Bamboos.

Mr. Mitford, while modestly calling his book a descriptive list, claims an attraction for it "in the admirable drawings furnished by Mr. Alfred Parsons." I confess to a feeling of disappointment with regard to these drawings. They may be art, but they are of no value either to the gardener or botanist. Photographs of representative plants would have been more acceptable.

The number of species described in the book as having proved hardy at Batsford and Kew is forty-five. Of this number thirty-six are natives of China and Japan, one of the United States, five of the Himalayas, the other three being of doubtful habitat. These are all distinct and not difficult to recognize after a little practice. They present considerable variety in thickness and height of stem, size, color and form of leaf and in their manner of growth. Most of them grow with astonishing rapidity and are evergreen even through severe winters. The only drawback Bamboos have is in the somewhat shabby appearance assumed by some of the sorts in April and May, the result of the trials of winter. Against this, however, may be pitted the perfectly healthy appearance they wear throughout the autumn and winter, when most plants are looking their worst. There can be no doubt that Bamboos will add a considerable attraction to the garden, and as they are not particular as to soil, living and growing in gravel, or even sand, if only they can obtain a good supply of moisture, they are available for all gardens where the climate is not too severe for them. At the same time they well repay liberal treatment in regard to soil and manure. All the species described by Mr. Mitford "have stood through four winters and twenty-six degrees of frost, and they have resisted an even more deadly enemy than frost in the droughts of 1892, 1893 and 1895. . . . As for *Phyllostachys nigra*, *nigno-punctata*, *Boryana*, *Henonis* and *viridi-glaucescens*, they simply laughed at the thermometer, and were as bright at the end of the winter as at mid-summer."

The following extract may be taken as a sample of the style of the author; it is also interesting as a description of his own garden at Batsford, one of the most charming, most informal and, at the same time, richest in grand effects to be seen in England:

As I write I look out upon a great rolling track of park-land studded with patriarchal Oaks that were saplings in Plantagenet and Tudor days, giant Ashes, Elms and Thorns planted in the reign of good Queen Anne. Far be it from me to introduce any change into such a scene. It is thoroughly English and perfect of its kind; no impious hand should dare to tamper with it. But farther up the hill there is a spot snugly screened from the cruel blasts which come from north and east, where, when the great Oaks and Elms, shorn of their summer bravery, are mere gaunt skeletons, there is still some shelter and some warmth. Here, amid the sparkling glitter of a Holly grove, are all manner of beautiful evergreens, rare Pines, steeping Fir-trees, Rhododendrons, Cypressess, Junipers. A tiny rill trickles over the green velvet of the rocks, with Ferns peeping out of crannies in which many an alpine treasure is hushed to rest, waiting the warm kiss of spring and the song of the birds, that, like Orpheus with his lute, shall raise the seeming dead from the grave. Tall Rushes and gracefully arching Bamboos, hardly stirred by the wind, nod their plumes over a little stream from which the rays of a December sun have just strength enough to charm the diamonds and rubies and sapphires; a golden pheasant, all unconscious of a human presence, is preening his radiant feathers by the water-side. It is a

\* *The Bamboo Garden*, by A. B. Freeman Mitford, C.B. Macmillan & Co. Price, 10s. 6d.

retreat such as the fairies might haunt, and where in the bitter Christmastide a man may forget the outside world, and for one too brief hour revel in a midwinter day-dream of glorious summer.

There is much thoughtful writing upon gardening in general, as well as upon Bamboos in particular, in Mr. Mitford's book which is certain to rank with the very best books of horticultural literature.

London.

*W. Watson.*

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