

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Flower In The Wrong Place

This charitable definition of a weed offended my forthright gardening principles when I first heard it. Like all obsessive-compulsion sufferers, I wanted my borders to be compact of nothing but well-bred antirrhinums, double stocks, and nicotiana, and I greeted the rude arrival of dandelions at the party with persecutory zeal.

Was Für Ein Garten?

What sort of garden does God plant in making us and “our” world? The authorities have shifted their ground here. Many a guru of the garden now finds space for the wild patch and the uncultivated wilderness, even within what used to be manicured space. It is vital for health, they explain, that there should be an area where nature can be free, and where the rigid discipline of the lawn and the flowerbed can yield to what grows naturally where we are. Farmers have come to realise that the vasty fields they’ve created to accommodate bigger and bigger machinery actually cost them a fortune in insecticide, because the bugs have a field-day far from the vanished hedgerows full of nesting birds that used to live on them. And we eaters of fresh vegetables have to saw off the extremities of our carrots to avoid eating the built-up fly poison that was necessary for their survival.

Garden Of The Soul

I had my little corner of garden as a child, and I think it was a good idea. My grandmother had a little prayer-book called *Garden of the Soul*, and I suppose this sowed the image in my mind that we have our little patch to cultivate. What sort of gardening is that? It’s a fascinating question. Just as actual gardens vary enormously in their qualities, so people answer the personal question in different ways: but all of them revealing. Some are intensively cultivated, others comfortably left to flourish naturally. Some are let out to others for rent. Some are strangely beautiful as they are, and seem to create their own plan of life effortlessly. Some are treated with what a friend of mine calls “fire, concrete, and noxious fluids” until they become spaces

fit only for the parking of cars, with neither need of, or possibility for, beauty or growth. No-one can properly demand that a concrete strip should yield fruit or flower.

“Root Out The Weeds!”

If we can read the mind of God in the way he has made the earth (this used to be called *the Natural Law*) today’s Gospel parable seems to be written in big letters. God doesn’t root out weeds in his world, because their roots are intertwined with those of the good crop. How could this have happened, if God plants only good seed? The statement *Some enemy has done this* has never entirely satisfied me. I have to return to my attitude to the dandelion: what I call a weed, I suspect, may not be a weed to God at all. Nor, necessarily, is my good crop God’s idea of a good crop. When I see the fearsome harvest some people carry in to the Kingdom of Heaven I am appalled at what has grown in the garden of their soul. Why do I find myself at the bedside of a young father whose life is going down to terminal cancer? What gardener-God wanted this particular growth to flourish? If I thank God for what he has given to me in my health or success or happiness - never asking why it pleased him to give these things to me - must I not seek to thank him for what he has given to a dying man who will never see his daughter’s wedding? I find myself calling on God to root out the weeds. I know many a victim of crime who would cry out in just the same way against the presence of the killer of children, the drunk-driver, the callous thief. Is there anyone in charge of this garden?

Give God Space And Time

God burdened us with space and time, which keep from us the whole picture. Our gardening policy is personal and limited; his is eternal and just. We must give God the very limiting factors we suffer from, sacrificing to his care our need to understand. Brambles and boulders may impede our fragrant visions for the garden. The beauty he calls forth from us, however, may be something more terrible, more divine, than we can know. *Fr Philip*