

GARDENING NOTES

(By Mr J. JOYCE, Landscape Gardener, Christchurch.)

A BEAUTIFUL CANTERBURY GARDEN.

A few years ago I had the pleasure of paying a visit to Otahuna, the residence of Mr. R. H. Rhodes, M.P., at Tai Tapu, Mr. Mallach, of Christchurch, a great enthusiast in horticulture, accompanying me on my very pleasing outing. Leaving Christchurch about 9 a.m., after a very pleasant drive along the foot of the hills, we arrived at Otahuna about eleven o'clock, where we met Mr. Lowe, the gardener in charge, who gave us a cordial welcome and showed us around the gardens.

In the first place I may state that Otahuna has very happy recollections for me, as I laid the foundations of what is now one of the finest grounds in New Zealand. Naturally, I was very much interested in my visit. It is now about fifteen years since Mr. Rhodes purchased Otahuna, then called Greycliffe. I was then gardener at the family residence at Elmwood, and Mr. Rhodes asked me to pay a visit to his new purchase, where he intended to erect his future home, as he wished to have my opinion as to the site best suited for the house and garden. I will never forget the forest of thistles through which I had to wade to enable me to form an idea of my plans. The whole ground was thickly covered with them. What a transformation to-day!

When I got back I submitted a plan to Mr. Rhodes, which coincided with his own ideas, and in a few months the contract for the house was let. Very soon after I commenced to lay out the ground. I had a large staff of men, horses, and drays to make the hills level, the valleys smooth, and the crooked ways straight, but it was very uphill work, as it was a very wet winter. The subsoil when wet was very slimy, and when dry like cement. The house stands on a high mound, and consequently it took a lot of labor to form approaches, walks, and terraces so as to give easy access to the premises.

This work went on for two years, and during that time there was a great transformation on the thistle paddock. During that time I planted twenty thousand trees, etc., on the estate. Of course, I do not take credit for having made Otahuna what it is to-day. Mr. Lowe has taken in acres of ground since then, and added an immense area to the ground which I laid out: so much so, that I have no hesitation in saying that the gardens of Otahuna to-day are the finest in New Zealand. I think Mr. Lowe can boast of having the finest collection of trees and shrubs and, without a doubt, the best collection of bulbs, in any private garden in the Dominion. Any tree, shrub, or flower, no matter how rare, provided it is suitable to the climate of Otahuna, is sure to find its way there. It would fill a nurseryman's catalogue to number the species and varieties of rare trees, shrubs, plants, etc., found at Otahuna.

It will well repay a lover of horticulture, and also afford a very pleasant surprise, to pay a visit to the Otahuna garden any time from September to April. In spring he will see acres of daffodils, narcissi, hundreds of varieties, and all sorts of bulbs in great quantities, and during the summer months all sorts of flowering trees and shrubs, beautiful lawns, and shady walks. In the autumn, what a wealth of glorious foliage putting on their autumn tints before retiring for their winter sleep! Mr. Rhodes is at all times only too pleased to receive lovers of horticulture, and Mr. Lowe is only too happy to show them around the grounds and give them information about any tree, shrub, and flower.

Otahuna is very picturesque looking from the main road. The house stands out on a high mound, about half a mile from the hills, which form a grand background. A narrow road, about three-quarters of a mile long, leads from the main road. On entering there is a neat lodge, the residence of the gardener,

where the visitor begins to realise what money and men have done in a wilderness. Further along the drive a pond is reached, where wild ducks sport and play, but though they bear the name of being wild they are very tame. They are never molested, consequently do not fear passers-by. The drive winds along between hills planted with occasional plantations, and at length a view of the mansion is obtained. Standing on a hill and looking down a fine slope of lawn and terraces, the view is very pretty. At the foot of the lawn is a very fine artificial pond, planted with a variety of water lilies and other rare aquatic plants. The pond is crossed by a rustic bridge, which gives it a very pretty appearance. To the right there is another undulating hill planted with clumps of ornamental trees, reminding one of the beautiful parks in the Old Country. A little further on the drive branches off, one track leading to the front door, the other along to the stables through a cutting planted on both sides with a fine variety of conifers and flowering shrubs. The drive leading up to the hall door finishes with a fine wide sweep of gravel, backed up by a very fine terrace. Standing here, the whole scenery can be viewed at a glance. Looking to the east, a splendid view of the plains towards Christchurch, and in front in the far distance is a fine view of the ranges, a beautiful sight on a fine winter's morning when they have their coat of snow. To the right and left are grand views of the Port Hills. Some very extensive plantations were planted on the hills by Mr. Rhodes, and at the back of the house can be seen the hills crowned by the great Cooper's Knob. Altogether the scenery viewed from Otahuna is perfect.

The back of the house is sheltered by a very fine plantation containing trees of all sorts. Proceeding down the slope a beautiful shady grass walk along the foot of the hill is reached—a place which is so sheltered and warm that the most tender plants thrive. This is a very interesting spot, and should be named the Paradise Walk—really a glorious place. Roses by the hundred climb and creep up the trees overhead, and there are also hosts of other rare creepers. It is such a spot as we read of in the tropical South Sea Islands. Here even the banana thrives most luxuriously.

Continuing along the Paradise Walk, the kitchen garden and orchard are reached. Here is a treat for the eye. Entering by a walk in the shrubbery, the first thing to meet the gaze is a large shade-house, where a number of tender plants not suitable for outside planting are grown. Here is a very fine rosary, with all the finest and newest roses. Dwarfs, standards, pillar and climbing roses are there in hundreds. Leaving the rosary and proceeding further along a rose-planted walk, the fruit garden is reached. And what a garden meets the sight! It covers, say, an acre of land, and contains the finest and cleanest of trees, laden with fruit enough to supply all Tai Tapu.

The trees appeared perfect, without a particle of blight or scale of any kind. They had such a fresh healthy look, and the skin of the apple trees showed such a clean, healthy appearance as is seldom seen in orchards. Kerosene emulsion, with attention and care in the proper seasons, accounts for this. Mr. Lowe always uses kerosene emulsion, having great faith in it for winter dressing, and judging by the appearance of his trees he has some justification for his confidence. Nearby is the kitchen garden, filled with the best of vegetables. Walking towards the stables, we inspected a propagating-house, heated by hot water; but being the end of the season this establishment was not in working order. After having a look through the stable, we came to the conclusion that a more up-to-date building could not be found. But I will not endeavor to describe the stable, as I am not a horsey man.

The growth of the trees has been marvellous. They look more like the growth of fifty years than of fifteen. One of the greatest difficulties that had to be contended against at first was the want of shelter. Everything was cut down by the winds from the gullies in the hills, and the east winds were also very detrimental

IN GOLD WEATHER

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