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The Ancient History of the Rose. By RANDLE WILBRAHAM
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(Read before the Botanical Society, Jan. 11. 1838.)

To the horticulturist the early history of the Rose may form a pleasing subject of study, while, perhaps, the scientific botanist will not find in it anything worthy of his attention.

In the following pages no attempt has been made to identify the kinds of roses mentioned by ancient writers, except in one or two instances, as the descriptions given of them are much too vague and indefinite to allow of any just conclusions being formed in regard to their respective species. The chief objects have been to enumerate and give the description of the roses mentioned by ancient writers, to show the periods of their flowering, their localities, the modes by which they were propagated, and the various uses to which they were applied.

Among both the Greeks and Romans some attention appears to have been paid to the cultivation of flowers, as offerings or as ornaments; as offerings in the temples of their deities, and as ornaments on occasions of public or private festivity. The Romans, however, appear to have esteemed flowers more than the Grecians, and the origin of this greater regard for them; may not improbably be found in the imitation of that luxury and splendour which the Romans had witnessed in eastern countries.

The rose is mentioned by Homer and by Anacreon. By

the former, in the hymn to Ceres; by the latter, in many of his odes; through which we learn that it was a flower remarkable for the beauty of its petals; that it grew amidst thorns; that it had a divine fragrance; was of the colour of the human complexion; that it was the most beautiful of all flowers; "the queen of flowers;" the "flower of love."

Theophrastus and Pliny state that roses may be distinguished one from another by the roughness, smoothness, colour, smell, and the greater or smaller number of their flower leaves or petals. The latter writer, speaking of the rose generally, thus describes it: — "The rose grows upon a thorny, rather than on an herbaceous, plant; it grows also upon a plant similar to a bramble. There it has an agreeable smell, but not perceptible at any great distance. The whole flower sprouts at first enclosed in a calyx full of seeds, which in a short time swells, and becomes pointed at the summit like green alabastri.* By degrees the flower grows, opens, and expands itself, containing in the middle of its calyx the erect yellow stamina." This author then proceeds to enumerate eleven kinds of roses, which, he says, were well known to the Romans. They are the following: —

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|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Rosa Prænestina. | 7. R. centifolia. |
| 2. R. Campana. | 8. R. Græca. |
| 3. R. Miliesia. | 9. R. Græcula. |
| 4. R. Trachinia. | 10. R. moscheuton. |
| 5. R. Alabandica. | 11. R. coroneola. |
| 6. R. spineola. | |

Four other kinds of roses are mentioned by Pliny, in different parts of his *Natural History*; but of these he gives no description; they do not appear to have been in such high repute as the above, though somewhat esteemed for their medicinal properties. These kinds are called R. alba, pallida, spinosa, and quinquefolia.

Of the first two kinds of the eleven more particularly described by Pliny, the Campanian was the earliest in flower, and the Prænestine the first which ceased blowing. The Milesian was of a very bright colour, and consisted of not more than twelve petals: it was the latest which came into blossom. The Trachinian rose was less red than the Milesian. The colour of the petals of the Alabandic rose inclined to white: it was less esteemed than any of the preceding. The Rosa spineola had a large number of very small petals, and was the least esteemed of all. The Rosa centifolia, or hundred-leaved rose, had many small petals. It grew in Campania in Italy, and in Greece near Philippi; to the latter place, however, Pliny says it was not indigenous. It grew also in the vicinity of Mons

* The "alabastrus" was a perfume-box which the rosebud resembled in form.

Pangæus; and the neighbouring inhabitants, taking it from this place, cultivated it for profit. The rose called Græca by the Romans, but by the Greeks Lychnis, had only five petals; it was of the size of a violet, and grew only in moist situations: it was scentless. The petals of the Rosa Græcula, which were very broad, were rolled or convoluted into a ball; they did not expand, except when forced by the hand, and had the appearance of always growing. The Rosa moscheuton had petals shaped like an olive, and grew upon a stem like that of the mallow. ("Funditur è caule malvaceo.") The Rosa coroneola was an autumnal rose, and, when compared with other kinds of roses, had a flower of a middle size. All of the above-mentioned roses, according to Pliny, were destitute of fragrance, with the exception of the R. coroneola. The Prænestine and Campanian roses obtained their names from their respective localities. The Trachinian rose appears to have been a native of Thessaly, and grew near the city of Heraclea, called also Trachinia. The Milesian and Alabandic roses were probably foreign kinds; the former deriving its appellation from Miletus, a city in the Island of Crete, where it was first found; the latter from Alabanda, a city of Caria, in Asia Minor.

Mentzelius, in his *Lexicon Plantarum*, regards the Prænestine, Trachinian, and Milesian as varieties of what he calls the Rosa rubra saccharina; which he considers the same as the R. Græcula of Pliny. Mentzelius and Clusius both agree in calling the Milesian rose, the Rose de Provence. Ferrarius, in his work entitled *Flora, seu de Florum Cultura*, states that the rose called by him "Rosa alba multiplex" has, by different authors, been regarded as either the Rosa spineola, Campana, or Alabandica of Pliny. He says, also, that some authors consider the Rosa damascena multiplex to be same as the Rosa coroneola, while others, again, think it is the Rosa spineola, mentioned by Pliny.

The flower enumerated among the roses by Pliny, and which was called by the Romans R. Græca, but by the Greeks Λυχνίς (Lychnis), is the flower mentioned by Dioscorides under the name Λυχνίς στεφανωματική, or Lychnis coronaria. It is generally considered to have been a species of our present genus *Lychnis*, commonly known as the rose campion. Dioscorides says, the "Λυχνίς στεφανωματική is a flower resembling the white violet, but of a purple colour." It was woven into crowns, hence called στεφανωματική, or coronaria.

There is one other rose mentioned by Pliny, but not classed by him with the kinds most celebrated among the Romans, namely the Rosa sylvestris. This rose, called also Cynorhodon, by Pliny, and by Scribonius Largus R. canina, grew upon a briar, according to the former author, and had a leaf resembling

the impress of a man's foot. Theophrastus, who also mentions this rose, says it bore fruit of a red colour. Dioscorides agrees with this account, and says the fruit resembles the nucleus of an olive. Pliny, however, states that this plant bears a black berry; which, Bodæus a Stapel remarks, no other author has mentioned, and considers that the passage in Pliny refers to another plant, subsequently mentioned by that author. Among the thorns of the stem of the *Rosa sylvestris* grew a round sponge-like substance, resembling a chestnut; the presence of this excrescence upon this kind of rose is also mentioned by Marcellus, an old writer on materia medica. Pliny says it grew *particularly* upon the cynorhodon, and that it contained a worm or grub which produced the insects called cantharides. The same insects are mentioned by Aristotle to issue from a worm found upon the κυνακάνθη, or "dog-briar" (?). In the spongy substance alluded to, we recognise the moss-like prickly excrescences which are found upon all rose trees, but especially upon the *Rosa canina*, and which are the habitations of the insect called Cynips røsæ.

Commentators on Pliny regard the *R. sylvestris* of this author to be the *R. Eglantéria* of Linnæus, now the *R. rubiginosa*, which, according to Fries, Linnæus for a long time referred to the species *R. canina*. The cynorhodon of Theophrastus, the cynosbaton and oxyacantha of Dioscorides, the cynacantha of Aristotle, and the *R. sylvestris*, cynorhodon, cynosbaton, cynapanxim, and neurospaston of Pliny have been generally considered as identical. There still appear, however, to have been some doubts upon this point, which are not yet satisfactorily explained. It would be uselessly occupying space, to enter at length upon the consideration of this question. The *R. sylvestris* appears to have obtained its synonyme, *R. canina* or cynorhodon, from a supposition that its root was a beneficial remedy for bites of mad dogs; an instance of its curative powers is cited by Pliny.

The roses mentioned by Theophrastus are few in number, when compared with the list given by Pliny: four only are enumerated, viz.—

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|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. 'Ρόδον πεντάφυλλα. | 3. 'Ρ. εἰκοσάφυλλα. |
| 2. 'Ρ. δωδεκάφυλλα. | 4. 'Ρ. ἑκατοντάφυλλα. |

The first of these is considered by Stackhouse to have been the same as the *Rosa canina* of Linnæus*; the second has not been referred to any species with which we are at present acquainted; the third is thought to resemble the *R. cinnamomea*; and of the fourth, or hundred-leaved rose, Theophrastus says, "The inner petals are exceedingly small; for the blossom-

* Illustrationes Theophrasti, &c. Auctore J. Stackhouse. Oxon. 1711.

ing is such, that some are inward and some outward. The greater number of such," he adds, "are about Philippi."

Theophrastus gives no detailed account of the roses he has named; he merely says that they are not large, and have *not a pleasant smell*. He enumerates the rose tree among perennial and woody shrubs; also among those plants which have their fruit placed under their flowers, "a peculiarity," he remarks, "which, on account of its great size, is most plainly to be seen in this plant." Some classical writers, who have endeavoured to show that the odes of Anacreon which eulogise the rose are frauds, have gone so far as to say that Theophrastus never saw a rose, and support this opinion from the very cursory manner in which he notices the plant. It is impossible, however, to coincide with them.

It is singular that Pliny has not mentioned the twice-blowing roses of Pæstum, so often referred to by Roman poets. Is the Prænestine or the Campanian rose to be regarded as the Pæstan rose, or a species of it? If so, is it not probable that Pliny would have noticed them more particularly? Of the Pæstan rose, we unfortunately possess no detailed accounts. They appear to have been extremely beautiful and fragrant, and to have grown very abundantly at the place from which they took their name. Virgil, Martial, Ovid, and Propertius constantly allude to the Pæstan roses, speaking at one time of their abundance, at another of their fragrance and colour.

But there is a rose which still blooms amid the ruins of Pæstum; and it is thus noticed by Mr. Swinburne, in his *Travels in the Two Sicilies*: "The Pæstan rose, from its peculiar fragrance, and the singularity of its blowing twice a year, is often mentioned with predilection by the classic poets. The wild rose, which now shoots up among the ruins, is of the small single damask kind, with a very high perfume. As a farmer assured me on the spot, it flowers both in spring and autumn." The Pæstan rose, according to most authorities, appears to have been of a deep red colour: yet Pomponius Fortunatus, in his notes upon Columella, says it was almost white; he further observes that it flowered in May and September.

Of the ancient Rosaria, or places set apart for the cultivation of rose trees, no account has reached us, as to the manner in which they were laid out. Pliny and Columella mention March and April to be the months during which the Rosaria should be dug up, and otherwise prepared for the reception of plants. Neither Columella nor Palladius mention by their names the kinds of roses which were cultivated in these plantations. This omission may, perhaps, be attributed to the kinds of roses used for wreaths, chaplets, &c., being generally known, since we learn that none but those so employed were planted in the Rosaria.

The most celebrated of these rose plantations were at Pæstum. It may here be mentioned, that the custom of rearing large plantations of rose trees still exists in the East, and in Russia, as appears from the following extract from Van Halen's account of his journey in that country. "On the following morning, we left our place of bivouack, in the vicinity of Kuba, with the rising sun, and proceeded through *picturesque fields covered with rose trees*. The exquisite fragrance emitted by them, and which the morning dew rendered more fresh and grateful; the varied warbling of a multitude of birds, who had their nests in these delightful bowers; and the sight of several cascades, whose playful waters leaped from their steep summits, produced on every sense an indescribable feeling of delight. One of the nobles belonging to the suite of Ashan Khan made me a present of a small flagon of oil extracted from these roses; and which, when some months after I compared with the best otto of roses of Turkey, surpassed it in fragrance and delicacy. Beyond these *woods of roses* spreads an extensive forest."

Roses, according to Theophrastus and Pliny, were raised, in some cases, from seeds; but they say that the growth of the plant when so propagated was slow, owing to the seed being situated within the bark under the flower, and having a woolly covering. Shoots or cuttings were also planted, and this mode of propagating the plant was preferred to the above, because their growth was more rapid.

The cuttings, according to Pliny, were four fingers or more in length, and were planted soon after the setting of the pleiades, perhaps, about April, and were afterwards transplanted during the following spring. The young plants were placed one foot distant one from another, and were frequently dug round. They required a light soil, not rich nor clayey, nor one in which there were springs. Their favourite soil was ground covered with the rubbish of old buildings.

The following account of the cultivation of rose trees is given by Didymus in the *Geoponics*.

If you wish, says the above writer, to have a constant succession of roses, plant and manure them every month. But roses are planted in various ways; some transplant them with the root entire; others take them up with the root, and cut them down to the size of four fingers in length, and plant all that is cut off the roots, and what grows from them, at the distance of one foot and a half from each other. Some weave wreaths of rose plants, and plant them for the sake of their fragrance. But we ought to recollect that roses will have more fragrance when they are grown in dry places, in the same manner as lilies have. Roses come early both in baskets and in pots, and require the same attention as gourds and cucumbers. If you wish those

rose trees already planted to bear flowers early, dig a trench two palms in breadth from the plant, and pour into it warm water twice a day. Democritus says that if a rose is (thus?) watered twice every day, in the middle of summer, it will bear flowers in the month of January. Florentinus says a rose may be grafted, or in-eyed, into the bark of an apple tree, and that roses will appear at the same time the apples do. If from a few plants you wish to make more, take cuttings of them, and, making them four fingers or a little more in length, set them into the ground. When they are a year old, transplant them at the distance of a foot from one another, and tend them by careful digging, and removing all the rubbish from about them.

It was customary among the ancients to cut back and burn down rose trees, by which means the trees were increased in size, and produced a larger number of flowers. Theophrastus says that the flower by these means was rendered more beautiful.

The rose, like the vine, appears to have grown most rapidly when transplanted; and Theophrastus informs us that, when this was done frequently, a more beautiful flower was produced. The rose tree cuttings required to be put into the ground deeper than young fruit trees, and not so deep as vines; the latter being sunk in the earth to the depth of two feet. Didymus observes that the fragrance of the rose is increased and improved by being grown in the vicinity of garlic.*

The rarity of early roses made them valuable, and, like all vegetable productions obtained out of their season, they were eagerly sought after, and bore a high price.

“Rara juvant : primis sic major gratia pomis,
Hibernæ pretium sic meruere rosæ.”

MARTIAL. lib. 4. epig. 29.

“The rare delights : we find first apples nice,
And winter roses bear a tenfold price.”

ELPHINSTON'S *trans.*

The employment of warm water for forcing roses has already been mentioned. Palladius and Seneca both allude to this custom, and Pliny states that the time when it should be put into practice is when the calyx of the rose begins to sprout. Columella and Pliny state that it was usual to cover plants with the “*lapis specularis*” (talc), when it was an object to make them produce their fruits early; and this plan appears from Martial to have been pursued with respect to flowers also : —

* ——— “The Pæstan rose unfolds
Her bud more lovely near the fetid leek.”

PHILIPS, *Cider*, v. 254.

"Conditæ sic puro numerantur lilia vitro,
Sic prohibet teneras gemma * latere rosas."

Lib. 4. epig. 22.

"So through the crystal are the lilies told:
So does the gem the blushing rose unfold."

ELPHINSTON'S *trans.*

Before quitting this portion of the subject, we must allude to a singular practice mentioned by Didymus in the passage from the *Geoponics* above quoted, namely the weaving of wreaths, and planting them; because Casaubon, in his *Comments upon Athenæus*, where a passage is quoted from Nicander's *Georgics*, in which it is mentioned, that frequently a complete crown made of ivy is planted, says, "Ridiculum est, . . . interdum coronam ipsam hederaceam cum suis racemis esse plantandam." It is probable that Casaubon had not met with the passage in the *Geoponics* which proves the possibility of forming wreaths thus; and, moreover, shows that it was by no means an uncommon practice to "plant crowns."

According to Nicander, in his *Georgics*, beautiful roses grew at a place called Themis, or Thetis; and at Olenum, a city of Achaia, not far from Patræ, now called Patras. Next to these places, Megara, Nisæa, Phaselis, and Tenedos were celebrated for their roses; but the finest grew at *Magnesia ad Mæandrum*, a city of Lydia, now called by the Turks *Gysel Hisar*, or the Beautiful Castle. One of the speakers in *Athenæus* is made to say that what is related by Æthlius Samius, in his work upon the singular occurrences which take place at Samos, namely, that in that island figs, grapes, apples, and roses are produced twice a year, appears neither improbable nor untrue. Cyrene, also, according to Pliny, was celebrated for its roses; and, according to Herodotus and Martial, Egypt was also renowned for these flowers. Herodotus says that in the gardens of Midas roses grew spontaneously, and that some had sixty flower leaves, and were more fragrant than the rest. †

According to the Calendar of Natural Occurrences in Greece, the rose blossomed in March, the *Rosa Græca*, or *Lýchnis coronária*, in May. In the Roman Calendar we find early roses were in blossom in April, and that in May they were generally in flower. In Egypt, according to Theophrastus, the rose blossomed two months before it appeared in Italy, and continued in flower for almost as long a time in the former country, after it had ceased blowing in Italy. In the latter country it succeeded the blossoming of the violet and the lily.

Among the ancients, the rose was employed as a medicinal

* By "gemma" is to be understood the tale with which the roses were covered in gardens.

† See *Miscellaneous Tracts, &c.*, on Natural History, by William Falconer, M.D., F.R.S.

remedy; at their festivals and sacred ceremonies; and as an article of luxury at their banquets. Of the medicinal uses of the rose frequent mention is made by Oribasius, Actuarius, Marcellus, Myriscus, Celsus, &c., together with many ancient writers on pharmacy; the accounts afforded by these writers are not sufficiently interesting to claim particular notice.

In alluding to the more general uses of the rose among the Greeks and Romans, the employment of flowers generally must, in some degree, be referred to; but the rose was unquestionably the most esteemed of all flowers.

By the Greeks and Romans flowers were frequently employed. It was usual for them to adorn the temples, altars, and statues of their gods with them. (See *Euripides: Hippolytus, Troades, Helena, &c.*) Wreaths of flowers were also worn by those who were present at, or assisted in, the celebration of sacred rites (*Eurip. Iphigenia in Aulide*). They were also offered to those divinities to whom they were considered most grateful. It was a Grecian custom, according to Athenæus, to decorate the doorposts of houses where a maiden, about to become a bride, resided. The dead were crowned with flowers.* Sophocles has represented Electra and Orestes as repairing to their father's tomb, to deck it with garlands, and honour it with libations. The relatives of the deceased wore garlands of roses during the days of mourning, as emblematical of the shortness of life, which passes as quickly away as the beauty of those roses would which formed the mourner's crown. The tombs of the dead were decorated with roses, under the idea that they possessed the power of protecting the remains of the deceased, and were peculiarly acceptable as an offering to their manes. Other flowers besides the rose were selected as having a special fitness for these purposes. The Greeks also used the amaranthus, which is commonly regarded as the flower now known by the name of "everlasting." Parsley and myrtle were also funeral plants. But the rose has been for ages the favourite flower for funeral and all other purposes.

Among the Romans all flowers of a purple or white colour were regarded as grateful to the dead. They were so fond of the rose, that we find inscriptions which refer to legacies left in their wills, for the express purpose of providing roses, with which their tombs were annually to be decorated.

. . . . DONAVIT SUB HAC CONDITIOE

UT QUOTANNIS ROSAS AD MONUMENTUM EJUS DEFERANT.

(See *Le Antichità d'Aquileja*, Giandomenico Bertoli: Venezia, 1739: p. xix. ccxxxvii., &c.)

Roses were also strewed on the tables at their convivial en-

* It is still a custom in the Levant to strew flowers on the bodies of the dead; and in the hands of young persons to place a nosegay.

tertainments, and on the floors of the rooms in which they feasted. Pacatius says: "Delicati illi et fluentes parum se lautos putabant, nisi luxuria vertisset annum, nisi *hybernæ* poculis *rosæ* innatassent."* Suetonius relates of Nero, that he spent upwards of thirty thousand pounds at one supper, in the purchase of roses. This custom is supposed to have been introduced during the time of Horace; an opinion which has been formed from one of his odes (lib. i. od. xxxviii.), thus translated by Francis:—

" I tell thee, boy, that I detest
The grandeur of a Persian feast;
Nor for me the linden's rind
Shall the flowery chaplet bind:
Then search not where the curious rose
Beyond his season loitering grows."

Cleopatra is said to have expended a talent in the purchase of roses for one banquet, on which occasion the floor of the apartment was covered with roses to the depth of a cubit, or one foot and a half. (*Athenæus, Deipnosoph.* lib. iv. cap. ii.)

The chief use of the rose at feasts was to form crowns and garlands, which were placed upon the heads, and around the necks, of the guests. The garlands were generally provided by the master of the house. Those who attended on the guests were also crowned, and even the drinking-bowls were wreathed with flowers. Owing to this use of the rose, we learn from Anacreon that a crown composed of them was regarded as an invitation to festivity; they were also considered as preventives of drunkenness; though certainly, in some instances, the flowery wreath seems to have been a well understood mark of inebriation.

" Capiam mihi coronam in caput, assimilabo me esse ebrium."

PLAUTUS, *Amphitryon*, act iii. sc. 4.

" I will place a chaplet on my head, and pretend to be drunk."

Rich unguents and oils were also prepared from the rose (see *Homer, Il.* xxiii. 186.), which were used on the same occasions as the rose flower itself.

There are many other less remarkable uses of the rose, which it would be necessary to mention, in order to render the above by any means a complete account of this flower; their importance, however, does not warrant their insertion here. To the philosophic botanist the above account of the rose will not, it is believed, be attractive; to the horticulturist it may present many pleasing features; to the classic reader, it will recall customs most intimately blended with the beauties of Grecian and Roman poetry. The feeling, too, which dictated some of the most striking and touching uses of the rose especially, and of flowers

* "The soft and luxurious thought themselves not sufficiently refined, unless their extravagance changed the course of the seasons, unless winter roses floated in their cups."

in general, is universal and natural to nearly all nations. The decoration of the tombs of the dead with flowers was an inexpressibly beautiful custom; and, though strenuously denounced by the early Christians, as savouring of idolatry, the hearts of men soon wandered back to so simple, so elegant, so natural a mode of testifying affection. This is a custom which has been well said to be "of the heart, and to speak to it, and has therefore maintained its ground in every age and region, unaffected by the constant changes in customs merely arbitrary and conventional."

Edinburgh, April 29. 1839.

