

# A FARMER'S PLEASURE GARDEN

*(DESIGNED AND LAID OUT BY HIMSELF)*

Some ten miles east of Limerick, and a little beyond the village of Murroe, on the estate of Sir Charles B. Barrington, Bart., in a place called Vaucluse, is a small garden absolutely original in design and in many senses unique.

One is always open for pretty surprises in originality when visiting picturesque localities: there are the mountains which sleep beneath the royal colour of the heath, valleys which delight the eye with their little straggling villages and silver streaks of streams; and in other places we wander into glades where it would be unholy to break the unspeakable stillness, not exactly silence, because that little noiseless noise – the very sigh that silence breathes – the soul-stirring trickle of water hid from view in the mossy richness of the ground-tinkles its little bell-like sound. 'Tis while wandering about a country where such sights are almost commonplace that one, as it were, trips over the little gem of a garden which is the subject of the present paper.

Firstly, it may perhaps be best to commence with the cause behind this grand effect, and for that reason I will first deal with the man. Mr. Ryan – for that's his name – is a fine, athletic build of a man, standing somewhere about six feet high, with just the slightest of that stoop,

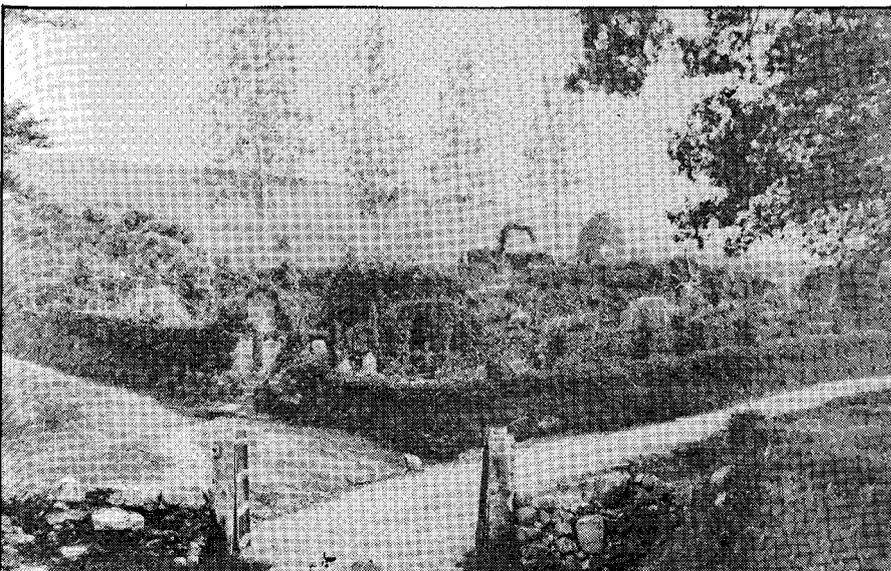


*Farmer Ryan and his terraced garden, with 'little bunches of trees and statues'.*

the hallmark of age and possibly of a student: a fine face with firm, determined mouth, and a dreamy look in the eyes which are tell-tale of a mind given to quiet fancy and calm reflection. He has the appearance of a man of about sixty, his step is so firm and his voice anything but weak; in reality he is over eighty years old. His manner is courteous – but that's a take-for-granted, being Irish. He takes great delight in acting cicerone to any

one who does him the honour of visiting his garden, and first impressions lead to the belief that owing to the cultured conversation he carries on he must be a man who has read widely and deeply.

Ten years ago, that is to say when Mr. Ryan was over seventy years of age, the plot of ground which is now the garden was a grassy slope, and hid from view on the south-east by rising ground. It is 52 yards long and 25 yards wide, and owing to the sloping nature of the surface, it is divided into three terraces, one above the other. It is entered by a stile from the lane, up which one must go from the main road to get to the garden. At the entrance the visitor is greeted in truly Irish fashion with the phrase worked in boxwood in a circular bed 'Cead Mile Failte'. To the uninitiated, the place is a very nice garden, laid out in a grotesque manner, but when, on explanation, we again look at the various features we are apt to look at them in a more appreciative, nay reverent manner. The little bunches of trees and statues now begin to take logical form, and we at once commence to recognise the mind which not only dreamt but executed this pretty scene. Having looked at the trees etc. for some little time, and given up the solution of the enigma we are 'let into' the secret by the owner, who informs us that it is mostly a horticultural representation

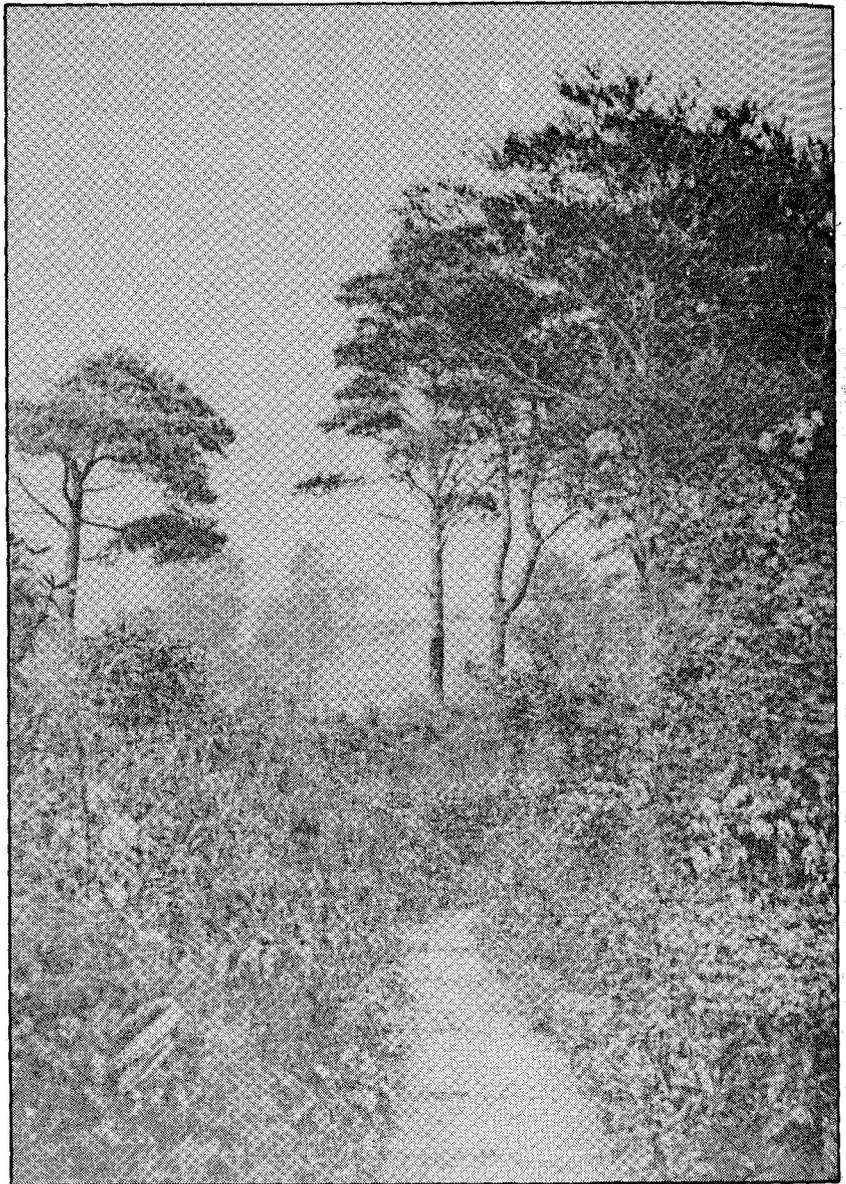


*The garden on the estate of Charles Barrington at Murroe '... evergreen shrubs, mostly laurels, with lovely flowers decorating the ground'.*



of our Lord's life on earth, from His nativity to His ascension. The means adopted to symbolise this history are evergreen shrubs, mostly laurels, with lovely flowers decorating the ground. The first terrace contains the Stations of the Cross, with Pilate's Hall. The cross is shown in various positions in the different stages of the journey to Golgotha, and the manner in which the evergreens are trained to resemble the cross deserves great credit. Mr. Ryan says that they are not yet fully developed, the trees not having expanded yet into the exact way he wishes them to be, but this will take some little time yet; in the meantime, the outlines are so marked that the wish to see them at a later time makes us hope that Nature will mature them quicker than in ordinary course! The most interesting of the stations are the eleventh, thirteenth and fourteenth. The eleventh station is beautifully depicted, the symbols being on the ground, and is singular in this respect; the thirteenth illustrates the taking down from the Cross, and our Lord being received by His Mother. It is artistically portrayed, and one cannot help admiring it. The fourteenth station represents the grave, and in this case in addition to the evergreens, a large stone is appropriately placed at its foot. Just beside this, Mary Magdalen is shown speaking to our Saviour just after His resurrection.

This brings us to the second terrace, on which are representations of the Annunciation, the Nativity and the return to Nazareth after finding the child Jesus in the temple. The Nativity is the first to arrest the eye; the Mother is represented in a kneeling posture bending over the newly-born babe, and near her stands St. Joseph; the Ox and the Ass are also included in this group. This terrace contains several beds of flowers, with the Latin words *Gloria in Excelsis*, done in boxwood, and another bearing our Lord's name in Greek. A little way back is a Crucifixion Tree, and beneath it is the Latin phrase *In hoc signo vincis*. The three Wise Kings from the East are represented by evergreen trees, deftly arranged. St. Elizabeth, with her son in her arms, and her husband are also portrayed as anxiously viewing the Crib, but the most striking object in the centre terrace is undoubtedly the large circular, star-shaped piece of bog-stick, which Mr. Ryan aptly calls 'The Star of Bethlehem'. It stands about nine feet high, and the 'arms' branch out from the centre in almost unbroken order. Just in the centre of this terrace is depicted the return from Jerusalem after the finding of Jesus in the temple. The trees are in this case not the symbols, as the three figures are made of clay. They are on an elevated bank, and are covered with evergreen creeper, with the exception of the face, the latter being fashioned with rustic simplicity.



'... the evergreens are trained to resemble the cross'.

The two clay figures which represent the Annunciation are partly hidden by the bank which separates the middle from the top terrace; the latter is little more than a walk, edged by laurels and rhododendrons, and near the centre is a representation of our Saviour's ascension. This interesting symbol runs back a little further than the rest of the terrace, it's semi-circular in shape and contains a clay figure, mounted on a pedestal, with outstretched hands and a dove resting upon its head.

This comprises the history of our Lord's life on earth, but there are many other interesting features, which deserve a little mention. There is a beautiful shrine containing a statue of the Virgin and Child between the first and second terraces, and in nearly half-a-dozen different places in the garden there are slates containing original poems by the owner which are simple in construction but lofty in theme. The words are scraped on the slate, so that 'age cannot wither' them. Primroses, mignonette and many other common but lovely flowers are

growing in nicely laid out beds, which are lovingly kept in order by Mr. Ryan. Fuchsias and forget-me-nots grow between the Stations of the Cross.

There is a curious plant in the eastern part of the garden called a holly thorn, just beside the thirteenth Station of the Cross. There is a pretty legend about its introduction into England, and it is said that it will not grow outside Glastonbury, but here is a specimen flourishing and healthy. No doubt, like the several shrubs peculiar to Killarney, the atmosphere of western Ireland is favourable to its growing in the open.

It is not often that one finds such an interesting 'hobby' carried on by a man who has set the psalmist's span of life at defiance and the freshness and vigour of his frame leave the index finger pointing to the garden as the cause. I must now close, and cannot do better than in the valedictory Irish phrase 'Beannacht leat', which catches the eye as the visitor leaves the garden.

24th October, 1903. (Author unknown)