

A CENTURY of CHRYSANTHEMUMS



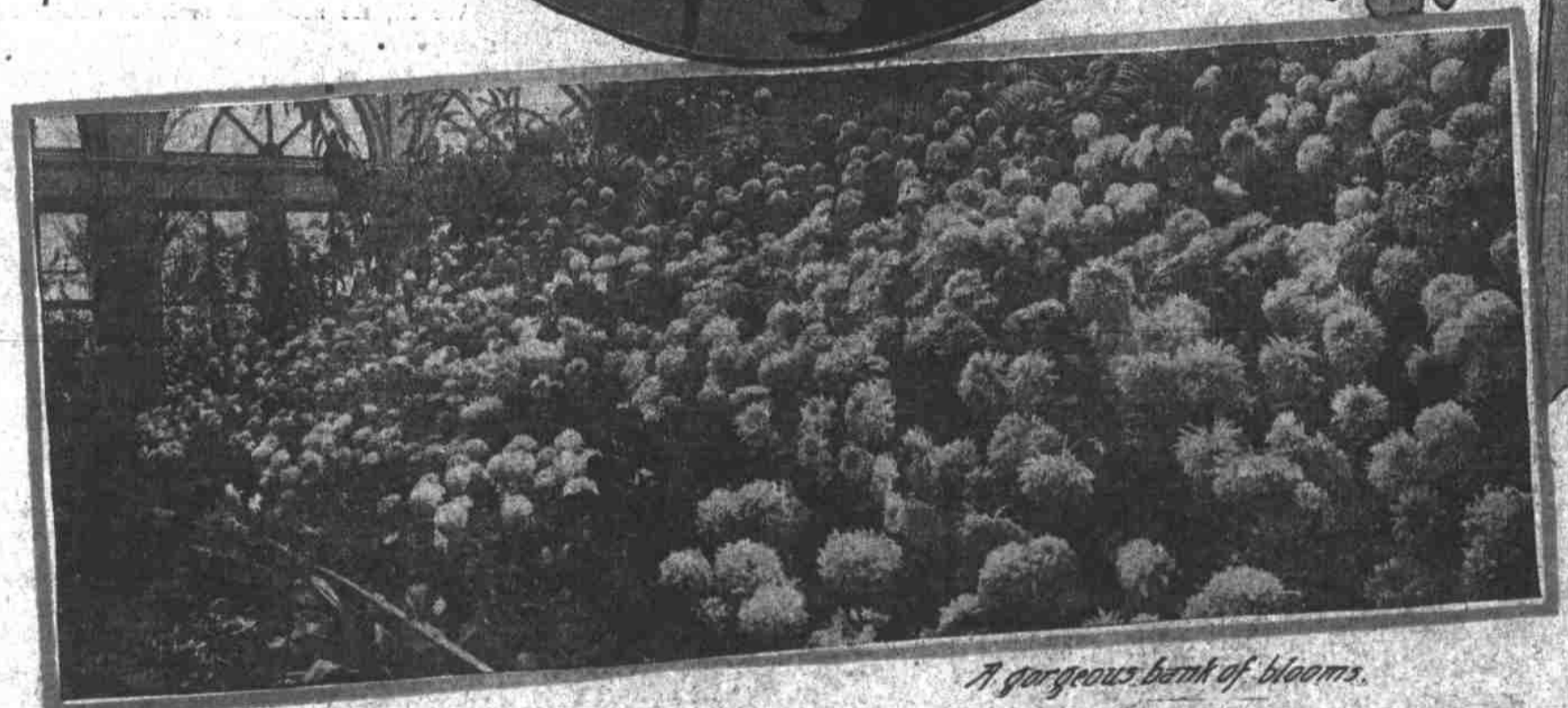
The original chrysanthemum, as seen by a Japanese artist of the school of Hokusai.



The Grand Philadelphia



The Agnes Stollen



A gorgeous bank of blooms.

How 100 Years in Europe and America Have Brought Japan's Flower to High Favor

ONCE there was, in Japan, a beautiful queen of the flowers, who went wandering abroad until she found herself in strange western lands, where heavy-scented blooms and vari-colored earth bulbs disputed between them the honors of precedence, and the strange queen was known only as a pretty foreigner with a very distinguished air.

As a great honor the barbarians among whom she found herself permitted her to appear in the company of their stolid Dutch bulbs and their fragile, scented roses; and people came, and sniffed at her, and turned away, saying:

"Huh! Might as well be a sunflower!"

But the wandering flower queen had all the pride of her race, and remained dignified and exclusive, even in those days of ignorant curiosity and equally ignorant disdain. As the years went by, and her descendants grew in beauty and refinement, the ignorant foreign people comprehended more and more the true distinction of the queen they had been entertaining unawares.

Finally, with the whole world in admiration of the numerous family, they made haste to celebrate a centennial of the first strange flower's public appearance.

It was in 1809 that the chrysanthemum played its earliest role of prominence in the flower shows of France and England.

That is the story of beautiful Queen Chrysanthemum; and the opening of the season this year is a continuation of that memorable anniversary.

LIKE many other anniversaries which have to do with events that covered more than a single day, the centennial of the chrysanthemum, now regnant as the one flower universally admired throughout the world, can scarcely be limited to one single year.

The flower was never confined to Japan exclusively; it is indigenous throughout the East. But it had for generations been a national emblem with the Japanese, and was the heraldic symbol of the family of the present emperor. Indeed, the Order of the Chrysanthemum is one of the Japanese knighthoods most highly prized, as emblematic of all the virtues.

The first of the flowers familiar to Europe was the yellow chrysanthemum, so well known in Japan, and its presence in the West can be traced back to a couple of centuries ago, when Holland, with its daredevil sailors and its angelic gardening, found opportunity and time to discover the chrysanthemum to the extent of half a dozen varieties. Breynius tells about them quite circumstantially.

MISFORTUNE AT FIRST

But general popularity did not follow, and misfortune attended the endeavor in England, by that celebrated gardener, Miller of Chelsea, to rear a "mum" imported from China in 1754. By way of Marseilles the wandering queen reached France in 1789 and London in 1795.

For a time the few specimens available sold at very high prices, as much for their rarity as for their beauty. It is said by experts in the history of the chrysanthemum that the first one which bloomed in England showed its queenly beauty in Colville's nursery, in the King's road, in Chelsea, in 1795, on a plant obtained from M. Cels, a famous nurseryman of Paris.

A curious dispute arose among the learned botanists, who felt bound to classify the handsome stranger according to some species or other with which they were familiar. So some vowed it really must be a sort of esomonia, while others swore it had to be a feverfew.

But it was like trying to prove an elegant princess belonged either to the family of a bumboatman or a costermonger.

Botanical science finally concluded Queen Chrysanthemum was in a class of her own, and combined "chryso," gold, and "anthos," flower, to designate the distinguished stranger.

One would think that in Holland, where 1698 has been fixed as the date of the chrysanthemum's earliest arrival, those master gardeners would have been engaged all that time in developing and expanding the prize they possessed. Nothing of the kind.

Sabine, secretary of the Horticultural Society and a distinguished authority, has been quoted as saying that in 1821 not a single gardener in Holland knew anything whatever about the chrysanthemum. It was as though the rose and the tulip had combined to resist the invasion of the beautiful stranger destined to usurp the floral throne.

Yet elsewhere the private gardening experts for the wealthier classes and enterprising nurserymen like M. Cels were steadily faithful to the promise it displayed. In the year 1808 there were as many as eight or ten varieties known to them, and only another year—the year of which this is the centenary—was needed to make the strange flower eligible at the shows in Paris and London, where it had a genuine popular success.

By 1825 the number of varieties known in Europe was forty-eight; a year afterward, at Chiswick, a distinctive chrysanthemum show was held, where the Horticultural Society and

its friends gazed rapturously on 700 plants in pots.

It was in 1845 that Robert Fortune, sent to China by the Royal Horticultural Society, returned with a semi-double flower secured in the island of Chusan. It was reddish, or light brown, and small in size. But the Royal Society propagated it and distributed specimens among its members. By this time Europe had begun to develop its chrysanthemum enthusiasts, among them M. Lebois, in Paris. The French autumn being much more favorable than England's damp and foggy climate, he produced a number of amazingly good varieties, and from them came the famous Pompon chrysanthemums.

IN THE NEW WORLD

By the middle of the last century Queen Chrysanthemum had so far come into her own in the West that she was the principal winter flower shown at the meetings of the Galadonian Horticultural Society.

The earliest authentic record of the flower in the United States appears to be a report in the New England Farmer of November 26, 1850, when several varieties were mentioned as having been shown before the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. They were of English origin, as evidenced by their names: tasseled white, Park's small yellow, quilled lilac, quilled white and golden lotus.

It was, however, the late Peter Henderson, who, in 1863, by importing direct from Japan some of the best varieties existing at that

period, stirred the interest of such flower lovers as John Thorpe and the men of that day, who gave the graceful bloom its first real welcome here. But Dr. H. P. Walcott, of Cambridge, was the first American to raise chrysanthemums from seed which he ripened in his own garden.

The formation of the Chrysanthemum Society of America took place in 1890, the period when the flower was making its usual, conquering way among all classes of people, yet still merely the overture to the chorus of acclaim which greets its appearance every fall in these more recent years.

There are now, something like 3000 varieties of the chrysanthemum, and the development of some new and excellent flower in that numerous and universally admired family is the hope of thousands of gardeners—and sometimes their great good fortune.

It has happened here, as, long ago, it happened abroad, that the poor as well as the rich feel they must have their share of the blooms that are royal in Japan. But with this difference: abroad, the very peasants feel they can grow their chrysanthemums as they want them; here, unless some apology for a conservatory belongs to the house, which we imagine reserved for wealth alone, we go out and buy them, potted or cut.

It is, however, only of late that Americans at large have attained the stage of appreciation, and the small measure of skill, in chrysanthemums, that were required to make them the patrons of the potted bloom. They seemed for a long time to be in awe of them.

That was to be accounted for by the impressive manner in which, when the chrysanthemum did begin to be admired in the United States, it became the fashion. Prices were for a long time much higher than those attaching to the more familiar flowers, and those who indulged in them were usually the social leaders of the communities in which the fair stranger was making her way. The mass of the people seemed to think that a bunch of really worthy chrysanthemums was beyond their purses.

To the American girl who first wore chrysanthemums at a football game the queen of flowers owes the appointment of some such post as maid of honor; and every indication seems to be that, ultimately, every girl who attends a game will hold the position, at least pro tem.

These lovely chiefters of the hard-fought gridiron no sooner saw one of their number blossom out in chrysanthemums than they all took the stranger to their bosoms, so that he was a hardy or a best-loved suitor who dared refrain from gracing his football invitation with a big bouquet of the variety that would be most salient to the crowd's obvious gaze.

Now, with every one knowing that those big, beautiful blooms last for weeks, and with countless florists devoting themselves to greater and greater output annually, the chrysanthemum throughout the fall and winter finds the American Beauty rose its only rival, and that with none but the wealthiest class.

A JAPANESE LEGEND

They have in Japan a charming legend of the flower which parallels the familiar myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Long years ago a young nobleman became enamored of a beautiful maiden who had been imprisoned in a print by the famous artist, Horonobu. To all living women he became as though blind; he had eyes only for the lovely creature of the drawing.

Once, after he had long implored the gods to make her a reality, that he might embrace and cherish her, a sweet little voice said to him: "Only when thou layest at my feet the pure gold of the sun can I become a mortal like thee."

So he hastened to heap before the picture all his gold and, for good measure according to the ideas of women, all his jewels, too. But the maid of the drawing never stirred. Her lover mourned, yet would not believe her false to her promise. He grew lean and wan. Then, to cheer him, the gardener of his noble father's estate brought him, one day, a magnificent yellow chrysanthemum, round and radiant as the golden sun itself.

Petulant, the despairing lover flung it from him. The flower fell before the picture, and forth stepped—all alive and loving—the lady of his longing, human for his embrace.

That is the Japanese legend of the chrysanthemum. But is it any more charming than the real story of the flower itself?