MEDICAL PRACTICE

Autumn Books

Vegetable love

TONY DELAMOTHE

"Herborising" was what John Ray's contemporaries called his forays into the Cambridgeshire countryside in search of plants. The Collins guide to botanical gardens starts with a short history of the botanical movement in Britain, which can be dated to the founding of the physic garden in Oxford in 1621, a few years before Ray's birth. It then describes the legacy of that movement: 28 botanic gardens open to the public, with detailed addresses, telephone numbers, and opening hours—the ideal companion for a spot of twentieth century herborising.

Half the gardens belong to universities, not surprising given botany's origins. The first "modern" botanical gardens followed the creation of the first chairs in botany at Italian universities in the early sixteenth century. Within a century no self respecting university anywhere in Europe was without one. These gardens were meant to be "living textbooks," designed for the mind's eye. The Chelsea Physic Garden best illustrates this purity of intention (although it's not a university garden, having been founded by the Society of Apothecaries in 1673).

Truth is beauty

Elsewhere in Britain lip service is still paid to this ideal—there are old order beds, chronological beds, greenhouses with different climatic zones—although, as a walk through Kew's Princess of Wales conservatory with its ten different microclimates confirms, what actually happens is an education of the senses. The botanic garden is where science was seduced by beauty.

Nothing else can account for the profusion of rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias, magnolias, cedars, and maples found at most of these gardens: the scientific lessons to be learnt from them are surely no less valuable than those from their dowdier cousins. Freaks get in—giant redwoods, tree ferns, and waterlilies—but only because they retain their beauty.

This gives the gardens what the author calls their "amenity value," recognised early on by a visitor to the Oxford garden ("for ye delight and pleasure of those of perfect health"), but developed

much further in the nineteenth century. Most of the non-university gardens listed in this book were started then—by subscribers, corporations, or philanthropists. Civic pride coupled with a patriotic wish to grow the plants discovered in the outposts of empire had large provincial towns competing with one another. By mid century

large glasshouses dominated the gardens, their contents "a mutinous density of informative planting." Sometimes the scientific impetus was lost completely (which is why Belfast and Liverpool city gardens are not included in this collection).

Open the gates and let us through

Living textbooks are harder to preserve than the other sort; even the lowest maintenance garden needs much more work than a library. When a botanic garden's early enthusiasts die sometimes the garden has quickly followed. Sometimes it has survived,

although in a parlous financial state. That can benefit the public—Chelsea Physic Garden remained closed to the public for 300 years until financial necessity forced it open.

This book touches on these issues, but only briefly. Most of the text is devoted to a description of what is in the gardens and how they got there. The book is well illustrated, but the colour photographs are neither too numerous nor too sumptuous to make it a substitute for seeing the gardens themselves.

Collins Guide to the Botanical Gardens of Britain. M Young. (Pp 160; figs and colour plates; £12.95.) London: Collins, 1987. ISBN 0-00-218213-0.

Enough for nature's needs

J H KAHN

The image of a psychotherapist in the patient's mind (and, only too often, in his own mind) may be that of a better physician than the patient ever had, or a better teacher; sometimes it is that of a mechanic who understands and can repair the human machine. These images are derivative of the infant's perception of the parent with unlimited power to give comfort or control. When, in our more mature years, we need help, we would look for these same powers in their perfect and benevolent form, and the different images sometimes merge into the figure of the healer with magical powers. The perfect therapist restores the perfection of the patient and, in the same way, the perfect parent produces the perfect child.

Rough magic to be abjured

Bettelheim, taking a phrase from our own revered Winnicott as his title, relieves the parents of the burden of perfection. It is good enough to be good enough. By the same token Bettelheim divests himself, as therapist, of magical powers. In *The Tempest* Shakespeare added another dimension to the father/daughter relationship: the ability to know when to discard the magic role. When Prospero finds it possible to enlighten Miranda about her origins he says:

'Tis time
I should inform thee further; lend thy hand
And pluck my magic garment from me—So!

The stage direction then states: "Lays down his mantle." Prospero, pointing to his robe, says, "Lie there my art." He had to stop being a magician, and be content with being an ordinary father.

Bettelheim, in what he believes at the age of 84 will be his last book, writes from his ordinary personal experiences and recollections as much as from the theoretical teaching of his psychotherapeutic training. He reveals the ethos which guided him through a lifetime of psychotherapy, and which led him to give 30 years of his life working, in the Orthogenic School in Chicago, with autistic and severely disturbed children.

His book is intended to make parents feel secure in parenthood, and less worried about what they may possibly do wrong.

The parent must not give in to his desire to try to create the child he would like to have, but rather help the child to develop—in his own good time—to the fullest . . . in line with his natural endowment . . . and unique life history.

He deplores the tendency of parents to seek and to trust the advice and recommendations in child rearing books, particularly those which foster the idea that there is only one way to do things, and that all other ways are wrong. Parents who ask for help to make their child "perform" or "function" better are dissatisfied with their failure to produce exactly the results they intend.

The book is in three sections. The first, under the title of "Parent and child," deals with the parents' inner experience and the value of their participation in the child's activities; school performance;

Bruno Bettelheim.

discipline; and with the need to tell children about their parents' own past. The second, "Developing selfhood," is largely concerned with the importance of play, which is a pleasure in its own right, a preparation for future tasks, and (most importantly) an activity that children can share with their parents.

What's past is prologue

The third section, "Family, child and community," begins with the Chinese proverb "Nobody's family can hang out a sign 'Nothing the matter here'" and it discusses how external events can affect children's perceptions of their parents.

For a survivor of the concentration camps ambivalence towards one's parents has a special savour. The identity inherited from them was the one reason for selection for extermination; yet from the