

CHAPTER XXVIII

ROSES

When Grandfather and Grandmother moved to Philadelphia in 1915, they quickly determined that they would never live in a semi-detached house. To be sure, that was the prevailing style of house, the style having been imported in an early day, we were told, from England. To your grandparents these houses seemed to be fully attached. How Grandfather and Grandmother came to change this resolution, this chapter will tell.

Having always lived in a single house with a yard, Grandfather and Grandmother insisted when they reached Philadelphia that they must have that kind of a home. It was decided to locate in Germantown because the new Germantown High School building - the finest in Greater Philadelphia - was nearing completion. Charles was ready for college, but George would have two years in the new school and Ruth and Grace might some day also attend.

Finally a single house with yard and some large trees were found on Penn Street. Great was the disappointment when summer came and millions of caterpillars began dropping out of the trees, much to the discomfiture of the ladies, especially Ruth, who insisted upon staying in a screened porch.

The first two winters were mild and then came the very severe winter of 1917-1918. The United States had entered the World War and coal was allotted on the basis of average purchases for previous years. Since Grandfather's previous years' purchases had been in mild winters, his allotment was not sufficient, and had it not been that the house had five fireplaces and that no restriction was placed on fireplace fuel, the family would have been forced to close the house and live at a hotel.

It was decided for next year to move into a house small enough so

that Grandfather's allotment of coal would keep the family warm. Ruth reported a house for rent on East Walnut Lane and enthusiastically urged the family to take it. It was near high school, she could save time and apply the time to her music. So the family moved into 112 East Walnut Lane. My what a change - it seemed like starting life over - many possessions had to be sacrificed in order to leave room for the family.

The following winter Grandfather and Grandmother went to the Pacific Coast, leaving Ruth and Grace with a housekeeper (Mrs. Hartlett, whom Grandmother had known in Wisconsin). Upon return, Grandfather was informed that the house had been sold, that a notice had been delivered at the house some time before and that we must move immediately. Next morning, Grandfather finding that No. 128 of the same operation was for sale, bought the house without taking time to look at it or to consult Grandmother.

At this point Grandfather is impelled to offer all his male grandchildren a bit of advice - probably you will not appreciate the importance of the advice at this time - but Grandfather assures you that it is so important that he feels he must offer you the advice even though it be long in advance of your need. The advice is "Don't surprise your wife by buying a house." It will surprise her all right, but then somehow women sometimes prefer not to be surprised.

This move, however, was to be only temporary. As soon as conditions became settled, we would decide what to do. Back of the house was some vacant land and a real estate agent bought some for Grandfather. Having built a fence around the newly acquired property, Grandfather thought to beautify the fence with climbing roses. Upon inquiry, he found that most of the climbing roses he had seen were Dorothy Perkins, so being unsophisticated on the subject of roses, he bought a couple of dozen Dorothy Perkins

and later seeing some other variations named in a catalog, bought one of each variety and hired a man to prepare holes and plant them.

Later he noticed that a young lady brought each day to the office an exceptionally beautiful rose. Grandfather asked her where she got such fine roses and she said she raised them in her garden. Would they grow in Grandfather's garden? The young lady was doubtful. Grandfather evidently had not impressed the young lady as one likely to have any genius in gardening.

This nettled Grandfather. Let's try. The young lady selected what she thought Grandfather should buy. A gardener was hired to plant them. "But," says the gardener, "they need a bed. You should dig out two feet of earth, put rocks at the bottom for drainage and build up with alternate layers of good top soil and manure." "All right," said Grandfather, "give the roses a chance." Then Grandfather went on a long trip and, returning, what do you suppose had happened? Why those roses were all in bloom!

Hooray! The loveliest roses Grandfather had ever seen and right in his very own garden! There must be some mistake - how could it be? Grandfather rubbed his eyes and pinched himself to make sure that he was not dreaming, but strange as it may seem, it was really, truly so - these fine roses were right in Grandfather's very own garden, and when he went out every morning and every evening to talk to them and cultivate them a bit and sometimes to water and to feed them, the roses seemed to know Grandfather and to answer back with lovely smiles and sweet perfume. Was not that a thrill?

Was it not fun to help the flowers grow? How stupid it had been of Grandfather when a boy to have preferred to go swimming and fishing when

it would have been so much more fun to make the fruits and vegetables and flowers grow in his mother's garden.

Really Grandfather must learn something about these wonderful roses. A few days later Grandfather, having an evening in Milwaukee, went to the Public Library and asked permission to go into the stacks and see the books on roses. No, Grandfather did not know what book he wanted. No, the card index would be no use. No, he was not crazy. Yes, he was perfectly sober. He just had a burning desire to look at all the books there were on roses.

In the stacks he took down the names of the best books on roses and next day in Chicago he bought copies and carried these with him and read evenings until he felt on friendly terms with Lady Ashtown, Madam Herriot and many other ladies of distinction. One day Mr. Eustace gave Grandfather Dean Hole's book on Roses and Grandfather got a good laugh from the book. The dean of all rose growers showed that one could grow roses without losing one's sense of humor - that was a relieving thought.

Up to that time Grandfather could not see that there was anything humorous about his new obsession of raising roses. He had spent most of his spare time in the winter measuring off new rose beds and planning what he should plant. You would have gotten a good laugh out of seeing Grandfather do this, but he could not see that it was funny.

But Grandfather could see that the Germantown Horticultural Society, which he joined, had its humorous aspects. An odd assortment of millionaires and gardeners and old families and newcomers met once a month and with sober faces competed for \$2 prizes for best roses. To be real frank, Grandfather did not find out that this was funny until he had competed and one year won first prize for the best single rose. He then knew just how funny it was, without being told.

Furthermore, he could see that it might tickle one's funny bone to watch the gravity with which this odd audience listened at each meeting to a couple of botanists who just loved to recite the Latin names of plants - all of which Grandfather was convinced registered with the audience no more than they did with him.

One night they asked Grandfather to talk on growing roses. Grandfather began by saying, "I did not know I had any of the qualities for a good gardener until I read the book of that dean of rose growers, Dean Hole. He says that he never knew a botanist who was a good gardener. I have one essential quality of a good gardener - I am not a botanist." This was *laissez faire* but caught the imagination of the audience, and for the next half hour we had a grand time - just rollicking in the fun of raising roses.

On succeeding meetings the botanists reasserted their authority, but here and there was a twinkle in an eye as some recalled how once upon a time the Germantown Horticultural Society had dared to laugh out loud.

Well, in the course of time Grandfather's humble back yard became a veritable bower of roses. Children and grandchildren could pick roses by armsful without injuring the display. Roses right up to the bedroom windows to smile at Grandmother as she looked out in the morning. Everywhere roses covered fences and trellises. Was this not wonderful and grand?

But how could Grandfather sell the humble house with its roses so dear to his heart? That seemed quite impossible. Besides the children were leaving to make homes of their own. Soon Grace would be in college. We had waited too long. The time to build a home had passed. A life ambition passed unfulfilled. But we could help George and Ruth build their own homes and besides, as Grandfather in June each year stands amidst the thousands of rose blooms, he is not sad. He says to himself, to be sure, we never owned a fine home, but oh, my, what roses and who would swap roses for a house?