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THE LABOUR OF HER OWN HANDS:
NINETEENTH CENTURY GARDENING DISCOURSES
AND THE WORK OF JANE WEBB LOUDON

by

Kelli Lee Towers

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

Approved:

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2006

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ABSTRACT

The Labour of Her Own Hands:
Nineteenth-century Gardening Discourses and the Work of Jane Webb Loudon

by

Kelli Lee Towers, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2006

Major Professor: Dr. Jeffrey Smitten
Department: English

Jane Webb Loudon, wife of eminent horticulturist and landscape architect John Claudius Loudon, has been largely ignored by historians and literary critics. Yet in her brief career she produced some of the most practical and influential gardening works of the early nineteenth-century. Beginning with *Gardening for Ladies* in 1840, Loudon published seventeen books and edited two magazines on gardening, botany, and natural history, most of them specifically directed to a female audience. These books would educate an entirely new class of gardeners, and allow women in particular to engage not only with gardening, but also with aesthetics, social reform, morality, empire, and ecology. To accomplish this task, Loudon adopts a masculine scientific discourse and demonstrates a conspicuous lack of sentimental language. She grafts gardening onto a range of activities considered acceptable for females, showing how it would actually help females care for their homes and families, honor the country and empire, and better care for the poor.

(73 pages)



The Labour of Her Own Hands:
Nineteenth-Century Gardening Discourse and the Work of Jane Webb Loudon

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Special thanks go to my family, friends, and colleagues for cheering me on, even though “it’s amazing how few people would be interested in that!” ☺ Without your love, support, and good sense of humor, none of this could have happened.

Kelli L. Towers

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- GFL*: Loudon, J.W. *Gardening for Ladies and Companion to the Flower Garden*. Andrew Jackson Downing, ed. 2nd American, from the 3rd London edition, New York: John Wiley & Son, 1874.
- EOG*: Loudon, John Claudius. *An Encyclopedia of Gardening*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822.
- LCFG*: Loudon, J.W. *The Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden*. 8th edition. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1865.

DUTIFUL PUPIL, POWERFUL TEACHER

Jane Wells Webb made her first real impact on the scene of literary London at the age of twenty with the publication of, as she called it, a "strange, wild novel." *The Mummy! a Tale of the Twenty-Second Century* told the story of Cheops, an ancient Egyptian prince reawakened in the year 2126, when England would be ruled by a celibate queen in a crystal palace. Science fiction being a rather unusual genre in 1827, particularly for a female writer, she had it published anonymously. And though it never enjoyed the same kind of fame as works by her contemporaries, it nevertheless attracted significant attention.

Jane had come to writing early in life, planning to make it her chief source of income following her father's death when she was seventeen. Though her mother had died when she was twelve, Jane had been well brought up, and had spent her youth with the benefits of a private governess and a good home library. That education, plus a few years living on the Continent with her father and attending dinner parties with his business acquaintance and friends, made her at twenty a woman of remarkable experience and intellect (Simo 268). Yet she was also quiet and timid, a quality which intensified her discouragement when writing endeavors met with rejection. She confided in William Jerden, father figure and editor of the *Literary Gazette*,

I have a naturally independent spirit and wish to maintain myself; but I am not fitted to struggle with the world. I cannot put myself forward, and I cannot make bargains [with publishers]. I am soon depressed, and when any one finds faults with any of my productions, instead of defending them, I throw them into the fire. I try to overcome this feeling, but I cannot. The phrenologists say that conscientiousness and love of approbation are my two strongest qualities, and

that I have no self-esteem. I believe they are right. Forgive this loquacity.
[qtd. in Simo 270]

Like most aspiring writers, Jane struggled with what seemed like continual failure, though she had managed to publish a small volume of *Prose and Verse* in 1824. But despite her despondent claims, *The Mummy!* demonstrated boldness, creativity, and forward-thinking that gave the impression not of a shy, retiring authoress, but of a knowledgeable and astute social critic. Historian Melanie Simo characterizes *The Mummy!* as a “bold, light-hearted satire [...] which revealed nothing of its author’s timidity. [...] a three-volume frolic of science fiction in which reformers, inventors, planners, and the working classes are all gently satirized” (270). Not only did Jane have the audacity to imagine England once again ruled by a celibate queen, she also imagined a myriad of inventions and civil improvements brought about by continuing advances in technology. Coffee-makers, mobile homes, well-planned cemeteries located outside city limits—every aspect of life was touched and improved by science, in ways remarkably creative considering that she envisioned them just one year after the first railroads had come to England.

The book would change her life in ways Jane did not expect. Among those her work impressed was a man twenty-four years her senior, one already known for his “decided opinions on taste in gardening, the rights of man, free trade, religious tolerance, national education, the wages of gardeners, the siting of public buildings, the ennui of ladies, and much more” (Simo 268). John Claudius Loudon, eminent landscape architect, horticulturist, and critic, happened across a review of *The Mummy!* soon after its 1827 publication, and directly borrowed a copy from a lending library to

read in full. Intrigued especially with its descriptions of mechanical milking machines, and convinced that the author must be a young man of exceptional scientific talent, he set about trying to meet him. With the help of a mutual friend they met in February of 1830, and apparently the woman was even more impressive than the book. Jane later recorded, "I believe that from that evening he formed an attachment to me, and, in fact, we were married on the fourteenth of the following September," a mere eight months later (Loudon, "Account" 30).

Thus, Jane Wells Webb became Jane Webb Loudon—a union for which, as Jerdan put it, she "wisely abandoned the unsuccessful struggle [and] happily became the help-mate of Mr. Loudon in the true spirit of his practical and solid productions" (Simo 270). At forty-seven, J.C. Loudon was already the author of twenty-three publications (including such massive tomes as the



John Claudius Loudon (Howe 49).

Encyclopedia of Gardening, the *Encyclopedia of Agriculture*, the *Encyclopedia of Plants*, and the *Hortus Britannicus*). He also edited two successful periodicals, *Gardener's Magazine* and the *Magazine of Natural History*, and worked almost fanatically to publish and circulate any information he believed would improve the lives and work of his fellow gardeners.

It soon became apparent that Jerdan's prediction of Jane Loudon as a help-mate was not mere lip-service: she accompanied her husband on countless tours around the country, studying and writing about the gardens they visited, collecting materials for the next installment of *Gardener's Magazine* or the next book he happened to be writing. Because he had lost one arm to severe rheumatism and incompetent treatment and his other hand had become crippled down to the use of only three fingers, he had been forced to hire draftsmen and scribes to carry out his dictations. Soon after their marriage, however, Jane became his sole amanuensis. The two would frequently stay up until long after midnight writing and drinking cups of green tea or strong coffee to keep themselves awake (Loudon, "An Account" 32).

By the end of his career J.C. Loudon had published thirty-seven books and launched five periodicals, at one point simultaneously editing four of them, plus a book. Historian Bea Howe notes that "being married to him must have often seemed to Jane like being attached to a carelessly whirling human dynamo, whose daily functions never allowed for letting up one single moment," and that she must have drawn upon "immense courage, resource, and physical stamina, [to] have coped as Jane did through those first grueling years of marriage" (56). J.C. Loudon was known for his strong opinions, and often "spoke his mind with an unequivocal bluntness that not

infrequently got him into trouble” (Desmond 79). Throughout his career the zeal and passion with which he wrote—or as Ray Desmond put it, “a didacticism unrelieved by any hint of humor, and inflexible moral principles” (97)—made him many enemies. Yet at his death in 1843 even they eulogized him as a man of integrity and honorable conduct, one devoted to the correction of the evils he saw in society.

For all his quirks, Jane Loudon was as devoted to him as he was to her. To him her “presence was a constant joy in his life” (Howe 81), and she wrote that “in his private capacity he was equally estimable as a husband and a father, and as a master and a friend” (Loudon, “An Account” 40). John Gloag argues that the Loudons found in each other “perfect partners,” and Simo concurs that “Jane may have reinforced in Loudon that extraordinary sense of self-confidence and optimism for the fate of humanity that can only well up in a person who loves deeply and is truly loved in return” (qtd in Simo 274). In their marriage, despite differences in age, public accomplishments, and temperament, it appears they considered themselves equals.

From such a relationship it naturally follows that each had a significant impact on the work of the other. As Simo states, “One wonders if the *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture, Arboretum Britannicum, Suburban Gardener*, and other late works [of J.C. Loudon’s] would ever have appeared without Jane’s constant, cheerful assistance” (273). She labored with him on his publications up until the very day of his death. Despite his chronic pain and other health complaints they had been up until midnight the previous evening recording details for his next book, and he rose before dawn that morning and paced restlessly with the knowledge that he would not live to finish it. Loudon records that “though his body became weaker every

moment, his mind retained all its vigour to the last, and he died standing on his feet. Fortunately I perceived a change taking place in his countenance, and I had just time to clasp my arms round him, to save him from falling, when his head sank upon my shoulder, and he was no more" (Loudon, "Account" 40). In the years following his death, Loudon's assistance in her husband's career continued: she carefully re-edited his most important works for new editions, bringing them up to date and ensuring their fitness for republication.

J.C. Loudon also played a supportive role in his wife's career. Jerdan may have seen Jane's marriage as her ticket out of the trade, but it was that marriage that led her eventually back into professional writing, and into a career that produced some of the most practical and influential gardening works of the early nineteenth-century. Beginning with *Gardening for Ladies* in 1840, which she wrote in hope of easing some dire financial circumstances, Loudon would eventually publish seventeen books and edit two magazines on gardening, botany, and natural history. Most of these were directed specifically to a female audience, though it soon became apparent they were equally applicable to amateur gardeners of both sexes. Several of them would continue to be republished throughout the remainder of the century, in more than one country and on more than one continent.

As she had not really studied much of botany or horticulture before her marriage, Loudon frankly admitted she owed to her husband "all of the knowledge of the subject she possesses" (*GFL* dedication page). The appreciation, however, was reciprocal: even with the high standard he set for himself and others, and despite the discriminating and critical nature of his reviews, J.C. Loudon publicly praised his

wife's work. In 1842, *Gardener's Magazine* featured a review of *Botany for Ladies* and *The Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden*, which he commended as "the best introduction to the natural system of botany for grown-up persons, amateurs, male or female, that has yet appeared." Notwithstanding the incredible scope and ambition of his own endeavors, he confessed that "both these works we are more proud of than any of our own" (qtd in Howe 81).

It is true that much of Jane Loudon's writing career took place in her husband's shadow (which position she never desired or endeavored to change). As a result she has been overlooked, and her success written off as riding on his coattails. But while an understanding of his career, his personality, and his ideals is certainly crucial to forming a complete picture of her, she does deserve to be considered a remarkable writer, thinker, and social commentator in her own right—one whose straightforward and graceful approach to life allowed her simultaneously to defy the conventions of her time and gain the respect and trust of thousands. A woman of "well-balanced mind, warm heart, and humane understanding" (Howe 109), she became a trusted and beloved figure to her readers, and at her death in 1858 her grave and the lawn all around it were heaped high with flowers from her countless admirers (Howe 165). Such admiration is no surprise considering what she accomplished in her life: how she navigated the changing times, and unlocked a realm of knowledge to an entirely new audience. Through her work between 1840 and 1855, Jane Loudon simplified and clarified the world of horticulture, making it accessible to a growing population of amateur gardeners of all genders and levels of society.

Even with the continued influx of new gardening knowledge following her death, Loudon's instructions and advice lost little of their usefulness. Andrew Jackson Downing, who edited a combined American edition of *Gardening For Ladies* and the *Companion to the Flower Garden* in 1874, states in his preface: "The simplicity and clearness with which she explains every branch of gardening, attract at once the novice and the amateur, who have had little practical experience, and who would be little interested in a less sprightly and more scientific work" (*GFL* preface). His praise echoes almost exactly the praise the books received on their first publications in England: a testament to the solid nature of the information, and the unaffected style of its delivery.

Yet it is not only information and style that make these volumes so enduring. Despite the fact that they must be considered in the context of her association with J.C. Loudon, and that they draw upon eighteenth and nineteenth century principles of science, morality, and design, Jane Loudon's works demonstrate a refreshing originality. Taking the discourses she encountered as she learned her subject, she made them her own—inflecting and interpreting and presenting them on her own terms. What results is a series of straightforward, honest, unsentimental arguments on gender, gentility, social reform, and ecology that profoundly affected the trends and attitudes of popular gardening for the remainder of the century and still continue to affect us today.

DEFINING THE TASK

GARDENER.— To keep a flower garden in perfection, it is necessary to have a good gardener, unless the amateur understands how the various operations of gardening are to be performed sufficiently well to be able to direct an indifferent gardener, or a common labourer, how to execute them. [...] Thus, those persons who wish to have a show-garden, will find it the best plan, if their grounds are large, to employ a good gardener and to leave every thing to his direction, (for a really good gardener will not bear to be interfered with) allowing him to employ labourers as he may think proper; but if the grounds be small, this plan will be found too expensive, and it is generally best to contract with a nurseryman to keep the garden constantly in order, and full of plants during the whole summer. This plan is frequently followed in the neighborhood of London [...].

The great enjoyment of gardening, however, in my opinion, is only to be obtained by the amateur who gardens himself, and who understands the principles or reasons upon which each operation is founded; and, therefore, I should recommend all persons fond of gardening, and especially ladies who have sufficient leisure, to manage their gardens themselves, with the assistance of a man to perform the more laborious operations. It sometimes happens that a man-servant in the family, who is not over burdened with in door duties, will answer this purpose; but it is generally preferable to employ a man who has been brought up as a gardener. (*GFL* 219)

The Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden was published in 1841, Jane Loudon's fourth major work on gardening to be published since her garden-writing debut the previous year. Defining it as a "dictionary of the English and Botanic names of the most popular flowers, with directions for their culture" (99), she also included in its pages commentary, definitions, and directions for such aspects of gardening as laying out walks and pleasure grounds, dealing with rabbits and hares, and of course, the management of gardeners themselves.

Effects of industry and politics were making the definitions of garden and gardener a little slippery by the mid-nineteenth century. The Great Reform Bill of 1832 had enfranchised a growing middle class. Agricultural depressions and the promise of

employment had made town-dwellers of half the country's population by 1851. The great landscape parks owned and governed by wealthy noble families were giving way to smaller villa and townhouse gardens of prosperous merchants, bankers, and publishers. Neglect brought on by war and depression had sent many great estates into disrepair, and it was quickly becoming apparent that the modest-sized gardens of the modest in means not only cost less to produce and maintain, but also possessed their own relative grandeur.

A great number of these new patrons were expressing a wish to get their hands dirty and learn the art of gardening for themselves. In the days of Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton, the laying out of grounds had been performed by artistic visionaries, and the maintenance done by gardeners—most of whom had been born into their profession and had apprenticed since birth in the identification and care of plants. In general, gardeners lived on estates but were not very highly ranked or well paid, though most patrons would have been hard-pressed to grow anything successfully without them. Landscape design, botany, and nature-painting were fashionable hobbies for gentlemen and even ladies, but most of the nitty-gritty details of proper plant-care—the planting, propagating, manuring and pruning—remained mysteries only understood by those born to the trade. Thus the budding population of amateur gardeners faced a significant challenge in adopting their new hobby. As Loudon stated, “It is so very difficult for a person who has been acquainted with a subject all his life, to imagine the state of ignorance in which a person is who knows nothing of it, that adepts often find it impossible to communicate the knowledge they possess” (*GFL* intro).

That communication was made even more difficult by the fact that professional gardeners were possessing more and more knowledge of an increasingly technical and specialized kind. In the preface to his 1822 *Encyclopedia of Gardening* J.C. Loudon explained, "No art has been more extended in its objects, or improved in its practices within the last fifty years than Gardening," a fact which merited his writing 1,469 formidable pages in tiny, close-set type, comprising "the theory and practice of horticulture, floriculture, arboriculture, and landscape-gardening, including all the latest improvements; a general history of gardening in all countries; and a statistical view of its present state, with suggestions for its future progress in the British Isles." A testament to the interest of the age, the encyclopedia proved incredibly popular. It became the major gardening reference work of its time, going through eight editions in twelve years with continuing reprints through the 1870's (Elliott 12).

The many editions of the *Encyclopedia* came forth in part as a commitment to J.C. Loudon's promise to include "every modern improvement to the present year" (*EOG* title page), for each year brought more improvements. Professional gardeners all over the country were undertaking experiments on plant hardiness, trenching and drainage, soil sterilization, fertilizers, pest control, pruning, plant breeding, and transplanting. They applied their energies to inventing as well: the lawnmower brought green expanses back into vogue; refrigerated boxes helped exotic plants survive journeys from far reaches of the empire. Watering cans, plant rotators—everything from glasshouse roof to the soil in its beds underwent some kind of study and improvement (Elliott 19).

Obviously, even several editions of a book could not keep up with this rapidly growing field, and seeing the need for a more immediate and regular publication, J.C. Loudon pioneered the country's first major gardening periodical. *The Gardener's Magazine*, a monthly journal beginning in 1826 and continuing until his death in 1843, provided the first forum in which gardeners could "discuss their work, both technical and artistic; campaign for better wages and improved working conditions; and debate the political questions of the day, and the merits of cooperatives, allotments, and cottage gardens" (Elliott 12). Loudon's goal for the *Gardener's Magazine* was "to put gardeners residing at a distance on footing with those round the metropolis" that they might "keep their stock of knowledge to the full standard of value." So rapidly was the field of horticulture growing that Loudon went so far as to proclaim, "Those who cannot or will not read, never have been, nor ever can be first rate gardeners" (*Gardener's Magazine* 1.1:3). It was clear others agreed: the *Gardener's Magazine* was soon joined by a host of rival periodicals in the 1830s and 40s (Elliott 12).

Through the dispersal and discussion of new gardening knowledge in these periodicals, gardeners became more able to cope scientifically and systematically with the challenges facing them, and their expertise blossomed in a way unknown to previous generations. Donald Beaton wrote that "only four years before the first Reform Bill, some of the best gardeners in the country did not know or understand the principle of potting plants," and in 1883 Shirley Hibberd recalled that the previous fifty years had "seen horticulture developed from an empirical mystery to an art founded on the truths of nature and the achievements of science" (Elliott 18).

In a nutshell, gardening was no longer a simple matter, if ever it had been one in the first place. Though more was being written about gardens and the exciting new developments in planning and planting them, most aspiring amateurs found the technical nature of that writing impossible to follow. Among these frustrated novices was Jane Loudon. The introduction to *Gardening for Ladies* begins:

When I married Mr. Loudon it is scarcely possible to imagine any person more ignorant than I was, of every thing relating to plants and gardening; and, as may be easily imagined, I found every one about me so well acquainted with the subject, that I was soon heartily ashamed of my ignorance. (GFL xi)

And since, as Howe notes, Jane found “most gardening books written by authorities on the subject were too arbitrary in their instructions to be much use to her as a novice, and the few produced by her own sex were made even more complicated by their ornate style of writing” (47), she relied chiefly on her husband to teach her the trade. Aiding him as he conducted his tours around the country and his own projects in their garden, she gradually learned enough horticultural language to wade through the books they kept in the garden shed.

It was only after a full ten years of such apprenticeship that Loudon ventured to publish her knowledge on her own, yet her experiences had ideally prepared her to reach out to a new audience. She modestly asserted her authority, stating:

Having been a full-grown pupil myself, I know the wants of others in a similar situation; and having never been satisfied without knowing the reason for every thing I was told to do, I am able to impart these reasons to others. Thus my readers will be able to judge for themselves, and to adapt their practice to the circumstances in which they may be placed. (GFL xi)

Her goal for the work was to teach gardeners, particularly female ones, to think for themselves, and give them the tools necessary to make choices and judgments.

This kind of thinking, feeling, discerning, participating garden patron was relatively new to the scene of English gardening. Throughout the previous century, poets, painters, philosophers and landscape architects had envisioned gardens as sacred places of contemplation, capable of evoking the sublime and elevating the soul to higher aspirations. However, it was not always clear who was to be doing the contemplating. Along with the grottoes and temples and gothic cottages placed strategically within landscape gardens came the fashion for hermitages and even hermits. According to John Dixon Hunt, hermitages “were evidently designed to announce, albeit in rather general terms, the idea of solitary meditation, to invoke without excessive realism the austere regimen of the hermit fathers.” Cultured intellectuals of the period liked the idea of the philosophical retreat, even though, as Hunt claims, “the realities bore little resemblance to either the physical or metaphysical rigors of the early fathers” (Hunt 1-2). Hermitages and hermits were easily accessed symbols of contemplative life.

But busy, comfortable landowners didn't always have the time or inclination to be out communing, so they sometimes hired others to do it for them. Requirements for the position sometimes dictated that the hermit never cut his hair and never exchange one word with the servants. And since one willing to hold such a position was hard to come by, the vacancies were sometimes filled with stuffed dummies, which could still evoke the desired effect from a distance (Hunt 8). By Loudon's time the taste had begun to change, but so many images of hermits and hermitages abounded in poetry and painting that she would have been familiar with the tradition. Thomas Parnell,

Thomas Warton, William Wordsworth – these and others praised those who seemed to live in peace with Nature.

But living in a cave was not the only way to commune; the latter half of the eighteenth century brought other developments. The garden stroll would evolve into an intellectual journey, abandoning the static geometrical style of French and Dutch gardens for patterns that would lead the viewers (or rather, the walkers) through a sequence of scenes. An afternoon ramble would be one in which “their minds were constantly being provoked by architectural or verbal items and where certain objects were designed to be seen or encountered from various points of view” (Hunt 198).

Capability Brown’s designs were most conducive to this kind of contemplative, intellectual journey, but his methods were too radical to stay in favor long; his successor Humphrey Repton found a more acceptable balance. Like Brown, Repton insisted on movement in or through a landscape, but also acknowledged the social function of terraces and flower beds (199). It was well and good to speak of contemplating Nature, but clearly some things had gone too far.

This shift occurred late in the eighteenth century, and by the nineteenth the ideal was really wearing thin. Whereas Nature had reigned supreme and popular philosophy regarded the mind as a mirror of it, the nineteenth-century brought a stronger spirit of self-determinism. Brent Elliott explains that in consequence of this change, gardening “was no longer to be subservient to the natural landscape, but to be independent, imaginative, and original. The old idol of Nature had been overthrown, and out of the bewildering wreckage rose instead the idol of Art” (10). The increasing value placed on individuality brought with it a pluralism of styles; throughout

gardening debates of the Victorian period, “for every Joshua Major or William Robinson who attempted to dictate aesthetic standards to the public, there was always a Donald Beaton or a D.T. Fish at hand to proclaim the arbitrariness of such standards and defend the right of the individual to gratify his personal taste” (10).

Considering this spirit of individualism, then, it comes as no surprise that so many amateurs were interested in planning and managing their own grounds. Nor is it surprising that Jane Loudon’s writings were so badly needed and so well received. The healthful benefits of working outside were well known. In 1779 Vicesimus Knox had written, “Happy it were if the amusement of managing a garden were more generally relished. It would surely be more conducive to health, and the preservation of our faculties to extreme old age, were that time which is now devoted to the dice and to the card-table, spent in the open air, and in active employment” (Hunt and Willis 332). Throughout his career J.C. Loudon spent a great deal of time and energy logically arguing the beneficial effects of yard work, its very real capacity to ennoble, empower, and elevate. But it was Jane Loudon who unlocked the door, setting out in plain terms the basic principles these gardeners needed in order to begin.

CHOOSING A VOICE

In performing that task, she encountered more obstacles than just learning the material; she had to decide the best way to present it. Much garden writing of the period, especially that done by women, featured more sentiment than science. Despite the value Victorians placed on knowledge, and the belief they held that science would answer the ills of society, scientific inquiry and argument were still primarily masculine discourses.

Through the 20s and 30s, fancily bound and covered ladies' publications such as the *Forget-me-not*, the *Diadem*, and the *Book of Beauty* had graced fashionable parlours, along with many a gilt-lettered manual filled with parlour accomplishments. The making of wax flowers or seaweed albums might be combined with tips on proper behavior, or with poetry deemed fit for ladies' ears, much of it saccharine with sentimentality.

The tradition of Nature poetry naturally extended the trend into garden writing. With such models as the work of Wordsworth and Keats, much nature and garden writing lent itself so well to lyricism that even male botanists occasionally indulged in sudden, gushing odes. William Paul, a horticultural lecturer, pamphleteer, and columnist, often interrupted straightforward descriptions of horticultural business with such lyrical passages as the following, from his 1849 *Remarks on the Cultivation of Tea-scented Roses as Conservatory Climbers*:

Sweet emblem of innocence, of virtue, of humility, whence derivest thou that power which gives thee such an influence over the mind of man? Truly, the Rose of the desert in its loneliness is suggestive of modesty and retiring worth, and the gorgeous masses of our flower gardens are realizations of grandeur,

beauty, elegance, and grace. No wonder, then, that thy declared admirers are so numerous, that thy presence should be sought so eagerly amidst the motley throng. No wonder that thou greetest us at every step, from the garden of the humble cotter to the Rosetum and conservatory of the wealthy and the great.
[74-75]

Gardens were still seen as places where their patrons could elevate their thoughts, and females, long associated with gardens and especially flowers, seemed naturally better equipped to write about their refining and gentling tendencies. Many gardening tidbits contained (or were contained in) religious tracts, and female writers were expected to focus on the spiritual rather than practical aspects of flower gardening.

One such female writer, calling herself simply "Flora," wrote monthly installments of such moralized gardening advice in *The Cottage Gardener* magazine, a periodical started by George W. Johnson in 1849. In its first edition she mused,

A flower, too, is a sermon—it preaches to our hearts and minds—it speaks to us loudly and powerfully of the tender love of our and its Creator—and it declares impressively also, this solemn and salutary truth, "man is as a flower of the field." We are taught, too, how wise, as well as how pleasant it is, to look for all we need spiritually and temporally from our heavenly Father. "How much more shall he clothe you, oh ye of little faith" (29).

Later installments see an increase in drama and religious fervor, to the point that the column became more sermon than flower. While it always included some practical advice on gardening, or some interesting tidbit of new plant knowledge, the point of the column seems to have been more focused on morality and religion. And while there were much more practical discussions being carried on in other venues, these were somewhat off-limits to the amateur crowd, being too technical for amateurs, and too blunt for gentle ladies.

It seems, therefore, that Loudon had a choice of traditions: the masculine scientific, or the feminine sentimental. Yet neither would help her publish a book that avoided the pitfalls of the others on the market. An astute businesswoman, she realized that if she were to be successful, she must fill the need she saw: the need for plain instructions written in simple, straightforward language, unfettered by technical jargon or preaching. There were enough manuals giving women instructions on behavior; hers would give instructions on gardening.

To that end, she seems to have adopted the more masculine scientific discourse. Nothing in the writing other than the title (and a few descriptions of logistical difficulties, such as how to dig or water plants while wearing voluminous skirts) particularly denotes a female audience. Loudon does not wax overly poetic about the delights of nature, or how flowers are like children, or how the heart thrills in a garden. There seems to be no room in her pragmatic volume for anything unscientific or unsupported by the best and most recent research. Science governs both the subject matter and the way she handles it in writing. Yet it is interesting to note how she inflects that discourse, presenting herself certainly as a knowledgeable gardener, but also as an intelligent, warm-hearted, and genuine lady.

For instance, it is readily apparent what stark contrast her writing provides to Paul's and Flora's. Compare the following passage on roses with Paul's mentioned earlier:

Of all flowers, none are more beautiful than roses; and none better reward the care of the cultivator. Roses are natives of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, but none have been yet found in Australia. The number of roses is almost incredible, above a hundred distinct species have been described, and there are above two thousand named varieties to be procured in the nurseries. In this

chaos, all that can be done in a work like the present is to give a slight sketch of the different kinds of roses grown in British gardens, with a few particulars of the more remarkable species. (GFL 355)

She follows that introduction with five pages of details on different kinds of roses, their soil and sunlight requirements, methods of propagation, and protection from insects.

No Thees and Thous, no pontifications on the propensity of flower gardening to refine human nature. The book conspicuously lacks didactic sentimentality.

However, that is not to say that Loudon's relationship with Nature or with people was cold and clinical; she was known for her gentle, warm-hearted personality. The things she loved about life and gardening simply appear in more restrained, subtle ways. While Flora was regularly invoking Heaven in her writing, Loudon almost never did. Rather, it appears she was so sincerely excited by the scientific wonders she describes, that mention of God would be redundant. In a chapter on "Stirring the Soil" from *Gardening for Ladies* she wrote, "The manner in which the root is fitted for the purposes for which it was designed, affords an admirable illustration of the care and wisdom displayed by the Great Creator in all his works. [...] the growth of the plant is wisely and wonderfully proportioned to the strength of the support which the root affords it" (14). This passage of course reflects the philosophic currents that were then driving nature poetry. To Loudon, as to so many others, the wonders of science suggested the wonders of God.

Nevertheless, it seems she felt no need to belabor the point—especially when her patient readers craved instruction. Thus, that passage goes on to underscore the importance of soil science, explaining why the first step toward promoting growth in plants is to accommodate the roots. It is also the *only* explicit religious reference in the

eighty-two pages of close-set type expounding the technicalities of everything from digging to manuring to propagating, pruning, training, and protecting plants.

Loudon did occasionally permit herself some personal voice and opinion, though it was always duly restrained. A passage on seeds from *Gardening for Ladies and Companion to the Flower Garden* reads:

The gathering and preservation of seeds is an occupation peculiarly agreeable to persons fond of gardening; partly, no doubt, because it contains so much of future promise, and on the same principle that sowing is universally considered a more exciting operation than reaping. (370)

An opinion, yes, but one which proceeds directly to a statement of fact: “The greater number of seeds of ornamental herbaceous plants are contained in long, narrow pods called siliques, or silicles” (370). It seems obvious that Loudon was dedicated to her task, and determined not to compromise its effectiveness with unnecessary prattle.

Passages like this point out that gardening is a pastime much to be enjoyed, but that half of the enjoyment comes from understanding and appreciating its complexities: not merely the appearance of nature, but its systems and functions. As she wrote in the preface to her *Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden*, “No one, in fact, can ever make a good gardener, who does not have a sincere love for plants” (*LCFG*). She was one of the first to offer such an in-depth understanding and hands-on training to women (recall that botany had been fashionable, but not yard work). Thus, Loudon's adoption and inflection of scientific discourse makes her an important bridge figure, extending a masculine world to a female audience.

GARDENING FOR LADIES

As we have seen, technical scientific discourse and business had combined over previous centuries to make the world of horticulture and landscape design a predominantly masculine one. While throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it had become a more defined and recognized art than ever before, it had also been professionalized out of female hands. Women were generally relegated to management of the kitchen and flower gardens, and this with little more knowledge than naming the plants, and knowing how to cook and preserve them. When depicted in gardens women were more often seen as the governing goddesses—beneficent and beautiful Floras, but with little more purpose than the flowers themselves. Before *Gardening for Ladies*, only two books had been written specifically for female gardeners in England: William Lawson's *The Countrie Housewife's Garden* in 1618, and Charles Evelyn's *The Lady's Recreation* in 1707 (Howe 72). Even these were heavily didactic, tempering horticultural information with various housekeeping maxims.

By the nineteenth century, however, women were beginning to take more of an active role in the layout and management of their grounds. This shift came about in part because of the example of a few bold upper-class women such as Lady Grenville of Dropmore and Lady Broughton of Hoole House in Cheshire, whose designs and taste merited praise from J.C. Loudon in *Gardener's Magazine*. But it was also due to shifts in economic structure and land distribution. While families accustomed to working for their living were slowly rising in class—merchants, bankers, and

lawyers—the general size of cultivated grounds was diminishing into much more manageable pieces.

Since the early modern period, household manuals had dictated that a woman's reign ought to be in or near the house, but that outdoor realms belonged to men. Thus, the enormity of the eighteenth-century landscape park would have been considered a space far too open for a woman to design and cultivate by herself. However, with the rise of the middle class and the population shift brought on by the industrial revolution, large estates were giving way to smaller suburban villa gardens. A happy medium between the fenced-in kitchen or flower garden and the open park, villa gardens allowed women to get out in the open and put their hands and their knowledge to work, in a setting still respectably close and connected to the house.

There was some dispute among landscape architects as to whether females actually possessed enough artistic taste and understanding of mathematics to lay out a successful garden, but J.C. Loudon, so critical of the lack of taste in many of the gardens he observed around England, believed that the introduction of females to garden design would accomplish nothing but good. In the 1838 *Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, he remarked:

There is scarcely such a thing to be found as a lady who is not fond of flowers; but it is not saying too much to affirm that there are very few ladies indeed who are competent to lay out a garden; though the skill required to do so is in the capacity of every woman who can cut out, and put together, the different parts of a female dress [...] We venture to assert that there is not a mantua-maker or milliner, who understands her business, that might not, in a few hours, be taught to design flower gardens with as much skill and taste as a professional landscape-gardener; and so as to produce incomparably better results than are now generally to be seen in the flower-gardens of the greater majority of British country residences. (qtd. in Howe 55)

Following her husband's lead, Jane encouraged her readers to try their own designs in laying out gardens, given a few practical caveats intended to cultivate taste.

Asserting her own opinion on the lofty subject of aesthetics was in fact one of the most interesting and important ways Loudon reclaimed the woman's place in the garden. A discourse that had not readily accepted female authority, aesthetics and design nevertheless figure prominently in several passages of her work, engaging with esoteric concepts usually reserved for highly educated men. And of course, in entering that conversation, Loudon invited her female readers to do the same.

On a basic level, her argument lies in notes on color and variety. While several trends in early Victorian gardening were roundly criticized by the 1870's for their garish tendencies, Frank Clark reminds us that these practices had genuine merit in their time, appealing to "the traditional floricultural interest of the artisan classes, [...] to their curiosity, their interest in novelties, and their attraction for colourful display" (37). Good designs, in Loudon's definition, utilized those characteristics.

Part of her life's work had been helping her husband study and spread word of new horticultural developments, and most of his writing praised variety and abhorred monoculture. Not surprisingly, so does hers. "Where a small space, even of a quarter of an acre, is to be made the most of," she wrote, "there should seldom be more than one or two trees, shrubs, or plants of exactly the same kind" (GFL 328). With so many new kinds of plants coming into the country, no self-respecting horticulturist would want to be without them. Botanical variety was the order of the day.

The same principles extended to garden ornament. J.C. Loudon had become well known for advocating the "Gardenesque" style, which privileged the grouping of

different kinds of trees and shrubs. As Jane argued in *Gardening for Ladies and Companion to the Flower Garden*, the Gardenesque could also be applied to architectural objects. She explained, "A pleasure ground in modern times differs from that prevalent at any former period, in including all the scenes and sources of enjoyment and recreation of the ancient style as well as the modern." It might feature terraces full of vases and statues, and "beyond this, or connected with it to the right and left, there may be a lawn with flowers, shrubs, groups of trees, ponds, lakes, rockwork, summerhouses, or greenhouses, an orangery, and sometimes a botanic garden." Shrubberies would be formed into arboretums "containing all the hardy trees and shrubs which the extent of the scene will admit of," and as for structural objects, "there is scarcely an architectural object capable of being rendered ornamental, and a shelter from the sun, the wind, or the rain, which may not find a place." Along with classical temples, Loudon particularly suggested rustic structures, such as "woodhouses, mosshouses, roothouses, rockhouses, cyclopean cottages, and Swiss cottages" [328].

Such a hodgepodge seems quite overwhelming to the modern reader, but even in her day Loudon argued that pains should be taken to integrate such variety seamlessly into the garden. Therefore, artistic feeling and sensitivity to color ought to prevail not only in choosing flowers, but in selecting garden ornaments. *Gardening for Ladies and Companion to the Flower Garden* has this to say about seats:

There should always be some kind of analogy between the seat and the scene of which it forms a part; and for this reason rustic seats should be confined to rustic scenery; and the seats for a lawn or highly kept pleasure-ground ought to be of comparatively simple and architectural forms, and either of wood or stone, those of wood being frequently painted of a stone colour, and sprinkled over with silver sand before the paint is dry, to give them the appearance of stone.[...] In general, all seats should be of a stone colour, as harmonizing best

with vegetation. Nothing can be more unartistical than seats painted a pea-green, and placed among the greens of living plants. (369)

The point of the passage lies not so much in the color of the seats as in the principle of harmonizing art with nature. The “proper” balance between wilderness and artifice in landscape gardening had been under debate since the previous century. In Capability Brown’s time, designers preferred pristine gardens meant to represent unfallen nature. But by the 1790s designers had begun to replace the “shaven lawns and elegant streams” with less pristine designs meant to replicate nature more faithfully (Elliott 7). The trend progressed to the extent that some designers even modeled their paths and walks on the tracks of animals.

Loudon spoke out against such practice, making an argument instead for the importance of clear and definite lines in art. In a passage from *Gardening for Ladies and Companion to the Flower Garden* she explained:

To imitate [sheep tracks] would be to copy vulgar nature; and therefore art refines on these lines by rendering them more definite and elegant. In short, by exhibiting in them a choice of form or line for its own sake; because of the various lines or parts of lines found in accidental footpaths, or in the tracks of hares, some must be more agreeable to the eye than others, and it is only these agreeable parts which are to be imitated, and combined in garden scenery. All this is founded on the recognition of a principle, which is or ought to be the foundation of all the fine arts; viz., that nature is to be imitated, not to be copied. (407)

Her opinion was shaped in part by her husband, since his recommendations on style read in much the same manner. But translated into her voice, and appearing in her books, the advice reads with a different tenor. It is a mark of her strength, confidence, and dedication to her vision that she would assert such decided opinions on such a philosophical subject.

She spent equal time, however, persuading other women they could do the same by drawing upon their God-given female gifts. According to Loudon, women naturally possessed more of that most crucial and indefinable quality of *taste*, a quality much needed and too often ignored in the laying out of grounds. The science of color having been recently introduced, she had definite ideas about color schemes in bedding plants—and about the need for women particularly to govern the choosing of suitable colors. In laying out parterres, for example, she argued that

the colours should be arranged so that those which are adjoining each other should be contrasts; and those which occupy corresponding parts of the same figure should be the same. [...] The colors which contrast with one another are generally well-known, particularly to ladies; such as blue and yellow, orange and purple, red and green, &c; and in practice any two colours which do not contrast well naturally, may be brought together or near each other by the intervention of white, or of a very dark colour approaching to black. [...] The laying out and planting of parterres should always be attended to by the ladies of the place, because it requires a degree of taste and artistical feeling which is very seldom to be found among some gardeners to a sufficient extent; and which, indeed, can hardly be expected in many of them. (GFL 311)

The same advice held true in the ornamentation of gardens with “rustic work,” or the making of urns, baskets, or trellises from such common materials as barrels, rope, or old tea chests. In addition to offering readers some designs for such work, Loudon praised the particular artistry and taste of women. She wrote in an issue of the 1841 *Ladies' Magazine of Gardening* (a short-lived periodical she conducted that year):

To the credit of my own sex, I may add, that the handsomest I have seen have all been designed by ladies. It appears, indeed, as though the elegance of female taste were peculiarly adapted for the designing garden-ornaments for the reception of things so lovely and so elegant in themselves as flowers; and I have no doubt that many of my fair readers, if they were to take the trouble to sketch designs, might have garden ornaments formed at a small expense, far superior to any they could purchase. (101)

This passage shows an interesting mix of conservative and progressive values regarding the role of women. Though not a true-blue feminist, Loudon managed to challenge the boundaries of appropriate female behavior while maintaining the highest level of respectability. In her definition, gardening could fit seamlessly into the ideal picture of domesticity, as shown by the mother and child on the frontispiece of *Gardening for Ladies*. Jane encouraged her female readers to design rustic work, reminding them that by doing so not only would they make their homes and gardens lovelier, but they would do so economically, as all good housewives should.

Loudon did persuade more women to design, but it was probably not difficult since design grew naturally from such refined “accomplishments” as flower arranging and landscape sketching. Getting women outdoors for some hands-on experience was a challenge, and perhaps Loudon’s greatest achievement was the way she broadened acceptable



Frontispiece of *Gardening for Ladies* (Howe 97)

upper/middle class housewife role to include the dirty work.

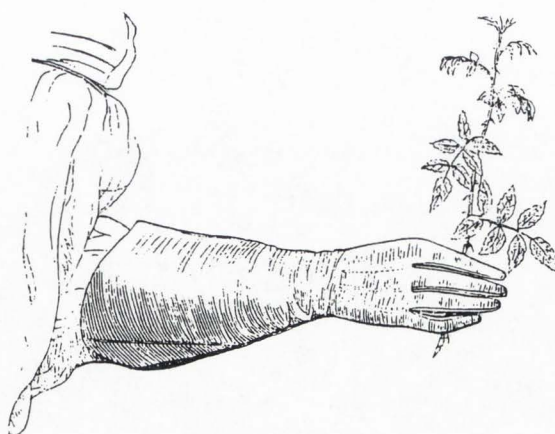
It was clear from the first chapter of *Gardening for Ladies* that the gardening Loudon expected her lady readers to do was indeed the real thing. Moreover, she took the time to persuade her audience that the real thing was indeed the most satisfying.

Consider this passage:

The uses of digging having been thus explained, it is now necessary to say something of its practice, and particularly of its applicability to ladies. It must be confessed that digging appears at first sight, a very laborious employment, and one peculiarly unfitted to small and delicately formed hands and feet; but, by a little attention to the principles and mechanics and the laws of motion, the labour may be much simplified and rendered comparatively easy. (7)

The passage shows how well Loudon worked within accepted social paradigms; she did not challenge delicacy as a desired characteristic among high-class women, but she showed that gardening did not have to interfere with that delicacy. Unseemly and indecorous labor could be avoided by attention to scientific principles, and fresh air and exercise—including digging—would do nothing but refresh and revive the spirit.

To further entice women to labor with their own hands, Loudon stressed the proper use of tools. Of primary importance was a “suitable spade,” which by her definition meant a strong metal head with a slender willow handle, smaller in size than a man’s spade. Clothing would include clogs or strong shoes, and stiff leather gauntlets (of which she recommended a



Glove recommended in *Gardening for Ladies*

type designed by Miss Perry of Stroud, which covered most of the forearm as well). And, "as few ladies are strong enough to throw the earth from the heap where it was laid from the first furrow to the last," females could rely on a small wheelbarrow (9-11).

It was probably true in the 1840s that the lifestyle of most upper-class women would have rendered them physically weaker than men. The smaller spades and the wheelbarrows were therefore practical and useful. More important, however, is their symbolic function. Proper, demure women would have been embarrassed to show too much strength, or to undercut the masculinity of their husbands by exercising too much. Thus, Loudon's recommendation of tools and apparel must have appeared just and tasteful—a promise that when properly outfitted, female gardeners could retain feminine respectability. "All this was virgin ground for delicately nurtured ladies of the professional classes, whose soft white hands in lavender and lemon kid gloves had never yet come into contact with rude earth, let alone with strong-smelling cow or horse dung," writes Bea Howe (75). And yet Loudon continued boldly, explaining each practice rationally and thoroughly. The subtleties of using manure, making hot-beds, sowing seeds, watering and grafting, transplanting, and even the complicated, manly art of pruning, all found a place in her manual.

One of the reasons she was able to get away with such radical advice was that both her personal life and her literary ethos were so unaffectedly ladylike. She herself upheld many of the beliefs of her time regarding appropriate male/female roles, remarking later in her career that "the paths of men and women are quite different; though both have duties to perform of perhaps equal consequence to the happiness of

the community. These duties are quite distinct” (qtd. in Howe 112). Despite supporting the separation of duties, however, Loudon did not see a need for the performance of them to be suffocating or over-regulated: when asked by her readers to recommend a book on etiquette she boldly proclaimed, “I do not believe any one to be of the slightest use. All that is required of a lady is to be simple and natural when she mixes in society, and then she will never disgrace herself or her friends” (qtd in Howe 116).

To Loudon, being “simple and natural” involved not only being intelligent and inquisitive, proactive and economical, but also meek and graceful as a woman, and affectionate and supportive as a wife. Her attitude is evident from the very first page of *Gardening for Ladies*, which bears this dedication:

To J.C. Loudon, Esq.
F.L.S., H.S., Z.S., Etc. Etc.
To whom the author of the following pages
owes all the knowledge of the subject she possesses,
this work is dedicated by his affectionate wife,
J.W.L.

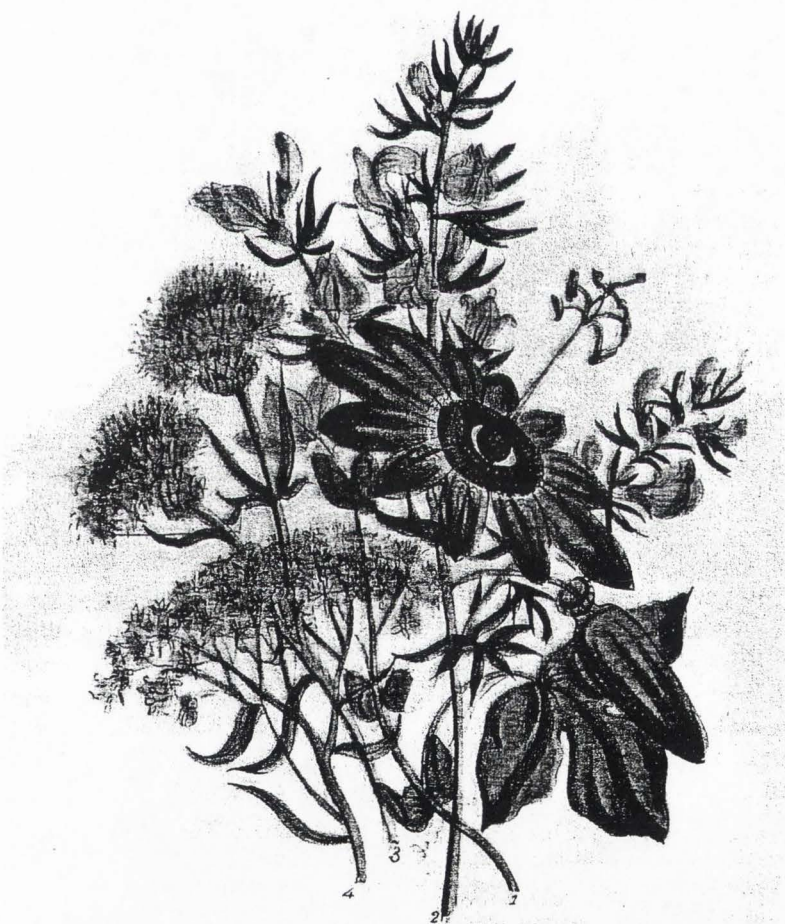
In a time when writing was still considered a rather questionable profession for a woman, Jane took care to establish her credibility not only as a humble authority on amateur gardening, but as a paragon of Victorian womanhood. She acknowledged and paid homage to her husband. She reminded readers of his titles and accomplishments. And while admitting openly to his superior knowledge of the subject and apparently placing him higher than herself in authority, she nevertheless asserted her own position of power. She was the affectionate wife. The word “affectionate” connotes equality and reciprocation. She was not merely “appreciative” or “respectful”—she certainly

fulfilled her role of attentive pupil, but we also assume that her husband depended on her for love and emotional support.

She paid him similar respects in her other books as well. The *Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden* featured a frontispiece of flowers all named after J.C. Loudon. The book was hers, but the tribute to his work and accomplishments would not have been lost on the audience. She thus showed her wifely devotion in

such a way that her writing became more respectable. An astute business move for certain, the inscriptions and dedications and subtle references gained readers trust because they believed they were also sincere.

Here was a respectable, intelligent, tasteful, compassionate,



1. *Passiflora Loudoniana* 2. *Adesmia Loudoniana*
3. *Perogon Loudoni* 4. *Loudonia aurea*.

Frontispiece to *Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden* showing flowers named after John Claudius Loudon (Howe 112).

morally upright, and married wife and mother, showing women how to take their place in the garden. She embodied every middle-class value one could want in 1840.

Armed with such credibility, it is no wonder she proved irresistible.

COTTAGERS, AMATEURS, AND SOCIAL PROGRESSIVISM

It was not just the world of gardening and design that Loudon extended: embedded in her work are a host of other issues and assertions regarding ethics, religion, and social politics. Victorian women wanted to participate in the exciting aspects of their rapidly changing world, but to risk marring the appearance of gentility was to risk everything. Class definitions were tenuous at best; the holy trinity of medieval gentility (birth, wealth, and land) was steadily giving way to the less quantifiable nobility of moral character. Women were particularly vulnerable to assaults on their gentility, since they were simultaneously accorded moral superiority and denied land and property rights; it was more unnatural for a woman to sin, and she had few other resources to compensate for mistakes. Thus, female participation in the grit of the real world had to be approached with caution and delicacy.

One of the ways Victorian women had been able to participate was through visiting and helping the poor. Since the middle classes maintained their position through demonstrations of their moral character, Christian-minded citizens spent a great deal of energy highlighting the depravity of the lower classes and planning ways to overcome it. A lady could simultaneously improve her character and her position in the eyes of society through her efforts to elevate the morals and morale of the poor. Unfortunately, since some of the motives were selfish, and some views of the problems simplistic, much of this charity work became merely misguided and ineffectual lip service: preachy rhetoric that did little but reinforce stereotypes and strengthen class boundaries.

Jane Loudon's writing seems to accomplish the opposite. Her no-nonsense style was a part of her moral code. In presenting the wonders of science cleanly and clearly, not clouding them with shallow, false, or sanctimonious lectures, she hoped to give her readers knowledge such that they would "be able to judge for themselves, and to adapt their practice to the circumstances in which they may be placed" (*Gardening for Ladies* xi). She clearly expected her readers to be moral people—to take responsibility for their own education just as she had, and to use knowledge for the good of mankind.

This expectation helps explain her specific avoidance of manipulative religious rhetoric. From a young age she had been aware of religious fervor's potential and tendency to carry over into unrighteous dominion. The opening chapter of *The Mummy!* imagined a world where

the religion of the country had altered with its government. Atheism, rational liberty, and fanaticism, had followed each other in regular succession; and the people found, by fatal experience, that persecution and bigotry assimilated as naturally with infidelity as with superstition. A fixed government seemed to require an established religion; and the multitude, ever in extremes, rushed from excess of liberty to intolerance. [7]

In her novel, the England of the 22nd century had settled, for the time, on Catholicism—fairly radical, coming from an authoress of the early nineteenth century, the time period when George IV was denied the crown because of his Catholic mistress, and in a country with a long and bloody history of anti-Catholic persecution. Realizing that all religions potentially engender intolerance, Loudon's attitude seems to be that state religion was necessary only because sheep need a shepherd.

As for her own religious views, none of her writings mention much—and her husband, outspoken on the subject of religious tolerance, also seemed more concerned with moral uprightness than with particular denominations. J.C. Loudon had been a friend and admirer of Jeremy Bentham, whom he praised as “the greatest benefactor to mankind, in our opinion, that has ever lived since the commencement of the Christian era” (qtd. in Simo 247). Bentham’s utilitarian philosophies were by no means universally respected. The codification of pleasure and pain and the belief that religion was an outmoded superstition were ideas roundly criticized by several notable critics including Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and Charles Dickens, and considered philistine, narrow-minded, or dangerous by the general public (Simo 247).

Nevertheless, J.C. Loudon found great inspiration in Bentham’s “greatest happiness principle,” the belief that one finds greatest happiness in the promotion of the happiness of others, and that a morally correct action would prove the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people. The principle appealed to his progressive sense of government, education, and social welfare, and found direct application in his architectural and landscape designs for the metropolis, which included boulevards, greenbelts or “breathing places,” glasshouses, and national gardens (Simo 248).

Jane Loudon seems to have taken the greatest happiness principle to heart as well. She had always been concerned for the poor. Howe explains that during her girlhood in Worcestershire, Jane “had first-hand knowledge of the distress encountered in many a rustic hovel round her home. Her tender heart had been touched, and she tried all her life to bring about a better living standard for the working-classes” (35).

She visited the families in one or two-room, mud-floor cottages. She saw the stunted and pale children growing up on near-starvation diets of potatoes and barley bread. And so, from the outset of her career and contemporary to the first installments of *Gardener's Magazine*, her writing manifests an interest in social and political morality. In *The Mummy!*, the twenty-second century still has a working class, but one with leisure time to spend in cultivating the arts; the urban housewife's lot is made easier through various gadgets including coffee-makers that roast, grind, and pour a perfect cup with just the right amount of warm milk added; and the poor dairymaid's hands are spared chilblains by, of course, the introduction of steam-powered milking machines (Howe 34-36).

What began as girlhood distress with fantastic solutions was nourished and strengthened over the years she assisted her husband in his work. In transcribing the concrete plans he set out, Jane Loudon must have gained hope that real improvement was possible. In her words, "there never lived a more liberal and thoroughly public-spirited man than Mr. Loudon" ("An Account" 11). And since Jane Loudon was his sole amanuensis and every work published under his name passed literally through her hands, there can be no doubt she was of similar mind.

Like Jane, J.C. Loudon was deeply concerned for the plight of the poor, and was constantly advocating plans for their welfare. Through the first decades of the century, the condition of the poor had grown steadily worse, and he believed it was within the power of gardeners to make a difference. He became one of the first and foremost advocates of teaching basic horticulture to country labourers (cottage gardening in other words) beginning as early as 1826.

But it was an uphill battle. In 1827 J.C. Loudon recorded, "The agricultural labourers, in many parts of the country, are in such a wretched state of ignorance and degradation, that to look at their cottages, habiliments, and weekly wages, one would think them incapable of any degree of refinement" (*Gardener's Magazine* 2:24-25). The close of the eighteenth century still savored a taste for the picturesque, which morphed into a cult of romanticism and medievalism in the nineteenth. As John Woodforde explains, "For the majority of the ruling classes [...], broken-down cottages and their underfed inhabitants were accepted in the 1840's and long after as desirable ornaments of the countryside" (5). The cottages, so often idealized in painting and poetry, were generally no better than shacks in appalling states of disrepair, and often sheltering more than one family.

In 1839 the House of Lords suggested that "the state of the Nation's rural cottages might have something to do with an annual death toll from fevers twice as great as the slaughter suffered by the allied armies at Waterloo" (Woodforde 1), and as sanitary officials began to research that claim, the evidence was clear. In their *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* presented to the Home Secretary in 1842, the Poor Law Commissioners delivered "a monotonous catalogue of scabrous floors, heaps of ordure, open sewers, polluted wells, and windows stuffed with rags" (1).

Finally the situation was so alarmingly bad that it was becoming everybody's business. Jane Loudon played an important part in the alleviation, partly because twenty years earlier, her husband had made the poor the business of gardeners, both professional and amateur. Gardening would be the answer! Not only would the

gardening poor be able to put some extra food on the table, their minds would be quickened with botany, physiology, and even art. In 1822 J.C. Loudon wrote in *An Encyclopedia of Gardening* that “to the labourer who has no cottage or garden, human life presents no hopes” and hence, “In a moral and political point of view, cottage gardens are of obvious importance; by attaching a gardener to his home and to his country, by inducing sober, industrious, and domestic habits; and by creating a feeling of independence which is the best security against pauperism” (1203).

These were admirable plans, but it was one thing to provide labourers with the means to grow their own gardens, and quite another to teach them how to do it. But who would provide the instruction? J.C. Loudon argued, “There is scarcely any person fond of gardening, and of promoting the comfort of his fellow-creatures, who might not do something. The humblest individual might give away seeds or plants, and, wherever he saw them, commend neatness and good crops, and blame slovenliness.” Clergymen could do the commending and blaming, while village clubs might give instructions verbally and in print. The wealthy could give away extra seeds and plants and sponsor gardening competitions with cash prizes for their labouring tenants. “We recommend such gardeners as can do it,” he pleaded, “to hint the thing in a proper manner to their masters, and especially to their mistresses, and the young ladies of the family” (*Gardener’s Magazine* 1: 276-77).

Since Loudon believed that the general despondence was due to “the neglect and bad treatment of the superior classes” (*Gardener’s Magazine* 1:277), he was spurring them to action, hoping that if those in power would invest a little time, effort, and resources in the poor around them, much good could be accomplished. As the

Encyclopedia of Gardening stated, "In a state of labor and servitude, man is generally so dull and stupid, that almost every degree of refinement, or sensation beyond that of mere animal feeling, is lost on him." J.C. Loudon aimed to get man out of that state, working from the inside out. The basic idea was to provide sustainable means for cottagers to teach themselves, and so *Gardener's Magazine* often featured articles encouraging the establishment of public lending libraries and botanic gardens. However, as we have already discussed, much of the literature available was too technical to be readily understood and put into practice. Even J.C. Loudon's own *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture*, a landmark work published in 1833, seemed more accessible and applicable to more educated classes.

J.C. Loudon argued that while rich men may have been willing to give money to help the poor, "to supply instruction in plain, practicable economy, and patiently to follow it up till it becomes a habit in the instructed, is to effect a radical improvement in this condition of life" (1204). He worked tirelessly on this project for decades, but when one considers the sheer number of poverty-stricken, uneducated labourers there were, and how few knowledgeable gardeners with the spare time and resources to provide instruction, it is no wonder that progress was slow.

Jane Loudon must also have anguished over the issue, commiserating with her husband during the late nights in their library. And in 1841 she made her own landmark contribution: the publication of *Gardening for Ladies*. Finally someone was writing specifically for amateur gardeners, supplying the "instruction in plain, practicable economy" that had been so badly needed! The mistresses and young ladies of the family J.C. Loudon had encouraged to help fifteen years previously, were

precisely the target audience—and now they would be better equipped to provide charity that actually accomplished something. In the process of sharing their horticultural knowledge they would become more ladylike than ever.

Unlike her husband's writing, Jane Loudon's is not explicitly or overtly progressive. She did not set out to be a social reformer; the Loudons had debts to pay, so she identified a gap she could profitably fill. To avoid overstatement it must be acknowledged that her style of reform is subtle, as it had been since the beginning of her career. Alan Rauch argues that despite the social progressivism and general improvement in living conditions for all classes in *The Mummy!*, Loudon's "sense of reform is anything but radical and thus the social order and class system of the twenty-second century bears a striking resemblance to that of the early nineteenth century" (Rauch xiv). Her horticultural writings manifest the same kind of conservatism: on first glance they appear not to bother with issues of class or self-improvement at all. The ladies addressed in the titles of her books seem to be middle-class ladies similar in situation to herself, with similar access to comparable plots of land both in London and in the country.

Yet because her texts serve as the critical link between the admirable plans proposed by her husband, and the fulfillment of those plans, she must be considered a key player in social reform. Rather than preaching (or even suggesting) what ladies, cottagers, or gentlemen ought be doing, she assumed they were already interested, and then provided them with the instruction to get themselves started. Her approach thus seems less advocacy than invitation. Rather than presenting plans of action for improvement of the masses, she taught her audience to take part in activities that

previously were considered either beneath them (as in digging and manuring), or above them (as in botany and design). For all their subtlety and conservatism—or perhaps because of them—her works helped to bring about quite significant social change, in the development of a class of amateur gardeners of both sexes who came to depend upon her for practical, understandable gardening advice.

Throughout the rest of her life and career, Loudon continued to play an interesting part in the trends of social progressivism in gardening. By 1850 cottage gardening had increased in popularity to such a significant extent that it was practiced and discussed all over Great Britain and Ireland. As more horticultural magazines entered the market, targeting different audiences and pushing various agendas, the social significance of gardening—especially cottage gardening—began to change. And the rhetoric of garden writing changed with it.

Political climate played a part in this shift. England had escaped the rash of revolutions that spread across continental Europe in 1848, but citizens were nervous nevertheless. Gardening, with its patriotic connotations of homeland and empire, became the perfect antirevolutionary discourse. Some of Jane Loudon's books had been in circulation for almost ten years, their popularity and credibility firmly established. Her advice and encouragement to gardeners of all classes formed a natural hedge against revolution, since it allowed for apolitical and organic class navigation. According to her, people of any class could make beautiful gardens and reap the benefits, improving their own lives and the condition of the general public.

By 1850, however, various periodicals were echoing the message with a very different tone. Their antirevolutionary discourse aimed not for peaceful transition, but

for a system that kept people in place. Sentimentality and inflated language were nothing new in most publications, but it is interesting to consider that these long, flowery pontifications may actually have been used to reinforce stereotypes and class barriers. William Paul's 1849 *Remarks on the cultivation of tea-scented roses as conservatory climbers* praised the democratic Rose: "Who can contemplate with indifference the beauty, variety, and perfume of the Queen of Flowers, or who can fix a limit to the circle over whose affections she holds sway? Cherished alike by peer and peasant, her circle of admirers is wide as are the dominions of our beloved Sovereign—the Rose of England" (74). The passage is full of patriotic symbolism: the English rose, the brotherhood of man, the reaches of the empire. Though Paul claimed a democratic sentiment, he also invoked the mystique of royalty and class. He doesn't seem to be serious about unification; his sanctimonious and falsely humble tribute seems to point out merely that flower gardening was the mark of every polished society, and every unpolished society. Put simply, every savage can dance. Thus, while gentleman and labourer alike could contemplate the wonders of nature and come closer to God, that did not mean they should go to church in the same carriage.

Thus, horticultural magazines became the vehicles for some troublesome and condescending floral sermons designed to keep people gratefully in their places.

Consider this contrast. In 1841 Jane Loudon wrote:

I have often observed the healthy appearance of plants belonging to cottagers; and I believe it arises principally from the habit that most poor people have of setting their plants out in the rain whenever there is a shower. This not only clears the leaves of dust, and opens the stomata or breathing pores, but gives the plant abundance of light and fresh air. (*GFL* 80)

The passage came from a section on hothouse gardening, and kept its focus there.

Loudon seems merely to point out that the plants placed outdoors by necessity, actually benefit from the fresh air. In 1849 the columnist Flora wrote a similar argument, except that it changed focus from the garden to the gardener, thus creating a political statement. She explained:

I have often remarked how very luxuriantly both flowers and vegetables grow in the labourer's ground; a cottage nosegay, a cottage raspberry bush, a cottage cabbage, always seem sweeter and finer than those in larger gardens, and I have invariably made and heard the remark, that geraniums and other pot plants flourish better, and endure the winter more fearlessly, within the cottage lattice, than in the warm room and sheltered window of the lady amateur. Does it not seem as if the labours of the poor, as if their very pleasures, received a special blessing from Him who sanctified their humble state by choosing it as His own? And should not this thought make the cottage gardener not only contented with his lot, but deeply, unspeakably thankful that *he has* 'where to lay his head,' and diligent to improve those means that God has given him to support his wife and family? How many hours are wasted at the 'idle corner!' How many are guiltily spent at the beer-house! How many are as wickedly passed in wood-stealing! Which might be so usefully and happily employed in gardening and cultivating the willing soil, and raising those wholesome roots and fruits that might feed him so abundantly in winter. If the cottager would consider these daily occupations as part of his duty to God and man, his days would be longer, his sleep sweeter, his character fairer, and his profits an hundredfold.
(*The Cottage Gardener* 2:29)

Flora's argument dwells at length upon the lack of morality among the laboring classes and cites the civilizing effects of plants and flowers. Loudon used her remarks to praise the good sense of cottagers in airing their indoor plants once in awhile, but Flora used hers to patronize the poor and remind them that if only they cared for their gardens properly they would be (and indeed ought to be) content with their state in life. The integrity of Loudon's original argument for cottage gardening seems to have diminished into a superficial, empty echo, representing more interest in encouraging and preserving a nostalgic ideal than in implementing a practical plan of improvement

and relief. Both messages, therefore, can be considered antirevolutionary in context of the larger political situation, but they seem to have widely differing implications.

As already noted, Flora wrote for a magazine called *The Cottage Gardener*. The magazine proudly proclaimed that “whilst no gardener, we believe, will turn from our pages without receiving some ray of light, yet we shall especially trim our lamp for the amateur of moderate income, and the cottager” (1). Johnson was quick to qualify that statement, explaining that most of the entries were meant for those with gardens of “moderate extent,” but he did promise his magazine would avoid overuse of technical terms and stick to simple language.

In reality it is far more likely that *The Cottage Gardener* was bought and read primarily by the gentility and upper classes. The articles and plans suggested in its pages better suited upper-middle-class gardens at the very least, and only occasionally did the contributors throw a bone to actual cottagers. The definition of cottage gardening was clearly changing. Just as pastoral dwellings had been the fashion in watercolor painting, many among the upper classes also began setting up affectedly rustic cottages for themselves on their estates. As Woodforde explains, “The reality of the thatched cottage did not tarnish a cherished image of a place of contentment and healthy virtuous life,” an ideal which, according to William Howitt in 1838, “gave origin to some of the sweetest paradises in the world—the cottages of the wealthy and tasteful” (5).

Eventually, after twenty-five years of circulation, *The Cottage Gardener* did admit its inaccuracy and switch names to *The Journal of Horticulture* but not without objection from its patrons. One wrote in favor of the change, pointing out that the

magazine circulated more widely than any other among professionals and the gentry and that “when quoted from, there is not much dignity in your appended name.” But many others unhappily protested, with comments such as “People won’t know you in a fine silk and satin dress. Stick to the corduroy and good Yorkshire broadcloth.”

Perhaps the most telling contributor offered: “I have little doubt that since your first appearance many a cottage gardener has, by his industry, perseverance, and your aid, become a country gentleman; but of this I am certain—that you have taught many a country gentleman the pleasure and advantage of being a cottage gardener” (*Journal of Horticulture* 1). Readers obviously liked the idea of being identified with the lower classes of society, and had few ethical qualms with, as Robert Southey put it, “aping humility.”

Thus, there are two trends at work here. While on the one hand reformers like the Loudons were using gardening as a means to improve and empower the demoralized lower classes, the upper and middle classes were also turning to gardening because it made them feel in touch with the common man. While the Loudons were using gardening literature to spur their middle-class compatriots to action that would genuinely improve quality of life for the poor, other writers used it as a self-lauding excuse for passing judgment on them. Politics were bringing classes closer than ever before—too close for comfort according to some—and so the rhetoric of some horticultural literature was doing its best to keep them separate. People from different classes liked the appearance of equality, the sound of it on their lips and the hints of it in their hobbies. However, gardening literature in the 1850s also served as an opiate for the masses—a way in which the upper classes could congratulate themselves on

their humble magnanimity while reminding the lower classes of the joy they ought to feel in the "simple pleasures" of life.

Despite this alarming trend, Jane Loudon continued her subtle but effective attention to social reform throughout the remainder of her writing career. In 1849, the same year *The Cottage Gardener* was featuring Flora's column so proudly, Jane had left horticultural writing and taken up work as chief editor of *The Ladies' Companion: At Home and Abroad*, a high-minded ladies journal launched by publishers Bradbury and Evans. The character of the magazine signals the shift in general reading taste that was beginning to take place at mid-century; though some readers enjoyed the patronizing angle taken by some periodicals, others were anxious for something more substantial. The "hungry forties" had made their mark, and many female readers were seeking sources that would improve both them and society. According to Howe, "During the years after young Queen Victoria had ascended the throne, a different note came to be struck in reading circles, largely brought about by the fact that ladies, on the whole, were becoming more serious-minded than previously. Slowly but persistently their attention was being drawn to the sad plight of the less well-off members of their sex" (109).

Bradbury and Evans saw their opportunity to publish to this new audience, personally invited Loudon to conduct and edit the magazine. Her background and character made her an ideal coordinator of the task. Not only had she assisted her husband in his work and written numerous books of her own, but she also had been a hard-working woman herself. Her characteristically unsentimental writing, therefore, shows genuine sympathy for female labourers of lower classes. Howe points out, "an

important feature of *The Ladies' Companion* would, in future, draw notice to 'the Causes of those Females who are compelled to Labour, whether mentally or bodily, for their daily bread'" (113). No female breadwinner was excluded from Loudon's notice, from governesses and sewing-women, to spinsters and old maids, to female emigrants and even prostitutes. Howe states that "she felt pity for them all and tried to ameliorate their lot by drawing her readers' attention to it" (113).

Loudon endeavored to keep the nature of the magazine strictly non-political and non-religious, in contrast to her husband, whose political views and calls for action in various areas of public domain were prodigiously apparent in his writings, particularly in *Gardener's Magazine*. However, in its pages she continued to stress the necessity for mental cultivation especially among females, "not to make women usurp the place of men, but to render them as rational and intelligent beings" (qtd in Howe 112). Howe explains that "In the same way that her husband had used *The Gardener's Magazine* as a platform on which to air his views in regard to bettering the working conditions and home-life of old and young gardeners, so Loudon used *The Ladies' Companion* to 'improve the minds of her women readers by showing them more varied aspects of life than were commonly known to them'" (112).

Once again, Loudon was reaching out to a female audience that was ready and eager to be taught. And once again she was teaching them principles that would empower and enlighten them, and help them do the same for their families and communities. Though she never set out to be a social reformer, it seems obvious in retrospect that simply by writing with integrity, Jane Loudon truly played a significant role in the movement.

CUTTING EDGE: LOUDON AND ECOLOGY

So far we have seen Loudon extending the female sphere from the house to the garden to the neighborhood. Working subtly and cannily within a conservative framework, she proved the respectability of gardening by showing its connection to family and motherhood, judicious housekeeping, patriotism, and charity work. Through the masculine scientific discourse she adapted to achieve these ends, she eventually led her readers even further outside the domestic sphere. Amid the frenzy of industrialization and urbanization, of colonization and empire, she helped women engage with critical issues of land ethic and stewardship over Nature.

In other words, she not only grafted gardening onto previously acceptable female practices, but also used it to discuss cutting-edge theories and ideas. Ecology was still a fledgling concept in the mid-nineteenth century: the word *ecology* did not actually enter the English lexicon until 1873. Our present western European idea of human connectedness to Nature has evolved only slowly, as we have begun to shape and affect land on a large scale. At the time Loudon wrote, new technologies had been significantly changing methods of farming in Europe, particularly since the latter part of the seventeenth century. Lynn White, Jr., explains that the heavier soils of Northern Europe led industrious peasants to convert the two-ox scratch plow (common in lighter soils of the Mediterranean) to a much more violent version—one that cut the furrow, sliced under the sod, and turned it over with a moldboard, attacking the land with such force that it required eight oxen to pull it. Since no peasant owned eight oxen, people pooled their resources and changed the system from subsistence farming to community

farming—a significant ideological shift in resource management, in which “distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth.” While man had once been part of nature, he was now the exploiter of nature, a fact that White relates to the later attitudes about technology that emerged from Western civilization. He writes, “Nowhere else in the world did farmers develop any analogous agricultural implement. Is it coincidence that modern technology, with its ruthlessness toward nature, has so largely been produced by descendants of these peasants of northern Europe?” (8).

Jane Loudon, writing amid the industrial revolution, seems aware of the complications White suggests. The picture she painted in *The Mummy!* shows a combined fascination and distaste for the new technologies and treatments of land. Though she wrote only two years after the coming of the first railways, she clearly anticipates the exploitative capacity of industry. Her twenty-second century earth was “brought to the highest pitch of cultivation; every corner of it was explored; mountains were leveled, mines were excavated, and the globe racked to its center. Nay, the air and sea did not escape, and all nature was compelled to submit to the overwhelming supremacy of Man” (3-4).

It seems strange, at first, that one so concerned about “the highest pitch of cultivation” would later write gardening manuals. It was the science of botany and horticulture, however, which provided the first stirrings of a solution to the problem. Gardeners in the nineteenth century were expected to have more working knowledge of horticultural science than any time previous, and while they may not have realized the

long-term effects of some of their practices, they were seeking the information that would make them more responsible stewards of nature.

Loudon's attitude on that subject had been influenced by the same ideals as her attitude toward the poor: a belief that it lay within the power of everyday people, including women, to effect positive change. Alan Rauch claims that, loyal to the progressivist attitude of the knowledge industry, Loudon supported the belief that progress must be good if its object was to advance civilization—that she and many of her contemporaries “saw no inconsistency between scientific improvement and the broader hope of the Christian ethic to improve the human lot.” In Loudon's words, invention and discovery were “‘the blessings of civilization’ and there could be no benefit in letting them ‘slip away’” (Rauch xix). She was highly invested in the business of dispersing these inventions and discoveries, in the “genuine hope that a world linked by science and technology would share common values if not common knowledge” (xxi). One of those common values was a love and respect for Nature—not just in the philosophic sense, but also in the scientific. Loudon's writing demonstrates an awareness of several movements in proto-ecology: specifically, how the human act cultivation affects plants and animals, and how plants and animals contribute to the mental and social health of humans.

Loudon's sense of stewardship did admit respect for technology and science. The opening chapter of *Gardening for Ladies*, “Stirring the Soil,” admits to the need for plowing (though a garden, particularly a small-scale garden in which the lady might actually be doing some of the work herself, is obviously much different than plowing a field for crops), but also points out the reasons for it and some of its effects. “When

manure is applied," she writes, "the ground is generally well dug, in order to mix the manure intimately with the soil: and when the soil appears worn out, or poisoned with excrementious matter, from the same kinds of plants being too long grown in it, it is trenched." She goes on to explain the procedure for turning the soil, but then offers a caveat: "These partial uses of digging should, however, always be applied with great caution, as in some cases manure does better laid on the surface [...] and there are cases when, from the sub-soil being of an inferior quality, trenching must be manifestly injurious" (15).

Soil must be stirred so roots will have room to grow. It must be manured so those roots can absorb food. In a garden, at least, human intervention was necessary for the survival of plants—especially those new species of plants that were arriving in England from foreign climes. Loudon welcomed new, exotic, or improved plant materials in her garden. Her husband once remarked to her, "If we had only confined ourselves to herbaceous plants from the first instead of growing three thousand species, then we might have had ten thousand plants in our limited space!" (Howe 67).

The number is intimidating, especially when one considers that many of the new species plants were imported and required all kinds of special attention for their survival and propagation. In fact, it was at precisely this time that several of the plants now considered staples of the suburban garden first arrived in England: the geranium, the shizanthus, the petunia. The country was becoming connected to a bigger Nature than it ever had before. The far reaches of the British Empire were fertile ground for zealous botanical exploration. For instance, in the late eighteenth century Sir Joseph Banks had suggested that a network of colonial botanic gardens be established as bases

for plant-hunting. His idea was accepted and developed throughout the Victorian period, creating an imperial network of gardens across the globe, with the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in the center. The system was so successful that by 1880 the curator of Kew could describe a botanic garden as one "in which a vast assemblage of plants from every accessible part of the earth's surface is systematically cultivated" (McCracken xiii).

Coming from a variety of climates, most of them quite unlike cool, moist Great Britain, these plants would survive only with a gardener's particular care and understanding of scientific fundamentals. Loudon's works reflect that shift: *Gardening for Ladies* features a chapter on the making of hot-beds, which rely on the heat produced by fermenting dung to raise the temperature of the soil. Already a common practice for such delicacies as melons and cucumbers, the use of hot beds was becoming increasingly important for the range of tender exotic flowers.

These were also popularly grown indoors, and so Loudon included a chapter on the art of greenhouse gardening. Her discussions are characteristically straightforward: rather than pontificating on the joy of collecting wonders of the world in one's own conservatory, they seem to admonish the gardener sternly for not treating those wonders with enough respect. She takes some time to remind her readers of every plant's basic needs for air, water, and light. Consider the following passage:

Another reason why plants kept in rooms are generally unhealthy, is, that they are watered in a very irregular manner. Sometimes they are suffered to become so dry that the mould in which they grow will crumble under the pressure of the finger, and the spongioles of the roots are quite withered; and then a profusion of water is given to them, quite cold from the pump, through they have probably been standing in a temperature of from 60 to 70. As a climax, part of this water is suffered to remain in the saucer for a day or two, till even the

healthy part of the root is thoroughly chilled, and the plant, if of a delicate nature, is destroyed. The reverse of all this should be the case. (*GFL* 81)

She provides specific instructions on caring for different greenhouse plants – camellias, verbenas, fuschias – since many of them require individual treatment. Thus, it seems she was teaching her readers not only to admire plants, but also to *value* them—not just for their rarity or high price, but for the wonder of their existence and their functions as living things. She was teaching her readers to become responsible stewards.

It is true that the market for exotic plants was already well established, but it must again be noted that Loudon was reaching out a whole new corner of it.

Gardening for Ladies was published in the same year that Sir William Hooker became director of Kew Gardens and began asserting its dominion over other botanical institutions in the British Isles. It was the beginning of a revival: Kew had fallen into disrepair during the Regency period, and was only saved by John Lindley's report to parliament in 1838, which stated that the Gardens ought to have both an imperial and a domestic role.

Following that suggestion, Hooker and his successors strove to popularize botany both at home and in the empire (McCracken 18), and Loudon played a large role in that movement. Between 1841 and 1843 she published six more works on botany and flower gardening, including separate treatments of ornamental annuals, bulbous plants, and perennials. In 1846 she published *British Wild Flowers*, and *The Ladies' Flower Garden* of ornamental greenhouse plants came out in 1848. She seemed equally interested in the preservation and cultivation of native and nonnative species, and the popularity of her books suggests that to a certain extent she was able to

spread her ideals to society. Loudon was making it possible for a very large chunk of the population to learn how the elements of nature interconnected.

Animals also entered the picture. While no gardener enjoys having her hard-earned fruit and flowers marred or devoured by insects, snails, or other pests (“the destruction they effect in some seasons in small gardens is almost beyond the bounds of credibility,” she wrote), Loudon moderated that horror with a love for and understanding of balanced ecosystems. Protect your plants, she seemed to say, but not to the extent you wantonly destroy other things. According to her instructions on “destroying insects” from *Gardening for Ladies*, lady-bird beetles should always be spared because they feed on aphids. Birds do little injury other than stealing fruit occasionally, and most of them do good by feeding on insects. Plus, they sing—and “a few cherries and currants are a cheap price to pay for their delightful songs” (*GFL* 75).

Even Loudon’s description of the lackey moth, an insect notoriously destructive in both its larval and adult state, is tempered with a respect for Nature’s connections.

In another rare show of religious feeling, she wrote:

Did all these insects live to become moths, they would completely destroy not only our gardens, but our forests, as they feed on almost every kind of tree; but with that beautiful arrangement by which all the works of our Great Creator are balanced equally with each other, and none allowed to predominate, these insects are such favourite food for birds, that not a hundredth part of them are suffered to reach maturity. (76)

Humans, she seemed to argue, need to learn to live within that balance, especially since for some pests, there was simply no practical solution. Consider the following section on hares and rabbits from *Gardening for Ladies and Companion to the Flower Garden*:

Hares and Rabbits do a great deal of mischief to flower gardens, as they are very fond of devouring many flowering plants—particularly Pinks and

Carnations. [...] Some persons sow parsley near their Carnations, in the hope that the hares will eat that in preference; but it often proves injurious, as the smell of the parsley attracts more hares than would otherwise discover the carnations, and thus the parsley being soon devoured, the carnations are completely destroyed. (242)

The passage highlights more human folly than anything, yet Loudon seems to bear the rabbits no ill will. Perhaps it was part of the reverence she held for nature—that part of the joy in working a garden derived from realizations that Nature was much too large and complex for any human to control. Perhaps it was that reverence for nature was a good antidote to urban revolution.

Loudon's stance is interesting, considering that movements of the industrial revolution were asserting more human dominion over Nature. And yet, complications of that industry were also showing that dominion to be taking its toll, not just on the environment but also on the mental and physical health of humans. Cottagers living in rural shacks were little better off than tenement-dwellers in industrial cities. Poverty and despondence increased, along with crime rates. Coal dust hung in clouds over every major town. The fields and flowers of the countryside seemed a separate world entirely, one factory workers longed for but could scarcely imagine attaining. Something was definitely wrong, and people were beginning to look back to nature to restore the balance. Connectedness was not only a question of what humans should be doing to care for Nature, but one of what Nature could do to heal humans.

By the time these problems reached public attention, urban green space was already at a high premium. Most towns had gloomy squares here and there, but those were usually too small to shut out any street noise, or to host any other activity than walking. The idea of the public park did not catch on until the 1830's. Between 1830

and 1842 public parks received much attention due to the general hope that some open space might relieve the increasingly depressed, disheartened, immoral, and unruly working classes that were filling city slums. One of the Bishop of London's priests, a hopeful advocate of parks, explained that parks might ease the situation because "they, who might otherwise have been absolutely pent up and stifled in the smoke and din of their enormous prison may take breath in our parks to satisfy that inextinguishable love for nature and fresh air and the bright face of the sun" (Clark 31). By 1848 enough people believed in the concept to bring about legislation. The Public Health Act of 1848 provided for the establishment of 'Public Walks' and 'means of exercise for the middle and humbler classes'" (31).

And exercise was only the beginning, because Victorians believed in personal progress through knowledge of science. The first parks were envisioned not just as green spaces but also as schools. Botanical gardens and arboretums made up a large number of parks in the earliest stages of the movement (Clark 35). Both Loudons played an important role in this development; J.C. Loudon's design for the Derby Arboretum was probably the single most important progenitor of what would become the public park, and works like Jane Loudon's were important to the success and utility of these gardens to the general public. Because of *Botany for Ladies* those women less inclined to get their hands dirty could nevertheless enjoy the fully colored drawings of ornamental annuals, bulbs, and perennials, and then surprise themselves by recognizing some of the flowers during an afternoon stroll. Those who enjoyed gardening could read up, and then take an outing to the botanic garden to identify and inquire about the specimens they had studied.

At long last, the many recommendations on the healthful benefits of yard work were being taken to heart on a large scale, and showing definite results. In 1842, a clause in an Enclosure Act saved portions of common land to be let out as quarter-acre allotments for one pound a year. Frank Clark explains that these were popular “not only with artisans who were said to have preferred cultivating plants to ‘exchanging game cocks and bartering away their dogs,’ but also with the authorities as they tended to lower rates by lowering the poor rates.” In 1852, evidence given before the Committee of Public Houses claimed that in Leeds, “a Rational Recreation Association had been started, Botanical Gardens had been opened on Sundays, drunkenness was said to have decreased, and ‘manners improved.’” In Manchester, 1854, “the new Zoological gardens were ‘well-attended by persons who before had spent Sundays dog-fighting or playing pitch in beer houses.’” And in 1857, a speaker at the first conference of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science explained that “the death rate had fallen, bath houses had been installed and a public park bought, in which as many as 40 cricket matches were sometimes played on a single Saturday afternoon when the mills had closed. The opening of the park had been followed [...] by a remarkable decrease in crime” (Clark 34).

Loudon, of course, was confident in the therapeutic powers of gardening. Accordingly she was doing her part to get her readers not only out in the open, but also doing their own work. It was not always easy to convince proper, kid-gloved women to don their leather gauntlets and Hessian aprons and go out and hoe a row, but she coaxed them in reasonably:

a lady, with a small light spade may, by repeatedly digging over the same line, and taking out only a little earth at a time, succeed in doing, with her own hands, all the digging that can be required in a small garden, the soil of which, if it has been long in cultivation, can never be very hard, or very difficult to penetrate; and she will not only have the satisfaction of seeing the garden created, as it were, by the labour of her own hands, but she will find her health and spirits wonderfully improved by the exercise, and by the reviving smell of the fresh earth. [*GFL* 9]

There was a relationship there that Loudon saw and believed in. She saw connection between the elements of nature, and between nature and the human soul. Through her writing, the fledgling ideas of ecology reached a new readership. The women who had been cooped up indoors for so long, were given license and purpose to experience interconnectedness—to govern Nature responsibly, and recognize the mental and physical benefits of doing so.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Jane Loudon passed away in 1858 at the age of fifty, having survived her husband fifteen years but not having lived to see the marriage of her daughter. England was continuing its rapid pace of social, political, and industrial evolution—within a year Charles Darwin would release his *Origin of Species*, George Eliot would publish *Adam Bede*, and William Morris would commission Red House. In ten more years the Second Great Reform Bill would offer the vote to the working classes, Karl Marx would publish *Das Kapital*, and William Robinson's *The Wild Garden*, with its emphasis on hardy perennials instead of tender hothouse bedding plants, would rock the world of landscape design.

Amid the change, Loudon's readers remained devoted. Several new editions of her books were republished throughout the century. *Gardening for Ladies* found its way to the United States, promoted by the American landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing. In Paris, some of her works were deemed worthy additions to the Bibliothèque Nationale. In England, the utility of her instructions to both sexes was soon publicly acknowledged: *Gardening for Ladies* was published in 1869 as *Plain Instructions on Gardening*, and *The Ladies' Companion to the Flower Garden* became simply the *Companion to the Flower Garden*.

Thanks to Loudon's contributions, some of the most influential gardeners in the next hundred years of English history would be women. 1890 marked the first entrance of women into horticultural colleges. In 1892 Edith Chamberlain published *The Gentlewoman's Book of Gardening*, arguing, "This out-of-door occupation is the very

thing wanted for strengthening delicate girls" (209). Gertrude Jekyll would begin publishing her own books and designs in 1899, and become as important as Robinson in her advocacy for herbaceous borders. And in the 1930s, Vita Sackville-West would be famous for her one-color gardens at Sissinghurst.

But not all encouraging developments happened after Loudon's death. In her lifetime she was able to see many of her recommendations (and many of her husband's) become realities. The plight of the genuine cottager had become enough of a concern that at the Great Exhibition of 1851, Prince Albert himself presented designs for a block of cottages on the outskirts of Windsor. The *Builder* magazine, founded in 1842, printed designs for cottages and continued to do so for the next forty years. Public green spaces were improved, many of them being replanted, as J.C. Loudon had once suggested, with sycamores and plane trees in place of yews. And the position of head gardener had risen in status, enjoying a greater degree of honor during the second half of the nineteenth century than ever before or since.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was particularly exciting for Jane Loudon, since it featured such breathtaking new technological wonders. Many of the industrial models presented were not so very different from ones she had imagined in *The Mummy!* A collection of the latest agricultural implements and farm machinery included two new designs for lawnmowers, improvements upon the Budding model J.C. Loudon had promoted in 1831. And of course, the Crystal Palace itself was a wonder, and could hardly have been less grand than the castle she had envisioned in the novel she had written as a teenager.

In a short memoir Loudon wrote of her husband's life, she recorded:

It is curious, in turning over his memoranda, to find how many improvements suggested themselves to his active mind, which he was unable, from various circumstances, to carry into effect at that the time, but which, many years afterwards, were executed either by himself or by other persons. (Loudon, "An Account" 11)

Taking into account the many subjects she wrote about, and the opinions and advice she suggested in her career, the same thing might be said of her. From the unbelievable inventions in *The Mummy!* to the knowledgeable, scientifically and artistically minded female landscape designers implied in her gardening books, Loudon's proposals proved, over the years, not to be so outlandish after all.

And she helped bring them to reality through the merits and qualifications of her own personality and voice. Despite the fact that Loudon was never as blunt or adamant in expressing her views as her husband had been, and that in direct contrast to his writings her publications include very little that might be read as explicit cries for political and social reform, she continued to the end of her life to effect and encourage improvements in the lives and minds of her readers. John Claudius Loudon's opinions were so strong, so decided, and so ubiquitous and public that many historians seem to have classified her more subdued writings as mere echoes of his—as recitations from a dutiful and devoted pupil. But although Jane Loudon certainly admired her husband's strength of character, often quoted him in her publications, and never openly contradicted him in anything, her own writings display marked individuality and strength of character that show her to be an active, intelligent, woman of opinion. Simo points out, "If he taught her all she knew about gardening, Jane communicated her new knowledge on her own terms, in her own distinctly feminine voice," which

was less characterized by bold, sharp phrases than by good sense, elegance, and poetic feeling (274).

Jane Loudon may have been suspicious of state religions, of heavy-handed governments, of preachy rhetoric, and of the potential that scientific exploration and technological advancement have to undermine morality and encourage exploitation. But she believed in gardening. She worked tirelessly to collect and distribute horticultural knowledge to a broader audience. She stepped willingly into the traditionally masculine discourses of science and aesthetics, bringing them to an entirely new class of amateur gardeners of both sexes.

Gardening was vehicle that would transport women into life beyond the domestic sphere. Within the realms of their gardens women could engage with all kinds of issues: aesthetics, homemaking, charity work, religion and nature, patriotism and empire, the stewardship of land. Though done implicitly, Loudon's instructions provided a moral message. More important than the information was the unspoken charge that went with it—what Loudon empowered her readers to *do* and to *become*. Like so many Victorians, she believed that true scientific inquiry, if done in a spirit of morality, would lift the general condition of humankind—especially if one performed the labor with her own hands.

Recall her initial advice: “The great enjoyment of gardening, however, in my opinion, is only to be obtained by the amateur who gardens himself, and who understands the principles or reasons upon which each operation is founded.” To Loudon that included not just understanding the theories behind weeding, pruning, and identifying plants, but actually donning the apron and gloves, and kneeling in the dirt.

Her message was one of integrity: she seemed to say that despite all the scientific knowledge and name-classification and new, exotic varieties of plants available for consumption, nothing would make a true gardener except an honest and genuine labor of love. In an era giddy with inflated ideas both scientific and social, nothing like unsentimental shoveling manure to keep a person rooted.

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