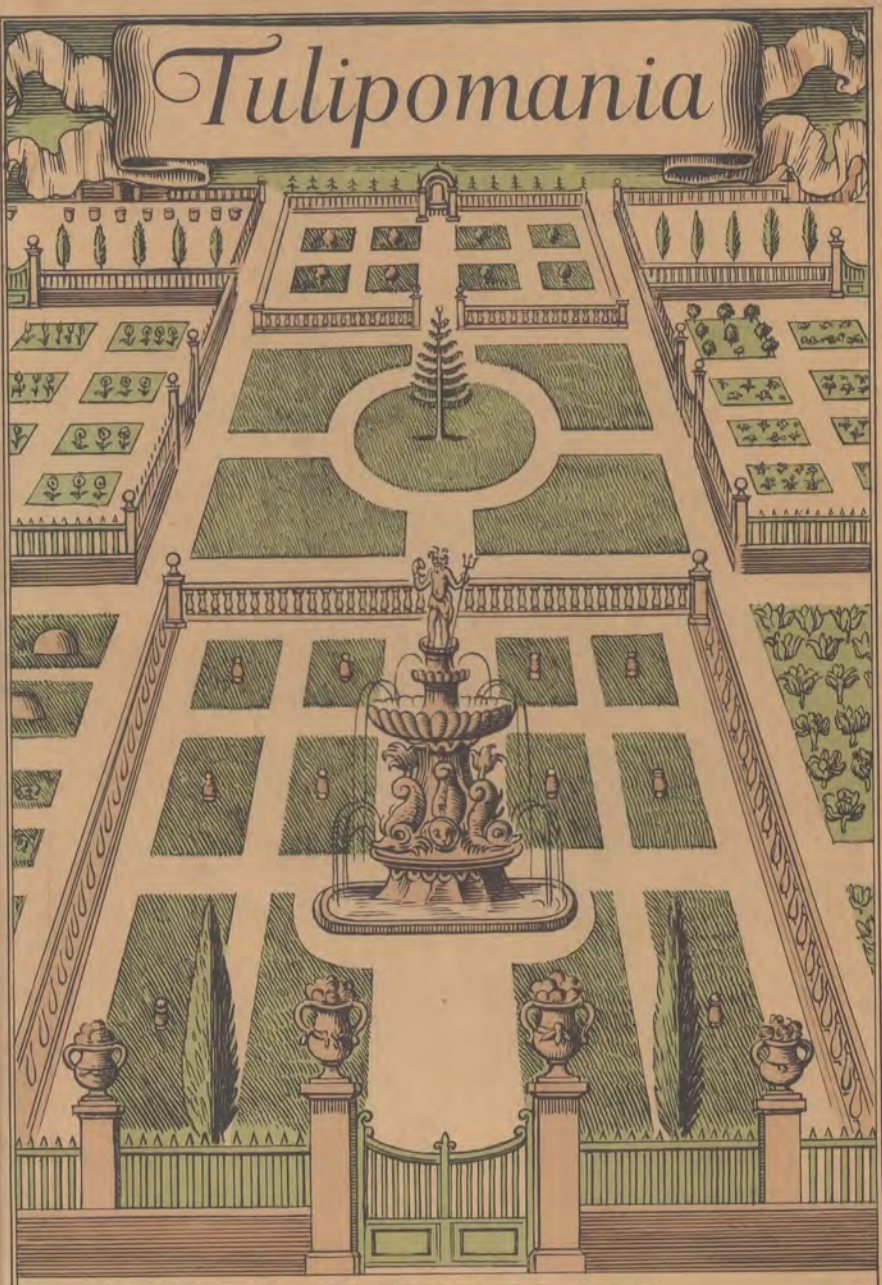
Tulipomania



A KING PENGUIN BOOK

Tulipomania

BY

WILFRID BLUNT

WITH SIXTEEN PLATES FROM
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY WATER COLOURS
BY ALEXANDER MARSHAL

PENGUIN BOOKS

THE KING PENGUIN BOOKS
Editor: N. B. L. Pevsner · Technical Editor: R. B. Fishenden
Published by Penguin Books Limited, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England,
and by Penguin Books Pty, Ltd, 200, Normanby Road,
Melbourne, Australia

THIS BOOK
FIRST PUBLISHED
1950

Text pages printed by Silk & Terry Ltd, Birmingham
Colour Plates made and printed by John Swain & Son, Ltd, Barnet, Herts.
Made in Great Britain

TO MY MOTHER
who first taught me
to love flowers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his gratitude for help and advice, to Sir Owen Morshead, K.C.V.O.; to Mr J. R. Seeley, of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; to the Secretary of the Royal Horticultural Society; to his brother Anthony, who first drew his attention to Marshal's work; to Mrs R. A. Harrison; to Mr L. E. Morris; and to Mr K. V. Rose.

Acknowledgement is also due to the representatives of the late Mr Humbert Wolfe for permission to quote his poem 'The Tulip' from *Kensington Gardens*, on page 30.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE TULIP

> The tulip is the peacock among flowers: the one has no scent, the other no song; the one glories in its gown, the other in its train. *Old French gardening book.*

WHEN we read in our Encyclopaedia that the zygadenus, the wachendorfia and the schizophragma were unknown to mediaeval gardeners, the information will cause us little surprise – our ancestors would have provided these flowers with names at once more homely and more musical; but it may have given us pause when we first discovered that the tulip, pride of our English cottage gardens, old and trusty friend, did not make its spectacular entry into the gardens of western Europe until the latter part of the sixteenth century.

No classical author mentions a flower which can with any degree of probability be identified with the tulip, though one of the varieties which now grow wild in Italy is almost certainly indigenous and several kinds are not uncommon in Greece; no Western painting, pottery or textile earlier than the end of the sixteenth century shows it; and the well-known 'Roman' mosaic which includes garden tulips is now generally agreed to be an eighteenth-century reconstruction.

In the year 1554 Busbecq, Ambassador from the Emperor Ferdinand I to Suleiman the Magnificent, was on his way from Adrianople to Constantinople when he observed 'an abundance of flowers everywhere – narcissus, hyacinths, and those which the Turks call *tulipam* – much to our astonishment, because it was almost midwinter, a season unfriendly to flowers. Greece abounds in narcissus

and hyacinths remarkable for their fragrance, which is so strong as to hurt those not used to it; the tulipam, however, have little or no smell, but are admired for the beauty and variety of their colours. The Turks pay great attention to the cultivation of flowers, and do not hesitate, although they are far from extravagant, to pay several aspers for one that is beautiful. I received several presents of these flowers, which cost me not a little.'

This is the first definite reference in Western literature to the tulip.* As to its name, the Turkish and Persian word for the flower is *lalé*, and it seems probable that Busbecq misunderstood his interpreter when he compared the shape of its petals to that of a turban (*dulban*).

Busbecq brought back seeds to Vienna; and probably bulbs also, for only five years later Konrad Gesner, 'the German Pliny', saw a tulip in the garden of 'the ingenious and learned Councillor Herwart ... growing with a single, large, reddish flower, like a red lily, with a pleasant smell, soothing and delicate, which soon leaves it.' The fame of the flower spread quickly; in 1561 the Fuggers were growing it in Augsburg, and the following year an Antwerp merchant received a 'cargo' of bulbs from Constantinople.

From Flanders the tulip was introduced into its spiritual home, Holland; and about the year 1578 it reached England. In 1582,

* It is quite possible, however, that the 'red lilies' which the French traveller Pierre Belon, who was in the Levant between 1546 and 1549, found in every Turkish garden were tulips. He expressly states that these lilies were 'different from those which we have at home, whose flowers are similar to those of white lilies'; but his description of the leaves makes the identification doubtful.

Monstereul (*Le Floriste François*, 1654) states that the tulip was first brought to Portugal from Ceylon about the year 1530 by Lopez Sampayo, Viceroy of the Portuguese possessions in India, and several other contemporary writers also refer to this earlier importation into Europe. The tulip does not grow in Ceylon; but it is always possible that Sampayo collected bulbs of florist's tulips in Persia or the Levant on his way home. The question cannot be discussed more fully here.

Richard Hakluyt of the Inner Temple, nephew of his better known namesake, sending to Master S. *a briefe Remembrance of things to be indevoured at Constantinople*, mentions that 'within these foure yeeres there have been brought into England from Vienna in Austria divers kinds of flowers called Tulipas, and those and other procured thither a little before from Constantinople by an excellent man called M. Carolus Clusius.' Clusius was shortly afterwards appointed

THE EARLIEST KNOWN ILLUSTRATION OF A TULIP
FROM KONRAD GESNER'S 'DE HORTIS GERMANIAE LIBER', 1561

Professor of Botany at Leyden. Here, we are told, he 'charged such an extortionate price for his tulips that no one could procure them, not even for money. Plans were made by which most of his best plants were stolen by night, whereupon he lost courage and the desire to continue their cultivation; but those who had stolen the tulips wasted no time in increasing them by sowing the seeds, and by this means the seventeen provinces were well stocked.'

The Germans, practical as ever, were not slow in investigating

the potentialities of the tulip bulb as a vegetable,* and a Frankfurt apothecary who preserved some in sugar pronounced them far superior to orchid bulbs – faint praise, perhaps, to those of us who are unfamiliar with the latter delicacy.

In England the tulip was soon popular. Gerard, in his famous Herball (1597), tells us that his 'loving freind Master *James Garret* ... a curious searcher of Simples, and learned Apothecarie in London' had been experimenting for twenty years with different kinds of tulips, 'all of which to describe particularlie, were to roule *Sisiphus* stone, or number the sandes.' Crispinus Passeus's lovely *Hortus Floridus* (1614) a work which the following year was 'faithfully and truely translated out of the Netherlandish originale for the comon benefite of those that understand no other language, ... all at the Charges of the Author' – contains exquisite engravings of tulips. But Parkinson – author of the *Paradisus* (1629), perhaps the greatest gardening book in our language – was the first English author to do full justice to the flower. He enumerates one hundred and forty varieties, 'all now made denizens in our Gardens, where they yeeld us more delight and more encrease for their proportion, then they did unto their owne naturals ... but indeede this flower, above many other, deserveth his true commendations and acceptance with all lovers of these beauties, both for the stately aspect, and for the admirable varietie of colours that daily doe arise in them'; and he recommends planting them that they 'may be so matched, one colour answering and setting of another, that the place where they stand may resemble a piece of curious needle-worke, or piece of painting.' He enquires, too, into the virtues of the tulip, and reports that it is said to be 'profitable for them that have a convulsion in their necke (which wee call a cricke in the necke) if it be drunke in harsh (which we call red) wine'; but as to the aphrodisiac properties of the bulb, he confesses 'for force of Venereous quality, I cannot

* In 1944 and 1945, during the German occupation of Holland, the Dutch were obliged to eat tulip bulbs.

say, either from myselfe, not having eaten many, or from any other on whom I have bestowed them ...'

For a time the fame of the tulip eclipsed that of the rose and the daffodil. John Tradescant, gardener to Charles I, grew fifty varieties in his garden, and the taste of the court was eagerly imitated; while Thomas Johnson gave the almost scentless flowers an odour of sanctity by his assertion that they were none other than the 'lilies of the field' of the New Testament (a theory which later met with support from the learned Dr Pococke, Bishop of Meath):

'I do verily thinke that these are the Lillies of the field mentioned by our Saviour for he saith that Solomon in all his royaltie was not arayed like one of these. The reasons that induce me to thinke thus are these: First, their shape; for these flours resemble lillies, and in these places whereas our Saviour was conversant they grow wilde in the fields. Secondly, the infinite varietie of colour, which is to be found more in this than in any other sort of floure; and thirdly the wondrous beautie and mixtures of these flours. This is my opinion, and these my reasons, which any may either approve of or gainsay as he shall thinke good.'

Nor were all our poets silent. In Stratford the gardens are now a blaze of tulips in the spring, but Shakespeare may not have known the flower (at all events he never mentions it); nor does Milton, whose taste was rather for the wild flowers of the hedgerow; but Herrick, in 'The sadnesse of things for Sapho's Sicknesse', predicts that for grief the

gallant tulip will hang down his head
Like to a virgin newly ravished.

As a rule, however, it is the flower's short-lived beauty which moves him most. Marvell also loved the tulip; in the midst of the Civil War, he fondly recalls days of peace

When gardens only had their towers
And all the garrisons were flowers ...

Tulips, in several colours barred,
Were then the Switzers of our guard.

The tulip was late in reaching France, where the religious wars had turned men's thoughts from the gentle pursuit of gardening, and there is no record of a bulb flowering there until 1608. But soon after this, no woman of fashion would be seen in the spring without a bunch of rare blooms tucked into her low-cut dress, and within a few years bulbs were changing hands for fantastic sums. For one bulb of 'Mère brune' a miller agreed to part with his mill; a young Frenchman expressed himself delighted at receiving for his bride's dowry a single bulb of a rare tulip appropriately christened 'Mariage de ma fille'; while another enthusiast exchanged a flourishing brewery, valued at 30,000 francs, for a bulb named 'Tulipe brasserie' in commemoration of the event. The craze spread northwards through Flanders (where Rubens was busy painting his second wife, Helena Fourment, in her new tulip garden) to Holland, which was to be the stage for the most astonishing drama in the whole history of horticulture – the *Tulpenwoede*, or Tulipomania.

*

TULIPOMANIA IN HOLLAND

In order to appreciate this gigantic gamble which, like the South Sea bubble and the Mississippi Company, ended in national disaster, it is necessary to understand something of the botanical nature of the flower. The bulbs first brought from Constantinople were almost certainly not those of species tulips (*i.e.*, wild forms of tulips), but of cultivated kinds. Now self-coloured cultivated tulips (known as 'breeders') have, alone among flowers, the curious habit of breaking, sooner or later, into variegated forms. From time to time 'sports', or freaks, occur, 'Nature' as Gerard says 'seeming to play more with this floure than with any other that I do know.' Once broken – or 'rectified' as it is called – the bulb rarely reverts. If it is

increased by offsets, the new bulbs usually flower approximately true; if it is increased by seed – a slow process often taking seven years or more before a flower is produced – the seedlings are self-colours which, after an indefinite period, break. In the unpredictability of the break or the freak lay the gambler's chance.

'If a change in a tulip is effected' says a seventeenth-century Dutch author, 'one goes to a florist and tells him, and soon it gets talked about. Everyone is anxious to see it. If it is a new flower, each one gives his opinion. One compares it to this flower, another to that. If it looks like an 'Admiral' you call it a 'General', or any other name you fancy, and stand a bottle of wine to your friends that they may remember to talk about it.'

The tulipomania was at its height between the years 1634 and 1637, but some time before this the enthusiasm of Dutch amateurs had already forced the prices of rare bulbs up to a ridiculous figure. Of one named 'Semper Augustus', with a red and white flower and blue-tinted base, Wassenaer wrote in 1623: 'No tulip has been held in higher esteem, and one has been sold for thousands of florins; yet the seller was himself sold (so he said), for when the bulb was lifted, he noticed two lumps on it which the year following would have become two offsets, and so he was cheated of two thousand florins.' These offsets, he adds, 'are the interest, while the capital remains'.

Soon everyone who had a few square yards of back garden was growing bulbs. The outlay was small – a few breeder tulips; the prizes were enormous. Hand in hand with tulip-growing went speculation, which, says Beckmann, 'was followed not only by mercantile people, but also by the first noblemen, citizens of every description, mechanics, seamen, farmers, turf-diggers, chimney-sweeps, footmen, maid-servants, old clothes-women, etc. At first everyone won and no one lost.' Then, as the gamble grew wilder, houses and estates were mortgaged. Workmen sold the very tools by which they had gained their livelihood; and some of the poorest people

'gained in a few months houses, coaches and horses, and figured away like the first characters in the land.' One speculator is said to have made five thousand pounds sterling in four months; and in a single town, deals to the amount of ten million pounds were made during the three years the mania lasted.

In every town in Holland, taverns were chosen where a 'collegium' or club for tulip trading was set up. Some light is thrown on these clubs by a contemporary work – *T'Samenspraeken tusschen Waermondt ende Gaergoedt* ... a dialogue in which two weavers discuss bulb dealing:

Gaergoedt. *If you wish I will sell you a 'Cargasoentje'; and because you are a good man and my special friend you may have it for fifty florins less than I would take from anyone else. And if you do not make a hundred rijksdaelers profit, I will make up the difference.*

Waermondt. *What a splendid proposal! But suppose I bought the bulb, how shall I get rid of it? Will the people come to me, or must I go to them and offer it for sale?*

Gaergoedt. *I will tell you. You must go to an inn; I will show you several, as I know few where there are no clubs. When there you must ask if there are any florists. When you are admitted into their club room, because you are a stranger some will quack like a duck; others will say 'I spy a stranger!' But do not take any notice. Your name will be written on a slate ...*

and he goes on to describe one of the two methods by which deals were transacted. It was illegal to *offer* bulbs for sale, but apparently there was no objection to a man saying to his neighbour 'I have more yellows than I can use, but I need some white', and to the employment of two arbitrators to settle the exchange or sale. The other method was to dispose of bulbs by public auction. 'Wine-money' was always levied to cover the cost of drinks, food, tobacco, lighting and fuel. 'I have often been to a tavern', confesses Waermondt, 'and eaten baked and fried fish and meat; yes, chickens and rabbits and even fine pastry, and drunk wine and beer from morning to

three or four o'clock at night, and then arrived home with more money than when I left.'

In the early days of the mania these sales took place between the end of June, when the bulbs were taken out of the ground, and September, the month for replanting them. Later, they were made all the year round, delivery being promised for the summer. 'Thus' says Beckmann, 'a speculator often offered and paid large sums for a root which he never received, and never wished to receive. Another sold roots which he never possessed or delivered. Oft did a nobleman purchase of a chimney-sweep tulips to the amount of two thou- florins, and sell them at the same time to a farmer; and neither nobleman, chimney-sweep or farmer had roots in their posses- , or wished to possess them. Before the tulip season was over, e roots were sold and purchased, bespoke and promised to be vered, than in all probability were to be found in the gardens of Holland; and when Semper Augustus was not to be had, which happened twice, no species was oftener purchased and sold.' The tulip trade, as can well be imagined, offered endless opportunities for fraud, because it was impossible to tell from the appearance of the bulb, when eventually it was produced, whether or not the promised article had been delivered.

It does not surprise us to learn that the mania brought in its wake a small but violent band of tulipophobes, chief among whom was Evrard Forstius, Professor of Botany at Leyden, who could not see a tulip without attacking it furiously with his stick. As Sir Thomas Browne observes in the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Garden of Cyrus:* 'The ingenious Delight of Tulipists stands saluted with hard Language, even by their own Professors.'

The highest prices paid by tulip speculators bore no possible relation to the beauty of the flower. For one 'Viceroy' bulb, paid for in kind, the following goods were given: 2 loads of wheat; 4 loads of rye; 4 fat oxen; 8 fat pigs; 12 fat sheep; 2 hogsheads of wine; 4 barrels of 8-florin beer; 2 barrels of butter; 1,000 lb. of cheese; a

complete bed; a suit of clothes and a silver beaker – the whole valued at 2,500 florins. One bulb of 'Semper Augustus' fetched nearly twice that sum, together with a fine new carriage and pair.

More often than not, as we have already seen, the bulb never actually changed hands. Let us take an example. A tulip-fancier would make an engagement with a dealer for a bulb which was to be delivered and paid for at planting time. If, when autumn came, the bulb had risen in value, the dealer would then pay to the tulip-fancier the difference between the old and the new price; if it had become cheaper, then the tulip-fancier would pay the difference. In either case the dealer retained the bulb. It was, in short, the familiar gamble of the stock exchange.

Suddenly, early in the spring of 1637, the crash came: the amateurs grew bored, and flooded the market; everyone wanted to sell, no one to buy. In vain the unfortunate dealers resorted to such ruses as mock auctions to restore confidence; nobody was deceived. On February 24, delegates from the principal towns of Holland, who met in Amsterdam to discuss what was to be done, agreed that all sales of tulips made before the end of November should be binding. Transactions after that date could be cancelled by the buyer, provided that notice was given before March. But this decision did not satisfy the public. 'When my buyer pays me, I will pay you; but he is nowhere to be found', says Gaergoedt pathetically. So many lawsuits were filed that the Courts could not deal with them all, and an appeal was made to the magistrates. A petition was sent to the Governors of Holland and West Friesland, urging them to cancel all agreements made during the winter. They replied feebly that they possessed insufficient evidence, and advised the magistrates 'to endeavour to induce the parties to come to terms in a friendly manner.' Soon, however, they were forced to act. In April it was declared by the Court of Holland that every vendor who could not make his purchaser pay, might dispose of his bulbs as best as he could and claim from him the amount by which the selling price fell short of the original contract. It was also ordered that all contracts should remain in force until further enquiries had been made. Many sellers, however, rather than face delay and uncertainty, preferred to cut their losses and to accept in ready money five or ten per cent of the amount owing to them.

There are many stories, more or less legendary, of the tulipomania. One will suffice. A syndicate of Haarlem florists, hearing that a cobbler at The Hague had succeeded in growing a black tulip, visited him and after some haggling purchased the bulb for fifteen hundred florins. No sooner was it in their possession than they threw it on the ground and trampled it underfoot. 'Idiot!' cried one of them when the astonished cobbler began to protest; 'we have a black tulip too, and chance will never favour you again. We would have given you ten thousand florins if you had asked it.' The wretched cobbler, inconsolable at the thought of the wealth which might have been his, took to his bed and promptly expired.

It was probably this story which suggested to Dumas the theme for his famous novel, and it was almost certainly to Monstereul's *Le Floriste François* that he turned for local colour; but the notion of making a bulb which was planted in mid-April flower early in May of the same year was a product of his own vivid imagination.

There is an amusing contemporary print by the artist Hendrik Pot, a Lieutenant in one of the Haarlem *Doelen*, which satirises the mania. It is entitled *The Fool's Wagon*, and shows a large, wheeled sailing-car, in the stern of which sits Flora holding in her right arm a cornucopia filled with tulips and in her other hand three separate blooms labelled *Semper Augustus*, *General Bol* and *Admiral van Hoorn*. Also seated in the car are three flower-bedecked florists named *Good-for-nothing*, *Eager rich* and *Tippler*, and two women – *Idle Hope* and *Miser* – who vainly reach out to recover the Bird of Hope which flutters beyond their grasp. The car is pursued by a crowd which shouts 'We will sail with you too' and tramples its weaving looms under foot. The foreground is scattered with tulips, while

in the distance can be seen the wreck of another sailing-car which has capsized.

The seventeenth century saw the publication of the first horticultural monograph – Monstereul's *Le Floriste François* (1654), an exhaustive work dealing with the culture of the tulip; the eighteenth century brought van Oosten's *The Dutch Gardener* (1703), in which the tulip is given first place, and Le Père d'Ardène's classic *Traité des Tulipes* (1760). Van Oosten's book, though much of it is plagiarised from Monstereul, is delightful reading. You will learn from it, for instance, that seeds should be sown in a north wind under a waning moon. He tells us everything – how to prepare the soil; how to judge a good blossom; how to store the bulbs in 'paper coffins' for the summer; and how flowers must be watched over like children, sheltered from sun and rain, shielded from wind, and examined daily for the first sign of sickness. He dismisses parrot tulips, which had been introduced in 1690, as '*Monsters*, frightful to look upon.' That the broken tulip was a 'sickly bulb that intimates outwardly the Pains it suffers within', he firmly (though, as we now know, wrongly) denies, preferring to believe that the change was comparable to that of man's greying hair in old age. He has a horror of false florists – 'ignorant Pretenders ... who like swine love to scuffle through our Flower-Gardens, to carry off their Riches by their Greatness and Impudence ... To hear them speak of Tulips, is a murdering Noise; the Hearer may wish that they had been Blind or Dumb, or that he himself had no Ears. These are Men that Sacrifice to unknown Deities, and that adore in the Temple of *Flora* Gods they know not ...'

Van Oosten declares stoutly that the Queen of Flowers (as he always calls the tulip) ought not to be vulgarised:

'If ... Tulips should be made common to all, we who take delight in Flowers, should in some measure be depriv'd of the benefit of human Conversation. How much Acquaintance doth their Rarity not afford to knowing Artists? How many pleasant Visits? How much friendly Conversations? And how many solid Reasonings? Certainly it is the sweetest life in the World, and a very pleasant Entertainment to our Thoughts, to imploy them thus in the Contemplation of Flowers, with the wonderful Elaboration of Nature, and to consider the Power of its Maker. And this without doubt would have been the contemplative Business of our first Father, if he had remained in the State of Innocency ...

'When the publick buying and selling of Tulips was ... prohibited, the florists fell to trucking and private selling; but because this could not be done without Animosities, thereupon the *Flemish* Florists elected a Fraternity in the Cities; and took St *Dorothea* to be their Patroness, and the *Syndicus* to be Judge of the Differences that might arise by their Trucking; and he to add more Authority to it, called in four of the chief of the Brotherhood, and this was the Occasion of the sweet Conversation of the Brothers, and brought them into great Esteem. The *Dutch* keep in this Matter another Rule; they meet together on a certain Day, when Tulips are in their full Bloom, and choose, after having seen the chief Gardens of the Florists, and taken a friendly and frugal Dinner together, one of the Company to be Judge of the Differences that might arise about Flowers in that Year.'

The *Tulpenwoede* never returned to Holland, although the unwavering popularity of the flower is attested by the important place it continued to hold in Dutch gardening books and in paintings of still-life. Even as late as 1836 a new bulb – *Citadel of Antwerp* – fetched £650 sterling. Early in the eighteenth century the introduction of the double hyacinth caused an ominous flutter which was silenced by the republication of *T'Samenspraeken*. It was illustrated with an engraving made specially for this edition, entitled *Flora's Fool's Cap; or Representations of the Wonderful Year 1637, when one fool hatched another, and the people were rich without property and wise without understanding.*

*

EVEN the staid English were not wholly immune from the mania, and in the eighteenth century only the ridicule of men such as Addison averted a catastrophe. The following, which was, perhaps, suggested by La Bruyère's famous satire on the tulipomaniac, included in *Les Caractères*, is taken from *The Tatler*, 1710:

'As I sat in the porch, I heard the voices of two or three persons, who seemed very earnest in discourse. My curiosity was raised when I heard the names of Alexander the Great and Artaxerxes; and as their talk seemed to run on ancient heroes, I concluded there could not be any secret in it; for which reason I thought I might very fairly listen to what they said.

'After several parallels between great men, which appeared to me altogether groundless and chimerical, I was surprised to hear one say, that he valued the Black Prince more than the Duke of Vendosme. How the Duke of Vendosme should become a rival of the Black Prince, I could not conceive: and was more startled when I heard a second affirm, with great vehemence, that if the Emperor of Germany was not going off, he should like him better than either of them. He added, that though the season was so changeable, the Duke of Marlborough was in blooming beauty. I was wondering to myself from whence they had received this odd intelligence: especially when I heard them mention the names of several other generals, as the Prince of Hesse and the King of Sweden, who, they said, were both running away. To which they added, what I entirely agreed with them in, that the Crown of France was very weak, but that the Marshal Villars still kept his colours. At last, one of them told the company, that if they would go along with him, he would show them a Chimney-Sweeper and a Painted Lady in the same bed, which he was sure would very much please them. The shower which had driven them as well as myself into the house, was now over; and as they were passing by me into the garden, I asked them to let me be one of their company.

'The gentleman of the house told me, "if I delighted in flowers, it would be well worth my while; for that he believed he could show me such a blow of tulips as was not to be matched in the whole country."

'I accepted the offer, and immediately found that they had been talking in terms of gardening, and that the kings and generals they had mentioned were only so many tulips, to which the gardeners, according to their usual custom, had given such high titles and appellations of honour ...

'I accidentally praised a tulip as one of the finest I ever saw; upon which they told me it was a common Fool's Coat. Upon that I praised a second, which it seems was but another kind of Fool's Coat ... The gentleman smiled at my ignorance. He seemed a very plain honest man, and a person of good sense, had not his head been touched with that distemper which Hippocrates calls the Tulippomania; insomuch that he would talk very rationally on any subject in the world but a tulip.

'He told me, "that he valued the bed of flowers that lay before us, and was not above twenty yards in length and two in breadth, more than he would the best hundred acres of land in England", and added, "that it would have been worth twice the money it is, if a foolish cook-maid of his had not almost ruined him the last winter, by mistaking a handful of tulip roots for a heap of onions, and by that means", says he, "made me a dish of pottage that cost me above a thousand pounds sterling ..."'

Such timely banter saved the day.

The tulip occurs less frequently than might be expected in our eighteenth-century poetry. Thomson, with his keen eye, observes the curious loveliness of the broken or 'rectified' flower:

Then comes the Tulip race, where Beauty plays
Her idle freaks ...

So too does Pope:

Ladies, like variegated Tulips show;
'Tis to their Changes half their charms they owe.

While Isaac Watts extracts from the flower his inevitable moral:

The tulip and the butterfly
Appear in gayer coats than I:
Let me be dressed fine as I will,
Flies, worms and flowers exceed me still.

*

TULIPOMANIA IN TURKEY

For the last romantic episode in the tulip's history we must turn once more to its eastern home. Persian legend attributed to the flower an origin similar to that of the Greek anemone which sprang from the blood of Adonis:

And where the tulip, following close behind
The feet of Spring, her scarlet chalice rears,
There Ferhad for the love of Shirin pined,
Dyeing the desert red with his heart's tears.

But there seems little doubt that throughout the whole of that large tract of country from France to India where the tulip flourishes wild, it was not brought into cultivation much before the year 1500. Even Persian art has no representation of the flower before this.* Sadi knew it. Hafiz matched it with his mistress's cheek, and it is almost an impertinence to quote lines as familiar as Omar Khayyam's:

As then the Tulip from her morning sup
Of Heav'nly Vintage from the soil looks up,

*Robert Byron (*The Road to Oxiana*) identifies as tulips some stylized flowers on a *saljuk* frieze of 1113 A.D. at Kazvin. If such they are, they are certainly not cultivated ones.

Do you devoutly do the like, till Heav'n
To Earth invert you – like an empty Cup.

But these poets almost certainly had the wild tulip in mind; and the sixteenth-century Mogul Emperor Baber, though he counted thirty-three different kinds in the plains near Kabul, makes no mention of a garden hybrid.

When the tulip first came into cultivation, eastern taste preferred to develop the lyre-shaped flower with pointed petals, while

FROM A TURKISH DISH

SECOND HALF 16TH CENTURY

in the west the clumsier, egg-shaped form with rounded, in-curving petals soon became more popular.

In Persia the flower became the symbol of perfect lovers. 'When a young man presents one to his mistress', says Sir John Chardin (*c.* 1675), 'he gives her to understand, by the general colour of the flower, that he is on fire with her beauty; and by the black base of it, that his heart is burnt to a coal.'

Adopted as an emblem by the Turkish House of Osman, the tulip

acquired a symbolic importance comparable to that of the fleur-de-lys in France; it soon became a favourite motif in textiles and ceramics, and a frequent theme for poets. Mohammed, Grand Vizier to the sixteenth-century Sultan Selim II (Selim the Sot) enticed his feeble-minded master to his palace by constructing a 'tulip-kiosk' overhanging the dark waters of the Bosphorus, and by planting his gardens with rare bulbs. The kiosk, with its splendid frieze of painted flowers, may still be seen, – now, alas, faded and crumbling from centuries of neglect.

The very turbans, which had once given their name to the humble flower, were modified in imitation of the rich garden hybrids; and

TURKISH FABRIC ABOUT 1600 A.D.

the green-robed descendants of the Prophet must have appeared, as Mr Sacheverell Sitwell points out, like the stems and blossoms of the tulip. It was hardly a coincidence, he adds, that Boissard, 'a breeder and lover of the Tulip'* published (in 1595) a book upon the Sultans of Turkey 'in which the engravings by de Bry devote an especial, almost an exaggerated, attention to the forms of the turban.'

In the following century, Ibrahim continued to popularise the tulip, but his successor Mohammed IV preferred the ranunculus, rare specimens of which were collected for him throughout the Levant. There followed a short period when flowers were neglected

* I can find no evidence that Boissard was a breeder of tulips.

for vegetables; and the French botanist Tournefort, who was in Turkey in the year 1700, remarks that the Turks took little care of their gardens in general, concentrating their attention almost entirely upon the melon and the cucumber. Under Ahmed III (1703-30) the tulip returned to favour, and the cult became little short of a mania, although it never degenerated into a mere financial swindle as it had done in Holland. The grower who produced a new variety was handsomely rewarded, while the poet who sang its praise was no less fortunate. A thousand gold pieces were paid for a single bulb from Persia; the mayor of Constantinople was commanded by the Sultan to control prices. A single order for the Palace ran to 50,000 bulbs, and the Palace gardens were said to contain no less than half a million. More than thirteen hundred varieties were listed by Sheikh Mohammed Lalézaré ('The Tulip Chief') and the names were as lovely as the flowers: *Beauty's Reward*; *Lover's Dream*; *Lightning Flash*; *Pink of Dawn*; *Fresh Breeze*; *Heart Reviver*; *Ruby of Paradise*. Many people will find these more satisfactory than *Rev. H. Ewbank*, *Mrs Potter Palmer*, or even *President Hoover*; but then, as we all know, there is no poetry left in the West. The old Sheikh loved his tulips, and his affection shines through the pages of his book. Hear the exultation in his description of the perfect flower he has grown:

'She has the colour of the violet, and the curved form of the new moon. Her markings are rightly placed, clean, and well-proportioned. Her shape is like the almond, needle-like, and ornamented with pleasant rays. Her inner petals are like a well, as they should be; her outer petals a little open, this too as it should be. The white, ornamented petals are absolutely perfect. She is the chosen of the chosen.'

Tulip fêtes soon became the rage at the Turkish court. The French Ambassador, writing in April 1726 to Louis XV, gives him a description of those which Ahmed's Vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, gave for his master:

girl who had most taken his fancy, and the handkerchief which he threw signified his wish to be alone with her. The courts were emptied, and her less fortunate sisters withdrew, to beguile, night after night, the intolerable tedium of the harem with memories of that unforgettable evening.

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THE TULIP OF YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

We must leave the Grand Seigneur among his flowers and his concubines, to return to prosaic nineteenth-century England. Here the cult of the tulip persisted, but it remained for the most part relatively sober. Tulip-shows were held throughout the country, and the so-called 'tulip war' between northern and southern fanciers raged through the forties, when the northern fanciers stood out for a more severe standard of markings on prize flowers. The National Tulip Society was founded in 1849, and countless new varieties of blooms were put on the market.

We may pause for a moment to visit Tom Storer,* early-Victorian engine-driver, who was famous for the tulips which he grew at Derby beside the railway line. We should have found him in his garden any Sunday, wearing his stovepipe hat, and tending his favourite bulbs as the little black trains rattled past his shack. There was Richard Headley too, who during the show season employed labourers to guard his plants – 'the said labourers being *suitably armed*.' These two men are typical of the small growers who gave new life to the tulip-shows in this country, and kept the love of the flower alive.

If the nineteenth century produced many keen gardeners, it also produced some sorry poetry about the tulip. Montgomery's verses 'On Planting a Tulip-root' (1824) are too pitiful to quote. The embryo tulip fascinated Robert Thornton, author of *The Temple of*

* See Sacheverell Sitwell: *Old Fashioned Flowers* (Scribner, 1939).

Flora, who invoked the feeble Muse of Erasmus Darwin to his aid. 'Open one of these young buds in any month of the winter', wrote Thornton, 'and you will see in *Miniature* the perfect flower destined in future to charm the admiring eye. This curious fact has afforded scope to a great poet for one of the most brilliant compositions in the English language:

When o'er the cultur'd lawns and dreary wastes
Retiring Autumn flings her howling blasts, ...
Quick hears fair TULIPA *the loud alarms,*
And folds her infant *closer in her arms;*
Soft plays affection round her bosom's throne,
And guards its life, forgetful of her own ...'

Leigh Hunt urges his readers to 'say it with flowers', and draws attention to the possibilities of a deplorable pun – 'tulips', 'two lips'; while the hero of Tennyson's *The Gardener's Daughter* made 'a Dutch love for Tulips' the pretext for frequent visits.

Robert Browning noticed the red Bologna tulip – not a native of Italy, but long naturalised there:

Mid the sharp, short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild Tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for children to pick and sell.

And in *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett (displaying a strange ignorance of the tulip's taste in soils) moralises:

He who makes,
Can make good things from ill things, best from worst,
As men plant tulips upon dunghills when
They wish them finest ...

In recent poetry, the tulip recurs frequently in the verses of Victoria Sackville-West; and who can forget Rupert Brooke's nostalgic cry from Berlin in 1912?

Here tulips bloom as they are told.

But it is in a little poem by Humbert Wolfe that we find the perfect epitome of those flowers which Thornton chose to call 'the most ravishing beauties of the vegetable world':

Clean as a lady,
Cool as glass,
Fresh without fragrance
The tulip was.

The craftsman, who carved her
Of metal, prayed:
'Live, oh thou lovely!'
Half metal she stayed.

The last fifty years have witnessed tremendous developments in tulip culture: the heart of Asia has been scoured for new species; magnificent new varieties have been produced by skilful breeding; and the Darwin tulip, first placed upon the market in 1889, has become a universal favourite. But there are many problems connected with the flower which still remain to be solved, many gaps in our knowledge of its history which are as yet unfilled. We shall never, perhaps, know much more of its early development, or of how it was first brought into cultivation in the Near East, although research may yet reveal the actual ancestors, or the origin, of our garden tulip. One day a fuller explanation may be given of the sudden appearance in recent times of a number of wild tulips (the so-called 'neo-tulips') in Italy and Savoy, in districts already well combed by botanists. One day, perhaps, we may understand more about the virus which causes tulips to 'break', and even devise a method by which this may be controlled. These are the problems on which tulip lovers are working; and in a hundred years' time our gardens may contain blooms which today would astonish us as much as our modern blooms would have astonished the amateurs of seventeenth-century Holland.

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NOTE ON THE PLATES

The sixteen water-colours in this book are reproduced, by gracious permission of His Majesty the King, from one of a pair of volumes of flower paintings by Alexander Marshal preserved in the Royal Library at Windsor. These splendid folios were purchased in a Brussels sale room in 1818, and later passed into the Royal Collection.

Little is known about the life of the artist. The Dictionary of National Biography is silent about him; but we learn from Walpole's *Anecdotes* that he made copies after Vandyck, and 'painted on velom a book of Mr Tradescant's choisest flowers and plants'. This book can hardly be identified with the volumes at Windsor, for almost all the paintings in the latter are on paper. A note in an early nineteenth-century hand states that the Windsor drawings were made about 1680 at Haarlem for William of Orange, afterwards William III, who, on his leaving Holland, presented them 'to a Dutch Nobleman the misfortunes of whose family during the late Revolutions alone would have induced them to part with (them).' The writer of the note also adds the suggestion that Marshal might be the son of the Dutch flower painter Otto Marcellis. All this seems highly improbable, for the only dated drawing – one of the last in the second volume – is stated to have been made in England in 1659. Moreover, most of the flowers are named in English in a hand which seems to be that of the artist himself. Twelve further drawings by Marshal are in the British Museum.

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Roy

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