

The Aesthetic and Recreational Values in Botanical Gardens

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Part 5

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RECREATIONAL VALUES

Widely different meanings are attributed to the word *recreation*, as it is applied to a great variety of activities. Because of these differences, it is desirable to indicate what is meant by recreation, passive and potential as these differ from other types.

Recreation is commonly referred to as "a type of experience, a form of activity, as an area of rich and abundant living . . . as an expression of the inner nature of man, or a phase of the total educational process . . ." Hence, in some ways it relates to the botanic garden purpose. Here, in this work, the term *recreation* will not be used to refer to forms of competitive sport or games, nor will it include such activities as picnicking. Both Charles Eliot and Frederick Law Olmsted recognized that the supreme functional use of garden or park areas of this type, for the recreation of the people, must be "of a passive and semi-active kind, the dominant ideal being peaceful enjoyment amid beautiful surroundings of a naturalistic kind."

Among the needs for satisfying enjoyment of life are cited "beauty, knowlege, and ideals." The botanic garden holds its place of importance in modern life because among other things it has afforded and continues to afford opportunities for the attainment of these basic human needs. The enjoyment of a visitation to a botanical garden is enhanced by the fact that "satisfaction may be derived almost as much from the memory of the experience in the garden as from the actual visitation itself."

The satisfactions to be attained as having recreational value, at a botanic garden, are in the use of one's mental powers, enjoyment of one's physical existence, emotional stimulation, the freedom of creativity (in self or others), a sense of adventure, even of achievement, relaxation, fellowship with others of like mind, and appreciation of beauty. Because individuals find that certain activities yield one or more of these satisfactions, the activities become recreation. However, different people seek and find different kinds of pleasurable experiences in a botanic garden. Furthermore, a single form of activity may yield several types of satisfaction to the same individual. Hence it may be said that the recreational value of an activity for a particular person depends upon the way in which he is affected by it and upon the richness of the experience which it affords him.

The persisting desire on the part of man to extend his knowledge and to gain new experience makes for continued growth and progress. Many forms of recreation owe their appeal to the fact that they contribute to this universal human desire. Especially is this true of nature activities, which afford unlimited opportunities for exploring the wonders of the world about us. Man's curiosity and his desire for new experience explain in part the popularity of travel. For this reason, those parts of a garden devoted to geographical organization, where plants are grouped by reason of similar geographical origin, may offer satisfaction through imagination or imagery, in the feeling that this situation is similar to a given foreign one. The occasional surprise feature, an experimental project, or sponsorship of an untried activity may yield an added element of satisfaction.

Because of the common association of mental effort and work, the relationship of recreation to the exercise of one's mental powers may not be immediately apparent. Yet man engages in many forms of recreation primarily because they offer a stimulation to

mental activity. "Interest in an activity is likely to lag when it no longer makes demands upon the mental powers of the participant." Thus the mental stimulation imparted by a botanic garden, the learning and studying of the many facets of available information, accounts for much of their extensive appeal.

The basic relationship between senses and satisfactions is so obvious as to require little comment. Harry A. Overstreet has probably made the most important point in this regard with his statement that "The more senses we lend to an experience, the more vivid and rich it . . . then . . . becomes."

The significant part which emotional response plays in the recreative appeal of the botanic garden depends largely upon the character of the landscape design and the effectiveness of treatment of the land, the spaces, the total composition, and consequently upon the entire effect gained. An activity is not likely to become a form of recreation unless participation in it brings a favorable emotional response in the person. Because, then, of the multitudinous potentialities of creation with plant forms, the emotional satisfactions which are sought and achieved through visitation to a botanic garden can be as varied in quality and scope as humanity itself.

Man is said to crave some area in his life where he can excel, can feel a sense of achievement. Because many people fail to get this kind of satisfaction in their work, they seek it in recreation. Some people are able to attain it by raising their own standard of performance rather than by surpassing others, in competition. Thus anyone may gain that satisfaction which results from making progress, from increasing his skill in some activity. A part of the fascination involved is in the opportunity offered for the utilization of existing skills and in their challenge to greater attainment. In the true and full meaning of these terms, then, the sense of adventure and the sense of achievement can be said to be very close if not indeed almost inseparable. Both may be exercised in experiencing what a botanic garden has to offer.

Certainly, relaxation and rest and repose are in themselves definite forms of recreation. Enhanced by reflection and contemplation, these may be indeed creative. They are potential forms of recreation to be found in a botanic garden, just as they may be found in any area of scenic beauty or grandeur. They may be enjoyed in solitude, sometimes thought to be essential for fullest enjoyment. At the same time, many of the other forms of recreational activity and value found herein, which yield their greatest satisfactions when engaged in by a group, are also available for participation and enjoyment.

Fellowship and shared interest are found in the visitations to a botanic garden, thus ministering directly to man's need for companionship, social relationships, and cooperative activity. Here people are gathered in an atmosphere of friendliness which pervades because of an underlying relationship of similar interests. Each person, consequently, may identify with the other visitors and feel himself to be a part of the total operation and process.

Valuable recreational and cultural services are offered by many present day botanic gardens. Among these, the following examples may be of interest. Afternoon and evening concerts, and other musical productions by outstanding artists are apparently much enjoyed. While this feature is more often found in gardens abroad than in the United States, there seems no doubt it is highly valued. At the botanic garden in Melbourne, Australia, musical functions "never fail to appeal, . . . and are never subjected to criticism." In recent years, the performances in this garden of open air orchestral and vocal concerts, under the title of "Music for the People," are said to have met with outstanding public approval; "music in the atmosphere of the Botanic Gardens on a sunny afternoon is a sheer delight." Official estimates of attendance on a single Sunday when a performance was scheduled have exceeded 120,000. The Waterfall Botanical Gardens of Penang are known as another institution providing musical programs at specified occasions during the year.

(To be continued)

This is the complete bibliography from Miss Morel's thesis.

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