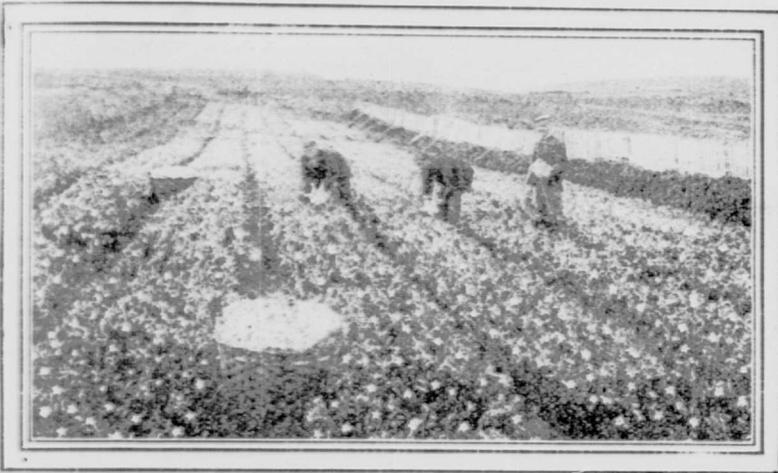


# A LAND OF PERFUME

How Great Farms of Roses and Lilies Are  
Converted Into Scent for the World's Women

By WILLIAM H. MANTER



Gathering Narcissus During the Flower Harvest.

HERE, one would say, is life idealized; in the Metropolis of Flowers is something aloof from the hard realities of the world outside; orange and lemon groves that stretch to the sunlit Mediterranean; sweet acres of rose and violet and lily, narcissus and heliotrope, mignonette and marjoram, and thyme and rosemary, with jasmine and scented geranium; tuberose and lavender and sweet basil, such as Keats would have sung. Their fragrant expanses creep up the smiling slopes of the Maritime Alps—will soon creep to the world's end to perfume my lady.

In their midst is set Grasse, the City of Flowers, where sated nostrils refuse their office; where men in May are overpowered by orange blossoms, and fall unconscious from their high orchard ladders. All Grasse is abroad these days; the women and girls in broad brimmed bonnets, picking delicate jasmine before dawn. They work hard, these peasants, to whom blossoms are bread. And soon Cologne will be asking for "neroli," essential oil of oranges, at fifty dollars a pound, in order to supply her famous water to the world.

Climb the hill and look down on Flora's own realm! The dark leaved oranges stretch far as eyesight carries; and jasmine plots are arranged in hedges on low banks, like the gardens of a doll. Trim acres of stunted rose are broken with dark patches, of violets and thin white stalks of tuberose. And beyond view are pleasant gardens, each with its own heavy crop, soon to be sold to the town's great factories, whose names and "marques" are famous on scent bottles from China to Peru. For the whole country's harvest is flowers: a spring harvest, whose great profit goes to sophisticated men beyond those silent peaks, beyond the Tideless Sea, a bare twelve miles away. Only nine cents for each two and a quarter pounds of tender blossom, rising to thirty cents for an equal quantity of *rosa centifolia*, best for perfume.

And yet Grasse makes little essence of rose. Her processes are so fine it takes almost a hundred tons of sweet petals to make only four and a half pounds of this precious stuff. In all, Grasse makes perhaps one hundred pounds each season, worth three hundred dollars to the pound. But Kazanlik, in Eastern Rumelia, turns out five thousand pounds of impure attar every year; even this brings from seventy-five to one hundred dollars a pound. The roses used are a pink single bud, not unlike the dogrose of the English hedge. Grasse uses her roses more for pomade and rose water, which last costs only twelve cents a quart. Compare this with fluid attar at three hundred and sixty dollars a quart!

### The Orange Blossom Harvest

MAY brings the orange blossom harvest. At this season the atmosphere exhausts one with evervating sweetness. Men and women, eager boys and girls, all on piece work, flutter and chatter amid big, dark, shining leaves. And as they work the waxen blossoms fall like fragrant snow into the big oster baskets beneath. July and August sees a heavy crop ready for the distillery—scarlet geranium and mint, jasmine and tuberose, sweet basil and lavender, hyssop and wild thyme, origan, fennel, and wormwood, with a second crop of balm mint. A few fragrant stragglers linger into September and October, and the garnering of these ends Flora's harvest.

The pickers are trained to the work. Remember, some flowers must be picked only at certain hours of the day; and their caprice is respected. Thus pinks yield up their perfume only when plucked after three hours' wooing by the hot sun. Roses must be gathered as soon as they open, and jasmine before sunrise.

The lovely harvest of Grasse varies from year to year, but roughly I should fix it at one thousand tons. Come into the receiving rooms of one of the great factories and watch men tossing mountains of violets with wooden pitchforks. There, is weight here. In a single day the stills of one house will eat up sixty thousand pounds of roses and forty-five thousand pounds of orange flowers. During last season's harvest

one ancient establishment, dating back to 1715, consumed three hundred and twenty tons of roses, one hundred and eighty tons of orange flowers, fifty tons of jasmine, sixty-five of violets, one hundred of mignonette, and two hundred and eighty tons of geraniums.

Only eight or ten out of the countless perfumes we buy are what they profess to be. Wall flower and wood violet, white rose or lilac, cherry blossom or new mown hay, are all put up in "triple extract" for dainty handkerchiefs; yet all are creations of the chemist. The flowers really used in scent making are jasmine, orange blossom, Parma violet, rose, jonquil, cassia, and mignonette, and to a smaller extent geranium leaves, lavender, and thyme. All other perfumes are judicious mixtures of these essences, with infusions.

One sees an entire countryside living upon flowers. And the blossoms received by these tens of thousands of pickers are carried in great bales from the reception rooms to the distillery, near to the monstrous stills of burnished copper whose big maws will swallow three thousand pounds of fragrant, dewy blossoms at one time. Jasmine and tuberose scents are extracted by the "cold process." A layer of pig's fat is spread upon panes of glass, and the sweet petals scattered on top. These petals are removed every day and replaced by others, until the fat is thoroughly impregnated with perfume. It is then stored as a white pomade.

### The Hot Process

ROSES, orange blossoms, cassia, and Parma violets undergo the "hot process." The fat is melted, and they are put to soak in it until it grows cold. It is then placed in a hydraulic press, and the dead flowers removed by sieves. The remaining fat holds the raw material used for the manufacture of essence. These essences have the property of vaporizing steam, although their boiling point is higher than water. Vaporization, however, takes time, and the flowers must remain for a long while in the great stills before they yield their perfume; for their fragrance appears to be mechanically imprisoned by the walls of cells or tissues.

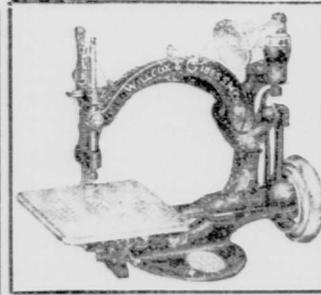
When at last all the flowers' essence is set free, it must be kept in constant contact with water; and it is only when the petals are thoroughly penetrated by steam that the essence is carried off. The stills consist of a huge boiler with a swan's neck top. This carries steam and vaporized essence to a spiral tube, which in turn passes through a vessel of cold water. In this tube condensation takes place, and essence and water fall into another vessel. Here, owing to difference of specific gravity, they separate of their own accord.

Thousands of women are employed in Grasse's factories, as well as in the great harvest outside. They extract perfume from heliotrope and jasmine by absorption, and one may see hundreds in long lines preparing sensitive mimosa for treatment by hydrocarbons. One of the forewomen told me that in the case of jasmine she found that two pounds of fat would entirely absorb the fragrance of six pounds of flowers. The proportions of flowers vary, however. Sometimes one pound of fat will require ten pounds of rose petals, eight pounds of orange blossoms, three pounds of cassia—yellow, fluffy ball, exquisitely scented. After the fat has been removed from the trays it is mixed with alcohol, and readily gives up the powerful essences it has coaxed from the flowers entrusted to it.

Not all the harvest is brought to the factories to be treated. In one case, at least, scent is extracted on the spot where the plant grows. This is especially the case with the Mont Blanc lavender, so famous for its delicacy. It is found growing in immense quantities in the Maritime Alps that tower about quaint old Grasse. That the sweet, old-fashioned stuff may not lose its fragrance in transportation to the valley, distillation takes place in the mountains. A small army of peasants go toiling up the rocky slopes, and return to the great portable stills set up by the manufacturers, carrying with them great armfuls of the fragrant plant

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