



Old Herbaceous: A Novel of the Garden

Reginald Arkell

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Back in print after fifty years

Old Herbaceous is a classic British novel of the garden, with a title character as outsized and unforgettable as P. G. Wodehouse's immortal butler, Jeeves. Born at the dusk of the Victorian era, Bert Pinnegar, an awkward orphan child with one leg a tad longer than the other, rises from inauspicious schoolboy days spent picking wildflowers and dodging angry farmers to become the legendary head gardener "Old Herbaceous," the most esteemed flower-show judge in the county and a famed horticultural wizard capable of producing dazzling April strawberries from the greenhouse and the exact morning glories his Lady spies on the French Riviera, "so blue, so blue it positively hurts." Sprinkled with nuggets of gardening wisdom, *Old Herbaceous* is a witty comic portrait of the most archetypal—and crotchety—head gardener ever to plant a row of bulbs at a British country house.

This Modern Library edition is published with a new Introduction by Penelope Hobhouse, a renowned garden designer and lecturer and the author of numerous gardening books.

Old Herbaceous: A Novel of the Garden Details

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From Reader Review Old Herbaceous: A Novel of the Garden for online ebook

Peter says

I purchased this original 1950's copy because of the John Minton artwork which is printed in green rather than the usual old black finish for this type of illustration.

A novel about gardening! A good read, uncomplicated and very relaxing. Nothing epic happens it's just a pleasant read that allows one to relax and truly forget the world. A beautiful pastoral pleasure

Would I recommend this? Maybe not it is a very acquired taste, like putting on an old and battered pair of shoes, you know you should get rid of them, but they are so comfortable.

Recommended.

Leslie says

If you should happen to read this lovely book about the life of a curmudgeonly yet charming head gardener of an English country manor house and not be touched, there must be something wrong with you. Perhaps some childhood trauma left you unable to feel; unable to appreciate the graciousness of a noble heart well placed at last after an ignominious beginning. This heartwarming (I can't believe I used that corny word, but there it is) work of fiction celebrates quietly the better parts of human nature. It is a soothing balm to the world weary among us who, like me, can not even bear the harsh realities of the evening news. It reminded me that there are good people out there. Old Herbaceous is an all too short application of cheer on a gloomy winter's day.

Katherine says

I don't know what it is about gardening books that so enthralls me since I'm only a passable gardener myself. I suspect a goodly portion of it is simply that I *wish* I were a genuinely green-thumbbed individual. It's not that I haven't made an effort, starting with small plants I found while camping that I'd attempt to transplant from their native mountain to my home soil. Never successfully. On to taking a horticulture class in college that I well and truly enjoyed. Eventually, at one point, I decided my growing skills were best limited to children (I was blessed to raise five), roses which I dearly love, and herbs which are somehow able to thrive in poor soil with very little care once they are established.

My three cultivating loves are still in that particular order: my children, roses, and herbs. And every so often, with expected regularity, I feel compelled to read yet another gardening memoir or novel, perhaps more for the dreaming, or wishing, element it provides than from any real improvement in my skills. Yes, this was still another gardening book of that sort, the kind that calls to me and allows me to fall under its spell and enjoy the fantasy that in another place and time, perhaps another life, my dream might have been realized.

A delightful novel of a young boy taken under the wing of the lady of the manor and who eventually grows

up to be not only her head gardener, but her friend as well. Sometimes laugh aloud funny and other times touchingly poignant. A wonderful fiction selection for any gardener, or gardener wannabe like myself.

Sylvester says

I am becoming more and more fond of books about gardeners. I will probably always be looking for another "Henry", and never find him, but that's alright as long as I keep coming upon fellows like Old Herbaceous.

Chock-full of charm - how else to describe it? A story about the rise of a misfit boy to head gardener of an estate.

Ivan says

Yet another life at the manor house novel - but this one is a bit different as the focus is on the head gardener. This isn't "great art" or "high literature" - what it is a very fine novel that chronicles a singular life. It is very well written with some truly fine passages.

Georgiana 1792 says

La storia della vita di Hubert (Bert) Pinnegar, a cominciare da come è cominciata la sua passione per i giardini (lui è un piccolo orfano, ma non ha intenzione di diventare contadino, anzi, per i contadini prova una sorta di timore/antipatia), e di come il suo amore per le piante lo abbia portato a essere il favorito della sua padrona (che è stata la prima a stimolarlo a diventare un giardiniere, proponendogli di lavorare con lei dopo un concorso floreale), tanto da nominarlo capo giardiniere e poi, in conclusione della sua vita, eleggerlo come uno dei suoi più cari amici.

Molto bello, e ho trovato tantissime somiglianze nello spirito tra Bert e il giardiniere senza nome di Giardino sul mare, un altro romanzo che ho adorato.

Andrea says

A simple, short and sweet read. Enjoy with a glass of lemonade after weeding your own little patch or pinching your own potted herbs and be glad for the little kindnesses that make the world bloom.

Miss M says

The description makes this sound a bit arch, but really it's more of a gentle story...
Available for download at the Internet Archive.

Roberta says

Quando ho acquistato questo romanzo, non so esattamente che cosa mi aspettavo ma non conoscevo l'autore, che invece a quanto pare in Inghilterra ha un certo nome sia come sceneggiatore sia proprio per aver scritto questo romanzo, *Old Herbaceous* in originale.

<http://robertabookshelf.blogspot.it/2...>

Susan says

I don't know how to review this book, because it was so different from anything I've ever read. It reminds me of so many books: *The Pilgrimage* of Harold Fry, the *Flavia de Luce* books by Alan Bradley, Agatha Christie (Miss Marple loved her garden), even the *Downton Abbey* TV shows. but it's not like any of those. No murders take place in these greenhouses!

Written in 1951, it has recently been reissued. It's a simple, quiet, quickly read story of the life of this man, Herbert Pinnegar, the head gardener at a manor house in England. The story opens with him at the end of his life, looking back on everything he had gone through.

You will love this if you are an Anglophile, as I am - this couldn't have been more British. If you're a gardener, you will love this book, although I'm just a wanna-be green thumb. If you like delicate narrative, with characters painted with the brush of a humane hand, this book is for you.

I'm lucky to have come across a mention of the reissue of this book - wonderful, wonderful.

Betelgeuse says

Recensione pubblicata su *Cronache di Betelgeuse*

Se amate i fiori e le piante, allora troverete uno spirito affine nel protagonista di questa storia. Percorreremo la trama del libro, scandita dalle stagioni di un giardino fiorito e sempre curato nei minimi dettagli, e la crescita del protagonista da bambino emarginato a saggio anziano. Seguiamo i primi rozzi esperimenti di Herbert, che trova nei fiori un vero e proprio sbocco professionale.

Effettivamente ha una vera e propria abilità con le piante e riesce a rendere semplice anche la coltivazione delle fragole precoci. I fiori che coltiva non sono troppo strani o rari, a parte qualche eccezione, ma la passione che ci mette è veramente grande. I suoi studi non sono molto tecnici, ma si basano sull'esperienza pratica e sugli anni di lavoro. Herbert affronta tutti i passaggi della gavetta e viene promosso solo grazie al suo impegno quotidiano. Non si può certo dire che faccia carriera per le sue conoscenze, perché lui è un figlio adottato da gente semplice. Il rapporto che però si stabilisce con la padrona della Villa in cui lavora è molto tenero, mostrandoci così un lato inaspettato di questo giardiniere tutto d'un pezzo.

La scrittura è scorrevole, raccontata sempre dalla voce narrante di Herbert. Scopriamo così le sue avventure e i suoi sentimenti, sia nei momenti di gioia che in quelli di tristezza. Mi piace il suo atteggiamento molto pratico nella vita di tutti i giorni. Secondo Herbert la cosa più importante è fare bene il proprio lavoro, assecondando i padroni della Villa, ma senza lasciargli commettere degli sbagli. Il suo incontro con i

giardinieri alle fiere e ai convegni gli rivela un mondo vasto e diverso rispetto al suo paesini di campagna, ma nonostante questo non ispira in lui la voglia di viaggiare. Lui si accontenta di coltivare le sue piante e di rendere il giardino sempre più bello e ordinato e soffre se non riesce a svolgere al meglio il suo lavoro. Non si può che ammirare questo spirito così mite ma allo stesso tempo in grado di coltivare dei fiori dalla dura terra ghiacciata.

Jane says

Herbert Pinnegar started working in Lady Charteris's gardens as an adolescent in the 1880's, spent the next sixty years there and gradually earned the nick name "Old Herbaceous". You can infer a great deal about the social class system in Great Britain of that age from this book, but as Penelope Hobhouse says in the introduction "Arkell is not concerned with social justice or injustice or, indeed, with rural poverty. Instead he weaves a tale around the gentle relationship that exists for nearly sixty years between Herbert Pinnegar and the charming Mrs. Charteris".

Marty says

What a sweet story! If you like Downton Abbey, and Carson in particular, you will love this gem of a novel about a cantankerous, yet tender 60-year estate gardener reflecting on his life in his golden years. And if you live anywhere on the east coast in this never-ending winter, you'll be glad to read about early season strawberries and sky-high morning glories. I'm so glad we got to read this for our book club!

Linda C says

Herbert Pinnegar reminisces about his life as gardener at the Manor, starting as a 14 year old and ending as head gardener. An orphan left on the doorstep of a kindly village woman with 6 children and possessing one slightly shortened leg, Bert was always a bit of a loner. He was taken under the wing of the local school teacher who was somewhat an authority on wildflowers. At 10 he drew the attention of a local well to do young lady with his exhibit at the flower show. Later when the vicar was giving the boys advice on their future as they graduated mostly sending them into the farming community, the Lady was again present and heard him say he wanted to work with flowers not farm. She was to marry shortly and move to the Manor and she told him to go there.

So begins the story of a friendship and a life in gardening, filled with poignant and humorous anecdotes. Since it takes place from 1870 to about 1950 it covers major social changes, 2 wars and technological changes in agriculture, all seen in the microcosm of the Manor. Beautifully written with great characters.

Andie says

This is a perfectly charming little book that was originally published in 1950 and now has been re-issued as part of the Modern Library Gardening Series. It follows the career of Bert Pinnegar beginning with his early life as an orphan in Victorian England where, with the help of a kindly school teacher, he develops a love for wild flowers. This leads him to be encouraged to enter the children's competition in the local flower show

where he catches the eye of the Lady of the Manor and is brought on to work in her garden. Gradually through the years he becomes famous for providing early strawberries from his greenhouse, and finally becoming notable flower show judge throughout the north of England.

The book describes the England of Masterpiece Theater; one that no longer actually exists, but still lives in the imagination of millions of people. This is a book to savor with a pot of tea on a rainy day. I guarantee you'll feel better once you turn the last page.
