Strabo's Hortulus. Seldom can the writing of a review give such relaxation and pleasure as on this occasion, when the subject is the ninth century Hortulus of Walahfrid Strabo from the Hunt Botanical Library.* An introduction by Wilfrid Blunt, an early and beautiful manuscript of the poem in facsimile, a new translation by Raef Payne, notes on the plants mentioned and on previous editions by the editor, G. H. M. Lawrence, and a fine piece of book-production: these are the twentieth century's tribute to this gem of 445 lines, a product of the period so glibly called the Dark Ages. Walahfrid Strabo was a voluminous ecclesiastical commentator and biographer, but today he lives in his lyrics and in this simple yet lively account of his garden: a monastic garden with a wall which may have kept out some of the sunlight (ll. 66–67) but which has since imprisoned many hearts.

The latin hexameters are here rendered into free verse, a choice which is fully justified by the result: the Hortulus is now made available to us in a form that can be read with enjoyment. Just occasionally the free verse is no more than a light and lilting prose, but the general standard is high and we shall wait long for a better conclusion to the introductory sections than

(ll. 73–75)
Now I must summon all my skill, all
My learning, all my eloquence, to muster
The names and virtues of this noble harvest,
That this my lowly subject may receive
The highest honor that my heart can give.

Walahfrid was a true enthusiast, gardening himself by day and poring over books about gardens at night.

(ll. 15–19)
This I have learnt not only from common opinion
And searching about in old books, but from experience—
Experience of hard work and sacrifice of many days
When I might have rested, but chose instead to labor.

Gardeners of such pattern are still with us, and must be if gardening is to flourish. They soon learn one lesson, that the watering of seedlings is a job to be done in person.

(ll. 59–61)
. . . et propriis infundere palmis
guttatim, ne forte velocio impetus undas
Ingereret nimias et semina iacta moveret

With my own hands I pour it
Drop by drop, taking care not to shift the seeds
By too sudden or lavish a soaking. . . .

(Here I feel the translator lacks experience of that horrifying and devastating gush of water that a fraction too much tilt may give. The last line has quite lost the impetus of the waves.)

Walahfrid enumerates some 23 herbs in his garden and is, of course, largely concerned with their medicinal virtues. This is no dull herbalist's catalogue. Horehound, for instance, is grown as a valuable internal remedy: Walahfrid's comment is human and humorous:

(ll. 204–207)
If ever
A vicious stepmother mixes in your drink
Subtle poisons, or makes a treacherous dish
Of lethal aconite for you, don't waste a moment—
Take a dose of wholesome horehound; that
Will counteract the danger you suspect.

Even in the ninth century there were taxonomic problems in the monastic garden:

(ll. 284–286)
I shall never lack a good supply of common mint,
In all its many varieties, all its colours, all
Its virtues.

*Hortulus by Walahfrid Strabo, translated by Raef Payne with a commentary by Wilfrid Blunt, Pittsburgh, The Hunt Botanical Library, 1966. xii, 91 p., facsimiles. (The Hunt facsimile series, No. 2) 10½ ins. Price: 12 dollars.

Two sorts are described, then comes the text for the monographer of *Mentha* to set at the head of his opus:

(ll. 295–297) Sed si quis vires speciesque et nomina mentae
Ad plenum memorare potest, sciat ille necesse est
Aut quot Erythraeo volitent in gurgite pisces

But if any man can name
The full list of all the kinds and all the properties
Of mint, he must be one who knows how many fish
Swim in the Indian Ocean. . . .

The work ends with the *Commendatio opusculi*, a tender lyric dedication to Grimald, Abbot of St. Gall and Walahfrid's former teacher. This stands as a poem in its own right and has tempted several translators: Helen Waddell made a true English poem of it. Did not Robin Flower say 'to translate poetry by less than poetry is a sin beyond absolution'? Raef Payne has not sinned: his translation here (except for the too formal 'most learned Father Grimald') follows Walahfrid to a higher level and is as good as anything in the book. It is simply his misfortune to follow. Surely somewhere in this volume, so full of notes and commentaries, the reader should have been told that Helen Waddell's rendering exists?

The other criticism I personally make is on the spelling of Walahfrid. No doubt there are good reasons in scholarship, other than the usage of the earliest manuscript (which smacks too much of botanical nomenclature), for spelling it with a medial 'h'. English however, has favoured the simpler Walafrid (library catalogues, the Lamberts' edition, Helen Waddell) and on the continent Migne followed the same line. Walahfrid will long seem a stranger to me. At least the taxonomist may be grateful to Ernst Meyer for naming his genus *Walafrida*. Meyer dedicated it to him "cujus Hortulum nemo nescit elegantiarum literarum peritus" (whose Hortulus is known to everyone versed in letters). That was in 1835. We owe the Hunt Library our warmest thanks for helping a later generation not to fall short of the standard set by Meyer on this particular point.

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