

# The Apple

Most of our hardy fruits have a long history of cultivation. Primitive man gathered berries from the wild bushes around him. One can imagine him removing undesirable plants so that those he found useful could be encouraged. Thus weeding was invented, the first step in crop husbandry. The next step was to plant deliberately the kinds he wanted in a concentrated area and, most important of all, select the best forms for his purpose. Plant breeding had been invented.

The apple certainly goes back into pre-history as a cultivated plant. The natural range of the wild form, which was very like the wild crab apple of today, was Europe, except the extreme north, and eastwards into Asia Minor, and possibly as far east as North-West India. It was well known and grown in the early Mediterranean civilisations.

As with many other plants native to Britain, the best early cultivated forms of apple were not home-produced from our native stock but were introduced from the Continent. The Romans are credited with introducing the apple but some exploitation of the fruit no doubt occurred before that time. Pliny, quoted by Loudon (*Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, 1824) says that at least 22 varieties were then known to the Romans and they included varieties for eating raw and cooking.

Throughout medieval times, apples were widely grown in Britain, new varieties doubtless coming over from the Continent from time to time.

By the end of the 16th century, the grafting and growing of select apples was widespread. Gerard, writing at that time, says: "The tame and grafted Apple trees are planted and set in gardens and orchards." We can now detect two divergent lines of development. The apples grown in gardens were usually specially trained as arbours or on walls or fences, whereas the orchards contained standard trees grown with little pruning.

Gerard continues: "I have seen in the pastures and hedgerows about the grounds of a worshipful gentleman dwelling two miles from Hereford called Master Roger Bodnome so many trees of all sorts that the servants drinke for the most part not other drinke but that which is made of Apples". And later: "The Parson hath for tithe many hogsheads of Syder".

Gerard thinks apples should be more commonly grown. He advises: "Graffe, set, plant and nourish up trees in every corner of your ground, the labour is small, the cost is nothing, the commoditie is great, yourselves shall have plenty, the poor shall have somewhat in time of want . . . and God shall reward your good minds and diligence". Modern apple growers may not agree with all of Gerard's sentiments.

Parkinson, in his "Paradisi" of 1629, deals with the problem of varieties, which was "so many and infinite almost as I may say that I cannot give you the names of all". It is obvious that many seedlings were being raised. Nevertheless he lists more than 50 varieties, some with very English names such as Golding, Broading, Costerd, Queene Apple, Leathercoate, Cowsnout, and Cats head. He notes that there are "twenty sorts of Sweetings and none good". Others are obviously of French origin. There was already a Worcester apple at that time but not, of course, our present-day Worcester Pearmain. It was described as a "very good apple, as bigge as a Pomewater", the latter being one of the biggest apples known.

It is in Parkinson that we find the first reference I have discovered to Paradise rootstocks. He says: "The Paradise or dwarfe Apple tree groweth . . . many times not much higher than a man might reach". The fruit of this apple was of poor quality but he states: "That being a dwarf apple tree, whatsoever fruit shall be grafted on it, will keep the graft low

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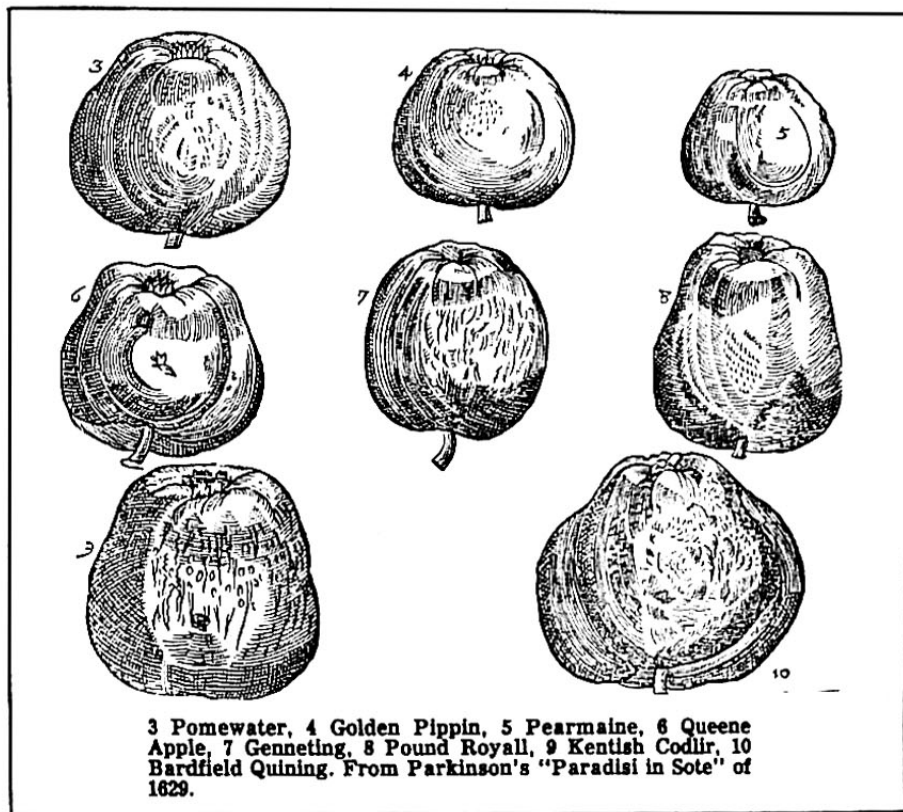
like unto it selfe, and yet bears fruit reasonable well".

Three centuries later East Malling Research Station were to carry out trials of a rather muddled collection of apple rootstocks then in commercial use. The old English Paradise became Malling I and a somewhat similar rootstock, of French origin, the Doucin, Malling II.

Parkinson was a much better grower and gardener than Gerard who was, in many ways, a bit of a fake. The care and maintenance Parkinson advises, even for standard trees in orchards, shows that he was under no illusions about the labour required. Keeping the centres open, removing unwanted branches while

they are young to avoid large pruning wounds, painting over the larger wounds to avoid heart-rot, and many other of his recommendations, are still valid today.

The intensive growing of apples in gardens on specially trained trees was covered by Parkinson, but this type of culture reached its highest peak in France where de Quintinye (after training as a lawyer) became Director of the Fruit and Kitchen Gardens for Louis XIV at Versailles. Charles II when in exile met de Quintinye, and, after the Restoration, sent his own head gardener, Rose, to study under him. The 18th century developments following this will be covered in the next article.



3 Pomewater, 4 Golden Pippin, 5 Pearmaine, 6 Queene Apple, 7 Genneting, 8 Pound Royall, 9 Kentish Coddir, 10 Bardfield Quining. From Parkinson's "Paradisi in Sote" of 1629.