English Pleasure Gardens

Above all, the pleasure garden was intended for the diversion of the chatelaine. As early as 1250 we learn from a contemporary record that Henry III, to gratify Eleanor of Provence, ordered his bailiff at Woodstock “to make round about the garden of our Queen two walls good and high with fountains so that no one can enter, with a well-ordered herbary befitting her position, near our garden pond, where the said Queen may roam about freely.” Here she might have meditated in solitude under a leafy bower, have enjoyed a tete-a-tete with a bosom friend enthroned on a turfed seat, or in pleasant company have paced up and down the sanded alleys, flanked by the pleasant sound of water from the fountains.As an agreeable alternative from the smoky castle hall, the pleasure garden was evidently the favorite place for recreation; and why not, since the pleasant forces of nature and tranquil sounds of falling water from the fountains was certainly a pleasing environment. It was often chosen for giving audience and receiving friends. Entertainment was furnished by the https://gravatar.com/colorfulbd49b96d40 troubadours, who sang their Chansons de Geste, interspersed with romances of the Crusades, of prowess, and of love; by the jugglers and tumblers, who performed wonderful tricks and gymnastic feats; and by the dancing-girls, whose graceful motions were of an Oriental character. The guests themselves also frequently caroled, or danced in a circle, sang songs, and played musical instruments on the steppes of the fountains for their own diversion.Garland weaving was a favorite occupation for ladies. Both men and women wore chaplets of flowers on festive occasions, and they were also given as rewards for success in various sports. Chaucer speaks of the month of May as especially the season for weaving garlands. The beauty of a jewel was never more enhanced by an appropriate setting than the loveliness of ladies by the fanciful environment of this medieval pleasure garden.Fresh as the new flowers of sondry hewe,” in her trailing robes fashioned ” summerwise,” her head wreathed with a chaplet of fragrant roses, her bright eyes sparkling in the sunshine, the “fayre ladye ” was indeed the crowning joy of a very paradise. And as she was its most beautiful ornament, so was it her chief delight.