12th June 2025

Gardens

Si hortum in bibliotheca habes, nihil deerit.

"If you have a garden in the library,
we will have everything we need."

Cicero, *Ad Familiares*

I'm not really a gardener. I'm happy to potter in my own garden, but I have no real interest in, or passion for, gardening. A little grass-cutting; occasional weeding; pruning to keep shrubs in order; colourful bedding plants for the summer; regular watering. Enough? Well, it is for me.

Having said that, I was interested in Cicero's useful insight into gardens and libraries, quoted above. Now, I take that *not* to mean that to have a little, indoor garden in a library makes using the library more pleasurable – though, I suppose it would. But I don't think this is Cicero's point. For to me he's implying that the library is a garden *of itself,* and, if that's true, we have, he suggests, everything we need.

So, with my *very* limited gardening knowledge, let's explore Cicero's metaphor. Firstly, we need to become familiar with our garden, make sure it's got things we take pleasure from, and that are useful, or colourful, or life-enhancing. That'll be different for everyone, of course. Some, like me, will keep it simple. Others, like many of you, I suspect, will learn about new things and deepen your knowledge regularly. But either way, the garden of knowledge is there to be enjoyed.

And then, it has to be looked after. Abandon the garden, and it'll become a jungle soon enough. But tend it, use it carefully, manage it properly, and it'll give you back so much. Books are like that. They're precious. They'll give us such a lot if we make good use of them.

I've just renewed my Council "Garden Waste Licence", £35 to East Lothian Council to remove my garden waste for another year. Grass cuttings; prunings; weeds; dead plants. Yes, and libraries need that too. The old can get rotten; the waste can become a burden; the deadwood can get in the way. So, it needs to go, regularly, to keep things fresh.

More to be made of Cicero's metaphor? I'll leave that to you, because I've done enough. I'm off to sit in my garden … Or is it my library?

A prayer for today

"Closer to God in a garden"? It looks like I have more work to do …

An original reflection © Tom Gordon *Also available at* https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com