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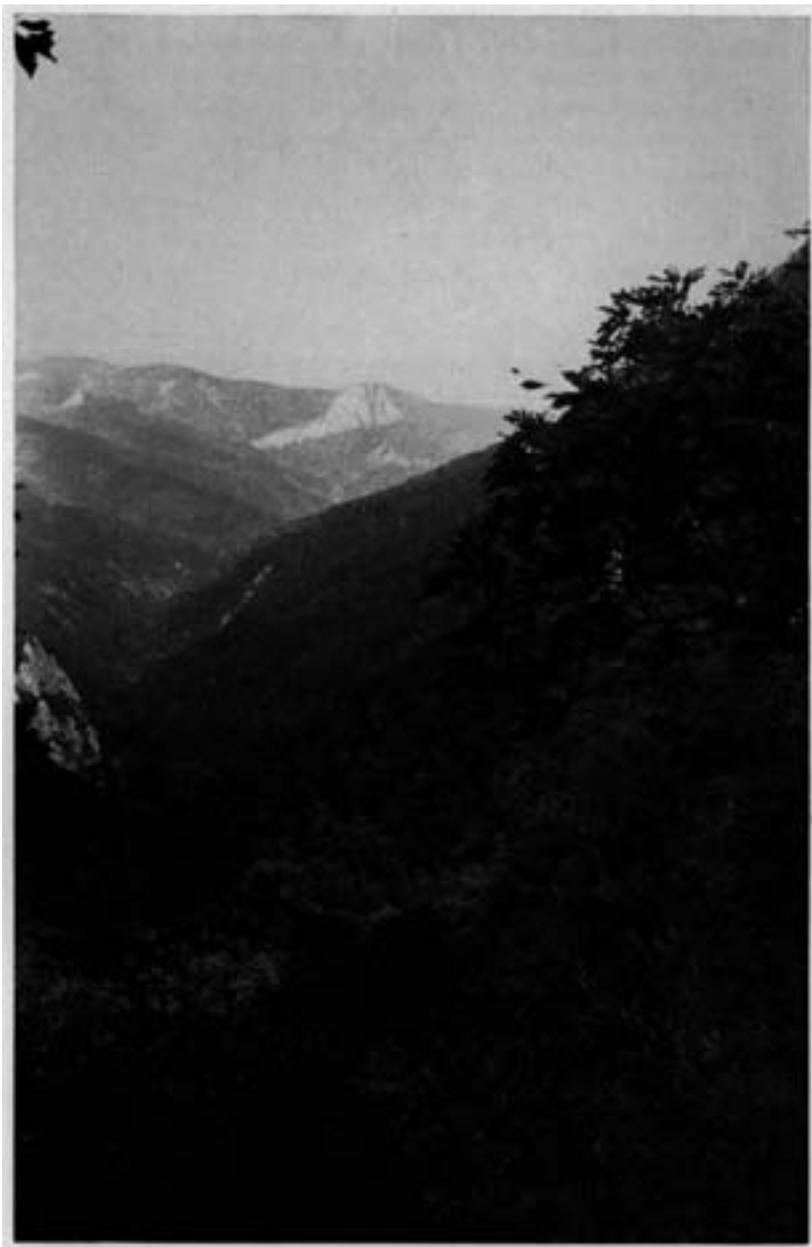
**A** VISIT TO THE HOME OF THE LILAC. To one who has known the lilac as a garden plant the first sight of it in its native home is almost certain to come as a shock. In the central Balkans, a dry and dusty land, whose climate roughly approximates that of central Nebraska, *Syringa vulgaris* picks out some of the driest, rockiest situations. At Pancherevo, Bulgaria, where I first saw it, there were scattered individuals growing in full sunlight in rock crevices above the roadway. They grew out sideways from the cliff and hung over the road in low tufts of foliage bearing here and there, for it was late in the summer, loose panicles of ripening seed capsules. I saw scattered specimens again near Gabrovo, at the foot of the Stara Planina, the mountain range which forms an east-west backbone across northern Bulgaria. There too they were growing in rock crevices but in this case the cliff rose above a stream and was covered with English ivy (*Hedera helix*).

Not until I came to Cazan Pass in southwestern Rumania did I find *Syringa vulgaris* growing in great abundance. At Cazan the Danube River is confined to a narrow gorge whose cliffs rise mountain high on either side. In a series of sharp turns the river, like a thwarted serpent, bends violently from left to right until it finally passes through the Iron Gates and reaches the level plain beyond the mountains. The lower Danube, like the lower Mississippi, is a great yellow-brown flood. Through the long level stretches of the Hungarian and Rumanian plains an American traveller might well believe himself at home. For all that he sees from the river steamers, the willow swamps and shifting sand bars might well be those of Arkansas or Tennessee. But when the Danube throws itself against the Iron Gates there is little to remind him of the American scene. It is as if the Mississippi, instead of skirting the flanks of the Ozark Mountains, were to pass directly through them on its way to the sea. For so large a river the gorge is surprisingly narrow. At Cazan it is only a little over 100 yards across.

Steep cliffs rise almost vertically on each bank with narrow roadways at their bases. The road on the Jugoslavian side of the river is in ruins, as well it might be, for it was constructed over 1800 years ago by the Emperor Trajan. It was a marvelous piece of engineering for that day, or for any day, since the road for much of the way had to be hollowed out of the rock. One can still see the holes drilled in the cliff to hold the beams on which the bridges were carried and at one spot there is a tablet with an inscription in Latin. On the Rumanian side of the river there is a similar road, a modern automobile highway, and, like the old Roman road, it now tunnels through the rock, now hangs on the foot of the cliff.

The lilacs were everywhere, particularly on the sunnier Rumanian bank. Some grew on the talus slopes, others seemed to spring from the bare face of the rock itself, and an almost continuous fringe of them lined the cliff edge a thousand feet above the river. The pass must be a marvelous sight in spring time. On inaccessible ledges wild tulips grow in profusion and make spots of color which can be seen from the river steamers. Flowering ash (*Fraxinus Ornus*) with its filmy yellow-green flowers forms a natural foil for the lilacs and all these colors are backed by the bright gray-white of the limestone.

There can be no possible doubt that *Syringa vulgaris* is native at Cazán. It is not only that it is abundant and that it grows on inaccessible cliffs, the same can now be said for the American black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), which is thoroughly naturalized along the Danube and at Cazán is a common sight at the base of talus slopes. A much more compelling argument is the form of the plants and the remarkable variation which exists among them. The wild lilacs of Cazán do not at all closely resemble cultivated lilacs run wild. Their flowers are not borne in tight little bunches, but in great open sprays. Even on small bushes wedged in between limestone boulders, the panicles may reach two feet in length. Nor does the general form of the bush follow closely a single pattern as in the cultivated lilacs. This can best be seen back from the cliff edge where the lilacs grow in their greatest profusion, on the limestone plateau above the river. Here they form open thickets among the rocks, much as does the redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) in similar situations in our own southern states. From bush to bush there is striking variation in form and habit. Some are dense, some open. In some the two branches of the panicle are widely divergent, in others they ascend stiffly, side by side. There is, in other words, that rich and manifold variation which characterizes most plants in their native home, but which is not found in the few strains which are brought into cultivation. In flower color and size, there may be greater variation



among the cultivated varieties, but the plant as a whole will show greater diversity in its native home.

It was from these Balkan cliffs and mountains that the lilac passed into cultivation. From Constantinople it was introduced into northern Europe in the 16th century. The botanists of that day, unaware of the richness of the Balkan flora, supposed that like many other plants cultivated by the Turks it had come from the Orient. This legend, once established, was hard to shake. In 1828, Anton Rochel first reported the lilac as native to the Balkans but not for fifty years did botanists as a whole accept the evidence.

Had the Romans been as good gardeners as they were soldiers the lilac might have been introduced into cultivation a good fourteen centuries earlier. So plentiful is it in this part of the Balkans that it must have been known to the Romans when they occupied the country. At Cazán it festoons the road which Trajan's workmen hollowed from the rocks. At Bâile Herculane ("Hercules Bath") it grows profusely on the limestone cliffs rising above the hot springs which have been known since Roman times. There, on the hot southern face of Mt. Domogled, *Syringa vulgaris* is found in a variety of situations. It springs from crevices in the bare rock, it forms thickets along dry gullies, and on the grassy slopes below the summit it assumes the character of an alpine shrub. As one ascends, the lilac bushes become smaller and more dense. At first they arch over the pathway, higher up they form dense clumps beneath the black pines, and just below the summit, they are barely knee high.

There, among the rocks, they grow into broad mats of foliage from which the long open panicles rise conspicuously. In late September, at the time of my visit, the seeds on these alpine lilacs had just begun to ripen and most of the capsules were a delicate yellow-green. The Rumanian Forest Service, however, has been kind enough to collect seed for the Arnold Arboretum and many seedlings have already germinated. What will they look like in twenty years? One can only guess. Some alpine plants retain their dwarf habit when grown in the lowlands: others do not. It is quite likely that, under cultivation, they will grow more luxuriantly than on the mountain top but there is a reasonable chance that they may not exceed three or four feet in height even when grown in fertile garden soil. If so they will fill a distinct place in American gardens.

EDGAR ANDERSON

#### EXPLANATION OF THE PLATE

View from Mt. Domogled showing dry limestone slopes on which *Syringa vulgaris* is found.