

WILD FLOWERS



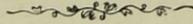
AND WHAT THEY TEACH US



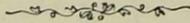
Melanie Susanna Duck,
Thank her May Paper
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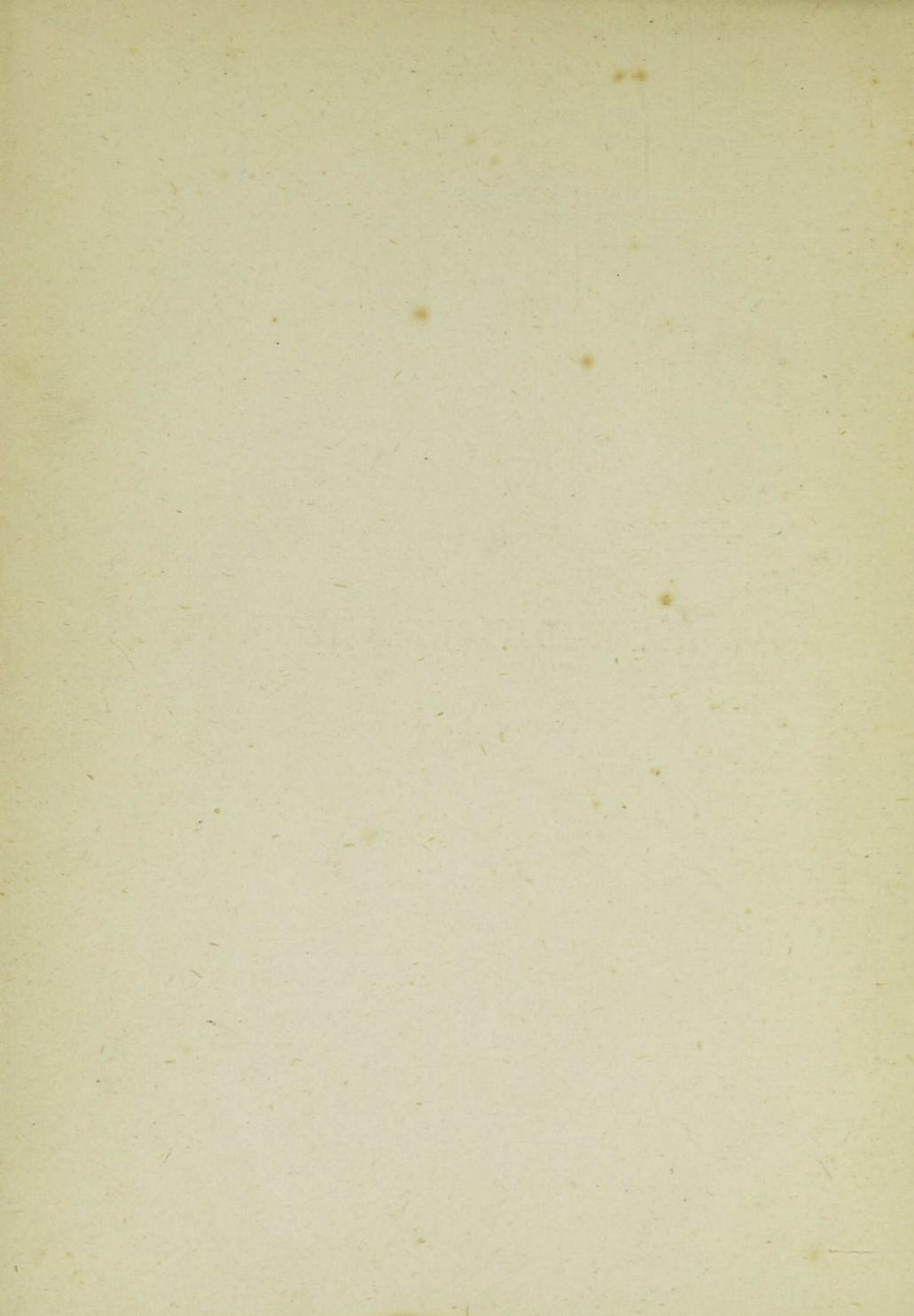
May all the sweet lessons,
This little book teaches,
Be learnt sincerely by her
For whom it's intended,
S. J.

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WHAT THE WILD FLOWERS TEACH US.







SWEET BRIAR AND FIELD SCABIOUS



WHAT THE WILD FLOWERS
TEACH US.

BY

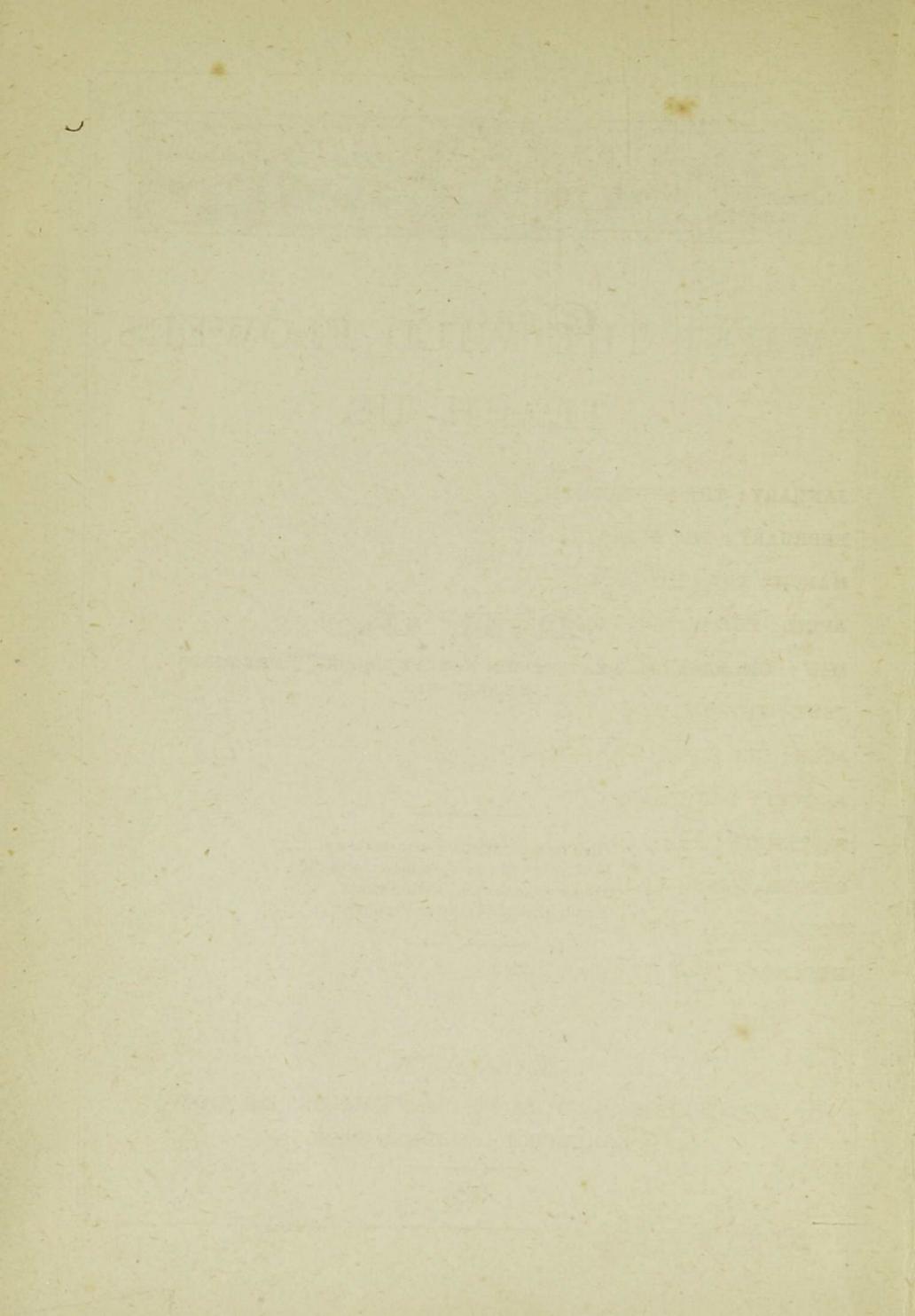
M. K. M.,

AUTHOR OF "LEAVES FROM NATURE'S BOOK," "THE BIRDS
WE SEE," ETC.

"Give true hearts but earth and sky,
And some 'flowers' to bloom and die ;
Homely scenes and simple views
Lowly thoughts may best infuse."

LONDON:
T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW ;
EDINBURGH ; AND NEW YORK.

1875.



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WHAT THE WILD FLOWERS TEACH US.

January.

THE SNOWDROP.

PERHAPS you are surprised to hear of the snowdrop being a wild flower. You have only seen it in the trim garden-bed peeping out to see whether, in all the cold wintry world, there is anything so pure and white as its own snowy petals. The Christmas-rose is the only bit of flower besides, and though it *calls* itself white, it is very dull and dingy in comparison.

Ah! there is the snow itself; that is the only thing to match the snowdrop. It looks as if some few resolute snowflakes were determined *not* to melt, but had set themselves into a green cup or calyx, and called themselves snowdrops. Well, it is pleasant to find them even in the garden, where you know you planted the little gray roots last November, and so you are not surprised to see them. But if you had the good fortune to make their acquaintance *wild*, it would be so much more pleasant still. I do not think you would forget it.

It is not very usual to find the snowdrop wild; but where it *does* grow, it grows in profusion. In a certain wood in Surrey it makes a perfect carpet of inlaid green and white, spread delicately over the autumnal last year's leaves, and beneath the bare, quaint arms of the giant

elm-trees. Under the shadow of the beautiful Malvern Hills it also makes its home, and in many other places; but sufficiently rare is it for even old, staid, care-worn folk, who do not stoop for a trifle, to stop and gather, and make a note in their memories of the fairy spot which came across them suddenly in the midst of a dark and weary and sin-stained world.

In the East, where it grows abundantly, the roots are much used as food. They are called *bulbs*—that is, they are formed of a layer of skins one over the other, like the onion. Roots of this kind are always wholesome and good to eat. I do not think, however, that you would care much to have the snowdrop boiled for your dinner; it would be too much like eating your own pets.

Poets call the snowdrop the “fair maid

of February ;” but when the weather is tolerably mild, it is generally to be found at the end of January. A prettier name still is what the Germans give it—“*schneeglockchen*”—which means *snowbells*. Yes, it *does* seem part and parcel of the snow; and though people talk of it as the first gift of spring, it speaks to me much more of being resigned to the winter than of being hopeful about the spring.

It was a cold day in January, so utterly cheerless and dreary you could hardly fancy the spring ever thought of coming back again. The roads were miry; the fields wet and yellow and sappy; even the garden looked about as comfortless as a garden could look. But stop a minute; down there—under the shade of the shrubbery, cold and trembling, but alive and well for all that—there grew a snowdrop.

And it did not escape the sharp eyes of the robin in the holly-bush, and he began to sing about it. *This* is what his song said,—

“ Why, old friend, there you are again; but I can't say much about being glad to see you! If you had only got a bit of colour in your face now—if you were only like the crocus now, so bold and bright and cheery, that *does* do me good after all the hard, hungry struggles of the winter: when I see it I seem almost to taste the delicious juicy worms which come out in the spring-time. But *you*, so pale and cold! why, it makes me shiver to look at you, and gives me the feeling it is going to be winter always.”

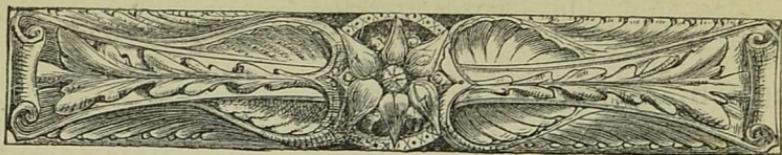
This was not very complimentary, certainly, to the poor little snowdrop; but what with his red breast, and the red holly-berries, I suppose the robin gets im-

patient of anything that does not come up to his ideas of colour.

The starling was sitting on the topmost bough of the elm-tree, and he had something to say about it too. "Well, it is a good idea to hear you talk in this fashion; for it is the very same thing as I have been saying to my friends all the winter about that song of yours. It's pleasant enough, but there's no *hope* in it; it's all about the past: the last year's flowers, the autumn leaves, how bright the world was once; but whether it is to be so again you don't tell us a bit. Now your neighbour wren has been singing on the bough below me all the morning. He has sung there all the winter, indeed; and the worse the weather, why all the louder. Such a lively, hopeful song, it warms me through and through; and it says just as plain as a parson that the winter is God's as well

as the summer, that it can't last longer than He means it to do, and that when His frost and snow have done His work, the sunshine will come back to us just as bright as before."

The robin did not like to be taken to task, so he turned his back pertly and hopped away. But the snowdrop lifted up her head a little, and said gently, "Yes, I may tremble, but I never shrink. Perhaps I don't help you to hope for what is coming, but I can show you how to bear *what is now*. My lot is cast in the winter-time. I have no choice about it; I cannot *help* it, but I can *endure* it. *This* is the lesson I have to learn, and this is what I am sent to teach others, *Meekly to bend, and patiently to bear.*" And the pale, fair blossom seemed to grow paler and fairer still, the whisper died away from out of the snowy bells, and I heard no more.



February.

THE FURZE.

HE snow is gone now, and February has come, and the crocus is just peeping out of the dark garden mould. Hardly less bright, hardly less golden, the furze-blossoms on the common begin to shine through the gray prickly leaves. It is true you might find a few flowers on the furze-bush any month all through the year; so that an old proverb says, "When the furze is out of blossom, kissing is out of fashion," which means that it never *is* out of flower; but it is only one here and one there. This

month, however, the bits of gold begin to show themselves without being looked for, though the full glory is not till May.

Then, indeed, it is a beautiful sight to see the wild moorland or hill-side one mass of burnished gold, so that nobody seeing it for the first time would ever guess it came from such coarse, common-looking plants as a set of furze-bushes. There was once a great man who loved flowers, and spent his life in watching them and writing about them for the good of other people. He lived in Sweden, and the furze does not grow there. He came over to see us ; and when he first saw the furze in full blossom on some green English down, he was so overpowered that he fell down on his knees there and then, in thankfulness to the great God who had created such a scene of beauty. This was Linnæus, the great botanist, and I hope

we have all felt something of what he did. Does it not sometimes seem to you as if beautiful things went straight into your hearts, as it were, and that then there was nothing else to be done but to give God thanks for them? The furze, or gorse, as it is often called, is not attractive when it is out of flower. Still it has its uses: goats and sheep feed upon the young shoots; the larger branches are chopped off to make winter shelter for the cattle; while in bleak situations, where nothing else could grow, it is planted for fences—and he must be a bold boy who would try to climb over such a sharp, prickly hedge.

The furze is a papilionaceous flower. I am sorry to use such a hard word, but you must forgive me for the sake of its pretty meaning. It signifies shaped like a butterfly. Our garden pease or sweet-pea blossoms will at once occur to you

as being the same shape, only still more distinctly formed like a butterfly. It is one of our largest as well as prettiest families of plants; and it would be very pleasant to look out in your walks for all the blossoms which seem as if they might claim kindred with the butterfly.

God *might* have made the flowers all of one shape and pattern, but instead of that, some have a cup, and some are like a bell; some spread out like a plate, and others, as in this case, have bright, wing-like petals. It is very curious to notice how the world of plants and insects is blended one with the other, so that not only are there flowers like insects, but also insects like different parts of a plant. There is a certain caterpillar so exactly like a bit of dead stick that—having moreover a trick of keeping its body straight out from the branch—you could never know it from a

little brown spur unless you were to take hold of it and find it soft instead of hard. Another of these caterpillars, when it becomes a moth, is just as much like a withered leaf; and it is covered over with little dark spots like a true faded leaf, so that it deceives even the closest observer. Another kind of moth has such light feathery wings, you could scarcely tell it from the downy dandelion or thistle-heads which float past you on the autumn breeze. So you must look out for flower-like insects as well as insect-like flowers.

“Alack-a-day, that I was born a furze-bush!” sighed one among many on a sloping hilly common. “There’s nothing worth living for on this dreary out-of-the-way place. I am mean and coarse and common, I know; nobody cares for me—nobody admires me; and all the notice

I get is in the shape of blows from the sticks of thoughtless boys, who (for the same reason as they beat donkeys) seem to suppose that creatures who are not handsome can't *feel*. Oh, if I had only been something else, and not what I am!"

The furze-bush did not know; the furze-bush could not tell. It was not flowering time yet, so it never guessed its own mission, or what was coming. This was in the early spring; but May arrived at last, and oh, what a change came with it,—the furze-bush was lost in a blaze of brilliant, shining *gold*!

Who had done it? Had the fairies been at work? No; the furze-bush had been itself the magician. Did you ever hear of people, years and years ago, who thought there was something somewhere, if they could only find it, which would have the

power of turning all the other metals into gold? So they were always looking for this marvellous gift, and always mixing different metals together, hoping that at last, by some lucky chance, they should hit upon the right thing. These people were called alchemists, and one after another they lived and died, and nothing ever came of all their labours.

But the furze-bush had found out the fabled secret. It had only lived and grown, as it thought, but a grand result came presently. The roots had sucked up nourishment from the soil, and the leaves (which are the lungs) had drank in the air, and the rain and the dew had watered it, and it had turned all these things into gold! *Such* gold, too! it lighted up the whole common,—you could see it half a mile off; the roughest plant of the waste became the brightest of the bright, the

gayest of the gay, admired by every eye that rested upon it.

“Furze-bush, furze-bush, give *us* a lesson! We have plenty of common things all about us; teach *us* how to make gold out of them as you do.” The only answer I could get was something like this:—

“Teach me, my God and King,
In all things *Thee* to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it unto *Thee*.

“*This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.*”





March.

THE SHAMROCK.



DO not mean the wood-sorrel, though that is often called the shamrock. True, its pale green leaves have the same triple form, and its delicately-pencilled flower is fair enough for any honour to be put upon it. True, it is delightful to find its little tufts of blossom growing under the still leafless trees some gusty March day. True, it has a beautiful name in Italy : it is called the alleluia flower, because it blooms at Easter-time. Yes, it has a history of its own, but not so interesting as that of the

real Irish shamrock, which is a species of clover. Listen, and I will tell you. It was a long time ago. A grave, earnest-looking man was standing upon a carpet of soft green turf. It was before the Saxons had ever seen our white cliffs, which rose above the bright blue sea then, the same as they do now. This was not in England, however, but in Ireland; and the grave man had just landed there. Had he come to fight? had he come to conquer? Everybody fought in those days, everybody tried to conquer. Yes, he *had* come to fight; but it was against the same old enemies which you and I have to fight to-day,—the world, the flesh, and the devil; and the conquests he hoped to make were the very same that you and I may win, even the victories of *love*.

This man was St. Patrick. He had been born in Scotland, but at the age of sixteen

was taken prisoner, carried to Ireland, and sold as a slave. There his humble office was to keep pigs. But in doing this he learned the Irish language, and this was God's preparation for the work he was to do in after-life. At last he managed to escape to France; he wandered about, picked up a good deal of learning, became a Christian, and was ordained a minister of the gospel. "I must go back and preach the glad tidings to my old companions," he said; and back he came to the green island where he had once lived as a slave-boy. And he stood forth on the emerald sod, and told the heathen people of a God who loved them, and a Saviour who had died for them, and a Holy Spirit ready to make them holy too. They listened and wondered. "But you say you have but one God," they replied, "and yet you speak of three; *how* can

three be ONE ?” St. Patrick paused a moment, then he stooped down and gathered one of the dark, velvety, threefold leaves of the shamrock which was growing under their feet. “Behold the three in one,” he said reverently. The symbol went home to their simple minds : they asked no more questions, and numbers of them became Christians.

St. Patrick was a wise man ; he knew that the deep and holy doctrine of the Trinity could not be explained ; but he knew also that a picture or anything that we can *see*, will often express what words cannot. Perhaps he also thought of Him who made the grass and the lilies and the common things the texts of His sermons. The shamrock grows everywhere in Ireland, and from that day to this it has been the national emblem and the favourite flower of all true Irishmen. So that

when you see, amidst the blaze of heraldry, the blooming rose of England and the hardy thistle of Scotland, underneath will there be sure to be the graceful leaves of St. Patrick's shamrock, as the representative of Ireland.

Now and then a shamrock is met with having a leaf divided into four instead of three, and this is supposed by the Irish to be endowed with some special power by the good St. Patrick; there is no end to the good a four-leaved shamrock is to bring, so that it is eagerly sought for—especially on the 17th of March, which is St. Patrick's Day. I do not think the shamrock grows wild anywhere in England, but it is so common in gardens you will easily find an opportunity of looking for the rare four leaves which are to work such wonders. I am afraid whether, after all, if found, it would be of any sensible

benefit to you, unless, indeed, you strengthened thereby *patience* and *perseverance*; and these would be better gifts than any fairy favours.

Some people call the common white clover the shamrock, but this is a mistake. The little white head of flowers and the general growth are indeed the same, but the beautiful dark veins upon the leaves mark the difference completely. I like to talk to those lowly velvet leaves; or rather, they talk to me. Have you never heard the flowers talk to you? If not, it must have been that you were not quiet enough to hear; for their voices are very small and still, and they never *will* speak in noise and bustle.

Or perhaps you do not stoop low enough. You must go down *very* low to hear what the shamrock says; for it is so weak, it never lifts itself up more than a few inches

from the ground. But if you listen, you may hear a whisper like this: "I never thought to be noticed and spoken about; I don't want to be anything more than a humble little shamrock, though they *have* put me up with the rose and the thistle to represent a kingdom. I was just trying to make the soil look green, and never wanted to be anything higher. But as it is, why I must just try and be *myself* still, and not trouble about how I look or what others may think of me in such grand company." And perhaps it is St. Patrick, and not the shamrock, which adds the holy words, "Go and sit down in the lowest room;" and, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."





April.

THE VIOLET, PRIMROSE, COWSLIP, AND ORCHIS.



THE April flowers crowd so thickly upon us, we must make a wreath of them instead of taking them singly. We love them so much, we do not know how to leave out any of them. We have been hunting a long time for the violets ; sometimes a few may be found in March, but the balmy April days bring them out in delicious bunches, both blue and white, hidden under the fresh green leaves.

But how is this ? we have gathered some, and they do not smell ; we begin to

fear that there may be deceivers even among flowers, and that violets, spite of all the praise that is given them, are not quite so innocent as we thought they were. But it is our own fault; we have plucked the hairy violet instead of the sweet-scented violet: it is paler in colour, the leaves are duller green, and more decidedly heart-shaped, so that a practised eye may tell it at once from its more favoured cousin. There is yet another kind called the dog-violet: it blossoms later, is more round in form, and when it grows in dry places is also paler; but if you should find it on a moist mossy bank, it is then of such a deep dark blue you would think you would never get tired of looking into it. I often wonder that it should be so little mentioned among the flowers of spring. I suppose it is considered that all violets fail in their duty if

they don't smell ; but I can't help believing that its beautiful dark eye has a light of its own to give, a place of its own to fill. The little yellow heart's-ease of the corn-fields is also a species of violet ; and it is interesting to know that the broad velvet faces of our garden heart's-ease are all derived from this humble, insignificant little plant.

We must have some primroses to mingle with our violets. Sweet, sweet primroses ! who does not love them ? don't you feel, when they first come back again, as if you wanted more power to admire them and enjoy them ? Those pale stars scattered in such myriads over that sunny bank, don't they seem as if they had dropped down from the sky, instead of springing out of the dark cold soil ? Perhaps it is their shape, perhaps it is their scent, perhaps it is their colour ; but they always

look to me less earthly than most other flowers.

But they have a real root in the earth's mould, and a very curious one too ; it looks as if it had been abruptly broken off, as if the plant had intended to grow a long root like a carrot, and then changed its mind and made a little stump only. But, however, a green circle of crisp, crinkled leaves shoots up out of it, and then the flowers peep timidly out one after the other till it is a mass of blossom. If you want to learn the different parts of a flower, I do not know a better lesson-book than the primrose : first, the green part or calyx outside, then the corolla or petals, the pistil and stamens, being all so clearly seen and plainly marked. You might think the corolla had five petals, but when you come to look into it you will find it is all of one piece, only deeply cut, and the

divisions are so evenly and exactly set, it gives the star-like form which is so lovely to our eyes.

The primrose grows in woods and on the borders of fields, on banks and sloping grassy places, where it can catch the sunshine. The cowslip is more especially a child of the meadows, though it is largest and sweetest, like the primrose, on high, hilly, open ground. On many a green, chalky down you might count thousands of its golden cups, all ready filled with honey for the bee and fragrance for the passer-by.

The cowslip is a much more matter-of-fact looking flower than the primrose ; its stalk is too thick to be ethereal, and its flowery head is too intimately associated with that institution of our childhood, the cowslip-ball, to be anything above the ordinary and the practical. It comes out

a week or two later than the primrose, and so is linked in our minds with the pleasure of advancing spring; when we see it we know so well how it grew amongst the thickly-springing meadow grass, the cuckoo-flower beside it, the skylark's cosy little nest underneath it, and the nightingale singing to it from the nearest oak-tree. Country people say it never *does* sing except where cowslips grow; and all I can say is, that if so, it is very sensible of the nightingale, and I should do the same.

But we must gather another flower in this same field, which is dotting it all over with purple spikes. It is the meadow orchis. Nobody loves it so well as the others we have spoken of; it has no smell, and is stiff and independent-looking; but it is welcome for all that, and it makes a bright change of colour in our spring nose-

gay. In other lands there are many beautiful and strangely-flowered orchises, which you may chance to see transplanted to our greenhouses and hothouses. But even in our own woods there are some very interesting kinds which are well worth hunting for; there is something peculiar about most of them. This purple orchis of the spring has some strange-looking spots upon its long green leaves. "I will tell you how they came," says the old legend. "The plant grew at the foot of our Saviour's cross, and that dark blotch upon the leaf is the precious stain which fell there then, and which from that time to this the plant has carried."

In the olden times they were very fond of linking holy things with common ones. Perhaps their hearts dwelt more among sacred themes than ours do, so that the shadow of the cross seemed to them to

rest naturally upon the familiar objects of everyday life. Let us try and take pattern from them. What we are always thinking about, we are sure to see reflected from outward things. If God's love is *in our hearts*, God's love will also be to us in the flowers.

The sun was just rising on a bright April morning. The thrush and the black-bird had been singing for an hour or two, but they seemed to think they had done *their* part in waking up the sleepy world, and so they had given over and were silent now. A multitude of other birds, however, smaller but sweeter still, were so rejoicing in the sunshine that they could not help telling it out—which is what everybody ought to do when they are happy. Down the slope of the wood some trees had been felled, and only their stumps

left—just on purpose, the primroses underneath thought, that they might get more light and air. They were showing their gratitude by growing as fine as they could, each cluster from its own root like a little separate family, yet joining with the others to make a beautiful whole—which is again what ought to be done by *all* families.

The sun had barely risen, so that the primrose-cups were brimful of the morning dew still. A child was wandering by; she was not often out so early, so she wondered what could be the matter with them. “Sweet primroses,” she said, “why are you so sad this morning? You know I love you; is not that enough?”

“Yes,” replied the primroses gently, “we know you love us *now*, but how will it be by-and-by? You will grow up and forget us; and that is why we weep.”

The child said nothing, but walked up

the slope and opened a little gate which led out into a field at the top. Matters were still worse there, for the dew lay thicker still. "Oh, cowslips," she exclaimed, "don't cry so; see how your tears are falling down upon the grass."

"We can't help it," answered the cowslips, shaking their heads and making the drops fall all the faster; "you see you may notice us now, but you will not do so long. Nobody cares for cowslips except children. In a few years' time, you will pass this spot and not even know that we are here."

The child grew sad now in her turn, and somehow the dew seemed to have got into her eyes too. Was it all true? Would it be as they said? Life was bright to her gaze with rainbow colours, her heart was full of dreams and fancies, —the birds and the flowers, the blue sky

and the sunshine, were part and parcel of them all; must all this, then, die away? What a cold, dreary thing the grown-up life would be! "Why can't I stay as I am," she cried passionately, "and still love the beautiful pictures painted for me? But I wish I knew. I wish somebody would tell me!"

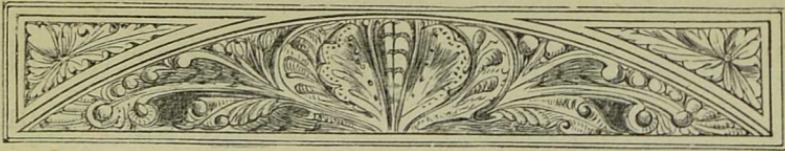
The eager, questioning eyes looked round for an answer, and an answer came.

"It is *not* true, little one," said the nightingale on the bough; "not one word of it. Don't be afraid: I know it depends on yourself; and if you don't let your heart get hard and worldly, you will love these things better when you grow up than you do now. We shall not be birds and flowers to you then, but *friends*—living friends and companions; and I don't know whether you will have most to say to us or we to you. You see God has put the

love for us deep down in your heart, and everything that *He* gives always goes on increasing unless you hinder it: gaieties and worldly pleasures will grow duller and duller every year, but these pure simple joys will only get stronger and sweeter as life moves on. Yes; and indeed you will find it true that the things of man are always *less and less*, but that what comes from God is always *more and more*."

The dew still lay thick upon the blossoms, but it was all gone out of the child's eyes now. She gathered a fresh nosegay of violets, primroses, and cowslips, and she kissed them every one, and then went home comforted.





May.

THE BLUEBELL, HAWTHORN, AND LILY OF THE
VALLEY.



WE must have a wreath again; the world seems just now made up of flowers. The fields are golden with buttercups and cowslips, set all round with a deep dark border of bluebells; the primrose stars are still studding the woody banks; the bold marsh-marigold glimmers on the marshy lands; and the white crowfoot covers the very ponds, just as if the dry earth were not large enough for God's lavish gifts, and so he must fling them over the waters also.

There is nothing but bright masses of colour everywhere. Those who have been to hot countries, tell us that though the flowers there are so wondrously beautiful *singly*, yet there is never the blaze of colour which we get in England, even from our simple, common wild flowers, when they all grow together. Is it not beautiful to see how God makes up for things, and puts the balance even between one country and another, as well as between one person and another?

The lovely colour of the bluebell beds is delightful at this time. They spread along under the hedges and on the banks, gladdening our sight and perfuming the air. The roots of a foreign kind are much used in medicine, under the name of squills; *our* bulbs are down so very deep in the ground, we should find it difficult to get at them if we wanted them. The bluebell is

often found white, which makes a very pretty variety. The hyacinths of our gardens are of all colours, but are all derived from the simple bluebell of the fields.

The bluebells have hardly faded when the hedges over them burst forth into another mass of blossom, only not blue but white. They look as if they were powdered all over with snow; here and there, where a hawthorn bush stands out alone in its white garment in a park or field, it is a more beautiful sight still.

What is so common as a hedge? and yet, from first to last, what pains have been taken to make it pleasant to our eyes. The tender green of the young leaves is the first thing to cheer us in the spring. How we like to watch it day by day spreading a little further and a little further; then the blossom, so fair and fragrant, filling our hearts with a vague, dreamy sense of

pleasure, as all sweet flower-scents do, we can't tell why; then the berries, ripening with the autumn into that brilliant red which is so pleasant to look at as bright colours grow scarce. Last of all, it is so nice to see the little birds eating on all through the winter, and to think what a beautiful dinner-table is spread for them, —a table which is never empty,—a table where all are welcome, and where there is nothing to pay.

The hawthorn generally blooms in this month, though it is sometimes not fully out till June. Though the flower is white, the anthers of the stamens are red or purple, which gives it a tinge of colour when you are near to it. It was thought a good deal of by our ancestors to twine round the Maypole, which they were in the habit of setting up on the village green on the first of May. Then they

had games and dances round it. We are too busy for such things now, but I hope we see as much beauty in the hawthorn as they did.

Did you ever hear how the royal crown of England once hung upon a hawthorn? You have read in English history of the Battle of Bosworth, between Henry, Earl of Richmond, and Richard III., in which that wicked king was killed. In those days, kings not only went to battle, but fought with their crown upon their heads. After the battle was over, a soldier found the dead body of the king, and he took off the crown and hid it in a hawthorn bush close by. There, presently, Lord Stanley discovered it, and he hastened with it to the Earl of Richmond, and placed it on his head, saluting him by the title of Henry VII. In remembrance of this, he and all the kings of his race took for their

device a crown in the midst of a hawthorn. The proverb which we still have, "Cleave to the crown, though it hang on a bush," alludes to the same circumstance. So the hawthorn, which took care of a crown, comes next in honour to the oak-tree, which sheltered a king, Charles II.

And now we must come down to something lowlier than kings and crowns, but to a flower which I could almost call the fairest and sweetest of all—the meek and gentle-looking lily of the valley.

It is not common wild ; the leaves you may often find where you look in vain for blossoms ; it is shy of flowering, unless it is just in the situation it likes best. It is not peculiar to the valleys ; generally it grows on moist banks or in shady woods ; but in gardens, I notice, it thrives best where it can get a good portion of sunshine. In April it begins first to appear :

a little folded sheath pierces the dark mould ; but we have to watch it a long, long time before it expands into a pair of large oval, bright-green leaves, one single stalk growing up between, set sparingly with white drooping bell-shaped flowers. And oh, their fragrance ! there is nothing more delicately sweet among all the varied scents which the flowers give to the summer breeze.

I don't think any other flower bears the impress of a moral quality so strongly as the lily of the valley. What I mean is this. You know there are many beautiful graces which we are to show forth in our hearts and lives. It seems as if God had put some of these on the flowers on purpose that we may see how attractive such graces look. He has stamped *humility* on the lily of the valley so plainly that we cannot choose but read it there. We can

hardly look at it without thinking of His own words, "He giveth grace unto the lowly." And then the next thing is to try and be a lily too. Oh! I wish you could all be living, breathing lilies of the valley. Nothing is so lovable as humility, and nothing so pleasing in the sight of God, when it is sought after—because it is like Him who was meek and lowly in heart.

There is an old and most sweet name for these fair flowers—*Ladders to heaven*. Yes, we know indeed, for our Saviour has taught us, that the way to rise is to stoop first; and that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

"You say that heaven has joys untold,
And gems and jewels rare;
But flowers are fairer far than gold,—
Will there be flowers there?"

"I know not, sister, but I think
Not with these rainbow dyes;
The *white* ones only would not shrink
In the air of Paradise.

“ Perhaps the jasmine might be seen,
With its soft starry light;
The snowdrop, stately lily queen,
The rose, not red, but white.

“ The lily of the valley, still
Fairest in lowliness,
More meet than all its place to fill
'Mid white-robed holiness.

“ *These* flowers, I think, would match the snow
Upon the angels' wings;
These, only these, were fit to grow
'Mid pure and perfect things.”

“ Dear children both, remember why
Such types to us are given ;
(Our thoughts can hardly reach so high,)
There is no *sin* in heaven.

“ God tells us of a white-robed train,
To show how pure and true
The holiness which *we* must gain,
If we would enter too.

“ We must wash our souls, and make them bright
As *they* have done before ;
And there we shall walk with them in white
As the lily evermore.”





June.

THE DOG-ROSE.



THE hawthorn blossoms have all passed away, and the hedgerows shut us in as we walk along, very green but rather commonplace. Yet no, we cannot say that; for the dog-rose is flinging its wild festoons over the same spot whence the sprinkled snow has just melted, and as we get its delicate pink flowers instead, why, we can scarcely miss it. It is always so; everything that *comes next* is so beautiful, we hardly think about what is past.

. The wild rose cannot stand of itself, and

so the sturdy hawthorn hedge lends it its support; and when its own flowers are faded, its neighbour covers it anew with beauty, in return for its kindness. Plants climb and cling in different ways; and they will always go their *own way*, do what you will to them. The convolvulus twines around a post or pillar from right to left; the honeysuckle from left to right. If you unwind them, and twist them contrary ways, they will go back again as soon as you are out of sight. The vine climbs by its tendrils; and our wild rose by means of its prickles, which entangle themselves with whatever comes first in their way. To drive or walk through the summer lanes, with the wild rose chains stretching over the hedges, catching glimpses here and there through them of the hay-fields on the other side, their delicious scent filling the air, is one of the great

pleasures of this fair flowery month of June.

What a variety there is in the colour of these roses! pure snowy white, delicate pink, deeper pink, and here and there bright ruby red. Look at the cluster of yellow stamens inside them. You do not see these in the garden roses, because by cultivation the stamens turn into petals, and so we get double flowers instead of single ones. It is a wonderful thing, that by planting them in fresh soil, and sometimes training and cutting them, sometimes nursing and petting them, we can change them so much, and get such an endless variety out of them. We all love variety, and God has put it into our power to get it for ourselves with a little toil and trouble, over and above what He has made for us in the first place.

I suppose there is no flower so distin-

guished as the rose. In all ages and all countries it has been loved and admired. Books have been written about it, and poets have sung to its praise. This, of course, refers to the rose of our gardens ; but, as the wild rose is the original stock, it is only fair it should come in for its share of approval.

It is of an ancient family, too, and worthy of all honour and respect. Why, do you know that Pliny, the great Roman historian, has taken the trouble to tell how beautiful the white roses were in this far-off island of the sea ! Indeed, he thought it might be called Albion (which means white, you know) partly for this reason, as well as on account of its white cliffs. Does it not give a new interest to our wild roses of to-day, to think of those stern soldiers who conquered the country, noticing them and talking about them when

they got home, so that it was written down in history ; and all this eighteen hundred years ago ?

You will remember, too, about those bloody civil wars in England, in which relations fought against each other for the crown, and which were called the Wars of the Roses, because one side took a red rose and the other a white one. How sad that anything so pure and bright should be made the signal for strife and bloodshed ! Then when it was all over, and the claims of both sides were united in Henry VII., he took for his motto a Latin sentence, which means, "A rose without thorns." A species of dog-rose, which grows wild in Yorkshire, of very pure white, is said to be the very one which figured as the White Rose on the Yorkist side in these dreadful wars.

After all the trouble people have taken

in cultivating roses, there is one thing they have never been able to do; they have got white roses, pink roses, red roses, and yellow roses, but never got a *blue* rose! They have tried and tried, but all in vain. Man can do a great deal, but cannot go beyond what God intends. We can call out the powers that are in a plant, but cannot put in what is not there. To other things besides the stormy waves may it be said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

"Which is the happiest? which is the strongest?"

This was the wind's question, as it wandered about among the thickets and forests, up and down, in and out; now on the bleak mountain top, now in the green depths of the valley.

"I am," said the cedar, stiff and stately,

and it spoke without moving a muscle or showing the least sign of feeling. "There is no doubt about it. I look down upon all that is low and mean; and even the wind that comes from above has little power to move me. I am complete in myself; I want nothing, and give nothing: and is not that enough to make anybody strong and happy?"

"Nay, nay," replied the wind; "you know not what these things mean. Cold and proud and self-contained as you are, your branches never mingling with others, never looking out for sympathy, never giving it to others, how *can* you be happy? how *can* you be strong?"

"*I* am," said the oak, as it spread out its sturdy arms. "*I* can afford shelter and support; I fold the bird and the insect in my embrace; a very centre of life to others, I give freely of

my stores, and I need nothing back again."

"Too independent still," muttered the wind; and it rose in fitful gusts, till the thickest of the oak branches broke beneath its power: they would not bend, and therefore they were split asunder. The oak-tree lived in its own might, and therefore it failed in the hour of need.

The storm passed away, and the wind sank down again into a gentle whisper, asking the same question, "Which is the happiest? which is the strongest?"

And it was the wild rose which answered this time, gently, "*I am*; yes, I am. Weak and feeble I may be; I cannot even stand alone, but I lift myself up by another; I lean upon another; another's strength makes up for my weakness; another does for me what I cannot do for myself: *therefore* I fear not the hurricane or the storm;

therefore I fling my flowers over the highest hedge-tops ; *therefore*, because dependent and clinging, I am safe—I am happy—I am strong !”

And the question needed not to be asked again, for the wind was satisfied ; satisfied that when the weak rest upon the mighty, *that* is happiness, and *that* is strength.





July.

THE POPPY AND THE CORNFLOWER.



WE will turn out of the hot dusty road into the pleasant field-path, and see whither it will lead. I always *do* long to know where the foot-paths go to—don't you? Through the hayfields, through the cornfields; to the widow's cottage, to the woodside, to the village church; now straight, now winding; over easy stiles, over rough stiles,—who does not long to follow? We will take one now across the summer fields; in the first one the hay has just been carried, so we will not linger there, but pass on to the

cornfield beyond. Our business, however, to-day is not with the waving, whispering wheat, but with the scarlet poppy blossoms standing out here and there amongst it. The farmer grumbles at them; but as you and I are now in search of the beautiful, *we* may be allowed to rejoice in them. We do not care to gather them for our nose-gays; their scent is not pleasant,—and besides, the petals, though they look so smooth and silky when on the plant, wrinkle and wither up directly they are in our hands. They are intended to make a show at a distance; and when more than usually plentiful, and when the field in which they grow is on the slope of a hill, the show is brave and brilliant indeed.

The poppy is one of the only two scarlet flowers which we have in England,—the little red pimpernel, or poor man's weather-glass, which closes in damp weather, being

the other one. There is a pretty yellow poppy, but it is not so common; and a large white one grows in our gardens, from which is obtained the medicine called opium, so useful in soothing pain and promoting sleep. It is procured by making slits in the capsules, or seed-vessels; a milky juice then oozes out from them, which hardens as it is exposed to the air. The seeds themselves are so small, and in such numbers, you would think it impossible to count them; but somebody once *did* do so, and found 52,000 in a single poppy head. These seeds have no opium in them, though the seed-vessels have so much; they are used in the East to sprinkle over the top of cakes,—and it is supposed that when we read, in the 14th chapter of 1 Kings, of Jeroboam sending to Ahijah a present of *cracknels*, it refers to this kind of cakes—the

word in the original meaning *spotted cake*.

One curious thing about the poppy is that a red gleaming light has been sometimes seen to play round the blossoms, not in the full daylight, but after sunset, as though the sunlight loved to linger over the flowers which gave back such a large portion of its rays and its warmth. It has also been seen round the scarlet geranium, and a few other plants of the same colour. I suppose a particular state of the air is necessary to produce this lovely appearance, and I am afraid we shall watch our friends the poppies a long time before we see it. If the sun loves the poppy, the poppy loves the sun. It does not flourish under cloudy skies; it is scarce in the north, and is rarely found in Wales.

However farmers now-a-days may dislike it, in heathen times we find it was

different: they seemed then to consider it rather an ornament to their fields; and when they presented a portion of their produce to their goddess Ceres, they always mixed some scarlet poppies with the pale barley or golden ears of wheat. They must have given Ceres credit for having an eye to the beautiful. At any rate, *we* know what those dark ages were never taught; we are quite sure that a God of love has created what is pleasant to please us as well as what is useful to feed us. And shall the heathen thank *their* goddess, while we forget to praise our God and Father for all his goodness?

Mixed with the poppy, and equally bright, though less visible till looked for, we find the blue cornflower. The loveliness of its colour makes it well known and admired. It belongs to a race of plants called by botanists *Compositæ*, which means

having a number of little florets all joined together in one calyx like a happy family. The inside is called the disk, the outside the rays. In this case the disk is dark purple, and the rays of the bright blue colour which seems to give its hue to the whole flower. In Germany the cornflower is still lovelier than with us, being larger and brighter, and is one of the most favourite flowers there. The ladies wear it in their hair, and everybody gathers it for bouquets.

But we must go back to the poppy, for I want to ask if you know what fairy uses the blossoms for tapestry. Listen and you shall hear; or rather, look and you shall see, for here she comes into this very cornfield. Yet she does not bear the gauzy wings and green attire which you suppose all fairies ought to do. No; her dress is plain simple brown, with a slight band of

gold; but her shape is elegant and her wings transparent. She flies to this very bright poppy just beside us (she is particular about colour), then she begins to cut a piece out of one of the petals with an instrument as sharp as your best pair of scissors, which she always carries about with her. Off she goes with it somewhere. Oh! there she is; she has alighted on the gravel path which runs through the field. Let us watch her. At one side of it she has scooped out a little hole, into which she enters, and when she comes out again she has left the leaf behind her. That little hole is a chamber which she means for a nursery, and the poppy leaves are to make a hanging for the walls. She must have some more, so she flies back again for another supply. The second piece is exactly the same form and size as the first; you with a pair of compasses could never

make the measure so exact as she does ; and the leaf never shrinks up in her skilful handling as it would do with you. She returns for a third piece ; and thus she goes on till her apartment is lined to her liking. Then what do you think she does ? She lays an egg, puts a store of bee-bread by it, shuts the door,—that is, covers up the hole,—and flies away. And you are disappointed to find that after all it is not a fairy we are speaking about, but only the poppy bee. Yet is it not wonderful that a little insect should take all this trouble for the children she will never see ? By-and-by the egg turns into a grub ; it eats the food its mother has provided for it,—let us hope it admires the scarlet tapestry in which it is cradled ; then in course of time it eats its way out, and becomes a perfect poppy bee of the next generation.

“ It is very fortunate,” says the poppy

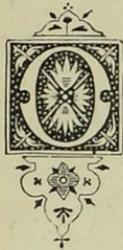
bee after it has done its work—"it is very fortunate that as nothing but poppy flowers suit me for my furnishing, so I always find them just where I want them. And it is fortunate, too, for the farmer, that, as the poppies spoil his corn, there should be creatures such as I am to pick them to pieces for him. You see, when I cut up the petals the seeds will not ripen, and thus there will be so many less poppies in the field next year."

Yes, it is quite true, little bee, that the same Hand has made you for the poppies and the poppies for you, so that you fit one into the other. And it is quite true also in higher kingdoms than those of the insects and the flowers. The things closest to us are put there on purpose for us, and what we really want we shall always find ready to our hand.



August.

THE HEATHER.



OF all the bright patches of colour which the spring and summer bring us,—the buttercups in the meadows, the bluebells in the woods, the poppies in the cornfields,—there is not one to compare with the heather on the hills. The purple blossoms packed so closely together on the long, steep ascent make such a show, and they catch and give back the sunshine so clearly, you could not wish to see a more brilliant sight. Some future August, when you are old enough to travel amongst the moun-



WHITE BLUE BELL. HAWKWEED, DEVIL'S BIT AND WILD PANSY.

tains, you will be charmed with it; but even now within the compass of your walks there will surely be some bit of waste or moor, in whose bright heathery tufts you will get a foreshadowing of what you will see then. The soil is barren, but what does that matter with such a richly-painted carpet spread all over it? There are no shady trees nor singing birds, but the pretty little stone-chat perches on the highest sprig he can find, and cries "clack-clack" with all his might; while the bee hovers about with a most satisfied hum, as if he had already counted up the stores of honey ready and waiting in those purple bells. Then the air which blows over the heather is so fresh, and fragrant, and exhilarating, you can't help feeling what a happy, pleasant place is this world which God has made.

There are several different kinds of heath,

but all are included under the general name of heather. The real heather is also called ling; its growth is much the same, except that it is rather more shrubby, and the flowers are paler and shaped like a cup rather than a bell. The species called the fine-leaved heath is the most common, and also the brightest in colour. You may know it by its reddish purple blossoms, set round the stem in what are termed *whorls*. Another kind, the cross-leaved heath, has pale pink bells so like wax, you don't feel sure about it till you touch them. The Cornish heath is white, with purple anthers; and where the wild rocky coast juts out into the Atlantic at the Land's End and Lizard Point, it grows in beautiful profusion, though rarely found out of Cornwall.

After the grass of the field, more ground is covered by the heather than by any



YARROW OR MILFOIL, QUEEN OF THE MEADOW, CORN MARIGOLD AND BLUE MEADOW CRANE'S BILL.

other plant. How dull and bare the moors and open places would be without it! But it is not only made for beauty; it is useful too, especially as it grows in the north and in cold spots, where other plants would wither and die. Scotland without its heather would be poor indeed. The Highlanders make their cottage-walls of it, by putting first a layer of thick heather and then a layer of mortar. Inside it serves them for a bed; and it is so springy and elastic, it is by no means a bad one or a hard one. They make its fibres into ropes, the stems into handles for their vessels, and tan their leather with its bark. They tie it up into bundles and catch fish with it; and once, most strange of all, it is said they used to make *beer* from it. But the art of doing so was kept a grand secret, and there is a tradition that the last of the Picts (the old inhabitants of

Scotland) was put to death because he would not tell. And so nobody has been clever enough since to find it out.

Besides its use to man, the sheep and goats feed upon the young shoots, and the grouse and wild birds upon the seeds. Other plants, when their seeds are ripe, drop them on the ground or send them out upon the wind to make their travels; but all the year round the provident heather keeps its store, and the hungry birds find that in spring, summer, autumn, and winter there is always a cupboardful for them on the bleak hill-side. So the heather is always doing its work. And it is a pattern for us in many other things also. It springs up so elastically beneath our tread, as if it were never discontented; and it is so brave and faithful, it does not care for the cold on the mountains, if it can only be of some good there. But you will be

tired of hearing of its excellent qualities before I am of telling them.

I have a little more to say about it yet.

“ I wish I were the heather ; of every flower that blows,
Yes, rather than the violet, and rather than the rose,
I would choose your purple blossoms,” I said to it one day,
As it opened to the sunlight upon the moorland gray.

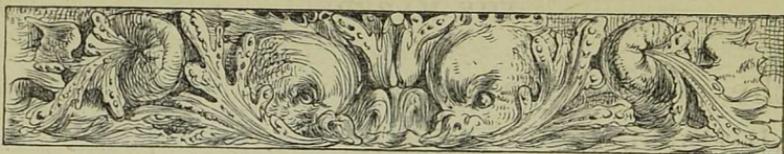
“ What makes you like the heather ? ” said a little sprig more bold.

“ Our life is hard and dreary, our home is bleak and cold ;
Alone upon the mountains, as their course the seasons run,
We bear the wind and weather, or scorch beneath the sun. ”

“ I have my reasons, heather. I want to be like you ;
I want to be as fearless, as patient, brave, and true.
Yet more than this : you bloom *alone*, and *then* unnoticed
grow ;
But the heather *altogether*, oh ! it makes a wondrous show.

“ God’s Church is like you, heather. Each weak and humble soul
Is yet a part of all the rest, a fragment of the whole ;
And this is given to them, to all, to each in mingled duty,
To clothe *their* world’s wide wilderness with grace, and love,
and beauty. ”





September.

THE HAREBELL.



THE summer flowers are fading ; there is no doubt about it, though we try not to see it. True, the garden is gayer than ever, with its scarlet geraniums and verbenas ; it is the wild flowers which are slipping so quietly away from our path.

The heather is not over, but its full brilliancy is gone. Underneath it we find a pale, simple flower just come out to make up for some of our favourites which have passed from us,—the harebell of the autumn. It will go on flowering, too, till

the end of November, a parting link to all the beauty which has gone before.

On all dry and sandy banks we find its thin wiry stems and drooping bells. The colour is not sky-blue, but of a peculiarly soft grayish tint. In books of botany it is called the round-leaved bell-flower; and as when we look at it we see only long straight leaves growing up the stem, we think *this* cannot be the species meant. But it does not do to decide such matters in a hurry; let us look a little more closely. And lo, hidden down in the grass, we find quite a tuft of small round leaves—the root-leaves, as they are called—utterly unlike the others, and so the botanists are right after all.

The word is often now spelt *hairbell*, because the name is supposed to have been given on account of the extreme fineness of its stalks, so that the least

breath of wind sets the pretty bells in motion. Another name for it is *witches' thimble*; but I should think the witches (if there *were* such creatures) must have had thick clumsy fingers, and would hardly have ventured to touch such a fragile, delicate-looking thing. It is also called the bluebell, and under this name it belongs more especially to Scotland, where it grows finer and more plentifully than I have ever seen it in the south. All over the wild heathy hills, high up on the mountains, down beside the rushing rivers, decking the old castle-walls,—there you may always find it; and though of smaller growth, the flowers are larger.

It is always the case that the blossoms on mountain heights, or in northern lands, though of the very same species, are larger and brighter than they are elsewhere. Nature has a reason, as she al-

ways has, for what she does. The larger the corolla, the more power it has to catch the rays of the sun, and so help forward the little seed within. Time is precious in the cold regions, because the summer is so short. Thus, by means of the larger flower, the seed is brought to perfection more speedily, which is the very thing wanted.

There is another curious thing which I should like to tell you here. You know that the tall pillar in the centre of the flower is called the *pistil*, and that at the foot of it lies the germ or seed-vessel. The stamens are arranged all round the pistil, sometimes on the corolla or calyx, sometimes on the germ itself. They have little oblong heads, called anthers, and what these have to do is to shed a certain dust called pollen or farina on the pistil. The pistil absorbs it and carries it down

to the seed-vessel below. Without it the little seeds would never come to any good at all. Now, in cup-like blossoms, which look up and not down, the stamens are always *longer* than the pistil, and thus the precious dust, when it falls, falls naturally on the pistil and does its work. But in drooping bells like our harebell, things are exactly the opposite; the stamens are shorter, and therefore the pistil comes below them ready to catch the pollen in like manner, and thus the same end is fulfilled. How wonderful to see how God has provided for everything! The more we look into His works, the more shall we be ready to exclaim: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches."

The Queen of the Flowers held her court

in a spacious and beautiful garden. Tall lilies and roses stood behind her as guards of honour, and geraniums, fuchsias, and verbenas bent before her to do her homage. But her majesty did not seem to be in good humour; there was something wrong, evidently. She looked listlessly at them all, and then, yawning wearily, she said, "Your colours don't please me. Can't you turn *blue*, some of you? I am tired of red and yellow and white; I want some blue flowers."

There was a moment's silence of surprise. Then the rose spoke: "I have been always thought perfect as I am," she said coldly.

"Blue," repeated the lily disdainfully; "you may get plenty of it in the fields, but it is too mean and common for our high society."

Then the vervena, being the swiftest

runner, started off to see what blue flowers the garden would produce. First, she lighted on the nemophila and the lobelia, and presently she hunted up the blue salvia; and with these in her train she hastened back to the royal presence.

“Please your majesty, I have brought the blue flowers,” she said; and they bent down their bright heads as she spoke, in the queen’s honour.

“Is this all?” she replied languidly. “I want more than these.”

The verbena was in despair. Then, remembering what the lily had said, she glided away this time to the fields beyond the garden gate. And then there was no trouble at all about it. She met some meek blue eyes at every step. First, violets and periwinkles, bluebells and harebells, and bell-flowers of all sorts and sizes; cornflowers, speedwells, and forget-me-nots,

and blue geraniums, besides ground-ivy and self-heal ; and many others which she thought too insignificant for presentation at court.

It was a long and lovely train which followed her now as she led the way back again. "These are from the woods and fields," she said humbly ; "may they meet your majesty's approval."

The Queen of the Flowers seemed to have got her temper right again, for she looked long and lovingly at these simple children of the wild.

"I see how it is now," she answered at last ; "the pure blue sky can only reflect itself in those who think little of themselves. Therefore it is that the lowly flowers of the field have most of the stamp of heaven upon them ; therefore it is because they are the humblest, they are also the loveliest, the happiest, and the best."



October.

THE BRACKEN.

THE Queen of the Flowers has indeed departed now, to hold her court in sunny lands beyond the sea. A few stragglers only are left of all her brilliant summer train. But there is beauty still left to cheer us, as we walk out this bright October morning.

There is something pleasant in thinking how all the work that the year had to do is done now. The flowers have blossomed, the fruits have ripened, the rosy apples are gone out of the orchard, the

corn is gathered into the barn. God gave the sun power to do it all, helped by the dew, the showers, and the breezes; and now he is just putting the finishing stroke to the red hawthorn berries and to the crimson of the forest leaves, and that will be all.

But there is such a thing in nature as *beauty of form* as well as brightness of colour, and wise people say that it shows more taste to admire the first than the second. So I hope you will not fail in this respect, as we stoop down to look at the ferns still green and flourishing under the fading, falling leaves. They are green, and *only* green; but their shapes are so graceful, and the tracery of their leaves so delicate, we love them *almost* if not quite as well as the flowers. They die partly down in the winter, but we may nearly always find a few fronds (as their leaves

are called) to remind us of what *has* been and of what will be again.

The bracken is the commonest of all the ferns; it is also the largest and most branched, so that you may easily know it,—it grows in such abundance on the hill-sides and in woods, it is so tall and spreading, it is like a tiny forest of itself. In the spring it peeps forth, as all the ferns do, in little coiled-up buds, which gradually unfold into the large branching fronds. In the autumn they fade into a peculiarly rich reddish-brown, which mingles well with the other tints of the season. If you cut the stem across in a slanting direction, you will find marked on the pith inside something like the figure of an oak-tree; when you have done looking at it, draw your knife in the contrary direction, and you will see an eagle instead. Sometimes it is tolerably clear, but gene-

rally it wants a little help from the imagination, which you no doubt will be able to supply.

The common male fern or shield-fern is almost as familiar as the bracken, and far more elegant and interesting. If you see it only on wayside banks, you might hardly notice it ; look for it in some shady nook, and beside the little streamlet in the wood, and there you will find such graceful tufts, each growing like a circle, and the tall fronds rising up, then falling over like a feathery crown, you cannot but stop and admire them.

Some ferns grow on old walls and rocks, some on the roots of trees ; but in general they love best the moisture of the wood, and here they are to be seen in their most luxuriant beauty.

As we have said, they have no blossoms, so where can be the seed ? We

must turn back the fronds, and there we shall find the little spores, which supply the place of seeds, ranged in rows round the margin of the leaf, or dotted over it, sometimes so thickly that there is hardly any space between.

There used to be a great many superstitions about the fern. It was such a mystery that it should have no flowers! So it was believed that once in the year, on St. John's Eve, it really *did* flower and the seed ripen all on the same night. At no other time could the seed be found, so people used to watch for it on this one night; and whoever should have the luck to find it, why, the wondrous seed was to give *him* the power of being invisible like itself whenever he wished it! I need not say that, with all their watching, nobody ever did find anything more than the tiny spores which we may see every day. We

know that the great Creator can do His work in other ways than one ; though in most cases He has formed the corolla to be the little nursery of the seed, it is not necessary. He could have made the whole race of plants to grow and increase “without a flower at all ;” only He liked to give us pleasure, and show forth His own loving workmanship and wise designs.

Yet the ferns alone, if we had never seen a flower, would surely inspire us with gratitude for their exceeding beauty, and would dispose our hearts to echo back the words we sometimes hear in church, and which always make me think of the ferns : “ Oh ! all ye green things on the earth, bless ye the Lord ; praise him and magnify him for ever.”

The air was hot and damp, as you have felt it in hothouses, and fantastic-looking

ferns were growing as you have seen them there, only they were not dwarfed and stunted and in pots, but larger and taller than a hothouse ever sheltered,—a very forest of ferns. A strange, weird-looking scene, indeed, it was ; and no wonder, for it was long ages ago, before the foot of man had ever trodden this earth of ours.

“ What is the use of growing ? ” exclaimed one tall feathery-leaved fern. “ What is the use of living ? We bear no flowers, we ripen no fruit ; nobody is the better for us, nobody sees us ; we had better die down at once, and have done with it.”

A slight rustling ran through the ferny forest, and then a whisper was heard saying, “ The world is larger than you think, for there is more around you than you can see ; do the best you can, and it shall not be in vain.”

So the ferns lived on and grew, but nothing seemed to come of it.

At last something *did* come. There was a great change. The air changed, and the earth changed, and all was confusion. The ferns turned pale and withered and died, and were buried under a mass of ruins. There was an end of them, or there seemed to be, and nothing had been done.

Years passed, ages passed; I know not how many. A bright fire was blazing on a wintry hearth. Cold hands were spread over it, and happy faces sunned themselves in its glow. The fire was made of coal; and what was the coal? *The buried ferns of those ages long ago.* The more they had drank in the light and the rain *then*, the greater the heat, the brighter the flame *now*.

And the red tongues of fire, as they

darted out, formed themselves into words, and this was the message they gave: "What seems the end is always the beginning of something else. Death is *not* death, but a better life. *You* may not see what is coming, but there is One who does. All that was once buried with the ferns rises up anew in the blaze of to-day. Be the best you can be, live the highest life it was intended you should live, and it will not be lost, it shall not be in vain."





November.

THE THISTLE.



IN the garden of Eden there were flowers and no thistles. Thank God! though we have the thistles now, we are not without the flowers. He *might* have shut up all the flowers in the garden on the other side of that flaming sword; but instead of that, he has strewn them broad-cast over the earth beneath our feet everywhere, that we might see it is true what He says of Himself in the Bible, that in judgment He remembers mercy.

And even the thistle is curious and in-

teresting, like everything else in nature, when we look into it. A thistle is a thistle, you think ; but there are as many different kinds as of other flowers. They are all alike in their thick prickly leaves and rough growth, as well as in their downy seeds. Who would have thought that those feathery-looking things, floating about in that airy fashion, should ever have come from such a common, coarse plant as the thistle ? Who would have thought that *any* seeds should have wings ?

Some thistles have purple, handsome flowers, such as we must often have noticed by the way-side. One kind has yellow blossoms, and is called the Carline thistle, because the great French Emperor Charlemagne is said to have had it revealed to him in a dream that it was a cure for the plague. Its flowers are of the dry crisp kind called everlasting ; and as

they close before rain, in Germany the people hang them up outside their doors, and make them do duty as a weather-glass.

The handsomest of all is the milk thistle. It has such large, dark, spiny leaves, with a beautiful white vein upon them, just as if you had dipped your finger in milk and drawn it round their margin. The purple flower is very large, and set round with stiff prickles, while its growth is very stately and imposing. It is not common; the only place where it grows in Scotland is round the stern old rock of Dumbarton Castle, where Mary Queen of Scots sometimes resided; and it is said the royal lady planted it there with her own hands. It is also found in Cornwall, and is there called St. Mary's thistle. The common names of our wild plants carry us back to early days, and in those days the Virgin

Mary was ignorantly and falsely worshipped.

But the largest thistle of all is the cotton thistle. It has such a sharp array of spines, it looks indeed truly formidable. We have seen how the rose figures as the emblem of England, and the shamrock of Ireland; beside them stands the thistle—and we cannot help thinking how well it represents the hardy mountain-land of Scotland, and the free, independent character of her people.

The cotton thistle is the favoured species chosen; it is as much as six feet high, and covers a space of five or six feet in diameter. It is covered all over with a cottony down, which is gathered and used for stuffing mattresses.

Hundreds of years ago, the Danes came over the sea to try and conquer the land of Scotland. It was not reckoned honour-

able to attack the enemy by night ; but on one occasion the Danes resolved they *would* do so, and take a party of Scots by surprise. To be more stealthy, they thought they would go barefoot. On they marched, silently and surely in the dead of night, and the unsuspecting Scots were all fast asleep. But, lo ! just as they were getting near them, a Dane put his foot upon one of the prickly Scotch thistles which lay in his way. He was taken unawares, and cried out ; the Scots heard, flew to their arms, and soon defeated the Danes. And *that* was the reason why they adopted as their emblem the thistle, which had done them such good service.

The thistles blossom all the summer ; and when the seeds begin to leave their nursery and toss about in the air, it is a sure sign of approaching autumn. Day after day the supply keeps on, till after this month the

winter rains drench them, and they lose their wings. These seeds are very dainty food to many of our birds, especially the goldfinches, who have a prejudice against eating their dinner off the ground, and so always perch on the plant and peck out the grains one by one. I hope you know the goldfinch; golden, graceful little sprite as he is. If not, be sure you look at all the thistle-beds till you meet with a little party there hard at work upon them; and you will so enjoy watching them, I think you will feel thankful that even the thistle, which is part of the punishment of sin, should be yet, in God's loving-kindness, a source of pleasure both to the goldfinch and to us.

“What is that?” asked the butterfly, rather startled, as something glided by; something a little like itself, except that instead of flying zig-zag it went straight

on, as if it knew quite well where it was going.

“It’s only a seed,” said the blackbird carelessly, as he picked the first ripe berries off the hawthorn bush on the down.

“A seed!” rejoined the butterfly in a doubtful tone. “Why, those are seeds you are eating now; it is not a bit like them. And the cherries I saw you steal out of the orchard in the summer, and the peas from the garden, why, they are all hard solid things, and they have no wings, and they don’t travel. No, you are laughing at me; and, besides, if they *are* seeds, why don’t *you* eat them?”

“Not I, indeed,” replied the blackbird. “I don’t eat such frothy stuff, I like something more substantial; but they are seeds for all that, and my neighbours eat them. There’s no accounting for taste.”

So the butterfly turned again to watch

them,—seeds, yet almost, as it seemed, alive. She saw how some rested here, some there ; some taking a longer journey, some falling gently to the ground when they had hardly even begun. Could it be that each one knew the way it was to take? She did not like to ask the blackbird ; he was so matter-of-fact, and had evidently no sentiment in him—not a bit.

And as she looked with all her hundreds of eyes, she began to see things clearer. She saw there was a silken thread, light and airy as gossamer, attached to every one of those tiny wanderers, and guiding each to a place appointed to it, a spot prepared for it, so that it was not chance that led it, but that it was always the right seed in the right place. And all the myriad threads never crossed each other, nor got entangled ; and *this* was the reason,—they were all held by a single

hand, and that hand belonged to One who knew exactly when and where the seed was wanted.

“Ah!” you think, “I wish I had the butterfly’s eyes; for *she* could *see* what *we* have to believe without seeing.”

No, we are better off than the butterfly; because the Bible says, “Blessed are they that have *not* seen, and *yet* have believed.”





December.

THE HOLLY AND THE IVY.

F you had been one of the little British children living at the time when our island was conquered by the Romans, the winter would have looked a great deal more dreary to you than it does now. There were hardly any evergreens then. It is thought that the holly and the yew are the only two trees not shedding their leaves which grew wild in England in those olden times. All the green leaves we look at now in the winter, belong to trees which have been brought here since from other countries.

We can hardly fancy how bare it would look without our laurels and bays ; we are so used to them, we should miss them sorely. And I wonder how the birds fared without the shelter which is now so familiar to them ! But the holly spread out its bough, like a friendly arm, to them, the same as now ; and its bright red berries flashed out the same old story which they have been doing winter after winter ever since,—“ God careth for the fowls.”

The holly never minds the cold, it is so hardy, and it will thrive in the highest and most exposed situations. Have you noticed that generally the upper leaves of the tree are smooth and pointless ? The reason of this is supposed to be that where the prickles are not wanted, the prickles are not found,—being only given to the lower branches, that cattle may not eat them and thus injure the tree. The blos-

soms appear in April or May; small, green, and waxy-looking, you would hardly notice them, they having no particular beauty; but by-and-by, when the world is dull and flowerless, we look at the green leaves and shiny berries standing out like a picture against the gray wintry skies, and feel thankful that a little bit of colour is left us still.

And not the summer rose, with all its charms, has associations like the winter holly. Its very name means *holy*-tree, because of its connection with Christmas-time. We do not know when the custom first began of decorating our churches at that season—it has been the practice from the earliest times; and we may look on it as a kind of outward expression of the joy and gladness which is in our hearts, and which we would fain tell out by every means we can.

The caterpillar of a beautiful little blue butterfly feeds upon the holly leaves,—though how it manages to eat anything so tough is a marvel. The wood is very hard and white, and is much used for inlaid work. Thus the holly is of benefit to us, as well as to birds and butterflies.

And so is the ivy, though in a different way. We should have a good deal less of what we call *picturesque*, if it were not for the ivy. In a world where things are always getting out of repair and crumbling away and going to ruin, what should we do without the ivy to cover them? It flings its kind green mantle over all that is unsightly—the ugly shed and tumble-down cottage and bare dead wall—and decks them out with its own freshness and beauty. The tower of our dear village church, and the remains of the old castle destroyed nobody knows when, get a new interest from

the ivy. The most doubtful thing it does is when it twines round the trunks of trees. Does it warm them only in that close embrace, or does it stifle them? We would like to deem it a clasp of love; it gives us such an uncomfortable feeling to think of the poor tree being suffocated and not able to help itself. If it could only cry out and tell us, we should not care. People do not agree about it; but it is generally thought now that it does *not* hurt the trees, so we will gladly believe it to be so.

When the ivy trails along the ground, or grows under trees, the leaves are of the peculiar three-cornered shape which we suppose is natural to it; but this is a mistake, it only shows it is struggling under difficulties. See it on the top of the wall, and you would not know it to be the same plant; the leaves are egg-shaped, large and glossy, and *now* it flowers, which it

never does unless it can get light and air.

In October it is covered with its small green heads of blossom ; you may know it with your eyes shut, for a farewell sound of summer comes to your ears from it, the humming of the bees making the most of the last feast of the season. A few lingering summer butterflies will also be flitting in and out among them. Indeed, if the frost is not very severe, one or two of the pretty tortoise-shell butterfly will live all the winter under the loving shelter of the ivy leaves.

The berries are ripe this month, just ready for the birds at Christmas-time ; they are dull purple, and not attractive to *our* sight. But they fulfil their part in the great designs of the world's Creator ; and whether it be flower or fruit, blossom or berry, summer or snow-time, He has not

only made everything beautiful in its season, but also He has made nothing in vain.

Was that a sigh? or was it only the ivy leaves shivering in the wind?

Yes, it *was* a sigh, and it came from the ivy-plant trailing along the ground under the trees, with the wood on one side and a stone wall on the other.

“I wish you would not make that melancholy noise,” said the holly-bush, always sharp. “What *are* you doing down there?”

“I’m just waiting,” answered the ivy meekly; “only sometimes I can’t help sighing a little too.”

“Waiting! what for? What do you mean?” inquired the holly.

“Waiting till times get better,” said the ivy. “You see, it is all very well for *you* to talk, up there in the air and the sunshine.

Why, I like air and sunshine just as well as you do, and these are the very things I want and can't get. You have no idea how bad for one's breath it is down here ; I've been struggling on for years, and yet seem to get none the more forward. I want to fill my proper place in life, and bear blossoms like my neighbours, of course ; but I never shall till circumstances are more favourable. Well, I must wait on, and do my best, and perhaps by-and-by I shall get room to breathe."

The holly was too stiff to have much sympathy, and so it said nothing. But a little gust of wind somehow got down to the ivy, and carried one of its long shoots over towards the wall. And by degrees the shoot began to creep, creep up the wall, clinging by its little fibres, very slowly at first, but faster and faster as it got higher up and more within the reach of the light

and air the ivy had been sighing for. Then another spray followed, and another and another. It was a work of time and of many summers; but at last, when one October came, there was the poor struggling ivy in luxuriant blossom at the very top of the wall. And it lifted up its head in thankfulness to the sunshine, and yielded joyfully its honey treasures to the bee and the butterfly, well pleased that at last it had something to give. And it nodded across to the holly-tree, saying,—“It is all right, you see; I have worked and waited to some purpose. I can breathe now, and my life henceforward will be what it was intended to be. And I say this,” the ivy added, looking round: “don’t be discouraged, any of you, because things seem against you; hope on, struggle on, as I did; have patience, and you will get room to blossom at last!”

Quite true generally ; but suppose you *should* be disappointed,—suppose your life never *should* blossom on earth as it was meant to do,—yet take courage : there is another world and a fairer flowering-time, and those who are planted in the Lord's garden *here*, shall without fail blossom in full beauty *there*.



