

Outside the Gates.

THE FLOWERS OF THE SEASON.

CHAPTER I.

JANUARY.

The flowers seem all to be asleep, but that is only in appearance. The work in the laboratory of plant life goes on; and the spirit of the flower is meting the time, and watching for the season. When January, the gate of the year, has fully opened, then shall commence the gay procession of blossoms that brighten our lives. Already out in the woodlands the mosses have enlivened their early tints, and the young leaves of the wild honeysuckle have expanded their fresh leaves, pale-tinted against the evergreens or the survivals of the past summer. Properly speaking, when one speaks of *the flowers of the season*, one should refer to *wild flowers*—those that are natural and indigenous to our soil and grow without care.

The flowers in our gardens may have been indigenous, but cultivation induces subtle changes. When the laws of natural competition are circumvented, the laws of natural evolution are confused. Some of our garden plants only grow the finer from their protection, as the wallflower; others become changed in some of their parts, as when the briar-rose is developed into the garden-rose by the change of some of its stamens into petals, enriching the flower at the expense of the seed. Such plants, beautiful as they may be, are botanically "monsters," or abnormal productions. Others are aliens naturalised, as the Japanese anemones; others are hybrids. The wild flowers are the natural descendants of their ancestors in this country of a long pedigree.

The number of wild flowers to be found in January depends considerably upon the temperature of the previous months. But there are a few that may always be looked for with a reasonable degree of expectation. Chief of these is The Daisy (*Bellis perennis*).

"The rose is but a summer flower,
The daisy never dies."

In that beautiful old poem, generally attributed to Chaucer, and published with his works, now proved by Professor Skeat to have been written by a gentlewoman of his school, there is a distinction made between those who pay court to the flowers, as being more gay, and those who pay court to the leaf, as being more plain and enduring. There seems hardly reason to distinguish thus between the parts of the "beautiful everlasting." Botanists explain that the daisy is a composite flower, that the little yellow florets that form the heart are bi-sexual, and that the white or crimson-tipped florets that form the fringe are uni-sexual or female flowers. But it is not so well known that old physicians ascribed many medicinal qualities to the simple daisy. Gerard, a botanist, who lived in his garden at Holborn and wrote his great Herbal at the end of the sixteenth century, while Shakespeare lived and worked in London, says of them, condensing the medical opinions of his period:—

"Daisies do mitigate all kinds of paines, especially in the joints, and gout proceeding from hote and drie humours, if the leaves be stamped with butter

unsalted, and applied to the part, but they work more effectually if mallows be added thereto. . . . The juice of the leaves and roots, sniffed up the nostrils, purgeth the head mightily of foul and filthie slimy humours and helpeth the megrims. . . . The same given to little dogs with milke, keepeth them from growing great. The field daisy decocted in water is good against agues and inflammations, and helps the liver and other inward parts."

Another plant you are sure to find is furze or gorse. As the old proverb says: "Gorse is out of bloom, when kissing is out of season." Its bright yellow blossoms, like sparks of concentrated sunlight, brighten many a dark hillside in January. Their flowers are papilionaceous like the sweet pea, and they bear pods with seeds in them. The scent of the flower is sweet, though, in the paucity of nomenclature of perfumes, I never knew how to describe it until I had made myself some fresh cocoonut tablet. That is the kind of odour of the furze.

I was surprised to read in Gerard: "There is nothing written in Theophrastus concerning this plant, but Pliny seems to attribute to it the same virtues as the Scorpioides. Later writers agree that it is hot and dry of complexion. The seeds are used in medicine against the stone."

Another flower to be found is the Common Chickweed; that grows everywhere, and in all seasons. In spite of its commonness and smallness it is an interesting plant. It is a species of *Stellar.a*. Its stalk at first is erect, and the small white, star-like blossoms look up bravely to the wintry sky. When the seeds develop, the stalk bends so as to protect them from the cold until they are fully formed; then it straightens again, when the seed-vessel opens into six small divisions so that they may be exposed to air and light. When that process is completed the seeds are ripe, and the stalk bends again to empty the seeds from the seed-vessel upon the earth. The hardy little birds that remain stationary with us all the year seek it as their winter salad. Gerard says: "Little birds in cages, especially linnets, are refreshed therewith when they loathe their meat." The Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) is often found as early. The White Archangel too, or Dead-Nettle (*Lamium album*), brightens the wayside or the field corners. Its whorls of white blossoms come out at different stages. At the top are the green-sheathed buds, below a circle of little white cushions, beneath that the half-opened flowers, and lowest, a whorl of perfect blossoms. The upper lip is entire and vaulted, rising and curving itself so as to form a canopy over the naked seeds, to protect them from frost and rain. Its relative, the *Lamium purpureum*, or the purple dead-nettle, smaller and more recumbent, also appears at this season, and is specially delighted in by the chaffinch. In mild winters, too, you may often find survivals not proper to the month, as the yellow wallflower and such hardy plants.

Out in the woodlands you may still find sufficient berries to make a vase interesting. Not only the Holly and Mistletoe of historical popularity, but bunches of ripe red dog-hips of wild Roses, clusters of crimson Haws of the May or Hawthorn Tree, ripe scarlet and amber tufts of the Barberry, red spikes of the Arum and the Iris, black clusters of the Privet, and the bright pink, strangely-cleft seeds of the Butcher's Broom. These may be interwoven with a few late-

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