

# FLOWERS, FANTASIES AND FOLK LORE

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"Come into the fields then; and as you come along the streets, cast your eyes upon the weeds as you call them that grow by the walls and under the hedge sides." W. Coles: *The Art of Simpling*. 1656.

"If pleasures may invite him (the herbarist), what fairer objects are there for the sight than these painted Braveries? What odours can ravish the sense of smelling more than those of flowers? If the sensuality of the taste hath delighted him, what can be more acceptable than the luxurious deliciousness of fruits?" W. Coles: *Adam in Eden*. 1657.

"That there is no place more pleasant (than a garden) may appear from God himself who, after he had made Man, planted the Garden of Eden, and put him therein, that he might contemplate the many wonderful Ornaments wherewith Omnipotency had bedecked his mother earth." *The Art of Simpling*.

"God Almighty first planted a garden, and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures . . . . and the greatest refreshment to the spirit of man." Bacon: *Essays*.

"What greater delight is there than to behold the earth apparelled with plants as with a robe of embroidered works, set with Orient pearls and garnished with great diversity of rare and costly jewels? But these delights are in the outward senses. The principal delight is in the mind, singularly enriched with the knowledge of these visible things, setting forth to us the invisible wisdom and admirable workmanship of Almighty God." Gerard: *Herball*. 1597.

SOME one has said that a love of flowers is an evidence of refinement. If this be so, we may well rejoice. Not a few have so small an appreciation of the subtlety of sound that they would hardly dissent from Samuel Johnson's view when he declared that music was the "most bearable of all noises." Many more there are who take no intelligent interest in what has been so aptly termed "frozen music"—architecture: otherwise we should not be afflicted with so many feeble and even monstrous travesties of good taste. But flowers appeal to everybody,—the child, the untutored savage, the person of culture. For this reason the study of plants, in some sort at least, began with the dawn of history and has persisted throughout the ages. The beauty of it is that one need not be a scientific botanist, need not know the difference between a pistil and a stamen, need not be able to distinguish between a monocotyledon and a dicotyledon in order to enjoy flowers.

It is a matter of great interest to note the widely differing phases through which the study of plants has passed during the centuries. For the ancient Greek philosopher plants were facts in the cosmogony of the universe, to be studied, to be correlated, to be ordered. And, with his racial genius for speculation, he did not fail to philosophize on the why and the wherefore of such things

as he observed. Aristotle was a keen student of the mysteries of Nature. Unfortunately, most of his botanical writings have been lost; but we know, for example, he taught that the substance of plants, like that of animals, was an organ of the soul, through which it existed. He wondered why a grain of corn always gave rise to corn, and not to something else—to an olive, for instance. Can we answer this question satisfactorily even now?

The formal study of plants, after the Aristotelian manner, was introduced into Europe first in the ninth century, by Maurus, who based his work on Pliny, who in his turn had borrowed from Theophrastus: and again in the thirteenth, by Albert of Bollstadt, Bishop of Ratisbon, by the roundabout path of Syria, Arabia and Persia. Albert is an outstanding figure, even for that wonder-age of great men. His reputation for learning was such that he attracted students from all quarters, among them St. Thomas Aquinas. Even in his lifetime he was called Albertus *Magnus*. For his times he evinced a remarkable talent for morphological botany, but yet withal was a typical Schoolman. He seems to have thought that attempts to systematize botany were mere waste of time, and was much more interested in abstract speculations, such as whether in the case of the physical union of two individuals—for example, the ivy and its supporting tree—their souls also were united.

Doubtless, at the first, plant lore was handed down by oral tradition, with the accretions and distortions that are inevitable in such a process, until the subject became invested with a mantle of pseudo-science, fable, mysticism, and deceit. But when thoughts began to be written, there appeared at least the vision of better things. The earliest extant work dealing with plants and their medicinal virtues is the famous *Materia Medica* of Dioscorides. Several manuscripts of this exist, perhaps the most notable being the *Codex Aniciae Julianae* in Vienna, which is thought to belong to the fifth century. Dioscorides was a medical man who lived in the reigns of Nero and Vespasian, though tradition has it that he was physician to Antony and Cleopatra. In this work the author deals with about five hundred plants, with some attempt at a systematic arrangement, though his descriptions—according to modern notions—leave much to be desired. Nevertheless, the botanists of the Renaissance, notably Matthioli, Ruellius, and Lusitanus, paid a great deal of deference and attention to the writings of Dioscorides, and a discussion of his botany was a necessary part of every work on plants for fully a thousand years. It was not until the early years of the sixteenth century that other influences made themselves felt, ultimately to become dominant.

Soon after the invention of printing, that is from about the year 1470, there appeared a wonderful series of books dealing with plants and their properties. These are usually called *Herbals*, and seem to have been originally intended to meet the demand for a "Household Physician." Most of them were written by regularly qualified medical men, and medical men did not disdain to use them. Books of this kind were produced in Germany, England, Flanders, France, and Switzerland. . . . Some of them, for example the *Herbarium Vivae Eicones* of Brunfels, the *De Historia Stirpium* of Fuchs, the *Cruydeboeck* of Dodoens, the *Herball* of Gerard and the *Theatrum Botanicum* of Parkinson, are veritable joys to behold. They are planned on a noble scale, made of excellent materials, well-printed, well-illustrated, and well-bound. One cannot help feeling that the production of these monumental tomes was a labour of love, alike with publisher and with author. But they have had their day. As they disappeared their place was taken, in a sense, by the quaint still-room and recipe books, some of which survive in museums and old country mansions, and in these much of the homely lore of the kitchen and the garden is preserved. Even they are gone now, and like the herbals are mere fragrant relics of an interesting past. In the passing of the herbal and the still-room book, while we have gained much in accuracy and in order, it can hardly be gainsaid that we have lost in large measure that human touch which makes books friends and companions.

All primitive peoples, of whatever race, have been impressed with the majesty and charm of Nature. The genial sun, the pallid moon, the gentle stars, the darkness, lightning, thunder, cloud, tempest, rain, snow, mist, the cataract, forest, moor, fell, and flower all appealed to their simple imaginations. Little wonder that they regarded these things with something akin to awe, that they linked them with supernatural attributes, that eventually they came to regard them as divinities, to be praised and propitiated. For those of old, the earth and sky were peopled with invisible beings, sometimes malevolent, sometimes beneficent, often only mischievous, but always interfering in the things of men. The grassy swards of earth, dotted with star-shaped flowers, suggested an affinity with the fields of heaven, bespangled with myriad gems. And so both celestial and terrestrial bodies came to be regarded as influencing the destinies of the human race. From this somewhat tenuous basis arose religion, the art of medicine, and those pseudo-sciences known as astrology and astrological botany, which had so great a vogue in the Middle Ages and even later. The study of plants, not unnaturally, became hedged about with mysticism,

glamour, and superstition. It is this that makes the early works on botany so delightful, rather than the meagre facts that are embodied there, for we come across most interesting sidelights on the thoughts, ideals, and character of the early peoples, including our own stock.

In course of time a great wealth of fable has grown up about the "personalities," if we may so express it, of plants. Every one knows the story of Narcissus. Saffron, or crocus, was named after a certain damsel named Crocus, who went into the fields one day with Mercury to throw the sledge—there were athletic maidens in those days too, it would appear! She was accidentally struck on the head and died. From her blood, as it fell on the ground, sprang up the saffron. Roses were at first all white. Some afterwards became red, dyed by the blood of Venus. Or, as another tale would have it, Cupid in flitting about upset a goblet of the heavenly drink, nectar, with his wings, and so stained the flower.

The early Greek herbalists seem to have endeavoured to invest their calling with a glamour of mystery, the underlying idea being that it was dangerous for the uninitiated to gather plants. Both Pliny and Theophrastus refer to a legend, old in their time, that the peony must be plucked at night; for if one gather it in the daytime, and a woodpecker see him, he is in danger of losing his eyes. Also, an offering of a honey-cake should be made when *iris foetidissimus* is rooted up. And if an eagle approach when hellebore is being collected, the one engaged in the work is fated to die within the year. One of the earliest and most remarkable myths was that connected with the mandrake, which was supposed to be fashioned something like a human being, having limbs. It uttered a shriek when uprooted, and very special precautions had to be taken in gathering it.

A well known and very beautiful tale is that of the Glastonbury thorn, which sprang from the staff of Joseph of Arimathaea, after he had planted it in the earth. This wonderful white hawthorn blooms at Christmas. This last statement is no fable, however. Culpepper, I think, states that the same phenomenon may be seen also at Whey-Street in Romney Marsh, and at Nantwich in Cheshire, if so be the winter is mild. In connection with Moonwort, Coles in his *Adam in Eden* tells us, "Traditions there are enough concerning this plant to exercise it, for it is said, yea and believed by many it will open the Locks wherewith dwelling houses are made fast, if it be put into the keyhole, as also that it will loosen the Locks, Fetters and Shoes from the Horses' feet that go on the places where it groweth." Coles is rather skeptical, apparently,

for he adds: "and of this opinion was Master Culpepper, who though he railleth against superstition in others, yet had enough of it himself, as may appear by the story of the Earl of Essex, his Horses which being drawn up in a body many of them lost their shoes upon White-Downe in Devonshire neer Tiverton, because moonwort grows upon the Heaths, a pretty conceit, if you please to believe it; but I must tell you Master Culpepper was very unable to prove that any moonwort grew there." Celandine (*Chelidonium*) was named from the swallow. Bartholomæus Anglicus has this about it: "Celidonia is an herbe wt yellowe floures, the fruit smorcheth them that it towchyth. And hyghte Celidonia for it spryngeth other blomyth, in the comynge of swalowes. . . . It hygte Celidonia for it helpith swallowes birdes yf their eyen be hurte other (or) blynde." The singular fable of the barnacle goose, which was produced from a tree, or from a weed floating at sea, was believed for centuries, but is perhaps too well known to be told here. There was an old-time notion that fern conferred upon the bearer the boon of invisibility. Thus, in *King Henry IV* (Part I, Act 2, Sc. 1) we read, "We have the receipt of fern seed, we walk invisible."

In this matter-of-fact age it is hard for us to realize the unbounded faith that those of old had in the efficacy of plants and the multifarious uses to which they put them. Herbs were valued to prevent and cure disease, to exorcise demons, to ward off enchantments, witchcraft, and the evil-eye, to protect against the unseen powers of evil, to procure love, to cure lunacy, to prevent weariness on a journey, to mitigate the effects of hail, to ward off lightning, to prevent the barking of dogs, to toughen one against the pain of a whipping, to help dimness of sight, to promote jollity, to elevate the spirits, to prevent unpleasant dreams and nightmare, to heal the bites of serpents and other noxious beasts, to improve the complexion, to grow hair on a bald head, to obtain beauty, to minimize the annoyance from a woman's tongue, and these were by no means all. The rites and ceremonies, the incantations with which all ancient peoples, irrespective of race, have hedged about the collection and preparation of herbs, show the important part they played in their lives. Furthermore, these ceremonies antedate Christianity, antedate the earlier pagan faiths, and carry us back to a period long before the dawn of history. In them we see, "as through a glass darkly" something of the struggles, the fears, the hopes, and the ideals of primitive man. It is a curious commentary on the credulity of the human mind that some of the charms and superstitions connected with plants have come down to us from these remote ages, and have been practised within the

memories of persons still living, probably are being practised even now in some of the out-of-the-way parts of the world. The materialism of the age is not yet all-pervasive, nor has it quite succeeded in quenching the imaginative faculty; and, in some respects, perhaps this is well.

One of the most striking characteristics of our Anglo-Saxon stock is its love of flowers. No visitor to England can fail to be impressed with the profusion of bloom everywhere. Every cottage has its garden, every tenement its window-box. The surprising thing about it is that this love of flowers is a genuine tradition of the past. It is hard to believe that our rude, berserking, Norse ancestors, intent—as we have always understood—on blood and pillage, could have had so gentle a saving grace as this. But so it is. Once in possession of the land, they seem indeed to have beaten their swords into ploughs, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Competent authorities tell us that the Saxon tribes, settled in Britain, had a much greater knowledge of plant lore than had their brethren of the mainland, or even than had the disciples of the Greek botanists of the same period. The *Herbarium* of Apuleius Platonicus, a standard work in the early Middle Ages, mentions only one hundred and eighty-five plants: the *Herbarius zu Teutsch* has a list of three hundred and eighty. But the Anglo-Saxons knew of at least five hundred; and their knowledge was not only extensive, but rather exact.

A study of the early Anglo-Saxon manuscripts treating of plants goes to show that the prime favourites in the old-fashioned garden of to-day, peonies, violets, roses, gilly-flowers, marigolds, and sunflowers, were also the delight of our forefathers. Some of the old Saxon names for plants, too, seem in many instances to be singularly appropriate. Thus, "Waybread," the broad-leaved herb of the paths, is a better term than "plantain," which is misleading. "Maythen" is smoother than "camomile." "Wergulu" is undoubtedly a more descriptive name than "nettle" for that harsh and forbidding weed. Knot-weed seems to be well described by the epithet "Unfortrædde," while "Joy of the ground" is a very pretty expression for "periwinkle."

Some of the later popular names for plants seem well worth noting. One species of cudweed was called "Live-for-ever." The fruitful marigold was termed "Jackanapes-on-horseback." Goat's-beard is "Go-to-bed-at-noon", from its early-closing propensities. The wild scabious is the "Devil's Bit", because the devil "did bite it for envie, because it is an herbe that hath so many good vertues and is so beneficent to mankind" (Gerard). *Delphinium*

was named from its fancied resemblance to the dolphin. Gerard says it is also called "Rest-harrow," "because it maketh the Oxen whilst they be in plowing to rest or stand still." Columbine was called after the dove, which it was thought to resemble. "Eye-bright" is the picturesque name for a plant much esteemed for its power of helping weak eyes. Gerard derives the name "Tulip" from tulipan, thefan, or turban, because the points and brims of the flowers turn back like a Dalmatian or Turkish cap. William Coles was a Fellow of New College, Oxford, and was, we may therefore infer, a bachelor; otherwise he would hardly have dared to write the following about the poplar: "In English aspe and aspen tree and may also be called Tremble, after the French name; because the leaves wag, though there be no wind: and therefore the Poets and others have feigned them to be the matter whereof women's tongues were made, which seldom cease wagging."

In the olden days herbs were frequently used as amulets, not only to cure or ward off disease, but for a host of other purposes. It is rarely nowadays that one meets with this, though every one knows of the value of white heather and the four-leaved clover to bring good luck. I have however known a man to carry about with him a horse-chestnut to prevent the rheumatism, with satisfactory results to himself. A potato is equally effective, I understand. The most popular plants employed as amulets were betony, vervain, mugwort, peony, yarrow, and waybread. Among the most valued was vervain, identified by some authorities with verbena. This plant was known to the Druids, and was esteemed as late as the seventeenth century. The gathering of vervain was attended with many mystical ceremonies. A libation of honey had to be poured upon the ground from which it was dug. It was to be uprooted with the left hand at the rising of Sirius, and when neither sun nor moon was shining. Bock (*Kreuter Buch*) remarks with some contempt that it was more used in magic than in medicine. The *Boke of Secretes* of Albertus Magnus tells us about verbena that "Infants bearing it shall be very apte to learne and louing learnynge and they shal be glad and joyous." "To make folke merye at ye table" we are recommended to "take foure leaves and foure rotes of vervain in wyne, then spryncl the wyne all about the hous where the eatynge is and they all shall be mery." Vervain, also, to be best, should be plucked "at spring of day," "in the monyth of May." Scarcely less prized was betony, for which twenty-nine uses are given in the Herbarium of Apuleius. It is described in the Saxon version as "good, whether for man's soul or his body."

Mugwort, *Artemisia*, or Wormwood, was for centuries trusted in for its efficacy against the unseen powers of evil. It is one of the nine sacred herbs mentioned in the *Lacnunga*, and is thus described:

Eldest of worts  
 Thou hast might for three  
 And against thirty  
 For venom availest  
 For flying vile things,  
 Mighty against loathed ones  
 That through the land rove.

In the *Hebarium* of Apuleius we read of mugwort that "If a root of this wort be hung over the door of any house then may not any man damage the house." In *The Grete Herball*, under "*Artemisia*" we find, "To make a child mery hange a bondell of Mugwort or make a smoke thereof under the chylde's bedde for it taketh away annoy for hem." Gerard quotes Pliny to the effect that "the traveller or wayfaring man that hath mugwort tied about him feeleth no wearisomeness at all and he who hath it about him can be hurt by no poysonous medecines, nor by any wilde beast, neither yet by the Sun itselfe." Many other plants have similar uses. "Dioscorides says that if such as journey or travel do carry with them a branch or rod of *agnus castus* in their hand, it will keep them from merrygalls and wearinesse." (Johnson's *Gerard*.) Yarrow, also called mylfoyle and nose-bleed, was a plant formerly much used by witches for incantations. In some quarters it is esteemed even now as a certain cure for rheumatism.

Peony, called after Paeon a physician who first described its marvellous virtues, was a favourite for many ages. It had to be gathered with much the same precautions as the mandrake. According to Galen, the root of the male peony "hanged about the neck, healeth the falling sickness."

Waybread, or plantain, is one of the nine sacred herbs of the *Lacnunga*. It is referred to as an herb "which spreadeth open towards the east", and is also called "the mother of worts." It seems to have been used as a cooling application to wounds, sprains, and the bites of snakes and venomous insects. In this connection we may quote *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 1, Scene 2):

Romeo.—Your plantain leaf is excellent for that.  
 Benvolio.—For what I pray thee?  
 Romeo.—For your broken shin.



Other plants that were of avail against venomous beasts are, the ash, the Ladies' Thistle, shrubby trefoil, the spatling poppy, rosemary, and citron.

Some plants, too, were of sovereign efficacy against enchantment and sorcery. An old fable, quoted by Apuleius, saith "that Mercury gave mulleyn to Ulysses when he came neare to the enchanteresse Circe, to the ende that by the vertue of mulleyn he might be preserved against all the enchantments or witchings of Circe." "Alyssum hanged in the house, or at the gate, or entry, keepeth both man and beast from enchantments and witching." (Lyte, *Niewe Herball*, 1578). Johnson quotes Fuchs that a "Root of Angelica is available against witchcraft and enchantments, if a man carry the same about him." Still better is snapdragon, for, "They report (saith Dioscorides) that the herbe being hanged about one preserveth a man from being bewitched, and that it maketh man gracious in the sight of people." Of the Great Mountain Garlic, Johnson tells us, "Some (according to Camerarius) hang the root about the necks of their cattell being falne blind, by what occasion soever it happen, and persuade themselves that by this meanes they will recover their sight. Those that worke in the mines in Germany affirme, that they find this root very powerful in defending them from the assaults of impure spirits or divels, which often in such places are troublesome unto them" (Clusius).

It is interesting to learn that the amulet should sometimes be bound to the person with red wool. This custom dates back to Assyrian times. The colour red seems to have been symbolic of blood. Hence it meant strength, and in a secondary sense, violence. Bartholomaeus Anglicus says, "Reed clothes ben layd upon deed men, in remembrance of their hardyness and boldness, whyle they were in theyr bloudde." In regard to this, Batman, the commentator on Bartholomaeus, remarks, "It appeareth in the time of the Saxons, that the manner over their dead was a red cloath, as we now use blacke. The red of valiauncie, and that was over kings, lords, knights and valyant souldiours." Red was also the colour sacred to Thor, and was particularly abhorrent to witches and other powers of evil. We read, too, that John of Gaddesden, the court physician, successfully treated the son of King Edward the Second for small-pox with red light. It is singular how tenacious of life some of these old notions are. Even now, we speak of "seeing red." Once when I had advised placing a piece of flannel on a patient's chest, I was asked, "Should it be red, Doctor?"

The perfume of flowers, nearly always delightful, receives much attention in the herbals. Gerard wrote, "If odours may worke

satisfaction, they are so souveraigne in plants and so comfortable that no confection of the apothecaries can equall their excellent vertue". Not only do sweet scents delight the sense of smell, but they have wonderful powers. They produce joy, strengthen the memory, and even seem to be the veritable elixir of life.

Why of seknesse dyeth man

When of sawge (sage) in gardeyn he may han.

(Macer's *Herbal*.)

Lyte tells us that "The flavour or scent of mynte rejoiceth man." Also, cerefolium, or chervil, is "good for people that be dul, olde, and without courage, for it rejoyceth and comforteth them, and increaseth theyr strength." "Also drye roses put to ye nose to smell do cõforte the braine and the harte and quencheth sprite." (Askham's *Herbal*.) Of Rosemary, Gerard writes: "If a garland thereof be put about the head, it comforteth the brain, the memorie, the inward senses, and comforteth the heart and maketh it merry". Again, "The leaves and floures of meadowsweet farre excelle all other strowing herbs for to decke up houses, to strawe in chambers, halls, and banqueting houses in the summertime, for the smell thereof makes the heart merrie and joyful and delighteth the senses." According to Parkinson, "lavender is almost wholly spent with us, for to perfume linnen, apparell, gloues and leather and the dried flowers to comfort and dry up the moisture of a cold brain." Rosemary was thought to strengthen the memory. We may quote Ophelia on this, "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance." This plant had many wonderful properties. "Also, put the leaves under the bedde and thou shalt be delivered of all evill dreames." (Banckes's *Herbal*). Again, "Make thee a box of the wood of rosemary and smell to it and it shall preserve thy youth." (*Ibid*).

Sometimes perfumes were relied upon to ward off infection. I have known of camphor being carried in muslin bags about the neck to prevent small-pox. At the time of the Great Plague of London bunches of rosemary were in great demand, and sold for six and eight pence apiece. It is interesting to learn in this connection that the gold-headed cane, which was once one of the distinguishing marks of the physician, represented what was formerly a pomander carried on the end of a stick. Also, there was an ancient custom that at the distribution of the Maundy Money in Westminster Abbey the clergy carried small bouquets.

From the earliest times we find many instances of herbs in various forms being used for cosmetic purposes. Vanity, evidently, is not a monopoly of these latter days. Thus, we find recipes to

grow hair, to remove hair, to make one look pale (and we suppose, interesting), to make one fat, to make one thin, to remove sunburn, freckles and wrinkles, to soften the skin, to preserve youth, and so on. By the time of Turner, one of the earlier English botanists, complexion lotions were apparently much in demand, and that sturdy Puritan seems to have looked upon this form of vanity with much reprehension. He says, "Some weomen sprinkle the floures of cowslip wt whyte wine and after still it and wash their faces wt that water to drive wrinkles away and to make them fayre in the eyes of the worlde rather then in the eyes of God, whom they are not afrayd to offend." And, "Summe use to make theyr here yelow with the floure of this herbe (marigold), not being contèt with the naturall colour which God hath geven thé." Preaching of this kind was of little avail, evidently, for Parkinson, who came much later, gives not a few beauty recipes. The French women "account the distilled water of pimpermell mervailous good to clense the skinne from any roughnesse deformity or discolouring thereof, and to make it smooth neate and cleere." The Italian dames, however, "do much use the distilled water of the whole plant of Solomon's Seal." Lupin is of remarkable efficacy, for it not only takes away small-pox marks, but it makes the user "look more amiable."! Under "Cowslip," in *Adam in Eden*, Coles tells us that "an oyntment made of the leaves and hog's grease healeth wounds, and taketh away spots, wrinkles, and sunburning, and so doth the distilled water of the flowers as diverse Ladies, Gentlewomen and the Citizens, whether wives or widdows, know well enough." We may note in passing that the term "pomatum" for an ointment is derived from the Latin "pomum" an apple, as it was compounded of apples, swines' grease, and rose water.

With the discovery of the New World, new fields, as it were, opened up for the herbarist, which lent increased interest to his calling. Some plants, that we regard as distinctively American, were introduced into European gardens, where they often flourished very well. A reference to a few of these may not be out of place. According to Coles, the potato of Canada was called the Jerusalem artichoke! In Gerard's *Herball* of 1597 we have what is probably the first illustration of the potato, which he calls, erroneously, the Virginian Potato, a term that he popularized, if indeed he did not introduce it. Potatoes originally had nothing to do with Virginia, but came from Quito. The *common* potato, referred to by Shakespeare, was the sweet potato, which was introduced into Europe about eighty years earlier. Gerard's word-picture of the plant is rather striking. It has "very faire and pleasant flowers,

made of one entire whole leafe, which is folded or plaited in such strange sort, that it seemeth to be a flower made of sixe sundrie small leaves, which cannot be easily perceived, except the same be pulled open. The colour whereof it is hard to expresse. The whole flower is of a light purple colour, stripped down the middle of every folde or welt, with a light shew of yellowness, as though purple and yellow were mixed together: in the middle of the flower thrusteth fourth a thicke fat pointell, yellow as golde, with a small sharpe greene pricke or point in the midst thereof." Gerard could never have experienced the delights of "Johnny cake", or he would not have written the following about Indian Corn, which he calls "Turkie Wheate": "We have as yet no certain prooffe or experience concerning the vertues of this kind of corne, although the barbarous Indians, which know no better, are constrained to make a vertue of necessitie, and think it a good food: whereas we may easily judge it nourisheth but little, and is of hard and evill digestion, a more convenient foode for swine than for men." Of tobacco we get a good account in a work of Nicholas Monardes concerning plants of the West Indies, which had been brought to Europe. An English version of this was published in 1577, under the title of "Joyfull newes out of the newe founde worlde." We learn that the Negroes and Indians after inhaling tobacco smoke "doe remaine lightened, without any wearinesse, for to labour again: and thei dooe this with so greate pleasure, that although thei bee not wearie, yet they are very desirious for to dooe it: and the thying is come to so muche effecte, that their maisters doeth chasten them for it, and doe burne the *Tabaco*, because thei should not use it."

One of the delightful recollections of a recent visit to England is that of a peep at the garden of New Place, Stratford-on-Avon, in which all the flowers mentioned in Shakspeare's plays are to be found, arranged after the formal Elizabethan manner. After seeing this, one could have no doubt that the immortal dramatist must have been a lover of flowers. In fact, outside of the herbals, there is more plant lore to be found in Shakspeare than in the works of any other poet. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* (Act. IV, Sc. 2) we find an allusion to the old fable of the Mandrake:—"And shrieks like mandrakes drawn out of the earth." In *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act. III, Sc. 2) we have Lysander addressing Hermia thus, in allusion to her small stature:—"Get you gone, you dwarf: you minimus, of hindering knot-grass made: you bead, you acorn." Knot-grass was anciently supposed to prevent the proper growth of a child. Again, in the famous lines:

And the imperial votaress passed on,  
 In maiden meditation, fancy free.  
 Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:  
 It fell upon a little western flower,—  
 Before, milk-white: now purple with love's wound,—  
 And maidens call it love-in-idleness.  
 Fetch me that flower. (Act. II, Sc. 2).

Love-in-idleness is the *viola tricolor*. A little farther on we read

I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,  
 Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows:  
 Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,  
 With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine:  
 There sleeps Titania.....

Again:—

Be, as thou wast wont to be:  
 See, as thou wast wont to see:  
 Dian's bud (*Agnus castus*) o'er Cupid's flower (*viola*)  
 Hath such force and blessed power.

And, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica says of a bright moonlight night:—

In such a night  
 Medea gather'd the enchanted herbs  
 That did renew old Aeson. (Act. V, Sc. 1).

An allusion to the old astrological idea that herbs should be gathered at some particular phase of the heavenly bodies.

Many more charming references to the cult of flowers might be quoted, but these must suffice. Shakspeare, during the heyday of his literary achievement, was a near neighbour of the great herbalist John Gerard, whose garden was in Fetter Lane, a district which nowadays one would hardly credit with such a pleasant association. We like to think that the prince of playwrights must have known the most illustrious herbalist of the time, and gathered from him much of the ancient lore which he used with such telling effect in his plays.

I cannot close this very imperfect sketch of an interesting subject without a reference to the pleasure to be obtained from a perusal of these old herbals. It is not that we gain any particularly valuable scientific knowledge, but we do get an insight into the minds of those who so long ago trod the same path that we are treading now. We learn something of the piety, the simple fait

the delight in Nature's loveliness, the altruism, that actuated so many of the early botanists. We apprehend something of their gropings in the darkness after truth. And when we find all this adorned, as it so often is, with the poetic touch, or couched in the stately Elizabethan speech of a Lyte or a Gerard, we have a joy indeed. I shall conclude this slight effort with the naive confession of William Coles in the preface to his *Art of Simpling*, in reference to the "Notions" and "Observations" which he was placing before his readers:—"Most of which I am confident are true, and if there be any that are not so, yet they are pleasant."

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## VIMY MEMORIAL

P. H. MOORE

Beyond the emerald,—pale mist I see;  
 And, formed to drape the mantles of the field,  
 The tender breasts of hills are there revealed  
 In fullness of the peasant husbandry;  
 And sky as blue as only sky can be  
 In sunny France. 'Twas here, the sword to wield  
 In red defence, that brothers stood to shield  
 From raping Hun both home and family.

And now on distant hill-top seem to sway  
 Two shining spirits, brooding o'er the fate  
 Of those who tossed the Torch and broke the lance.

The spirits pass. My lips unbidden pray;  
 Two Pylons stand, like nuns, to dedicate  
 The Brotherhood of Canada and France.