

MAY FLOWERS

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May flowers by James Harris

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JAMES HARRIS

MAY FLOWERS

May Flowers;

*A Popular and Scientific description of the Wild
Flowers of the Month; with their Habits,
Properties, &c.*

BY

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Preface.

A few words may be necessary, to account for the publication of the following trifle:—

In the summer of 1870, the Rev. Canon Kingsley, during his three months' residence in Chester, delivered a course of lectures on Botany to the members of the City Library and Reading Room. These lectures, as was to be expected, excited a considerable interest, and led many of those who heard them to wish for further instruction in the subject. Accordingly, on the expiration of the Canon's term of residence, a deputation from the Class waited upon me with a request that I would continue the lectures. I was reluctant to do so, but as I felt that the interest that had been excited would, in all probability, die away, if no attempt were made to keep it alive, I consented to give a few lectures on Structural Botany during the autumn and winter: these lectures were continued until the Canon's return to Chester, in 1871. I selected *Structural Botany* as the subject of my lectures, as several of the Class felt that, from their imperfect acquaintance with the rudiments of the

Science, they had not profited so much by Canon Kingsley's lectures as they would otherwise have done; and I thought that some instruction in the *Grammar* of the Science would be a fit preparation for the Canon's more elaborate lectures on Systematic and Geographical Botany, which I expected him to resume on his coming into residence. The Canon, however, had decided upon Geology, as the subject of his second course of lectures. With a view therefore to keep up some degree of interest in the Science of Botany, I wrote for the *Chester Chronicle* a series of papers on May Flowers: these papers several friends, both in Chester and elsewhere, have requested me to print in a form more convenient than the columns of a newspaper—hence the publication of this little book, which will, I trust, meet the wishes of those at whose request it is issued, and stimulate others, who may read it, to the study of a subject, which cannot fail to be productive of pleasure and profit.

I have added an Index, shewing at a glance the scientific and popular names of each plant mentioned in the book, and its position both in the natural and artificial classifications: this may be useful to beginners.

King's School, Chester.

May Flowers.

" March winds and April shower

" Bring forth May flowers.

MARCH, with its cold easterly winds and its equinoctial gales, and April, with its alternations of showers and sunshine, have now passed away, and the "merry month of May" has again come round, gladdening us with its brightness, and giving promise of enjoyment to all lovers of nature. The first-named months are not without their floral attractions, which are the more highly prized because of the scarcity of flowers at that season—the first primrose and violet of the spring are perhaps hailed with greater delight than any of the more showy productions of summer and autumn. The hedge-banks have also for some weeks past been adorned with the Celandine or Pilewort (*Ranunculus Ficaria*), with its yellow star-like blossoms and its bright green leaves, the praises of which flower have been sung by the poet Wordsworth ; the

woods and many shady hedge-rows have been dotted with the pretty Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*); the white-flowered Whitlow-grass (*Draba verna*), a small cruciferous plant, has been abundant on many old walls; the bright yellow Coltsfoot (*Tussilago Farfara*), a sure sign of a poor soil, has been a conspicuous object in waste places and by the sides of ditches; the white and purple Dead-Nettles (*Lamium album*) and (*Lamium purpureum*) have long displayed their blossoms by the roadsides—indeed both species may be found even in January; the Ground Ivy (*Nepeta Glechoma*), with its trailing stem and its pretty blue flowers, has resumed its place in moist, shady spots under hedges and in woods; and a few others might be named as appearing in March and April: flowers, however, are by no means numerous at this early period of the year, but those we meet with are welcomed as the heralds of summer, and the harbingers of a gay crowd which will soon come pressing upon us in every variety of form and colour. In the present month the number of wild flowers is greatly multiplied, and a country ramble, whether it be in the lanes, or in the fields, or in the woods, will introduce us to some of the most beautiful and interesting specimens of the vegetable kingdom.

Let us take these localities in the order in which we have named them, strolling first along the lanes, which are most easily reached from our respective homes, keeping our eyes open, and peering into the hedge-bottoms and the ditches, as well as the hedges themselves, on both sides of our way. We shall not proceed far in our walk before we come upon a beautiful plant, with deep azure-blue flowers, the Germander Speedwell (*Veronica Chamædrys*), which the uninitiated will persist in calling the Forget-me-not. This latter flower is very different in form, whilst its colour is that of the turquoise. The true Forget-me-not (*Myosotis palustris*), as its specific name indicates, must be looked for in marshy places, in ditches, or by the sides of streams; we shall not meet with it in our present walk, as it is seldom in flower until June, but we may probably find one of its sisters upon some of the dry banks in our way. But to return to our first floral discovery, the Germander Speedwell, which deserves better of us than to be dismissed so hastily. The genus to which it belongs is a very numerous one, containing eighteen native species, whilst a still greater variety may be found in gardens; they are easily known, as they have all a rotate or wheel-shaped corolla, deeply four-cleft, with the lower segment smaller than the

others. The flower has two stamens; it is therefore in the Linnæan class, *Diandria*. The Natural Order, *Scrophulariaceæ*, of which the genus *Veronica* forms a part, is remarkable for the number of beautiful flowering plants it contains—the Mulleins, the Foxglove, the Snapdragons, various species of Toad-flax, the *Mimulus* or Monkey-flower, the Speedwells, the Red and Yellow Rattles, the Cow-wheats, &c. A little further on, quite within the hedge, on which it leans for support, is a striking looking flower, with white star-like blossoms; it is the Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria Holostea*), the most showy species of the genus, of which the Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is the best known example. The Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*) has disappeared, but we may still find another species, the Dog Violet (*Viola canina*): this is usually of a paler colour, and without the delicious fragrance for which the Sweet Violet is so valued. Should any of our young readers, owing to a cold or other cause, be unable to decide whether the flower they may have found is fragrant or inodorous, they may settle the point by noticing whether the peduncle, or flower-stalk, springs directly from the root, or from the axils of the leaves; in the former case, the flower will be the