

**NATURAL HISTORY
RAMBLES; PONDS AND
DITCHES; PP. 15-254**

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Natural History Rambles; Ponds and Ditches; pp. 15-254 by M. C. Cooke

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FLOSCULARIA.

NATURAL HISTORY RAMBLES.

PONDS AND DITCHES.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE WOODLANDS."



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CHAPTER II.

FLOWERING PLANTS.

THOSE who expect to find in marshes and swampy places the same flowers and plants as are familiar to them in lanes and woodlands, will be very much disappointed. There is such a marked distinction between the character of the plants found growing in low swampy places, marshes, and bogs, and those habitual to pastures, woods, and hedge-rows, that the young botanist will find himself in presence of as distinct a flora as if he were to travel to some foreign country. So many of the usual inhabitants of such localities are enumerated in a companion volume to the present,¹ that it is our intention to allude only to those which are thoroughly aquatic in their habits, that is to say, to plants which will be found growing *in* the water of ponds and ditches, rather than to those which flourish only on their margins. Rivers and running streams are very deficient in growing plants, except along their borders, whilst stagnant waters teem with growing plants of various kinds, large and small, many being so very minute as to be almost, or quite, invisible to the naked eye. Flowering-plants, or those which produce conspicuous

¹ "Lakes and Rivers."

flowers, are always large enough to be seen. What an inexhaustible store for investigation will be presented by a single stagnant ditch, choked with vegetation, such as Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, and Lincolnshire could furnish.

Almost the first plant which would attract notice



WATER CROWFOOT.

in ponds and some ditches would be the little white

flowers of the Water Crowfoot,¹ just peering above the surface of the water. The leaves are submerged and very variable, the upper ones being three-lobed, but the lower ones almost skeletons. The great variability of this plant has led some botanists to regard many of the forms as distinct species, but this need not trouble us, who are content to regard them all as simply the Water Crowfoot. This plant is so common that it should be at once recognized ; indeed, it is essential that all the ordinary flowering-plants which grow in ditches should be readily distinguished, on account of the large number of minute animals which will be found adhering to them, so that hereafter we shall constantly have to refer to the names of plants which we are now about briefly to describe.

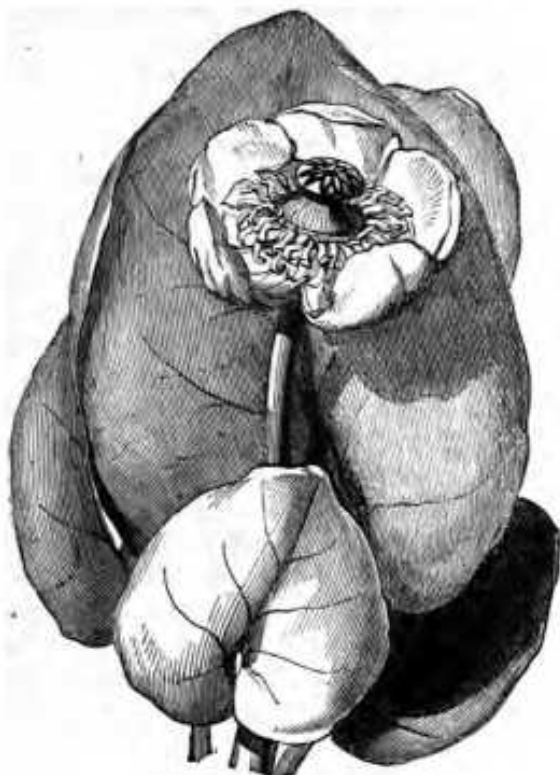
Still more imposing in appearance are the White² and Yellow Water Lily,³ their large, smooth, glossy leaves lying on the surface of the water. It has been asserted that the flowers of the latter have the odour of brandy, and hence in Norfolk are called " Brandy-bottle." As far as our experience of Norfolk goes, it is the flask-shaped seed vessels which are called " Brandy-bottles," from their resemblance to a flask. The water-lilies are the noblest of British aquatic plants, and the under surface of the broad-spreading leaves afford shelter and a home for many a minute animal. The sacred Lotus of Egypt and India was a water-lily, and its flowers were largely employed in the sculptures which decorated their

¹ *Ranunculus aquatilis.*

² *Nymphaea alba.*

³ *Nuphar lutea.*

temples. The Water Villarsia¹ is too uncommon a plant to cause much trouble in its identification. It has somewhat the habit of a small water-lily.



YELLOW WATER-LILY.

There are two very prominent plants in ditches from their tall erect straggling mode of flowering.

¹ *Villarsia nymphaeoides.*

One of these is the great Water Plantain,¹ with long lance-shaped leaves, standing erect on long stalks,



WATER PLANTAIN.

the veins of the leaf running parallel, as in the Common Plantain. The flowering stem is at least 2 ft.

¹ *Alisma plantago*.