

WILD FLOWERS OF THE HOLY LAND

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Wild Flowers of the Holy Land by Mrs. Hannah Zeller & H. B. Tristram

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MRS. HANNAH ZELLER & H. B. TRISTRAM

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PREFACE.

I HAVE been asked to commend the work of my old and dear friend, Mrs. Zeller, of Nazareth, to the public of this Bible-loving land. I have the less hesitation in acceding to her wish, as our mutual friend, Mr. Edward Atkinson, not only well acquainted with the sacred soil by long residence there, but also an accomplished botanist, has kindly provided an Introduction. I have promised Mrs. Zeller a welcome for her drawings to many an English table. The flowers of Palestine are the chief natural attractions of the country, and what traveller returns without many a floral souvenir pressed between the leaves of Bible or guide-book! But precious as the relics are, they lose the bright fresh hues faithfully depicted here. The fifty-four species of flowers represented on these plates are but a sample of the varied Flora of that country, rich beyond most others in botanical rarities. My herbarium contains thirteen hundred Palestine species, a number which might be considerably increased.

The aim of Mrs. Zeller has been, not to select the most gorgeous or the rarest, but to give a fair representation, if I may so speak, of the every-day Flora of the Holy Land. The gorgeous asclepiads, the gigantic orobanches, the magnificent ipomeas of the Jordan valley she has passed by, in order to cull those familiar flowers which carpet the soil or fringe the wayside in every plain and dell.

But the volume will not be the less welcome, because it contains many an English weed, as well as the familiar denizens of our gardens. The anemone, the gladiolus, or the hollyhock, will not lose their place in our regard when we trace them to their cradle, nor will the fumitory, the speedwell, and the buglos be less interesting ornaments of our hedgerows, because they extend their range beyond the Eastern Mediterranean.

For the fidelity and the accuracy of Mrs. Zeller's drawing and colouring it is scarcely necessary for me to vouch. But the chief interest of the plates will lie in the fact that they represent to us the very flowers on which our Lord's eye must so often have rested in childhood, and which provided Him with illustrations for His teaching and parables. They are the flowers not of Judæa, but of Galilee, culled on the hills round Nazareth, and in the plain of Gennesareth, by the wife of our indefatigable Missionary at Nazareth, and who has for so many years been the zealous helper in his work.

H. B. TRISTRAM.

COLLEGE, DURHAM,
12th September, 1875.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Holy Land having been my home for more than four years, while botany has been a hobby with me, more or less, for thirty—the charmingly faithful portraits of so many of the field flowers of Palestine could not but kindle, as they passed under review, many pleasant memories and some latent enthusiasm for the Flora of “those holy fields.”

It is a common boast of English travellers that no country possesses so large a number of beautiful wild flowers and sweet-scented blossoms as their own. Perhaps, as regards the latter, there may be some truth in the vaunt; and still the rose, hawthorn, wall-flower, and lily of the valley, of our woods and hedgerows, though more abundant, cannot rival in sweetness the scented clematis, yellow jasmine, lavender, and narcissus of the Galilean hills. Nay, even the arid wilderness of Judæa is frequently rendered odorous by the delicate perfume of the *sunt* (*acacia vera*), the “shittim-tree” of Holy Scripture; not forgetting the true *mignonette*, a wanderer from Egypt.

But for mere colour, I think there can be no doubt England must yield the palm to Syria. In a single hour's stroll on a spring morning, whether in the environs of Jerusalem, on the slopes around Nazareth, in the fields of Bethlehem, on the banks of Jordan,

“ — Or where Gennesaret's wave
Delights the flowers to lave,
That o'er her western slope breathe airs of balm,”

I could at any time fill my hand with a bouquet of flowers as rich in colour, and as varied in form, as one could gather at midsummer

in a well-kept garden at home. The remembrance of my wanderings in that country, so differently regarded, according to the colour of the traveller's mind, is distinctly and indelibly stamped on my mental retina; for, whether travelling for mere pleasure, or on a journey of duty, my eye was, as a matter of habit, accustomed to see everything, from the humble flower beneath my horse's feet to the snow-clad summit of Hermon.

In this way I learned to associate individual plants with the localities where I have seen them flowering; and thus, in looking through the following pages—several of which it was once my privilege to see under the skilful pencil of my old friend, Mrs. Zeller, in her own house at Nazareth—I have vividly brought before me the spot where the gaudy tulip (*T. gesneriana*) grew abundantly on the hill-side between Nazareth and the Valley of Jezreel; the hollyhock (*Althæa lavaterifolia*) at Magdala; the apple of Sodom (*Solanum sanctum*) near Jericho; the blue lupin (*L. pilosus*) on the Mount of Beatitudes, near the Horns of Hattin; the elegant storax-tree, with its burden of snow-clad bell flowers and dark green leaves with silvered undersides, forming a relief to the sturdy oaks in the Forest of Carmel; the delicate little rock stock (*Ricotia lunaria*) with its pink stars, almost smothered among the pathless thickets of Capernaum; and the massive acanthus (*A. dioscoridis*) revelling among ruins in the Valley of Elah.

The scarcity of trees in the Holy Land deprive it of all those shade-loving flowers and ferns which add such a charm to our woodlands at home. But no sooner have the heavy rains of January and February fallen, than the soil of the plains and valleys, baked hard by eight months of exposure to a cloudless sky, burst forth into a sudden green, whose vividness seems all the greater by contrast with their previous bareness. A thousand brilliant flowers, chiefly of bulbous plants, convert the uniform drab-coloured livery of the country, during its long dry season, into a gaudy carpet as varied as the patterns of a kaleidoscope.

Crocus, yellow and white and blue; iris, of intense blue;

anemone, scarlet, pink, blue, and white; grape hyacinth, of royal purple; dark-red gladiolus and orange ranunculus; the lovely cyclamen with its cherry-coloured eye and its marble leaves; and the greenish white star of Bethlehem,—appear like magic, as if shaken out of Flora's lap. Meanwhile the hill slopes are frequently decorated, (notably those of the Mount of Olives), by the almond with its sheet of pink, and other flowering shrubs.

“ Soon o'er their heads blithe April airs shall sing,
A thousand wild-flowers round them shall unfold,
The green buds glisten in the dews of spring,
And all be vernal rapture as of old.”—*Keble*.

Later in the season the cistus, or rock-rose (*C. creticus* and *C. salviæfolius*) sheds its fugitive fairy petals over the mountain-sides, varied by the spinous burnet (*Poterium spinosum*), lavender, Greek hyssop, and marjoram: whilst the plains are decked with blue, yellow, and rose-coloured flax, scarlet poppies, salvias, vetches, and many composite plants.

When most other flowers have faded; when the corn-fields have been reaped, and the grapes are ready for vintage, there are still a few lingerers that seem to reserve their charms until all else is withered, and

“ Remind us of summer, when summer is gone.”

Of such is the handsome ever-green oleander, which affects the water-side where water is to be had, but often thrives in the dried-up bed of a mountain stream. Thus Warburton poetically says: * “The Ilyssus exists no longer, but a torrent-like line of oleanders seems still to fill its course with verdant waves and rosy foam.” The *Vitex agnus-castus*, another ornamental flowering shrub with an aromatic fragrance, is found in similar situations. At the same season, in shaded nooks, and in the chinks of overhanging rock, the glossy leaves and strong-scented tufts of pendant white flowers of the *Schubertia*

* *The Crescent and the Cross.*

multiflora, and several other, but less striking, asclepiads, peep out. The straggling stems and changeful chameleon flowers of the European plumbago fill up many a waste place, with store of showy star-thistles, purple and yellow (*Centaurea calcitrapa* and *C. verutum*), and the white and crimson everlastings. Almost every ruin or ancient building we pass is more or less mantled with the graceful caper-plant (*Capparis spinosa*), which strikes its roots firmly between the stones, and, at this season, spangles its thorny sprays with its handsome tassel-like blossoms and edible buds. This plant is identified by Schubert, Tristram, and others, as the "hyssop" of the Pentateuch, which, as Solomon saith, "groweth out of the wall."

The last of these has vanished, and two or three months of relentless autumn suns have left no vestige of green or colour on the plains, when towards the end of October a few scattered showers—the early rain—soon deck the fields with pink and purple colchicums, or meadow-saffron—the promise and antepast of spring's resurrection.

There is, however, another aspect in which the flowers of Palestine claim a special interest, which attaches to those of no other land. So many instances occur in Holy Writ of trees and plants associated with particular scenes and localities, that, where we find them still flourishing on those very spots, they are silent witnesses to the truth of Scripture.

Examples of this abound on every side. The cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan (Isa. ii. 13); the olive trees of Gethsemane and Olivet—all of which exist in their lineal descendants at the present day, are too familiar to need more than a passing notice. The sycamore tree, formerly so abundant, is now by no means common, but, says Dr. Tristram, "there are still a few gnarled and aged sycomores at ancient Jericho," where it afforded Zaccheus (Luke xix. 4) a vantage point for seeing and intercepting the Saviour. A notable instance, which came under my own observation, is the bramble (*Rubus sanctus*), which, though common in Lebanon, occurs in only a few well-watered places in Lower Palestine, and the