


Flowers of Lyle.

By IDA WHITE.



A decorative rectangular border with a repeating floral motif surrounds the text.

PRESENTED BY

Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji.

The Flowers of Lyle

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And Elegiac Verses

BY

IDA WHITE,

Authoress of "Prison Poems,"
"The Brides of Seven Towers," &c.

"I cry you mercy, sir; and well could wish
You had not found me here so musical;
Let me excuse me, and believe me so—
My mirth is much displeased, but pleased my woe."
—*Mariana*, "*Measure for Measure*."

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PREFACE.

BEING now out and the door closed against me, I feel keenly how much I have left unsaid of this Eden seeking, or Eden making, still within reach, and still before—never behind us. All the pleasure grounds, Botanical wonders and ordered results of that other Maker or Gardener's invention or design must ever remain for you the merest skeleton of a myth, and very shrunken and decrepid at that. Only glance at these extraordinary blooms 'forced' up by every artificial ingenuity into that military precision where they stand the 'sports' and 'monstrosities' of a system of hot water hydraulics—They have gained a glass-house and lost their own soul. All these wonderful accumulations of petals and spots and streaks and strains were at the expense of the organs of propagation—the plant is henceforth under the curse of sterility.

Now to understand this in the highest, you should keep observing these Beings at our feet, because from the first moment you will find there cause and effect in all their naked integrity, and the reasoning the deductions from these, if carried up to or into the analogous plane of your own life and relationships, shall be of inestimable service. Unless you grasp the spiritual signification of its life you might as well keep your eyes for the shop windows, and may crown yourself with flowers but remain an insensible brute. But what can it teach? you query. Again I say unto ye, watch. Sit down beside any favorite as it first appears and note the time of its coming—same as last year! Yet it is not the same flower; it has only taken the same appearance, the same task, the same mission of its predecessor, working always with the one and the same

purpose in view, and surely these are all spiritual attributes. And what is its object? To bring forth that which is so beautiful. your mind could never have conceived it till your eyes first drank it in. How much is this enhanced by finding the wild plant at work, spinning out its own fortunes, and independent of any arbitrary fiat, accident, or even obstacle. It will engineer far down among rocks and rubble and roots as determined as its own, to secure as much room and moisture and food as shall keep it comfortably, and having nicely woven its leaves, it has instructed every fibre of them how to seize the air, heat, and all genial influences; and there on a mere patch of soil or the cranny of a rock it goes through such a course of chemical analysis—light, aerial magnetism, &c.—as should win it a chair in the finest university of the globe! But the dear plant has yet a nobler ambition or object—it will bring forth the most beautiful utterance of all the uncountable æons, and deliver it with the indelible impressions of an earnest soul appealing to the world around it, Believe in me and live!

There is the flower—the joy and glory of the organism, and of all who have eyes to see, but to prove that beauty and utility are one, is the first exercise of the young queen's reign; and so, long before her babies are out of the cradle, she has wrought out such devices for their welfare, future settlement, their protection from enemies, or rain or frost, as all sane, wholesome, natural minds must take delight in. And what is the secret of it all?—and here it is an open secret. Between its concrete existence and its abstract there was such perfect correlation as gave it *all knowledge*. I can put it no other way, because it has, and must be admitted, numbers, geometry, deduction and induction, harmony and adaptation of means to an end, that *self-regulating power* that made it influence conditions, or modify or contend with them for its own purposes and benefit. Waiting on Hammersmith Bridge one evening for a lecture by William Morris, I passed the time looking into the various vegetable tufts that ensconced themselves above and in the water-mark of the stones. One was a creeper well known to me in far-off fields, long years ago; but it was not creeping now, but had straightened its filament - of a *back* into the functions of a stem, above which it turned its anxius bedraggled corolla towards the upper arches. Now I won't say it thought of gaining the road, but I do say it was working thro' all the destitution of its unsuitable environments in that direction. Could

it only get enough of sunshine to ripen its pollen it could now have it deposited higher up in the world, even one step further from that boa-constrictor of a Thames flood that threatened its destruction every day and hour, and I will say and commit no further violence on my belief—away in the deep mystery of its being there was a design, an hereditary purpose, of reaching land, and founding a floral colony in a happier, *better* place. A waft of wind, a bird of the air may have lodged it where it was—and in the affluence of incidents, why not some coincidents?—it would arise from that crevice—as high as Heaven! With this gospel of the fields before us, one might repeat that old and very pertinent question—What is man that any of us should take him seriously? When he sneaked out of the Tertiary, hideous and gruesome, he found Queen Flora at the head of a flourishing kingdom, the table spread, the fire laid—just waiting for that flint spark, and surely a far more worthy guest, for very soon we find his trail of devastation and massacre wherever he passed. But worse was to come, for when he began the manufacture of ghosts, gods, devils, and kings, his terror and superstition so distorted, perverted, deformed and inverted the natural process of growth and development, that as it went on he became so brutal, sensual, cruel and atrocious as horrifies us to read of. He became the most rabid and ridiculous of all animals until self-preservation began to assert itself, and the constant necessity for it strengthened both it and all the organs co-operating with it, so that pioneers of a new and higher variety soon broke away from this paleozoic-sang, as one might call him! We want our classification revised—pshyic-ozoic has been suggested—could we not have optozoon, or a seeing one? I shall be “had up” by the ‘*Chronicle*,’ ‘*Telegraphs*’ and so on, and compelled to do penance, for all these, malicious pointings and pinches and jaggings may reach this fatherless bairn, my book—still, gils, I cannot beg of you to be your own natural, wholesome, individual selves, and at the same time shrink the consequences. Because the entire substance of my message might be condensed in this one sentence—I want you to hate what is hateful, to love what is lovely, with all your heart and mind and strength, but you cannot discern between these without the power of visualising, and this only comes by intuitions cleared and convinced by study and observation and elevated by the most vitalising of all objects or subjects, a growing plant, a wild flower at home!

The poem “Favourites of the Year” was prompted by one of the loveliest of flower-like girls, Bessie, eldest daughter of W. J. Knowles,

Esq., of Ballymena, a gentleman of rare culture and attainments, and when we wanted specimens for her papa's lectures she was the first to find them. She passed and disappeared just as life opened before her, yet I never gather flowers, think or speak of them, but she is as clearly present with me as in the sunny days of her spring that was to have no summer.

Midsummer's day was written with Violet's little son at my side, one of the brightest and sweetest of children, with wonderful beauty and great promise. Lally's supreme delight was in dandelions. If I missed him for a little I could always recover him by simply getting on the track of yellow heads escaped from the little fists. On his return from a visit of a few days (every hour of which I grudged), thousands of these had turned into 'clocks.' "Mamie," he would question, "where are they?" I told him they had changed, but would be there next year. "But I won't have these old clocks," he would shout, and like some unbalanced sprite he would tear about the place whacking down the poor scapes. When the primroses went he would know also, so I took the child and showed him the seed vessels, showed him the petals fallen everywhere but leaving something in its stead, and with the greatest ease he began to understand.

He was watching the horses and trappings of a hearse one day after his return to London, and asking what it meant, his mother told him a little girl had died. 'Oh,' said he, with a fearfully sagacious air, as one who knew all about it—'She has changed her dress.' His mother thought he said she has changed her 'address,' for he's very witty; but I happen to know what he meant. He used to put his pretty hands together and say a grace when he came first. Dropping this habit, I asked him one day, why. 'Well, you know, mamie, it's all rot!!' Of course I had never before spoken about it to the infant of five years old, that one question excepted; but he had gathered this to be the Tryst view of it. His silvery, baby laughter, his world of make believe and mimicry! He would give a concert, placing me on a dyke as part of his audience, and at the end of each piece bow gravely to all the bushes and rowan trees—with a most elaborate salute for my applause. There was a little hill near the house—a wonderful splendour on a May afternoon, all ablaze with whin and furze and the duets and choruses of many tra-lilling throats. As we stopped there one day, he said softly—'Say something, mamie,' his eyes full of a rapt intelligence. Oh, what a beautiful world of broom and flowers, and the dear birdies happy and good like my Lally!' This pleased him, and

presently he broke away up the road, and I caught up to him just in time to hear—'Oh, dans, and prims, and vis (dandelions, primroses, violets), I love you all, I love you all, and my Tryst mamie, my London mother and dada—and all the 'tings!'

But so much of all my life and ways and deeds have their sustenance in another, that I should say something of the source—my sister "Barrie"—Agnes Cameron. She was so unworldly as to be unfit to arrange or conform to the accepted conventionalities between the ideal within and the sordid denuded realities around; there were continual fractures, ruptures, or what geologists call 'faults,' she was shaken to her foundations. Yet by the very tenacity of her affections she was preserved from mental overthrow, in her life's fitful fever the unsettlement was but momentary, and always from her such freshness and force of originality as made me feel when near her I had reached the highest plane of sensibility or imagination. The simplest of narrations were invested with a charm and finish of which I need not say she was wholly unconscious, and when describing characters we knew, homely wit and humour sparkled and played all over, without the smallest effort or affectation. The last time she convoyed me away, she pointed to where the primroses had been very numerous—'but' (it was now August) she said, 'I told them they needn't linger, for you were not coming.' She also tried to convey the warning of her death; but I never thought of death or blight when near her.

But my heart was like lead as I left her, and turning at the gate, I saw her wistful, shining face fixed silently on me. I could not get away the moment the telegram reached me, and for three maddening days and nights I was ploughing thro' sea and land. I was tearing thro' the wild streets as if that hastened me—to reach her, only to reach her!—precisely as in some horrid nightmare one struggles to escape or wrestle ineffectually, while the feet are rivetted to the ground. I got away at last, and for seven days and nights of mortal agony to both I had the melancholy pleasure of anticipating her little needs—breasting with her the surges of eternity as they beat round us—the dear face still turned to me with the same affectionate trust bestowed me from her infancy. On the seventh night her voice rang out like a clarion—"Welcome, death!"—and after a while with rapidly failing power—"pray!" It was one of those awful moments that can never come again to me; to fail her would be cruelty and desertion, and to deny myself, very base

and impossible, but in the painful silence, for no one else spoke, the thing resolved itself. Torn with a convulsive sob, I cried—'God, that is Nature, that delivered you from your mother's womb, deliver you from the shadow and agony of this death, and restore you gently to the Peace and Happiness within her bosom, which is eternal life—which is God.'

She heard and kept perfectly still, for she was heroism itself, and I place the incident here, well knowing the vulgar propensity so many sub-human Christians have of representing persons of my cast of opinion as changing or swerving at the presence of death. I consider it a far more terrible ordeal to live among such creatures than death in any form—which to me has no more importance than birth. To rescue it then from such distorting medium I give it here.

The dawn was opulent with gifts, and with gradual but steadfast benevolence continued yielding them up. It brought the Repose she so much needed, Joy, Youth, a serene dignity, refining and illuminating as it increased, till she lay crowned with such beauty as made her face animate with the communication of it. Oh the wild tears I shed!—unhindered now—for at any sign of my giving way she used to raise her hand with the sharp authority of a sword between me and weakness. Soon the tranquility that rested on her glided into my heart like an emanation of her—together we fronted the Inevitable. I hold myself in eternity with her, the bitterness of death is passed, she was my other self, the only terms on which life would be henceforth supportable, must lie in the power to penetrate the shadows of Border land—and in my heart and memory—'hide her from the grave!'

Just one word of the dear little girls who used to send me essays and impressions of their flowering mates—from France and Ireland chiefly—well worth re-reading in winter days waiting on me. But the charm of *nâiveté* rests with a ten year old sissy, who told me of a flower the name unknown to her—but, she assured me—"it was pink before it came out!"

"Man's thought is like Antæus and must be,
Touched to the ground of nature to regain
Fresh force, new impulse, else it would remain
Dead, in the grip of strong authority."

Now dear girls, gather blossoms while ye may, but the most delightful, lasting and useful, shall be your individual interpretation of womanhood when it Flowers by that grace of understanding that expands only in close alliance with whatever is simple, natural and true.

IDA WHITE.

The Tryst,
Lyle Hill,
September, 1900.



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