

## Notes on the Mayflower of the Loyalists.

By G. F. MATTHEW, M. A., F. R. S. C.

It has been suggested that the delicate and modest little flower which we call the Mayflower should be adopted as the emblem of the Loyalists, because it is in full bloom at the season of the year when they landed on these rocky shores. In this connection it may not be out of place to inquire as to the use of the word "Mayflower" or "May blossom" in the past; and specially to ask what was the *Mayflower of the Loyalists*? Was their Mayflower identical with our spring favorite; or was it some other plant, to us unknown; or if known, called by some other name?

Our Mayflower has been named by botanists *Epigæa repens*, or the plant that *creeps on the ground*—a name very appropriate to its habit of growth as it forms patches of foliage, branching and spreading on the ground from a central root. The flowers are found at and near the ends of the branches, and are almost concealed from view by the thick, leathery, shining, dark-green, round-oval leaves. The Mayflower delights in a rocky and not too fertile soil. When it grows in richer land it is apt to be choked by the surrounding plants better adapted to such situations; and in very shady places it will not blossom. It craves a well mulched surface with gravelly, or rather stony soil beneath, and seems to enjoy itself most where granite and trap rocks, or quartz rocks prevail. On and around reefs or ledges of such rock, on the border of the forest, the Mayflower spreads its refreshing green, and perfumes the air with its delicate fragrance. It is as wild by nature, and as hard to tame, as the savage that once roamed master of the wilderness where it still abounds; hence, many attempts to cultivate it have failed, for it is easily killed by kindness or injudicious care. The Mayflower belongs to the great family of the Heaths, and its nearest allies in this country are the Bearberry\*, Spicy Wintergreen† and Teaberry‡. They, like the Mayflower, have evergreen leaves, and differ in this respect from most of the American Heaths.

The barren and gravelly soils of many tracts in North-eastern North America, and its moist climate are particularly well suited to the Mayflower, and it flourishes here in abundance. Warned by the experience of many seasons on the Atlantic coast, it does not open its petals when the spring rains first remove the snow, but awaits the advent of warm weather, knowing full well that the warm days of early spring are deceptive, and that the chilling winds from the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and the snow-

clad hills of Labrador, will, later on, chill the air and interfere with the development of its tiny tubular blossoms, protected though they are by enveloping scales and sepals without, and by a fluff of woolly hairs within. On Lake Superior and the inland region generally the Mayflower has greater confidence in the sun's power, and as soon as the snow is gone, confidently opens its petals to the vernal breeze.

But the purpose of these remarks is not so much to describe the Mayflower and its habits as to enquire whether this flower of ours was the Mayflower of the Loyalists. The writer was very much surprised, many years ago, on being told by an old lady who came here with the Loyalists, that our plant (*Epigæa repens*) was *not* the Mayflower. Among wild flowers that were afterwards shown to her, she at once recognized one as the true Mayflower. This was the plant which is now called the Spring Beauty (*Claytonia caroliniana*), a delicate little plant with two opposite leaves, which are not unlike an Indian's canoe-paddle in shape, and having a cluster of nodding pink flowers between the leaves. The short stem which the Spring Beauty annually sends up comes from a little brown tuber, buried deep in the rich mould of the hardwood forest. The plant differs from our Mayflower in preferring a rich and moist soil, and its stem is soft and succulent like its ally the Purslane (*Portulaca*); while the stem of our Mayflower is strong and woody, and its leaves thick and hard.

The family to which the lady belonged, who spoke of the Spring Beauty as the true Mayflower, came from Connecticut; and it is easy to see why our Mayflower was not theirs. In the region where they had lived the *Epigæa* would blossom in April and the term "Mayflower" would be inappropriate to it; hence, some other blossom would with them have borne the name of "Mayflower." The name and the associations connected with it were dear to those New England colonists. With what object more attractive could they have associated the ideas and the name, than the delicate Spring Beauty—a plant which abounds in the rich woods, covering the mountains and hills of Western New England and New York? To the Loyalists of Connecticut, therefore, the word "Mayflower" carried a different meaning from that which it bears with us.

And to the Loyalists of New York and New Jersey, where the *Epigæa* was known as the Trailing Arbutus, the idea of "Mayflower," as applied to this plant, was equally foreign. Their name for our Mayflower, however, was not happily chosen, as the Arbutus was one of those European heath-plants, which casts its leaves in the autumn, and in this resembles such

\**Arctostaphylos*. †*Gaultheria*. ‡*Chionogenes*.