

INGLE NOOK

SOME OF THE EARLY FLOWERS OF SPRING

By H. M. S., of Pilot Mound.

To write specially for the women readers of the "Farmer's Advocate" is a delightful task, because I shall be sure of an appreciative set of readers, readers in sympathy with those touches of sentiment and fancy which may be woven so pleasantly into all the details concerning the habits and growth of the wild flowers of any country. The guiding spirit of these columns demands that I shall be non-technical! She shall be obeyed. Technicalities are all right for botanists, but we only want to know here the names of our flowers so that we can tell our children, "That's a buttercup, child!" not "Oh, here's a Ranunculus fascicularis." We are field botanists only of a simple sort. Would that we had some field handbooks illustrated like Edward Step's or Anne Pratt's books in the old land! Spotton is too learned and confusing for us, is it not? Let me, however, recommend you to get Mrs. Doubleday's charming book called "Nature's Garden," her pen-name being "Nettie Blanchan." This treats of many of our Western wild flowers, though not of all. Then I would advise you to go to the clerk of your municipality and ask him to let you see "The Farm Weeds of Canada" with illustrations by Norman Criddle, one of our own Western men, whose careful drawings are colored so truthfully and beautifully. I wish Mr. Criddle would produce a simple "Handbook of Western Wild Flowers" along the same lines. Owing to the limits of space I shall omit any allusion to the June-flowering mustards and other weeds, because this book is accessible to all having been sent to municipal clerks, and school secretaries by the Dominion Government. My own natural desire to know the names of all wild flowers, if possible, received last year a special stimulus by the company of a gracious lady, whose years have in no sense robbed her of the spirit of youthfulness or of the joyous appreciation of our Manitoban flowers, though and perhaps because she is skilled to observe those of Great Britain. Many of my professional drives she shared. I shall not easily forget her delight at seeing for the first time the lady's slipper at the edge of a woodbay slough, or the wealth of purple bloom displayed by the spires of willow herb adown some Fall-burnt stretches of bush in the Dry River district. Therefore, fair readers of the West, permit me to dedicate these sketches not to you alone, but also to the keen and gracious personality of our last summer's visitor from the old land.

The wild flowers of May in Manitoba and the West are so few that they are easily told, especially in a late year like the present. The liverleaf, which bears a tiny purple cup, is to be found in some parts of Manitoba, I am told, but it has never been my luck to see this early flower, which blooms scarcely less early than the well-known anemone, a flower most excusably and universally known as the "crocus." All through the month of May, from the eastern edge of the prairie away to the Peace River district, the dry grasses are strangely starred and clumped with the beauty of its pale purple bloom, most lovely when half-closed. If, however, you have ever seen the real crocus with its grass-like leaves, you would know directly you saw the leaves of our prairie "crocus" that it should be called an anemone. These leaves come later than the bloom and are branching something like the horns of a stag. Next following blooms the tiny buttercup, star-like, not cupped like the Old Country buttercups, but still glossy-golden enough to place under the children's chins to see "if they like butter." By the end of May they swarm in the prairie

grasses on many branching stems. Late in May there comes another flower whose arrangement of florets is something like that of a garden ver-bena, but the petals thereof are a rich golden or orange yellow—"like a cowslip!" do you say? Nay, who ever saw a cowslip of so orange a tint or looking so straight into the sun's eye? Call this flower by the soft Indian name of the yellow puccoon. Say, but the scent thereof! Rich is its odour. I wonder whether anyone ever tried to make a ball out of the puccoon flowers, such as Old Country children make of cowslips. This yellow puccoon is a distinctively Western flower, very common along the trails all through June, both in single plants and in small clumps, usually on sloping ground and banks. I must now tell of another early yellow flower common to this continent and the other side. Before the leaves of the trees come forth in protected Western glens and ravines, where water-springs break forth and descend through marshy spots to lower levels, you may rejoice in the glorious vision of the marshmallow blooming without stint in handsome golden cups amongst bush dark green leaves with stout, fleshy stems. You long to fill your arms without delay, but the boggy forest mould threatens

some of early shrubs; and where these are absent the modest wild strawberry pours out its essences from a million cups hidden amongst the rising grasses. Loudly trill the railing frogs upon the marsh; weirdly the blackbirds wind their queer wheezing calls; deep is the boom of the bittorn, the partridge, and the prairie chicken; but all these are blended into a wonderful setting for the soloists of Nature, such as the golden oriole, the rose-breasted grosbeak, or the cat-bird.

Now, notice, please, that we have some reds and purples amongst our spring flowers. It always seems to me that if a prairie province needed a distinctive flower it might do worse than choose the three-flowered avens. From out of a rosette of fern-like leaves its red stalk rises six inches or less in height, and modestly hangs thereon three brilliant crimson bud-like blooms; so like buds are they that you can scarcely convince a newcomer that the bloom has not yet fully unfolded. The yellow stamens peer just through the cone of close-embracing petals. Soon it develops a wonderful seed-head, a little reminiscent of that clematis which is called "old man's beard." When the setting sun shines on a clump of three-flowered avens at seeding-time, you may see a vision all glorious to behold, a sheen and shimmer of gossamer silk shot with lines of crimson threads. For a conventional design for any fabric from a curtain to a wallpaper, let me commend to some

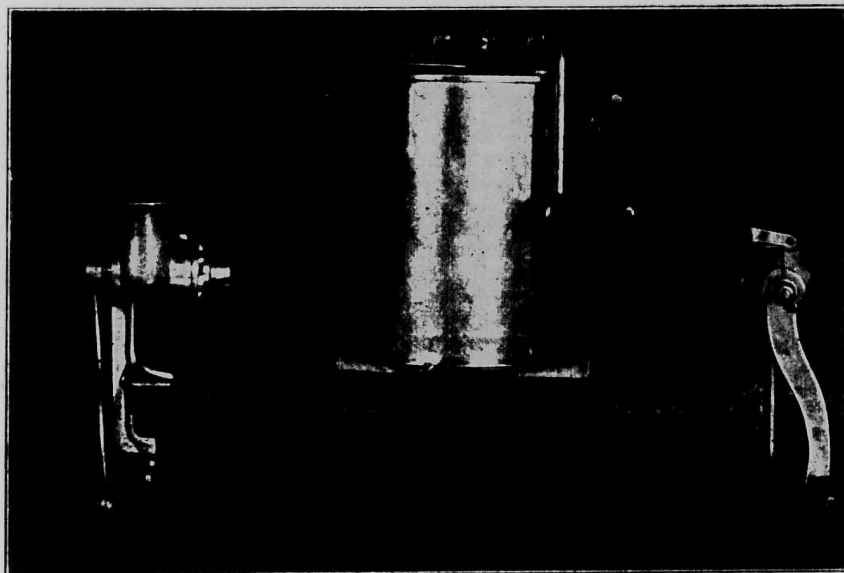
The later tribe of violets is sweet-scented and confined to sheltered thickets and the bush districts, and is broad-leaved with either white or yellow flowers suggestive in shape of tiny pansies. Both these colors are often touched faintly with purple on the under sides of the petals. You may see that same purple touch on the wind-flowers, which we call often by the Greek name of anemone, relatives of the early "crocus." Both in the bush and on the prairie wind-flowers bloom abundantly during the rainy spells of June when the rich green of the under-bush or of the prairie grasses is a firmament spangled with the soft white anemone cups as the bright stars spangle the heavens. Allow them to stay unplucked and they are celestial; pull them and all the inspiration of their beauty is gone, so soon do they wilt and limply hang both heads and leaves. Another common June flower is the pentstemon or beard-tongue, in color varying from white to pale purple. Each stalk holds a number of loosely-hung tubular flowers with four fertile stamens and a fifth which has no reproductive function, but is altered into a bearded thread, like a tongue in shape. The meadow rue now leans rather like a maiden-hair fern or a Columbine, and puts forth a tall stem from three to six feet high, surmounted with a large head of knobby buds which develop into a feathery top almost fluffy with white stamens tipped with green. All over the meadows and prairie at the end of June the white crowns of the familiar yarrow become conspicuous; but of white blooms none brings a sweeter touch of childhood's days than the Western hawthorn with its scent of May. True it is a rather rare bush here, and its flowers are large, and its thorns like spears; but the fragrance, ladies, the fragrance makes me my mother's child again.

AFTER AUNT SARA'S SILENCE

Dear Dame Durden and Ingle Nookers,—I enjoyed so much my seat with you in the Nook last fall that I have ever since wished to call again, but have been waiting for something definite and worth while to say. In the meantime, I have been eaves-dropping and now come armed with both compliment and criticism. I like Dell Grattan's box lounge, for its economy in making, and more for the economy in its use. But with her permission I want to improve it with no expense, but a set of lounge castors. Lift off the straw mattress, fasten the castors on the four corners of the double box, then turn it over—boxes top up, castors on floor. Remove most of the joining ends by sawing down near each side (leaving enough to hold the nails), and split out the pieces. Now, fill up with straw, packed closely in corners, and evenly all over. Tramp it in level, and pile the top round. Cover with any coarse sacking, turning the edges, and tacking to boxes all round. Lay on the mattress and cover, and you have a nice, springy, restful lounge, that will be just a delight to recline on for a minute or an hour.

I tried the cream of pea soup, given among some recipes in the "Advocate" some months ago, and we all were so pleased with it that it has often been on our table through the winter. But, in preparing it, I found my colander too fine to use quickly, so I put the peas in a shallow, round-bottomed dish and mashed them fine with a silver fork, and the soup was so good that I still make it that way. It does not remove the skins, which some might object to, but we do not. Next, I want to try those hot-cross-buns I saw in the last "Advocate." Perhaps they will be as good in May as in April; anyway, I will know in time for next spring!

It puzzles me why so many people—men and women, too—waste time and paper discussing pros and cons (making them as they go) in regard to woman and the franchise. Should woman have the ballot? Would she, or could she use it wisely if she and it etc., etc., ad infinitum. The simplest answer is, "Let her try!" She, as well as her brother, has a



TWO KITCHEN TIME-SAVERS.

to engulf you to your knees. Not even on the undergrowth is a green leaf to be seen and leafless is the grey filigree of the tall trees where the coarse nest of the hawk which wheels and screams unseen above our heads awaits fresh occupants. Mossy, rotting tree-trunks cross here and there the tiny rivulet which trickles over a tree-root into a clear basin, whose bottom is peopled with caddis worms. The leafless contrast enhances the golden sunshine of the mallow cups and thrills the heart-strings with Nature's strange power to awake mysterious chords of almost painful pleasure. A similar chord is struck, when, later on, perhaps early in June, the willows are a bloom. All through April to mid-May their shoots burned red or golden; then each shoot became beaded with silver beads, enlarging to those soft, silvery buds beloved of children and called by them "pussy-willows," which finally break and change the silver into gold, flowers beloved by bees and laden with perfume such as no perfumier on earth can rival. Is there any natural combination of scent, and sight, and sound to excel that which is afforded to us hard-bitten Western folk on some warm vernal morning in late May or early June after a night's rain when the sun shines brightly on bush and prairie. Added to the delicate odour of the willows are the delicious aromas of the wild cherries blooming white before leafing, and of the red-stemmed dogwood, hand-

artist the three-flowered avens in bloom and seeding. This is a very common flower and is accompanied by one as common, the blue spring daisy or Robert's plantain. You will recognize these daisies easily, because they look like pale purple asters, but they are single blooms upon a fleshy stem six or eight inches high, having pale purple rays around a yellow center. Amongst these you may see a little beauty, the blue-eyed grass, which looks like a very small flowering rush. Someone has called this the "little sister of the stately blue flag." Its flower lasts but a day, is deep blue with a yellow center, and is an inch or two below the top of its pointed stalk. I do not think you can miss noticing it, because it is as common as it is striking.

Now, we come to the violets of which there are two sets, the early and the late June. There is that common blue scentless violet, called the dog violet by Old Country folk, which rejoices the eye on dry meadows or banks from the end of May onwards. This was never made to be picked, but should be allowed to adorn its native sod untouched. Less common, but, if anything, rather more beautiful, is the bird's foot violet which arises in early June from a spread of leaves split somewhat after the fashion of a bird's foot. I like to see this plant stray into corners of my garden, where, after its delicate purple bloom is past, the seed-head splits also into bird's-foot shape and flings abroad its seeds.