

ROADSIDE FLOWERS

BY GERALDINE STEINMETZ

DECORATIONS BY INNIS D. STEINMETZ

THE flowers of spring live in the woods and make a delicate and ephemeral cover for the brown, exposed earth. Pale blue and white and pink, they shrink under bare branches from the last biting winds of winter, only to fade in the advancing heat of summer. But the flowers of summer, yellow, red, and purple, are tall and strong, and come out boldly to march along the roads with us, and camp in the fields, greeting the sun as a friend. Their vitality is mature; they have the courage of life.

To see the spring flowers, which are called "wild flowers," you have to go out especially, and, having made the effort, you value what you see. But the flowers of summer come to you, as it were, and are beside you as you drive or walk; so you pay no attention to them and call them weeds. This, in itself, suggests a curious symbolism and enlists the imagination on the side of the weeds.

In the summer do you ever walk along the road in the dust and heat? For, it seems to me, you also must be a tramp to appreciate the plants that go along with you.

Most of these plants of summer have come with us across the Atlantic and we only renew a world-old acquaintance with them. You have seen the stout, strong elecampane that lives in fence-corners and among the pine stumps in half-cleared fields? The thick, coarse leaves clasp the heavy stem, and many branches bear the flower-heads with yellow ray-florets and brown disk-florets; flower-heads, for the elecampane is one of

the compositæ, the most important of all plant families, chiefly because, long ago, some intelligence led it to group its florets into heads and so bring them more to the notice of the fertilizing insects. This elecampane found its way to America as a horse medicine, and we in our modern pride forget that Hippocrates, and with him all Greek medicine, considered its root an excellent stimulant for the human stomach and brain. We laugh, but is not the laugh rather with the elecampane?

So many of the most noticeable of summer flowers are of the compositæ, with their bunched-up heads of every colour—some, the primitive yellow, original colour of flowers, but many, blue and purple, the colour last evolved, beloved of bees. There are the thistles, of which the Canadian thistle—wrongly so named, as it also comes from Europe—has a perfume strange and haunting. Let this thistle, with its persistent roots and aeroplaning seeds, once get in his fields, and the farmer will have no time to think of its fragrance or admire the completeness of its prickly protection. The thistle is, indeed, an example among plants!

Among the purple compositæ, too, is the salsify—another introduction from Europe, but one which is not so generally common. The leaves are long, grass-like, vertical, and the flower-head will make you, at first, think of a garden pink, and the salsify (*Tragopogon porrifolius*, T.) actually has escaped from gardens to freer, if less protected, life of the road.