

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Prickly Armor Furnishes Protection for the Thistle; Caterpillars Crawl by and Browsing Horses Shun Plant. - August 27, 1911

The Scotch made no mistake in selecting the thistle for their national flower. Bristling with needle-like prickles, a type of stern independence, it does not admit of close intimacy. But we are captivated by its reddish purple blooms, fragrant as roses and brimmed with sweetness. Economical and thrifty, the thistle can wrest a living from the scantiest means; but "ow'er canny" as it is, it sends out myriads of plummy seeds, by which it will establish itself in richer soil whenever the opportunity offers. The voracious caterpillar crawls by it to plants with unarmed herbage; the thistle is browsed only by underfed donkeys. It is often decked with winged visitants of black and gold, the thistle birds or goldfinches, surrounded by drifting clouds of silvery plumes, as they lightly swing on the matured flower heads and eagerly break them apart to obtain their favorite food. The buds, the beautiful flower clusters, the feathery balls of fruit, and the deeply lobed leaves with ruffled margins of the thistle, all readily lend themselves to designs for ornament.



Field Thistle, *Cirsium discolor*



Canada Thistle, *Cirsium arvense*

The Field Thistle, *Cirsium discolor*, is particularly lovely by reason of its pale pink, or sometimes white flowers, and long, drooping leaves. The bull thistle (Ref. #1) has larger heads and still more formidable prickles; while the tall swamp thistle is less stout and spiny. [*C. muticum*].

These species are not undesirable for a garden, if one has space enough to keep them at arm's length. But no good word can be said for the Canada Thistle (Ref. #2), an emigrant from Europe that multiplies apace, although allowed no rights of citizenship. It seems useless to legislate against it; for it has a running root stock that spreads while we sleep, and the seeds fly over the country to sow discomfort everywhere. It is a pest because it is so difficult to keep within bounds. If you wish to know just how Theophilus Thistlewaite thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb (too low an estimate by far!), clear by hand a plot of land that has been overrun by Canada Thistles.

A vegetable pariah, also of foreign origin, humbly occupying waste places, is especially abundant about drains and pig styes, and is stigmatized by the rude Saxon term, "stinkweed". It is also known as Dog Fennel and as May Weed, although it blooms throughout the summer until nipped by frost. It is as pretty as its much admired cousin, "Marguerite" - cultivated here (Ref. #3), but an injury to the hay fields in the East - for it has the daisy beauties of pearly white ray flowers encompassing golden tubular flowers of the disk.

The leaf too, may be favorably compared with that of the fern. But the weed is without regard on account of its associations and fetid odor. It bears the scientific name *Maruta cotula* (Ref. #3), and its nearest kin are the garden and medicinal chamomiles.

One might be justified in asking the mower to stay his scythe in the meadow until the fleeting beauty of the Grass-of-Parnassus is past (Ref. #4).

It is not a grass, but it is always found among the grasses. The glossy leaves are clustered in a rosette close to the ground. The cream white flowers grow singly on the stalk, and the deeply veined petals are marvels of perfectness in detail. Poets drew inspiration from similar species on Mount Parnassus, in the legendary days of Greece.



Marsh Grass-of-Parnassus,
Parnassia palustris

Several over four pounds in weight have been noted this season. Some of the small puffballs have a smooth surface, some are covered with tiny tubercles of spines, and some are stalked. In the puffballs, the spores are enclosed instead of being exposed to the air on the surface of gills or tubes as in the umbrella or bracket forms of fungi. As far as is known, the true puffballs are edible. They are to be used for food when the inside is firm and white - like cottage cheese.

When mature, the puffball splits regularly or irregularly, according to the species, discharging a mass of dark, powdery spores. Those fond of this delicacy are much grieved when they see a specimen that has been used as a football and kicked to pieces. If one realized that a puffball when fresh is good, palatable food, he would resist the impulse that impels him to destroy it.

Happy is he who finds in brooks winding through meadows the tiny blossoms that vie with the violet and the rose in popular favor - the forget-me-not. It is not easy to Forget these pale blue flowers with yellow eyes - an unequalled harmony of color. The Brook Forget-me-not (Ref. #5), after three unsuccessful attempts has been firmly established in the wild garden, where it blooms the summer long. The parent stock in Needham, Massachusetts, grew waist high in prodigal profusion. "Oh!" said one admirer, "these flowers are just like those we see on hats!"

In pastures, giant puffballs [*Calvatia gigantea*] may be seen breaking through the grass. The one photographed [shown in attached article] weighed 14oz but specimens weighing twice as many pounds are occasional.



Dog Fennel, (Stinking Chamomile or May Weed).
Anthemis cotula



True Forget-me-not, *Myosotis scorpiodes*

State Fair exhibit. The following was also printed.

An exhibit of the wild garden in Glenwood Park will be given in the horticulture building at the coming state fair. During the remainder of the season Miss Butler will have no regular days for conducting parties through the garden. However, those wishing to see the Garden may set a time by telephone to suit convenience. Phone N.W. Colfax 1689.

Notes:

1. *Cirsium vulgare* - distributed throughout North America and is listed as a prohibited noxious weed in Minnesota.
2. *Cirsium arvense* - distributed throughout North America except for six states in the SE section of the U.S. It is also listed as a prohibited noxious weed in Minnesota.
3. *Maruta cotula*, today classified as *Anthemis cotula*. It is established throughout North America except for the far north Canadian Provinces. It too is listed as a noxious weed by several states. As to "Marguerite" - she is referring to the Oxeye Daisy, *Leucanthemum vulgare* (formerly - *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) which has a similar flower arrangement. The old French name for that flower, "Marguerite," is from the petal pulling game of "He loves me, he loves me not" ('effeuiller la marguerite' in the French)
4. Grass-of-Parnassus: There are two native to Minnesota, *Parnassia glauca*, Fen grass-of-parnassus; and *Parnassia palustris*, Marsh grass-of-parnassus. In her 1908 Garden Log, Eloise noted *Parnassia caroliniana* growing in the wild garden. As this species is restricted to the Carolinas and Florida, it would seem impossible to be here. The resolution of this is a notation in *Flora of North America* Volume 12, that *P. caroliniana* had been misapplied to *P. glauca* in early references such as Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. *An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions*. 3 vols. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
5. Brook Forget-me-not: She refers here to *Myosotis laxa*, which is native to Minnesota and which she first planted in 1909. Introduced later was *Myosotis scorpiodes* which is an introduced plant, native to Europe. It is the plant in the Wildflower Garden today and it also has become naturalized in Minnesota.



Giant Puffball, *Calvatia gigantea*.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Canada Thistle, Puffballs, Mayweed and Grass of Parnassus, was published on Sunday August 27, 1911 in the *Sunday Minneapolis Tribune*. It was one of a series of weekly articles Eloise Butler published in 1911 to help acquaint the public with her newly established Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park. Some of the plants she discusses are extant in the Garden today. In brackets within the text, and in the notes, have been added the necessary common name or scientific name, that she did not list in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America* and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©G D Bebeau or as credited.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.