

## THE FORGET-ME-NOT.

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O flower, perhaps, from our early childhood has possessed for each one of us a greater charm than the little forget-me-not. Indeed, it is so entirely a flower of associations that, as it has been often said, there are few lives in which its memory is not treasured up long after, it may be, its beautiful blossoms have faded away and perished. From time immemorial, too, this favourite flower has been made the subject of numerous poetical fancies and legendary tales; and throughout Europe it is still regarded as the emblem of true friendship. Wherever seen, either by the brook or riverside, or in the hedge ditch of some leafy lane, its bright-coloured turquoise flowers seldom fail to captivate the passer-by, and to arouse within him feelings of mingled joy and melancholy. Who, as Coleridge says, but loves to meet—

“By rivulet or wet roadside,  
That blue and bright-eyed flow’ret of the  
brook,  
Hope’s gentle gem, the sweet forget-me-not.”

And again, to quote some further lines on the subject—

“Sweet, fragile weed, while thus I view  
Thy softened tint of constant blue,  
I pray in life, whate’er my lot,  
May those I love ‘Forget-me-not.’”

It is not generally known that, in the first instance, the forget-me-not derived its name from its supposed talismanic or magic virtues—notice of which are frequently to be met with in many of the German legends. Thus, it is related, for example, how a traveller when wandering on a bleak and lonely mountain unexpectedly picks up a small blue flower which he sticks in his hat. He has no sooner done so than forthwith there appears before him an entrance into a magnificent hall, where he sees rubies, diamonds, and all kinds of precious stones piled up in huge heaps. Seizing the opportunity, he enters this enchanted building, and eagerly fills his pockets with the treasures that lie before him. In the excitement of the moment, however, his hat falls off, and with it the little flower, but in his anxiety to enrich himself as much as possible, he pays no heed to his loss. On taking his departure, the tiny flower, which has brought him so much good luck, calls after him, “Forget-me-not!”—a voice to which he turns a deaf ear;—so bewildered is he through his strange adventure. As he passes out of the doorway the mysterious door closes behind him amidst the clashing of thunder, and once more he finds himself a lonely traveller on the dreary mountain top. Although he searches on all sides for the entrance to the golden hall, yet it is in vain, as all sight of it has completely vanished, and never again is he favoured with a view of it. On this account, therefore, the little blue flower was known as the “forget-me-not.” This legend has a variety of forms, and in years gone was current in many parts of the Continent. Thus,

for example, sometimes a white lady confronts the traveller in his wanderings, and invites the finder of the luck-flower or “forget-me-not” to help himself to her treasures, warning him at the same time to be on his guard lest he lose the magic charm. The sequel in most cases is generally the same: the unwary traveller, in his desire to enrich himself as quickly as possible, forgets the real secret of his good fortune. Such, then, are the talismanic properties formerly assigned to this little wild-flower, and hence originated the popular name assigned to it.

Many of our readers will wish, perhaps, that these wonderful virtues still resided in the forget-me-not, for although in their summer rambles they may have often gathered it, yet its presence in their hands has never brought them the good fortune of which the old German legend speaks.

But it must not be forgotten that this pretty flower, like all other of God’s beautiful handiworks, contains a lesson for all who see it, in that its very name of “forget-me-not” should warn us not to forget Him who made it, especially as He has in store for all those who love Him such unsearchable riches as can be found nowhere on earth.

Referring in the next place to the romantic origin of the name of the forget-me-not, this, as most of our readers are doubtless aware, is of a very different kind. It is related that a young couple, who were on the eve of being united, whilst walking along the delightful and picturesque banks of the Danube, saw one of these flowers floating on the surface of the water, which seemed ready at any moment to carry it away. The affianced bride, struck with admiration at the beauty of the flower, regretted she could not have it, whereupon, anxious to gratify ever so small a wish on her part, her lover jumped into the stream, but had no sooner grasped the fatal flower than he sank beneath the flood. Making, however, one desperate effort on rising to regain the shore, he threw the flower upon the bank, and casting a long affectionate glance upon his lady love, he gasped out the words, “Forget-me-not,” and then was seen no more. Since this romantic occurrence the flower, it is said, has been made emblematical of, and taken the name of, “forget-me-not.” This is the popular origin of the name of this familiar flower, although Miss Strickland, in her “Lives of the Queens of England,” gives another explanation. Speaking of Henry of Lancaster, she says:—

“This royal adventurer, the banished and aspiring Lancaster, appears to have been the person who gave to the forget-me-not its emblematical and poetical meaning by writing it at the period of his exile on his collar of S. S., with the initial letter of his *mot*, or watchword, “*Souveigne vous de moy*,” thus rendering it the symbol of remembrance, and, like the subsequent fatal roses of York and Lancaster, and Stuart, the lily of Bourbon, and the violet of Napoleon, an historical flower. Few of those who, at parting, exchange the simple touching appeal to memory, are aware of the fact that it was first used as such by a royal Plantagenet prince, who was, perhaps, indebted to the agency of this mystic blossom for the Crown of England.”

Whether or not this be the true origin of the forget-me-not’s emblematical meaning, there can be no doubt that, from time immemorial it has been employed for the same

sentimental purpose as it is famous nowadays:—

“An emblem true thou art  
Of love’s enduring lustre, given  
To cheer a lonely heart.”

As a further evidence, also, of its long established use in floral language, it appears that as early as the year 1465, when a joust was held in which Lord Scales, brother to the queen of Edward IV., took part, the fair ladies of her Court presented to the favoured knight a collar of gold, enamelled with the words “Forget-me-not.” A well-known botanist, however, disregarding the romantic associations which have clustered round the flower, considers that the true signification of its name is really due to the bright blue tint and yellow eye of its blossom, which, if but once seen, is not likely to be forgotten. This prosaic and matter-of-fact explanation, which divests the forget-me-not of all the pretty sentiment connected with it, will never find favour with those of a romantic or poetical turn of mind, because:—

“Where time or sorrow’s page of gloom  
Has fixed its envious lot,  
Or swept the record from the tomb,  
It says, ‘Forget-me-not.’”

And this is still the loveliest flower—  
The fairest of the fair  
Of all that deck my lady’s bower,  
Or bind her floating hair.”

In days gone by the forget-me-not grew nowhere in greater perfection than on the banks of a stream in the environs of Luxembourg, popularly known as the “Fairies’ Bath,” or the “Cascade of the Enchanted Oak.” To this favourite spot the young girls of the neighbourhood often resorted to spend their leisure hours. On holidays, too, we are told, they might be seen crowned with flowers gathered from the stream, “like so many nymphs celebrating games in honour of the Naiad of the Enchanted Oak.” So much prized, too, was this little flower in France, that it was generally cultivated with the greatest care, and when sent to the Parisian markets, found a ready sale.

The forget-me-not is not without its superstitions, having been supposed to possess the peculiar property of hardening steel. It was also said that if edged tools of this metal were made red hot, and then dipped in its juice, the steel would become so hard as to cut iron, or even stone, without turning the edge. In the Netherlands a syrup is made of the juice of this plant, and given as a remedy against consumptive coughs.

Once more, the name given to the forget-me-not by the ancients was “mouse-ear,” from the form of its leaves; and for the same reason it is still called by the French “rat’s ear.” The name “forget-me-not,” it may be noted, was also applied in years gone by to a popular wild-flower known as the speedwell, from its corolla falling off and flying away when gathered—“speedwell” having been a common form of valediction, and equivalent to our “farewell” or “good-bye.”





“FORGET-ME-NOT!”