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G. E. Graves

## A WILD BOTANIC GARDEN

By W. P. KIRKWOOD

The name "Wild Botanic Garden" suggests a kind of plant museum, wherein trees, shrubs and herbs are all nicely set in order, each with its proper label (in English and Latin), for the easy study of the budding scientist. Any one who has such an idea, however, has an agreeable surprise in store if inclination ever takes him to the Minneapolis Wild Botanic Garden, one of the first gardens of the kind maintained by an American city, and perhaps the most extensive. This garden is really a wild botanic garden. It is a bit of almost primeval wilderness, which happily escaped the encroachments of civilization as the

city spread, and is now preserved in its native wildness as a part of one of the city's parks. Here things grow as they will, without human intervention save the curator's effort to give every variety a chance, "with special privileges for none." The garden is so wild that though it is within comparatively easy walking distance from the ends of two trolley lines, and is skirted on the south and west by a sweeping boulevard and on the north by a well travelled thoroughfare, it is still the haunt of the barred owl, the marsh hawk, and the American bittern. If it is wild enough for these, surely it should satisfy in some degree the call of the wild in the blood of any one.

It was, doubtless, the call of the wild more than anything else that five years ago led Minneapolis lovers of the open country, including primarily the teachers of botany in the public schools, to petition their Park Board to establish such a garden. It is true that the argument put forward by the petitioners was largely utilitarian,—that before the city spread too far it should provide a natural mustering ground for the state's flora and a depot of plant life for students of botany or forestry, in or out of school. While this was sound and sufficient, behind it certainly lay something of the other reason,—a zest for the wild and the spirit of play at its best.

The Minneapolis Park Board had just acquired on the western edge of the city an area of several hundred acres to be known as Glenwood Park. Parts of this were still altogether wild and admirably suited to the use proposed. In answer to the petition, therefore, three or four acres were set aside for a wild botanic garden. The Park Board agreed to meet the cost of maintenance, but gave

supervision into the hands of the teachers most active in the movement, and named Miss Eloise Butler, an ardent lover and student of wild plant life, with a real genius for plant hunting and cultivation, as curator.

That the plan has been a success is shown by the fact that the area of the garden has from time to time been increased until now, only five years since the garden was opened, it is three or four times its original size. The best test of the garden's worth, however, is pragmatic. To visit it is to become a devotee, if one be a true nature-lover and not merely a flirt and trifler.

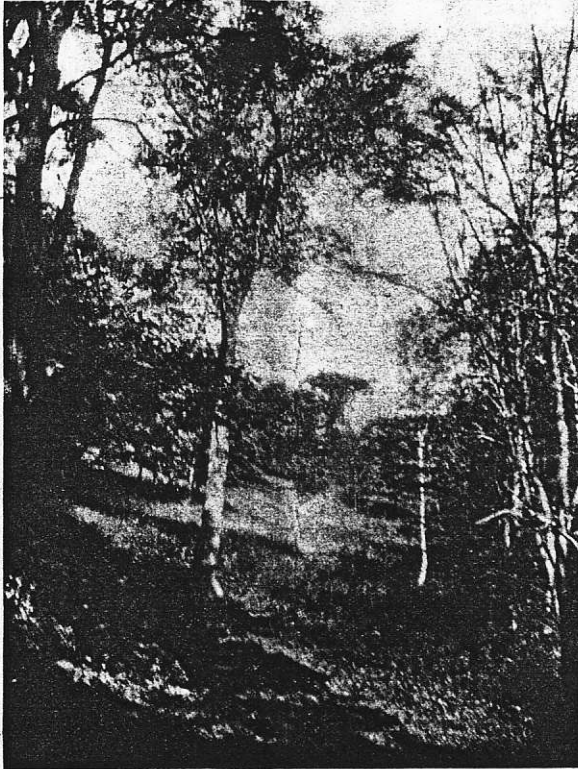
The area is of glacial formation and much broken. Around on the east, south and west bends an irregular, wooded range of hills. From the center of the southern

curve of this ridge juts a long promontory into the very heart of the garden, forming the tongue of a huge, though somewhat crooked, letter *c*. To the westward the descent from the promontory is almost precipitous to a rich natural meadow, which is bounded on the north by an almost too picturesque tamarack swamp. In front of the promontory is another meadow, through which winds a small stream with a system of tiny bayous almost wholly hidden by tall native grasses. Here, on the limb of a dead tree, a large marsh hawk frequently mounts guard.

Beyond this meadow, to the northward, lies Glenwood Lake, gleaming white against the green of a range of hills. On the east the ground slopes less steeply to the garden's inner court. Here, nestling under the protecting promontory, is another swamp of tamarack mixed with white and yellow birch, black

ash, red maple, and basswood. Outside of this lies a third meadow, boggy like the others, but the home of some of the garden's most interesting inhabitants. On to the eastward rises a hill covered with birches, elms and oaks of different varieties. This hill breaks off almost even with the point of the promontory and swings back still further to the eastward, forming the southern side of a deep glen in which stand several splendid elms, "fountains of living green." The garden now includes practically the whole of the promontory and the surrounding meadows and tamarack, as well as a part of the hills on the east and south.

The stranger visiting the garden for the first time may be slightly disappointed, as he comes from a winding path out upon the edge of the elm glen, on the eastern



A Corot of the Camera

side of the garden. The glen is wild enough, but the view further to the westward, across the meadow into which the glen leads, is not like a wilderness. As one descends the slope to the westward, however, he catches the tinkle of falling water. Lured on, he comes to a placid pool, sheltered by trees and hemmed by grasses and water plants. From the lower end of this the water splashes musically and then races away into a marsh of sweet flag and cat-tails. Beyond the thicket at the head of the pool the view opens on a meadow with a background of serrate tamaracks. Here beside the pool one can easily imagine himself in the heart of a wilderness of almost limitless extent, hills and dense foliage so completely shut away the outer world. Indeed, here he can hardly believe anything else. The place is fairly racy of the wild.

The pool is formed by a grass and moss covered earthen dam, which has been thrown across a brook's course. The dam is almost, though not quite, such as beavers would have made, but it is now so covered with things growing at random, as they do in wild places, that it seems the work of nature itself. It is, however, the only bit of artificial work in the entire garden.

If it is not too late in the season, a bed of wild violets, covering a bit of ground from which sod was torn to make the dam, attracts instant attention, and below the dam lies a bed of golden saxifrage to vie with the violets in claiming interest. One speaks of beds from force of habit. There are in the garden, however, no beds with regular borders and sharp limitations. The saxifrage is an importation to the garden, though native to the state. At first all efforts to get it to grow in the garden were futile. It seemed to resent being transplanted. Something was lacking. Then Miss Butler, the curator, on a plant-hunting expedition to the Wisconsin cliffs of the St. Croix River, found a thin limestone slab, like a large piece of heavy strawboard. This, by train and trolley and hand, she carried to the garden. Under two or three inches of soft soil at the water's edge below the dam she placed it, and over it she again planted her saxifrage. This time it took root, and it is now in its fourth year. About this spot, too, grow the jewel weed with its curious explosive seed-pod, wild sarsaparilla, wormwood, wild

calla, water willow, pickerel weed, the monkey flower, turtlehead, and milkweed. In the pool itself grow duckweed and the algae, among the latter the desmids. The pool's further opportunities for the growing of aquatics will be improved as circumstances may permit.

As untainted wildness is the aim in the garden, there are no graveled or concrete walks to guide one; only grassy foot-trails, like the runways of wild animals. One of these skirts the east side of the pool, and leads toward a thickly overgrown level, which Miss Butler has named "Puff-Ball Flats." The thicket is the home of the huge lycoperdons and lepiotas. A dense clump of prickly ash at the edge of the "flats" is the secure hiding-place of the interesting collar earthstar. But these are only a few of the garden's mushrooms. Others are agarics, boleti, polypori, and cup-fungi. Stumps and fallen trees are left undisturbed to furnish food for such growths, while the trunks of dead trees are preserved as supports for vines and nesting places for birds.

Not far from "Puff-Ball Flats" is another spot given a name out of the curator's active imagination and quick association of ideas. In a bit of thicket here she was planting something that seemed to fit the place, when she was charged by a flying brigade of hornets. The spot is now known as "Roaring Camp."

Presently the trail bends to the right and approaches the brook a little above the pool. Miss Butler warns the stranger to step with care here, for beside the path is a water-hole almost hidden by grasses, like those one has stepped into if he

has ever fished a bush-screened trout stream through a stretch of swampy meadow. Missing the hole, the visitor stops at the edge of the stream with an exclamation of genuine pleasure. Down the opposite bank stretches a mass of brook forget-me-nots. The name rises to the lips like a command, bringing, perhaps, a rush of tender memories. Yet the thing one woman thought here, and said, was: "Oh, they are just like the flowers we wear on our hats!" The ruling passion with some people is irrepresible, even in a wild garden. Here also flourishes the cardinal flower of perfect red, so brilliant that its color seems a kind of incandescence; and again rhexia and the closed gentian.



An Eight-holed White Birch

Returning to the pool and doubling back along the foot of the hill, which slopes from the eastward, the trail leads to a great white oak, the largest in Minneapolis, with a bole ten feet in circumference. This is the king of the garden. Decay had weakened its top, but shortly after the garden was established a tree surgeon was called in, and now his majesty is in perfect health and apparently good for a long reign. "Wormwood Gulch" lies a little further on and to the left. It is a gully washed out of the hillside and filled with wormwood. Above this is another of the garden's prides, a perfect eight-boled white birch, to which from the meadow below beckons the "Seven Sisters," a seven-boled yellow birch.

Further on a side path drops into the meadow. It is rough and hummocky, and sometimes soggy, but here and there it is starred with the delicate white flower of the grass of Parnassus. Perhaps a third of the way across the open, among the lush grasses, is discovered what seems the shimmer of dew, though the sun may be at the meridian. It is not dew at all, but sparkling bait for foolish insects. It is the clear, glutinous fluid secreted by the hairy glands of the round-leaved sundew. An insect, lighting on one of the leaves to allay its thirst, is caught by the hairy glands, the leaf folds around it, and before long it is—digested.

Only a few steps away is uncovered another of the garden's rarities, the pitcher plant, which might furnish point for other bug moralizings. The pitchers radiate from a central root, all with mouths upward, and are found partly filled with water. Under the rim on the inside of the leaf is a sticky substance which attracts insects. A bug, having sipped this nectar, crawls on into the pitcher—perhaps after more drink—over countless little hairs which all point downward. Going down is easy, as is the descent to Avernus, but getting out is quite another thing. The little hairs now prove a veritable barbed wire *trocha*. Exhausted at last in trying

to pass this, the insect slips into the water below, and becomes food for the plant.

Not far off, again, stands a tall shrub, which without close inspection seems to be sumach, and sumach it is, but the poison kind and to be carefully avoided. It is worse than poison ivy, which is found elsewhere in the garden. But both are allowed to grow, in order that visitors may be instructed as to their dangerous peculiarities.

Seen from its southern and higher end, the meadow, in which are sundew, pitcher plant, poison sumach, and so on, is through spring and summer and fall a mass of ever-changing colors, an immense oriental rug over which the magician, Nature, waves a mysterious wand, bringing out one new color scheme after another. In August, at its upper end where it is driest, it matches the Carpet of Ardebil, with its masses of rosy purple joe-pye weed (named for a New England Indian who is said to have cured typhus with it), mixed with golden rod, asters, wild bergamot, tall cone-flowers, belated black-eyed Susans, rosy swamp milkweed, blazing star, sneezeweed, and possibly here and there a gorgeous Turk's cap. For a background there is the quiet green of the tamaracks, shot through with the white of birch boles or patched with the brilliant red of swamp maples. And at the further end stands a perpendicular jet of green, spreading at the top,—a superb elm, fitly named the "Lone Sentinel."

On the trail along the foot of the hill, once more, is found the only unwelcome occupant of the garden,—the Canada thistle. From a pasture over the garden's hill wall the parent seed of this thistle one day migrated on a tortuous wind, and now the plant stoutly refuses to be evicted. It has been cuffed and kicked and actually torn up by the roots, but still it grows. Another rather forward and pushing plant of the garden is Creeping Charlie. Charlie is rather pleasing of countenance. His face is round and shining. But he is avaricious; he aspires



The "Inner Court" of the Garden

to be a great landed proprietor. Consequently he has been placed under the guard of Bouncing Bet (surely a militant suffragette), and other good plant police, including tansy, spurge, butter and eggs, and catnip.

In a shady nook among the trees where the hill rises gently toward the south is one of the retreats of the Indian pipe, or corpse plant,—corpse plant, because it has no foliage, but is merely a white, clammy stem, with bractlike appendages and a simple white flower nodding from the top. It is a parasite, drawing its nourishment from living roots or decaying vegetable matter.

At the southern end of the tamarack swamp the trail turns sharply westward and leads directly to the steep eastward side of Proniatory Hill near the point at which it leaves the main range. Here, in the thick shade of numerous small oaks and ashes, is the garden's fernery. To approach this—to the loud scolding of red squirrels—

when the sun is aslant among the trees and a gentle south wind is dipping over the hills, shaking the fern plumes, is to get a picture long to be remembered with pleasure. The most conspicuous of the ferns is the interrupted (*Osmunda Claytoniana*), though large clumps of maidenhair also attract the eye. About ten species are native to the garden, and about thirty others have been introduced, so that now the garden contains all of Minnesota's ferns save a few of the rarer and more inaccessible forms. The list includes the beech, the broad-leaved beech, the oak, the ostrich, the bladder, the hay-scented, the cliff brake, the evergreen Christmas fern (not certainly a native of Minnesota), and the curious walking fern. In the swamp grow the cinnamon fern and two species of the evergreen shield fern, the crested and the spinulose.

From the fernery the vista along the eastern slope of the tongue of the *e*, looking northward, is the most beautiful in the garden and not easily matched for quiet charm anywhere. On the left the hill rises abruptly and is covered with trees and undergrowth. On the right is the tamarack swamp. In the foreground is a shapely elm, the "Inner Guard." Beyond, across a sun-kissed open space, rises the "Lone Sentinel," first seen from the other side of the swamp. All that is needed to make the picture an almost perfect Corot is the presence of a few dancing maidens,—wood nymphs they would have to be to fit the fair seclusion of the scene.

This part of the garden is one to linger in. Here may be seen, at the right season, the hibiscus lifting its large flower of delicate rose color above the surrounding green, the tall spike of the Canadian burnet, wild spike-nard, false and true Solomon's seals, the pure white of the white closed gentian and the perfect blue of the fringed gentian. Under the shrubbery just up the hillside grow fine specimens of the rattlesnake plantain,

which the Indians regard as a sure antidote for snakebite. Its richly mottled and lined leaves spread from a central root-stalk and its scape is surmounted by a spike of delicate flowers of greenish white. All around is a tangle of blackberry, raspberry, wild roses, wild grape, Virginia creeper, and bittersweet. The yellow fall foliage of the bittersweet is frequently strikingly capped with the brilliant red of the sumach.

But the mysteries of the swamp call and one plunges in—perhaps to startle a great owl into silent flight. Here one could come again and again and again without exhausting the possibilities of fresh discoveries. Orchids are numerous, including the various species of the lady's-slipper, with the showy lady's-slipper, Minnesota's state flower, prominent among them. Here also are several species of habernaria, including the orchis spectabilis, pogonia, calopogon, and arthusa,—all of rare and delicate

beauty. There are also two species of twayblade. Along with these grow the red osier dogwood, the highbush cranberry, the dwarf cornel or bunchberry, the dainty snow-berry, and various wonders of moss kind.

But the treasure of treasures of this spot and of the garden is the delicate twin-flower, with its trailing, reddish brown stem, and its gracefully slender, leafy flower stalks, each bearing two pendulous, bell-shaped white blossoms flushed with pink.

In the green around the "Lone Sentinel" is the garden's pinetum, where are being encouraged the various conifers of Minnesota. On the edge of the green also grow native specimens of hawthorn, one of the features of the spot in the spring.

Half-way down the nose of the promontory is a gully where, twenty years ago, lived a hermit, known to the people of the countryside as "Old Andrew." He seemed to have a notion that he

could dig a living from the meadow below, for there remain traces of trenches of his creation. After a while, however, the old man disappeared. The site of the "cave" is now covered with stag-horn sumach and clusters of wild roses.

Only an inconsiderable fraction of the interesting things in the Minneapolis Wild Botanic Garden have been named. Minnesota embraces a wide range of plant life,—alpine, forest, prairie, and semi-arid,—and the garden draws upon all. Wildness is the aim of the garden's supervisors, however, and the aim is fully justified by the beauty and charm of the result, whether considered in massed effects or in detail. From the first spring sproutings of skunk cabbage, Jack-in-the-pulpit, or hepatica, through the climatic splendors of summer and fall, to the day when snow decks the trees and covers the brown stalks of the annuals, the garden is a place which invites body and mind and spirit to play.



The Fernery