

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Blue Flag, Native Minnesota Iris, Classed as Richest of Lilies; Early Meadow Rue and Larkspur Treated by Miss Butler - July 2, 1911

Born in the purple, born to joy and pleasance,
Thou does not toil nor spin,
But makest glad and radiant with they presence
The meadow and the lin.
The wind blows and uplifts thy drooping banner,
And round thee throng and run
The rushes, the green yeomen of they manor,
The outlaws of the sun.
Thou art the Iris, fair among the fairest,
Who, armed with goldenrod
And winged with the celestial azure, bearest
The message of some god.
O flower-de-luce, bloom on, and let the river
Linger to kiss thy feet!
O flower of song, bloom on, and make forever
The world more fair and sweet

Thus sang Longfellow of the iris, most fitting emblem of France, the leader in refined taste and art. "If eyes were made for seeing," we do not need to be poets in order to note the grace of the recurved petals, the stately pose of the flower and the choice reserve that withholds, except under close inspection, the delicate finish of etched lines and blending of color.

The flower is richer than other lilies by reason of the pistil terminating above in three leafy divisions colored like the petals. Behind them are artfully concealed the three long stamens in exactly the right position for the insect guest to be powdered with the pollen.

An ardent lover of flowers has dreamed of a garden devoted entirely to irids [sic] from all quarters of the earth and including the hybrids produced under cultivation - of every conceivable shade and combination of color, ranging from dwarfs to splendid grenadiers, and with a succession of bloom throughout the growing season. Among them our native iris, or "Blue Flag" [*Iris versicolor*] would have an honored place.



Blue Flag, *Iris versicolor*.

The Early Meadow Rue [*Thalictrum dioicum*] is one of the most common woodland flowers of May. In June, the much showier late and Tall Meadow Rue, *Thalictrum polygamum*, (Note 1) is a charming

feature of the low lands. Its white, feathery masses of bloom, swaying in response to the gentlest breeze, cannot fail to win admiration.



Early Meadow Rue, *Thalictrum dioicum*

No less lovely and growing in the same habitat or on drier soil is the dainty Northern Bedstraw, *Galium boreale*. The flowers are very small but so compactly massed that the tract so fortunate as to be starred with them can be detected from a distance. This plant has the same effect in bouquets as the much esteemed exotic, Gypsophila.

One species of Galium, very similar to the one under consideration, is cultivated under the name “baby’s breath.” The entire genus is characterized by small leaves arranged in whorls on slender, four-sided stems and tiny three or four parted corollas. Some of the species are covered with hooks which grip everything at hand, and the roots of some afford a red dye, thereby accounting for the other popular names, cleavers and madder.



Tall Meadow Rue, *Thalictrum dasycarpum*



Northern Bedstraw, *Galium boreale*

Whoever sees a rocky hillside lit up with the tall candles of the white larkspur (Note 2) will decide that they outrank with their ethereal beauty the great blue larkspurs in the formal garden of royal pedigree. Burly bumblebees flock about the plants, clasping each flower in turn upon the wand like stalks and thrusting their long tongues into the upturned spurs to extract the sweets within.

It seems necessary to write a work in favor of what are usually called weeds, which may be defined as plants out of place, growing where we wish something else to grow. The print of the Cow Parsnip [*Heracleum maximum* - she is referring to the photo in the article] shows fine decorative possibilities. A rampant growth of this herb gave character to a certain roadside. Barely an hour after a photograph



Prairie or Carolina Larkspur,
Delphinium carolinianum. Photo
©Merle R. Black, Wisconsin
Flora.

was taken, the plants were mown down and nothing left in their place by monotonous stubble. A plea is offered for the next season: O scytheman, spare this weed! It is harmless, and does its best to make glad the waste places. It is named for the god Hercules on account of its massive bulk. Compare it with the castor bean occupying the central post of honor in an ornamental mound of flowers. Has it not as vigorous a growth; are not the leaves as large and finely formed and the flowers as beautiful as that of the favored imported bean?

Turning from the sturdy habit of the *Heracleum* to the *Linnaea* we are reminded that it is proverbial that goodness and sweetness are concentrated in small masses. For the Twin Flower (note 3) is a trailing, small-leaved evergreen studded with pairs of little white flowers striped with pink.

It was a favorite with its namesake, Linnaeus, and that it becomes of every one who once enjoys its exquisite delicacy and fragrance. The wild garden in Glenwood Park is the only place where it may be found in Minneapolis. To conserve this flower alone is a sufficient reason for the perpetuation of the place.



Cow Parsnip, *Heracleum maximum*



Twin Flower, *Linnaea borealis* L. Photo
©Kitty Kohout, Wisconsin Flora.

Tours to the Garden. The following was also printed at the beginning of the article.

Miss Butler will conduct parties through the Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, Tuesday and Thursday mornings, meeting them at the terminus of the Fourth and Sixth Avenue north Street

Railway, Sixth Avenue and Russell Avenue North, at 10 o'clock; also Saturday & Sunday afternoon, meeting then at 2:30 o'clock at the same place. One hour later on the same days, persons coming by automobile or carriage will be met at the entrance to the Garden, on the boulevard, at a point northeast of Birch Pond in Glenwood Park. To reach Birch Pond, turn in at the left on Western Avenue where the Park Boulevard intersects the avenue.

Notes:

1. *Thalictrum polygamum*. Here she refers to a species known as King of the Meadow that is not present in Minnesota. The species present in Minnesota and known as Tall Meadow Rue and indigenous to the Garden is *Thalictrum dasycarpum*.
2. Prairie Larkspur or Carolina Larkspur, *Delphinium carolinianum* ssp. *virescens*, first planted in 1910 and in many years thereafter. The older botanical name is *Delphinium virescens*.
3. *Linnaea borealis* ssp. *americana* was indigenous to the Garden area. It was also planted in the Garden by Martha Crone in 1933, 1934 and 1936. Ken Avery planted it in 1961.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Blue Flag Iris, Northern Bedstraw, Larkspur, Cow Parsnip, Twin Flower and Late Meadow Rue, was published on Sunday July 2, 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 square 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.