



[Drawn by F. Morgan.]

MEADOW-SWEET;
OR,
THE QUEEN OF THE MEADOWS.

By JAMES MASON.

WHEN the Editor of the GIRL'S OWN PAPER called for an article on "Meadow-sweet" for this Summer Number of ours, I was for the moment a little perplexed. The puzzle was: Would there be enough to write about? All the facts that concern meadow-sweet, said I to myself, can be put in a paragraph—or at most in two; what, then, is to be done with a whole article?

But when people sit down and let their minds dwell on anything, the difficulty very often really is to come to an end of all that can be thought and told. Paragraphs expand to articles before you know where you are. And just so it happened with meadow-sweet.

First and foremost, let us see what sort of a plant it is, so that, if not already a familiar friend, girls on their summer rambles may know it when they see it. You meet with it all over the country, in moist meadows and on the banks of rivers and streams, and there is little danger of mistaking it for anything else. It stands three or four feet high, has divided leaves, and beautiful tufts of white flowers. A

glance shows it to be first cousin or something of that sort to the spiraea of our gardens.

The stalk is sometimes of a pale green and sometimes of a purple colour. The leaves are of a fine green—"a sad green," Culpepper calls it—on the upper side; but if you look underneath they are whitish. When you feel them they are rough. The flowers are small and white, but they stand so close together that the whole cluster looks like one large flower.

As for the roots, let us quote old Culpepper. "The root," he says, "is sometimes woody, and blackish on the outside, and brownish within, with divers great strings, and lesser fibres set thereat; of a strong scent but nothing so pleasant as the flowers and leaves; and perisheth not, but abideth many years, shooting forth anew every spring."

It is seen in flower somewhere or other all the summer through, giving us a long opportunity for making its acquaintance and fixing it on our memories.

Such, then, is the meadow-sweet, meadow-sweet, or queen of the meadows. And now, knowing what it looks like, let us dip into the

famous work by the "Gentleman Student in Physic and Astrology," from which we have just quoted, and find out if Culpepper has anything more to say of interest.

To be sure he has. He tells how the plant is ruled by Venus, and how it is useful medicinally to stay all kinds of bleeding, and is good for ague and other complaints.

And then he adds this: "It is said to make a merry heart, for which purpose some use the flowers and some the leaves."

A merry heart? That's what we all want to have. The meadow-sweet, then, appears to be the plant of joy, and is worthy, therefore, of having not an article only, but whole volumes dedicated to it. If any are bold enough to doubt its power in this direction, very likely Culpepper will reply, as he does in another place: "I don't care a halfpenny whether they doubt or not," and we are going in this instance to pin our faith to Culpepper, and write up meadow-sweet as the plant *par excellence* for all joyful souls.

In an old Welsh story we are told of a youth on whom the spell had been laid that

he should never marry a wife who claimed relationship with the human race. But two magicians who were interested in him resolved that a wife he should have notwithstanding, and that they would by charms and illusions form one for him out of flowers.

"So they took the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, and produced from them a maiden the fairest and most graceful that man ever saw. And they baptised her, and gave her the name of Flower-aspect."

These magicians knew their business, and selected their flowers with taste and discretion. The blossoms of the oak, the monarch of the forest, stood for strength. Flower-aspect was in consequence a hardy young woman, well fitted to brave the weather on the bleak hillsides of wild Wales. The blossoms of the broom represented industry. A girl with its golden flowers in her composition might be expected to be an active housekeeper, with a special gift for sweeping. And to these were added the blossoms of our meadow-sweet, to give her good spirits. She had all the charm therefore of a joyous nature.

Unfortunately, it was beyond the power of the magicians to add to these admirable qualities sound principles, so Flower-aspect failed to conduct herself as she ought, and as a punishment, was changed at last into an owl. But they did their best, and made her attractive as far as they could.

The meadow-sweet for a merry heart was a happy thought, and with it to fall back on Flower-aspect got lightly over many a hill of difficulty. And what a blessing it would be if, either by magic spells or in any other way, some of us could only come under the influence of this flower of the brookside. It would raise our value at once in the world, add to our popularity, and tend to the extermination of the troublesome race of the querulous and discontented.

Going up the lane the other morning I met a boy who, most mornings, is to be seen on his way to school with his sister. He was alone.

"Well, Tom, where's your sister?"

"Oh, Ada," said he, "is behind. She has got the grumps."

And when I passed Ada, and looked at her sour face, without a trace of the beauty of youth which I had often noticed in it before, I remembered old Culpepper's "Meadow-sweet is said to make a merry heart, for which purpose some use the flowers and some the leaves." A dose for Ada might have set her right.

Joyfulness should be a leading feature with all of us. "A cheerful temper," says Addison, "joined with innocence, will make beauty attractive, knowledge delightful, and wit good-natured. It will lighten sickness, poverty, and affliction, convert ignorance into an amiable simplicity, and render deformity itself agreeable."

Those who know the charms of cheerfulness will readily testify that life is to them a continual festival. And not only are they happy in themselves, they stand high in favour with others. The dolorous countenance never made friends anywhere, and there is a general

agreement to shun those whose character is sombre and chill.

It is the smiling people who get on, and the merry-hearted who become favourites. Look at Nanette. Why is she best loved everywhere? Simply because she is happier than anybody else. From her merry heart one would think she had been making meadow-sweet a main article of diet all her life. Florence told me she got a letter from her a while ago, and it was so full of liveliness and good humour that she carried it in her pocket for weeks, and when out of spirits, read it over and over, and grew quite cheerful again.

No doubt there are some who turn up their noses at good spirits, and act as if they thought the true mark of sagacity was to be dull and precise. To them meadow-sweet would appear a kind of poison. They are as afraid of being happy as if happiness could bite them.

There is no more objectionable company. Their gloom is infectious, and they leave the impression that human beings only exist to worry and annoy each other. Let us not speak about them any more, but take leave of them with this anecdote told of Dr. Samuel Clarke, the famous English philosopher and divine.

Dr. Clarke was once amusing himself with a few friends, and they were in the height of their frolic when an acquaintance, who was a pattern of precision, was seen approaching.

"Let us be grave, boys," said Dr. Clarke, "here comes a fool."

No one will suppose we are here praising the form of merry heart that goes with an empty head, and which gave rise to Solomon's observation, that "the laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot." That kind of merry heart is a sham article, the possession of the girl who is always grinning, and who ridicules everything because she understands nothing. You might as well associate with a mocking bird or a laughing hyena as with her. Her merriment, too, is seldom consistent with good manners, which true joyfulness always is.

Though it may be true that for a merry heart "some use the flowers and some the leaves" of meadow-sweet, other things are essential. You must first, girls, have a good conscience. Happiness belongs specially to her who obeys the laws of duty, so let those who would know what a merry heart in its best form is, do always what is right. It is wonderful, then, what a fund of pleasure will be discovered in everything—even in hitherto unnoticed trifles. "To be capable," says a shrewd observer, "of deriving amusement from trivial circumstances indicates a heart at ease, and generally may be taken as the concomitant of virtue."

Besides a good conscience you must have health. That must be prized and attended to. In sickness there may be resignation, but there can hardly be joy. You cannot imagine joy existing alongside of toothache, or gumboil, or headache, or any other ailment we poor mortals know. The slightest bodily discomfort puts it to flight, and not all the flowers and leaves of all the meadow-sweet in the world could make a merry heart in the presence of a

grain of sand in the eye or the pressure of a tight shoe.

And now we are on this subject of health, it may be added, that one of the greatest obstacles in the way of good spirits is nothing more nor less than *over-eating*. No other cause than this will account for numberless fits of depression that convert life into a howling wilderness, and rob people not only of enjoyment, but of a great part of their usefulness.

If a girl lays so much beef and pudding on her spirits that they cannot move, what wonder if melancholy gets the better of her? The young man who took Clara in to supper the other evening was surprised at her proving such poor company. He might have thought of the business she got through with her fork and knife, and summed up her low spirits as the gloom of indigestion.

The merry heart never goes in company with the overworked and jaded stomach; so, girls, be warned: Whatever the temptation—whatever the nice things—whatever the pressing invitations—don't eat too much!

Another necessary thing is occupation. Busy people—so long as they are not over-taxed—are far happier than the idle, as everyone knows who has had the chance to try. I had a letter the other day from a friend, in which he spoke of having put the thing to the test. After a busy life he had come to retire. "I am doing nothing," he wrote, "and doing it as well as I can; but it is very hard and dreary work sometimes." It is a friendly turn then, girls, to wish that you may always have plenty to do, not only because idle folk are useless creatures, but that you may be kept free from melancholy.

A common mistake is to suppose that joyfulness is a question of money, and that a sigh for a thousand a year is excusable on the ground that a good income must bring happiness in its train. Nothing of the kind. Joyfulness is a cheap article if we go to the right merchant for it.

Izaak Walton tells of a rich neighbour he had who was always so busy that he had no time to laugh. The whole occupation of his life was to get money and more money, that he might still get more and more money. He kept drudging on, quoting Scripture to the effect "that the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

"This is true indeed," says Walton; "but he considers not that it is not in the power of riches to make a man happy." One may be woe-begone and yet rolling in wealth. It is not impossible indeed that the merriest of us all may be the poorest.

Even by the aid of meadow-sweet, however, one cannot expect to be always and uniformly merry-hearted, for accidents will occur to disturb us, and things will fail to go right in spite of all we do. But these are to be looked on only as passing clouds; and so long as we have nothing to reproach ourselves with, and keep our trust in the goodness of Him who cares for and guides us all, we may expect the sun to shine again, and joyfulness again to assert itself. "Tell her who is oppressed with care," says an Arab writer, "that it will pass away; as happiness passeth away so passeth away anxiety."

