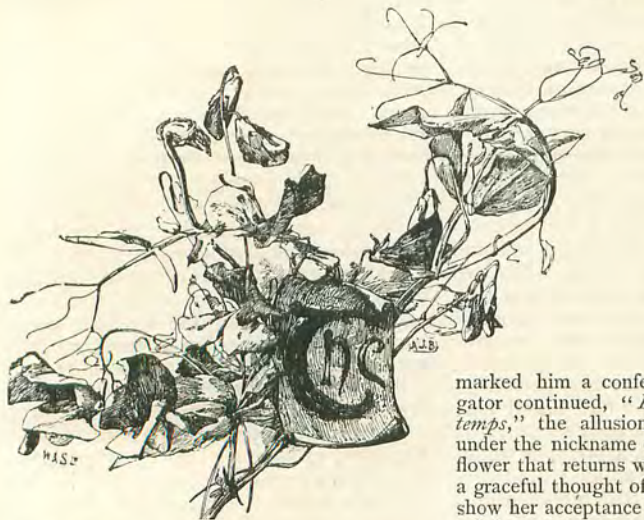


VIOLETS, SWEET VIOLETS!

By FANNY L. GREEN.



cry of the flower-girl, "Vi'lets, sweet vi'lets!" is now heard nearly all the year in our streets, though it is only in the spring that we are greeted with its variation, "Sweet vi'lets, a penny a bunch."

This "choice flower of delight," as the herbalist, Parkinson, calls it in his *Garden of Pleasant Flowers*, can be made even in our climate to bloom through the autumn and spring by placing it in glass frames. From this source comes a part of the dark blue odorous violets of the market, the Czar, Victoria Regina and Marie Louise being favourite sorts. The delicate French grey blossoms of the Neapolitan violet, the "pale February violet" of Italy are also largely grown in this way for button-holes. A large part of the flower-girl's store comes to us, however, from afar, from Scilly and the Channel Islands, from Italy and the South of France.

The violet has always been a poet's flower. Herrick tells us that the March violets are the descendants of girls who brought defeat on Venus in a dispute with Cupid as to whether she or they surpassed in sweetness, and were forthwith beaten blue by the goddess in her jealous rage. In another place he tells us that Io was changed into a cow by Jove to escape Juno's wrath—

"Wheresoe'er her lips she sets,
Said Jove be breaths called violets."

There are three beautiful stanzas in Herrick's "To Violets"—

"Welcome, maids of honour,
You do bring
In the spring,
And wait upon her.
She has Virgins many
Fresh and fair;
Yet you are
More sweet than any.
You're the maiden posies;
And so graced
To be placed
'Fore damask roses."

The violet has its associations with history. It was the badge of ancient Athens, and a golden violet was one of the prizes of the floral games. In modern times it has become inseparably associated with the Napoleonic dynasty. When the great Napoleon was exiled to Elba, he promised to return in the spring, and his partisans wore violet-coloured

rings bearing the design, "*Elle réparaitra au printemps.*" The flower too was made the test of political opinion. "*Aimez-vous la violette?*" was the question addressed to a suspected Buonapartist by adherents of the exile. If he were not a follower of Napoleon, he replied simply "*Oui.*" The reply "*Eh bien,*"

marked him a confederate, and the interrogator continued, "*Elle réparaitra au printemps,*" the allusion being to the Emperor under the nickname of "Caporal Violette, the flower that returns with the spring." It was a graceful thought of the Empress Eugénie to show her acceptance of the third Napoleon's suit by appearing one evening at the Spanish court with violets in her dress and hair, while in her hand was a large bouquet of the fragrant flower.

When household remedies were drawn from the still-room, the violet played quite a prominent part in the simpler's art. "They are a very fine pleasing plant of Venus of a mild nature, no way harmful," says a physician of the time of Charles II. "Violets comfort the brain and preserve against drunkenness; the syrup of them is very good against the falling sickness." This is how our great-grandmothers made syrups of their flowers. "Clip your flowers, and take their weight in sugar; then take a high gallipot and a row of flowers and a strowing of sugar till the pot is full; then put in two or three spoonfuls of the same syrup or still'd water; tie a cloth on the top of the pot, and put a tile on that, and set your gallipot in a kettle of water over a gentle fire and let it infuse till the strength is out of the flowers, which will be in four or five hours; then strain it through a flannel, and when 'tis cold, bottle it up." The green leaves of the violet were used in poultices for inflammation and swelling, and the powder of the dried and crushed purple petals was drunk in warm water to heal the quinsy. We are apt to think insomnia a modern disease, but in Culpeper's time a decoction of violet petals steeped in wine and water was resorted to in order to ease pain in the head caused through want of sleep.

Like the rose, it may be said of violets, "Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made." The demand for essence of violets is far in excess of the supply. The Parma violet is the variety grown for this purpose, and the finest flowers are grown in the neighbourhood of Nice, though there are large violet plantations in Italy.

In October or April the young plants are placed in long furrows in the olive-groves, where they are protected from the scorching sun of summer and the cold of winter. Formerly they used to form a second crop under the shade of orange and lemon plantations, but this practice is going out. If the plants are on very dry soil they must be irrigated every fortnight during the summer. The violets of Nice begin to bloom in November, and in December their heart-shaped leaves are completely overtopped by the fragrant purple blossoms. Every fifth or sixth year, the old plants are removed, their place being taken by young roots.

The flowers of the violet are gathered in the

morning and taken at once to the flower factory, for if held over till the next day they would lose a large portion of their perfume. A much more delicate process than distillation is required in the case of such flowers as the violet and jasmine. A very pure and inodorous fat having been produced by pan rendering and repeated washings of beef-suet and corn-fed lard, the mixture is spread to the depth of about a quarter of an inch on both sides of panes of glass enclosed in wooden frames. These frames, which are about two feet wide and three feet long, are called *châssis-en-verre*. After the petals of the violet have been sprinkled on their upper surfaces, they are piled up in a stack, forming a series of wax-like compartments, the upper and lower surfaces of which are formed of grease. The flowers are changed every day for thirty or forty days till the fat is sufficiently impregnated with their odour, the grease, each time fresh petals are put on, being well furrowed with a palate-knife so as to present a new surface to their action. The odorous greasy mass produced by this process is violet pomade.

The scent of violets is also absorbed through the medium of the finest olive oil. *Châssis-en-verre* frames, with coarse wire gauze stretched between their four sides, take the place of *châssis-en-verre*. On the gauze of each frame is laid a soft thick fluffy cloth, not unlike a bath towel, which is called a *molleton*, and is saturated with pure olive oil. The violet petals are placed on the *molletons*, and after frequent renewal with fresh flowers the cloths are folded together and put under a powerful press in order that they may be deprived of the enflowered oil. In commerce this product is known as French oil of violet.

Extract of violet is of a beautiful green colour. It is sometimes obtained by a process called the *nyrogene*. The freshly gathered petals are placed in a kind of sieve with a receptacle beneath it. Prepared alcohol is then dropped on the flowers from a great height, and soaking through them falls into the receptacle. After this shower of alcohol has passed many times through fresh layers of petals it becomes extremely odorous. The more usual method of preparing violet extract is by the agitation of violet pomade or violet oil with strong spirit. The pomade is first passed through a macaroni press in order to bring it into a fine state of division and offer a large surface to be acted on by the alcohol. Then it is placed together with the spirit in a steam perfumery churn, a large drum-shaped copper cylinder provided with powerful stirrers revolving both ways after the fashion of an egg-whisk. The stirrers are set in motion for several hours, and the pomade and alcohol blended into a creamy mass. Then the contents of the churn are allowed to remain quiescent, the alcohol is drawn off and is freed from fat by being passed through tubes surrounded by iced water. The extract thus produced is extremely fragrant, and will neither stain nor injure the most delicate fabric.

The fragrant odour of violets, "sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes or Cytherea's breath," is not confined to that plant. Several woods, as myall wood, have a distinct violet odour, and more than one species of orchid possesses this fragrance. Commercially, these members of the violet group of perfumes are unimportant, but the rhizomes of three species of iris, *costus* root, and the blossoms of the cassia tree, *Acacia Farnesiana*, supply a large proportion of the perfumes sold under the name of violet.

The iris is the plant chiefly cultivated on

Tuscan flower farms, three species, *Iris Germanica*, the blue flag of our gardens, *Iris Pallida*, and *Iris Florentina*, being cultivated for the sake of the rhizomes. In the spring these flags are dug up and cut back, the top part of the rhizome with the clipped flag growing from it being replanted, while the remainder is spread out to dry in the sun. At first orris root has but an earthy smell. The violet odour develops gradually during the process of drying. Orris root is generally used in perfumery in the form of a fincture made by treating crushed orris roots with rectified spirits. When the rhizome is distilled with water, a crystalline odorous yellow brown mass is obtained which is called *beurre d'iris*, but its great price prevents its being much used. It is worth about thirty-two shillings an ounce.

Costus root, a product of *Aplotaxis Lappa*, comes to us from the slopes of the north-western Himalayas. In September and October, when the plant is approaching the resting-stage, the roots are dug up and chopped into pieces from two to six inches long. They have a rough, brown, furrowed surface, and are very brittle. More than two million pounds of this root are exported annually from India, but a large proportion of this quantity provides the Chinamen with violet-scented incense. Costus root is univer-

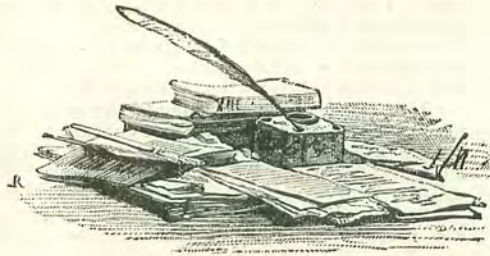
sally employed by the shawl merchants of Cashmere to protect their fabrics from the attacks of moths and insects. It is also smoked as a narcotic and stimulant.

The golden blossoms of the cassie tree form the most effective substitute for the more expensive blossoms of the violet, and it is cultivated in the neighbourhood of Grasse and Cannes entirely on this account. As in the case of most acacias the seeds must be steeped in water before they are sown, a process that must take place in heat. In their third year the young trees are grafted, but they do not flower for another three years. The harvest of cassie blossoms is from October to January or February, and the crop is a successive one; each full-grown tree will produce about two pounds weight of flowers, which are worth about threepence or fourpence a pound.

Huile de cassie is produced by enfleurage olive oil as in the case of violets. Cassie pomade may be prepared by the cold process of *enfleurage*, but it is usually the result of the less delicate hot process known as maceration. Pure fat is put into clean *bainsmarie*, metal or porcelain pans, and melted by means of steam. The cassie flowers are then immersed in the liquid fat during a period of from twelve to forty-eight hours, when they are carefully skimmed out, and fresh flowers added till the

grease has absorbed the required strength of perfume. Pure olive oil often takes the place of fat in the maceration process. Extract of cassie is derived from cassie pomade or oil, in the same way that extract of violet is obtained from violet pomade or oil. Like violet extract it is of a fine green colour.

The following beautiful thought of an old herbalist may fitly bring this paper to an end—“The blacke or purple violets, or March violets of the garden, have a great prerogative above others, not only because the minde conceiveth a certain pleasure and recreation by smelling and handling of these most odoriferous floures, but also for that very many by these violets receive ornament and comely grace; for there be made of them garlands for the head, nose-gaies and poesies (posies), which are delightfull to looke on and pleasant to smelle to, speaking nothing of their appropriate vertues; yea gardens themselves receive by these the greatest ornament of all chiefest beautie and most gallant grace, and the recreation of the minde, which is taken thereby cannot but be very good and honest, for they admonish and stir up a man to that which is comely and honest, for floures through their beautie, variety of colour, and exquisite forme, do bring to a liberrall minde the remembrance of honestie, comeliness, and all kindes of vertues.”



MUMPS.

By BUZZIE, Author of "Refining Fires," etc.

CHAPTER IV.

Friday, June 23rd.—Half my term of imprisonment is at an end. I have just received an anxious letter from home asking me for news of my illness, and an impertinent query from my sister as to whether mumps hurt much.

Well, here I am seated at my davenport, or escritoire, or secretaire as they call it here. What a delightful bit of furniture it is to be sure—full of little drawers and snug compartments, and tiny recesses, and miniature cupboards! Love for inanimate things is not generally permissible; if it were I should, without doubt, proclaim the fact that I love my davenport. I find an infinite pleasure in opening the little drawers one after another, peeping inside at their contents, and letting them shut again with a bang. My davenport has a secret—a most obnoxious secret, but still a secret—and I am proud of the fact! I should never have found out the existence of this secret had I not occasionally and very mysteriously lost a number of my copy-books, papers, and pens. This made me institute a search, when I discovered a little brass button, which on being heavily pressed opened a small door, which instantly sprung back again and shut on my fingers. This process always has to be undergone when I visit my secret, and I have never once been able to open it without being punished for my curiosity.

My davenport is of carved black oak like the rest of my furniture, and the slab on which I write is covered with red rep, so old, and tattered, and worm-eaten, that it has become

the abode of quite a family of wood-lice and moths, who occasionally emerge from their ruby-coloured seclusion to have a peep at the world outside, and are immediately pounced upon and punished by me for their indiscretion. In one of the drawers of my davenport is my correspondence, and a bitter fund for sarcasm it might prove if I were at all of a pessimistic turn of mind.

My letters are divided into three groups. The one tied with red ribbon is my collection of *billets-doux*, the second my school friends' effusions, and the third an assortment. Nearly all my *billets-doux* are in the poetic style, and breathe of perfumed ringlets, rose-bud lips, etc., etc. This is no doubt accounted for by the fact that my particular friends mostly belong to the artistic or literary profession, and are in the habit of giving vent to their feelings by invoking the muse. Very good! There couldn't be a better way; it smacks of serenades, moonlight, rustic benches and the olden times, and whenever in all the history of love-making did it reach the heights of perfection as in those same famous "olden times."

To return to my poetry, it may interest the reader to know that the first lines of four different poems penned to me at different times by four amorous swains commence thus—

1. "If your black eyes were blue, dear!"
2. "Sweet are your eyes of hazel hue!"
3. "Brightest eyes of Heaven's own blue!"
4. "Your eyes of sunny ray shine o'er me!"

This is certainly rather alarming, and if I

hadn't a mirror to reflect back upon me a pair of honest but uncompromisingly green eyes I might be led to suppose that, like the heroine of one of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, I was afflicted with four eyes, black, blue, brown, and yellow (for I suppose yellow matched closest to the colour of the sun's rays). If all the flowery flatteries which follow up these initial lines are as truthful as themselves I shall begin to think that that old cynic Voltaire was right when he apostrophised compliments as being a "bouquet of lies."

My prose love letters are exactly like every other girl's—effusions which seem to me more or less idiotic seen through the medium of an attack of mumps, but which at other times may have impressed me, and have received the same number of tears and smiles as are usually lavished on such precious documents. In fact, I am not quite sure whether I have not on the receipt of one or two of them brightened up and blushed, and like "Little Emmy" tripped off to my room with a beating heart to read them all unseen.

My school letters, alas, have little more sincerity and candour about them than my *billets-doux*. They are all very gushing, and generally begin with "My own dear old darling," or something similar, and finish up with "Yours for ever and ever till death do us part," and yet the writers have one and all married or otherwise been lost to me, and I no doubt have completely passed out of their life and thoughts.

I here give a fair specimen of one of these school-girlish effusions written to me by Hilda—aged twelve.