

THE FLEUR-DE-LIS: THE FLOWER OF SONG

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



So far back as the time of Clovis the French soldiers have recklessly followed that imperious mandate which has lost neither weight nor inspiration: "Charge for the golden Lilies!" Through the centuries, on many "a hard-fought, well-won battlefield," the best blood of France has deemed it a privilege to die for what those Lilies symbolize—a nation's honor. These "flowers of chivalry," for so were called the Fleur-de-lis, were once thickly sown upon the royal standard of France. They waved above those glittering Crusades which started into life when the voice of Peter the Hermit rang through Europe. It was for their preservation that Joan of Arc, listening to the

spirit voices and dreaming that she was destined to lead a nation to victory, left forever the haunted woods of Domremy, where she fancied she heard supernatural voices commanding her to liberate France.

It is difficult to determine whether the "golden Lilies," which, far back in history, claimed the devotion of the *preux chevaliers* of France, were identical with the Fleur-de-lis adopted by Louis VII, and named in his honor, or were widely different. It was Charles VI, however, who in a moment of religious zeal reduced the number to the mystical three.

The soft pronunciation of the quaint and stately Fleur-de-lis did not come trippingly off English tongues, so it became anglicized to the equally delicious Flower-de-luce. Henry V, wooing the not unwilling Katharine, could think of no sweeter name to call her than "fair Flower-de-luce," and "Perdita," in "The Winter's Tale," recalling the spring flowers, speaks of "Lilies of all kinds, the Flower-de-luce being one."

One of the oldest of garden flowers is this same flower. The blue and white varieties were favorites in old English gardens, and it was one of the first flowers imported into this country. It was a great favorite among Colonial dames, and no garden of that day, constructed, as they were, after old-world models, was without its clumps of blue and white "flags."

A curious catalogue of the older, common names of flowers states that Iris is but the later name of the original Fleur-de-lis, given it by Protestant botanists, anxious to change the quaint, Catholic nomenclature, which comprised such names as Our Lady's Mantle, Job's Tears, etc. Thus the Fleur-de-lis became, botanically, the Iris, in honor of the rainbow-winged messenger of the gods. And the name is not inappropriate. It is not, by-the-way, a Lily, but Shakespeare called it so, and Longfellow, in his poem, "Flower-de-luce," speaks of the

"Beautiful Lily, dwelling by still rivers,
Or solitary mere,
Or where the sluggish meadow-brook delivers
Its waters to the weir!"

The Persian Iris, another variety of the Flower-de-luce, is delightfully fragrant, and comes to us from Holland.



Closely akin to the proud Fleur-de-lis is our native blue Flag, standing with drooping azure banners among the rushes, those "outlaws of the sun." One of them, the Iris Versicolor, is Longfellow's:

"Thou art the muse, who far from crowded cities
Hauntest the sylvan streams,
Playing on pipes of reed the artless ditties
That come to us as dreams.

"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!"

On an island in Lake Superior I have seen a swamp full of these blue Flags rising from the water with that stately unconventional grace which distinguishes them; the pine-scented, sun-warmed wind waved their drooping petals, their companion reeds stood guard about them, and down "the listed sunbeam rode resplendent, the dragon-fly with steel-blue mail and shield."



The sweet-scented varieties are among the earliest of spring-blooming flowers. There is one that makes its appearance with the swallows, and ventures but a few inches above ground; its recurved petals are of the palest lavender with a silver sheen upon them, and its fragrance is one of the most delicious odors that spring wafts o'er the dreaming earth. Of these early-blooming dwarf varieties *Pumila*, with its violet flowers marked with pale blue and gold, and *Iris Odoratissima* are enchantingly pretty and fragrant.

It is from the lovely white and lavender Florentine Iris that orris root is obtained.

The English and Spanish varieties also bloom very early, and the members of these families exhibit a great variety of hues. They stand among their long, stiff leaves clothed in their robes of state—of blue, of gold and of imperial purple. The Spanish Iris is often prettily called the "Rainbow Flower."

The best known of the varieties of this exquisite plant is, perhaps, the Iris Germanica. It is stouter, more globular in form, more majestic in bearing than any other variety, and is indispensable for the garden, forming, as it does, great clumps. It sends up above the sword-

like leaves, which seem as naked guarding blades, the flags which float their iridescent banners from tall green columns. A little later blooms the Iris Siberica; this variety has long grassy leaves, and flowers more delicate, more beautiful and more fragile in appearance than those of the Germanica.

A very old flower, much written of but rarely seen, is the Iris Susiana, which was brought from Constantinople

in the sixteenth century. Gerarde gives an elaborate description of it. It is so dark in color that it is sometimes called the "Mourning Flower," the petals being of a dark grayish-blue, with markings of black and white. In July and August blooms the "king of the Iris," the magnificent Iris Kæmferi, which is a native of Japan and Siberia. The enormous flowers, often measuring from eight to ten inches across, are flat in form, thus differing from other members of the family, and the variation of hues is superb. The large petals are splashed, blotted and streaked with resplendent colors, wherein all shades of red and blue are beautifully blended.

The construction of the Iris, or "Orchid of the garden," as it is often called, is curious. The perianth is composed of six petals, three of which are deeply reflexed. These are called, in floral parlance, the "falls." The other three are, in most cases, upright, and curve together, forming a dome of petals. Over each of the "falls" are arches which appear to be another petal, but which are, in reality, the style of a common pistil; the stigma of each of these styles is a thin lip on the inner surface of the style near the tip. Adhering to the base of the styles are the stamens, which are in such a position that the pollen could never reach the stigma above them. Consequently the seed of that flower must be fertilized from the pollen of another blossom. This mission of carrying pollen is performed by bees, for whose reception the flower has cunningly adapted itself, usually wearing blue, which is the color most attractive to this insect. The flower also indicates the road to its nectaries by throwing out dark lines on its "falls," which the bee understands as accurately as the prospector can distinguish the soil in which gold is found. As the bee follows these darker markings the widely-opened hallway grows narrower, and its head naturally brushes against the stamens, which burst, discharging their contents upon it. Reaching the nectaries the honey-gatherer seizes its booty, and makes an exit. As it strolls over the "fall" of the next flower its pollen-dusted coat comes in contact with the projecting stigma, and thus the flower is fertilized.

Although the flowers of the Iris are variously hued, there is usually some touch of color about them in compliment to the preference of their insect lovers.

The Iris family is usually divided into three sections: the bulbous, the tuberous and the fibrous rooted. The bulbous varieties should be lifted every two or three years, else they are useless, and they require a light, dry soil of leaf-mould, sand and garden soil. The so-called fibrous-rooted section grow well in any good garden soil, rather sandy, and require but little attention. They should never be disturbed. The tuberous-rooted section should be planted in a well-drained, rich, sandy, garden soil.

Parkinson, in his "Garden of Pleasant Flowers," says that "there is not anything extant, or to be heard, that any of these kinds

of Flowers-de-luce hath been used to any physical purposes, and serve only to deck the gardens of the curious." "Born in the purple, born to joy and pleasure," is this "Flower of Song"; and what more fitting commentary on the national genius for discerning the truest artistic forms than the choice of the Fleur-de-lis for a royal device.

The Pseudocarus, or yellow Flag, is another interesting variety, because its roasted seeds have been used as a substitute for coffee.

It is commonly supposed that the word orris is a corruption of the word iris, from which it is procured. From this variety, the Florentine, there was obtained in times past the *vergeris*, or iris green pigment, used so extensively by miniature painters.

It is interesting to learn that the remains of at least three species of Iris have been found in fossil state in rocks of the Tertiary age. This is, of course, their earliest historical discovery. The Fleur-de-lis of conventional designs is suggested by the Iris, and has a form which fits it for the terminal decoration of a sceptre, or the ornament of a crown.

In the structure of the flower is something unwonted, but infinitely stately, and in the gleam of its petals an imperial fantasy of Iris hues.

