

WILD FLOWERS OF THE ASPHALT

by William Dean Howells

Looking through Mrs. Caroline A. Creevey's charming book on the Flowers of Field, Hill, and Swamp, the other day, I was very forcibly reminded of the number of these pretty, wilding growths which I had been finding all the season long among the streets of asphalt and the sidewalks of artificial stone in this city; and I am quite sure that any one who has been kept in New York, as I have been this year, beyond the natural time of going into the country, can have as real a pleasure in this sylvan invasion as mine, if he will but give himself up to a sense of it.

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Of course it is altogether too late, now, to look for any of the early spring flowers, but I can recall the exquisite effect of the tender blue hepatica fringing the centre rail of the grip-cars, all up and down Broadway, and apparently springing from the hollow beneath, where the cable ran with such a brooklike gurgle that any damp-living plant must find itself at home there. The water-pimpernel may now be seen, by any sympathetic eye, blowing delicately along the track, in the breeze of the passing cabs, and elastically lifting

itself from the rush of the cars. The reader can easily verify it by the picture in Mrs. Creevey's book. He knows it by its other name of brook weed; and he will have my delight, I am sure, in the cardinal-flower which will be with us in August. It is a shy flower, loving the more sequestered nooks, and may be sought along the shady stretches of Third Avenue, where the Elevated Road overhead forms a shelter as of interlacing boughs. The arrow-head likes such swampy expanses as the converging surface roads form at Dead Man's Curve and the corners of Twenty third Street. This is in flower now, and will be till September; and St.-John's-wort, which some call the false goldenrod, is already here. You may find it in any moist, low ground, but the gutters of Wall Street, or even the banks of the Stock Exchange, are not too dry for it. The real golden-rod is not much in evidence with us, for it comes only when summer is on the wane. The other night, however, on the promenade of the Madison Square Roof Garden, I was delighted to see it growing all over the oblong dome of the auditorium, in response to the cry of a homesick cricket which found itself in exile there at the base of a potted ever green. This lonely insect had no sooner sounded its winter-boding note than the fond flower began sympathetically to wave and droop along those tarry slopes, as I have seen it on how many hill-side pastures! But this may have been only a transitory response to the cricket, and I