

## Four Poems on Gerard's Herbal

In 2017 and 2018 I posted several poems that adapted passages describing flowers and vegetables in John Gerard's *Herbal*, edited by Thomas Johnson and published in 1633. This blog posting offers four more of these free verse adaptations, resurrecting Gerard's portrayal of Daffodils, Tulips, Fritillaries, and Fleur-de-lis. Although my verse condenses and rearranges Gerard and Johnson's 17<sup>th</sup>-century text, all the words and phrasing—including the spellings—are taken directly from the original passages. I would hope my versifications manage to accentuate Gerard's enchanting celebrations of plants and gardens, the "bosoms of the beautiful." ~Bob

### Of the Floure de-luce

There be many kinds of Iris or Floure de-luce,  
some tall and great, some little, small, and low;  
some smell exceeding sweet in the root, some not smell at all.  
Some floures are sweet in smell, and some without:  
some of one color, some of many colours mixed:  
vertues attributed to some, others not remembred.  
Some have tuberous or knobby roots, others bulbous or Onion;  
some have leaves like flags, others like grasse or rushes.

The common Floure de-luce hath long, large, flaggy leaves  
like the blade of a sword with two edges,  
amongst which spring up smooth and plaine stalks,  
bearing floures compact of six leaves joynd together.  
The roots be thicke, long, and knobby, with many hair threds.  
The water Floure de-luce, or water Flag, or Acorus,  
is like the garden Floure de-luce, but the leaves  
are narrower, longer, sometimes the height of foure cubits.  
The floure is of a perfect yellow, the root knobby like the other;  
but being cut, it seems to be the colour of raw flesh.  
The water Floure de-luce prospereth well in moist medowes,  
and in the borders and brinks of Rivers, ponds, standing lakes.  
Although a watery plant of nature, yet being planted  
in gardens it prospereth well.

The root of the common Floure de-luce cleane washed,  
and stamped with a few drops of Rose-water,  
and laid plaisterwise upon the face of man or woman,  
doth in two daies at the most take away  
the blackness or blewness of any stroke or bruse:  
if the skinne of any person be tender and delicate,  
it shall be needfull that ye lay a piece of silke, sindall, or fine laune  
betweene the plaister and the skinne; otherwise in such tender bodies  
it often causeth heat and inflammation.

## Of Daffodils

The first of the Daffodils, with the purple crowne,  
small narrow leaves, thicke, fat, full of slimie juice,  
among which riseth up a naked stalke smooth and hollow,  
a foot high, bearing a faire milke white floure  
growing forth of a hood such as onion flours are wrapped in.  
In the floure is a small coronet, yellowish, bordered  
about the edge with a pleasant, purple ring.  
There followeth a thicke knob wherein is contained  
the blacke round seed.

The root is white, bulbous, Onion-fashion.

The second kind of Daffodill is that Primrose peerelesse  
most common in our country gardens, knowne everie where,  
the floure of a yellowish white color,  
with a yellow crowne in the middle,  
floureth in the moneth of Aprill, sometimes sooner.

The Daffodils with purple coronets grow wilde in sundry places,  
chiefly in Burgondie, and in meadowes in Suinterland.  
Theocritus affirmeth the Daffodils grow in medowes.  
In his 19 Eidyl he writeth that the faire Lady Europe  
entering with her Nymphs into the medowes,  
did gather the sweet smelling daffodils, which we may English thus:

But when the Girles were come into  
The medowes flouring all in sight,  
That Wench with these, this Wench with those

Trim floures, themselves did all delight:  
She with the Narcisse good in sent,  
And she with Hyacinths content.

The common wilde Daffodill groweth wilde in fields  
and sides of woods in the West parts of England.

Galen saith that the roots of Narcissus  
have such wonderful qualities in drying, that they consound  
and glew together very great wounds,  
and such gashes or cuts as happen about the veins,  
sinues, and tendons. They have a certaine cleansing facultie.  
The root of Narcissus stamped with hony and applied plaisterwise,  
helpeth them that are burned with fire,  
and joineth together sinues cut in sunder.  
Being used in manner aforesaid, it helpeth  
the great wrenches of the ancles, the aches and pains of the joints.  
The same applied with hony and nettle seed helpeth Sun burning.  
Being stamped with the meale of Darnel and hony,  
it draweth forth thorns and stubs out of any part of the body.

### **Of Tulipa, the Dalmatian Cap.**

A strange and forrein floure, a bulbed floure,  
whereof there be sundry sorts of brave floures  
all studious and painefull Herbarists  
desire to be better acquainted.  
There be two chiefe kinds, Praecox and Serotina:  
the one doth bear his floures timely, the other later.  
To these we adde another sort, Media,  
\flouring between both the others.  
From these three sorts all other kinds doe proceed,  
almost infinite in number.

The Tulipa of Bolonia hath fat, thicke, and grosse leaves,  
hollow, furrowed, or chanelled, bended a little backward,  
and as it were folded together, which at their first coming up

seeme to be of a reddish colour, and being  
throughly growne turne into a whitish greene.  
In the midst of those leaves riseth up  
a naked fat stalke a foot high;  
on the top standeth one or two yellow floures,  
sometimes three or more, consisting of six smal leaves,  
like a deepe wide open cup,  
narrow above, wide in the bottome.

After it hath been some few days floured,  
the points and brims of the floure turn backward,  
like a Dalmatian or Turkish Cap, called  
Tulipan, Tolepan, Turban, and Turfan.

The threds in the middle of the floure be  
sometimes yellow, otherwhiles blackish or purplish,  
Nature seeming to play more with this floure  
than with any other that I do know.

This floure is of a reasonable pleasant smell,  
the root is bulbous, very like to a common onion.

The roots preserved with sugar, or otherwise dressed,  
may be eaten and are no unpleasant nor offensive meat,  
but rather good and nourishing.

Tulipa groweth wilde in Thracia, Cappadocia, Italy,  
in Bizantia about Constantinope, at Tripolis and Aleppo.  
They are now common in all English gardens.

They floure from Februarie unto the beginning of May.

Augerius Busbequius in his journey betweene Hadrinople and Constantinople,  
saw great aboundance of them in floure everie where,  
even in Winter, in the moneth of Januarie,  
which that warme and temperat climat may seem to performe.

I do thinke these are the Lillies of the field  
mentioned by our Saviour, Mat. 6. 28, for he said,  
that Solomon in all his royaltie was not arrayed like one of these.

The shape for their floures resemble Lillies, and in these places  
whereas our Saviour was conversant they grow wilde in the fields,  
the infinite varietie of colour, the wondrous mixtures of beautie.

This is my opinion, which any may either  
approve of or gainsay, as he shall thinke good.

## Of Turkie or Ginny-hen Floure

The Checquered Daffodil, or Ginny-hen Floure,  
hath small narrow grassie leaves, among which riseth  
a stalke three hands high, having at the top one or two floures,  
sometimes three, which consisteth of six small leaves  
checquered most strangely, wherein Nature,  
or rather the Creator of all things, hath kept a wonderfull order,  
surpassing the curiouesest painting that Art can set downe.  
One square is of a greenish yellow colour, the other purple,  
keeping the same order on the backside as on the inside,  
although blackish in one square, a Violet in an other,  
every leafe the feather of a Ginny hen.  
The second Checquered Daffodill is like unto the former,  
saving his floure is dasht over with a light purple  
and is somewhat greater than the other.

The Ginny hen Floure is called of Dodonaeus, Flos Meleagris:  
of Lobelius, Lilio-narcissus variegata, for it hath  
the floure of a Lilly and the root of Narcissus:  
it hath beene called Fritillaria, the table upon which men play Chesse,  
with square checkers the floure doth very much resemble.  
Martial seemeth to call Fritillus Abacus, or the Tables  
whereon men play at Dice, in his Epigrams, writing to Galla:

The sad Boy now his nuts cast by,  
Is call'd to Schoole by Masters cry:  
And the drunke Dicer now betray'd  
By flattering Tables as he play'd,  
If from his secret tipling house drawne out,  
Although the Officer he must besought, &c.

Of the facultie of these pleasant floures there is nothing set downe  
in the antient or later Writer, but they are greatly esteemed  
for beautifying our gardens, the bosoms of the beautiful.