

QUARTERLY NEWS LETTER

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AUCKLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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We have pleasure in publishing the following very interesting extracts from a letter by Mrs. Lucy Cranwell Smith :

"I see the cherry-trees every day now, so I am in a good position to report on their budding, blossoming, and passing.

The most attractive are the Yoshino trees, but quite a few other varieties are grown around the famous Basin, near the Jefferson Memorial. They have all been perfectly lovely, and they have far exceeded my expectations. There has been no wind to disturb them, so they have lasted well. We had a glimpse of early blooms last year, through a wild storm of rain, but apparently even the full blossoming then was nothing compared with what we have seen this year. It has certainly been an early and beautiful spring.

To begin with, I received a sort of shock when I realised that the blossoms were all single, and, of course, much smaller than those of the ornamental double cherry which flowers with us (in New Zealand!) in September and October. But their grace is beyond description, both as to the branching of the trees and the soft droop of the rounded petal-ends. The flowers are very pale pink colour, and the old petals are much paler than the buds. Not a leaf has burst free when the flowers are at their best. When I first saw a good showing across the Basin it was clear that the branches were arranged in tiers, but when all the flowers were out each tree looked like a soft fluffy ball. No wonder the Japanese go out into the hills to worship the trees in the Spring! Each blossom is so soft, so graceful, so airy, especially when you look up through the branches to a sunny sky.

We joined the throng of thousands strolling under the trees last Sunday. It was a perfect day and the colours of the people's clothes looked well under the pink flowers. I was rather surprised to see how many of the women wore clear red coats. People streamed up and down the steps of the Jefferson Memorial all day long and we decided that that was just what it needed - people bustling round, as on the steps of a temple. Not that the people were bringing offerings! Many had plucked branches to take away, and many flowers had already been thrown to wither on the ground. Parks police were catching some of the offenders. I thought it would be fine if the people were allowed to pick a little, as you could see that they felt the whole outing was a great experience. I'd arrange it so that certain trees were grown for picking, and everyone could then be given a piece (cut by an attendant) if they promised to walk in procession with it before going home. That would make a fine sight, wouldn't it? It might develop a better feeling about flowers here too. So few have gardens. I think most people prefer a gift of expensive "shop" flowers to a posy from a garden. (Often \$12 a bunch in early spring.)

To return to the cherry-trees:- They began to drop on Monday, but the red stalks and the redish leaf-buds were very agreeable, to me. They gave a very pleasant contrast that was lacking amongst the masses of pink before many of the flowers fell.

Today there are pink apple-blossoms out in clumps near the Basin, and the huge "tulip" magnolias that do so wonderfully here are just passing. They suffered a lot of damage at the hands of the crowd, but I believe they soon recover. The blooms wilted at once, of course, and then they were thrown away.

Forsythias are almost over. They came out with a bound in one night in Arlington. One day we had fat buds, and the next, when the temperature rose suddenly from about 34°F to 84°F, the plants were gleaming balls of pale greenish-gold. Simply astounding to me, as I hadn't seen many since I had that early spring in Sweden. There the Forsythias bloomed amid the February snow, in Gothenburg. They come later here, as do many of the species I saw in the spring in Cornwall. I think this climate must be much more continental than anything I have experienced before.

Red -buds (Judas Tree) were out in profusion in the undergrowth at the Zoo yesterday. They form sturdy little trees, simply

smothered with their elegantly-toned blooms. I have seen thousands scattered through the oak forests on the way to Mt. Vernon. Red-buds and Dogwoods together are something to remember! The bracts of the Dogwoods are large and snowy-white; they are wedged together at the tips (just like finger-tips stuck together) and it takes quite a pull to free them before they are ready. When they do pull apart you see that the interlocking parts are stained purplish with anthocyanin. I believe they look their prettiest before opening, as the up-folded bracts make each bloom look like a poised white butterfly. I have noticed that every bloom on a tree may be at the same stage; next day every one will be open.

"Japonica" is a prime favourite for park and garden planting. Apparently it demands little care, even in this climate. The commonest form is a rusty-red which I like much less than the clear deep red so common in Auckland. Pink forms are very common too, and they are extremely beautiful, just like shells. Every cottage (white or negro) has a bush in bloom. In neglected gardens they may be 7 ft. high, and very wide. I did filch a bunch of pink blooms from one of these bushes in a deserted place; it was outside a cottage of two rooms, graced with an old double-bed filling most of one room, and a tremendous accumulation of litter, much of it probably left by tramps. The wall-boards were rough-hewn, so the place must have been old.

Violets are common as wild-flowers, but they seem to have no scent. Our favourite garden violets are lacking here (in Washington anyway), as also is the common daphne, and mignonette. Some gardens may have them, of course, but I haven't seen them even in the very fine grounds of "Dumbarton Oaks", where tulips, roses, and peonies grow freely, to flower a little later than the early spring flowers.

At Dumbarton Oaks, which is administered by Harvard University, a real attempt has been made to interest the visiting public in the wildflowers in particular. These are at their best in the woods. A stream wanders through this part which has been kept as natural as possible. We saw it when the dogwoods and the blue Mertensia were at their best. Truly, there is much to see here - and nothing more interesting than the flowers!

Dogwood (*Cornus florida*: Dogwood family. This includes the N.Z.

Corokia)

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*: Senna family i.e.a relative of Kowhai.