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## «The procession of flowers in Colorado» a note on a picture album memorial to Helen Hunt Jackson

James D. Van Trump

THE PICTURE BOOK we have always with us; it has even managed to withstand the massive onslaught of television. Photography has enlarged its boundaries and increased its numbers, but it was the nineteenth century (which may yet be looked upon as the great age of the popular book) that provided not only the impetus for present-day developments, but also the most salient protests against the new mass production of books. The machine-made book did not sweep the field entirely. William Morris spoke strongly for the revival of old or dying handicrafts and buttressed his words with his example, but there were other minor affirmations of the good old ways. Among these is a thin royal quarto volume—Helen Hunt Jackson's *The procession of flowers in Colorado*—which was published in 1886 by Roberts Brothers of Boston in a deluxe, limited edition of one hundred copies, each of which was illustrated to order, in water color by Alice Stewart Hill, a now-forgotten American “flower painter.”

We now examine the book on two counts: bibliographically, because it is, as far as its actual production was concerned, an interesting nineteenth century compromise between the new printing methods and the old craft of hand illumination which had almost died out; artistically, because it will call to notice the work of a not untalented botanical artist of the period. The volume itself, which has escaped the lush over-decoration so often characteristic of the Victorian picture album, deserves to be discussed beyond its importance as a period piece, simply as a handsome book, a pleasure to the hand and eye.

The dual nature of the book makes a description of it difficult; the text (the machine-made portion) is quite precise and straightforward, but the illustrations (the work of the human hand, and a feminine one at that) display almost infinite variations from page to page, from copy to copy. Each copy is numbered and signed by the artist, Alice Stewart, but even the signature does not remain the same, since she married in the later stages of the book's production and copy 100 (now at the Denver Public Library) is signed Alice Stewart Hill. Some differences may also be ascribed

to the amount of time it took to illustrate the book. The title-page bears the date 1886, and it is probable that all the sheets were printed at that time for Roberts Brothers—the University Press of John Wilson and Sons at Cambridge, Massachusetts, being the actual printers. But the hand illustration took a much longer time and the project was not completed until May 1888.<sup>1</sup> The book, like most items in which handwork figured, was expensive and sold for twenty-five dollars. To modern eyes, the close juxtaposition of two different methods of production is startling, but it was by no means unsuccessful. It was well received by the public and praised by reviewers.<sup>2</sup>

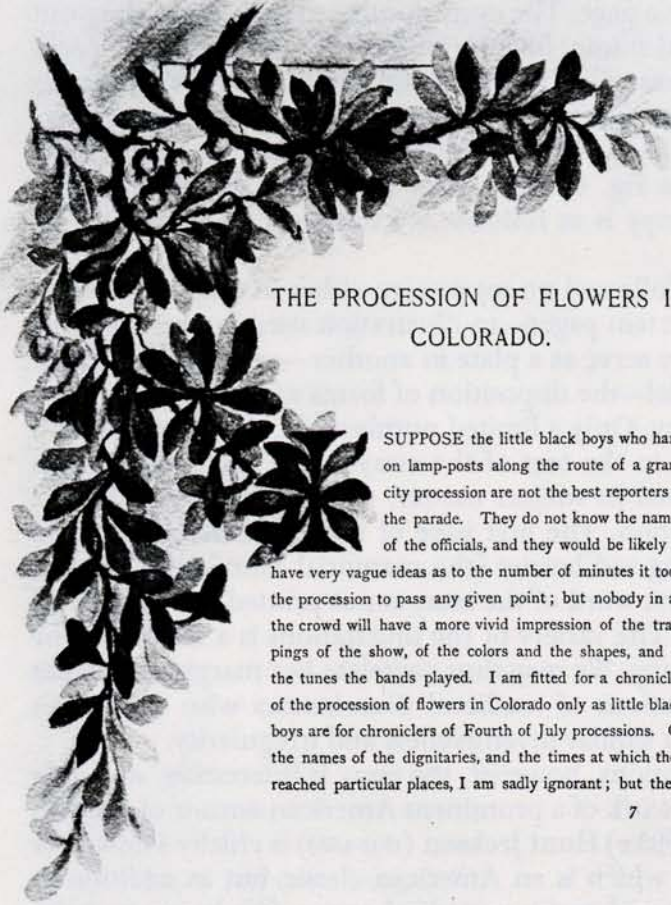
The writer has located, to date, nine copies, not counting that owned by the Hunt Botanical Library (copy no. 40+), which served as the basis for this investigation. The other copies, listed alphabetically according to place, are those in the Massachusetts Horticultural Society Library, Boston (no. 20); the Brooklyn Public Library (no. 59); the Charles Leaming Tutt Library of Colorado College at Colorado Springs (two copies, nos. 66 and 76); the Public Library, Colorado Springs (no. 61); the collection of Mrs. Charles Leaming Tutt of Colorado Springs (no. 64); the Public Library, Denver (no. 100); the Columbia University Library, New York (no. 96); and the New York Public Library (no. 86). Of these, in addition to the Hunt, Denver, and Colorado College (no. 66) copies, the writer has examined those at Brooklyn and Boston as well as the New York examples, which have been seen in microfilm.<sup>3</sup> There is, in addition to these volumes, a loose-leaf album printed at Colorado Springs and illustrated by Alice Stewart which was presumably a “trial run” for the 1886 edition. This bears the 1878 copyright date of the essay, but the prefatory acknowledgement is dated December 1, 1885. A copy which the writer has examined is now at the Denver Public Library.

Most copies of the 1886 edition are bound in pale blue cloth (although some are bound in pale green, as in the Boston copy) with an ivory-colored calf back-strip. The front cover is decorated with the title in a wavering Victorian script and a length of kinnikinnick vine or *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (repeated from the first text page, see Fig. 2), both in gold. The copies examined are all printed on Whatman water color paper, watermarked 1886;

<sup>1</sup> Raymond L. Kilgour, *Messrs. Roberts Brothers*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1952. [See p. 230.]

<sup>2</sup> A pamphlet issued by the Colorado Springs bookseller, S. W. Moore, and now in the possession of the Denver Public Library quotes laudatory passages from several reviews.

<sup>3</sup> Another copy sold at the Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, sale of 7 August 1947, and listed in *American book-prices current* 53: 251, 1946-47, has not been located. Professor Joseph Ewan, Tulane University, directed my attention to a copy listed in Catalogue 297 [1957] of Dawson's Bookshop, Los Angeles, Calif., but no information on its present whereabouts, or serial number has been obtained.



THE PROCESSION OF FLOWERS IN  
COLORADO.

SUPPOSE the little black boys who hang on lamp-posts along the route of a grand city procession are not the best reporters of the parade. They do not know the names of the officials, and they would be likely to have very vague ideas as to the number of minutes it took the procession to pass any given point; but nobody in all the crowd will have a more vivid impression of the trappings of the show, of the colors and the shapes, and of the tunes the bands played. I am fitted for a chronicler of the procession of flowers in Colorado only as little black boys are for chroniclers of Fourth of July processions. Of the names of the dignitaries, and the times at which they reached particular places, I am sadly ignorant; but there

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Fig. 2. *Procession of flowers in Colorado*. First page of text, Hunt copy.

each copy contains from nineteen to twenty-five quarto leaves (none of which is conjugate with another) depending on the number of illustrations.

The preliminaries and the text display no variation from copy to copy and the latter is confined to thirty pages of small blocks of print in varying shapes with one block to a page. The even-numbered pages have the print contained within a ruled frame, but the unframed odd-numbered pages have marginal decorations. The Brooklyn and the two New York copies have no extra illustrations, but the Boston and Hunt copies have six interpolated plates, and the Denver copy five (in the latter, the first plate is missing). The plates (see Fig. 4) occur after every four leaves of text. A collation of the Hunt copy is as follows: 4°; unsigned, 19 leaves; [iv] 1-6 7-30 [4].

The artist apparently followed no set pattern either in assigning certain flower illustrations to certain pages—an illustration used in one copy as a marginal decoration may serve as a plate in another—or in the treatment of the illustrative material—the disposition of forms and tonality of color varies widely in each copy. Only a limited number of Colorado flowers—a few of those mentioned in the text of the essay—were used, but though Mrs. Hill was thus limited in subject matter, she displayed considerable latitude in its interpretation. The first page of text is invariably adorned with a green vine bearing red berries (the memorial kinnikinnick again) and the initial I of the first word of the essay is not printed but painted by the illuminator (Fig. 2). The variety of the illustrations is a tribute to the artist's facility and ingenuity. We may thus correlate her marginal sketches with the painted decorations of medieval illuminators who sometimes displayed in their work a similar inventiveness and irregularity.

Aside from the illustrations, however, the essay is interesting, not only for itself, but also as the work of a prominent American author of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup> Helen Maria (Fiske) Hunt Jackson (1831-1885) is chiefly known for her novel *Ramona* (1884), which is an American classic, but in addition to fiction she wrote poetry and many periodical essays. She began to write after the death of her first husband and of her sons in the 1860's. Pretty, impulsive, clever, she had a hard New England core of intelligence which saved her best work from becoming like the dulcet balderdash dished out by most lady writers of the period. *Ramona* deserves its enduring reputation, and even some of her travel essays are sprightly and readable today.

In 1873 she went to Colorado for her health and liked the region so much that she settled in the newly founded Colorado Springs and married one

<sup>4</sup> The best biographical account of Mrs. Jackson is to be found in Ruth Odell's *Helen Hunt Jackson* (New York, Appleton-Century, 1939). It contains also a bibliography of her work.

of the town's leading citizens, William Jackson, in 1875.<sup>5</sup> As a writer, she was very practical and turned everything to account, not only in a literary but a financial way. Her Colorado essays began to appear in magazines, among them being the *Procession*, which came out in the October 1877 issue of the *Atlantic monthly* (40: 402-407). Mrs. Jackson had "cribbed" the idea from her literary mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson whose *Procession of flowers*<sup>6</sup> is obviously her model, both in content and style.<sup>7</sup>

The American reading public of the time possessed an insatiable appetite for material on the opening West, and the *Procession* was reprinted in Mrs. Jackson's *Bits of travel at home* (Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1878), and again in *Colorado Springs* (Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1883). The last appearance of the essay, aside from our edition, was that issued by Roberts Brothers in 1897 just before the firm's amalgamation with Little, Brown and Company. This was a small 16mo paperbound pamphlet illustrated by Louise B. Graves which was intended as the first of a series of monographic souvenirs of Colorado life and scenery.<sup>8</sup>

Among those whom Mrs. Jackson met in Colorado Springs was the local artist Alice Amelia Stewart,<sup>9</sup> who, like many other inhabitants of the place, had come from the East. She was born in Amboy, New York, in 1851, but apparently had been taken as a child to Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, where her family lived for some number of years. She early showed artistic talent and later studied in New York at the Cooper Union. The National Academy of Design in the same city also lists her as having been a student in the Antique School in the 1873-1874 term.<sup>10</sup> After this schooling, she rejoined her father, George H. Stewart, and his family, who had just moved to Colorado Springs. The *Colorado Springs gazette* of 22 August, 1874, carried a notice that she had "opened classes in the Wanless Block for object drawing, water color and oil painting." Gilbert McClurg states that she also studied flower painting in Chicago with a "Mrs. Scott."<sup>11</sup> Gradually she

<sup>5</sup> For an account of Mrs. Jackson's life in Colorado Springs, see Marshall Sprague, *Newport in the Rockies* (Denver, Sage, Books, 1961), p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> In Higginson's *Outdoor papers* (Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1863), pp. 319-337.

<sup>7</sup> Odell, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> *Descriptive catalogue of Roberts Brothers' publications now issued by Little, Brown, and Company*, Boston, [1898 ?], p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> The fullest account of her life is to be found in Gilbert McClurg's "Brush and Pencil," part 5—"Early Painters of Colorado's Flowers," in *Colorado Springs gazette* (14 December 1924), Section 2, pp. 1, 4. There is also a brief notice in Mauley Dayton and Eleanor R. Ormes, *The book of Colorado Springs*, p. 344. Colorado Springs, Denton Printing Co., 1933.

<sup>10</sup> In a letter to the writer, dated 7 June 1962.

<sup>11</sup> McClurg, *op. cit.* There is no record of any Chicago flower artist of this name at the Burnham Library of the Art Institute, Chicago. The artist may have been Mrs. Emily S. Scott (1832-1915) who lived and worked in New York. McClurg's statements are not always accurate.

THE  
PROCESSION OF FLOWERS  
IN  
COLORADO.

BY  
HELEN JACKSON (H.H.)

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ILLUSTRATED IN WATER COLORS

By ALICE A. STEWART.

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BOSTON:  
ROBERTS BROTHERS.  
1886.

Fig. 3. *Procession of flowers in Colorado*. Title-page, Denver copy.  
Courtesy, Denver Public Library



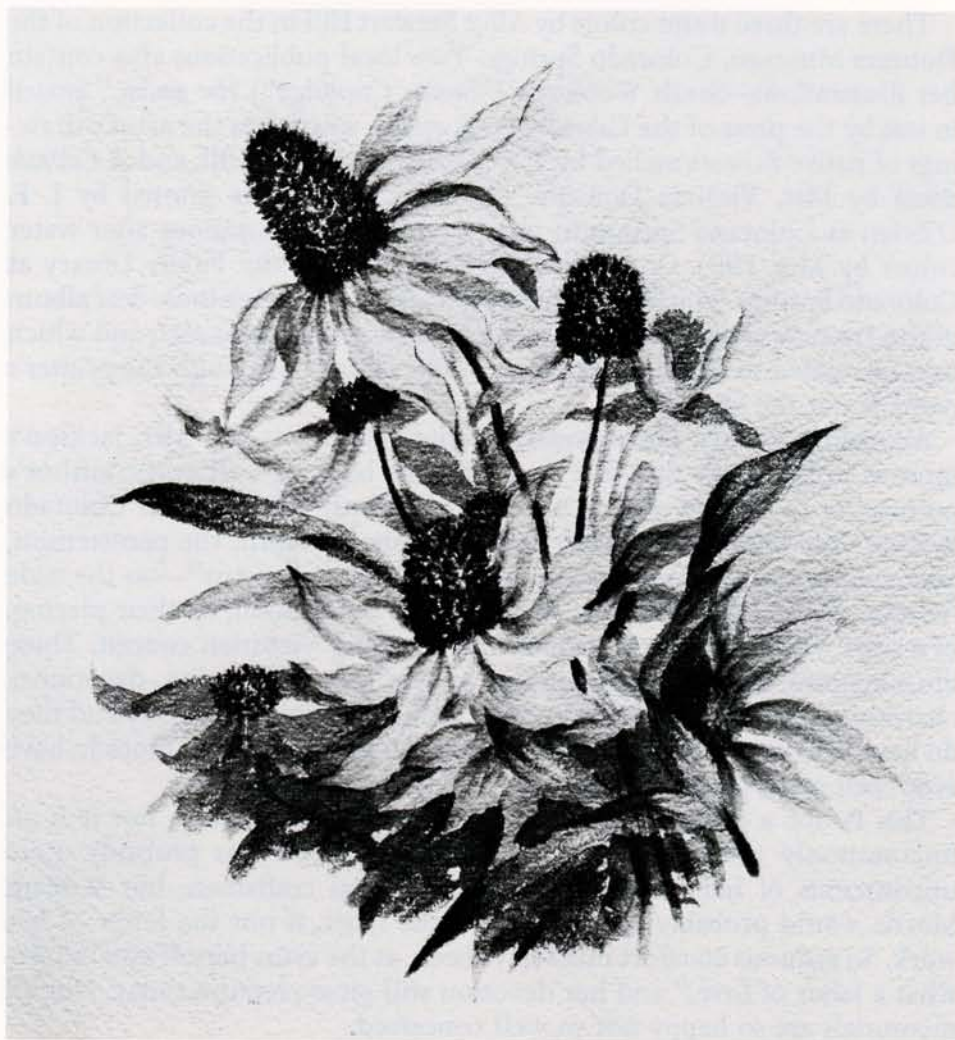


Fig. 4. *Procession of flowers in Colorado*. Plate of *Rudbeckia*, Hunt copy.

came to have a considerable local reputation as a painter of Colorado wildflowers. In 1887 or 1888 she married Francis B. Hill (1827-1911) a local financier. She died on 10 January 1896 in a sanitarium at Dansville, New York,<sup>12</sup> and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Colorado Springs, where Mrs. Jackson is also buried.

<sup>12</sup> Obituary notices in *Colorado Springs gazette* (15 January 1896), p. 9 and *Colorado Springs gazette weekly* (16 January 1896), p. 7.

There are three water colors by Alice Stewart Hill in the collection of the Pioneers Museum, Colorado Springs. Two local publications also contain her illustrations—Sarah Woolsey's ("Susan Coolidge") *Her garden*,<sup>13</sup> issued in 1888 by the press of the *Colorado Springs gazette*, which has the artist's drawings of native flowers etched by T. C. Parrish and Alice Hill, and *A Colorado wreath* by Mrs. Virginia Donaghe McClurg, which was printed by J. F. O'Brien at Colorado Springs in 1899 (this last has illustrations after water colors by Mrs. Hill). Copies of both works are in the Public Library at Colorado Springs. The Pioneers Museum also has another loose-leaf album of the *Procession of flowers in Colorado* which the writer has not seen and which may be related to that at the Denver Public Library, although the printer's name is not the same.<sup>14</sup>

According to Mrs. Hill's preface to the *Procession*, it was Mrs. Jackson's interest in her work that first suggested the book as well as the author's permission to use the essay in any way she liked.<sup>15</sup> Many of the Colorado flowers—the blue wind-flower, the mountain-hyacinth, the pentstemon, gilia, mentzelia, and mertensia, as well as yucca and cactus<sup>16</sup>—on the wide margins frame felicitously the text, creating the illusion, by their placing, of a page within a page—a curious and engaging Victorian conceit. These illuminations and the plates display a style that is feminine, decorative, charming—but the sketches are sound in their botanical accuracy and they do have weight and structure. It is doubtful if the flowers of Colorado have ever been more pleasantly painted.

This is not a great book, either in content or execution, but it is an uncommonly tasteful and pleasant one. Alice Hill was probably quite unconscious of her kinship with the medieval craftsmen, but William Morris would probably have approved the spirit, if not the letter of her work. So arduous an effort must have been, as the artist herself says "some-what a labor of love," and her devotion still gives pleasure today. Not all memorials are so happy nor so well conceived.

<sup>13</sup> This book is listed at ten dollars in the S. W. Moore pamphlet mentioned above.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to the writer from Miss Dorothy E. Smith of the Pioneers Museum, 9 June 1962.

<sup>15</sup> See also an unsigned review of the book in the *Literary world*, 19(12): 179. (9 June) 1888.

<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to enumerate the exact number of plants mentioned because specific references are interspersed with the most general terminology such as "pink roses" and "yellow daisies." Mrs. Jackson made no pretense of being a botanist. A part of the essay which purports to be a quotation from "an enthusiastic Cayon City botanist" is rather more scientific in tone.