

In the Great Steep's Garden



Poems by Elizabeth Madox Roberts
Pictures by Kenneth Bartley

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The Hill People.

Their steps are light and exceedingly fleet:
They pass me by in the hurrying street.

I pause to look at a window's show—
From the white-flecked alp the hill winds blow—

And all at once it has passed me there,
Lilting back to the land of the air,

Back to the land of the great white stills:
Is it only the wind that comes down from the hills?

Was it Pikes Peak Pixie or Cheyenne Shiee
That whispered a gay little rhyme to me?

Or a gnome that lives in the heart of a stone
And dances at dawn around Cameron's Cone?

Did the haunting laugh of the Maid of the Corn,
An Aztec memory trill on the morn?

Or soft did the Navajo Shell-Woman speak
As she passed with a hymn for the great white peak?

They touch me light with their finger tips
And lay little snatches of song on my lips,

And swift I am gone where the hill-streams flow,
Where the pit-lark soars and the gentians blow.

The tapers of blossoms flame under the tree
And the pilgrim road unfolds for me,

Lifting away where the hill-folk keep
The gardens and cloisters and shrines of the Steep.

In charmed ways my feet are set:
By what fair host is the palmer met

And borne away to the great white stills?
Is it only the wind that comes down from the hills?



Colorado Columbine

Aquilegia Canadensis (var. *monticola*)

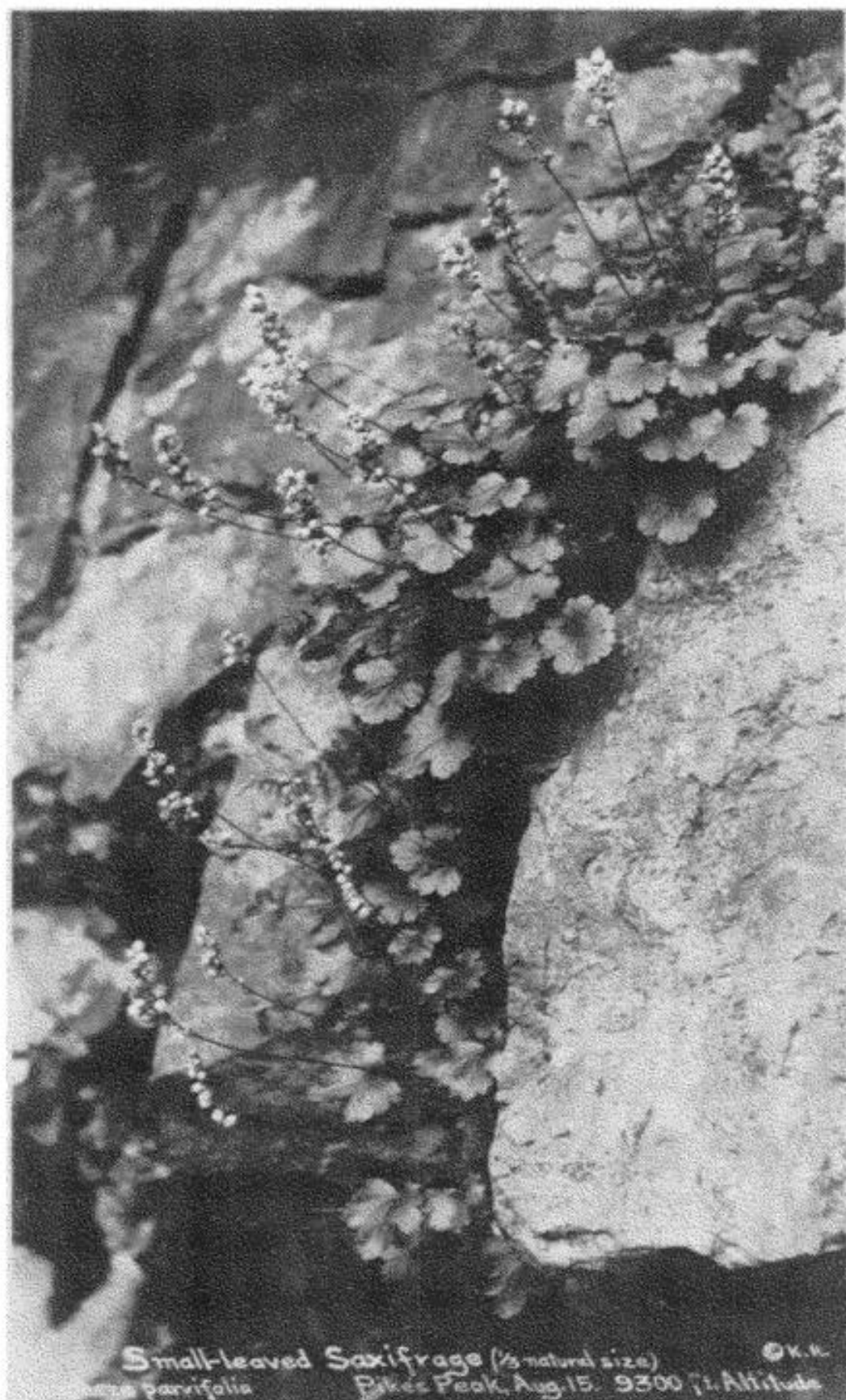
© K. V.
Cather Springs, June 27

Columbine in the Hills.

A carnival gladdens the hills in June,
And Columbine waltzes a gypsy tune;
Or deep in the pleasance, happily met,
She whirls with a gay little pirouette,
Where the long trees lean in a twilight trance,
Dreaming her over the seas to France.

Or quiet under the aspen's shade,
Misty-eyed little pensive maid,
Musing under the Great Steep's tree,
Is it for Pierrot?—where is he?

A flutter of petticoats, buff and blue,
Sashes and streamers and holiday tire,
Columbine trips her a measure for you,
Gayest heart of the waltzing choir.
Under the pines I saw her dance,
Lilting a gay little tune of France.



Small-leaved Saxifrage (1/3 natural size) © K. H.
Saxifraga parvifolia Pikes Peak, Aug. 15, 9300 ft. Altitude

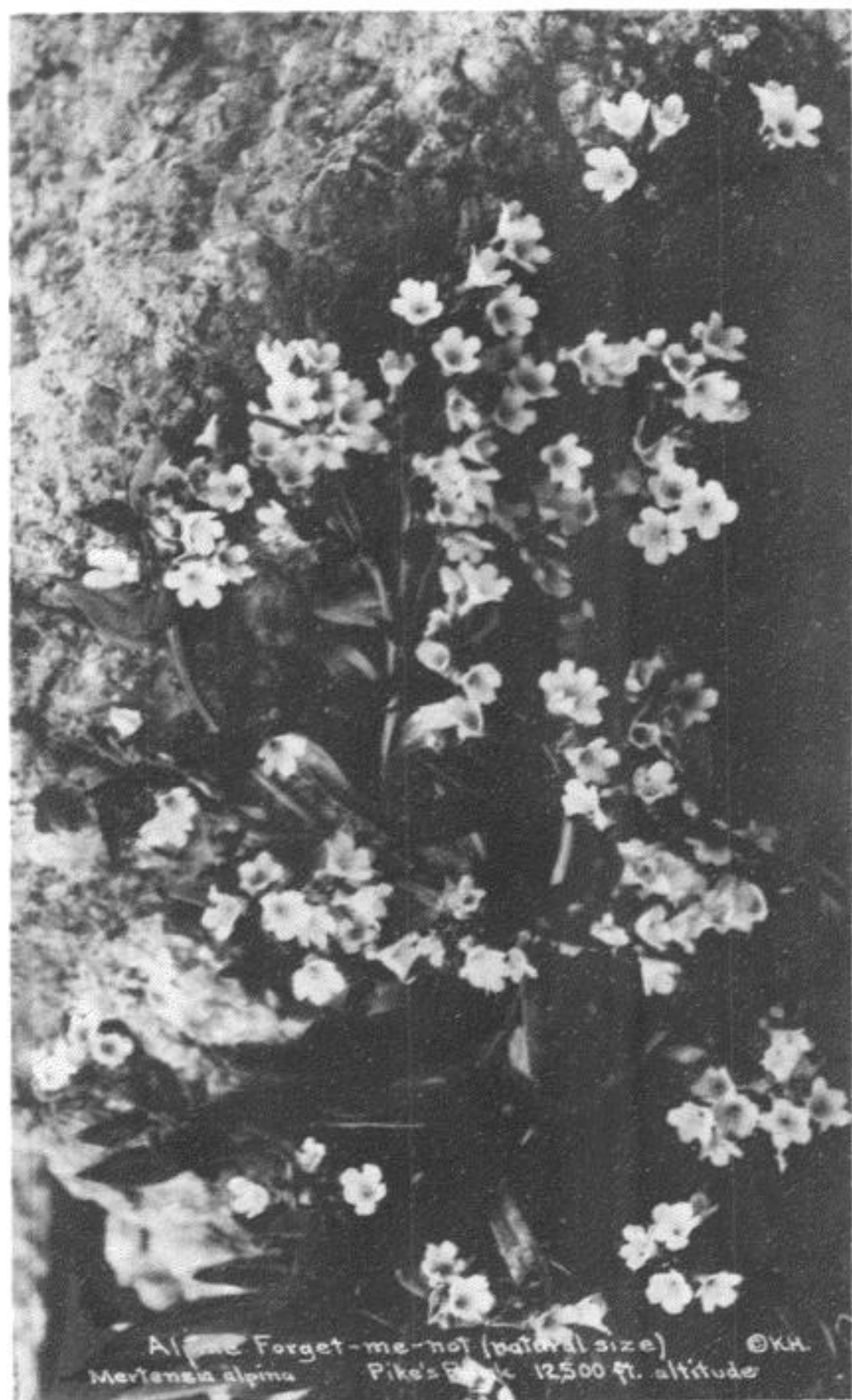
Saxifrage.

The wide, wide sky was a crystal clear,
A great blue dome that quivered near.

And oh, the white-flowered miracle grown
Out of the broad gray breast of a stone!

Little plant, did you guess that when I heard
You whisper your one sweet rune-telling word,

Straight into the crystal I could see,
And the Heart of the Sky leaned down to me?



Alpine Forget-me-not (natural size) ©KH.
Mertensia alpina Pike's Peak 12,500 ft. altitude

Alpine Forget-Me-Not.

Before earth's dawn hour thought to wane,
Where Paradise leaned over Iran's plain,
A man god looked from his templed fane
On a maiden wondrously fair:
He saw her first in the Cashmere's danks,
Singing at dawn by a river's banks,
Where the long grass leaned to her, ranks on ranks,
Forget-me-nots twined in her hair.

O night of sorrow in Cashmere's fen—
For a god may not wed with a maid of men—
Driven in wrath was the man god then
From the genii's holy mirth,
Till the river-maid's hand shall scatter and pour
The seeds of the little blue flowers she wore,
From the happy lintels of heaven's own door
To the uttermost ends of the earth.

The Great Steep's Garden is musked and fair:
Araby-sweet is the spice on the air:
Ah, softly tread, have gentle care,
Love's handmaid has passed this way,
Did the long miles fret or the red suns beat?
Did the great stones tear at her little white feet?
Did the storm winds harry with stinging sleet,
Or the mad seas bid her stay?

Ah, Allah is great; but Love is great
When the woman-heart needs make atoning and wait:
She has led him back to the crystal gate,—
Together they entered there.
The Great Steep's Garden is musked today:
The spices of Araby over it lay,
For Love's handmaiden has passed this way,
Forget-me-nots tressed in her hair.



Indian Paintbrush

1900

Indian Paint Brush.

Brave bold warrior, standing afar
On the summit place where the wind-torn pine
At the battle front of the timberline
Knows never an end of the harrowing war
Of Life on Death!—and there arrayed
In the trappings of battle and unafraid,
Painted and feathered in hostile design,
Indian chief on the marching line!



Arctic Gentian.

Beyond the reach of the timberline,
The long trail lifting, lifting,
Past wizened gardens of low gaunt pine,
Crouching out of the great storm's path:
The last tree flees from the arctic wrath,
But on is the white trail lifting.

Cities and rivers and fields beseem
A fantasy, fading, fading,
Lost away in the myth of a dream:
And the wide land reaches beyond our eyes,
A Navajo carpet of strange soft dyes:
Patterned with cities the great web lies,
Woven with fantasies, fading.

Rolls in the tide and the cloud waves toss,
The reach of the long land merging:
Where the still white surges part and cross
The quivering vistas seem to be
Of a lost land under the waves of a sea.
O summit flower, what strange waves toss
Below in the long, long surging!



Alpine Primrose.

Happy Heart coming home from the far, far hills,
How the primrose flamed in the arctic chills!
And you heard the flutes of the summit birds:
You will keep forever their sky-lost words,
Happy Heart coming home from the hills.