

# W. C. McCalla Collection Presented to University of Alberta

By Elizabeth Cruickshank, Regina

It has been said that there has not been much written about plants that one might compare with the writings about birds. But Dr. McCalla wrote one flower book of quality, of sheer beauty of expression, describing the **Wild Flowers of Western Canada**. Now out of print, it is a most prized volume on our bookshelf.

In McCalla's book every lovely characteristic of a plant received comment, anything strange was noted; but he did not pass over the ordinary virtues, the modest distinctions possessed. The common Marsh Ragwort he described as adding to the June landscape a veritable "field of the cloth of gold," the cobwebby hairs on the stems and leaves looking as if spun from clear glass. The white trumpets of Wild Morning Glory he saw holding wells of nectar. About every flower he wrote as a

scientist not emotionally dead to its history, problems and excellences.

Knowing how flowers are slaughtered, Dr. McCalla wrote about the Saskatchewan emblem, the Red Lily: "The wild flowers are the culmination of Nature's efforts applied to plant life through millions of years. They should be the heritage of mankind for all time but the choicest are in danger of disappearing. We have learned to hunt song-birds with field glass and camera instead of a gun. Let us learn to enjoy wild flowers where they grow. Each has a life story well worth reading."

Dr. McCalla's illustrations make us feel as well as see the exceptional loveliness of form or colour, the smoothness or the crimple of the leaf texture, the relation of the whole plant to its natural surroundings.

The hope of Dr. McCalla's life was that all might find in the contemplation of the manifold beauties and wonders of Nature fresh joy, quickened sympathy, and an enlarged outlook on life. These are the things that a study of botany gave to his life, and through having enriched his life they further inspired all who came under the spell of his personality and teachings.

Now the tangible evidence of more than 65 years of collecting, photographing and recording plants on this continent has become a gift to the University of Alberta which conferred on him the honorary doctor's degree. A collection of herbarium sheets numbering over 14,000, together with field note books and photo negatives, were this summer safely installed in the new Biological Sciences Building of the University of Alberta at Edmonton. Now his work, his labour of love, will go on enriching and helping future generations of students; while for him, to use one of his own quotations:

The flower that on the lonely hillside grows  
Expects me there when spring its bloom has given.

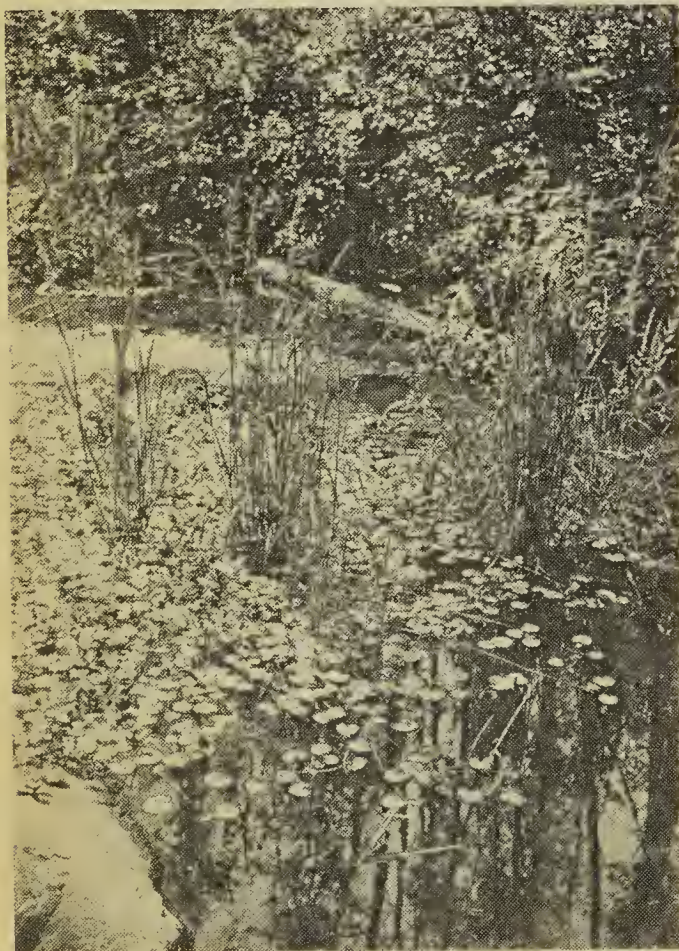


Photo by W. C. McCalla

A quiet pool on Dr. McCalla's farm near Edmonton with its rare colony of Floating Marsh Marigold (*Caltha natans* Pallas). This odd marsh marigold has stems and leaves that float, and from each node several thread-like roots reach for the bottom.