

## 18 · Apathy, Depression and Despair

*LITTLE BRIAR ROSE* IS A STORY told by the Brothers Grimm.<sup>1</sup> It was popularized by Walt Disney as the cartoon *Sleeping Beauty*. The story is well known: everybody remembers the princess who is cursed to prick her finger on a spindle, how the king ordered every spindle in the land to be burned, then the fateful day when the princess climbs a tower and sees an old woman busy spinning flax. Curious to try to spin herself, the princess no sooner touches the spindle than the magic decree of the thirteenth wise woman (in some versions a fairy, in others a wicked witch) is fulfilled and everyone in the palace falls into a deep sleep which lasts one hundred years. Around the castle a thick hedge of thorns grows up. The story of the sleeping princess 'Briar Rose' encourages many princes to attempt rescue but they die, impaled on the thorns. At last, one prince comes to the hedge and finding it in flower he succeeds in passing through. And when he kisses Briar Rose, of course, all reawaken; the couple marry and live happily ever after.

The story can be read in different ways and its symbolism disputed. Going up into a tower may indicate a higher level of consciousness. The act of spinning could symbolize thinking or mental awareness, but more especially making those connections which are the threads of meaning in life. A pricked finger might suggest menarche or intercourse to some, a loss of innocence, or an action which wounds, linked to the will—to be pricked by a spindle means this wilful action somehow breaks the thread of life. Falling asleep means gliding through life, taking it as it is, without any effort to improve things (Bach's indication for *Wild Rose*). The coming of the princes, impaled upon thorns, may show the repeated attempts to achieve reunification of the soul or self through the union of male and female. This is done over many lifetimes during the hundred years. The kiss which awakens Briar Rose leads to a deeper joy in life and rebirth in the lost kingdom of nature. All depends upon how the tale is interpreted. But there is a link here to the symbolism and gesture of the *Wild Rose*, which Dr Bach chose as remedy for those who become apathetic and allow their will to fall asleep.

*Wild Rose*



*Eglantina*

This association between Briar Rose and spinning is reinforced in a curious way by an engraving dating from 1847 by the French caricaturist J. J. Grandville (1803-1847). He illustrated a book, *Les Fleurs Animées*, with flowers in human form. The brief story accompanying the illustrations explains how flowers have tired of their settled life in nature and beg the Flower Fairy to allow them to experience human qualities. For thousands of years, say the flowers, we have supplied mankind with their themes of comparison, metaphors and language of poetry. In return 'men lend to us their virtues and their vices, their good and bad qualities, and it is time we had some experience of what these are'.<sup>2</sup> Eglantina, Wild Rose, will become a literary lady. But Grandville's illustration shows her in a moody pose, carrying carding combs, her

wrists bound by entwined stems, so that she either cannot, or does not wish to use them. Carding wool is a preliminary to spinning; both were undertaken as a matter of routine by women in traditional communities who would spin as they walked. So carding combs are symbolic of being occupied with productive work; spinning with the hands or spinning with the mind. 'Nothing is made without carding and spinning,' Eglantina seems to say, 'and I am tired of doing it. I can no longer be bothered!' She is a perfect picture of arrested process which characterizes the Wild Rose state:

*Those who without apparently sufficient reason become resigned to all that happens, and just glide through life, take it as it is, without any effort to improve things and find some joy. They have surrendered to the struggle of life without complaint.*<sup>3</sup>

Remember that this emotional state, as with others of the Second Nineteen, is the result of some life trauma or changed circumstances. The key words are resignation and surrender.

Wild Rose, *Rosa canina*, can be either white or rose pink: shades of both Clematis and Honeysuckle. And the same gesture is there in the stems which, although they start off energetically, thrusting up vertically,

when free of support curve over and turn back towards the earth (Clematis pages 47–8, Honeysuckle page 264). Roses put out new growth in August and September, at the end of the summer, and so leave it late in the year (like Gentian, page 128). These gracefully arching stems, fresh green and flexible, are an echo of spring. The thorns, which are a bright, flesh-pink when young, act as hooks, helping the plant to gain stability. This is important, because the long stems would otherwise be blown about by the wind, damaging the plant. When a person becomes ‘resigned to all that happens’ they are indeed blown as the wind wills, without structure or direction of their own. Hiding in the hedge, Wild Rose usually gains support from others.

The hooks or thorns are fiercely prominent and extremely sharp. Approach Wild Rose and you will never escape without a scratch; blood will be drawn. Here we see again the image of forceful stimulus found in Gorse (pages 146–7) which will jab at apathy and weak will. The thorns are curved downwards, shaped like a canine tooth (hence *Rosa canina*) and they share the tooth’s ripping and tearing disposition. In the converse of the Wild Rose state a person takes hold and will not let go; with terrier-like determination they keep working at a problem until it is solved. *Rosa canina* is also known as Dog Rose though it is also supposed that Dog derives from *dague*, Old French for dagger.<sup>4</sup> The sharpness of the prickles is followed by the jagged edge of the leaves. The surface of the leaf is smooth, without hairs to indicate sensitivity to the environment around.

The simple five-petalled flowers are the largest in the Bach range: up to fifty millimetres across. The central part of the flower is filled with golden-yellow stamens, a star burst of strength. The petals open as a flattened dish, as if to absorb all possible light, like a satellite receiver searching for signals and stimulus. While Rock Rose opens in a similar way, lying back to face the sun, Wild Rose faces out in all directions. The remedy is more concerned with activities of life on earth and human participation (or the lack of it). Compare the floral gesture of Wild Rose with that of Oak (page 154). Oak



Wild Rose





is powerfully-structured, with very small, hidden flowers; the emotional state is determined and represents a fully-engaged, even over-active will force. The same idea is expressed in the small flowers of Vervain. By contrast, the large, flamboyant rose with its loose plant structure illustrates lack of will and lack of clear determination. Dr Bach pointed towards this as he grouped Cerato, Clematis and Scleranthus opposite Honeysuckle and Wild Rose (page 280); all have the same unstructured form and a similar confused mentality.

Red rosehips contain high concentrations of vitamin c, important for strength and health. Those who suffer the Wild Rose lassitude and mental fatigue would find physical stimulus and refreshment from rosehip tea or syrup. Little hairs cushion the seeds within the hip and these provided playful children with itching powder<sup>5</sup> in the days before television eroded interest in the natural world. The irritant effect of these hairs echoes the prickling of the thorns. Like the stinging nettle (*Urtica urens*), Wild Rose stimulates a physical response. Indeed, there is a link between nettle and rose; both are markers of human settlement. In Scotland, where many crofters were dispossessed of their land and homes during the Highland Clearances, tumble-down ruins can still be found where people lived 150 years ago. They are marked by Wild Rose and nettles. Nettles grow wherever urine has fouled the ground and Wild Rose where human endeavour has been defeated by time and troubles (like Gorse).

Roses are said to be long-lived. At Hildesheim, near Hanover in Germany, there was and may still be a Wild Rose more than a thousand years old.<sup>6</sup> Time certainly plays a part in the nature of the plant: we can see this in germination. *Rosa canina* seeds have a low viability, often below thirty per cent, even in nursery conditions. There is little inclination to take up the opportunity of life. Tests have shown<sup>7</sup> a noticeable delay in germination until the second year, indicating a slow response, a lack of effort, delayed reaction. Two other plants in the Bach range share this feature of delayed germination: Hornbeam<sup>8</sup> and Mustard. Hornbeam, like Wild Rose, waits until the second spring before the seed breaks open and develops; both display a similar apathy and weariness. Mustard seeds

can wait, buried in the earth, for many years before they germinate. The Mustard emotional state develops through lack of interest in life and a will-less emptiness (accidie—ἀκηδία—acedia).

The key to understanding Mustard, as a Bach flower remedy, is given in an observation by Johns in his *Flowers of the Field*: 'a common weed in cornfields, sometimes springing up in profusion from recently disturbed ground, though previously unknown there'.<sup>9</sup> It is not uncommon for wild plants to appear suddenly but Mustard can swamp a field of corn with yellow flowers among the green stalks, like the red poppies which used to be seen in ripening wheat or barley—an unexpected invasion. It is like the sudden and unexplained onset of depression or despair which Bach described for this remedy:

*Those who are liable to times of gloom, or even despair, as though a cold dark cloud overshadowed them and hid the light and the joy of life. It may not be possible to give any reason or explanation for such attacks.*<sup>10</sup>

The farmer ploughs a field, plants seeds and, as they germinate and grow, weeds appear among the crop. These days such weeds are quickly eradicated, sprayed with chemicals as soon as they appear, but in the 1930s they were a common sight. Charlock, or wild Mustard as it is also known, was a real nuisance—'probably the most troublesome of all annual weeds of arable land'.<sup>11</sup> It competes for light and air by overgrowing other plants, more or less smothering them; harvests may be reduced by as much as fifty per cent.<sup>12</sup> It also takes nutrients from the soil and harbours pests like turnip fly and gall weevil.<sup>13</sup> No wonder farmers wanted to be rid of it.

Bach first saw Mustard growing in the Sotwell area in the early summer. He sent some of the flowers to The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, asking for identification (his letter dated May 12th 1935). They replied that the specimens were probably *Brassica (sinapis) arvensis* a flower which reaches full flowering in early June. ('June is the month in which ordinarily it is most abundant').<sup>14</sup> So his first sight was of weeds growing among the corn (like biblical tares) but not yet fully in flower. Perhaps he even had a conversation with the farmer and so learned about the unusual life cycle of *Sinapis arvensis*. Writing in 1852 about *The Weeds of Agriculture*, George Sinclair, gardener to the Duke of Bedford, commented:

*It is well known that the seeds of charlock, poppy and camomile, lie for ages in the bowels of the earth uninjured; and it is only when brought near the surface, that they can be made to vegetate, and then only under peculiar circumstances of the surface soil in which they lie. It has*

### Mustard

