

## 7 · The Last of the First Twelve

IF WE LOOK AT THE REMEDY PLANTS as individuals, observing their gesture in the same way as the gesture and personality of people, the structure of Bach's work and discoveries becomes clear. There are various different plants, growing in a variety of soils and circumstances. These reflect the variety of soul types which he described as his *Twelve Great Remedies*. These soul types, or soul lessons, characterize the opportunities that we have for learning and development in life on earth. According to the way the plant grows we can detect the qualities associated with it, and build a vocabulary based upon simple observations.

Water Violet grows, not just by the river, like Mimulus and Impatiens, but actually submerged in water. It is thought that life originated in water and later migrated to dry land.<sup>1</sup> But freshwater aquatic plants moved from the land back into water. It follows that such species are more highly evolved. As plant forms they have a longer ancestry of adaptation, reaching back through the geological ages of time. That Water Violet is such an 'old' plant is proved by its unusual and sophisticated system of avoiding self-fertilization. This is called heteromorphic incompatibility.<sup>2</sup> This leads us into the soul nature of Water Violet; a flower which appears simple but has a complex life history.

Water Violet is a member of the primrose family. The Latin name is *Hottonia palustris*: *Hottonia* after the Dutch botanist Petrus Hotton and *palustris* from the Latin for marsh or pond. All primroses have simple five-petalled flowers and like to live in damp ground, though Water Violet is the only one in Britain living entirely in the water. For much of the year it is submerged. Only in May and June do the stems rise clear of the water, straight and elegant, as they lift flowers into the sunlight. Bach wrote of the Water Violet soul type:

*These are very beautiful people in mind and often in body. They are gentle, quiet, very refined and cultured and yet are masters of their fate and lead their lives with a quiet determination and certainty.*<sup>3</sup>

This statement is apt as a description of the plant, too. For these are flowers which lead their lives with great precision, clarity and purpose.

*Water Violet*



Water Violet has always been relatively scarce, growing only in slow-moving but pure water, in ditches and ponds where it will not be disturbed. By nature it is fastidious and cannot abide any form of pollution. Perhaps it does not like competition and that is why it withdraws to water where it can spread out undisturbed. Certainly, Water Violet people will withdraw into their own space and do not like intrusion—like a cat, some say. But the withdrawal from land to a water habitat signals more than a desire for peace and solitude; it is symbol of the transition to a higher plane of being. These souls are older and wiser than the rest of us! This idea is conveyed succinctly in a commentary on medieval cosmology by E. M. W. Tillyard in *The Elizabethan World Picture*:

*Water is nobler than earth, the ruby than the topaz, gold than brass: the links in the chain [of Being] are there. Next there is existence and life, the vegetative class, where again the oak is nobler than the bramble.<sup>4</sup>*

While such ideas may not sit easily with contemporary scientific thinking, we know that Bach was familiar with them (his reference to combining the Four Elements shows that)<sup>5</sup> and they have a meaning based upon observation. Water Violet is a plant which has only the slightest contact with earth, living in water and pushing a stem to open flowers in the air. After Antony's death in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra recalls how:

*. . . his delights*

*Were dolphin-like; they show'd his back above*

*The element they lived in.<sup>6</sup>*

She is comparing Antony to the dolphin, king of the fishes, leaping out of the water into the air, since he too transcended his element and became thereby more than an ordinary mortal. Water Violet as a soul type has just such greatness and superiority. Bach calls Water Violet people 'great souls':<sup>7</sup>

*Very quiet people, who move about without noise, speak little, and then gently. Very independent, capable and self-reliant.<sup>8</sup>*

Remembering Chicory (page 102) and the way its root illustrates a connection to the past and to family, this context is precisely absent with Water Violet. Although it is a perennial it has only the frailest of roots—a few fine, white threads which dangle from the green stems. They only serve to absorb minerals for the plant and do not anchor it to the land: Water Violet has freedom. The leaves and stems are 'spongy', containing many air spaces which allow the plant to float, just below

the surface. The rosette of leaves, pinnatifid (deeply cut into segments), looks like a green star in the water, delicate and refined, yet somehow inspiring and exciting.

But interesting changes in behaviour occur as the water level drops, if the pool dries in July or August. The roots then play a more important part, anchoring the plant to the mud, keeping it alive by transmitting moisture. In these conditions, the leafy stems grow rapidly and spread outwards to prevent any other plant or seedling from obtaining light and space. Water Violets are capable of asserting themselves and will not tolerate interference from others. Equally, this is indicative of the growth and gain for Water Violet people if ever they fully involve themselves in the physical world. When the water rises again the rooted plant releases the individual stems and leaves through a process called 'stolon budding' and they float upwards to cover the available space.



Bach commented directly on this pattern of growth with unattached roots and freedom to float:

*If so, the beautiful Water Violet, which floats so freely on the surface of our clearest streams, will help you . . . to stand absolutely alone in the world, gaining the intense joy of complete freedom.<sup>9</sup>*

And later:

*They do not often form strong attachments even to those nearest them.<sup>10</sup>*

This may be the clearest indication yet that Bach was looking at the plants as a literal emblem of the soul condition.

What then is the soul condition for Water Violet types? What is the lesson they are here to learn? The soul difficulty is pride and aloofness; the lesson that of 'perfect service to mankind'.<sup>11</sup> Bach described it as a contrast between joy and grief. His point was this: these are souls who 'know their work in life and do it with a quiet, certain will'.<sup>12</sup> They have experience and know what this work brings—'have you had real losses, sad times and yet go quietly on?'<sup>13</sup> But it can also be inferred that these people come somewhat reluctantly into life. They know too well the vicissitudes of the world and have striven to leave them behind. But simple human duty obliges them to return to assist their fellows, to absorb the flood of grief and work with love to better life. It is the commitment to turn back and become involved in the world which leads to 'the intense joy of complete freedom':<sup>14</sup>

*Moreover that little plant will help you to the understanding that so much you think of in life as being cruel and sad, is truly for the good of those you pity.<sup>15</sup>*

The flowers are pale mauve, similar to the Impatiens mauve, and both are remedies for loneliness. With a yellow centre, the Water Violet flower points to self-knowledge and the calm assurance of an unemotional understanding. It has knowledge of life, a certain calm detachment. The stem is glabrous (smooth, without hairs) and there is a general lack of that responsive, emotional sensitivity found in Chicory (page 103) or Agrimony (page 95).



Water Violet is unusual in the structure of its flowering stems. The flowers are arranged in whorls around the stalk, like a coronet of lights that shine with soft intensity. Three, five or sometimes up to seven individual flowers open at the same time, while on the whorl above, the buds are still developing. There are six or seven rings of flowers, depending on the weather in May and June. One can tell at a glance what stage this plant has reached, reading from a clear calendar each stage of life development. This is in distinct contrast to plants like Chicory or Cerato where, looking at a photograph, it would be hard to say whether the flowers were the first or even the last of the season. In its structure, Water Violet demonstrates a clear and straightforward purpose in life.

Because of its dimorphic incompatibility Water Violet flowers do not always set seed. Dimorphic means 'two forms' and each form can only be fertilized by the other. It is a strange system, which ensures cross-pollination and therefore stronger progeny.<sup>16</sup> However, it reduces by fifty per cent the opportunity for an individual flower to form seeds. Being loners, we might think that Water Violet people, like the plants, are less likely to form relationships and have children. But, remember, there is always the standby of vegetative reproduction: as Water Violet grows it branches occasionally and then sections may break off and float away (stolon budding). Without the fixed attachment of a root, this allows for dispersal but not necessarily an increase in the volume of the population—there are more plants but they are smaller. It is anything but aggressive in its reproduction.

The seeds of Water Violet sink to the mud, germinate and then, secreting a bubble of air, the young plant rises back to the surface of the water.<sup>17</sup> So, even at the beginning, these seedlings move freely in

the water and do not take root. There is a picture here for Water Violet children. Quiet, self-sufficient, knowledgeable and showing a wisdom beyond their years, they are often independent of their family. It is not hard to imagine that such children, born into a family which fails to recognize and respect their need for privacy and solitude, might become deeply unhappy. There is much to be said for parents who allow their children to develop their own nature rather than imposing adult values and old family patterns of behaviour. Bach wrote of this on many occasions, stressing the need to avoid interfering with the individuality of one's offspring (*Free Thyself*, chapter one; *Heal Thyself*, chapter five). The privilege of a parent, he said, lies in 'enabling a soul to contact this world for the sake of evolution . . . every possible freedom should be given for unhampered development'.<sup>18</sup> Arbitrary control, emotional manipulation and falseness are particularly offensive to the Water Violet person.

Selfish parenting can be seen as a form of emotional pollution. It is paralleled in the outer world by physical pollution. This, as was said earlier, forces Water Violet into retreat so that it is now difficult to find. The



drainage dykes where Bach found it growing in Sussex have been changed by modern farming methods, as have the Somerset Levels. Writing in 1946, Geoffrey Grigson said we need not be surprised or alarmed by the changes taking place:

*There is less water on the face of Britain. Marshes have been drained, the vast amount of water taken for cities has lowered the permanent water-table. Roads and drains and ditches are better kept, so water hangs about less and runs off quicker into streams and rivers and into the sea.*<sup>19</sup>

Fifty years on we might not be so sanguine: the process of change has accelerated hugely and plants have been among the casualties. But perhaps the loss of flowers like *Scleranthus* and Water Violet merely reflects the soul qualities which are diminishing in our society.