

NATURE RAMBLINGS

by Frank Thone

BOTANY



Pokeberry

ALMOST all of our commonest weeds are foreigners; for it seems axiomatic that an ill weed thrives best away from its own home. But one American plant can claim the somewhat doubtful distinction of sometimes amounting to a troublesome weed on its native heath. This is the pokeberry, or pokeweed, also known simply as poke, and as scoke and garget.

Weed though it is, it is not without redeeming qualities. Prof. Liberty Hyde Bailey, who always has the right word when it comes to botanical description, calls it "a robust plant of heavy odor, but of good habit and clean." Right now, with summer flowers one by one folding up under the unrelenting drought, the pokeweed helps by gauging the corners with stiff bunches of berries so purple they are almost black.

Those same berries yield quantities of most amazingly purple juice, which children often make into ink for their own amusement and their mother's despair. They might do for a dye, but the color has never yet been fixed.

In earlier days, and to a certain extent still, the thick, asparagus-like shoots of the pokeweed furnished pot herbs. They were a trifle rank in taste unless taken in the very flush of their crisp infancy, but in the lack of asparagus would do all right. They were even cultivated once, but that has passed, too.

The roots of the plant are yellow and intensely bitter, yielding a violent purgative drug. Eaten by accident for horseradish, they have caused serious illness and even death. So that use is gone, too.

Robbed of all its possible occupations, is it any wonder that the pokeberry has become a vagabond and a weed?

Science News Letter, August 5, 1933

GENERAL SCIENCE

"Research Tithes" Would Insure Benefits of Science

IN THE REARRANGEMENTS being made in industry between capital, labor and the public under the National Industrial Recovery Act, there is opportunity for providing regular and ample support of scientific research out of which so many industries today have sprung.

The radio engineers have led the way by suggesting that a small percentage be set aside out of manufacturers' gross sales to provide for research and scientific study in the radio industry. A figure tentatively suggested is five per cent. but this may be too large.

A dollar or two out of every hundred, if planted in research for any industry, could be viewed as insurance for the industry, for the public and for civilization. We do not live in a static world. Progress must be made or retrogression will set in. Research is old-age insurance for industry, the elixir of everlasting youth that fulfills the strong claims made for it.

Where are the wagon makers of yesterday who did not experiment and manufacture automobiles?

Even if an industry is complacent, content with its processes and product, it is the duty of the public and the government to prevent stagnation and a freezing of the technical progress of the industry. If this argument of safety for

progress is not appealing, remember that competitors in other nations will not stay static.

Through the formation of NIRA codes for industry now in progress, a convenient mechanism exists for introducing these "research tithes." Along with minimum wage, hours-of-work, and other provisions, this equitable method of research support should be provided.

To the substantial, ethical manufacturer who desires to see his industry prosper, the research tithe will be a defense against the leech-like manufacturer who lives upon the technical advances of others. It would kill off the gyp manufacturers or force them to contribute to the art that they now benefit from but do not support.

Scientific research at present is a function of government through its departments and universities, of foundations established largely from the profits of industry, and of individual manufacturing concerns. Government by direct expenditures, small though they may be as compared with other costs of government, must continue to plant seed for future generations in pure research investigations that are one or more steps in advance of industrial research. Rich men should continue to implement financially foundations to carry on other pure researches.

Science News Letter, August 5, 1933

Holds your SNL in a grip of steel

Costs
50c
Post-
paid
in
U. S. A.

Here is a cover for your SCIENCE NEWS LETTER that is no bother at all! No holes to punch, no screws to tighten. Just snap it open, lay in your latest SCIENCE NEWS LETTER on top of the older ones, snap it closed. Two strong fingers of steel hold the copies firmly. Capacity, four months' issues. Cover color, black. Cover material, leather finished heavy bookbinder's bristol. Cost 50c, postpaid anywhere in U. S. A. \$1 elsewhere. Cash in advance. Send order and remittance to Librarian, SCIENCE NEWS LETTER, 21st and Constitution Avenue, Washington, D. C.