

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By Frank Thone



Columbine

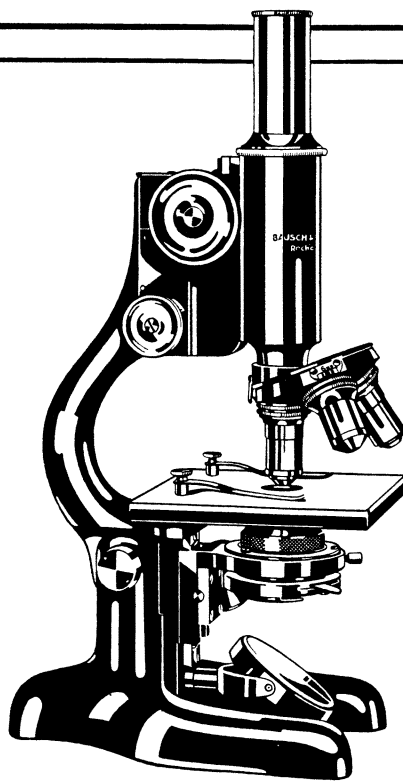
In the perennial debate, that never seems to approach a conclusion, as to what should be our national flower, the columbine has always had a solid body of staunch advocates. The chance resemblance of its name to Columbia, the poetic title given to the United States in the later eighteenth century, may have something to do with it. But more probably it is simply a matter of the recognition of the beauty of the graceful plant that in a number of species ranges over a very considerable portion of our country.

The commonest columbine of the eastern United States is the vivid orange-colored species sometimes called the Canada columbine. Not that it is peculiar to Canada, but that in old French days a good deal of the territory beyond the Alleghenies was considered a part of Canada. The Rocky Mountain long-spurred columbine is a magnificent blue, and the Yellowstone Park area boasts a species that is appropriately lemon-yellow.

The saltier-minded among our political commentators might point out a parallel between the somewhat inconsistent American temper, which alternates between truculence and pacifism, and the two mutually contradictory names of the columbine. For the Latin name of the plant is *Aquilegia*, which comes from the word meaning an eagle. The name was suggested by the claw-like cluster of the flower-spurs. And the common name, columbine, is also taken from the Latin, but refers to doves!

But to such scoffers it might be countered that the eagle's claws are tipped with beads of honey, and that this dove-named plant is very hardy and able to take care of itself in all wind and weather. It even thrives in dry places, though it prefers a reasonable amount of moisture.

Science News-Letter, June 14, 1930

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