Christmas Cheer.

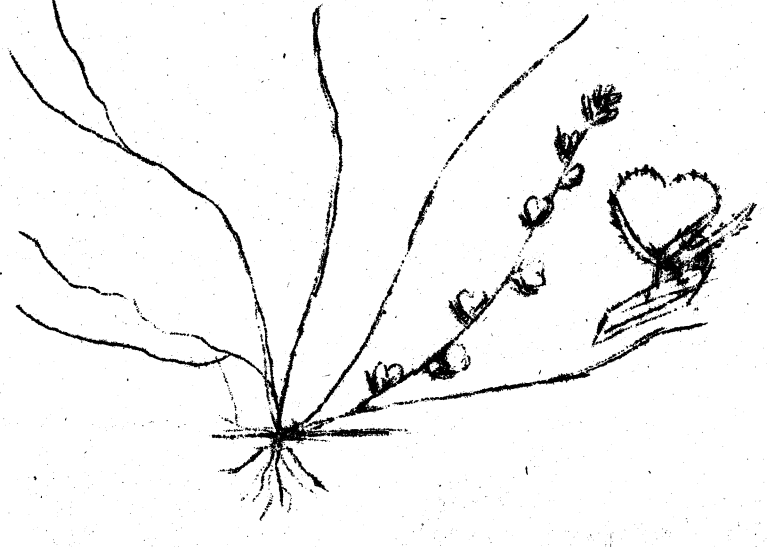
If you are to get any real satisfaction from the study of weeds, two things are essential - a hand lens and a flora. Now is the time of gifts, and if you want to make a gift to a botanical friend or put an idea in the heart of someone for yourself, here's your opportunity. Of course, a high class lens can be extremely expensive but you may get good ones for ordinary field work from 6/6 upwards. Generally speaking a X 10 will show you all the necessary details of small flowers, hairs, markings on seeds etc., that are requisite for identification. In addition you will be continually surprised and delighted at the sudden beauty springing to life in plant forms that unmagnified seem commonplace and uninteresting.

In addition to a lens, you must have a reference book of some sort. Unfortunately H.H. Allan's Naturalised Flora of New Zealand is unobtainable outside libraries. But luckily much help may be obtained from John Hutchinson's British Wild Flowers (Pelican Books, 2 volumes 6/6 each.) Over 800 plants are described and each is fully illustrated by the author's beautiful line drawings. Hutchinson does not include grasses in his book, but these are dealt with in another Pelican, Grasses by C.E. Hubbard - a profusely illustrated book of 428 pages (4/6).

Weeds In My Garden (Part 2)

The two Speedwells in my garden have merits as weeds,- they both branch loosely from tap roots and are readily removed.

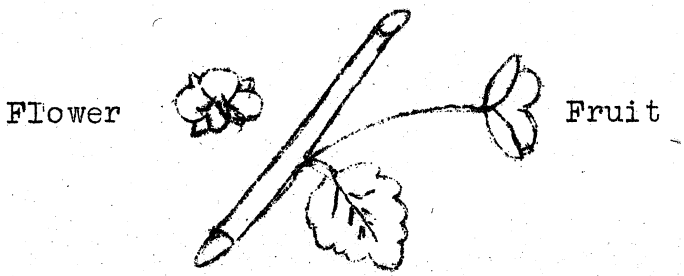
The smaller, the little Eurasian Wall Speedwell (Veronica arvensis L.) has spreading slightly hairy stems up to about 8 inches long, and tiny modest little almost stalkless flowers (blue or sometimes white) in leafy racemes that are sometimes the full length of the stem. The fruits are heart-shaped fringed with gland-tipped hairs.



V. arvensis

(Flowers resemble those of V. tournefortii, but are much smaller.)

Tourneforte's Speedwell (Veronica tournefortii Gmel.) is built on a larger scale. Its hairy spreading stems are up to a foot long, and its stalked flowers a bright blue. The fruit is heart-shaped notched and about twice as broad as long. It is very different from the small wall speedwell, but closely resembles the common field speedwell (Veronica agrestis L.) The latter, however, is smaller in all its parts, has whitish blue-veined flowers, its capsule is more deeply notched, scarcely broader than long with the two halves less spreading. (N.B. In some floras this species is referred to as V.buxbaumii Ten or V.persica Poir.)



In the last number of the News Letter I described the mouse-eared chickweed (Cerastium glommeratum Thuill.) Just now my garden is bespattered with its close relative the perennial mouse-eared chickweed (Cerastium caespitosum Gilib) The two plants are much alike, though C.glommeratum is of a rather darkish gray-green instead of being rather light yellowish-green like its brother. But an infallible "spotting point" is the chartaceous (papery) edge to the sepals. To the naked eye this appears as a white line, but seen under the lens its papery nature is obvious.



Sepal of C.glommeratum showing plain margin.



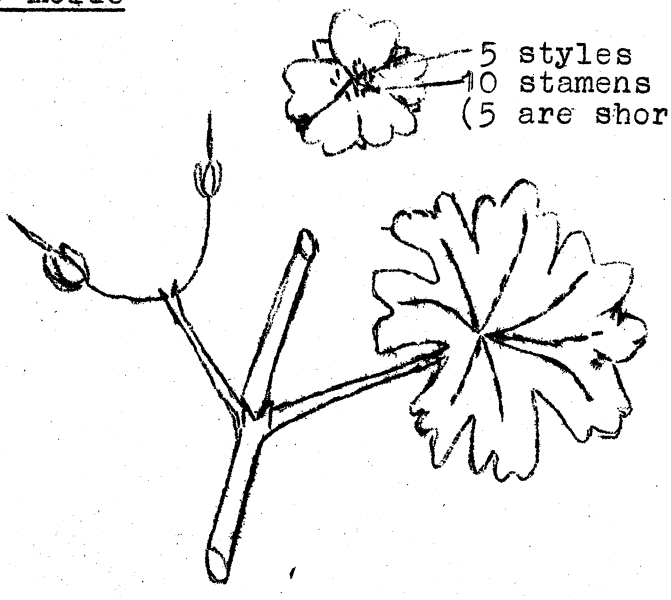
Sepal of C.caespitosum showing chartaceous (papery) margin.

You are not likely to mistake the little pink flowered Dove's Foot Cranebill (Geranium molle L.) for anything but a geranium. It is softly hairy and the spreading stems may be a foot or more long. The stalked flowers are in pairs opposite the leaves. Under the lens the carpels are seen to be transversely wrinkled.

The fruits of Geranium are most odd. The unripe fruit resembles a bird's beak hence the name Geranium from the Greek geranos a crane. The fruitlets at the bottom of the beak remain attached to it by a thin strip which eventually, when the fruit is ripe, jerk away

from the beak usually carrying the little fruits with them. The Dove's Foot Cranebill is unusual in that its fruits remain sedately in the original place.

G. molle



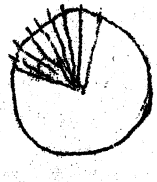


Fruit of Cut-leaved Crane's Bill (G. dissecttum L.)

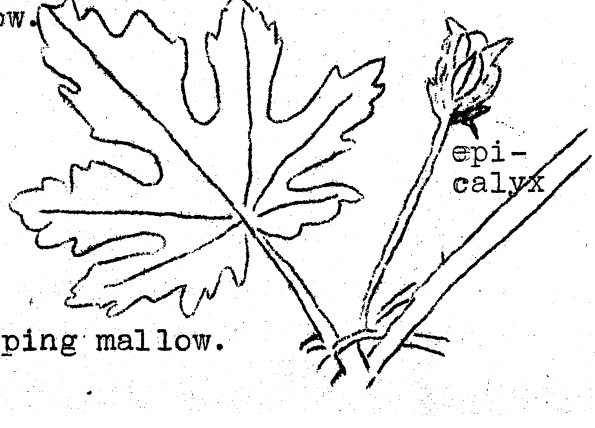
Other weeds that flourish in my garden are sometimes regarded as "some sort of geranium". Various species of mallow are apt to suggest geraniums, and in some cases there is a superficial resemblance in colour, flower and leaf. As a number of exceedingly common weeds are included in both families it is as well to get the obvious distinctions firmly in one's mind. In the mallow family the stalks of the stamens all unite to form a tube, which joins on to the petals. Also below the ordinary sepals some genera have leafy bracts known as an epi-calyx.



In the little creeping mallow (Modiola Caroliniana (L) Don.) which is thriving in my garden just now, the three little leafy bracts below the flower are readily seen. The creeping mallow is somewhat hairy. Its stems may be up to twenty inches long and its little red flowers are solitary in the axils of the leaves. The stamen tube is topped by many anthers, and the pistil may have twenty or so styles. The fruit is shaped like a small thick disc and has as many divisions as there are styles. The divisions are each provided with bristles, and it is the presence of thes bristles that marks this genus off from Malva which lacks them. It is the reason why it is sometimes known as the bristly mallow.



Fruit of M. Caroliniana Detail shows bristles.



Creeping mallow.