

QUARTERLY NEWS LETTER

Vol. 2, No. 2.

March 1945.

AUCKLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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Mt. Eden, Auckland, S.2.

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Members will be glad to know that the Society's gift to Mrs. Lucy Cranwell Smith has now safely arrived, and we are now able to publish her charming letter of thanks. Mrs. Smith is apparently remaining in Washington for sometime, so members could safely forward any letters to the address given. Needless to say, people far from their native land are always eager for letters.

"1128 South Wakefield Street,  
Arlington, Virginia.

January 5th, 1945.

The Hon. Secretary,  
Auckland Botanical Society,  
AUCKLAND, New Zealand.

Dear Mrs. Hynes,

My husband and I wish to convey to the President, committee and members of the Auckland Botanical Society our sincere and very warm thanks for their delightful gift to us. You could not have chosen anything more nostalgic for me, nor anything more calculated to make my heart swell with pride when I show these pictures to strangers. I have lacked just something of this kind with which to answer queries about New Zealand. I am so often asked, "Is it beautiful?" These pictures are now my answer.

I am wondering how the choice was made, and I suspect that someone had my old stamping-ground in mind when pictures of Piha and the Whangarei Heads were selected. My first introduction to Whangarei Heads was in the old "Clansman" days when I went to Whangarei to play a particularly muddy game of hockey. Soon after that I was a member of Professor Bartrum's parties, with very primitive headquarters at Urquhart's Bay. From those days Manaia and the Heads proper have always charmed me. I don't know how many times I have walked the shores, or climbed the heights, always with the hope that I might find Xeronema Callistemon among the many treasures there. Miss Katie Pickmere and Miss Lucy Moore would be with me. It is well when one can combine collecting with the contemplation of such beauty. While we were at the Heads we would look out to the Hen, the Chickens, Sail Rock, or up to the Poor Knights, and when we were out on any of these islands we would look back to the mainland with equal enjoyment.

I am glad I have looked on the face of our country so much: it is so very beautiful, and so varied. I have realised this more and more since coming here. Not that I wish to disparage this country, of course, but a sojourn of six months in central Florida, far from the sea, and with dark live oaks stretching to the horizon, teaches one the value of variety. Racing across country by train I saw very lovely country in Arizona. The Mountains were noble, the rock colours beautiful, the juniper and pinon trees gnarled and interesting, but there was no sea! There we were, far inland, but harking back to the sea. My husband thinks Arizona looks a little like New Zealand, if you can imagine the sea washing around the feet of the jagged ranges: perhaps we shall have to live in Arizona, in the end, if we cannot come back to New Zealand to live!

A young girl graduate from Minnesota, a botanist, was prepared to argue with me. She said that our country couldn't be prettier, as America has everything that New Zealand boasts. She was intelligent, and had read something about New Zealand. I could only smile when I thought how accessible our "beauty spots" are ... Remember the descent of the southern glaciers, from the peaks through flowering forests to the lakes and the sea in a few hours! Remember the view of Auckland harbour from the Museum, looking out to Te Moheau o Te Tamate Kapua and all the islands of the Gulf, right round to the double hump of Tamahunga or Mt. Hamilton on the

mainland! And remember the harbour itself from Waiatarua and from the top of Rangitoto! Or the grandeur of Wellington Harbour, for that matter...You can see all these things, but I remember them very gratefully.

There is an endless novelty for me here of course. In the months since I left you so abruptly I have seen something of California (just after a snowstorm which left the San Gabriel Mountains looking very lovely) the Santa Fe route, Chicago, Pennsylvania (so far the most prosperous state I have seen, well-farmed, with plenty of standing timber), Washington, New York, Maine (with the sweetest scented woods I have ever been in, as also the most vicious insects - hornets - that it has ever been my ill-luck to encounter!) and, as I said, a good deal of Florida, especially around Orlando, Kissimee, the headquarters of the famous St. John's river Tampa, Tarpon Springs (a Greek sponge-fishing settlement, where you can get Greek food and Greek resinated wine), Daytona, and points south on the Atlantic coast. I have certainly been lucky to see so much in wartime.

I cannot say how much I enjoyed the wildflowers in Florida. They were changing all the time. When we left, the various small purple and mauve asters were in full bloom over all the waste sandy soil, and as there are miles upon miles of this in Florida, the masses of flowers were very spectacular. Wet areas were always aglow with yellow, orange, white or blue flowers, while in the late summer Crotalaria Spectabilis was in magnificent bloom in the citrus groves, and along roads etc. I stated in an earlier letter that the use of cover crops didn't seem general, but apparently this Crotalaria is the chief plant used, it isn't evident at all in the spring and early summer. Hence the shining white sand, free from weeds, that I had remarked on earlier. This Crotalaria is sometimes grown for ornament in Auckland: I have seen it in a florist's shop in Customs Street West.

A number of species of Crotalaria or "Cowpea" have been tried in Florida for forage, as well as for cover-crops. Much of this work has been done at the University of Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, Gainesville, where, as you may remember, the first tung trees were grown in the United States. We had a hurried trip through Gainesville, but we saw very few Tung trees. Apparently there are some excellent groves there,

but the specimens we saw planted on private land beside the road were not usually especially lush in their growth.

To return to the Crotalaria...The handsome species mentioned above has proved very toxic to cattle, especially after feeding from it in late summer and autumn. It contains an alkaloid named monocrotaline, said to be similar to the alkaloids of species of Senecio, and one species of Erechtites. I wonder if Dr. Briggs has investigated any New Zealand species in this genera?...The experience in Florida has shown that cattle should not touch the green forage, hay, nor silage of this handsome plant. If this were not so, it could be planted freely on blowouts in West Coast dunes, for instance. Other species, as for instance, the less showy C. Intermedia, might be well worth trying.

This letter is already very long, so I shall not test your patience further. Please let me know however, if you would like me to make enquiries about other plants that might be of use in New Zealand. As a matter of reciprocity I should like to suggest that the "Poorman" orange be introduced here. All marmalade is made from sweet oranges, and advertised as "for the American palate" simply because there appear to be no bitter oranges here. English friends in the United States say they miss a bitter marmalade as I do. Our friends have not had marmalade in England for a long time, I imagine, as very few shipments of oranges of any kind have reached Britain.

With warmest greetings to all members of the Society,

Yours cordially,

LUCY GRANWELL SMITH. "

(Crotalaria is a large genus of 350 species, found in tropical or subtropical countries. It belongs to the Pea family (leguminosae) and its name comes from a Greek word meaning a rattle or castanet, an allusion to the rattling of the peas in the pod. C. juncea, an annual about 8 feet high, yields the Sunn-hemp or Madras hemp of India. The species noted by Mrs. Smith in the florist's shop is possibly Crotalaria laburnifolia, the "West Australian Bird Flower". This is an attractive shrub, about 6 feet high sometimes grown in Auckland Gardens. It makes rapid growth and bears spikes of greenish yellow flowers, which look for all the

world like small birds attached to the stem by the beaks! For this reason it is sometimes called the canary tree. It is somewhat straggling, requires rigid pruning, and likes a sheltered corner. Ed. )

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Members who are fortunate enough to either possess microscopes or have access to them, will be interested in Mrs. Smith's appeal for fresh or fossil diatoms. Diatoms are microscopic plants of extreme beauty. They are encased in exquisite "shells" of silica, and move through the water by squirting mucilage through minute perforations in the cell wall. Deposits of fossil diatoms are found in the vicinity of Auckland on the shores of Lake Takapuna, and used to be obtained from the neighbourhood of Cabbage Tree Swamp. They are whitish in colour and the "earth" forming them is powdery.

SPECIAL REQUEST FOR MATERIAL : DIATOMS: Dr. Paul S. Conger, Diatomist at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, is anxious to receive diatom material from New Zealand. He has large collections of Oamaru material, but he would like more from that area, if possible, or from any other fossil deposit. I believe he is already in contact with a Mr. Reid, an amateur diatomist in Christchurch, but but he has no other correspondents in New Zealand.

Dr. Conger tells me that he will welcome fossil or fresh material, and he will endeavour to send back identifications as soon as possible after receiving the packets. As there is some difficulty in sending things through the post (declarations etc.,) I suggest that those interested should make up packages giving localities, date, etc., and post them as one offering from the Auckland Botanical Society. Dr. Conger could then send all identifications to the Society, with separate notes to individual collectors, if they wished to have them. Dr. Conger has developed a wonderful technique in mounting specimens. He would probably send back some mounted material to those who are willing to study diatoms. Diatoms are certainly fascinating to study, and some group in the Society might well begin on the diatom flora of the Auckland district.