

UNWANTED IMMIGRANTS

Miss M. Crookes

The property which I now occupy was acquired by my family as a holiday retreat in 1928. It is to be found just at the lower end of the heavy bush in Mountain Road, Henderson. It will be seen that I have been able to follow the coming of unwanted botanical immigrants for a considerable time. I will now discuss some of the larger weeds. A weed already found on our arrival was the Himalayan honeysuckle, Leycesteria formosa. It is a small shrub about six feet high with hollow stems. It has leaves about four inches long with drooping tassel-like spikes of flowers, each whorl subtended by claret coloured leafy bracts. The ripe fruit is a dark red berry. I have not noticed it increasing to any extent, though a couple of shrubs have sprung up in my own property. It crops up on forest margins in both Islands.

A weed that has arrived since 1928 and now lines the road in places is the attractive Crocosmia aurea (commonly known as Montbretia). It belongs to the iris family and produces many flowers in panicles. They are a decorative orange-yellow with coppery tips. If weeds must come it is a satisfaction that they should be pleasant. A weed that was already here when we arrived is the charming blue periwinkle Vinca major. It formed a mass close to my entrance. It has somewhat shiny dark green leaves which form a pleasant background to the flowers. It is a trailing plant covering banks and roadsides. The clump has certainly enlarged since we came and it has started up on the other side of the road, but it does not increase to any considerable extent and the flowers do not seed themselves up the road.

A weed that has invaded the road fairly recently is the so-called "ginger". It is actually Hedychium gardnerianum. Hedychium comes from the Greek *hedys*, sweet and *chion*, snow. The flowers of H. coronarium, the species first discovered, were white and sweetly scented. H. gardnerianum is yellow with touches of crimson. The plant is large, from three to six feet high with leaves 8 - 18" long. The flower spike is about 14" long and very decorative. The individual flowers are really most curious and if you look at its yellow floral leaves you would probably say it had six petals, but you would be wrong for three of the petal-like leaves are actually staminodia. The functional stamen starts off as a tube enclosing the stem of the pistil (the style) only the tip of the pistil, the receptive part (the stigma) projects. The stamen now continues with a bright red filament ending in a bright red anther. The lower part of the flower is tubular with sepals at its base. The three genuine petals are narrow and not so decorative as the modified stamens. So you see it is necessary to examine the flower carefully in order to understand it.

Another Hedychium (H. flavescens) is also represented along the road. Its cluster of yellow flowers has rather the appearance of a *Canna* inflorescence. The flowers are yellow, sweetly scented and come out in the winter. It was originally planted in my property by the previous owner, and has now spread for a short distance both up and down the road on both sides but it does not distribute itself in separate clumps like the previous species.

Not surprisingly the daisy family (Compositae) is represented along the road. A weed without any redeeming feature is the fleabane (Erigeron canadensis). It has clusters of small flower heads consisting of flowers that are individually small and inconspicuous. Its foliage is rather scruffy. It grows to about three feet high and the erect stem is much branched above. The leaves are narrow and hairy, the upper ones are stalkless.

Of a very different type of Erigeron is E. karvinskianus (previously known as E. mucronatus), a small shrubby looking perennial about 18" high. It produces a fair number of small daisy-like flowers, some white and some pink. I first noticed a clump of it a few years ago near the gate of the entrance to the ranger's house. The following year there were three clumps, then more, and now it has spread itself all the way from the upper gate to a short distance from the entrance to the Fairy Falls track. It spreads by underground rhizomes. In its native haunts it ranges from Mexico to Panama.

Another pleasant member of the daisy family is the yarrow. I noticed it a few years back. There is a clump of it at the beginning of the heavy bush. It has extended itself a little but has not spread very far. The leaves are dissected, the flower is white. Allan describes it as having ray florets white to pink, but this clump only has white flowers so far.

A large and very aggressive weed, the pampas grass (Cortaderia atacamensis) has found its way into Mountain Road during the last year or two, and one can only hope that it will not spread unduly.

A weed I noticed with concern a few years back, the wandering Jew, Tradescantia fluminensis, formed a patch on one side of the road. This is a most unpleasant weed to have about, since as it spreads it will form a complete carpet, blanketing out whatever grows beneath it.

Several other common weeds have established themselves along the road. The oxeye daisy (Chrysanthemum leucanthemum) is well established along the roadside, while there are a few clumps of the beautiful arum lily (Zantedeschia aethiopica). It has formed one or two patches, but it does not seem to be an aggressive weed. It is not, by the way a member of the lily family, as you will see if you examine the flowers. These consist of a spike of very small flowers with the male flowers above and the female below. The whole is subtended by a beautiful creamy-white spathe (large bract). It is certainly a lovely inflorescence. I remember many years ago passing a considerable number of Japanese sailors evidently out on leave. They were returning to their ship, each one bearing an arum lily.

The plants mentioned do not exhaust the weeds found on the upper part of Mountain Road, but they are a good selection, and perhaps readers may like to look out for them on other roads in the Ranges.

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