

ABOUT POISON-IVY.

At this season of the year, when so many of our young folks are gathering wild flowers, ferns, berries, leaves and mosses in the woods and along the hedges, I cannot think of a more useful lesson in wood and field botany than that which teaches how to know and distinguish two of the most poisonous vegetable substances to be met with in the woods. I mean the poison-ivy, poison-oak, and mercury-vine, which are the common names for one and the same vine found climbing up the trunks of trees, on rail, board and stone fences, over rocks and bushes, in waste lands and meadows. In fact everywhere and anywhere it can secure a foot of ground, no matter how poor, or how much exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, this wretched vine prospers, happy and contented to spread out its poisonous arms hidden beneath its glossy and graceful foliage. In Fig. 1 is shown a close study from nature of a specimen growing at the sea side. When the ivy has a chance to climb up a tree or bush, up it goes, throwing out its aerial rootlets in all directions. But when growing away from any support, in the sand which is being constantly displaced by the strong ocean winds, it then grows stout, erect and bush-like. Under these peculiar circumstances of growth it has received the name of poison-oak, and was supposed by many botanists to be a separate variety, though in fact the poison-ivy and oak are one and the same thing. When the stem of the poison-ivy is wounded, a milky juice issues from the wound. The leaves after being separated from the vine, turn black when exposed to the air.

The stem of the vine is nearly smooth in texture; the aerial rootlets (Fig. 1, AAA), which start from all parts of the stem, are of a bright brown color when young. The masses of berries when unripe are of a light green color:

when ripe, of an ashen gray. Below the mass of this year's berries are generally to be found those of last year. The leaf has a smooth and somewhat shiny texture, and curves downward from the midrib. To many people the slightest contact with the leaves of the ivy will produce poisoning. I have known of instances where persons in passing masses of ivy-vine, particularly when the wind was blowing from the vine toward the passer-by, became severely poisoned. One of our most beautiful native vines, the so-called Virginia creeper, which frequently grows side by side with the ivy, is often mistaken for it, and blamed for the evil doings of its neighbor, and yet is so innocent and beautiful a vine that I have figured it in full fruit (Fig. 2). The Virginia creeper has a leaf consisting of five lobes, which are distinctly notched, and which curve upward from the midrib. Instead of aerial rootlets like the ivy, it has stout tendrils more or less twisted and curled, often assuming the form of a spiral spring. These tendrils are provided with a disk by means of which an attachment is made to any object within reach (see Fig. 2, B B.)

The stem has the appearance of being jointed. The berries are large and grape-like in the form of the cluster, and when ripe are of a deep blue color, with

heavy bloom. In the fall of the year the leaves turn to a deep red and brownish-red color.

The poison-sumac, swamp-sumac, or dogwood (Fig. 3) is ten times more severe in its poisoning qualities than the poison-ivy. It grows from six to ten feet in height, in low marshy grounds. The berries are smooth, white, or dun-colored, and in form and size closely resemble those of the ivy.

This sumac is terrible in its effects often causing temporary blindness. Some years ago it became the fashion to wear immense wreaths and bunches of artificial flowers inside and outside of ladies' bonnets. The flower-makers, being hard pressed for material, made use of dried grasses, seed-vessels, burrs, and catkins; these were painted, dyed, frosted and bronzed to make them attractive. I became greatly interested in the business and the ingenuity displayed, and spent much time examining the contents of milliners' windows. On one occasion when standing before a very fashionable milliner's window on Fourteenth Street, I was horror-stricken on discovering that an immense wreath of grayish berries which constituted the inside trimming of a bonnet, was composed entirely of the berries of the poison-sumac just as they had been gathered, not a particle of varnish, bronze, or other material coating them. The bonnet, when worn, would bring this entire mass

of villanous berries on the top and sides of the head, and a few of the sprays about the ears and on the forehead. Stepping into the store, I addressed the proprietress, and asked her if she knew that the bonnet was trimmed with the berries of one of the most poisonous shrubs known in the country. After staring at me in a sort of puzzled way, she informed me that I was mistaken; that she had received those flowers from Paris only a week ago.

"Madam," I replied, "there must be a mistake somewhere, for those are the berries of the poison-sumac, which does not grow in Europe."

She gave me one angry look, asked me to please attend to my own business, and swept away from me to the other end of the store.

A few days after this I read in the daily papers an account of the poisoning of a number of small girls employed in a French artificial flower manufactory in Greene Street. I at once guessed the cause. I visited the factory mentioned, introduced myself to the proprietor, told him what I knew about the poison berries—and was rudely requested to make myself scarce. After these two adventures I made up my mind to keep my botanical knowledge (poisonous though it might be) to myself.

When poisoned with ivy or sumac (they are all sumacs), if time and cooling medicines are taken, the poison will slowly exhaust itself; but it is a tedious and slow operation.—*Harper's Young People.*

THERE IS NO SOIL which, under proper tillage, may not be made a garden. So there is no heart or life, however barren, that may not, by cultivation under the inspiration of Christ, be made productive of every good word and work.



FIG. 1.—POISON-IVY.

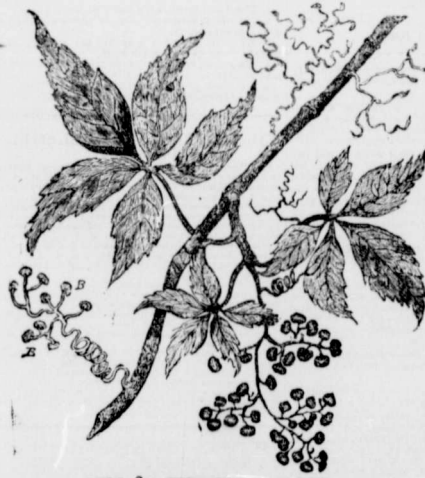


FIG. 2.—VIRGINIA CREEPER.

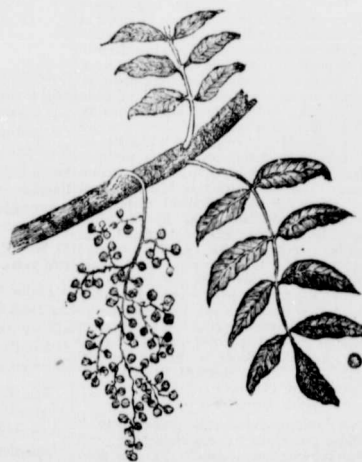


FIG. 3.—POISON-SUMAC.