What of New Zealand's own folk names? Unfortunately exploration and settlement came here later than systematic botany so that our native plants have all the foreign professors in Latin guise. There has been no time to develop such charming names as Texas "blue bonnets" or the Australian gum called "Nevergreen". Yet the wealth of Maori names continues to amaze and delight, so smooth sounding and observant; names by no means confined to trees and plants of importance to Maori economy. A Maori dictionary will spell out the meaning, and that is difficult enough for a South Islander, but what subtle implications, what fantasy, so difficult to convey in translation, lie hidden?

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TOADSTOOLS

This late-lasting autumn, with frequent rains in the foothills has brought beneath Notofagus solandri, var. cliffortoides, an unusual wealth of toadstools, more visible on a mown and mossy turf than on a covering of dead leaves, or among long grass. In clear autumn sunlight, a chestnut coloured one scattered thickly as if sown by a too generous hand, on its vivid green carpet has lasted until frost came.

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PERIWINKLE - A FIREBREAK - A SHEEPFOOD

R. Mason

Can periwinkle (Vinca major) act as an effective firebreak? Mr. Wilkinson asked, when I was looking at the railway reserve west of Chertsey, whether it was true that periwinkle made a good firebreak and whether the early Canterbury settlers, as said, always established it around homesteads for that reason. This was quite a new idea to me, but Dr. Lucy Moore has since said that she found when the fierce fires were raging on St. Andrews Hill and Mount Pleasant that a tall thick growth of periwinkle was looked on with a very favourable eye, although it was not put to the test. So the tradition may be fairly well known, though perhaps not recorded. Does anyone know whether there is a sound basis for the story?

In last year's journal I said that in the Prebbleton churchyard periwinkle was ignored entirely by sheep, even when grazing pressure was very heavy. Not so this winter. In July a dense patch of periwinkle, about 25 yards long by 5 wide and 4½ feet tall has been eaten down, leaving a foot length lying on the ground. Little leafage remains. The position is well sheltered from the south and the sheep concentrated there during the coldest spell, but it seems that neither a lack of other food nor the need to keep in shelter led to the eating of the periwinkle. The grass is by no means in poor condition and some young gorse is still untouched. It is not unusual for gorse to be grazed by sheep. Smaller, scattered, more exposed patches of periwinkle are also eaten down. Perhaps the exceptionally heavy frosts this winter have made the periwinkle more palatable.

OUT IN THE OPEN

At this season that dainty little annual, the Jersey fern, (Gymnogramma leptophylla) may be detected shyly peeping forth from crannies and crevices of dented rocks and cliffs by the sea; nowhere have I observed it more thriving than in a little bay in Akaroa harbour. There, a mountain rill sweeping down a small wooded ravine cleft a narrow opening to the rocky shore; on the sea facings just above high-water mark, this tiny fern flourished with the utmost luxuriance; its pigmy tufts crowded into thick pale green patches. These seem to follow a soak caused by a thread-like trickle that slid over slippery rock ledges drop by drop, encouraging and feeding moss growth. Scattered about were a few stunted ngaios (Myoporum) that offered some shade and shelter; these advantages the tiny annual appeared to neglect, as it displayed its tender unevenly-divided fronds to the full light of day. But the Jersey fern, the kindly visitor for a season, soon passes away after the spore-fall or seed cast; as though this lover of sea-girt rocks and beetling craggs satisfied with providing successors for the future, like a good fairy, departed for other shores, where barren sea cliffs needed the rare charm of its soft green foliage.

In this country the phenomena of life and death are portrayed with singular sharpness in the habit of that well known British plant, the Common Buckler (Male) fern (Lastrea filix-mas). Handsome and bold in the aspect of its outlines, vigorous of growth, its rich green lance-shaped fronds stand up rather stiffly some three feet or so above its tufted scaly crown, a grand ornament amongst the varied occupants of the hardy out-door fernery. Let Spring come fairly in, the tapering fronds but yesterday proudly erect, still deeply verdant, fall flat as though struck down by force, or bashed by heavy gusts of wind. Pluck or handle a frond, the leaflets may be found fresh and green, the numberless chaffy scales not to have lost their crispness, yet on a sudden call of nature, without fading or showing any of the gradual discolouration of decay, prone lie the fronds, disclosing the young growth knuckled and crowded, just appearing and rising from the thick bed of scales that so closely invest the crown.

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PHYMATODES DIVERSIFOLIUM

by John Thompson

I am seeking information on the reasons why the fern Phymatodes diversifolium is so variable in its production of fertile fronds. Neither Allen or Crookes and Dobby mention the fact that some colonies of P. diversifolium, bear fertile fronds while others consist entirely of barren fronds.