WHAT IS A WEED?1

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At the present time a great deal of interest centers in weeds, especially in the control of some of the most obnoxious ones. The question arises, therefore, what is a weed? Perhaps the question is more or less academic, since so far as the serious weeds are concerned at least, there is no dispute as to what they are and that they are serious weeds.

Agronomists should, however, be able to define their concepts as comprehensively and accurately as possible and hence it may not be out of place to renew the inquiry as to the proper definition of a weed. Is it possible to frame a definition at once inclusive and exclusive? The brief discussion herewith covers an attempt to analyze the definitions current or proposed; to point out in what particular they are unsatisfactory and to raise the question whether a better definition can be framed.

The late Dr. Beal, of blessed memory, was the one who offered the definition which has been pretty generally accepted. He said a weed was a plant out of place. While this definition has a great deal to recommend it, it has always seemed to the writer somewhat unsatisfactory. The term "weed" is an odious one and carries with it inevitably the idea of something evil, of something that does harm and should be destroyed. Dr. Beal's definition makes the matter depend on where the plant is found and according to that definition the same plant might at one time be a weed and at another, not a weed. Buckhorn, thistle, and crabgrass would, under this definition, be weeds when found in cultivated fields but when growing along the roadside or in waste places, they would not be weeds. On the other hand, red clover in a garden would be a weed. Except as a concept of the human mind no wild plant is out of place. It is merely a part of the general scheme of nature.

Dr. Beal's definition depends on the place where a plant is found, not upon any character inherent in the plant.

The writer has been very much interested in speculating on this point because in his own garden white clover, bluegrass, and the American elm make more trouble than any other plants. In this

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