Treasure Hunters Of Agriculture

Knowles A. Ryerson as told to Obed Stearns, in "Country Home," Sept, '31.

Men always have wanted more plants than they already had, and they never have been satisfied to raise only those plants which they found growing in their particular patches of soil. Thus they have picked up seeds or lifted up plants by the roots whever they have found them in their wanderings, and tried growing them whever they settled down.

Consider what would be the state of agriculture in America today if men had been content to grow only native plants. The only major crops would be corn, tobacco and possibly cotton; in the way of vegetables, nothing except sweet corn, squashes and beans. Some inferior varieties of rye and rice, a few berries, some native grapes, crab apples, native plums, pecans would be raised. Little else. No wheat: that was brought in from the Old World. No potatoes: those came from South America by way of Europe.

Although the Department of Agriculture had no explorers of it own until 1898, American in foreign lands, whether officials or private citizens, had their eyes open for possible plant introductions long before that time. In 1870, for instance, an American missionary in Brazil wrote to the department extolling the delicious oranges being grown in that country. A first shipment of trees was made, but they all died because of improper packing. They tried again, and at last got 12 trees in good condition, replanted them—and thereby started the Washington naval orange industry. The average annual value of this crop now is $35,000,000.

In order to understand what is now a regular system of exploration, let us suppose that you looked out in your back yard and saw a stranger, in queer foreign garb, down on his haunches, studying, with apparently fascinated interest, your radish plants. Just so strange and incomprehensible does the plant explorer often seem to the people in whose back yards he must seek out new plants for you to grow. For frequently he is likely to bring back a plant that is as common to those who are growing it as the radish is to you.

For example, in what remote wilderness do you think the late Frank N. Meyer discovered the wild Chinese peach tree? He found it in the garden of the German legation in Peking! It was so commonplace that nobody had ever thought of it before as being worth a second glance.

Meyer was perhaps the most colorful and certainly one of the most useful explorers who ever served the United States government. The greater part of his adult life was spent prowling around in the far, wild corners of the earth, seeking rare and strange plants.

His first work of importance was the introduction of Chinese persimmons in 1905. Studying them, he explored the provinces of Shantung, Shensi, Honan and Chekiang, finally succeeding in importing live scions from the Ming Tombs region northwest of Peking. If you are one of those persons who turn up their noses at Persimmons, you should try a Tamopan persimmon with a little cream for breakfast some day. This is the variety that Meyer brought in.

Turning next to peaches, Meyer here encountered his first real trouble, his first duel of wits with the Chinese. Up in the little village of Fei, in Shantung province, they grew an extremely large and luscious peach, often weighing as much as a pound. But Fei was the only place where these peaches grew, and the inhabitants therefore had a very comfortable and profitable monopoly in the Shantung market. So they didn't take at all kindly to Meyer's attempts to buy a few trees to take away with him.

He argued and pleaded. Finally a native grower offered to sell him his orchard. There seemed no other way to get trees. But when they reached this country, and were replanted and developed it was found that they were not the true Fei peaches after all! The natives won that skirmish, but the government is still after Fei peaches—and will get them in the end.

Such a casual discovery, for instance as a type of disease-resistant spinach, the seed of which Meyer picked up in Liaoyang, has repaid America many times over for sending him on his various expeditions. This spinach was crossed with another variety and the resulting type saved the disease-threatened spinach industry of Virginia and Maryland.

One could go on listing Meyer's introductions: the Chinese pistachio, which now grows luxuriantly in California; the Rosa xanthina, that hardy yellow bush rose which keeps many a New England garden gay when all else fails; the jujube, which gives farmers in the dry sections of the Southwest a fruit crop; and the Chinese chestnut, which is blight-resistant and gives promise of saving our chestnut industry from extinction.

Three times Meyer went out into the Orient. Twice he returned. On his third trip he had a nervous prostration. Although after a time he was able to go on with the search—the only thing in life that mattered—health had definitely gone out of him. Soon it would be time to go back to civilization, and the chances of his ever being able to return to his work were practically nil. He never came back. On the night of June 2, 1918, he disappeared from a little steamer on the Yangtze River.

Others carried on. Durum wheat ranks high in their list of introductions: several million acres are planted annually in different varieties; barleys from Asiatic Turkey and from Egypt are now grown to the extent of about 750,000 acres in regions where rainfall is low; from Russion comes the Swedish Select and Sixty-Day Oats now being grown to the extent of 4,000,000 and 5,000,000 acres, respectively. Acala cotton, found in Mexico, has been developed into a variety which is the foundation of the cotton industry of the Southwest; its annual production reaches a value of $50,000,000.

Of all the plants which reach this country comparatively few prove good enough, after thorough tests, to go to the trade. And the stories of the explorers who found them somewhere across the globe are, in all probability, lost.

But the explorer who achieves honor in the eyes of his fellow plantsmen is well rewarded, for he receives the Frank N. Meyer Medal, which is given for distinguished foreign-plant introduction work. One side of the medal is a reproduction of the white-barked Chinese pine and the jujube, two of Meyer's many introductions. On the other side is a reproduction of the bas-relief which Queen Hatshepset carved on the Temple of Luxor. Whoever receives that medal has, like Queen Hatshepset, given his country something more precious than gold and ebony: the lasting wealth of living plants.

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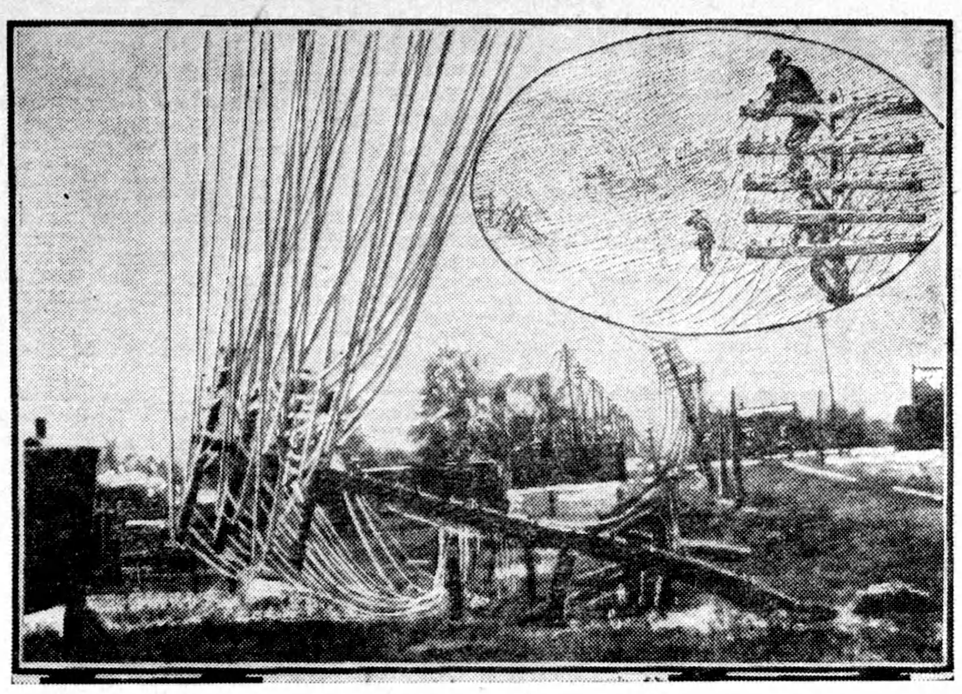

"Whew! What a gale. There will be trouble on the line tonight!" Lineman Taylor of the Bell Telephone staff was right—there was trouble and plenty of it, especially up around Pembroke when the icy blast from the Laurentians swept down across the Ottawa Valley giving warning to all that King Winter was again holding court.

All through the night and during the next day the forces of the Bell Telephone Company battled the storm which had covered the wires with ice and snapped telephone poles like pipe stems. True, by the following night many of the poles were still down but the service continued practically without interruption by means of emergency cable and the tangled wires and broken poles were rapidly being restored to their usual trim, serviceable appearance. Thousands of dollars worth of expensive equipment, and scores of skilled workmen, must be kept constantly available for just such emergencies in order that the universal service of the Bell Telephone Company may be available to all at all times.

Hospital for Sick Children

67 COLLEGE ST., TORONTO 2
(Mothercraft Centre, Toronto)
(Country Branch, Thistletown)

December, 1931.

Dear Mr. Editor:

Last year the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, through the generosity of friends in every line of publicity, was enabled to impress upon the parents of Ontario that any crippled or ailing child was equally entitled to the unexcelled service for which this Hospital is world famous. It was also mentioned that if the "Sick Kids" — as the Institution is affectionately called—were to look after more youngsters, it would need more money for their maintenance.

What happened in 1931 was that more children came to the Hospital, but also about $10,000 less money to maintain them. I spare you the statistics; but I cannot alter the fact that, if the Hospital for Sick Children were not a provincial charity, its debts would not be as burdensome as those under which it seems fated to enter 1932.

The Hospital's immediate neighborhood (Toronto and York County) has kept up close to its average subscription per patient. But outside that area there has been a sad drop. What should be done?

The Hospital for Sick Children is not a local concern. Its aim is that no Ontario youngster shall go handicapped through life either because of deformity or disease. That cannot be accomplished with a cash-box full of overdrafts. Yet that is the position to-day and it is not one which can everlastingly continue. So, Mr Editor, will you not invoke your readers to lend us a helping hand? Not one of them, I venture, could care to see the "Sick Kids" with a mortgage over their heads.

Faithfully yours,
IRVING E. ROBERTSON,
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

A Mender

You came to me world-worn and weary,
Rumpled and tattered of feather,
Whimpering and broken of spirit,
Crying to be put together.

I mended the place that was broken,
I smoothed you, and soothed you, and kissed you,
And when you were gone I was frantic.
Oh, Lad, if you knew how I missed you.

It seems I'm a fixer, a mender,
And when my poor patients are done
They flutter their wings at my window
And I give them back to the sun.

—P. S. McDonald, in the Chicago Tribune.

Photographs were recently taken at a depth of 900 feet below sea level by a research expedition working near Genoa.

Montreal—Miss Florence Stacey, Rev. Edward Hancox and Mrs. Hancox, three missionaries from the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec, who sailed on "Ascania" recently to take up missionary work in Liberia.

Threescore Years and Ten

Quick, Sir, help me up—and bring my cane!
'Tis cold tonight, but then I like it so.
I heard a sudden tapping on the pane;
Grey Winter's here again, and so I go
To meet him by some gaunt and leafless tree
Where we can whisper underneath our breath,
And once more jest at that pale Enemy
Whom you may know by sight—I speak of death.

Tonight the jaded year grows old with me;
I hear the fierce Hounds of the Wind give tongue—
Not as in Spring when Zephyr's melody
Recalls those far-off days when I was young—
But loud and wrathful, harbingers of snow,
And though 'tis cold tonight—I like it so.

Dallas Bache Pratt
—(From Horae Scholasticae, St. Paul's School)

A Whistle to Call the Child

A mother who had difficulty in making her little son hear her when she called him, while he was playing out of doors, now uses a whistle for the purpose. She finds that it is much easier to use the whistle than to shout at the top of her voice, also that it is far more effective. The sound carries further and the little chap enjoys being called in that novel way, and it is less personal.

ISSUE No. 50—'31

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Owl Laffs

Daddy—"Young lady, do you mean to tell me you've been carrying that money around in your stocking?"

Daughter—"Why, daddy, you told me to put it where it would draw interest."

Wife—"How do you like me in my new gown? I got it for a ridiculous price."

Hubby—"You mean you got it for an absurd figure."

Ain't science wonderful? One manufacturer asserts that his cigarette is the best because it's toasted and "heat purifies." Another manufacturer who makes a cigar claims it is the best because it has been given a "cold treatment." There you have it, and the public may take its choice and blow smoke either hot or cold.

New Lodger—"Can I have a private bath?"

Landlady—"Yes, sir. We have only one bath tub in the house, but everyone here takes his bath privately."

Willie — "Pop, do angels have pockets in their wings?"

Pop—"No, certainly they do not."

Willie—""Then where will I put my hanky?"

He—"What are all those men doing in a circle with their heads together? Is it a football team?"

She—"No, my dear, just a bunch of Scotchmen lighting a cigarette."

Old Stuff

Brown—"Why do you keep going to the doctor? He said it was no longer necessary."

Jessup—"I'm reading a continued story in one of his waiting room magazines."

Once there was a group of girls and the teacher told them to draw what they were going to be. One was going to be a milliner so she drew some hats; another was going to be a dressmaker so she drew some dresses, and the other did not draw anything. The teacher asked her why she did not draw anything, to which she replied: "I'm going to get married and I don't know how to draw that."

We always class the salesman who tries to sell stock that will make you rich, along with the bald headed druggist who sells hair tonic. We can't make ourselves happy by making others unhappy. Some men can't be kept down in the business world and some are like the flapper's stocking—they don't get very high. Courteous people usually are treated courteously. It's easy to make a husband good-tempered, unselfish, and polite. You do it by spanking him regularly, beginning at the age of three. Thrift is like spinach, good for you, but you must cultivate a taste for it.

Stranger — "Why aren't you in school, my little man?"

Child—"Hell, lady, I'm only four."

Unpaid Ad

If the person who stole the jar of alcohol out of my celler will keep same and return grandma's appendix, no questions will be asked.—Joe Bungstarter.

Common-Sense and Cleverness.

C. E. Lawrence in the Quarterly Review (London) — The inordinate confusion of affairs everywhere now manifest over the wide earth is the result of civilized man's passion for improving and arranging and of his infinite capacity for mismanagement, helped by the narrow rules, conventions, and fashions by which he lives, and his illimitable vanities, greeds, suspicions, frequent unscrupulousness and unspeakably silly ambitions. The mere cleverness, which, after material success, is the foremost idol worshipped in our temples of progress proves often a mere stupidity, and, being at best but shallow, is apt to leave consequences far worse than honest and simple common-sense would have brought. Be the causes what they may for the havoc of blunders in which civilization at present is lost, the world is in a mess so involved and sad that statesmen and so-called practical men, men of the world, are looking with strained attention and anxious eyes to a very doubtful horizon. For tomorrow there may be ruin, and the civilized world may have to re-make itself on simpler, nobler lines.

"I'm afraid there are fiery days ahead, but no people ever won its freedom with suffering."

—Mahatma Gandi.

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Rangoon's New Airport

The new Mingaladon airport in the suburbs of Rangoon is nearly completed. It has been designed a customs airport and is intended as a station on the Imperial Airways line between London and Australia. A brick-and-steel hangar measuring 130 feet in length, 100 feet in width and 24 feet in height is in course of erection. A second airport, at Bassein, will have a hangar. Landing fields are to be made available at Tavoy, Mergui and Victoria Point. A field at Akyab is available and has been used by Australian-bound fliers, the Department of Commerce reports.

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