

LATE LUTHER BURBANK WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THE GREATEST GARDENER OF ALL TIME

(By Adam the Gardener)
Luther Burbank was one of the greatest scientists of his age. He was the greatest man ever to bend her to his will.

When he died he had devoted fifty years of his life to the improvement of forms of plant life which could be helpful to mankind.

In those fifty years he had evolved new fruits, new flowers, new vegetables and vastly improved those which already existed. He had forced Nature to give more generously.

He cleared the deserts of America of their tantalising prickly-pear and replanted them with shrubs that provide food and drink.

They Sneered at Him

He performed miracles of horticulture. At first he was sneered at as a crank and a fool. In his early days he almost starved more than once.

Even when he had attained considerable fame for his botanical creations he was condemned from the pulpit in his own hearing, for working in direct opposition to the will of God. But Luther Burbank was a courageous man.

He was born in 1849 in a small town near Boston Mass., of English and Scottish stock. He was educated at the local academy, and then in his early 'teens went to work as an apprentice in the plough factory where his father worked.

Great Potato Discovery

By the time he was sixteen he had invented a method of woodworking which revolutionized the ideas in the factory.

But while he worked in the factory his heart was with the plants he played with in his leisure time. He was offered considerable money to stay and still further improve the plough factory's methods of production.

But his heart was not in the work. He refused, and went off with his mother to a farm in New England.

There he slaved away for seven or eight years, and by the time he was twenty-six he had evolved a new potato. It was a wonderful discovery.

He had noticed one day a potato which carried a little bunch of seeds. Potato plants seldom have seeds. He planted the seeds and found that one of them produced tubers of a size and whiteness until then undreamed of.

He persisted in his efforts to improve it year after year. At last he established the variety—the Burbank potato—and won for himself £25! His plant increased the annual value of America's potato crop by more than £5,000,000 within a few years.

This success encouraged him. He longed for a better climate. He sold his little stock of seeds and plants to a local seedsman, and with his aged mother went off to California.

There he found a little cottage where he installed his mother. He then secured fifteen acres of rich land.

In the glorious Californian climate his genius flowered. His only stock-in-trade consisted of ten of the most perfect potatoes he had grown in the east.

These potatoes established him in California. There had been endless trouble with potatoes there. His variety put an end to the trouble.

Improved the Blackberry.

Then he set his mind to the improvement of fruits which grew so easily in California. One of the first he tackled was the blackberry. The berry in America grows small and juiceless.

He not only improved its size, but he produced white berries, and then triumphed over all other experimenters with a blackberry bush bereft of every thorn.

Then he evolved a coreless apple. He invented a new variety of quince with a sweeter and more palatable flavor.

Then he turned his attention to plums. He worked every minute of the day. He covered his land with plants, at one time he grew 300,000 distinct varieties of plums in his efforts to produce a plum luscious and juicy but with a stone.

He had more than 50,000 peach and nectarine trees growing at once, and in his greatest season he carried on more than 100,000 graftings.

A Labor of Love

With all this work he had not added

much to his personal fortune. His methods were his own. He kept no records. He just worked for the love of it. But there is no doubt he would have been better known had he been more systematic.

With plums his success was fantastic. Within a few years of devoting his attention to plums he had produced one of his greatest marvels—a plus without a stone. This he had done by persistent blending of the small European plum with a big fleshy American plum.

He went further. He produced the "plumcot". It is a perfect merging of the plum and the apricot, and he made a great commercial success—for other people.

Probably his most spectacular demonstration of power over Nature was the evolution of a plant that bore peaches with almond nuts in their centres in place of the ordinary stone—two fruits in one.

This miracle he performed again when he made tomatoes grow on the same plant as potatoes.

Prickly Pear Magic

Then came perhaps the greatest triumph of his amazing career. In the United States there are one million square miles of desert. The only plant that grew on these deserts with any real nutriment in its composition was the prickly pear.

It is a species of cactus. The stems and the fruit contain both water and food, but are covered with innumerable protecting pikes.

If cattle starved in the long dry summer months attempt to eat it they inevitably die from the lacerations caused by these spikes.

When Burbank took the cactus in hand very few cattle were able to graze the big deserts because of the sparsity of the food. With a hundred problems solved already, Burbank set about making the desert of use to his country.

For years he worked and experimented. He grew tens of thousands of cactus plants in his nursery, and after years of labor he found one morning a plant among those he had grown with all the juice and nutriment of the prickly pear, but without one of its pikes.

Its surface was smooth and velvety, and it was even a better fruit than the desert plant from which he had grown it. Their came the problem of establishing it as a plant that would not drift back in Nature's pet way, always becoming worse and worse.

A year or so after he had first seen this magic plant he had established it firmly. He had grown hundreds of other plants from it, and never once did the hated spike make its appearance.

Today thousands of cattle graze the deserts where formerly they went to die. When the heart of the dry summer burns up the grass they feed on the luscious cactus invented by Luther Burbank, and grow sleek and fat where once they starved.

His Help to Humanity

This was the greatest triumph of his life. Not long afterwards the Carnegie Institution in Washington awarded him a sum of \$2,000 a year for ten years, to enable him to carry on his priceless experiments without having to make a living for himself by the sale of his seeds.

For Burbank was very little richer after twenty-five years' hard work than he had been when he started, though in that time he had helped humanity in the most permanent way possible.

Still he went on to the day of his death, increasing the debt owed him by the world.

He used no laboratories, no scientific apparatus. The earth was his workshop and there, backed by infinite patience, vast knowledge, and a marvellous intuition, he discovered the secrets of nature and made her share them with him.

He coaxed and persuaded the most recalcitrant plants to become the most famous horticulturist the world had ever known.

All the Year Rhubarb

He turned the California poppy from gold to red. He made rhubarb grow the whole year round. Then he brought out a "superwheat" contain-

UNLIKE MEN, BIRDS ARE SAID TO BE LITTLE AFFECTED BY THEIR ENVIRONMENT

(By Bob Davis)

Key Largo, Florida—Among the angler maniacs gathered here to fight fins on the Gulf stream, which flows serenely past the entrance of Sail Fish channel, just around the corner from the All-year-round club quarters, is John Kieran, who gives brilliance to sports in the New York Times.

Comparatively few of his myriad readers are aware, however, that John stands high among the nation's ornithologists and foresters.

Here at Key Largo, with no intention of intruding upon his privacy, while wandering for my own account through the woodland depths, I found him seated in the shade, his back against a mangrove tree, a pair of high-powered opera glasses glued to his eyes, studying the bird life of the Florida forest.

"There is no turnstile to this show," said he as I walked into his line of vision, "sit down. No reserved seats, umpires or referees. We are the whole audience and no ushers may interfere with us."

For an hour or more I sat at the feet of Kieran and took a course in the study of birds. A phoebe, a sparrowhawk, a pair of finches and a boisterous blue jay put on more or less an exhibition and left for parts unknown with little ceremony, each in turn receiving what was equivalent to a paragraph from Kieran's stock of bird lore and furthermore, valuable particulars concerning the trees.

"Are Birds like human beings?" I asked the sportswriter-naturalist.

"All living things have points of resemblance," he said, "but in some particulars individuals asserts itself. A case in point: If an infant American child is brought up by a foreigner, that child speaks the tongue of the adopter, manifesting similar mannerisms and tendencies. But in the case of the cowbird, which lays a single egg, let us say in the nest of the yellow warbler, allows its offspring to be hatched, fed and brought up by a foreigner, with no fear that it will contract any of the habits of the foster parent. When the egg is hatched the cowbird fledgling hogs all the food brought in by the warblers; fattens, kicks the warbler infants off the premises and is never anything other than a cowbird while life lasts. It neither speaks the warbler language nor sings their songs. Not so with the human race. We are affected by externals, contracts, diet and relationships. But birds as a rule maintain their racial pride and characteristics."

We drifted into a discussion of the songs of birds. I remarked that the woodcock, most toothsome of all the feathered tribe, is the worst singer, his vocal range consisting of a discordant squawk at the moment of rising for a getaway. Kieran actually bristled.

"That statement is a malicious libel," he exclaimed, lifting for the moment a voice habitually soft. "Despite his long bill, his predilection for the exclusive life and the fact that he is an insect eater, the nuptial song of the male woodcock puts him in a class with the nightingale."

"When does he fling his intoxicating solo?" I asked.

"As the shades of evening fall," replied Kieran, "the courting bird begins to plume himself for an expression of his sentimental mood, selecting an open space in the swale, not too far from the object of his serenading. At the approach of darkness he rises from the earth, spirals upward in the gloom and sings a few opening bars."

"Harmonious, definite notes?" I asked.

ing 14 per cent of gluten just in the last year of the war when the world was shouting aloud for food.

One of his great rivals, a famous Dutch horticulturist, said of him:

"It is almost impossible to over-estimate the greatness of the benefit Burbank will have conferred on mankind."

Yet at least on one occasion his success was the cause of his failure. He dealt with the hardshelled walnut. He softened the shell until it could be peeled off like paper.

Then Nature protested. The birds attacked the nuts, and Burbank had to retrace his steps and once more harden the shell.

"Not exactly; but something in the nature of a tinkling roulade, increasingly deep in volume and range as he soars into the shadows. Once awing, moving with the indecision of a moth, but ever ascending, he flutters onward with the high purpose of reaching a

crest where he releases his melody. both athletic and musical. each stanza His song has the tempo of a water-fall spilled from space; a cataract of symphonic beauty progressing until the somber shadows reverberate with the nuptial message, repeated again and again, the serenader overpowered by the ecstasy of his declaration."

"Does the soloist respond to echoes?" I asked.

"Up to midnight," replied Kieran "or just so long as the female bird pipes her single note of appreciation. Taken as a whole, the performance is

John Kieran led me back to the Key Largo club and rigged himself up for a sail-fishing expedition on the restless Gulf stream. Many men have many moods.

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