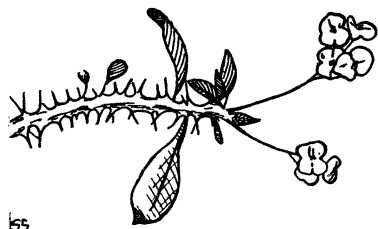


BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



Two Yuletide Flowers

There is a very pretty Christmas legend, connected with the story of the Holy Grail; it is better known in England than it is in this country. The story is, that Joseph of Armithea, the friend of Jesus who buried him after the crucifixion, left the Holy Land and went to England, taking with him the cup used at the Last Supper. He stopped at Glastonbury, the tale relates, and thrust his thorny staff into the ground, and the staff there took root and became green. It is still there, at Glastonbury Cathedral, and sometimes at Christmas it bears flowers as red as drops of blood.

There is a plant at Glastonbury, whether Joseph brought it there or not, and there are others like it in many places, that answer this description nicely. It is known technically as *Euphorbia splendens*, or the "splendid Euphorbia," and is related closely to that other well-known Christmas flower, the Poinsettia. Its angular, thorny stem is hardly strong enough to form a staff; but since it is a desert plant a piece of it could be thrust into the ground and caused to strike root and grow after it had been carried about for weeks. It bears few leaves, but its flowers range from coral-pink to a bright blood red.

The poinsettia is a botanical relative of the Christmas thorn. It was first introduced into American cultivation ninety years ago by a gentleman of the Old South, a Doctor Poinsett of Charleston; but it was the more hustling new State of California that was largely instrumental in popularizing this bright tough exotic plant as a Yuletide decoration. Now the poinsettia is found quite as frequently in our holiday windows as is the holly, and its bright flowers flame from our Christmas and New Year cards along with the waxy berries of the mistletoe.

The poinsettia is a botanical paradox. It is not a flower, but rather a red collar around a whole bunch of flowers. The odd little nubbiny objects at the center, greenish yellow with perhaps a touch of red here and there on them, are the real flowers,

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PSYCHOLOGY

Parents and Personalities

Painfully timid persons and "reds" may alike comfortably lay part of the blame for their personalities upon their parents. The chances are that these characteristics were developed in them at an early age by treatment received at home. The necessity that parents watch their step is stressed by Dr. Phyllis Blanchard, psychologist at the All-Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic.

The emotions of fear, anger, and love come early in the child's experience and in their modification lies the beginning of character molding. "If some one reaction is continually evoked," she said, "it is likely to crystallize into an habitual reaction and to color the attitude toward other individuals in the wider social group outside the home."

Thus if a child has been given cause a number of times to fear a parent, he will develop a timid, fearful attitude toward the world in general. In the same way, repeated unjust treatment at the hands of his parents will produce in the child a rage reaction that leads him to become suspicious of all mankind. He may become a "red," resistive to all rules and regulations of organized society.

A child that has predominantly experienced love at home will greet the world with confidence and trust, making friends easily. This does not mean, however, that parents should "spare the rod and spoil the child." Love, like fear and anger, can be overdone as a stimulant to personality traits.

The natural imitativeness of children is another cause for care on the part of the parents. Chronic discontent or cheerfulness will be aped with equal readiness.

Science News-Letter, January 1, 1927

ANTHROPOLOGY

Dolls Were Once Gods

The family tree of the modern doll sprouted back in the Stone Age, when cave men carved out the first little rounded image. The doll's ancestry from this beginning is explained by Dr. Walter Hough, curator of anthropology at the National Museum.

Contrary to popular belief, children among primitive peoples are not normally found to have dolls as playthings. This surprising lack of one of the commonest and simplest of toys he explained on the ground the primitive people first made images as religious and magic objects, to be used

by medicine men and sorcerers in their rites.

"An object set apart by some incantation and made to contain more fully the unseen power of the essence of nature is dangerous, not to be seen or touched except by the initiated," says Dr. Hough. "When these ideas are current among lower races, no one would allow a child to possess any image of human or animal form, as such things are forbidden or tabooed under heavy penalty, and the children must amuse themselves in other ways."

As tribes progressed to higher culture some began to look upon images, not as spirit-inhabited fetishes under the control of their possessors, but as beings with higher attributes, more powerful than their creators, who must supplicate and appease them.

The images at this stage come to be regarded as containing or representing the spirit of ancestors, and in the course of time these ancestors become deities. The deities rise, flourish, and decay and others take their place. The cherished deities of former times are thus shorn of their power and the gods at this stage are very near to becoming dolls, for the children to handle with childish disrespect.

In view of this evolutionary background, the "free use of dolls is evidence of the submergence of superstition and an advance to higher culture with the consequent broadening of religious ideas."

Science News-Letter, January 1, 1927

ASTRONOMY

Harvard Observatory Moves

The work of the Boyden Station of the Harvard College Observatory at Arequipa, Peru, established thirty-eight years ago to study stars in the southern hemisphere of the heavens, invisible from northern latitudes, will soon come to an end, when the equipment will be moved to South Africa, according to Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the observatory.

The new Harvard station will be the third from an American university to be established in South Africa since 1924. Last year, Dr. Frank Schlesinger, of the Yale University Observatory, installed a large telescope at Johannesburg for the measurement of distances of some of the southern stars. A large telescope belonging to the University of Michigan is now being installed at Blomfontein for the study of double stars. Still other American observatories are said to be considering the establishment of South African stations.

Science News-Letter, January 1, 1927