

BOTANY

Isolated Plants Reveal Story Of Post-Glacial Period

PATIENT plants, that have waited a hundred thousand years or more to tell us what the landscape was like when the ice of the glacial age passed away, were discussed by a group of botanists at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Cleveland.

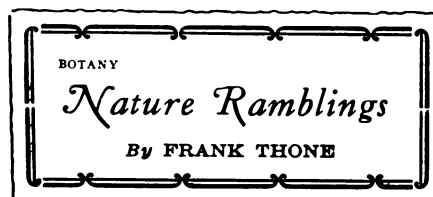
Far-flung across the upper Mississippi valley, all the way from Pennsylvania to Kansas, there are nooks and corners sheltering relicts of the vegetation that once covered the land during the chill, stormy summers that slowly forced the age-old ice front back. There are hundreds of miles south of the main armies of their own kin, colonies of such northern things as white pine, Canadian yew, balsam fir, white spruce, Arctic primrose, harebell and bearberry. They grow in bogs and swamps, in deep protected ravines, on high limestone cliffs and in other places from which the main plant population, that has come in since the

end of the Ice Age, has not yet been able to crowd them. Some of them, however, are plainly on the downhill road.

Buried in the peaty muck of the vanishing bog lakes are preserved remains of their actual ancestors, that died in the struggle against the stubbornly retreating ice and were buried in the silts released by its flood-waters. Studies of such plant communities can tell us much about what our land was like while our own ancestors wore skin clothes and fought with stone weapons somewhere in the still unknown interior of Asia.

Among the participants in the program were Dr. A. Hollick, of the New York Botanical Garden; Prof. P. B. Sears, of the University of Oklahoma; Prof. O. E. Jennings, of the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh; Dr. E. Lucy Braun, of the University of Cincinnati; and Dr. Winona H. Welch, of DePauw University.

Science News Letter, January 10, 1931



Geraniums

AS WINTER takes solid hold upon the land, and there is less and less to see in the woods, we begin to take refuge and consolation in potted plants indoors. For man is, by some old memory, a creature of semi-tropical woodlands and never feels at home in the temporary Arctic he has to endure every year in high latitudes. So he builds little bowers to keep his soul alive until spring.

Of all potted plants, the red geranium is the staple, the standby, the one thing that a housewife will have if she lacks all other houseplants. It is handed down from mother to daughter through generations, it is passed along from neighbor to neighbor through whole streets, it is multiplied into dozens by "slips" stuck into a bottle of water.

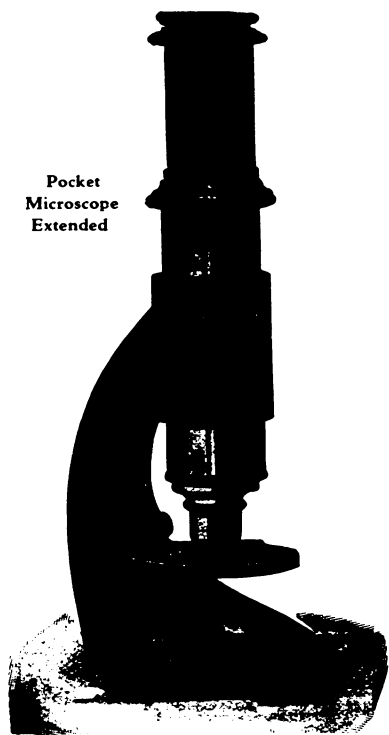
The geranium is well adapted to the hard life a potted plant has to live in the average modern house or apartment. It has to get along with intermittent waterings and yet keep its water-supported life going in an atmosphere almost as dry as the Sahara. It can do this because it is a plant of semi-arid habitat to begin with. It has a thick, succulent stem that serves as a water reservoir, and can keep the plant alive even if drought causes the leaves to wither and drop off. And its vitality is so high that even after a drought of this kind it will break crazily into bloom as soon as you give it a cupful of water.

Cheap if you like, plebeian if you choose to call it so, the red geranium has its own good place in the world and fills it praiseworthy and well.

Science News Letter, January 10, 1931

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