

BOTANY

Flower Blooms by Moon

South African member of iris family appears to follow lunar phases in its flowering periods. *Morea* stands nearly bare-stemmed during new and full moon.

► A FLOWER that appears to follow the phases of the moon in its blossom periods, bearing abundant blooms during first and last quarters but standing bare-stemmed or nearly so during new and full moon, is described in the *National Horticultural Magazine* (January).

The plant is a South African member of the iris family known horticulturally as *Morea iridoides*; its iris-like flowers are white, marked with yellow and blue. Its peculiar behavior was not noticed by a botanist but by a psychologist, Prof. Knight Dunlap of the University of California at Los Angeles, one of whose hobbies is gardening. He kept several clumps of *Morea*, growing in rather diverse habitats, under close observation for over a year.

In southern California, the *Morea* blooms almost all year round, though it produces fewer flowers during the winter months.

"The *Moreas* bloom normally within two periods in each lunar month," Prof. Dunlap states. "One period commences on the date of the first quarter, and ends the day before the full moon. The other period runs from the date of the last quarter up to the new moon. In the

other phases, (new moon and full moon), there are normally no blossoms. In a blooming quarter, the first blossoms may appear on the first day, or on the second or third day. By the last day of the quarter, sometimes a day or two earlier, the last blossom has withered; the petals either dropped off or curled up. In the winter season, even the best plants may pass one or more bloom quarters entirely."

Apparent exceptions, when flowers appeared during the normal non-flowering periods of full and new moon, appeared to be connected in some way with spells of summer "high fog" which considerably reduced the illumination received by the plants.

What it all may signify, Prof. Dunlap is not prepared to argue on the basis of data now in hand. He hopes that other flower growers, both professional and amateur, will take the trouble to make careful observations as opportunity may offer.

"Meanwhile," he adds, "I am satisfied to present evidence confirming the principle familiar to students of mythology, namely: Ancient superstitions often have foundation in fact."

Science News Letter, February 27, 1943

MEDICINE

Agglutinins Aid Diagnosis

► DISCOVERY of substances in the blood, called cold agglutinins, that may help to segregate some of the cases of atypical pneumonia prevalent these days is announced by Dr. Osler L. Peterson, Dr. Thomas Hale Ham and Dr. Maxwell Finland, of Harvard Medical School and Boston City Hospital (*Science*, Feb. 12).

These now prevalent kinds of pneumonia are generally called atypical pneumonia, because the disease is different from the pneumonia caused by the pneumococcus germ and is not caused by any known pneumococcus. Some cases may be caused by a virus. Until germs causing the atypical pneumonias

are definitely known, the development of the cold agglutinins in the patient's blood may, the Harvard scientists suggest, serve as a criterion for segregating them.

Cold agglutinins, or autohemagglutinins as they are also called, develop very rarely in ordinary pneumonia and have been observed in a few patients with liver or blood diseases. The word cold describes the temperature at which the agglutinins act and does not refer to the common cold. The only infectious disease besides atypical pneumonia in which they have been found regularly is African sleeping sickness, known medically as trypanosomiasis.

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