



Mendel's Bequest

► HENRY WALLACE declared a short time ago, during a visit to the Mendel museum at Mary Washington College, that Gregor Mendel did much toward the winning of the war, although he has been dead for several decades. As explanation, he pointed out the great increase in the corn crop made possible by the planting of hybrid corn, which in turn was made possible through the practical application of the basic principles of heredity which Mendel had discovered.

It is not quite fifty years since Mendel's original papers were rescued from the generation of obscurity in which they had been buried during his later lifetime. It is just forty years since Prof. George Shull of Princeton made the last planting of his experimental strains of hybrid corn. It is only a little over twenty years since Henry Wallace began his campaign to persuade farmers to stop merely selecting open-pollinated seed-corn ears for "prettiness" and begin growing hybrid corn for profit.

At that time he expressed his belief in the ability of hybrid corn to boost the

per-acre yield by as much as ten per cent. This was a most cautious, conservative estimate; present-day figures show that the increase has been at least double that. This means more corn for less work; it also permits sloping fields to be changed from plowland to pasture, at once checking erosion and increasing supplies of milk and meat. So it is not at all far-fetched to assert that a long-dead Austrian monk helped America toward victory.

Corn is perhaps the most conspicuous of crop plants that has benefited by the application of the Mendelian principles, but it is by no means a solitary example. On the contrary, it is quite safe to say that there is no grain, or garden vegetable, or fruit, or fiber plant, or domestic animal that is not receiving attention from breeders who follow the lines originally laid down by Mendel nearly two generations ago. The method is even used to produce hybrid strains of forest trees, to give us quicker and bigger yields of timber and wood pulp.

Mendel was a European. His discovery has had its greatest development, in both theory and practice, in America. The chaos of the postwar world gives American science its opportunity to pay an old debt, by aiding European plant and animal breeders to establish "mendelized" varieties and breeds, to the general betterment of European standards of living.

Science News Letter, June 8, 1946

GEOPHYSICS

Earthquakes Can Be Set Off by Rain

► RAIN CAN HELP set off earthquakes, Prof. V. Conrad of Harvard University's Blue Hill Observatory told the American Geophysical Union. It does not hasten the occurrence of all earthquakes, but only those resulting from the down-bending of rock strata by the slow loading of erosional debris on top of them. The thousands of tons of water that filter down into the ground after heavy rains may prove the last straw in such a loading, increasing the strain in the supporting rocks to the breaking point.

Contrariwise, where an earthquake is in the making as the result of forces from beneath pushing up on the rock layers, the added burden of accumulated rain water will push in the opposite direction, perhaps delaying the occurrence of the earthquake.

Science News Letter, June 8, 1946

ASTRONOMY

Harvard Observatory Given Large Telescope

► THE TELESCOPE that for the last three decades has delighted university students and visitors in Rochester, N. Y., is being moved to Colorado to help probe the mysteries of the sun. The large Bausch & Lomb Optical Co. telescope has been made an outright gift to Harvard University.

The telescope is expected to be installed by fall in the High Altitude Observatory at Climax, Colo., the world's highest observatory. The Colorado observatory, astride the Rocky Mountain Divide, is operated jointly by Harvard and Colorado Universities.

The telescope, fitted with special filters, will be used primarily to study the sun's disk, including sun spots. An attached motion picture camera will record the rapid changes occurring in the solar atmosphere. The telescope boasts a 10½-inch lens and star dials that make it easy to read right ascension and declination and eliminate the necessity of computing hour angles.

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GIFT TO HARVARD—Dr. Donald H. Menzel, Harvard Observatory, and Dr. John W. Evans, right, formerly of the University of Rochester Institute of Optics, inspect the Bausch & Lomb Optical Company telescope, which is to be dismantled and installed at the High Altitude Observatory, the highest in the world, at Climax, Colorado.

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