



Mountain Laurel

➤ **CLOTHING** THE slopes of the lower mountains of the East and running down into the lowlands, wherever the soil is stony and poor enough to suit its hardy tastes, we find the mountain laurel.

It is one of the most glorious of our shrubs, ranking along with rhododendron and azalea, and indeed is a close cousin of theirs. Like them, it is one of those peculiar plants that thrive well only in acid soils, and one should know the chemical condition of one's yard, or else have it artificially adjusted to suit, before planting laurel.

The botanical name of the mountain laurel constitutes one of the most enviable of all monuments ever erected by one man in honor of another. When a botanist wants to pay high compliment to a friend,

he names a plant after him. Naturally, the more beautiful the flower, the higher the compliment.

Peter Kalm, contemporary and co-worker of the great Swedish naturalist Linnaeus, who first organized botany on a modern basis, has received perhaps the most flowery botanical compliment that has ever fallen to the lot of a scholarly collector of plants. For when Linnaeus was called on to give a name to this new handsome shrub from America, he thought of his friend and former pupil Peter Kalm, who had traveled in the New World, and called the beautiful flower *Kalmia*.

Kalmia, or mountain laurel, is a most attractive plant at any time, for its dark shining leaves are evergreen, relieving even the white bareness of the winter woods. But when spring brings its leaves to bloom, the laurel simply outdoes itself. Its clusters of closed star-flowers, pink, but by sheer miracle of vegetative good taste not too pink, are things for poets to write sonnets about.

Most of our fine flowers are in greatest danger from vandalistic gatherers when they are in bloom, which is what one might expect. But the mountain laurel is less troubled than it is in late autumn and early winter. Its evergreen leaves have found altogether too good a market in eastern cities, and the more accessible areas where it grows are rapidly being depleted by the market-hunters.

Fortunately for future generations of American flower-lovers, mountain laurel is true to its name, and the higher slopes of the Appalachians still give it refuge, keeping green the memory of Linnaeus' friend, Peter Kalm.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1955

MEDICINE

Leukemia Death Rate Shows Slight Decline

➤ A "SLIGHT" decline in the death rate from leukemia since 1951 is reported by statisticians of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. The report covers the company's industrial policyholders, most of whom live in cities and towns.

The decline follows a rising death rate over many years, from 1.8 per 100,000 in insured persons in 1930 to 4.7 per 100,000 in 1951.

The statisticians point out that it is difficult to say whether the mortality has reached the level at which it may become stabilized, or whether it will continue upward after a temporary interruption, as has happened in the past.

Even past mortality trends for leukemia are not as unfavorable as would appear at first glance.

"A large part of the long-term increase in the death rate undoubtedly reflects merely the more frequent detection of the condition through improved methods of diagnosis," the statisticians comment. "Also, some progress has been made in the treatment of the disease, particularly the acute

Questions

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GEOPHYSICS—When did the Wisconsin glaciation begin? p. 327.

METALLURGY—Why is ordinary aluminum unsatisfactory in some uses for supersonic planes? p. 325.

PSYCHOLOGY—How is stress used to combat schizophrenia? p. 322.

PUBLIC HEALTH—What are the gases in smog that form oxidants in sunlight? p. 328.

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form, through the use of hormones and chemicals. Continued intensive research holds out tangible hope for the future."

Science News Letter, May 21, 1955

PSYCHOLOGY

Homosexuals May Not Be Security Risks

➤ THE IDEA that homosexuals are necessarily bad security risks is debunked in a report by a psychiatrist before the American Psychiatric Association in Atlantic City.

"There is little proof," he said, "that the official government attitude that homosexuals make poor security risks is valid."

The psychiatrist is Dr. Manfred S. Guttmacher, chief medical officer at the court house in Baltimore, Md.

There is no general agreement, he finds, as to the cause of homosexuality, its prevention, methods of treatment and success with such methods, nor as to the social significance of homosexual behavior.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1955

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