
NATURE RAMBLINGS

Natural History

By FRANK THONE



Leucothoe

It might strike one as a trifle odd to find here in modern America a memorial to a princess of Babylon, and a mythical princess at that. Yet such is the case. For growing in the mountains, from Virginia southward, there are three species of a shrub that have been named *Leucothoe*, for the daughter of a king of Babylon mentioned in the works of the Latin poet Ovid. The man who named the genus must have had much more of a taste for the classics than most modern botanists have. A fourth species, summing up the genus so far as eastern America is concerned, grows at lower altitudes along the coast from Massachusetts to Florida.

The shrub is really a most graceful and attractive-appearing plant, with long, slender, arching branches that bend over and touch the ground with their tips, forming very much intertangled thickets. It is next to impossible to wade through a dense growth of *Leucothoe*, for the tough stems catch and hold you by the ankles. For this it has received the name "fetter-bush".

Curiously enough, however, there is at least one rural region where the plant is not known by its homely and descriptive English name, but by its classical and more or less fanciful Greek one. In the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, now designated as a National Park, the inhabitants call it *Leucothoe* just as the botanists do, or sometimes "*Leucotia*," obviously only a slight corruption of the name. Presumably they had no well-agreed-on English name, and adopted the technical one from botanists who have long made a Mecca of their mountains.

Science News-Letter, August 10, 1929

Several species of cactus were taken from America to the Old World by early European explorers and became established in the Mediterranean region.

Would Have Zoos Study Apes

Zoology

A plea to the zoos of the world to help enhance man's knowledge of his nearest relatives by utilizing captive specimens of the higher apes for biological study, has been made by Prof. Robert M. Yerkes, renowned psychologist of Yale, and Ada W. Yerkes in a huge scientific work entitled "The Great Apes."

"For decades," declared Prof. Yerkes, "the zoological gardens of the world have held captive specimens of gibbon, siamang, orang-utan, chimpanzee and gorilla. Often the individuals have lived for many years, and occasionally they have bred, in reasonably satisfactory environment. Yet, almost without exception, the scientific use of these exhibition specimens has been neglected. Evidently there is opportunity for some progressive zoological-garden director to lead the way and establish a fashion by converting his establishment into a center for biological research without undesirably sacrificing its primary function of entertainment and education."

Detailed study and observation of the man-like apes is absolutely necessary, according to Prof. Yerkes, to make any generalizations about

the psychological make-up of the nearest kin to the human race. Thus far only isolated examples have been available for prolonged study of the orang-utan, chimpanzee and gorilla, so that it is impossible to draw any very general conclusions with respect to their relative intelligence.

Yale has one of the very few special laboratories for anthropoid research. Eventually Prof. Yerkes hopes that there will be available a breeding station for apes somewhere in the subtropics where studies can be made on reproduction and life history and young apes can be reared for investigation of special subjects.

Probably the most notable among projects of this sort in existence today is a station maintained by the Pasteur Institute at Kindia in French Guinea, Africa. Here scores of chimpanzees and other primates are kept in as close an approximation of their natural environment as possible. They are now used largely in medical studies but plans are under way to add equipment whereby it will be possible to start psychological and biological investigations at an early date.

Science News-Letter, September 21, 1929

Preventing Crimes of Insane

Criminology

The individual who suddenly takes an uncontrollable impulse to destroy life or property, one of the great unsolved problems of society, was brought before the attention of psychologists at the International Congress of Psychology.

Prof. Fred. A. Moss, of George Washington University, stressed the importance of insanity as a cause of preventable crime.

"Insanity is more and more frequently being offered as a defense in criminal procedure," he said. "Some of the more obvious types of insanity, such as those accompanied by wild excitement or marked hallucinations, are fairly easily recognized. But there are certain types of mental disorders, that often lead to the most serious crimes, which are not recognized, or if they are recognized, their predisposing influence to crime is overlooked."

Citing mental maladies that may lead to such unexpected outbreaks, Prof. Moss mentioned epilepsy, dementia praecox, senile dementia, par-

anoia, paresis, and impulsive obsessions.

The victim of paranoia may reason logically and conduct most of his affairs with good judgment and yet may believe himself to be persecuted by some wholly innocent person or organization. Such an individual hesitates at nothing that would further his revenge on those who, he imagines, are persecuting him, the psychologist explained. Dementia praecox, a mental disease of youth, often causes the patient to hear imaginary voices inciting him to acts of violence. In the degeneration of old age, anatomical changes are sometimes accompanied by senile dementia and serious crimes may be inspired.

There is a need for more effective recognition of persons who are potentially dangerous because of mental and nervous disorders, and there is need for more effective handling of their cases when such persons are brought into custody for committing crimes, Prof. Moss urged.

Science News-Letter, September 21, 1929