BOTANY

NATURE RAMBLINGS
by Frank Thone

Vegetable Cinderellas

"THEY were in the direst extremity, having been forced to subsist on wild roots and berries for several weeks."

Over and over again that sentence or its equivalent crops up in accounts of early days, when exploring parties got lost, or emigrant wagon trains ran out of supplies in the Great American Desert. Yet all around them were Indians who, though they might not have found life very soft, nevertheless had managed for centuries to subsist at least in part on those same wild roots and berries.

Re-acquaintance with the food possibilities of neglected wild plants is offered in a new book, *Edible Wild Plants,* by Oliver Perry Medsger, emeritus professor of nature education at Pennsylvania State College. Prof. Medsger does not content himself with telling what wild plants are good to eat; he gives recipes, and has personally cooked and eaten most of them himself.

Many wild food plants are still appreciated; at least part of the blueberries and cranberries that come to our markets are gathered in the wild, and open-air gourmets declare that for flavor no cultivated strawberry can touch the wild species. Likewise, of course, the best mushrooms are those that come from fields and woods and not from the caves and cellars of cultivation—particularly the edible morel, figured by Prof. Medsger as frontispiece in his book.

But who would expect stinging nettle or skunk cabbage to be possible food sources? Prof. Medsger knew of the use of young nettles as soup vegetables in Scotland, but he was skeptical about skunk cabbage until a friend convinced him with a tasty dish of their tender young leaves and petioles, after all the "skunkiness" had been stewed out of them.

More substantial fare is offered by many kinds of fleshy roots, bulbs and rhizomes, all of which were staples of primitive Indian diet. Notable are the roots of wild morning-glories, which are botanical first cousins to the cultivated sweet potato.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Mr. Ape Doesn't Learn Well When Mrs. Ape Is Teacher

MRS. APE can learn by aping Mr. Ape but he can't learn from her so well—not because of sex difference but apparently because it is hard for a dominant animal to take lessons from a submissive one. This observation of ape ways, of possible implication in education of their human relatives, was reported to the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology by Dr. James H. Elder, of the Yale Laboratories of Primate Biology at Orange Park, Florida.

Despite popular notions, it is quite a trick for an ape to crack open a stubborn coconut. They can roll it around and fumble with it for a long time without getting anywhere. Only once did Dr. Elder find a chimpanzee who could crack the nut by his own efforts; that seemed to be a happy accident.

It takes a firm hold and a sharp pound against the concrete floor. After Dr. Elder had allowed his chimpanzees to struggle alone until they gave up the problem, he showed them how. Two apes learned in just one demonstration. They could then show other apes how, and they can learn just as quickly from each other.

But in two cases where the ape "instructor" was demonstrating for a dominating animal, the pupils could not learn even after as many as 16 demonstrations. These two poor learners were not dumb, either; one, in particular, was very intelligent.

Shorthand To Teach Deaf

TEACHING deaf children to talk by use of shorthand, a method devised by Alexander Graham Bell, has at last been vindicated by science.

"Entirely feasible," is the verdict pronounced by Dr. Max F. Meyer, of the University of Miami, as a result of experiments on half a dozen children.

The method, as proposed by Bell, was first to teach the reading and writing of shorthand words, unabbreviated, then the pronunciation of such words, phonetically written, and only after that the reading and writing of ordinary English.

"Fifty years ago, it was," related Dr. Meyer, "when Bell hired a teacher for his small experimental school, but she had not enough patience to continue the experiment for more than one year. In so short a time nothing could be proved.

"The professional teachers of the deaf ever thereafter scorned Bell's idea, saw nothing good in it. They meted out the same scorn to me when, ten years ago, I began to revive Bell's idea. They even refused to let me announce it in the very Volta Review which Bell founded and endowed to spread the teaching of speech to the deaf."

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The Ukrainian steppes provide one-fourth of the Soviet Union's cereal crop.

●RADIO

Dr. Rock Sleyster, president-elect of the American Medical Association, will be the guest scientist on "Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, and Miss Jane Stafford, medical writer, over the coast to coast network of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Monday, May 8, 5:45 EDST, 4:45 EST,, 3:45 CST, 2:45 MST, 1:45 PST. Listen in on your local station. Listen in each Monday.