

Reviews and Abstracts

Luther Burbank: The Wizard and the Man. 1967. By Ken and Pat Kraft. Meredith Press. 270 pages. \$7.95.

The Krafts offer the reader a very palatable biography of Luther Burbank. The authors attempt to show all facets of this legend of a man, sometimes referred to when he lived as the "plant wizard." He is portrayed as the plant breeder, as a lover of children and humanity, and a mystic.

We see Burbank as a highly skilled plantsman with a great love for plants, and almost obsessed with a mission to improve plants "to make a better life for people." Driven by this inner almost messianic compulsion, Burbank gave up a lucrative nursery business, and devoted most of his adult life to plant improvement.

His secret appears to have been his productiveness—he introduced over 800 new plants, and his marvelous intuitive ability to select plants from among thousands of seedlings which will be well received later by growers and consumers. Nor did he limit himself in his breeding work to any one group of plants, for he introduced new forms and varieties of vegetables, fruits, cactus, flowers, and even grains.

Burbank was probably the best known horticulturist in the world of his day. People came from everywhere to meet him and to see his famous experimental gardens in Santa Rosa, California. Some 7000 visitors came to his home in the year 1910, when he was in his prime. Among them were many notables—Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Liberty Hyde Bailey, and David Fairchild, to name but a few.

Although honored and loved by many, Burbank was criticized by many scientists for his "unscientific" methods of plant breeding. He depended on his intuition, his keen eye, and skill as a breeder, rather than on scientific methods. And he kept his records in his head rather than in record books. The exaggerated stories about him that appeared in the press did not help his image one bit.

Whatever one may think of Burbank as a man or a breeder, the fact is that he did give the world many useful plants, and he did draw attention to the importance of plant improvement, probably more than any other single person of his time.

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This special issue of *Experimental Horticulture* covers research with apple, strawberry and black currant done in various research stations of Great Britain.

Among the subjects reported on are urea sprays on apple, pruning of black currants, and the control of runners of strawberry with CCC.

H. J. Gooding of the National Fruit Trials at Faversham, discusses the problems of classifying pome fruits. A system for classifying cider apples developed by Dommergues, Fleckinger and Messie in 1955 is described briefly. The present techniques used in classifying fruit at the National Fruit Trials, are also described.

—G. M. Kessler