

EDITORIAL

And so passes another year under the Bridge of Time. It seems only moments since I heralded the last of the 1900's onto the scene. Has your growing year been a successful one? I can't grumble to much about mine. A few plants have graced the scene with their first flowers, new plants have taken up residence, some have passed away but mainly they have put on girth. Many are still crying out for more space to spread their toes, but space is at a premium and I know of no remedy that will squeeze a gallon in a pint pot.

One thing that is noticeable this year is how late the first frosts were. Plants that enjoy an outdoor existence stayed out way later than usual. Even the Dahlias remained out till November and still hadn't been scorched by frost.

Christmas is upon us and I wish you all the most pleasant season possible, may all your wishes see fruition and may the coming year produce many fruits of your dreams not just on your plants.

This is my last editorial for some time. Ivor Crook has expressed an interest in producing the newsletter and I wish him well in the venture. A new angle, new ideas; all augurs well. Please give him at least the same level of support I received, but better still improve on the last year's agenda.

Photography and the AGM see the year close. Time to put matters into place for the coming year and time to look back at other moments through the lens of the camera. Geoff is a capable photographer, it is a long time since the way to approach the unwary plant to snap it for posterity

was last seen, so it should prove a fruitful evening.

WANTED WANTED WANTED

Peter Hendy is trying to complete his collection of BCSS Journals. He would very much like to acquire volume 14 (1996) and volume 15 (1997). If you can help him either see him at the Meetings or alternatively phone him on

ON THE CULTIVATORS OF CACTI

This article is taken, verbatim, from "THE GARDENER'S YEAR" by Karel Capek. This book was first produced in 1929, published in Prague and written in Czech. So successful does it appear to have been that it was printed in English for the first time in 1931. The copy I have to hand is from the 14th. Impression 1951.

When I call them Sectarians, it is not because they cultivate cacti with great enthusiasm, for this can be put down to passion, eccentricity, or mania. The gist of sectarianism is not that something is done passionately, but that something is passionately believed in. There are some cactus-men who believe in powdered marble, whereas others believe in brick dust, and others in charcoal; some approve of water, while others reject it; there are profound mysteries in a Real Cactus Soil which no cactus maniac would betray, even if you broke him on the wheel. All these sects, observances, rituals, schools and lodges, as well as the wild or hermit cactus maniacs, will swear that only by their Method alone have they achieved such miraculous results. Look at this Echinocactus Myriostigma. Did you ever see anywhere else such an Echinocactus Myriostigma? So I will tell you, on condition that you will not tell anyone else, it must not be watered but sprinkled. That's what it wants. "What!" cries another cactus-man. "Who ever heard that Echinocactus Myriostigma could be sprinkled? Do you want its crown to catch

cold? My dear sir, if you don't want your Echinocactus to die straight away of putrefaction you must damp it only by putting it once a week, with the pot, in soft water, warmed to 23.789 degrees Celsius. Then it will grow like a turnip." "God Almighty!" shouts the third cactus-man, "look at that murderer! If you damp the pot, sir, it will be covered with Protococcus; the soil will get sour, and you will be done for - yes, done for; besides your Echinocactus Myriostigma will rot at the root. If you don't want your soil to turn sour, you must water it every second day with sterilised water, and in such a way that 0.111111 gramme, exactly half a degree warmer than the air, comes on a cubic centimetre." Then the cactus maniacs begin to shout altogether, and attack one another with their fists, teeth, hooves and claws; but as is the way of this world, the real truth is not brought to light even by these means.

The truth, of course, is that cacti deserve their special cult, if only because they are mysterious. The rose is beautiful, but not mysterious; among the mysterious plants are the lily, gentian, golden fern, the tree of knowledge, ancient trees as a whole, some mushrooms, mandrake, orchids, glacial flowers, poisonous and medicinal herbs, water lilies, Mesembryanthemum and cacti. Where the mystery lies I cannot say; yet mystery there must be, if we are to search for it and reverence it. There are cacti just like porcupines, cucumbers, marrows, candlesticks, jugs, priests' caps, snakes' nests; they are covered with scales, teats, tufts of hair, claws, warts, bayonets, yataghans, and stars; they are bulky and lanky, spiked like a regiment of lancers, sharp like a column brandishing swords, swollen, stringy, and wrinkled, pock-marked, bearded, peevish, morose, thorny like abatis, woven like a basket, looking like excrescences, animals, and arms; the most masculine of all plants which were created on the third day, bearing seed according to their kind. ("Well, I'm blessed," said the Creator, astonished at Himself at what he had created.) You can love them without touching them indecently, or kissing them, or pressing

them to your breast; they don't care for any intimacies or other such frivolities; they are hard like stone, armed to the teeth, determined not to surrender; go on, pale face, or I will shoot! A small collection of cacti looks like a camp of warlike pygmies. Chop off a head or arm from that warrior and a new man in arms will grow out of it, brandishing swords and daggers. Life is war.

But there are mysterious moments when that obstinate and surly blockhead somehow forgets himself and falls into dreams; then a flower bursts out of him, a big, brilliant flower, a sacramental flower in the midst of brandished arms. It is a great favour, and a precious event, which does not happen to everyone. I tell you a mother's pride is nothing to the boasting of a cactus-man whose cactus has come into flower.

For this disrespectful humour I am indebted to John Foley who found the aforementioned tome. If you see yourself therein fret not as you are not unique. It is amazing what truths are hidden in the sentiments offered.

There endeth the story according to Peter.

If, like Peter Hendy, you have any wants advertise them within these columns.

**A HAPPY
CHRISTMAS
AND A
JOYFUL NEW
YEAR TO ALL
READERS!**