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But what do flowers say it with?

by H. E. BATES



Cupid inspiring the plants with love... An illustration from the book.

"DEUS CREAVIT; Linnaeus disposuit": "God created, Linnaeus set in order." Who then was Linnaeus?

Carl Linnaeus, the son of a pastor, was born in Southern Sweden in 1707. It is Mr. Wilfrid Blunt's contention in *THE COMPLETE NATURALIST, A Life of Linnaeus* (Collins, £3.50) that this incontestably distinguished man, one of the world's greatest naturalists, who believed himself to be "God's chosen instrument to put an end to the chaos that reigned in the classification and naming of animals, vegetables and even minerals," is now virtually forgotten outside his native country.

One can only say that if Mr. Blunt's admirable biography, superbly illustrated and clearly the fruit of much research, does something to alter this state of

affairs it will be no less than his just reward.

It is remarkable that the young Linnaeus was, scholastically, a palpable failure, constantly playing truant in the summer months, always sloping off to mess about with plants as other boys mess about in boats. His school-fellows nicknamed him "the little naturalist."

When he exchanged the gymnasium for the University of Lund, where his father had matriculated, and later for that of Uppsala, things were not a great deal better. His parents, more particularly his pious mother, devoutly hoped that he would follow in father's footsteps, but not for the first time in the history of parental hopes, it was not to be. Linnaeus exhibited no taste or talent for either scholarship or Church.

But fortune has a way of serving not only the brave but

the persistent, the stubborn and the single-minded and the dedicated. For the rest of his life Linnaeus had the knack, in times of crisis, of falling on his feet.

Somehow he managed to meet the right people, such as the botanists Dean Celsius, Robert and Rudbeck (from whom we get the plant named *Rudbeckia*) at the right time. Also, unlike many men distinguished in the sciences, he could express himself in words.

To expound

In lyrical language Linnaeus proceeded to express "the joy that the sun brings to all living things," together with the fact that "every animal feels the sexual urge. Yes, love even comes to the plants. Males and females, even the hermaphrodites, hold their nuptials, showing by their sexual organs which are males, which females, which hermaphrodites."

Linnaeus in fact proceeded to expound, in quite revolutionary terms, the sexual life of plants in more or less human terms. The function of stamens and pistils in pollination he saw as the equivalent of the sexual act; the removal of the anthers in a flower as castration; pollen as the sperm, seeds as the ova and so on.

All this, in the 18th century, was highly if not dangerously provocative; it was an entirely revolutionary thing "to equate the sex life of plants, with all its implications of polygamy, polyandry and incest, with that of animals; and later his 'sexual system' as expounded in his *Systema Naturae*, was to earn for Linnaeus the strong disapproval of the straitlaced."

Thus, in the course of time, we got the Linnaeus systems of botanical classification and nomenclature; order was brought into chaos. And today, just as Linnaeus is incontestably a great man, so this is incontestably a good time for a new biography of him.

In our 20th century world we may think we are smart fellows to have discovered something called "the permissive society." But don't let us over-flatter ourselves: Linnaeus discovered that nature, working its own miracles in its own way, through flower and seed pistils and pollination, knew a thing or two on that particular subject a long time ago.

Seller of '71 . . .

by Richard Lister

HERMAN RAUCHER'S *SUMMER OF '42* (W. H. Allen, £2) is the book from which the current film was taken. I have not seen the film but readers will, I presume, get a certain surplus over filmgoers since the film cannot surely be quite as physically explicit as the novel.

For *Summer of '42* is another example, like *Love Story*, of the new American best seller formula, where the charm and the sugary sentiment are carefully tacked on to a scaffolding of the four-letter words. Thus for all the crudity, there is no offence in it, no offence in the world.

The novel is a kind of rhapsody on the pains and pleasures of male adolescence. The pleasures are mostly fantasy: the pains of physical frustration. Three American 15-year-olds on a dull holiday island go through the whole gamut from A to B. Hermie is the chief character, and suffers most because the most sensitive; Oscie is the leader because the toughest, what he says goes; Benjie, not quite so physically advanced, just tags along.

The lads are in the great divide between boy and man; they have discovered, or are just discovering, their virility, but do not know what to do with it. Boredom is another problem.

Bronzed

Then Hermie sees an older woman, quite 24, saying goodbye to her bronzed young Marine husband. If only Hermie were big and bronzed like that, how he would love her! He would be able to do it at last.

Next day he meets her out shopping and helps her with her parcels, and the day after returns at her invitation to help store some heavy boxes. Paralyzed with shyness, he is all the same enraptured with his goddess. How vexing that she sees him on the day the three try their first clumsy pick-up at the local cinema, a total disaster.

But fulfilment is at hand. He has arranged to drop in on his goddess one evening, only to find she has just had news that her Marine husband has been killed in action. In her state of shock and grief she responds to his fumbling attempts to comfort her, and before he knows it, it has happened.

The whole experience of the long hot summer has been puzzling and kind of agonising, and the climax has been puzzling but kind of beautiful too, and it's all pretty skilfully described so that a shimmer of charm plays over even the most physically intimate surfaces.

BOOKS edited by Anthony Hern

Guilty Men—no reprieve!

by MICHAEL FOOT

GUILTY MEN was the title (and an extremely good one, I must immodestly admit) under which our pre-war rulers, Chamberlain and Co., were arraigned for the way their "appeasement" of the dictators plunged us into the Second World War.

It was devised, amid the red heat of public anger just after Dunkirk, but it survived as a label for something more, what might almost be dignified as a theory of history. For it was soon seen to overlap with the Churchillian view of those times, the idea that we drifted into "the unnecessary war" thanks to the inordinate blindness and conceit of the pitiful crew from whose palsied leadership Churchill saved us in 1940.

The verdict

This verdict on the 1930s held the field until the 1950s or thereabouts, but since then historians of various breeds have sought to revise it and now we are offered another most distinguished and sophisticated contribution to the revisionist school. Franklin Reid Gannon in *THE BRITISH PRESS AND GERMAN 1936-1939* (Oxford University Press £3.25) appears to explode one previously accepted myth after another.

For example, was not Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*, central figure of the Cliveden Set, one of the criminals of the piece? Did he not, on his own admission, "do his utmost, night after night, to keep out of the paper anything that might hurt their (the Nazi's) susceptibilities?"

Was he not the first to sell the Czech pass in the infamous editorials of September 7?

But not a bit of it, insists the bland Dr. Gannon. Life was never as simple as that and even those apparently heinous quotations can be explained away. Besides, *The Times* editorial policy, like that of everybody else, moved in zig-zags, not straight lines.

As a matter of fact, *The Times* was the first and originally the only paper to implicate Germany in the bombing of Guernica.

Often it provoked among the Nazis the most violent explosions of anglophobia. Once they discovered that if the name of the paper was spelt backwards it spelt SEMIT, and thus on occasions the appeasing Dawson was exposed as the cunning director of a Jewish-Marxist organisation.

Contrarily, some of the newspapers with supposedly the best anti-Nazi records were not always saying what retrospectively they might have wished. *The Manchester Guardian's* leading article on Munich was

headed "Respite and Hope." Only one British newspaper, *Reynolds News* (apart from the *Daily Worker*, which does not come under Dr. Gannon's surveillance) denounced it outright.

Dr. Gannon recites one awkward, unexpected fact after another, assisting the plausibility of his thesis—the proposition that the policies of all papers were surprisingly much of a muchness.

So has he proved his case? Were all the editors equally blind or equally prescient? Have the *Guilty Men* won their full reprieve at last?

Don't you believe it. Dr. Gannon has examined the dusty files with immense industry and fine detachment. All he leaves out is the sweat, the tears, the agony, the contortions of conscience, which gripped Fleet Street no less than the nation; how the crises of Abyssinia, Spain, Austria and Germany were interlocked; how the whole machine of the Establishment was mobilised to corrupt the will and sensitivity of the British people; how Britain was so nearly subdued by the most appalling tyranny in history; how we were only saved because the *Guilty Men* were cleared out at the 13th hour.

Try as they will, Loquacious academics will never rewrite that chapter in British history, and, for all its virtuosity, this latest attempt can make those who lived through it all scream. It is high time the revisionists were themselves revised, and if no-one else will do it maybe the authors of *Guilty Men* will have to undertake the task.

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BBC PUBLICATIONS

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A THOUSAND YEARS OF LONDON BRIDGE. C. W. Shepherd. John Baker. £2.25. It's a great story, what with the Romans, and the medieval shopping precinct, and Dickens's Victorian gloom; and in his traditional way Mr. Shepherd tells the story of the four London Bridges, clearly—traditional because he is able to say, in this outspoken time, such an old-fashioned sentence, about the execution of the Scottish rebel/hero William Wallace, who was quartered, that one contemporary writer went "into detail which we shall not repeat here". For heaven's sake, why not?

DYING FOR FUN. Mollie Lee. Michael Joseph. £1.90. Murder Must Advertise, wrote Dorothy Sayers; and you'd think that. Life must too, if you read Mollie Lee's effervescent novel about a living and, especially, loving in the mixed media.

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS. Anthony Birley. Eyre & Spottiswoode. £5.50. The point about Septimius Severus, Emperor of Rome from AD 193 until he died at York in the year 211 while fighting the British anti-occupation forces, was that he was a black emperor. Dr. Birley with unnecessary tact goes no further than accepting the evidence that Severus was "dark-skinned": he was born in North Africa, was elected to the purple by his troops, and is a shining example of the multi-racial strength of the Roman Empire. This biography is the product of a lot of learning.

STORE. Alexander Fullerton. Cassell. £1.75. Arnold Bennett did

it with Imperial Palace, and not entirely to his credit: tell the story, I mean, of a large self-contained enterprise. Bennett chose an hotel (the Savoy, thinly disguised). Mr. Fullerton has chosen an Oxford Street store (ditto), here named *Manifolds*, and tells an up-to-date story of a take-over bid and its effect on the varied personalities, upstairs and basement-level, that make up a West End department store. An absorbing read on the hotel terrace.—A.H.

THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT, 1944-1970 by Harold Wilson is best seller, followed by *The Art of the Possible* by Lord Butler. Then come Gerald Durrell's *Fillets of Plaice*, Daphne du Maurier's *Note After Midnight*, Spike Milligan's *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall*, and Krumpholtz by Peter Ustinov.

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W.H. ALLEN