BOOK REVIEW

LUTHER BURBANK—A VICTIM OF HERO WORSHIP

By Walter L. Howard, Waltham, Mass.; Chronica Botanica. 208 pages, illus. 1946. $3.75.

The author began in 1932 to compile a list of Luther Burbank’s plant productions and the task grew until it developed into a study of his life. His information was collected mainly from Burbank’s writings and interviews with people who had been associated with him in business, socially, or otherwise. Many conflicting opinions were gathered, especially as Burbank was thought very highly of in numerous circles and ill of in others.

Many laymen considered him as a plant “wizard”, due to the glowing accounts of the press and by his ardent admirers concerning his marvelous achievements. Burbank’s main achievements were the importation of plant materials and the growing of numerous seedlings regardless of having accurate record of their parentage. He was an exceptionally keen observer and selected many unusual variations. When he observed a new plant character he did not hesitate to capitalize on his discovery. His methods of procedure were condemned by plant breeders and horticulturists but such criticisms were considered by Burbank as based on jealousy.

His more important productions are listed and a brief account of their origin and importance is given. Commercially speaking, Burbank’s greatest contribution was numerous plum varieties. If one wishes to learn the details of Burbank’s life and work one must read the text.—RICHARD WELLINGTON.