

ARCHIVES | 1974

## Biblical Garden Has No Apples

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD MAY 23, 1974

It's not exactly a Garden of Eden, but it is as charming an assortment of plants mentioned in the Bible that you will find the length Amsterdam Avenue or maybe anywhere in the city.

The Biblical Garden is an ecumenical growth nestling against the south side of the towering walls of the Cathedral of S. John the Divine at 111th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Yesterday, various committee members representing Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Jewish and less denominational views, gathered in the garden and a rabbi quipped, "You could call it God's little quarter acre."

The quiet garden on the cathedral grounds, which is open to the public, is a leafy guide to the Bible. It is a relatively new addition to New York, having just opened a year ago. Yesterday marked the start of a fresh season.

Mrs. Albert P. Loening, chairman of the garden, said that there were more than 100 species, each one mentioned in the Bible, pushing up through the New York soil. Not all pushed up, really because a number of less hardy breeds were standing in tubs; they had been brought down from Hawthorne, where C. Powers Taylor of Rosedale Nurseries had nurtured them during the cold months.

### Apricot in Eden

"The apricot is a hardy plant," said Mr. Taylor, waving to the several trees in the garden. "But the best botanical opinion is that the apricot is the apple in the Garden of Eden. The apple tree didn't exist in that area at all then, but transators often took the names of things they knew rather than of those they didn't know." As Mr. Taylor patrolled the little garden, he noted a little withering on one of the apricot trees and said he'd have to see what had gotten into it. Someone observed that perhaps a serpent from the streets had gained access.

A walk through the garden revealed papyrus growing in a tiny pond, too little yet to make paper or mats out of; indeed, it looked rather weedy at the moment. Near the entrance was a clump of wormwood, cited in Deuteronomy 29:18 (King James), looking like harmless little scrub plants.

There are fig trees, carobs, thyme, sorghum, thistles, oleander, flax (too little to make into linen), a pomegranate—a green bush with red buds (“Thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks”) and onions.

#### Relatives Are Present

There also are some plants that didn't exactly flourish in the Bible countries, but are relatives of those that do. There are even a few ringers, such as something called clary, that do not seem to have any Biblical reference, but apparently fill an esthetic gap in the collection. One relative is the styrax japonica that was filling in for the Biblical styrax, which was not on hand.

The Judas tree, or *cercis siliquastrum*, the tree from which Judas hanged himself (Matthew, 27:5) is represented by the *cercis Canadensis*, which never got closer to the Middle East than the Canadian border.

While the citations for the garden tenants come from the King James version of the Bible, the actual plants used were determined by the volume, “Plants of the Bible,” by Harold and Alma Moldenke.

Dr. Moldenke (the Mister member of the pair) showed up for the coming-out party). He explained how, he came to immerse himself in the specialized field of Biblical botany.

“I'm a botanist and my brother, my father, my grandfather, were all ministers so how could I not do it?” he said. Dr. Moldenke, who was at the New York Botanical Gardens, is retired, but still retains an emeritus title there.

#### A Thorny Reminder

With obvious delight, he pointed to the aloe, which crossword puzzlers only know as a four-letter medicinal plant, and said that the thorny little green-leafed affair came from Ethiopia and was used to make embalming fluid. It was brought to the Holy Land by Moses and used only to lay away important people.

Dr. Moldenke noted the Star of Bethlehem, another small plant.

“This was popularly called ‘dove's dung,’” the botanist said. “You'll find it in II Kings 6:25—a famine in Samaria when they sold ‘the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.’”

The name was given to the plant because it whitened the hillsides much as guano bleaches the Galapagos. Dr. Moldenke said, "We are sure that the bulbs of the Star of Bethlehem was used to make flour with grain."

As the Very Rev. James P. Morton, dean of the cathedral, and the Rev. C. E. F. Hoefner, prefect of St. Ignatius Roman Catholic Church browsed through the garden, which is sponsored by Mrs. Loening as an outgrowth of the cathedral's gardening program.

Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly, noted with satisfaction that the garden covered about one dunam, an old Hebrew land measure also found in puzzles, and that the gathering was appropriately held just before Shevuot, a feast of first fruits.

"It's the only holiday when Jews bedeck the synagogue with greens and flowers," he said.

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