

INDIANAPOLIS IN 1843—A HENRY WARD BEECHER LETTER.

WE ARE indebted to Mr. W. H. Ragan, of Washington, D. C., for a copy of this interesting letter, which was originally published in Hovey's *Magazine of Horticulture*, of Boston, Mass. It contains information not to be found elsewhere, both as to horticulture in Indiana and conditions in Indianapolis at an early day. We have omitted an unimportant preliminary paragraph.

"In this State we have an area a little more than four times greater than Massachusetts. There are eighteen nurseries, whose proprietors are chiefly supported by their sales. Apple trees sell for ten, and pear for twenty cents. An orchard is to be found upon almost every farm, and lately the pear has been more than ever sought after. At our October fair [county fair] was exhibited the greatest variety of fruits and flowers ever exhibited in this State—perhaps I may say in the West. From fifty-five to sixty varieties of apples were shown, and forty-three new seedling apples competed for a premium. A branch of the R. I. Greening was exhibited, two feet in length, bearing fifteen apples, weighing 12 lbs. 9 oz. I send you a brief account of the fair, enclosed in some other papers. You will see a beet mentioned, weighing thirty-two lbs. You will also see three seedling apples named and recommended for cultivation—Tariff, Red Jacket, and Osceola—the first two, capital fall apples, the last supposed to be a first-rate late winter apple. Those which we have are not yet ripe (January 24), nor at all fit for eating. The number of seedling apples in this State is very great, and some of them, in the neighborhood in which they grow, are esteemed more highly by the settlers than the old standard fruits. The soil and climate so modify the flavor and other qualities of the apple that there is some reason for believing that an apple originated on any given soil, will be better than many which are introduced into it; for though the apple is raised with great facility in almost every soil, yet it is probable that each variety affects a particular one and will refuse its most perfect qualities

to all except that one. Thus, I perceive, the most popular apples of New England are natives—the R. I. Greening, Hubbardston Nonsuch, Roxbury Russett, Baldwin, Minster, etc. The choice apples of the middle States are natives of them, and to a very considerable extent this is becoming true of the West.

“The annual meeting of our society is held during the winter, that the greater number of citizens from abroad during the sessions of our courts and legislatures may be reached and interested in this subject. I shall send you the reports, address and proceedings of our winter meeting as soon as they are published. I omitted to mention that on selling the fruit last October, great competition arose for the pears, and they sold at 12½, 25 and 50 cents apiece, many of them. I obtained the only specimen of the Duchesse d’Angouleme (the first I believe which has ripened in the State) for the moderate price of 62½ cents. I am afraid I should have doubled the bid rather than have lost her ladyship; and if all duchesses are of equal worth commend me to their society. I need not say I was ‘somewhat filled’ with her company. It was not a dear bargain in the sequel, for the gentleman who raised it was so much pleased with my enthusiasm for his favorite that he presented me a tree of the same kind, and one of the Beurre d’Aremberg.

“You will perceive, when you obtain the report of our winter meeting, that a premium of fifty dollars is offered for seedling apples, other premiums to encourage gardens, the obtaining of choice fruit trees, introduction of hardy shrubs and flowers, etc. Our great design is to awaken in the body of the people—among farmers, artisans and men of small means—a taste for fruit and flowers, and to fill the State, from the beginning, with the most select varieties. The peach, plum, cherry, apple, pear, quince, apricot, and small fruits might search through our land and find no better soil and climate for their perfection than that of Indiana. Our variable springs are almost the only obstacle. Long summers, brilliantly clear atmosphere, great warmth, and dryness during the fall ripening months, give our fruit great size, color, and flavor. If the mass of the community take hold earnestly, amateur cultivators will spring up of themselves. As it is I remember very few gardens in Massachusetts, except near large cities, which could compare with ten or twenty in this town (Indianapolis is a town of about the size of Northampton).

“In going to Terre Haute last summer I stopped at a small, poverty-stricken little town called Mt. Meridian; shackly houses, huts and hovels, pale faces and ragged children gave no great expectation of refinements. Putting up at the best tavern (at the West, no matter how small the town, there are always from two to five or even eight taverns to choose among), I soon retired to bed as the easiest way of reaching next morning. On rising and going into the rear of the building for washing water (we are always allowed to help ourselves in such trifles), I found the well standing in the middle of a very beautiful little flower garden—neat beds full of flowers, cleaned walks, trimmed borders. I could hardly trust my eyes. From the rear of the grounds I could almost throw a stone into the primeval forests, whose fragments yet lingered in parts of the garden; and the house was itself poorer than many a barn which I have seen in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Opening a rude wicket gate, I entered a spot of nearly an acre, well laid out and filled with the choicest vegetables, growing with the most vigorous health. Currants, raspberries (white and red Antwerp), strawberries, gooseberries, were thriving, and many select varieties of pear and apple. The whole garden bore evidence of careful cultivation and good taste. Such a spot, in such a town, and behind such a house, surrounded and almost overshadowed by the forest, and produced, not by wealth, but by the personal labor of one man, poor and advanced in life, delighted me more, I do believe, than would the grounds of the London Horticultural Society. If every county in our State had one such citizen I should not fear for horticultural interests in our State. The best assortment of seeds and plants which our town will afford shall be at the service of such a cultivator the coming spring.

“You will be pleased to learn that many of the pears which have given out in New England do well as yet with us. The St. Michael (or fall butter, as it is called here), thrives and bears excellently well, though Kenrick, following Fessenden, says that in New England it is ‘an outcast, intolerable even to the sight.’ The specimens at our fall fair could hardly be surpassed.

“A number of public-spirited gentlemen have associated, to plant all the private streets in this town with shade trees. We shall select from the ample stock of our own forests, mostly.

But it is proposed to put in a number of pear and plum trees—the first being a beautiful shaped tree as well as fruitful, and the plum, it is thought, will be free from the curculio, planted upon a highway. In the three squares upon which stand the State House, Court House, and Governor's House, it is proposed to gather and plant a specimen of all our forest trees.

“This reminds me of an incident in our early town history related to me by one of the first settlers. A large circle of nearly four acres was reserved in the center of the town and the native trees, sugar maples, left standing upon it. Under these trees, before churches were built, religious meetings were held in summer, and the prospect was that our town would have an adornment of this little grove which no architecture can bestow. One morning, however, he was attracted thither by the sound of an axe, and found one of the leading lawyers of the place exercising himself, as a preparation for breakfast, in felling one of the largest trees. It was too far cut to be saved. And so good an example could not be lost upon others. One by one these magnificent trees disappeared. Now we have a huge yellow brick building in the center of this circle; about a dozen locusts, with stems half as large as one's wrist, have for the three last years been struggling for life until they seem weary and faint, and so stand still.

“The Court House Square, something larger than the former piece of ground, was covered with a noble growth of stately trees, and it was determined to save them. A man was set, however, to thin out the plat, and being left to his own discretion, he felled all the younger trees and left the very old and tall ones standing. As might have been expected, the first wind, finding an easy passage through, uprooted a multitude of trees, and the citizens, to save the rest from a like fate, chopped them down instantly, and happily relieved this square, too, from unpleasant shade. All is not yet told. At a later day a number of gentlemen procured an order (if I mistake not) from the county commissioners to plant out the ground with shade trees, and a large number of the locust was set. However, that nothing might break in upon the practice of the county, the jailer's cow was permitted to pasture upon the plat, and in sight of the citizens she proceeded patiently to bark the trees or break

them down, until not a single one was left. A gentleman not without a taste for horticulture, from day to day, saw, from his office door, this destruction, as he informed me with great *naivete*, as though it were a sin to interfere and save the trees. Thus, in all our towns, comes first, extermination; then come scorching summer suns, and too late the wish that the trees had been spared; and at last planting begins, and we who live amid the immense forests of a new country—on whose town plat, not fifteen years ago, grew immense oaks, maples, sycamores, beeches, tulip trees and elms—are planting the short lived locusts (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*) to obtain a speedy shade! I can think of but three forest trees now standing in this town within a space one mile square—two elms and one buckeye. The same scenes are enacting in every town which springs up at the West. We are gaining meadows, and corn bottoms, and green hillsides, and town plats, by an utter extermination of the forest. Here and there an Indian may be found lingering around the old possessions of his nation, as if to mourn their loss, and to remind us of his ancestors; but of the forest, it is almost true that not a single tree is left to recall to our minds the glory of its fellows. Indeed, I have thought that those who were obliged to clear farms or timber land, imbibe the same feelings toward trees which the pioneers have toward the Indians—as things to be destroyed, of course. This devastation of our forests the political economist regards as a blunder, and says it is an unthrifty practice, but one who looks upon trees almost as if they had souls, witnesses this needless extermination with some feelings which can not be expressed in the pound and penny language of the mere economist. I think it is Michaux who pronounces the full-grown elm to be the most magnificent production of the vegetable kingdom. Is not an old, and tall, and broad, and healthy tree nobler to the eye than any temple or cathedral? The wonder of a century's growth ends in an hour by some man who never for one single moment thinks of the majesty or beauty of his victim—who only thinks how soonest to get it down, and burned up, and out of the way of the plough.

“Respectfully yours,

“H. W. BEECHER.

“Indianapolis, Indiana, January, 1843.”