

URUSVATI BRINGS AMERICA NEW BOTANICAL TREASURES

By DR. E. D. MERRILL

DURING the past year the Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute of the Roerich Museum has entered the biological field with a view to assembling material and data appertaining to the flora of the Western Himalayan region. In this endeavor the cooperation of the New York Botanical Garden was enlisted. The actual field work in India has been done by Dr. Walter Koelz, and his first season's collections are now available for study. The first set of duplicates, approximately 1,000 specimens, has been received and mounted at New York, and the preliminary identifications are being made by myself, as Director of the New York Botanical Garden.

The objectives are to study in the field and in the laboratory those plants of economic and scientific value, particularly as to their medicinal, or possible medicinal uses, as well as those involved in other ways in the daily life of the people; and to assemble other economic information regarding the qualities and uses of plants, their local names for comparative purposes, and similar data that will be of significance to the general field operations of the Roerich Museum and its artistic, economic, and scientific program.

This is a field of much promise, opening up new vistas and broadening the scope of the activities of the two cooperating institutions, the Roerich Museum and the New York Botanical Garden. It is an example of productive work fostered by the Roerich Museum and furthered through the voluntary cooperation of the Garden, to their mutual benefit.

While considerable field work has been done in the past in the northern Punjab, intensive work in any particular area in the region constantly brings to light new forms, and unquestionably a number of undescribed species will be found in the collections available and those being assembled. During the 1930 season, Dr. Koelz operated chiefly in Lahul, at an altitude of about 13,000 feet, and in the vicinity of Kulu. It is his plan to cover all of the botanically interesting regions in the general vicinity of Kulu and in Lahul, extending his field work, as possible, into the more remote and inaccessible areas.

The scientific value of the collections already assembled is very great, and duplicate sets of the specimens will be available for study in various institutions in Europe and in America, supplementing the original collection preserved at Kulu.

URUSVATI JOURNAL

The Himalayan flora is a very diversified and interesting one, containing many species of marked beauty, and others of great economic importance. The region is one of an exceedingly diversified topography, with great ranges in altitude, great variation in temperature and in the seasonal distribution of the rainfall, factors that favor the development and persistence of a very rich flora. Few parts of the world can be compared with this particular area in the richness and in the economic and scientific value of its plant life. It is to be hoped that the work so auspiciously initiated in 1930 can be maintained and amplified, not only for the work in itself but also for the prestige of the cooperating institutions.