



CECIL BILLINGTON

1876-1950

Cecil Billington of Birmingham, Michigan, passed away on March 17, 1950. With his passing, students of natural history lost a stimulating example, a courageous spirit, a loyal and kindly friend. Few contemporaries possessed to an equal degree his capacity to influence for good the advancement of education, culture and natural history.

Born in Lenawee County, Michigan, in 1876, Mr. Billington graduated from Cleary College at Ypsilanti in 1897. Soon after, he settled in the Detroit area and entered the newspaper field, becoming connected with the Scripps Booth publishing interests, an association that was maintained throughout his life. For many years he was secretary of the Evening News Association, the George G. Booth Corporation, and held directorships in major newspaper companies of Michigan.

Attainment of high recognition as a newspaper executive was paralleled by achievement in the study of Michigan botany. This inspiring interest had its origin in the casual perusal of a book concerning flowers that every botanist should know. From that time (about 1911), he set about to repair what he considered a personal intellectual deficiency. That he was successful is indicated by the fact that a few years later he was made Honorary Curator of the University of Michigan Herbarium and in 1940 he was awarded the Esther Longyear Murphy Medal for distinguished service in horticulture. For many years he served as Trustee of Cleary College. Shortly before his

death, this institution voted to award him an honorary degree at the June 1950 commencement. His studies of plants were continued to the end with ever-increasing vigor and interest. He presented one herbarium to the institution now named Wayne University, and gave his principal herbarium to Cranbrook Institute of Science. In honor to him, the entire Cranbrook herbarium was named "The Cecil Billington Herbarium," and upon his retirement in 1947, the Cranbrook Foundation established the Cecil Billington Fund, a tribute to his services in many fields.

But it was not alone as a field student of native plants that he earned the everlasting respect and admiration of his botanical friends. His respect for nature, for preserving her inimitable pattern, her perfection in detail and her limitless unfoldings in reward for man's searchings, was ever present and unequivocal. Applied Ecology was a very real subject to Cecil Billington. The grounds of his summer home revealed this interest in the development of natural biotic communities. It was on these grounds that he found much of the evidence for his scientific paper on the botany of fence-corners.

In addition to four scientific papers on the flora of Michigan, Mr. Billington wrote a book, **Shrubs of Michigan**, published in two editions, concerning which one contemporary botanist wrote "this publication has given the public the best book on shrubs ever written." A second book entitled "Ferns of Michigan" was completed in 1950, and is now being printed.

In a life filled with many diverse business responsibilities, and with evenings and weekends devoted to plant study, Mr. Billington still found time to engage actively in many other fields of interest. He was a profound student of many things. He was as interested in social problems as in those of nature, and constantly sought an explanation of man's behavior in terms of biological backgrounds.

Eminently gifted with the capacity for stimulating the power for good in others, Mr. Billington's influence was nowhere more effectively felt than in the development of the Cranbrook institutions established through the Cranbrook Foundation. As its Secretary and as Trustee of the Cranbrook Institute of Science and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, he "exercised a greater influence in the development of Cranbrook institutions than anyone save the donors."

In addition to membership in several non-scientific societies, Mr. Billington belonged to numerous biological and conservation organizations, including the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters (Vice President, Botanical Section, 1932-1933), Michigan Horticultural Society (Trustee), Torrey Botanical Club, Nature Conservancy, Botanical Society of America, National Audubon Society, New York Botanical Gardens, A. A. A. S. and the Ecological Society of America.

Many rare qualities of spirit and mind were combined in Cecil Billington to create a great and powerful force for good affecting all who came within his inspirational reach.

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