A Glimpse Into the Garden of Eden

ENTRANCE TO THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GARDEN IN THE SOUTH
JUNGLE GARDENS, AVERY ISLAND, LA.
There is something essentially homely in the very thought of pepper and salt, for it brings to mind kitchens, clattering stewpans, and stoves black with constant use. Yet in one instance, pepper and salt—and a man!—have given this world such authentic beauty as monarchs of old strove vainly to attain when they laid out the gardens around their palaces.

In Louisiana, hard by the point where the sweeping curve of the Gulf of Mexico reaches the northernmost point of its arc there is a plug of salt that is eight miles deep and, at its tip, is narrowed to a circumference of some six miles. It is difficult to visualize the immensity of it. Try to picture it in this way: If you fashioned of pure salt a life-sized model of Himalayan Mt. Everest, the mightiest mountain in the world, it would still be so much smaller than that plug of salt that there would be room to add a dozen or so of the major mountain peaks of the Allegheny range.

Only the uppermost tip of that mountain of salt projects beyond the level of the reed-grown tide marshes through which it is thrust, with a skim of top soil to clothe it, and to form an "island" of high, firm ground that dominates the surrounding marshlands: Avery Island. Hundreds of acres of the soil that covers this mountain of salt are each year
THE WEST SIDE OF BIRD CITY, IN WHICH MORE THAN 100,000 BIRDS MAKE THEIR SUMMER HOME
ONE END OF THE THREE HUNDRED FOOT MIRROR POOL
AT JUNGLE GARDENS
The Jungle Gardens of Avery Island
grown to the hottest peppers that ever came out of Old Mexico.

These two products—the salt that is mined from beneath the earth through a shaft 530 feet deep, and the pepper that is harvested from the soil above it—constitute the foundation of a fortune which through many years has been devoted to the development of the most remarkable garden anywhere to be found, a garden whose cultivated and landscaped portion is more than 200 acres in extent.

Once more we must resort to comparisons to endow that figure with meaning. The entire Loop—Chicago's famous inner business district—could be put into the gardens of Avery Island. Or, if you were to picture a garden a full city block wide, you might walk along it for 36 blocks before encompassing an area equal to that of the gardens atop that South Louisiana salt plug.

Though undeniably impressive, mere size is no measure of beauty. But for thirty-five years this particular landscape has been molded to splendor by the talent and the imagination of Edward Avery McIlhenny whose home, on Mayward Hill, is the focal point of the Avery Island gardens it overlooks. To understand what happened to that pepper grown salt plug you must know E. A. McIlhenny, the M'sieu Ned of all that country-side.

Now in his early sixties, but with a physique that many a wrestler might yet envy, Mr. McIlhenny is explorer, writer, business executive, naturalist, conservationist and half a dozen other "ists". He is the author of many books on nature; he has bred
A SMALL PORTION OF THE SUNKEN GARDEN AT AVERY ISLAND
hundreds of new varieties of plants; he saved the snowy egret from extinction at the hands of the plume hunters; he manufactures Tabasco sauce; he has tamed alligators and keeps three of them as pets; he has written a book on Negro spirituals; he holds what still stands as all time records in big-game hunting; he and the Emperor of Japan are the only men privileged to grow Wasi orange trees; he has taught the Arctic tribesmen to play football on the frozen tundras beyond Point Barrow, the most northern point of continental North America; and from a Rajah of India he took the lore which put a colony of nearly a quarter of million herons into the great bird sanctuary covering one lake on Avery Island.

From every quarter of the globe he has imported plants for the garden that pepper and salt built, not for any pride in the possession of exotic or rare varieties, but for the beauty thus to be achieved. There is, for example, a 300-foot shadow pool, bordered on each side by giant, bearded live oaks. Between the oaks, Chinese wisterias are grown as trees; climbing the oaks are giant wisterias from Japan, planted so that one day the vines may meet in an arch over the pool, in which the great pendant blossom clusters will be mirrored.

You will find huge, flame-colored daisies, like no daisies you are likely to have seen before, and small wonder, for these come from the Mountain of the Moon on the high table lands of equatorial Africa. Not far away you will find Irises from bleak Siberia; but there is hardly a section of the Northern hemisphere which is not here represented by its irises.
THE TIMBER BAMBOO FOREST—JUNGLE GARDENS
The Jungle Gardens of Avery Island

The iris gardens of Avery Island are half a mile long, and among the plants are no less than 1700 varieties of the blooms which adorn the banners of France as formalized "Fleur-de-Lys".

On one slope of Mayward Hill you will find a dense forest of 60-foot canes of Chinese Timber Bamboo; but that, too, is hardly a matter for wonder, since there are 64 varieties of exotic bamboos that grow profusely, in jungly thickets, about Avery Island, from the lace-leaved fern bamboos to the Titan Timber canes of the Orient.

You will find pink-fleshed, hybrid grapefruits from Cochin, China; you will find a queer evergreen that is one of the sole survivors of the coal age, an exact duplicate of the plants whose fossilized remains constitute the coal beds of today. A plant explorer found it in a remote Tibetan Valley and shipped it to Louisiana. You will find finger bananas from China, and huge pools where lotus and papyrus from the upper Nile grow in luxuriant profusion. You will find papayas from the American tropics; soap trees from India; junipers, arbor vitae, and a host of vari-colored crepe myrtles of India, with their foam of crinkle-leaved blossoms, amid stately magnolias and mighty, gnarled live-oaks.

You will find the world's most complete collection of camellias, for among Avery Island's 10,000 camellia plants there are no fewer than 500 varieties —importations from France, China, and Japan, besides new varieties produced on the Island itself by skilled hybridizing. Let mere numbers convey no
false impression. Those 10,000 plants are not set out in geometric, orchard-like rows, but in superb groupings, to make up individual pictures: on this slope a temple garden that might have come straight from the Tuileries—small plants near the center, then larger ones, tall palms behind them, and behind these, as a backdrop, a circling wall of bamboo; a sunken garden just above the level of the nearby marsh, with the camellias set about a horse-shoe dike, enclosing a jeweled emerald lawn.

In the field of such plants, however, the azaleas of Avery Island are the most numerous, some 30,000 of them with more than a hundred varieties represented; white, variegated, single, double, magenta, pink, red and purple. Where the average home gardener counts himself fortunate, even in the Southland, to border one or two beds with azaleas, here acres upon acres are literally carpeted with them, and the beauty of these in blossom time is something almost unimaginable.

There are hilltops on the island where acres are sown broadcast to wild flowers; others where clusters of somber-hued evergreens are margined by the brilliant white of thousands of chrysanthemums. You approach them through living tunnels of wisteria vines, so arranged that the blossom colors shade from pure white at one end, through delicate gradations of pink, to purple at the other. There are roads hedged on both sides with Ilex Cornuta, a lovely oriental holly. There are slopes of great leather-leaved Xanthsonias and Arallias looking upon little waterfalls built of old sugar-kettles above pools.
where enormous water lilies from Africa reveal their purple glory.

Not far from this point the visitor will find a small Wasi orange tree. In all the world there are but two others, and these are closely guarded in the imperial gardens of Tokyo, for by immemorable custom the Wasi is sacred to the emperor of Japan. No one else is permitted to taste them. But in 1896, on one of his Arctic explorations, Mr. McIlhenny rescued the crews of five shipwrecked whaling vessels. Among those thus saved were three high caste Japanese, for whose rescue the Japanese government sought to bestow upon the young Louisiana explorer a decoration, and, when that was refused, a financial reward. This too was declined. Inquiry was made as to what might be offered as a suitable token of appreciation. This elicited a request that the gardens of Avery Island be given one of the sacred Wasi oranges. Botanical gardens all over the world had been vainly seeking this prize. Several years later one sapling was ceremoniously transferred from Tokyo to Avery Island, with the chief pomologist of the federal department of agriculture as escort to the last stage of its journey.

However, this is but one of scores of stories that might be told of the rare exhibits to be found in these gardens. Perhaps the most thrilling of all concerns Bird City, the heron sanctuary. It is a great artificial lake between the hills, surrounded by low but- tonwood trees. Each Spring some 20,000 nests are built there; each Spring some 20,000 heron families are there hatched and reared, in spite of the fact
SCENES IN BIRD CITY—JUNGLE GARDENS—avery island, la.
that forty years ago there was scarcely an egret left not only in Louisiana, but in all North America. The plume hunters had virtually exterminated them, for their aigrettes and nuptial adornments which these glorious birds wear only at the mating season. To deck out the world’s womankind these birds were thus slain at a time when of necessity their young must die unhatched in the shell or be left to starve.

Apart from unceasing efforts to pass legislation which would outlaw plume murder, “M’sieu Ned” decided to do something practical. A British vice-roy visiting the McIlhenny home, had told the story of a long-dead and forgotten rajah who, for the delight of a girl queen, had constructed vast flying cages of bamboo at Juraspore. Exotic birds from all parts of India were brought here and liberated within the cage, built nests there, mated and reared their young. After the rajah’s death the bamboo cages were neglected. They rotted and fell away. But the nestlings who had there been hatched and who had there reared broods of their own, still remained, though there were now no bars to hem them in.

In the Spring of 1892, Mr. McIlhenny built a flying cage of wire over a small part of an artificial lake on Avery Island. Going into the swamps himself, he captured seven young snowy egrets and liberated them in this cage. He fed them there to maturity, watched them grow, select mates, build nests, hatch and rear their young. At the beginning of the next migratory season, he destroyed the cage and watched his egrets take wing for South America.
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where the snowy herons spend their winters. Overjoyed, the next Spring, he saw those same birds return to the spot they knew as home with their young, the latter now fully matured and ready for the serious business of rearing youngsters of their own. Each Spring since that time, this has been repeated. So numerous are the birds now that it is necessary to assist nature. More than thirty truckloads of twigs for nesting material must be dumped about Bird City for each annual house building of Bird City inhabitants. The natural fringe of buttonwood bushes must be supplemented by double-decked structures of bamboo, floored with brush, where the newcomers now quite contentedly build their nests.

And here is a strange thing: The adults of Bird City never feed in Bird City lake. That food is left scrupulously to each year's crop of youngsters, not yet strong enough for long and sustained journeys. The grown birds fly out over the illimitable waterways of the coastal marshes for their food and at nightfall you may see them returning by countless thousands, gleaming white in the level rays of the setting sun, rocketing down out of the blue to their homes, preening and ruffling the magnificent nuptial aigrettes which no plume hunter now dares touch. With them are blue herons, parti-colored herons, and even glossy black ibises. It is a sight not elsewhere to be duplicated.

The gardens of Avery Island have recently been thrown open to the public upon payment of a modest fee. The old roads laid out before the days of automobiles have been widened to permit cars to drive
The Jungle Gardens of Avery Island

over them. Suitable parking spaces have been constructed, for the real beauty of this garden can only be freely enjoyed by walking through the miles of hidden paths, paved with stepping stones. Guides are there to show visitors about the huge estate.

There is a swimming pool, set amid exotic foliage, where bathers may refresh themselves after their walk about the Island. The place has become a Mecca for tourists from every part of the globe, for the pilgrimage is easily made.

A four-hour drive from New Orleans, or five hours from Houston, brings one to the city of New Iberia on the banks of the Bayou Teche where the Evangeline and Basil of Longfellow's immortal poem played out their tragic romance and through which pass the Southern Pacific and Frisco railroads.

Here may be had comfortable hotel accommodations. Eight miles from New Iberia are the gardens of Avery Island that are well worth seeing any day in the year; the kingdom of beauty that was created out of pepper and salt.

This is the most perfect spot in the United States for the study of nature, and to observe, plants and flowers from all over the world.

For further information address Jungle Gardens, Avery Island, La.
Blossoms from the McIlhenny Iris Garden. Some of these blossoms measure 12 inches across the petals, and there are more than 1,700 varieties covering acres.