Lore of the nightshades. Almost a quarter of this book* is devoted to the 'Wonderberry', claimed by the Californian plant breeder Luther Burbank to be the miraculous result of a cross between *Solanum guineense* (*S. melanocerasum*) and *S. villosum* and launched on an unsuspecting American public in 1909 as "Luther Burbank's greatest and newest production. Fruit blue-black like an enormous rich blueberry. Unsurpassed for eating . . . The greatest garden fruit ever introduced . . . Easiest plant in the world to grow, . . ." The furore aroused by such extravagant claims—most expert opinion, including that of the Kew Herbarium, considered the Wonderberry no more than a form of *S. nigrum*—is fully described and includes many extracts from *The Rural New Yorker* who clearly felt it an editorial duty to protect the public from people such as Burbank and equally clearly relished their campaign against him. These extracts, together with letters from Burbank, John Lewis Child (who distributed the plant) and contemporary experts make entertaining reading and the story is continued to the present day with an account of Professor Heiser's own efforts to establish the true identity of Luther Burbank's plant.

The potato, tomato, peppers and tobacco naturally figure prominently, the eggplant, mandrake, belladonna and thorn apple are not neglected but there are interesting facts to be learned of plants less well known to the Old World. *Solanum quitoense*, the lulo, is said to "yield one of the most delicious fruit beverages known" and *S. muricatum*, the pepino, produces a pear shaped fruit with a melonlike taste rarely encountered outside Latin America. Neither is humour lacking; there is a delightful account of the origin of a recipe for eggplant known as 'Imam Fainted': "An imam, or Moslem priest became engaged to the daughter of a wealthy olive oil merchant. Part of the dowry was twelve huge jars of olive oil. After the marriage the wife served the imam eggplant and olive oil for twelve consecutive evenings. On the thirteenth she failed to do so and he inquired as to the reason. She answered that she had run out of olive oil, and the imam fainted".

This book certainly deserves to be read for it is a lively erudite work with appeal to layman and botanist but it must be said that two pounds sixteen shillings is a very high price to pay for 200 rather small pages. The illustrations are in monochrome only and the photographs suffer from lack of contrast. The several line drawings, based either on old herbals or living plants, are simply done and match the general lay-out and typography well.

R. M. SMITH.

* Nightshades. The Paradoxical Plants. By Charles B. Heiser, Jr., W. H. Freedman & Co., San Francisco 1969, 200 pp, 14 plates, 16 line drawings. 56s.