



The Botanic Garden of New York founded by Henry Rusby.

True "Indiana Jones" of Pharmacy

Rusby (1855 - 1940)

...nian Institution, at the time in which the above mentioned states were a stage of the horrible conflicts between the Apaches and the colonists that all of us have seen in wild west movies. While he was practising botany, he had to fight against the Apaches and gunmen and, nevertheless, he found time to translate Goethe into English.

In 1884, recently graduated, he embarked in an expedition to South America in search of a new discovery of possible importance for pharmacy; the Erythroxylon coca, plant of divine coca for the Incas. Scientifically speaking, the expedition was a success.

Tenacity

Although his sponsors ordered him to return, the tenacious Rusby personality didn't allow him to waste the opportunity to be one of the first in exploring the wealth of the South American flora, so he attempted a journey by foot and by boat. The crossing was incredibly hard. He endured a tropical fever that made him unconscious, thus making his Indian guides put him in an empty grave waiting for his death. He recovered, went out of the grave and returned to work. At the end of the trip, he arrived to the grounds of a specialist in orchids on the coasts of Brazil, where he introduced himself as Rusby. He was so weak as to be unrecognizable, making it neces-

sary to do big efforts to convince him in his personality. "Rusby is dead. The Indians killed him. I ordered an expedition in his search and I have all the tests" he said. The orchids grower wasn't the unique skeptical on his identity. In his return home, he was so weak that his father didn't recognize him and threw him out of the house. He brought the most numerous specimens, many of them new for the science.

After his appointment as professor of Botantics, Pharmacy and Physiology of the University of Columbia a year later, he agreed with Parke Davis to charge royalties from the medicaments produced with the drugs he discovered, as he found it unfair to seek his own benefit instead of human-kind's welfare.

He also did a great campaign, along with Dr Harvey Wiley, which led to the promulgation of the first Pure Food and Drug Act, to protect people from adulterated medicaments. After this struggle, he went on being a chemist of New York Port, where he established controls over the importation of plants.

Over the years, he made several expeditions to the south american continent, from which he brought over 17000 specimens from the low river Orinoco. When he was 64, and when he had just recovered from a pneumonia, he

embarked in a two-year trip to Bolivia and Brazil. As he was unable to resist the hardships of the trip, he returned earlier, which caused confusion among those who didn't expect him to survive the trip. He lived and worked for another twenty years. His name is now part of several species and plants, and he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Columbia.

His obituary, published in the magazine Science, quotes his words from a letter of his:

«Unfortunately, honesty does not always have results immediaty enough to guarantee the old adagio. Maybe the dishonest win ins-

stead of the others, but I will always stick to an honest behaviour until the very end, as the welfare of humankind depends on this sacrifice, and life's purpose is the improvement of the human character».

Translation: Miguel Bernardo Olmedo Morell.



Above, Henry Rusby along with other scientifics. Under that, in the Amazonas.