

Gregor Mendel

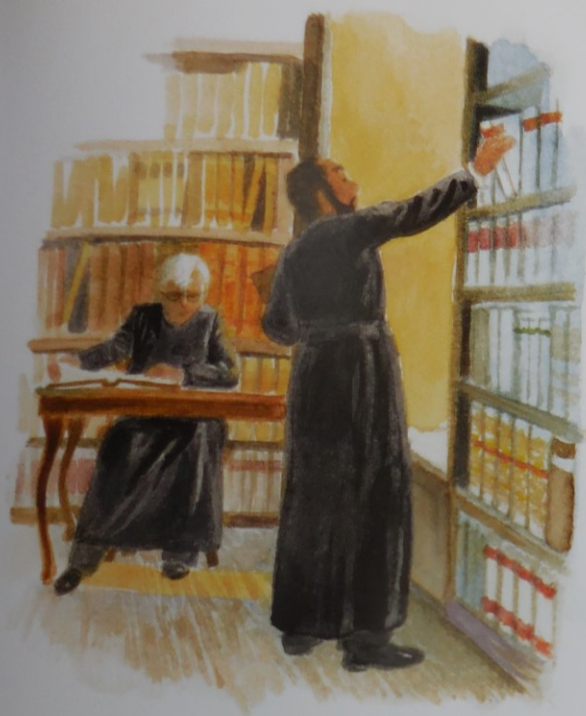
The Friar Who Grew Peas

by Cheryl Bardoe
illustrated by Jos. A. Smith

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Gregor's problems were solved when he became a friar. At the Abbey of St. Thomas, in a town called Brno, Gregor could feed his body, mind, and soul. His fellow friars preached sermons, cared for the sick, taught school, and were respected community leaders. They were also mathematicians, botanists, philosophers, and geologists. They studied in



a library where 30,000 books lined the walls. They discussed ideas over three plentiful meals each day.

Surrounded by great thinkers, Gregor plunged into further studies. He became "addicted to nature," he later wrote. "I would shrink from no exertions which might help me . . . to fill the gaps in my information."

In the spring, Gregor used tweezers to peel open the inner petals of a flower on a yellow pea plant. He snipped away the flower's stamen, so that it could no longer make pollen. Then he brushed the egg cells in that same flower's pistil with pollen from a green pea plant. When he was done, he tied a tiny sack around the flower to prevent another plant's pollen from drifting in on a breeze or the legs of a bee or butterfly. This way, he was positive that no other plant had pollinated the flower.

Step by step, Gregor pollinated 287 flowers by hand, working his way through the seven pairs of traits—smooth peas and wrinkled peas, yellow pea pods and green pea pods, smooth pea pods and bumpy pea pods, and so on. His fingers moved carefully, as a mistake might spoil his results.

Then Gregor waited. He would not remove the sacks until the flowers had been replaced by pea pods filled with seeds. He nurtured the plants that he joked were his children. Fall finally came. Gregor eagerly split open the newly ripened pea pods.

What did he find?

