58

Gregor Johann Mendel (1822 - 1884)

Austrian monk, whose experimental scientific work became the basis of modern hereditary theory. He investigated variation, heredity, and evolution in plants at the monastery's experimental garden.

Mendel was born into a German-speaking family in Heizendorf, Czechoslovakia. He was born into a poor farming family. At that time it was difficult for poor families to obtain a good education and the young Mendel saw the only way to escape a life of poverty was to enter the monastery at Brno in Czechoslovakia. During his childhood Mendel worked as a gardener, and as a young man attended the Philosophical Institute in Olomouc.

To enable him to further his education, the abbot arranged for Mendel to attend the University of Vienna to get a teaching diploma. However, Mendel did not perform well. He was nervous and the University did not consider him a clever student. Mendel's examiner failed him with the comments, " he lacks insight and the requisite clarity of knowledge". This must have been devastating to the young Mendel, who in 1853 had to return to the monastery as a failure. As this was a teaching order, Mendel had to decide whether to stay on at the monastery as a failed teacher - or return to what?

On his return to Brno in 1854 Mendel was appointed a teacher of physics and natural history in the Technical School. In 1856 he prepared himself for the university examination again, but he became seriously ill and did not take it.

Gregor Mendel, who is known as the "father of modern genetics", was inspired by both his professors at university and his colleagues at the monastery to study variation in plants, and he conducted his study in the monastery's garden. Between 1856 and 1863 Mendel cultivated and tested some 29,000 pea plants. Mendel cultivated and tested at least 28,000 pea plants, carefully analyzing seed and plant characteristics. His experiments brought forth two eneralisations which later became known as Mendel's Laws of Inheritance and led him to coin