AMERICAN SONG BIRDS

A new exhibit of North American song birds has been installed in Hall 21. About one hundred species of flycatchers, wrens, thrashers, jays, swallows, etc., are shown, including all the species belonging to these families that occur on this continent north of Mexico. One of the most interesting is the vermilion flycatcher from the deserts of the southwest, which makes its living as other flycatchers do while clothed in the brilliant plumage of a tanager. Also shown are the violet green swallow which has the same iridescent colors in its plumage as oil film on water; Leconte's thrasher from the desert, which is one of the birds most perfectly adapted to living on dazzling sand under a bright sun; and many species of jays and magpies whose blue, green, black and white feathers make a pleasing contrast to their more somberly colored cousins, the crows and titmice. Birds in the exhibit which are seen in the state of Illinois are especially marked with a red star.

The birds were mounted by Taxidermist Ashley Hine, of the Museum staff.

TOBACCO PLANT EXHIBITED

By B. E. Dahlgren
Acting Curator, Department of Botany

Tobacco is of American origin. The earliest mention of it was made by Columbus and the first description of the plant and its use was that of Romano Pane, a monk who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage. He described how the Indians made a roll of the dry leaf, lighted it at one end, and, holding the other in the mouth, puffed clouds of smoke which, he supposed, were intended to drive away mosquitoes. Such cigar-like rolls, enveloped in corn husk, the inhabitants called *tabaco* and this Carib word has passed practically unaltered into the vocabularies of all western peoples.

Seeds of tobacco were carried to Spain where the plant was grown as a curiosity and as a remedy of great repute. It was called "herba santa," "herba panacea," and "divine tobacco." Soon afterwards it was introduced into France by Jean Nicot, the French ambassador to Lisbon, whose name has been given to the genus, *Nicotiana*, to which tobacco belongs, and thence to nicotine.

It did not take long for mariners, and settlers in the New World, to adopt the use of tobacco, and its cultivation was undertaken by Spaniards in Haiti, Portuguese in Brazil, and Englishmen in Virginia.

Smoking was introduced into Spain by sailors in 1570, and into England from Virginia soon afterwards. It did not become prevalent until the beginning of the seventeenth century. The cultivation of tobacco was begun in Holland in 1615 and afterwards in other European and in Asiatic countries.

Use of the herb for narcotic purposes encountered great opposition, especially from the church, and in several places severe penalties were imposed. In Russia it was forbidden on pain of slitting the nostrils of offenders, and later even of death. The herb was officially and ecclesiastically cursed in various countries as being unclean and an invention of the devil.

The denunciations and prohibitions, however, were ineffective, and the popularity of the "detestable" smoke of the North American Indians and the snuff of the South American tribes rapidly became almost universal. Asiatic smokers began to mix tobacco with their hemp. The Chinese quickly became devotees of the weed. The economic aspect of the trade in tobacco grew in importance and has steadily continued to grow. Tobacco now forms an important part of the agricultural production of many lands, especially the United States.

The tobacco plant is a member of the nightshade family which includes such food plants as potatoes, tomatoes and pimentoes, as well as various poisonous plants, such as

Tobacco Plant
Reproduction exhibited in Hall 28, prepared by Stanley Field Laboratories of the Museum.

datura, belladonna and hyoscyamus. The genus *Nicotiana*, typically and almost exclusively American, includes some forty-five species, many of which are attractive garden plants.

By far the greater part of the world's tobacco crop is derived from one species, *Nicotiana tabacum*, and its varieties such as Virginia and Turkish tobacco. Another species, known as Hungarian peasant tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica*, furnishes a part of the tobacco of Asia and South America. The Levantine cigar tobacco is said to be *Nicotiana crispa*.

A reproduction of a typical plant of the species *Nicotiana tabacum* in flower has been added to the Museum's exhibit of tobacco in Hall 28. It is the work of Emil Sella of the Stanley Field Plant Reproduction Laboratories.

Lacquer Ware from China

An exhibit of Chinese lacquer ware, including rare pieces hundreds of years old, some artistically carved, has been installed in George T. and Frances Gaylord Smith Hall (Hall 24). Among curiosities in the collection are sets of lacquer trays with pictures which serve as illustrations of ancient Chinese novels, and an elaborate picnic set of lacquer bowls and plates which fit into each other and into a small globe.

Field Museum's ethnological collection from Madagascar, in Hall E, is one of the most complete ever assembled.

WOOD CARVING WITHOUT METAL

By Albert B. Lewis
Assistant Curator of Melanesian Ethnology

Metal has become so necessary to our modern civilization that we find difficulty in imagining that mankind could ever have accomplished much without it. With the prehistoric stone ages we associate the cave man, and seldom think of him as possibly living, during the later periods, in well-constructed wooden houses, and making and using numerous wooden utensils of various kinds.

Yet proof that man is able to accomplish much without metals is found not only in remains of neolithic times, but also in the achievements of the natives of New Guinea and other South Pacific islands. Their large, finely carved houses and well-constructed seagoing canoes have been described by many early voyagers. Not only was the woodwork well done, but the decorative carving was often very elaborate, as, for example, in New Zealand and many Melanesian islands.

The superiority for woodworking of iron over stone, bone, tooth or shell, was speedily recognized by these peoples, and at the present time not much of the early work remains except from regions where the natives have acquired iron only recently.

In Joseph N. Field Hall (Hall A) there are many examples of such work, especially from the Admiralty Islands and New Guinea. The workmanship is equal, if not superior, to that done by the same people after they began to use iron, so that it is often difficult to tell from the specimens themselves what tools were used. All too frequently, however, the natives ceased their wooden manufactures after contact with Europeans, and the ancient art degenerated or disappeared in spite of better tools. The old artisans and artists died, and there were no younger ones to take their places.

Before the advent of metal tools, stone and shell axes and adzes of different sizes were common, and many examples can be seen in the Museum's exhibit. Stone or shell blades were fastened to straight handles and used as chisels. For smaller chisels bones were sometimes used. Many carving tools were made of teeth, either by using a portion of the jaw as a handle, or by setting them in a handle of wood. Boars' tusks were very commonly used in this way. The finer carvings were smoothed and polished with some rough substance such as a piece of shark's skin. Some of the best examples of the old work may be seen in the large circular wooden bowls from the Admiralty Islands, the wooden figures and masks from the Sepik River and the north coast of New Guinea, and the bowls and pillows from Huon Gulf.

Exhibit of Cork

Cork is obtained from the soft, spongy, and elastic bark of a stout, medium-sized oak tree (*Quercus suber*), native of southern Europe and northern Africa. As the tree grows the bark thickens and becomes firmer and denser. At certain periods of growth it falls naturally from the trees. For commercial purposes, however, it is removed, care being taken not to wound the inner bark or cambium layer. The outer matured bark is taken off in large sheets, soaked in water and then flattened by pressure. An exhibit in Hall 28 shows the entire bark of a cork oak as it appears when stripped from the tree trunk.