

STORY OF EARLY COFFEE TRADE

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growing are limited to the slopes of the mountains and highlands adjoining the Red Sea just above the western tip of the peninsula, a narrow zone where climatic conditions and mountain streams make irrigation possible. The production of the none-too-extensive coffee gardens of the Arabs was necessarily limited, but that part of the crop which was not required for home consumption passed up the Red Sea or along its coast, and overland to near-by Mediterranean ports, either to Cairo and Alexandria, or to Acre, Jaffa, Tripoli or other cities of the eastern Mediterranean coast for transportation and sale to consumers in Damascus, Aleppo, or in Constantinople where coffee houses were opened in 1554.

In Europe coffee was unknown until travelers to the Levant returned with stories of the black drink, which, in the words of Francis Bacon, "comforteth the brain and heart, and helpeth digestion." From Constantinople coffee soon found its way to Venice. This and other commercial cities in the north of Italy obtained a supply from Alexandria for resale to western Europe and for a short time held a virtual monopoly of this as of other exotic products of the Near and Far East, until Marseilles on the French Mediterranean coast, also securing its supply from Alexandria, became the center for the coffee trade in France. The Dutch had in the meantime not been idle and regular shipments arrived in Amsterdam. Coffee was soon sold at public auctions there, in London, and in New York. Dutch traders obtained seeds from Aden and planted coffee in Ceylon, where it did not thrive, and later, more successfully, in the Netherlands Indies. In 1706 a coffee plant grown in Java was received in the botanic gardens at Amsterdam.

It was about that time that merchants of St. Malo, a small island off the channel coast of France, decided to dispute the French coffee trade with Marseilles and dispatched three ships directly to Arabia. The story of that expedition, which took several years, was told by Jean La Roque in his *Voyage de l'Arabie Heureuse*. How the enterprise of the St. Malo merchants afterwards led to the formation of the French India Company and how the ships of the French pioneers were followed by others, including chartered American clippers, belongs to the history of commerce and would take us too far afield.

The presentation to the king of France, a few years later, of a coffee plant raised from the seed of that in Amsterdam, is however, a link in the story of coffee, for the plant in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris was carefully described and well figured by the French botanist Jussieu, and seedlings derived from it and from the parent coffee

trees in Amsterdam are said to have been the first to reach the West Indies. At any rate the French soon afterwards introduced coffee plants in Haiti and Martinique; the Dutch in Curaçao and Dutch Guiana. Before the middle of the eighteenth century coffee plants were being grown in almost all West Indian islands and in all the Central and South American countries, which have since become the chief producers. Africa, the original home of the coffee tree, was the last to undertake its large-scale cultivation.

The destruction of millions of sacks of surplus crop in Brazil is spectacular evidence of the enormous increase which has taken place in the production of this one commodity since the ships of the merchants of St. Malo appeared in Yemen to bargain for a share of the product of the Arabian coffee gardens. Who could have predicted at the time of the visit of the French coffee buyers that the economy of entire nations in another hemisphere some day would be largely dependent on commerce in the dried seeds of this Abyssinian plant!

EXOTIC BIRDS IN NEW EXHIBIT

BY EMMET R. BLAKE
ASSISTANT CURATOR OF BIRDS

Two temporary screens of mounted birds recently installed near the southwest end of Hall 21 illustrate in a striking manner the great diversity of color, pattern, and form to be found in the bird world. Sixty-two species, representing more than thirty families, are included. All of the birds are of foreign origin, with the Australian region particularly well represented.

Among the more striking exotic species is a crowned pigeon of New Guinea. This handsome bird, the largest member of its family, attains the size of a small turkey and superficially bears little resemblance to any other pigeon. An erect fan-shaped crest, dull bluish, like the general plumage, arises from the top of its head and lends it a particularly distinguished appearance. Smaller, but scarcely less attractive, is the Nicobar pigeon of Australasia with its remarkably developed mantle of greenish-bronze feathers.

Of special interest is the kea, a large olive green parrot of New Zealand. Keas inhabit the higher mountains during the warm months but descend to the sheep ranges in winter. Although normally omnivorous, these sturdy birds have become a serious economic problem in some areas through their attacks upon sick or weakened sheep which they destroy by devouring the fat about the kidneys.

Weaver finches, an Old World family of extremely diverse sparrow-like birds, are represented by nine of the more colorful species. Several hundred forms are known to science. Many have become popular as cage birds because of their attractive colors and hardiness in captivity. Our ubiquitous



CROWNED PIGEON

The largest member of its family, this beautiful bird of New Guinea may grow to the size of a small turkey.

but relatively drab English "sparrow" is, in reality, a weaver finch, which has spread over most of this country since its introduction at Brooklyn, New York in 1850.

The bird fauna of the American tropics is represented by numerous rare or beautiful species. The oil bird of Trinidad and northern South America constitutes an anatomical link between owls and goat-suckers and bears a notable superficial resemblance to the latter. Oil birds dwell in caves from which they emerge at night to feed upon palm seeds. Their name is derived from the condition of the nestlings, which become so distended with fat as to attract native hunters who melt out the oil for use as butter.

A quetzal, the national bird of Guatemala (also represented in a habitat group in Hall 20), a crested oropendola, a motmot, an Australian tawny frogmouth, a Philippine hornbill, and various tanagers and other exotic species which pique the imagination or delight the eye are also displayed. The birds were prepared for exhibition by Staff Taxidermist John W. Moyer.

Folk-lore of Christmas Plants

You have to have holly at Christmas, of course, and you know what to do when you encounter the mistletoe. But do you know why you do these things? The origin of the customs surrounding these Yuletide shrubs is traced in *Mistletoe and Holly*, a leaflet published by Field Museum. This little book, which makes a charming Christmas gift itself, presents in interesting form the principal botanical facts about the plants.

On sale at THE BOOK SHOP of FIELD MUSEUM. Price 25 cents. Copies may be ordered by mail.



1941. "Crowned Pigeon." *Field Museum news* 12(12), 2-2.

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