Perils of the Nature Hunter In Earth's Far Corners

New Plants and Animals Are Magnets That Lure Scientists To Risk Life for Discovery's Sake.

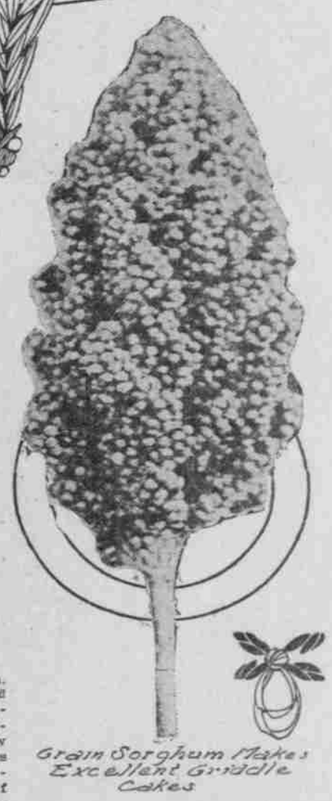
Karakul Ewe.

Dr Frank N. Meyer, Government Plant Hunter

Radishes as Big as a Child's Head

A New Giant Peony Introduced From China

A Full-bred Angora Doe.



Grain Sorghum Makes Excellent Griddle Cakes

BY RENE BACH.

WHEN Dr. Frank N. Meyer, Government plant-hunter, made a recent trip through Corea and Northern China, he was obliged to cover a distance of 1800 miles on foot, crossing lofty ranges of snow-clad mountains, swimming or wading icy-cold rivers and deeming himself fortunate when he could obtain lodging at an inn where he occupied the same room with horses and in which there were no tables, no chairs and no lamps.

The natives of the region, who had never seen a white man before and who regarded him with a natural curiosity, were friendly enough; but it was by mere good luck that his little caravan, comprising an escort of seven Chinese coolies and five ponies with baggage, escaped attack by the Redbeards—fierce robbers who rove in predatory bands, seeking just such opportunities for theft and murder. The only weapon in the party was Dr. Meyer's revolver.

Such risks as these, however, are all part of the game from the viewpoint of the adventurous explorers who, to obtain new plants and animals for introduction to the United States, seek the least-known and most remote corners of the world. The ever-tempting possibility of a fresh discovery and useful acquisition lures them, as with a beckoning finger, into wild and often dangerous places, where venomous reptiles, deadly miasmas and bloodthirsty savages combine to minimize their chances of return.

Thus, not long ago, when Dr. C. C. Young, of Belen, Texas, went to Bokara for the purpose of procuring the Karakul sheep, whose pelt is the much-prized "astrachan" (the skin of the new-born animal being known commercially as "Persian lamb"), he was warned by the Russians that the attempt would cost him his life. Nevertheless, though dogged by official spies (the local government being vigorously opposed to the enterprise he had undertaken), he managed to secure a number of pure-bred specimens and brought them to this country—the result being that, thanks to his successful endeavor, we shall be able before long to produce, through scientific breeding, grades of Persian lamb and astrachan far superior to the best hitherto known in the market.

Perils equally great were encountered by Dr. W. C. Bailey, of San Jose, Cal., when, a few years back, he undertook to obtain some pure-bred angora goats from Turkey. Their exportation was forbidden by law, and to get them out of the country seemed almost an impossibility. Having secretly purchased four, resort was had to a series of most ingenious expedients to elude the vigilance of the authorities—the first thing done being to cut off the long, silky hair and transport them over a long distance on muleback.

Another stage of their journey was accomplished on camels. Then they were transferred to a closed carriage; and later on, they were carried for many miles on men's backs in sacks. Thus at length they reached the Bosphorus, across which they voyaged under a boatload of loose hay.

Still the danger of detection was far from being over. The goats, worth literally their weight in gold, were sprinkled plentifully with coal dust, and disguised as black sheep, were carried through the streets of Constantinople in an open wagon. Three times the wagon was stopped by Turkish officials and police; but a liberal bestowal of "baksheesh" extinguished curiosity, and at last the precious animals were safe on shipboard.

Angora goats in this country are now annually producing more than $1,000,000 worth of wool, the finest of which owes its quality to the blood of the four specimens secured by Dr. Bailey.

Occasionally it happens that our consular officials abroad act as volunteer explorers. Thus, not long ago, Mr. Nightingale, vice-Consul at Fu-Chau, went forth to seek the wonderful tea which hitherto has been monopolized by royalty and the highest nobility of the Chinese Empire, much care being taken to prevent any of the seeds from getting abroad. To obtain the seeds, Mr. Nightingale was obliged to take a long boat trip, and then to proceed on foot a distance of 200 miles. At length he came to the River of Nine Winding, which runs through a district of huge sandstone cliffs and boulders. In the shadow of the cliffs and in clefts among the boulders, wherever a small quantity of the poor, sandy soil is found, the marvelous tea grows.

There is nothing more picturesque in agriculture than the role played by the discovery or introduction of a new kind of plant. The vines of the Chatuaqua grape belt, producing annually 200,000,000 pounds of grapes, are derived almost entirely from cuttings of a single seedling planted at Concord, Mass., 71 years ago. The Elberta and Belle peaches, which have earned many millions of dollars for fruit growers since 1870, both originated in Georgia from one tree of an imported Chinese "cling." The cultivation in California of many square miles of such oranges (navels) as the world never saw before is the result of the importation of a single buuch of "scions" from Brazil.

These are familiar examples of discoveries in the plant world which are comparable to the inventions of the telephone and the typewriter in the mechanical world. Yet Ephraim Bull, who discovered the Concord grape; the Rumph brothers, who originated the Belle and Elberta peaches, and William Saunders, who introduced the navel orange, received no financial advantages from the benefactions they bestowed upon mankind.

In Northern China has been found what the Government plant bureau calls a veritable Klondike of new plants. From that source one of our agricultural explorers obtained not long ago a new and very curious kind of cabbage which grows on a tall stalk. It is believed to be well adapted for cultivation in the United States. He also secured, at Kirin, a frost-proof peach that promises to be very valuable. A Buddhist priest secretly sold him the cutting of it for $2. But in the Shantung province he got hold of budwood of the most remarkable peaches in the world, which weigh a pound apiece. They are so delicious in flavor that 100,000 of them are sent each year to Pekin, for the exclusive delectation of the imperial court.

In the same province were found some most curious watermelons—not red inside like ours, but salmon-colored and white. Also a "strawberry tree" which bears small, round, wine-red fruits of delicious taste.

Yet more remarkable were apples the size of green peas. The productiveness of the trees is described as nothing short of marvelous—the bright red fruit being eaten fresh or dried, or made into preserves, by both Russians and Chinese. As ornamental plants, when loaded with thousands of the tiny scarlet apples, the trees would be very effective.

Anybody who should visit a vineyard in Northern China in the Winter time would scarcely suppose that the barren area over which he walked was covered in Summer with a luxuriant growth of choice grapes. But inquiry discloses the fact that the grapevines, grown upon arbors overhead in the Summer, are taken down after the first cold snap in Autumn, pruned, tied together in long bundles, and buried in pits, covered with old matting and a couple of feet of soil. The roots, of course, are not disturbed. When Spring comes they are dug up and trained again over the arbors. It is thought that this method of growing grapes might be profitably adopted in the region of our own Rocky Mountains—the object of it, needless to say, being protection against freezing.

China is supposed to have been the original home of the sweet orange. More than 80 different kinds of edible oranges are said to grow today along the southern coast of the Empire. But, strange to say, lemons are not grown in that country, except as dwarf potted plants—the idea being to have as much fruit as possible on the smallest possible tree. Wholly a curiosity is the fingered lemon, or "Buddha's hand," which is grown as a pot plant. It is supposed to bring good luck, and the hand-shaped fruit commonly sells at 50 cents apiece.

Thanks to the Jananese short-kerneled rice, introduced into this country a few years ago, land in the coast sections of Texas and Louisiana has risen in value within a short time from $2 to $40 per acre—the output of the cereal increasing during the same period from from 115,000,000 to 750,000,000 pounds per annum. Macaroni wheat, fetched from Russia, now produces in this country an annual crop valued at $45,000,000. It is remarkable for the size of its heads, the small amount of water it needs, and its large percentage of gluten.

Grain sorghum and broom-corn millet are the most important plants recently introduced for forage purposes—the one from Manchuria and the other from the steppes of Siberia. Both are cereals excellent for human food and are so employed in the regions from which they come. They bear huge crops, the grain sorghum having ears that weigh three or four ounces apiece, which are masses of seeds. Our own farmers in the Northwest have found such grain excellent for griddle cakes.

From Turkestan has recently been obtained a new kind of musk melon, huge in size, which looks somewhat like an elongated watermelon, its skin smooth and mottled in green and yellow when the fruit is ripe. It has a pulp of delicious flavor, several inches thick, so that a single slice furnishes as much to eat as the whole of an ordinary muskmelon. But it can be grown only in the arid parts of the West, under irrigation.

Another valuable importation made by a Government explorer, David G. Fairchild, is the carob bean, native to the Mediterranean region, which is being tried in the arid parts of the United States. It is the fruit of a beautiful tree and its seeds are edible by human beings, while the husks are supposed, as a matter of popular tradition, to have supplied the humble provender of the Prodigal Son when the fortunes of that youth were at their lowest ebb.

Recently there has been search for new varieties of maize, or Indian corn, in Central America, whence this kind of grain originally came. Many centuries before Columbus landed the usefulness of the corn plant, which grew wild in that part of the world, was discovered by the natives, who cultivated it, and spread a knowledge of it abroad. Thus the cereal was commonly grown by the Indians all over the United States by the time the first white settlers arrived in the New World.

As a result of this inquiry the explorers have secured several odd and most interesting kinds of maize, the value of which for our own agricultural employment lies in the fact that they have become "specialized" for local conditions of moisture, drouth or high altitude. In other words, some of them are suited for wet lands, being able to endure almost any amount of moisture without being drowned out; others are adapted for getting along with a minimum of water, while yet others will do well at lofty elevations.

Jose D. Husbands has recently obtained a number of new kinds of potatoes, unlike any with which civilization is familiar, from the little archipelago of Chiloe, off the south coast of Chile, which is now believed to have been the original home of the much-prized tuber. The group of islands in question is inhabited by Spanish-speaking white people, whose sole food, practically, is potatoes. They even make bread of potatoes, pounded raw and mixed with a little grease.

NOON DANCE ADVOCATED

"WHAT'S the great idea in going to a roof garden for your feed?" objected the young man who was being dragged away from his usual midday haunt and led in the direction of the Strand Roof Garden, in New York City.

"Dancing thrown in," laconically replied his friend, taking him by the arm.

The two young men squeezed into a crowded elevator and a minute later found themselves skillfully marshaled in line with hundreds of other young people and a goodly sprinkling of older ones.

"Take your tray," directed a woman's voice, and they found themselves stooping and groping for a capacious tray on which some one deftly placed knives, forks and spoons wrapped in a paper napkin. The line moved slowly but continuously and the attendants behind the counter handed out croquettes, chops, omelette or other viands as requested.

The man who had been there before seized his dessert with his free hand, and his friend followed his example; then some one put a check on the tray, another person took their money and they found themselves looking for a table. The music struck up a fox trot, and the response of the dancers left room for them at a convenient table.

The dance finished, some of the dancers, whose lunch time was up left the place and others sat down to the tables to wait for another dance. There was constant coming and going, eating and dancing, always on the verge of a crush and yet—whether it was the music or some clever unseen executive at work—chaos was avoided.

"Working pretty fine, isn't it?" asked Miss Elizabeth Marbury, sweeping a contented eye over the place. "What do you think of it?" she inquired of Dr. Joseph Fraenkel, the noted nerve specialist, who, by invitation of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, one of the managers, was partaking of luncheon and looking on interestedly.

"You want my candid, professional opinion of such an experiment?"

"Yes. Don't you approve?"

"Well, as I came in here I received an instantaneous impression of light, brightness, flowers; later, I found that the food was not only good but that it was temptingly served and that the expense was moderate; next, I saw that, although there were so many at the tables and on the floor there was no discomfort and I got the impression of rhythmic and harmonious conditions.

"'What does all this mean to these young men and young women?' I asked myself. They come from offices and places of business of various kinds. They have been working at high tension, many of them, some of them in uncongenial surroundings; they have been nagged and hurried and worried. They come out at noon in a depressed or tense state.

"Here they find a place high above the noise and turmoil of the street, the light streaming in from broad windows, harmony of colors prevails.

"Watch the consequent transformation.

"The relaxing of tension is an essential process for every one. Even automatic machines must have periods of rest or the molecules composing them will grow stale. Much more, when the human element enters into consideration, is it necessary that the machine be rested from its accustomed work.

"The results are wonderfully beneficial from a medical standpoint. As far back as Hippocrates dancing was prescribed for those who were out of condition. If a maiden were pale the prescription was for her to dance.

"The Spartans and Athenians always had dancing and other entertainments in the middle of the day, and the results were beneficial from the standpoint of health as well as of esthetics. The best time for that sort of thing is when the sun is high and vitality is at the maximum.

"Another thing that is good is that the dancing and relaxation come in between working hours. That is why it affords the best possible stimulus. When one seeks these things at night, at the end of an exhausting day, it takes far longer to get into the excitement that the tired nerves demand.

"This complete getting away from the demands of work and business reminds me of my student days, when my most cherished treasures were my walking stick and my hour and a half of freedom at noon, which I used most frequently for the indulgence of my day dreams. Coming to this country, I discarded my walking stick, as I foun dthat because of it I was under mild suspicion, and I learned that few persons of serious purpose let ease or pleasure have any chance in the middle of the day.

"Another advantage of a place like this roof garden is that the young people seem to have come to it from every kind of occupation. That is good.

"If a girl goes out with a fellow-worker from her office or shop at noon they will soon find that they have nothing to say to each other. They do not change the current and they are not freshening their ideas or invigorating their minds. The break which comes by lunching in a place like this and indulging in a recreation which is a radical change from business is decidedly beneficial.

"If it were possible for the working girls and boys of the city to take a longer time in the middle of the day, even if they had to make it up later in the day, it would be a greater gain for them and for their employers.

"The expression of life, of vitality, is essential to the best development and its maintenance. In other countries there is more opportunity for that kind of expression. Yet there is much to be said for the intensity with which Americans have pursued their vocations and avocations. That has its place when the developing and building up of a country is the chief matter in hand. The time has now come, however, for something different, for more leisure and for a better use of it.

"If there were more roof gardens with noonday dance lunch there would be fewer nervous breakdowns, better work and happier workers. More persons would be fit for their business, more attuned to life and better able to express themselves artistically and usefully."