

AGRICULTURE
**NATURE
RAMBLINGS**



Maize

► IN THE mighty harvest of autumn are many things natively American: pumpkins, squash and cranberries, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and turkey, pecans, peanuts, Brazil nuts, black walnuts, chocolate and tobacco.

But of all the Thanksgiving Day bounty which the American Indian bestowed upon the white man—or which the settlers took from him without thanks—the greatest has been corn. It was maize, the Indian corn, which brought the Pilgrims through their first desperate winters of sickness and starvation. Now it is a billion-dollar U. S. crop.

Where this giant grass with the giant ears came from originally is still an unsolved mystery. It probably grew first in the South American highlands, but by the time the European settlers came its cultivation had spread to North America, as far north as the climate would allow. Mummy burials in Peru, Mexico, our own Southwest, have funeral offerings of corn. There is abundant evidence that the mound-builders knew the grain too.

American Indians believed maize was a food of the gods, dropped from their hands

when they flew back to heaven in indignation at man's ingratitude and greed. Some tribes treated the crow as a sacred bird, believing this bird was the seed-bearer who brought corn from heaven.

One early Indian legend tells of the First Mother, born of a beautiful plant. When famine came to the land she begged her husband to kill her and strew fragments of her body over the fields. The Great Spirit told the First Father to obey. He did what his wife asked, and after a time great waving grass sprang from the earth, ripened and was corn.

The Iroquois told another story. A

mighty chief climbed upon a mountain and asked the Great Spirit to send more food for his people, for they were weary of berries and wild game. The Great Spirit bade him go into the fields with his wife and children in the moon of the rains and wait there for three days. This the old man did, and there his family slept. When tribesmen came later, the old chief and his wife and children had turned to corn.

However maize appeared, it was found in America by the Spanish in Florida, John Smith at Jamestown, the Pilgrims at Plymouth. The settlers called the grain Indian corn, and then simply corn.

In 17th century English, "corn" meant all kinds of grain—wheat, barley, rye and all the rest—yet so completely did the new crop dominate colonial agriculture that the word was appropriated for it. Today, with corn a mighty crop across the land, the other bread-grasses our grandsires grew are crowded under the ignominious title "small grains." But the Englishman, perhaps with greater conscience, still calls American corn by its rightful Indian name, maize.

Science News Letter, November 4, 1950

ENGINEERING

**Military Map Making
Faster with New Process**

► FASTER production of military maps was promised in Baltimore by Dr. Bernhard Landow, development specialist of AnSCO Research Laboratories.

He reported to the Photographic Society of America a new technique, known as the Hersol process, developed in cooperation with the U. S. Army Map Service. It provides a method for making color separation negatives on contact from line copy. In printing color maps, a separate negative and plate are required for each color on the map.

Development of this process is expected to save time and labor.

Science News Letter, November 4, 1950

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On This Week's Cover

► A STARFISH, when viewed from the oral surface, exhibits its tube feet to good advantage. When the starfish of the phylum echinodermata is usually seen on a rock or on sand its mouth is at the center of the under surface which is known as the oral surface.

The tube feet are small muscular tubes filled with water and ending in small vacuum discs called suckers. By these the starfish can catch hold of a rock or other object and either moves the object toward itself or pulls its own body toward the rock. The feet also function as sense organs.

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