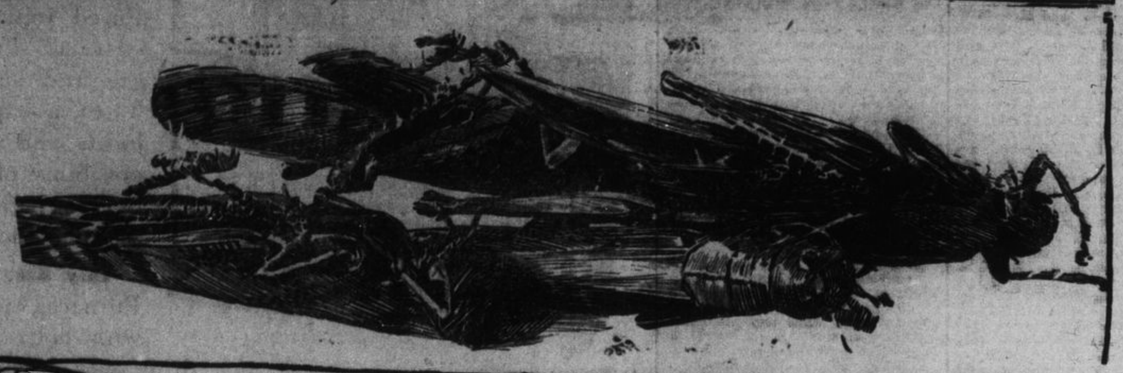
Insects that are Used as Food

Flying Beetles that Savage Peoples Crave



The Cicada, Eaten in many parts of Africa

Locusts, Sold in Moorish Market

Priones Beetle. Eaten by the Kafir Women

Grub of the May Bug, Roasted by the Javanese

Large Cricket, Prized in Southeastern Africa

Chief among insect articles of diet is the locust. From the earliest times this little winged creature has been made the food of man.

Historic carvings taken from the ruins of Nineveh show men carrying locusts to market, the insects being tied to long sticks. In ancient Athens locusts and grasshoppers were sold as regularly as other produce, and it is recorded that they were preferred as dainties to quail or the choicest figs.

The law of Moses, as set forth in Leviticus, permitting locusts to be used as an article of food, is still followed in Palestine, where the insects are fried in sesame oil for the table.

Many African races virtually live upon locusts, which are captured in the forests in immense quantities. They build fires at night under trees in which the insects have lodged, and the smoke suffocates them, so that they fall to the ground by the bushel.

In different parts of the world there are different methods of preparing this dish for consumption. Arabians dry the locusts in the sun, and afterward grind the bodies into a kind of flour, from which a cake is made; they roast them in butter or crush them with camel's cheese and dates.

Certain tribes of Central Africa prefer to stew the insects and make them into a thick soup; in Madagascar they are baked in huge jars, then fried in grease and mixed with rice.

Peasants of Southern Russia regard the locust as one of their staples of food. The insects are gathered in large quantities and smoked like herring. When prepared for the table, the legs and wings are detached, and the bodies are boiled, roasted, fried or stewed, according to taste.

According to those who have sampled the dish, the flavour of locusts, which is strong and disagreeable when raw, becomes mild under the cooking process, and is readily disguised by the addition of other ingredients to the dish.

Some years ago P. L. Simmonds experimented with a Rocky Mountain species. He made a broth by boiling young insects for two hours.

Seasoned with salt and pepper, he declared that the product could scarcely be distinguished from beef broth. Some friends whom he induced to sample the dish agreed with him in this statement.

When seventeen-year locusts visited several eastern states, a few years ago a man in Baltimore made locust pies and invited his friends to a feast.

He was the only one, however, who partook of the delicacy. Although he pronounced it very palatable, he could not induce others to sample his pies.

It is said that locusts, fried in their own oil and with a little salt added, have a decided nutty flavor and have by no means an unpleasant taste.

In countries where the insect is recognized as a regular article of food, it is said that persons soon acquire a taste for it.

The food appears to be wholesome and nourishing, at any rate, as members of locust-eating tribes become fat when the insects are plentiful.

In addition to the locust, the ancient Greeks manifested a partiality for the common cricket. This taste is preserved by the natives in a considerable section of south-eastern Africa.

There a large species of the cricket family is found, generally dwelling in holes in the ground. The natives capture these, either by digging them up or watching at the entrances to the little caves.

When they gather a sufficient supply they roast the insects over outdoor fires and greedily devour them.

Next to the locust family, perhaps the most popular insect food consists of grubs or caterpillars of different kinds. Many species of these are eaten in various countries of the world.

The grub of the common May bug, or cockchafer, is regarded as a delicacy in some parts of Europe, especially in France.

It is asserted that, when properly prepared, this forms a nutritious and really palatable dish, although at first attempt the uninitiated would probably have to attack the fat white worms with eyes closed and imagination banished.

For the especial purpose of testing the edible qualities of the "ver blanc," as the grub is called, a banquet was given a number of years ago at the Cafe Custom, Paris.

In a paste of flour, milk and eggs the worms were fried to a rich golden color and served piping hot to about fifty guests. Most of the diners were so pleased that they called for a second helping.

Visitors may find this grub offered for their delectation in many parts of France to-day. The popular method of preparation is as follows:

"Roll the 'ver blancs,' which are short and fat, in flour and bread crumbs, with a little salt and pepper, and wrap each in a stout piece of paper, well buttered inside.

"Place them in the hot embers of a fireplace, leaving them to cook for twenty minutes or so, according to the degree of heat. Upon opening the envelopes, a very appetizing odor comes forth, and this tempts one to taste the delicacy."

Those who have acquired a taste for this grub declare that it is superior to snails and forms really a delightful dish.

Ancient Romans were accustomed to eat a large woodboring larva, but its identity is not now clearly established.

They called it "cossus," but the cossus of to-day—the grub of the large goat moth, which is destructive to fruit trees—has such an unpleasant odor that one cannot fancy the epicureans of old as deriving any pleasure from its consumption.

Some naturalists think the stag beetle was the "cossus" of the Romans; its larva is large and certainly as attractive, as a food morsel, as the grub of the May bug. Another woodboring beetle, known as prionus, is found all over Europe, and this may have provided feasts for banqueters along the Tiber.

Natives of Australia eat a large butterfly which they call bubong, from the fact that it is found every year in immense swarms on the rocky slopes of the Bubong mountains.

These are also captured by building large fires under the trees in which the insects have settled for the night. Suffocated by the smoke they tumble to the ground until the surface is deeply carpeted with their bodies.

When a sufficient quantity is thus collected, the fire is cleared away, the insects are spread upon the heated surface and raked about, and their charred wings, legs and feelers drop off. The partially roasted bodies are then ground into a coarse meal in a wooden vessel and are made into cakes.

These insects give out an extremely pungent smell, and it is seldom that any one but a native can eat the cakes.

Even in the case of natives the first attempts at eating bubong cakes often result in violent sickness, which continues several days.

When the diet is persevered in, however, an acquired taste results, and those who live upon the butterflies wax fat and indolent.

The gru-gru, or pain grub, of the West Indies, and an allied species of the Island of Java form a considerable part of the regular diet of natives.

When roasted upon small spits and richly spiced, it is said by those who have mustered sufficient courage to try them that these worms surpass all animal food in flavor.

"At first," said the traveller, Leblond, "I thought them disgusting; but after a while I grew accustomed to them and considered them excellent."

Among the lower classes in China the chrysalides of silkworms are regarded as a luxury. When the cocoons of yellow silk have been removed, they are hawked about the streets, and sell readily at a price equal to about 10c. a pound.

The fact that the chrysalides are relished by the Chinese, however, is no proof of their palatable qualities. One can expect little else from the taste of a people who raise for consumption the larvae of bluebottle flies and consider them a delicacy.

New Entente With Italy.

New York, Sept. 8.—Joseph S. Kennard, Tarrytown, returned yesterday from Italy. He says arrangements for the exchange of university professors between that country and the United States on the same lines as the system now in force between America and Germany, but on a large scale have been completed.

Italian professors will come to American colleges to lecture, and American professors will go to Italian colleges. Circles for the study of the English language in Italy and of the Italian language in America will also be established.

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Humor Touched by Adventures With Parishioners.

New York Press.

"When I took my first little parish, down in Maine," said one of them, "I was a trifle anxious about my first sermon. The pastor who preceded me had been a very popular man and I wanted to make a good impression at the start. Now, as you all know, there is in every parish of every denomination one woman who sort of bosses things, and after my first service I naturally made my first parochial call upon her. She received me cordially and praised my sermon until I began to feel quite 'chesty.'

"Then she launched out into a paean of praise for my predecessor. He was everything that was good and great. He had but one fault, she said, and that was he was apt to preach over the heads of his congregation—a trifle too scholarly for them. "But" she added in a burst of confidence, "I am sure we shall never find that fault with you.' Now that woman meant to be complimentary. Was she? I don't know."

"Well," said another, "when I got my first charge I was the nicest curate going, and extremely diffident in the presence of women. One of my first calls was made upon a sharp-tongued woman who was suffering from some real and many imaginary ills. She at once began upon her physical woes, and before I knew it I was deep in a discussion of roots and herbs and various medicaments beneficial to the liver. I was too diffident to change the conversation and direct it into spiritual paths, and a neighbor—a—woman—"dropping in," I made my departure in something of the nature of a retreat.

"As the little maid of all work was showing me out, I heard the visitor say: 'That's the new minister. What did he want?' "Well," replied the sharp-tongued invalid, "I suppose he came to inquire after my soul, but he had only got as far as my liver when you came in."

"It was months before I summoned up resolution enough to go to that house again."

"I," said a third clergyman, "never stood so much in awe of the female parishioners as you fellows. I remembered once, when I was in the theological seminary, I used sometimes to assist down at old St. Paul's. One day at some church doings up town, a woman came rustling and bustling up to me and said:

"I hear you are doing some work at St. Paul's. How nice. I am coming down to see you some day," she added in a patronizing tone. "You know we have a family vault in St. Paul's."

"'Madam,' I replied, "I hope you will not wait so long as that before visiting us." Rather clever—for me—though I do not think she saw the point."

The Language Of Umbrellas.

From Spare Moments.

There is a language of umbrellas as of flowers. For instance, place your umbrella in a rack, and it will often indicate that it will change owners.

To open it quickly in the street means that somebody's eye is going to be in danger.

To shut it quickly signifies that a hat or two will probably be knocked off.

An umbrella carried over a woman, the man getting nothing but the drippings of the rain, signifies courtship.

When a man has the umbrella, and the woman the drippings, it indicates marriage.

To swing your umbrella over your shoulder signifies "I am making a nuisance of myself."

To put an alpaca umbrella by the side of a silk one signifies "Exchange is no robbery."

To lend an umbrella indicates "I am a fool."

To return an umbrella means—well, never mind what it means; nobody ever does that.

Her Kind Of Moon.

A bolt of lightning made a hole in the roof of George Gray's house in Watertown, Conn. A domestic not long in the country, heard the crash, saw a ball of fire rolling along her room and exclaimed: "What a country is this, where the full moon comes in through the roof?" She was not alarmed and kept on with her work as if nothing had happened.

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WHEN SHIPWRECKED

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Stewed Rope Yarn, Paraffin Wax, Raw Seaweed and Barnacles Are Some of the Delicacies Indulged in By Castaway Mariners.

Shipwrecked persons have been kept alive on the most repugnant and unwholesome of foods. Probably the hardest fare that six strong men and a boy of fifteen ever kept alive on was the daily menu of the Windover's survivors, who were cast up on the Irish coast near Kilsegg not long ago. They lived sixteen days on stewed rope yarn.

When they took the ship's small boat they had water enough for a month, but only a small amount of provisions. These lasted four days. After having nothing at all to eat for the following two days they tried boiling lengths of tarred hemp rope into pulp and swallowing it.

They had a keg of paraffin wax, which they boiled to add to the nourishment. The sickness they experienced as a result of the diet, says What-to-Eat, was only temporary and they landed in comparatively good health.

Capt. Maboly of the foundered steamer Gwalior and his second officer, created a record less than two years ago by living for seventeen days on boot leather and a pint of water a day each.

Of course no teeth can tear cowhide boots; they have to be cut and shredded with a knife and the shreds chewed and swallowed. Boiling, even when possible, it is said, does no good, but takes from the nourishment of the boots. A few ounces of leather being very hard to digest, stay in the stomach for fifteen or twenty hours.

A diet of boots and shoes is one of the commonest of last resource foods, and though it is hard for a well-fed person to imagine that any one could masticate and digest leather, a pair of long sea boots will keep a man alive for a fortnight if he has a little water.

Two men who went to a small island off the Irish coast not long ago kept themselves going for ten days on a diet probably worse than this. They landed in a boat which was smashed by a wave on their trying to relaunch her, and they were kept on the bare, rocky island without food.

Fortunately there was a spring on the island, but nothing in the way of sea gulls which they could catch, and nothing with which they could make a fire as a distress signal. There were not even any shell fish, as there was no beach, and the pair had to subsist for ten days on cold, raw, seaweed washed up by the tide.

The best known and most useful starvation diets for wrecked or castaway people, however, is that of barnacles. Three Englishmen and a crew of Lascars who had been forced to abandon the sailing vessel North Star a few months ago, kept themselves going for more than a week on barnacles and only two of the crew died.

The worst of this diet is that the barnacles give one internal cramps and cause an insufferable thirst, but they do nourish the frame. You have to reach under the vessel's side and pull them off taking care not to leave the best half of them sticking to the planks.

Bishop Lets Her Talk.

Woman's inborn right to preach has been recognized by Bishop Talbot, of Pennsylvania. A skirted itinerant expounder of the gospel used to gather a crowd every Sunday within sight of the bishop's cathedral and many of his flock were lingering under her spell. One of the vestrymen, a pompous and prosy banker went to the bishop to remonstrate. He wanted something done to stop the preaching so near the cathedral. He thought the mayor would help them out if the bishop were to appeal to him. "This thing of unmarried women preaching around in a crowd of men is scandalous and should be stopped" said the banker. "Oh, never mind," said the bishop, easily, "she cannot hurt me. Let her preach. She must exhort somebody, and, you see, she has no husband. I warrant your wife gives you many a good sermon in the retirement of your home. All women like to preach."

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