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The Origin of Cultivated Plants

Alphonse de Candolle (1806–93) was a French-Swiss botanist who was an important figure in the study of the origins of plants and the reasons for their geographic distribution. He also created the first Code of Botanical Nomenclature. Despite initially studying law, he took over both the chair of botany at the University of Geneva, and the directorship of Geneva's botanical gardens from his father Augustin de Candolle (1778–1841). He published numerous botanical books, and edited ten volumes of the *Prodromus*, a seventeen-volume reference text intended to cover the key properties of all known seed plants. This work, reissued in the second edition of the English translation of 1886, is his most famous and influential book, tracing the geographic origins of plants known to have been cultivated by humans. It is one of the earliest studies of the history of crop domestication, and an important contribution to phytogeography.

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ORIGIN OF CULTIVATED PLANTS

BY

ALPHONSE DE CANDOLLE

FOREIGN ASSOCIATE OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE;
FOREIGN MEMBER OF THE ROYAL SOCIETIES OF LONDON, EDINBURGH,
AND DUBLIN; OF THE ACADEMIES OF ST. PETERSBURG,
STOCKHOLM, BERLIN, MUNICH, BRUSSELS, COPENHAGEN, AMSTERDAM,
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.



THE knowledge of the origin of cultivated plants is interesting to agriculturists, to botanists, and even to historians and philosophers concerned with the dawnings of civilization.

I discussed this question of origin in a chapter in my work on geographical botany; but the book has become scarce, and, moreover, since 1855 important facts have been discovered by travellers, botanists, and archæologists. Instead of publishing a second edition, I have drawn up an entirely new and more extended work, which treats of the origin of almost double the number of species belonging to the tropics and the temperate zones. It includes almost all plants which are cultivated, either on a large scale for economic purposes, or in orchards and kitchen gardens.

I have always aimed at discovering the condition and the habitat of each species before it was cultivated. It was needful for this end to distinguish from among innumerable varieties that which should be regarded as the most ancient, and to find out from what quarter of

the globe it came. The problem is more difficult than it appears at first sight. In the last century and up to the middle of the present, authors made little account of it, and the most able have contributed to the propagation of erroneous ideas. I believe that three out of four of Linnæus' indications of the original home of cultivated plants are incomplete or incorrect. His statements have since been repeated, and in spite of what modern writers have proved touching several species, they are still repeated in periodicals and popular works. It is time that mistakes, which date in some cases from the Greeks and Romans, should be corrected. The actual condition of science allows of such correction, provided we rely upon evidence of varied character, of which some portion is quite recent, and even unpublished; and this evidence should be sifted as we sift evidence in historical research. It is one of the rare cases in which a science founded on observation should make use of testimonial proof. It will be seen that this method leads to satisfactory results, since I have been able to determine the origin of almost all the species, sometimes with absolute certainty, and sometimes with a high degree of probability.

I have also endeavoured to establish the number of centuries or thousands of years during which each species has been in cultivation, and how its culture spread in different directions at successive epochs.

A few plants cultivated for more than two thousand years, and even some others, are not now known in a

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

vii

spontaneous, that is, wild condition, or at any rate this condition is not proved. Questions of this nature are subtle. They, like the distinction of species, require much research in books and in herbaria. I have even been obliged to appeal to the courtesy of travellers or botanists in all parts of the world to obtain recent information. I shall mention these in each case with the expression of my grateful thanks.

In spite of these records, and of all my researches, there still remain several species which are unknown wild. In the cases where these come from regions not completely explored by botanists, or where they belong to genera as yet insufficiently studied, there is hope that the wild plant may be one day discovered. But this hope is fallacious in the case of well-known species and countries. We are here led to form one of two hypotheses; either these plants have since history began so changed in form in their wild as well as in their cultivated condition that they are no longer recognized as belonging to the same species, or they are extinct species. The lentil and the chick-pea probably no longer exist in nature; and other species, as wheat, maize, the broad bean, and carthamine, which are very rarely found wild, appear to be in course of extinction. The number of cultivated plants with which I am here concerned, being two hundred and forty-nine, the three, four, or five species, extinct or nearly extinct, is a large proportion, representing a thousand species, out of the whole number of phanerogams. This destruction of forms must have taken

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

place during the short period of a few hundred centuries, on continents where they might have spread, and under circumstances which are commonly considered unvarying. This shows how the history of cultivated plants is allied to the most important problems of the general history of organized beings.

GENEVA, 1882.

CONTENTS.



PART I.

GENERAL REMARKS.

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. IN WHAT MANNER AND AT WHAT EPOCHS CULTIVATION BEGAN IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES | 1 |
| II. METHODS FOR DISCOVERING OR PROVING THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES | 8 |

PART II.

ON THE STUDY OF SPECIES, CONSIDERED AS TO THEIR ORIGIN, THEIR EARLY CULTIVATION, AND THE PRINCIPAL FACTS OF THEIR DIFFUSION.

| | |
|---|-----|
| I. PLANTS CULTIVATED FOR THEIR SUBTERRANEAN PARTS, SUCH AS ROOTS, TUBERCLES, OR BULBS | 29 |
| II. PLANTS CULTIVATED FOR THEIR STEMS OR LEAVES ... | 83 |
| III. PLANTS CULTIVATED FOR THEIR FLOWERS, OR FOR THE ORGANS WHICH ENVELOP THEM | 161 |
| IV. PLANTS CULTIVATED FOR THEIR FRUITS | 168 |
| V. PLANTS CULTIVATED FOR THEIR SEEDS | 313 |

PART III.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

| | |
|--|-----|
| I. GENERAL TABLE OF SPECIES, WITH THEIR ORIGIN AND THE EPOCH OF THEIR EARLIEST CULTIVATION | 436 |
| II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS | 447 |
| INDEX | 463 |