



By

HERBERT E.

FRENCH

# *The Most Romantic TREE in the World*

THIS is the time of the year when all of us long to see and feel more of the warmth of the sun. We especially need to see the color of "warm green," and nothing else looks quite so appealingly warm and green as the fronds of a palm tree. What is an oak, an elm or a birch alongside a palm, especially in midwinter when these other trees have lost all their leaves?

A palm is the most romantic tree on earth, and when the frost is in the ground, up north, there's nothing more wonderful than to be able to head southward for a really relaxed loll beneath the waving fronds, on a palm-fringed dream island.

Much of Rudolph Valentino's torrid charm as a desert sheik, back in the 1920's, was mere verdant reflection: his viewers, seated in the poorly

heated movie houses of the north, fell in love not so much with the ex-busboy as with the romantic date palms of Araby swaying over his turbaned head. And in today's South Pacific adventure films most of the romance of the tropic islands comes not so much from the half-clothed human actors as from the exotic coconut palm trees that dreamily fan the breezes.

In fact, how could any of us ever tell down south from up north if it weren't for palm trees? Havana without palms could easily be mistaken for Hoboken — or for Hanover, New Hampshire.

One doesn't flee the north merely to escape the cold, and one doesn't go south only for the warmth. Almost certainly you go south to sit under a palm tree. Human "palmigration" nowadays is as natural a phenomenon as the yearly southward migration of wild birds and bugs.

The human species goes by train,

plane, bus, ocean steamship or in the old family car. And if you don't think they're all searching for a fancy palm tree, just glance at the travel posters and the southern resort ads in your local newspaper. Almost every one will have a "beckoning" palm. This remarkable tree, which incidentally isn't a tree at all but much nearer to a grass or a lily, is the symbol of everything tropical, romantic and exotic that anyone ever dreamed of on a cold winter night in Massachusetts or Montana.

MERELY as a visual symbol of tropical sunshine, the palm is the most valuable "tree" on earth, more precious than if its enormous leaves (some *Palmaceae* have leaves up to forty feet long) were so many real dollar bills rattling in the wind. And palm leaves make just about the silliest of sounds. They crackle like rattling paper, and so, momentarily, when you first see and hear a real palm in its native setting on a tropical island with its giant leaves rattling sillily in the trade winds, the whole thing seems like a grotesque carnival of make-believe.

But palms are prized for reasons other than their ability to attract tourist undertree sitters. They are the most valuable food plants on earth, second only to the grain grasses in the vegetable world. In the hot, dry desert, the date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera*, first made life possible for the Arab world. And in what otherwise would be the barren islands of

the wide, watery South Pacific, the coconut palm, *Cocos nucifera*, makes living a rich experience for all the races of South Sea islanders.

Desert dwellers are said to eat about nine dates each per day, year after year. Multiplying Arabs by dates, or vice versa, could account for about 164 million dates a year, not counting those the rest of us eat. About 18 billion coconuts a year are consumed in the Far East alone, from India eastward throughout the Pacific islands. In addition to their food use, Dr. Ferdinand C. Lane tells us, in his *Story of Trees*, "Every particle of leaf and bark and trunk has some special value. The wood is used as timber; the leaves for thatch and basket weaving; the rough fiber is woven into ropes. To a caravan toiling across the desert, a distant grove of date palms is quite as appealing as a tropic island to shipwrecked mariners."

Date trees, like the animal creatures among man's domesticated servants, are dependent nowadays on him for their survival. They are male and female, about one to fifty trees, and the human gardeners must arrange *les noces des palmiers*, the transfer of pollen, by shaking the male flower over the female flowers. Herodotus reported that the ancient Babylonians were already excellent husbandmen, and the art doubtless dates back far beyond his day. On the other hand, wild island coconut palms usually arrange their own marital and maternal affairs.

MEN have been almost more sentimental about palms than about their wives and animal friends. Mohammed suggested that all of us "honor your maternal uncle, the palm . . . he was created from the earth left over after the creation of Adam . . . the palm resembles man by its erect position and its height, its separation into two sexes and its necessity for the pollination of the female. If its heart is exposed to too great a strain it perishes. Is it not the same with man?"

In the Pacific islands, a palm nut often is planted to commemorate the birth of a child. In Arabia the palm is sacred, and angels are said to descend sometimes from heaven for the pleasure of dancing and singing beneath it.

To New Englanders and other far northerners, all palms naturally are bizarre and romantic. But the most impressive member of the family is the royal palm, *Roystonea regia*, a native of southern Florida and Cuba. Royal palms line the most famous avenues of the great cities which happen to lie within the tropical belt where palms can survive.

There are about three thousand other species of palm, many of them both useful and decorative. Brazil has more kinds than any other nation, at least half a thousand of them. Our own California has a variety that dismayed natives sometimes describe as so many mops stood upon their handles.

Raffia comes from a Madagascar palm that's also known as the Traveler's Palm, because one may find a supply of fresh drinking water at the base of the leaves. Rattan, the summer-furniture makings, comes from the Malaya palm, a vine that grows up to a thousand feet in length, said to be the longest vegetable growth in the world (three times longer than a redwood tree is tall!). Malacca palms make some of the world's finest walking-sticks. West Africa's oil palms are a main industry around the Gulf of Guinea, and Ecuador's "ivory nut" palms make excellent buttons.

Two dozen years ago, the English writer-traveler, Alec Waugh, after a lengthy voyage through the "Hot Countries," demanded wearily of fate, "Did it really profit a man that he should make fortunes in Lombard Street when copra can be sold at a few francs a bag, on the palm-fringed edge of a lagoon?"

Few of us today actually want to go and live the rest of our lives beneath the palms. The dream of the 1920's, to find a palmy place-away-from-it-all and stay there, would be a nightmare today. All we want now is to go and sit beneath the palms for a fortnight or so.

Then, after the tropical vacation is over, we hustle back to our busy and happy lives at home and dream about palm trees for the rest of our lives. The enchantment somehow never fades.

# PEACE?

## OR A HUNDRED YEARS WAR?

AFTER the manner of the proverbial moron who hit himself over the head with a hammer because it felt so good when he quit, American eggheads are full of rejoicing whenever the Bolsheviki stop walloping us temporarily. It feels so good, the eggheads say, to have the Russians adopt a conciliatory line.

To the Communists, "peace" is a euphemism for "war." Real peace will be established only when capitalism has been superseded by socialism throughout the world, according to orthodox Communist dogma from which there is not the slightest evidence of deviation.

In ten years of "peace," the conquests of the Soviet Empire have greatly exceeded those of any other empire in history — and all without the sacrifice of a single one of its own infantrymen. As long as "peace" is so productive of results, it is unthinkable that the master minds of Moscow will switch to the instrument of "war."

In the ten years since the cessation of World War II's hostilities, the wheels of the Kremlin Jugger-naut's car have rolled onward to increase the number of his victims to the staggering total of 900,000,000 human beings — crushing their hopes and liberties, if not their bodies.

As long as conquest by infiltration is so successful, and as long as it can be carried out under the bourgeois concept of peace, there is no reason for the Russians to swap their peaceful Trojan horses for the more risky Martian steeds, in the middle of a stream of territorial acquisitions.

The strategy of the Kremlin, plainly apparent after 38 years, is one of alternating periods of tension and relaxation — a strategy in which the Kremlin always retains the initiative. Both the tensions and the relaxations are Kremlin induced, never accidental.

Any one of a number of reasons might prompt a Bolshevik switch from deliberately created tension to fake relaxation. It

**BY J. B. MATTHEWS**

