

**A KEYHOLE FOR ROGER
WILLIAMS' KEY; OR, A STUDY,
OF SUGGESTED MISPRINTS,
IN ITS SIXTEENTH CHAPTER**

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A Keyhole for Roger Williams' Key; Or, A Study, of Suggested Misprints, in Its Sixteenth
Chapter by William D. Ely

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WILLIAM D. ELY

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A KEYHOLE
—FOR—
ROGER WILLIAMS' KEY;
—OR—
A STUDY, OF SUGGESTED MISPRINTS,
IN ITS SIXTEENTH CHAPTER,
"OF THE EARTH AND THE FRUITS THEREOF, &C."



A PAPER,
READ BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
BY *Davis*
WILLIAM D. ELY.

PROVIDENCE:
1892.

A KEYHOLE
FOR
"ROGER WILLIAMS' KEY, &c."

As the Rhode Island Historical Society was the first to reprint in this country the "*Key into the Language of America*," composed by Roger Williams during his voyage to England in 1643, and originally published there by Gregory Dexter, of London, in that same year, it seems peculiarly fitting that a question, which is now made for the first time, relating to the accuracy, or authenticity of a portion of the Key, and as to the genuineness of the text and of the definitions of certain of its Indian words, as printed therein, should be first brought before this Society.

While it is certainly late to question the Key, it is never too late to correct an error if it exist,—and especially if the error was doubtless not the author's own, but one imposed on him by typographers and by want of due care on a proof-reader's part.

It should also be remarked beforehand, that the occasion which at this late day calls our attention to the Indian language and suggests inaccuracy in Roger Williams' Key, has arisen incidentally from an examination of his writings as bearing on the botanical question of the true origin of the common kidney bean, known also as the "Indian beane," and sometimes as the "French bean," according to his statement.

And it is hoped that the essential dryness of the subject and circumstances of its presentation will explain and excuse the desultory manner of its treatment.

The works and reputation of Roger Williams deserve the highest consideration ; and if in his Key or elsewhere the bean seems to have been overlooked or misrepresented, it is due to the truth of history and language to reconcile the discrepancy if possible, and if that be not possible, then to vindicate the character and reputation of the author and the man, without impeaching or treating with disrespect the reputation of the bean.

To this duty your attention is now turned in an essay towards solving the question, Why, in the 16th Chapter of Williams' printed Key, relating as it does expressly to the Fruits and products of the Soil, do we find no mention whatever of beans ?

And to indicate the neglect to which the bean is

subjected on the face of this chapter, a few remarks may be made in illustration of the high position accorded in various ages of the world to this humble legume.

It will hardly do to say this is a question of no moment, or that the inquiry is beneath the dignity of this Society. It must be borne in mind, that beans are not to be trifled with, or treated with neglect.

A distinguished son of Rhode Island, the Rev. Dr. Lincoln Wayland, brought them forward not long ago on a public occasion by asking the question — “Why does the World minify our intelligence by depreciating our favorite article of diet, and express the ultimate extreme of mental pauperism, by saying of him on whose intellect they would heap contempt, ‘He doesn't know beans’?”

He did not answer this question, for like many others, it is more easily asked than answered,—but as “the Hub” of New England is the centre of wisdom, and as in the progress of evolution its ancient symbol of the groveling cod seems to have been supplanted by that of the aspiring bean,* it

* *Life*, so quick to seize the spirit of the times, in its anniversary illustration of 16th June, 1892, symbolizes the crowning defence of Bunker Hill by a bag of “beans.”

In *The New York Times*, also, July 15th, 1892, it is stated that the mysterious letters built into the walls of the Public Library of Boston, when properly combined, spell “baked beans.”

may be imagined that beans are regarded there as the primal object of intelligent consciousness, the first reality of human knowledge.

If this be so, the *minimum* of knowledge is the knowledge of beans; and, consequently, the *maximum* of ignorance — or as Dr. Wayland happily phrases it, “the extreme of mental pauperism” — must be “not to know beans.”

Besides all this, the ancient Greeks and Romans, we are told, had higher uses than we have for the bean. They gathered by them the votes of the people, determined the elections of magistrates and decided the guilt or innocence of parties accused of crime. A *white* bean signified absolution or acquittal, and a *black* one condemnation. Indeed, so closely was the bean identified with ancient political systems, that when Pythagoras himself would caution his disciples against soiling themselves in party politics, he had only to urge them to “abstain from beans.”

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the corporations of the Dutch provinces generally selected their officers by lot, using for this purpose colored or gilded beans.*

Even in Massachusetts, it was ordered, in 1643 (at the very meeting which decided on hostilities

*Campbell II. 436, 439.

against Gorton), that for the yearly choosing of Assistants for the time to come, instead of paps. [papers] the freemen shall use Indian beanes — the white beanes to manifest election, the black for blanks.*

A late deliverance in your *Providence Journal*, also shows that the bean is beginning to figure in American politics. It says, that "Boston has been getting its principal supply of brain food from imported beans, and that the native bean must be protected against the pauper leguminists of Europe, although the intellectual product of Boston should be reduced fifty per cent. in quality and an equal amount in quantity."

But above and beyond all these and a thousand years before the founding of Rome, if we are to accept the dicta of the clergy, the fate of nations and the religious development of mankind was staked in no small degree upon a mess of beans. For Bishop Hall declares that "Jacob's Pottage" was made of lentiles or small beans, common in Egypt and Syria, probably Egyptian beans, which Jacob had procured as a dainty; and adds "There never was any meat, except the forbidden fruit, so dear bought as this broth of Jacob."† A broth of beans, on which so

*Mass. Records, II. 42.

†Commentary, p. 30.

largely turned the destinies not only of the two sons immediately concerned, but of the twelve tribes of Israel, and of all the nations thereafter brought under the influence of their religion and their material or moral power.

Associated thus with ignorance, with politics, with tariffs, with religion and with law, and cultivated for food over all the world, it is obvious there must have been evolved, in the course of Nature, several genera of beans. Three of these genera, all that we need notice here, *Faba*, *Phaseolus* and *Dolichos*, are those most universally known,

The common bean, in all its varieties as cultivated in Britain and on the continent of Europe, is said to be the produce of the *Faba vulgaris*. The kidney bean or Indian bean, and Haricot or bush bean, is the seed of *Phaseolus vulgaris*; while according to De Candolle, our pole bean was probably the *Dolichos* of Theophrastus, the voting bean of Roman and Greek. But it is only with the *Phaseolus*, that we are now concerned, and we find by the statements of various authors that this bean was of as great relative importance to the American Indian, as the other genera of beans to the inhabitants of the various portions of the world in which they grew.

Now Prof. Wittmach of Berlin, remarking upon Dr. Asa Gray's Review of De Candolle, on the *Origin of Cultivated Plants*, has recently pronounced in