

INTRODUCTION.

The cowpea (Vigna sinensis), is really a bean and not a pea, and was the bean most commonly cultivated for human food in the Old World before the discovery of America.

According to Piper (1) and Hardenburgh (2) it is indigenous to Central Africa, because in no other region have wild cowpeas been found. In the past there has been a great deal of controversy as to the correct nomenclature of the cowpea. Piper is of the opinion that it is the "phaseolus" referred to by Pliny, Columella, and other Roman writers, but the terminology "phaseolus" is now applied to the kidney bean following its introduction into Europe from America. In Italy the blackeye cowpea is called by the same name as kidney beans, namely "fagiolo." Today the cowpea is generally given the generic name of Vigna sinensis.

The cowpea has long been grown in the West Indies. Some authorities claim that this plant entered America via the West Indies, but the evidence is not very conclusive.

In the United States of America, the cowpea has played an important role in improving the standard of agriculture, especially in the Southern States. It owes much of its great value as a soil improving legume to the fact that it is well adapted to growth on a wide range of relatively acid and infertile soils, but good drainage is essential, and like many other leguminous plants it has been known to fail in areas where the necessary strain of bacillus radicola is not present. Hardenburgh in his book on bean culture (2) says that the cowpea is to the cotton belt what clover is to the dairy, corn and potato regions further north. To-day, however, especially in the Northern States, the cowpea is rapidly being replaced by the Soy bean (Glycine max.) (3).

There are many varieties of cowpea in cultivation to-day - Morse records fifteen varieties as being in common cultivation (4). Varietal distinctions are numerous, e.g., habit of growth, length of growing period, resistance to pests and diseases, and differences in shape and colour of the pods and seeds. The varieties, however,

may be divided into four main groups, depending on the purpose for which they are grown:-

- (1) As a food for man
- (2) As a soilage crop
- (3) As an ensilage crop
- (4) As a soil restorer

In this paper we are only concerned with group (1).