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Origins[®]

Fever for the tonic...

“... A tree grows which they call the fever-tree.....when made into a powder and given as a beverage, cures fevers”. Crónicas de San Agustín 1633.

Legend has it that the bark of the fever-tree was first used by the Spanish in the early 1630's when it was given to the Countess of Chinchón, who had contracted malaria, colloquially known as the fever, whilst living in Peru. The Countess recovered and the healing properties of the fever-tree were discovered.

Despite this success its reputation was slow to catch on. It was imported to Europe under the name 'Jesuits curing powder', a very poor term in Protestant England. Even when Charles II in 1679 was cured of the fever, its popularity was not assured as its use remained the secret of his physician (Robert Talbor).

However, the healing power of this remarkable tree only became world renowned in the 1820's when officers of the Indian Army, in an attempt to ward off malaria, mixed quinine (the extract from the bark of the fever-tree) with sugar and water, creating the first Indian Tonic Water.

Since its taste was very bitter, it was made more palatable when they added a bit of gin to the mixture.

The original gin&tonic was thus born, and soon became the archetypal drink of the British Empire.

But the Raj gin&tonic was a necessity before becoming a pleasure. Colonialism produced a huge increase in demand for quinine and the East India Company was not capable of meeting this demand. The answer was to try and cultivate fever-trees in the colonies. They tried with Ecuadorian seeds but the tree was very poor in quinine.

The Dutch had more luck with Peruvian seeds provided by Charles Ledger, a British explorer, whose seeds were rejected by the British government, still smarting from its experience with the Ecuadorian seeds.

It turned out that the Peruvian seeds yielded up to eight times more quinine and subsequently gave Holland a near monopoly of the market.

Fever-Tree Ltd has gone back to the roots of this remarkable tree and have discovered the last remaining plantation of original fever-trees descended from the Peruvian seeds, a variety still in existence in the heart of the war torn Rwanda-Congo border. The plantation is prospering, and keeps producing the finest natural quinine in the world still harvested with traditional methods.