

Written for this Paper

## THE SOCIETY ISLANDS.

The following is from a letter written by Elder Frank Cutler, who is laboring as a missionary on the Society Islands:

It is a genuine pleasure to have an opportunity to throw off all thoughts of duty and responsibility and allow my mind to feast on remembrances of home and its associations for a brief spell. Memory has put her stamp upon the mind indelibly, fixing there the visions of bright, happy faces, fields of waving grain, trees laden with toothsome fruits, and the grand old rocky mountains. There is a mysterious charm about the old scenes which I was almost unconscious of until separated from their immediate presence. Though thousands of miles of billowy waves intervene, their magic influence does not wane, but on the contrary it may be truly said that "distance does but lend enchantment to the view." It is eight months since I saw a mountain. It is eight months since I saw anything save sand, coral rock, cocoanut trees and the sea. There is one thing I am glad to be able to miss, and that is your Salt Lake mud. You will remember that when I left home I thought that I was coming to a rainy, muddy and fruit-growing country. It does not rain here as often as at home, and mud is unknown on these islands. One could not wish for a finer climate. Nine out of ten days, a cool sea breeze keeps the graceful cocoanut palms in constant agitation and sends the little sail boats of the natives flying across the lagoon, while the roaring of the breakers on the reef furnish music in the absence of birds.

When I tell you that nothing of value is to be found here outside of cocoanuts, fish and pearl-shell, you will most probably think, and that truly, that this must be a most uninteresting place to spend three or four years. Yet we have one of the wonders of the world here, the like of which I do not think can be found in all our country. It would fill a small volume to tell of all the uses which might be made of the cocoanut tree and its fruit. Perhaps a short account of some of the uses the natives make of this wonderful tree would be interesting to you, as it will serve to show some of their daily habits and customs.

The tree grows to a height of from 10 to 60 or 70 feet; its trunk being from 10 to 18 inches in diameter, with no branches whatever, except a heavy bunch at the top. It thrives well in sand and even in places where nothing but coral rock can be seen. In five or seven years after being planted it bears fruit. Of the tree itself the natives make almost everything they use that is not eatable including house, furniture, clothing, cooking utensils, fuel, boats, etc. Of the trunk they make what we call a vaa (canoe), by chiseling out the inside and rounding off the outside with an adz. Before the advent of the white man this was done with shells, and is the only kind of boat these people originally made. It must have been a most laborious task for it is hard wood. The trunk also furnished posts and rafters for their huts, wood for spears, wooden bowls, and now answers for making bed-posts, etc., though the people where I am now, do not use beds. Of the leaves they make their houses, churches, etc., braiding them into a mat

some 6 by 2 feet, and tied to rafters as we nail shingles. Of the leaves they also braid and weave all sorts of baskets, and everything they have to carry is done in baskets. The native carpets and mats are also made of them, their hats, ornaments of several kinds, several varieties of fishing nets, etc. The stem from which the fruit has been plucked serves as a broom, while from a fibery substance which binds the limbs to the trunk, cloth was formerly made. It now answers as a strainer to extract the oil from the nut, strain their medicines, etc., and is extensively used to start a fire, besides being a good covering for their ovens to keep in the heat and keep out the dirt. It resembles the material gunny sacks are made of. A sheat, resembling the leaf of a century plant, which grows with, and is a protection to the stalk bearing the fruit, contains considerable oil, and burns readily with a bright light. It is split up, tied in long sticks about two inches thick and makes an excellent torch, by the light of which the natives fish at night.

The cocoanut is the staple food, the staff of life, of the Tuamotuian islander. It is on his breakfast table (which consists of mother earth and generally dirty hands), finds its way back there at dinner time and is never absent at supper. It is food for him, his wife, his children, his pigs, cats, dogs and chickens and, if he has more than he can eat, he dries it in the sun and sells it for four or five cents per kilo (two and one-fifth pounds), while the money he gets for it is worth just half what our money is. When dried it is called pupaa (cobre) and is shipped to Europe and America, where the oil is extracted and serves innumerable purposes. Of the meat in the cocoanut the native extracts the oil and makes his perfume, his hair oil (which they all use profusely), his lamp oil, his medicine and many other things, while he often mixes it up in his bread, rice, etc., when he is fortunate enough to secure any, and which makes a very palatable dish, greatly improving the eating qualities of the articles mentioned, and many others besides.

The milk of the young cocoanut is a very refreshing beverage and discounts soda water all to pieces, though when I first landed here, I did not like it. It is a God-send that cocoanuts bear good water as well as fruit, for the island water is very bad. Rain water is much prized, no more by the natives than by us, and it is a great relief after drinking the hard, salty island water. Where will you find another tree that bears both food and water?

The apu or shell is the native cup and bowl made without hands, and it is quite amusing to see how the natives pass the sacrament around in them. He grasps it firmly in both hands and holds it for you to drink as best you can. I once attempted to take it in my hands but the man would not let go and I had to give in. This shell is also an excellent fuel and makes a bright, hot fire. Of the husk they make all kinds of cord and rope that they have use for, and rope made of this material is said to be much superior to the manilla rope we use at home. A rope they call "nape" makes a most excellent spring bed, which I found in almost every house in Tahiti. Have only seen one or two in Hao, and never had the privilege of lying on one. This fibrous husk called the puru is also made into brushes, stuffed into horse

collars, beds, etc., and is used in innumerable ways in our country.

By twisting the leaves and tying them together a net is made, sometimes 200 feet in length, and twenty-five or thirty people will drag this through the water and encircle a school of fish; then by opening one end, the fish are driven into a basket-like net, amidst a bedlam of shouting and yelling. It always reminds me of a political pandemonium. I recently saw five thousand fish caught in a few hours in that way.

Out of this wonderful tree they make their houses, hats, clothes, brooms, pens, ink and paper, cups, plates, spittoons, baskets, carpets, mats, hair-oil, fish nets, spring beds, ropes, boats, fish-lines, nails, ornaments for head and neck, perfume, torches, coal oil, medicines, firewood, charcoal, dishcloths, strainers and fire-starters; it furnishes food for himself and family, his pigs, cats, dogs, chickens, ducks, rats, and most generally a host of fleas, yields a most refreshing beverage, and grows without any cultivation, while its fruit is introduced into hundreds of American foods, and the tree, were it to flourish in our land, would find its way into every household in a hundred more different articles.

We have baptised eighteen persons during my stay on Hao, in the face of the boast of the Josephite that their missionaries would turn back all who had previously been baptised. Our Josephite friend took the very first opportunity to get away, saying that their church had plenty of places to send their missionaries where their labors would be more appreciated. This, too, when they have a branch almost as large as ours left. Before leaving, he said he had traveled over a good deal of the world, but never seen as tough a place as Hao. He has now been here fifteen months and cannot begin to hold a common conversation, let alone preach. I have done first rate so far. A Josephite missionary who has been here twenty-six years, and has been constantly engaged in preaching and interpreting for the last eight years, recently came to Hao, and after hearing him preach, his own people told me they could understand me much better. They said my talk was plain as daylight, but his reo (voice) was fifi voa, i. e., tangled or difficult.

As with all these islands, the people of Hao are easier to convert than to get to live properly after conversion. Still some good has been done and our people abstain from drink and tobacco, paying very strict regard to those laws while we are here. Traders all predict that observance will end when we leave, but we hope for better results, though I do not expect to see but little progress while they remain on the isolated, barren isles. They must come under the stir and bustle of civilization to wake them up, and very little civilization will ever be seen upon these scattered dots of rock and sand. There are no natural resources to sustain a civilized community. Were it not for pearl-shell these natives would scarcely ever see a white man or hear from the outside world, and from all reports that is rapidly disappearing. My only hope for the good of these people is in the "gathering." Arizona and Mexico would make an excellent place for them.

I am well and feel to press on and do all I can to lift them from the mire into which they have fallen.

FRANK CUTLER.