

CORRESPONDENCE.

SAILING AROUND CUBA.

July 12, 1898.

Next to bananas, the most important product of eastern Cuba is cocoanuts. The trees grow rapidly, without cultivation, and every man's field is fringed with them. Fruiters buy the nuts, at the rate of \$8 the thousand; and they are hulled on the island, ground in primitive mills and pressed for oil. Or, correctly speaking, we should put it in the past tense and say this was done, up to a few weeks ago. Now every industry, however simple, is paralyzed. Spanish soldiers, almost as hungry as the starving people, occupy every village and hamlet and prey like locusts on the devastated land.

The Cuban process of extracting oil from the cocoanut resembles that by which Texans make oil from cottonseed. The "cake" of solid residue is fed to the pigs—about the only "live stock" ever successfully raised in eastern Cuba—and the shells are used for fuel in the sugar factories. So far, the oil has been locally employed only as a lubricator for sugar making machinery—a wicked waste of valuable material, it seems to those who are familiar with the splendid possibilities of the product. Here is an unequaled opening for the manufacturer of palm-oil soap, cocoa-fiber mats, hats, etc., to say nothing of the hundred other uses to which parts of the tree, its fruit and fibres, may be put. The saying goes that a cocoa tree bears a nut for every day in the year. In time of peace one might buy a dozen nuts for a twenty-cent coin anywhere in the rural districts of Cuba; and he who has never tasted the "milk" from one freshly gathered can have no idea what is meant by a draught fit for the gods. In their proper state, however, the nuts are not brown and hard, as you see them in northern markets; they look like enormous pale-green apples, slightly elongated—for each still wears its Robin Hood jacket, which is removed before shipment. Being still "alive," as they say on the island, its shell is soft and easily cut, with the machete, or long-bladed knife, which every countryman carries; or your own pocket knife may answer the purpose. Make a hole in one end of the nut about the size of a half-dollar, and out gushes the "milk" like a living spring; not by any means such sour stuff as you have seen come out of cocoanuts at home, white as chalk and thick as buttermilk.

Give one of those imported things to a monkey, pining in captivity for its native food, and he will refuse it with scorn and indignation. The trouble is that the cocoanuts of commerce are gathered before they are ripe and entirely spoiled in transit. The fluid shut up within it should have no suggestion of milk, but be colorless as water, with a slight sparkle like that from some clear mountain spring, except for a slightly sweet and most delicious flavor; and if freshly picked in the early morning, after the nut has been swinging all night in the cool breezes, the liquid is almost ice-cold. Where cocoanuts grow, you never see inside of their shells any of that hard, white layer which Northerners grate and "dessicate" (one might as well say desecrate), for in its best estate the nut has no substance; only a creamy white film inside of it, hardly thicker than your thumb-nail, which is scraped off with a spoon when eaten. Before drinking the juice, the "tender foot" generally pours it out into another vessel than that which nature intended; but the sophisticated epicure tilts

the cocoanut at just the right angle to let the "milk" trickle gently down his throat—and like the old toper we have heard of, he wishes his throat were a mile long. There is nothing in the wide world more nourishing or fattening, more health-restoring and youth-preserving. Emaciated invalids are recommended to begin on the juice of half a dozen nuts a day, the dose to be increased according to the patient's inclination. And the invalid is yet to be discovered who does not develop a taste for it so rapidly that in a week's time half a dozen nuts at a single sitting will hardly satisfy him. Each full-grown nut contains nearly a pint of this true "fountain of youth"—the same, perhaps, which the old Conquistadores sought vainly far and wide, expecting to find it rushing out of the earth in some sequestered spot, instead of hanging, green and beautiful, everywhere overhead. The big nuts grow in bunches, five or six on a stem away up near the top of the tall tree, just under its crown of plume-like leaves. A native darkey, young or old, thinks nothing of shinning up the smooth, branchless trunks, which look like a telegraph-pole, towering straight and slender from 50 to 100 feet—whacking off the nuts with his machete (carried up in his teeth) and tossing them down with the ease and agility of his ancestors, the monkeys. No cocoanut ever falls from the parent stem until it is too old and withered to be good for anything. The poorest denizen of the tropics would disdain to eat such wind-falls—and so they are shipped to the north, to be eaten by those who know no better! Nowhere on the globe do pine-apples thrive as in eastern Cuba, where the conditions of soil and climate bring "the golden apples of Hesperides" to absolute perfection; yet the pine-apple industry has never had much attention in this section. Here is another chance for the enterprising Yankee. A tract of unoccupied land, extending as far as one can see, may be bought for a few dollars and turned into a fruit-farm, the virgin soil of unparalleled richness being capable of producing every tropical growth. Shipping facilities are already established at Baracoa and several small ports; and if the land touches the Yumiri or some other river, so much the better for its owner. Until one has seen the golden glory of a pine-apple plantation, he can think of no more attractive sight than a sugar-cane field, glistening pale yellow under the torrid sun and billowing in the gentle breeze like a wind-swept sea. But even more fascinating is a field of pines, each great "apple" guarded by a circle of glittering, sharp-edged bayonets. In Florida the pine-apple leaf is so sharply serrated that the thought of getting around among them suggests a field of torture. Evolution seems to have progressed farther in Cuba, for in the older and more carefully cultivated plantations the saw-teeth that edge the long, pointed leaves have mainly disappeared.

Before the war, it was the sight of a life time to go out to Marianao, a suburb of Havana, and there drive through an estate which had 80,000 pine-apple plants in full bearing. Over in Nassau they call the pine-plantations "groves" and "orchards," as if they were trees. Whether groves or fields, the plant is about the same, producing one of the most luscious and popular fruits known to man, for which there is constant and ample demand. Like most things worth having in this troubled life, the golden "pines" are not easy to get at. A very short stroll among the stinging leaves will lead you to sym-

pathize with the New Yorker who, after a visit to Marianao said: "You do not mind the first two thousand or three thousand sticks and prods from the needle-points of the bayonet-leaves as you cross a field; but after a while your tortured cutis can endure no more and your remarks about the pineapple crop are likely to be prejudiced by present soreness. How much nicer it would be if the 'apples' really did grow in 'orchards' and you could send a colored boy up the trees to shake down a few, and then you could sit down in the shade and eat them!"

A plant produces only one pine at a time. The fruit thrusts itself upward in the middle of a mass of long, narrow and sharp arched leaves, spreading forth from a central stalk, precisely like those of the Agave Americana, or "century" plant, with which everybody is familiar. The stem is perhaps eighteen inches to two feet in height.

The same plant produces a second apple, and a third, and so on through several bearings; after which a new plant must be started from the "slip." Nothing is easier of cultivation, or requires less capital and previous experience; and few crops bring in greater or more certain returns.

Baracoa, the port and village on the eastern tip of Cuba, a few miles north of Malsi light, has a population of about 3,000. It was once of considerable importance, when the Cubans had a fruit trade, as the shipping place of large quantities of pine apples, banana and cocoanuts, and at certain seasons its small bay was crowded with fast sailing fruit ships seeking their cargoes. There is no hotel in the village only the usual wretched "Fonda y Posada," fit for neither man nor beast. The port is surrounded by an abrupt range of hills—part of the Sierra Nisise chain. At the summit of the mountain, a few miles from the town, there is a huge volcanic cavity of great depth, in the form of a crater, but in which, singularly enough, the strata give no evidence of volcanic origin. The most conspicuous feature in the landscape, however, and the one most dwelt upon by Columbus in his journal, is the great table-topped mountain close behind the town, which is visible miles out at sea. It is still called by its aboriginal name, Yunque, and about it many traditions cling. To this day the natives declare that at times the face and figure of the martyred cacique, Hatuey, may be clearly traced on the perpendicular cliffs of Yunque that overlook the valley he loved; and then the apparition disappears as mysteriously as it came. By the way, we have heard little about the aboriginals of Cuba, but this particular chieftain, Hatuey, seems to have been a savage of remarkable foresight.

Though nearly twenty years elapsed from the time of Columbus' discovery of the island to the founding of its first settlement, the chief cacique, Hatuey, never ceased to warn his people against the Spaniards. Having secretly informed himself of the barbarous treatment inflicted upon the Indians of Santo Domingo, he called all the tribes of Cuba together in a three-days' council. He told them that the Spaniards performed all their cruel deeds for the sake of a great god whom they were serving, whose likeness he would show them. Then taking some gold from his pouch he said: "This is the god whom they serve and him they follow. They are coming here to seek this god. Therefore let us make a festival and dance before him, to the end that we may please him, and when the white strangers come he will order them to do us no harm." After they