

New System of Fruit Preservation

The decline of the tropical regions of America has of late years been a fruitful topic of discussion. Well provided as the public has been with statistics as to the condition of those once favored countries, says the New York Tribune, no one who has not seen with his eyes the present state of affairs can fully realize the change. In a land where nature is so prodigal that almost the casual thrusting of a branch into the earth insures a tree, desolation and poverty are everywhere found. The reason is plain enough; it is only the remedy that has remained the problem. The products of the tropics are fruits, and the exportation of these involves a greater risk and a larger knowledge of the subject than has been at the command of these countries. On every side there is a waste of food fairly maddening to the student of economics; but how to utilize this superabundance, how to convey it in proper shape to the millions who win only a bare sustenance from over-worked soils in other countries, is the great and hitherto unsolved problem.

The solution now suggested is one which has the sanction of Australia, and this means more than appears on the surface. Whether it be because Australia has fewer lives to care for and finds them more precious, or because the authorities have less to do, cannot be now debated; but the fact is that Australians are not permitted to poison themselves with adulterated food, as is the glorious privilege of free citizens in this country. The government watches with a never sleeping eye the food which supplies the tables of the people. When, therefore, the Australian government indorses a process and gives it medals galore it means that science has set her seal on it. The system of fruit preservation which is now being introduced into the West Indies and Central America has for some years been successfully tried in the countries of Australasia.

A Simple Process.

The new system is one of evaporation, but the process differs from others in that it is quickly done and insures absolute cleanliness. The fruit and vegetables are not dried on the ground for days together, like figs, prunes and similar preserves. Five or six hours is all that is required to change fresh fruit into an article which will keep for months and years, and still preserve the original flavor—in some cases actually improve it. It is not, however, so much the mechanical process as the effect on the tropics which interests the ordinary observer, and it is in this direction that it is at present being developed.

There is no fruit in the world so easy and cheap to raise as the banana, or which contains more nutriment and can be served in a greater variety of ways. Yet there is no fruit which is so carelessly exported and the general value of which is so little understood. The banana is the main object of attack under the new evaporation system. The exporting companies use only the largest bananas, and every year thousands and thousands of bunches rot on the plantations in the tropics. The new evaporation process takes these smaller bananas and makes them into a dozen different marketable commodities. There is banana flour, to begin with, a delicacy which is used for the making of cakes, fritters and the like. There is banana prepared as a substitute (an excellent one) for citron and raisins in fruit cake. It also makes a delightful preserve not unlike and quite as delicate as figs and prunes. Banana butter is another product; this is a sort of jam, which is not unknown in tropical countries as a great delicacy rather difficult to make by the old-fashioned process. All these products can now be marketed at a small cost. The machinery is not elaborate and the original cost of the fruit is almost nothing. It is estimated that the banana butter, for instance, can be put on the European market and sold there at less than half the price of any native condiment. To the poor of Europe, whose list of delicacies is so limited, this will be no small blessing.

Tried on the Banana.

The banana is not the only tropical fruit which is being treated by the new process. Any one who has lived in tropical countries knows that the negroes who are not on the track of civilization make from the cassava a kind of flour which is extremely wholesome and cheap. This is also being put up for exportation. The extremely nutritious okra (the value of which is fully realized in the tropics, where it is constantly used as food for invalids) is being prepared in quantities for exportation. In its canned form the okra necessarily fails to retain all its value as a food, but the evaporated vegetable has been proved by analysis to contain all the nutriment. The man who makes okra soup a standard food among the poor of any country is bestowing a permanent benefit. Sweet potato flour is also made for exportation.

The British government is just now unusually keen as to the condition of its West Indian possessions. As long as fruit is the chief product of these countries and as long as old methods of exportation prevail so long will the decline of the West Indies continue. Once save the enormous waste by finding a market for the innumerable products of the south and the islands will regain their old prestige. The government of Jamaica has been interested in the evaporation question and a favorable outcome seems probable. In Central Amer-

ica the process is now fully appreciated. From Santa Tomas, Guatemala, the British army is now receiving supplies of evaporated food. The republics of Central America have all indorsed the process and are beginning to experiment on their own account. From a trade point of view the innovation is important. Fruit authorities think that it is likely to revolutionize the tropical fruit trade. Be this as it may, there is great interest in watching the attempt to give to dwellers in the comparatively unproductive north some of the blessings of the prodigal south.

Short Stories Well Told

"It isn't safe to be funny these days unless one labels one's jokes," said a woman who went abroad this past summer to a Washington Post man. "You know I've always rather fancied myself as a wit, and



TUCKED BODICE—TUCKS EDGED WITH WHITE SILK.

on the steamer coming home I really let myself out. Everybody was a bit seasick, and I—well, even I had times when I thought I'd rather own an automobile than any kind of a yacht. One day we all foregathered on deck and talked about what we'd gone through—you know how people do on shipboard. I was talking in my cleverest vein with an English family.

"I'm like a famous lady," I chortled gaily. "I'll be extremely glad to set foot on terra cotta again."

"That evening the mother of the English family took me aside.

"My dear," said she, "I'm so much older than you that I'm sure I may make so bold as to tell you something, and I want you to take it in the spirit in which it is meant. You said this morning you'd be glad to set foot on terra cotta again. I thought I'd just call your attention to the thing so you won't make the same mistake again. It isn't terra cotta; it's terra firma."

"The Congressman's Wife," in her letters to the Saturday Evening Post, tells many good stories. Here is one of them:

Finally, these men got around to the recent visit of ex-President Harrison to Washington.

"General Harrison," said Senator P—, "is one of the strongest, soundest, ablest men we have ever had in public life. He has always been reserved and is rather handicapped by an unresponsive, cold manner. Why, I remember—" and here the senator began to chuckle to himself, and the whole table leaned forward full of expectation. The senator went on:

"When Harrison was in the senate he always used to bring his luncheon to the committee room. He carried it in his coat pocket and would eat it while he went on with his work. One day when he got it out as usual from his pocket we saw him look it all over ruefully, and it did look rather flat and dubious. He finally remarked to us that he guessed he must have sat on it accidentally. One of his colleagues, one who had recently been ignored by Harrison, spoke up impulsively: 'Well, by Jove, Harrison, if you've sat on it I'll bet you a sixpence it is frozen solid;' and of course a shout went up from the whole committee."

"How did he take it?" asked I, when the merriment had died away.

"Oh," returned the senator, "he joined in the laugh. It was too good a one on him and he had to unbend."

In Dr. Weir Mitchell's recent book a pleasant story or two is told of Walt Whitman, the writer to whom some would deny the name of poet, while others regard him as one of the greatest of all poets. One of the characters in the story of "Dr. North and His Friends" says that Whitman was eaten up by his own vanity, regarding everything he did as of such supreme value that he had lost all power of self-criticism and could not tell good from bad or indifferent. Once he was asked if he thought Shakespeare as great a poet as himself. He replied that he had often thought of that, but had never been able to come to a decision.

He went to a physician upon an occasion, thinking himself seriously out of health. When he learned that his ailment, whatever it was, could be treated best by living as much as possible out of doors without dos-

ing himself with medicine he was leaving in all good humor, when he bethought himself of the physician's fee. "How much will it be?" he inquired. "The debt was paid long ago," said the doctor, who knew and liked his writings; "it is you who are still the creditor." Whitman thanked him and went out. Another patient, a woman, had taken his place when he returned. He put his two great hands on the table opposite his medical adviser—he had not stopped to knock or announce himself—and said: "That, sir, I call poetry."

The woman was scandalized by his abrupt appearance and demeanor and asked, as soon as the writer had gone for the second time: "Is the gentleman insane?" But, learning his identity, she wished she had asked for his autograph.

"Colonel," the fair girl asked, "what was the closest call you ever had?"

The handsome soldier looked thoughtful for a moment, relates the Chicago Times-Herald, and then replied:

"I was at Fort Laramie, several years ago. I was in command of the forces there at the time. Some of the officers had friends visiting them from the east, most of them being women who had come out west to get a glimpse of real frontier life. Well, we got word from one of the agencies that the redskins were acting ugly and it was feared that there would be a terrible massacre unless the soldiers were hurried forward to settle matters.

"It happened that my horse had stumbled a few days before and fallen upon my left foot, hurting it so that I was unable to get around except on crutches. I hated to remain behind when there was trouble anywhere, but it was simply out of the question for me to try to do any campaigning, with my foot all done up in bandages, so I was forced to let the boys go ahead without me. Our force at the fort was unusually small, for which reason every man except myself was sent forward to deal with the Indians."

He paused, and she, in agony of suspense, cried out:

"Oh, colonel! And while all the rest were away the Indians came swarming around the fort and you, single-handed and alone had to hold them at bay. Oh, how did you ever do it? How heroic! And how long was it before—"

"No," he interrupted, "it wasn't that. You see, there were two grass widows among those visitors from the east, and for three days I was the only soldier around the fort."

A wearied Cleveland stepped from a train at Pittsburg the other morning at an early hour and rushed into the depot lunch room to get breakfast, reports the Cleveland Plain Dealer. He was extremely tired from a long ride, and consequently not in the best of moods.

"What do you want?" snarled one of the waiter girls. She had a got-up-too-soon expression on her face and spoke savagely.

"A little courteous treatment," responded the traveler.

"We don't keep it here," rejoined the girl.

"I thought so," was the laconic reply of the Clevelander. "Give me some regular eggs."

"We only keep fresh eggs," replied the girl.

"Everything fresh around here?" queried the Clevelander.

"Yes," she hissed through her teeth.

"I thought so," the traveler replied. As the traveler ate his breakfast in silence he wondered who had the best of the skirmish. From the look on the girl's face, she, too was pondering over the same question.

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