

The BANANA and its RELATIVES

By FRANKLIN ADAMS

If you did not eat three dozen bananas last year, you did not have your share. Over 40,000,000 bunches, or more than 2,000,000,000 bananas, were imported into the United States in 1910. The immensity of this shipment can be more readily grasped by the statement that it would cover an area 20 feet wide, reaching from New York to San Francisco, or, placed end to end, would extend thirteen times around the earth at the equator. The "ship" in the peels would launch the ships of the world. The wholesale value of the 1910 importation, at point of export, was over \$12,500,000, while in all probability the consuming public of the United States expended over \$25,000,000 for this delectable fruit.

During the past ten years the number of bananas consumed in the United States has more than doubled, and the increased tropical acreage under cultivation assures even more startling figures for the next decade. Many European countries are importing large quantities of bananas; last year Great Britain consumed over \$8,000,000 worth, Germany, over \$1,000,000, and France, \$500,000.

With the world's decreasing food supply, and the wheat crop at a standstill, the banana comes forward as an important factor in saving the day. One acre with little labor will annually produce 17,000 pounds of bananas, or more than one and one-third times as much food substance as an acre of corn, two and one-third times as much as oats, almost three times as much per acre as wheat and potatoes, and four times as much as rye. The chemical composition of bananas and potatoes is almost identical.



CUTTING BANANAS IN COSTA RICA

from \$10 to \$20 per acre yearly. The net profit, however, averages about \$50 per acre in the various banana producing sections. The banana often grows in combination with other products. In some cases it is used as a shade for young coffee plants.

A great many people are of the opinion that the banana would be much better if it was allowed to ripen on the plant, but this is not the case. Such fruit is strong in flavor, does not mature to perfection, and the skin breaks, attracting numerous insects, while the weight of the bunch itself becomes too great for the plant, either one or both coming to the ground. The bunches are cut when the fruit is one-half to three-quarters matured, though still green and as hard as nails. It continues to feed from the cut stalk, which contains a great amount of sap, until fully ripe. Should the cutting occur too soon, however, the fruit, although turning yellow, will never attain the perfect flavor.

With the cutting of the bunch ends the life of the plant, for it bears but once and is usually cut down to obtain the fruit, or succumbs a few days later to the cleaning process, which is merely the bringing of a spent piece to the ground. Cutting the fruit itself involves the only careful labor on the banana plantation, as the bunches weigh from fifty to sixty pounds, and even slight knocks are followed by bruised spots, under which the fruit quickly ripens and decays. However, by the liberal use of dried



LOADING BANANAS IN PANAMA

Forty years ago there were very few people in this country who could boast of having seen a bunch of bananas. The fruit was practically unknown. Now, in even the most remote country store, this "pride of the tropics" is a familiar sight.

Despite the fact that millions of bunches are consumed, they belong almost wholly to one member of the family, the common yellow Guinec.

Scientists have recognized and classified as many as 40 different species, ranging from the ornamental groups that do not develop fruit, to the giant bananas, the Platano of the Spaniards. The red banana is not common in the American markets. In the United States it is used only to "dress" fancy baskets of fruit, but in the tropical countries it is quite a favorite. The individual banana is large, but the stalk does not carry as many "hands" as the yellow varieties, so as it does not bring as large a price to the grower and wholesaler, its extensive cultivation is not encouraged.

Banana culture is one of the oldest industries. It has been known since the origin of the human race. Long before the dawn of history in the old world, perhaps long before the old world rose from the waters, man lived on the fruit of the Muses. The banana was generally considered a native of southern Asia, and to have been carried into America by Europeans, until Humboldt threw doubt upon the purely Asiatic origin, quoting early authors who asserted that the banana was cultivated in America long before the conquest. It is claimed that at the time of the Incas in Peru, bananas formed one of the staple foods of the natives of the warm and temperate regions of the Montana. In spite of the uncertainty as to just which country may claim the fruit as indigenous, all tropical lands assert their right to it.

The first importation of bananas to the United States occurred in 1894, when the schooner Heyward, on a voyage from Cuba, brought into New York, as a commercial venture, a consignment of 20 bunches; but the real beginning of the trade dates back to 1868, when Mr. Charles Frank undertook the importation of fruit from Colon to New York. Previous to that venture small cargoes consisting mainly of the red banana had been received at irregular intervals from Cuba. In 1879, Captain Baker, an owner of a Cape Cod schooner, took a charter to carry gold miners and machinery 300 miles up the Orinoco river in Venezuela. After discharging his cargo, Captain Baker ran into Jamaica to secure some coconuts as ballast to New York, carrying a few bunches of bananas on the deck as an experiment. The result promised a great future for the industry on that island, which has been fulfilled; the exports last year reach \$4,000,000.

On the American continent, bananas are successfully grown through 50 degrees of latitude, from Tampico, Mexico, 25 degrees north, to Asuncion in Paraguay, in the Tropic of Capricorn, 25 degrees south—a belt over 2,000 miles in width. Cultivation of the fruit is practical-



STALK 8 HOURS AFTER CUTTING

IDENTICAL STALK 3 SECONDS AFTER CUTTING

ly restricted to the eastern coast line, for the banana is one of the thirstiest of plants, and cannot be expected to produce its maximum amount of fruit in districts where there are less than 100 inches of annual rainfall. Unfortunately for humanity, great areas of the land lying within this belt are high, dry and sterile, while others are sandy or rocky, so only a small fraction is so located that banana growing can be made profitable. The altitude must not invite danger of frost, and high temperature is necessary for the growth. The southern coast of the Mexican gulf, the Puerto Barrios section of Guatemala, the Puerto Cortes district of Honduras, the Puerto Limon district of Costa Rica, the Bluefields district of Nicaragua, the Bocas del Torro region of Panama, the Colombian province of Santa Marta, and certain portions of Cuba, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Dutch Guiana, all combine the favored elements of soil and climate.

The plant has two natural enemies—the gopher and the wind storm—but against almost all other tropical conditions its hardiness is remarkable. It is a matter of common observation that the banana is absolutely seedless, cultivation through innumerable generations having led to a vegetable method of propagation. Some of the primitive seed-bearing varieties are still said to exist in isolated regions of the far east. The first step toward cultivation is the clearing of the land. Into the tangle of shrubs and vines and the thick snarl of tropical vegetation the laborer comes with an ax and "machete" and cuts low everything but the giant trees. When all of the small timber and brush has been felled planting is commenced. Young shoots are obtained from a plantation already in bearing and these are placed in rows about 12 feet apart. When the planting is finished, the only labor necessary is to keep

down the weeds and carefully clean the ground about the root of each stalk.

The banana plant will grow with wonderful rapidity under favorable circumstances. In fact, the development from a newly planted sucker to the plant in full bearing is simply short of marvelous. Within a space of six or seven weeks the two or three foot plant has more than doubled in size, and a month or so later the leaves cease to unfold and a spike appears out of the center of the crown. This is the future stalk of the bunch and carries a huge red blossom at the end. It develops rapidly, continually bending more and more until in a short time it has turned completely upon itself, so that the bananas grow end up or in a position the reverse of which they are usually hung. From seven to twelve months after the blossom appears the fruit is ready for the gatherer. At irregular intervals along the entire stalk, and only extending part of the way round at any one place, the bracts break forth thin ridges of flowers—which are almost immediately replaced by nine to twelve embryo bananas. These are the future "hands" of the bunch, so called on account of their resemblance to those members when held in a certain position.

The banana has a curious and prodigious method of propagation, for before the parent stalk and fruit have matured new ones spring up. These are offshoots that grow from the root of the original plant, resembling sprouts from the "eyes" of a potato, and each in turn becomes a parent stalk with its fruit. It follows that unless most of the continually appearing new plants are cut out (which is the practice) the first stalk in a few years will become the center of a miniature jungle. The plants grow to a height of from fifteen to thirty-five feet, spreading in all directions, until the soil is overburdened with an enormous mass of stalk and leaf growth, and stunted fruit is produced. In planting for the market about 200 hills are allowed to the acre. Sometimes the number can be safely increased to 225, in which case there will be 500 stalks. However, after one year all of these stalks do not produce a marketable bunch of bananas, and the average yield is not over 300 full bunches to the acre per annum.

Perry, the well-known authority on bananas, estimates that a grower can produce a bunch for ten to fifteen cents, which will have a market value of 30 cents. The cost of producing after the first crop is confined to cultivating and harvesting, which may be done for

VIRGINIA IN THE CITY

By PHILIP KEAN

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For hours the girl had walked through the city streets, hot, dusty, tired, hungry. She sought work, but could not find it.

Everywhere she was turned away. They wanted only those who had held similar positions, and Virginia, fresh from the country, could claim no knowledge which would be of use to her in town.

It seemed to her that the tall buildings on each side of the street frowned ominously. As evening came on she grew afraid. She hated to go back to the tall tenement where she had paid a week's rent for a room. Dinner was out of the question, and she had had no breakfast or lunch.

It was with a gasp of relief, therefore, that she spoke to a boy who stood on the corner under a street lamp.

"Why, Billy Locke," she said, "is it really you?"

"It sure is," he said heartily and grasped her hand. "But what on earth are you doing in town, Virginia?"

She told him her little story. The aunt with whom she had lived had died, and Virginia was unwilling to be a burden in the homes of outsiders.

"But I can't find work, Billy," she said.

He was only twenty-one but he had a man's discernment of a woman's need of protection.

"You oughtn't to be running around these streets alone," he said gravely; "you'd better let me take you back to your boarding house right now."

"It is not a boarding house," she informed him. "I just have a room there and take my meals out."

"Have you had your dinner?" he demanded.

She flushed. "No—o," she stammered.

"You come right in and have something to eat," he commanded.

She would let Billy order nothing for her but a glass of milk and some crusty rolls. He urged upon her a more elaborate feast, but her inde-

pendence made it impossible for her to accept too much of the boy who had been only a casual acquaintance in her home town.

"What are you doing?" she asked him. He had a fairly good position in the packing department of a big store.

"Some day I want to go back home and have a store of my own," he said. "I don't care much about living in the city."

"It would be lovely here if I only had money," Virginia said, but Billy shook his head.

"It ain't any place for people like us. We are better off in small places."

Virginia did not dare tell him how homesick she had been.

"I have just got to find work," she said desperately. Then her eyes brightened. "I believe you have brought me luck," she exclaimed.

"How?" Billy demanded.

She pointed to a sign on the wall, "Waitress wanted."

Billy, remembering her refined home surroundings, expostulated. "Oh, you wouldn't take a position here, would you?"

But she did take it. There was a head waiter, a young man of somewhat sporty appearance, who passed her on, when she questioned him, to the woman at the desk. Arrangements were made for Virginia to come the next morning, so Billy took her home promising to see her soon.

Every day after that she sat at the table where she served, and every day she begged her to let him write to his people and make arrangements for her to go home. "It makes me sick to see you working here," he said.

"It needn't," she told him. "We get good things to eat, and I have a com-



WAITRESS WANTED

"You Wouldn't Take a Position Here, Would You?"

fortable room, and tomorrow I am going to buy myself a new dress and a hat."

She hoped when she told him that that he would ask her to go out with him to the theater or to some of the restaurants where some of the other girls went.

But he did not do anything so dazzling. He blushed and whispered, "Will you walk in the park with me on Sunday?"

She consented, wondering if he were stinging. He surely made as much money as the head-waiter, who invited her to go with him on Saturday night to see a play at a near-by theater.

This was the kind of invitation she craved, and she accepted gladly.

On their way to the theater they passed Billy Locke. He bowed, and Virginia saw the astonishment in his eyes. "Serves him right for not taking me himself," was her thought as she tossed her head, but all the evening his miserable face haunted her.

The head-waiter proved to be poor company. He was not in Virginia's class and his conversation was limited.

Virginia, however, made another engagement with him for the following Saturday, and the next day when she went with Billy Locke to the park, she told him of it.

"He's awfully nice, he is so generous," was her statement.

"Perhaps he's generous," poor Billy said, "because he hasn't anything ahead of him to save for."

"I should think a man who cared for a girl would want to give her a good time," said Virginia.

For a moment Billy was silent. Then he faced her. "Look here, Virginia," he said. "I want to take you back home and put you in a little house of your own, and care for you for the rest of your life. And I can't do it if I spend money on you now. I cannot bear to see you in a place that you don't belong, like that lunchroom. It is not the place for a lady, like you, and that head waiter is not a gentleman. I don't like to see you with him and I don't think you ought to go with him, Virginia."

He spoke with a vehemence that astonished Virginia. She had not dreamed that Billy had it in him. "Why, Billy Locke," she gasped, "I didn't suppose you thought about me that way."

"Well I do," said Billy, earnestly. "I love you, and I want to marry you, Virginia, and by fall I shall have enough to take us both back where we want to be. Will you wait till then, Virginia?"

She hesitated. "Oh, I can't say what I will do right now, Billy."

She thought it over and the vision of the little home among the lilacs came to her when, on the hot days, she served luncheons to a ravenous population.

In vain did the head-waiter whisper in her ears dreams of future delights. What had he to offer her that could compare with the dreams Billy had put into her head? Trips down the river, and to amusement resorts—these were things of the moment. But Billy's promises were for a lifetime.

The next Sunday in the park she told the results of her decision to Billy Locke.

"It is because you are so good, Billy," she said. "Somehow from the very moment I saw you standing on the corner, I knew that I could trust you."

"You bet you can," said Billy, fervently.

The Power of Pantomime.

Henry E. Dixey, the comedian, was praising the pantomime powers of Nijinsky, the Russian dancer.

"Nijinsky's pantomime skill is wonderful," he said. "Without saying a word he makes you laugh or weep or shudder or rage—all by means of pantomime. Once, indeed, on a bet of 50 rubles, Nijinsky, all by pantomime, expressed to a large audience the fact that his younger brother, Plotz, though born in Moscow, was at present staying at a small boarding house near Warsaw."

Vaudeville in Ancient Rome.

Arbuckle, the coffee man, told Spreckels, Jr., that Haverdave was a much misunderstood patriot. "You misunderstand Haverdave just like I did," said the coffee magnate. "He is a fine, cultivated man—why, he plays the violin." "So did Nero play the violin," was Spreckels' retort. It shows how careful a man should be to avoid blundering. If Nero ever actually played the violin it was nearly 2,000 years ago, and the world has never been permitted to forget it.

"Pop, Is the World Round?"

"That, my son, depends on who gives the answer. The extreme optimists say it is sometimes square, and the majority of pleasure seekers declare it is very flat."

Let Fortune Escape Him

"Old Man Cheney" Sold Land for a Song, but Does Not Seem to Regret It.

One of the reasons that the old New England farmers were forced to abandon their homesteads is that they did not conserve their resources. Through lack of foresight, they sold for small sums property which was afterward immensely valuable.

But we have one citizen whose unfortunate lack of foresight even we can appreciate. He is close to ninety years old now, and last Fourth of July we got out the great ugly yellow landau in which General Grant was hauled by eight pairs of horses from Franconia to the Frollo house on his famous tour of the country, and we decorated it with streamers, and we rode "Old Man Cheney" through the town, as a tribute to one whose luck was so colossally bad.

Old Man Cheney once owned the Frollo notch, and he sold it all for

A Commercial Failure.

"Is that astronomer successful?" "Not very." "He insists on spending his time staring through a telescope when he ought to be at a typewriter plunking out articles for the magazines."

A Preference.

"I'd rather be a live rabbit than a dead lion," he said, after they had been sitting for a long time when the silence was almost oppressive.

"Well," she replied, "you got your wish."

Sunday Observed in China

People of the Flowery Kingdom Will Keep Holy the First Day of the Week.

China is showing signs of exceeding even the speed attained by Japan, when she started on the way from medievalism to modernism. The Flowery Kingdom, which, during many centuries, has existed until itself, is advancing to the advantages

of western civilization, and is hastening to make up for lost time. Its latest move is embodied in an official determination to observe Sunday as a day of rest. While the considerations prompting this step, may not be religious, the result is sure to be beneficial. Six days of work to one of rest constitute proportions justifiable on scientific grounds, and furthermore

will help to put China in accord with the rest of the civilized world. The importance of the reforms that are following one another in China and the extent to which they are radical may be appreciated when it is considered that until the present generation outsiders, in practically every part of China, were "foreign devils." There were no railroads, and no disposition to permit the construction of any or to encourage anything not already tested by centuries of practice. China not only has railroads

now, but is building more and has in prospect a network of lines to grid the empire. It has a parliament, a constitution and a cabinet, all the acquisitions of a decade. China seems destined in a very short while to take a much more important position that is now occupies in world affairs.

Volunteer Cooks.

On a camping trip of young persons two of the girls volunteered to get breakfast the first morning while the

rest of the party went off to find a spring. When the searchers returned with the water, they found nothing ready but the coffee, which, being in temperature-retaining bottles, required no preparation.

"Where's the bacon?" asked one of the men. "Didn't the fire burn well enough?"

"The fire's all right," said the would-be cook, "but we'd like to know how you expected us to fry bacon without any lard?"—Lippincott's Magazine.