

How Hemp is Grown-- A Profitable Crop

(Copyrighted, 1900, by Frank G. Carpenter.)
DAVAO, May 1.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—The Philippine islands could furnish galleons enough to hang the whole human race. Their chief product is hemp, and they sell about 18,000,000 silver dollars' worth of it every year. You see hemp spread out to dry in the streets of the prin-

and it can be easily cut down with a carving knife. The men I saw cutting used bolos, the same knives that they used for cutting off heads. They are not unlike our corn cutters, save that they are heavier and that as a usual thing they are kept as sharp as a razor. I had to go some distance from Davao to



WEIGHING HEMP AT DAVAO.

cipal towns. It is carried in from the country on buffalo carts or on the backs of men, and many a petty Chinese merchant has made his fortune by dealing in it. We pay every year several million dollars for the Manila hemp which we use. It is sent to New York, Boston and other cities and there made into all kinds of rope, from clotheslines to cables. A vast deal of it goes to the northwest to make binding twine for harvesting. Some of it is employed in our gold, silver and iron mines, and the finer qualities are mixed with silk and used in weaving. It is made into hammocks. It is used for nets and in Paris it goes into making of hats, tapestry and carpets. From the waste and old ropes Manila wrapping paper is made, and here in the Philippines the finest of the fiber, mixed with the threads of the pineapple, is woven into an exquisite stuff known as Just cloth, which the American women buy for party dresses and which is commonly used by the richer of our Filipino sisters.

There are thousands of men in these islands who live off the hemp industry and there are merchants here who have made fortunes out of shipping the product abroad. Some of the best opportunities for fortune-making in the Philippines are in planting and raising hemp, and in the future there will be many Americans engaged in the different branches of the industry.

Where the Hemp Comes From.
I find that the hemp plant grows in nearly every one of the Philippine islands. There are provinces in Luzon which are supported almost entirely by it and the islands of Leyte and Samar raise thousands of bales of it every year. When the ports of the eastern part of the Philippines were opened up about 100,000 bales were found there ready for shipment, and today there are steamers loaded with them going out from the Philippines.

The province of Albay, which is in the southeastern part of Luzon, is one of the best hemp districts, yielding more than 6,000,000 pounds of the stuff annually. A great deal of it is produced in Cebu and a limited quantity on this island of Mindanao. Some of the finest hemp grown comes from here and there are thousands of acres, I might also say millions of acres, which could be turned to hemp raising.

From inquiries which I have made from people interested in the subject, the available territory has hardly been touched and the product might be made ten times as large as it is. So far the Philippine islands are the only places in the world where the hemp plant has been successfully grown. Attempts have been made to raise it in India and elsewhere, but so far none has succeeded.

A Visit to a Hemp Plantation.
I spent this morning going through one of the largest of the hemp plantations of Mindanao. If you have ever seen a banana grove you can imagine how the plantation looks. The hemp plant, or abaca, as it is here called, is the Musa Textilis, a species of the same family as the edible banana, whose botanical name is the Musa Paradisiaca. A hemp tree looks just like a banana tree. It is more of a plant than a tree, sprouting up from the ground to a height of from twenty to twenty-five feet, composed of many leaves wrapped round and round about a central stalk, which, when the plant is full grown, towers high in the air above you. The outer leaves are each a foot wide and ten feet or more long. As they grow upward they branch out from the stalk, shading the ground. The hemp comes from the inner leaves, which are tightly wrapped around the central stem, there being so many of them that the plant at its base is from eight to ten inches thick.

As it stands in the field the plant stalk is as crisp and juicy as a stalk of celery



"IN A HEMP ORCHARD"—MR. CARPENTER IS HOLDING UP THE CORE OF A PLANT.

reach the hemp plantation. After I entered it I kept close to my guide, for it was so large that I might have lost myself in it and spent days finding my way out. There were thousands upon thousands of the abaca or hemp plants, making a veritable forest, or rather a jungle, in which there were neither roads nor paths. The plants were about six or eight feet apart and they shaded the ground so that we walked in semi-darkness in going through it, although it was almost midday. Now and then we stumbled upon a cocoanut tree, but as a rule there was nothing but hemp, hemp. Here and there a stalk had been cut out, but sprouts were growing up from the bottom, and I am told that a hemp plantation once started will keep on reproducing itself.

How Hemp is Grown.
From one of the proprietors I learned how the orchard was started, or, in other words, how hemp is grown. It thrives best upon a hillside where there is plenty of moisture, but where the water does not stand so as to rot it. The land is first cleared, many of the larger trees being left standing in order to shade the young plants. The ground is burned over and the sprouts, which are usually the suckers taken from an older plantation, are set out about six or eight feet apart. They grow rapidly, but it is three years before they are ready for use. After this time they can be cut right along throughout the year, the only caution observed being to cut the plants when they are just about ready to blossom and before they bear fruit. Such plants as have fruit do not make good hemp, the fiber being weakened by the strength of the plant going into the fruit. As the plants blossom the year around, the farmer can be kept busy cutting; there is no danger of his losing his crop by the hurry of harvest as in sugar and rice. The only cultivation necessary is to keep down the weeds and now and then to set out fresh suckers.

Harvesting the Crop.
Hemp farming, in fact, seems to me the softest and easiest kind of agriculture I have yet met with. A plantation once started, its owner is practically independent, and if his farm is big enough he can lie back in his easy chair and spend his time counting his shekels. The harvesting is chiefly done on the shares, the harvesters receiving half the crop.

The hands work in couples, two men going together into the plantation to cut down the plants and prepare the stuff for the market. They do this in the crudest and simplest way. One man cuts down the

stalk, chops off the top and strips off its outer leaves. He has now a white pole five or six inches thick and from six to ten feet long. This is made of a soft central core and a number of white leaves which run the full length of the stalk. These leaves contain the fiber known as hemp. The man strips the leaves off one by one from the core, and, throwing them over his shoulders, carries them to his partner, who does what we call the stripping.

The fiber is on the outside of the leaf, the inside being made up of a pulp which must be squeezed out before the hemp is ready for use. This is done by drawing the leaves one by one under a knife which rests upon a log in such a way that the juice and pulp are scraped out and only the fiber is left. The knife is fastened to a treadle upon which the man puts his foot, forcing it down tight upon the leaf and pressing it against the log. As he pulls it he wraps the fiber about a stick in order that there may be no danger of breaking it. When it has been drawn under the knife it looks just like a skein of fine silk and needs only drying to be ready for the market. The drying is done in the sun.

After this the stuff is put up in bundles or twists much like a hank of yarn and carried to the store for sale. The planter usually buys the hemp gathered from his own plantation, paying his workmen for their half of it. The prices at times range all the way from \$7 to \$25 a picul, or 110 pounds. Owing to the war hemp is now very high, selling at \$25 in silver for 140 pounds. It sometimes brings as much as \$250 or \$300 a ton in American money, and there is one grade known as Lupiz which has brought in London as much as \$600 a ton. This, however, can be raised in but small quantities, and it should not be regarded as a criterion in considering the hemp possibilities.

Growth of the Industry.

Hemp has been steadily going up in price since it was first exported and this notwithstanding the size of the crop has trebled

in the last twenty years. About fifty years ago the price was between \$4 and \$5 per picul. In the next decade it rose to \$9 and in the '90's the average price was \$11. Ten years later it had risen to \$17 and it is now, as I have said, up to \$25. These high prices are caused by the war and there will probably be a fall within the near future. At present the crops runs in the neighborhood of a quarter of a billion pounds a year, enough to give every family in the United States enough for a clothesline and to supply all the children with jumping ropes and still leave much to spare. It would, in fact, give three pounds of hemp to every man, woman and child in our country and not exhaust the supply by 25,000,000 pounds.

Of this amount the United States takes more than one-third. We use more Manila hemp than all Europe, excepting England, Great Britain coming next to us, but she acts rather as a middleman for Europe than as an actual user herself.

During my stay in Manila I spent some time in the great hemp warehouses. There are perhaps a dozen of them where the

(Continued on Seventh Page.)

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