
TWO METHODS OF STRIPPING ABACA.

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CAVITE abaca, known as "Indan abaca" from the principal commercial center of the district, is sold regularly in Manila for about 10 per cent more per picul than the abaca from Batangas and other provinces having soil and climate similar to that of Cavite.

The circumstance would seem to demand an explanation. There is no reason why there should be such a difference in the prices of a product grown under exactly the same natural conditions in neighboring provinces. Manila dealers affirm that the Cavite fiber is whiter and more lustrous than that from other provinces, and since this class of abaca is used almost entirely in the higher grades of textile articles, there is a strong demand for the best fiber.

Some owners of abaca plantations in Cavite claim that there are different varieties of abaca, one in particular being known as "abacang siniboyas" so called from the resemblance of the fiber in color and luster to the white onion. The writer has examined this claim of "different varieties" and has found that the variety known as "abacang siniboyas" seems to grow on high and rather unfertile soil, while the other variety, known as "kinalabaw" is dark, rather coarse in texture, and grows on low, fertile soil. The conclusion is, naturally, that the so-called different varieties, at least as far as Cavite is concerned, depend for their difference upon the nature of the soil in which they are grown. These local differences of soil occur in all provinces where abaca abounds and there doubtless occur, also, minor differences in the quality of the hemp produced in any one locality.

Some years ago it was noticed that buyers paid ₱2 or ₱3 per picul more for abaca produced in Mendes Nuñez and Indan than for the product from Alfonso, a town some 7 miles distant. On inquiry it developed that a different method of stripping was followed in Indan than that practised in Alfonso; this difference in the method of preparing the product apparently accounts for the difference in prices.

In Indan the method of stripping in vogue was known as the "bakbak;" while that in use in Alfonso at that time was known as the "baknis," which is the identical method followed in Ba-

tangas. As evidence that the difference in prices between the Alfonso and the Indan product was due to the difference in the method of stripping, it may be stated that since the Alfonso strippers have learned the "bakbak" method the price of Alfonso abaca has been the same as that of Indan.

In stripping by the "baknis" method, the strippers, after cutting the stalk and tearing it apart, separate the outer skin of the petiole known as the "lupis" from the pulp and pass it under the knife to clean the fiber.

Under the "bakbak" method the stalk after being cut is leaned against a tree. The operator then grasps the outer edges of the petiole with his fingers and tears it loose from the stalk, sinking his thumbs at the same time into the center of the petiole so as to split it through the middle from top to bottom. When the petiole is torn loose to within about 2 feet of the base it is bent so as to break off the thickest portion of the pulpy interior and leave it attached to the base of the trunk. The petiole, thus retaining a great part of the pulp, is cleaned in the same manner as is the "lupis" under the other method.

The explanation of the superiority of the latter method of stripping probably lies in the fact that since a greater quantity of pulp is gathered in front of and under the knife, the fiber is cleaned more by the pressure of this pulp than by direct contact with the knife. Consequently the outer skin of the fiber is not injured, hence the greater luster of the fiber cleaned by the "bakbak" method.

Another explanation is that under the "baknis" method, after the "lupis" has been separated from the petiole it is often left for some time before it is cleaned. As a result, the sap dries on the exposed fiber and discolors it. On the other hand, under the "bakbak" method, at no time during the process of stripping is the fiber exposed until it is finally cleaned.

Strippers say that it is somewhat heavier work to strip by the "bakbak" method than by the "baknis," but affirm on the other hand that sufficient time is saved in the method of preparing the petiole for stripping to compensate for more than the difference in the labor of passing the fiber under the knife. Moreover it is claimed that fiber stripped under the "bakbak" method is more uniform in length; that is, that the ends are not broken as much as by the usual method. This, if true, means greater returns for the owner of the field, in quantity as well as in quality.