

**ALL ABOUT ALOE AND
RAMIE FIBRES;
DYE AND TANNING
STUFFS; DRUGS, &C.**

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All About Aloe and Ramie Fibres; Dye and Tanning Stuffs; Drugs, &c. by A. M. & J. Ferguson

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A. M. & J. FERGUSON

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE main object in publishing this little pamphlet is to embody a paper written on the minor products and resources of Ceylon about forty years ago by the late Mr. Henry Meade. This will be found on pages 49-84. We have also had in view, if possible, the encouragement of a new local industry in Aloe Fibre, such as has been successfully established in Mauritius, and under the name of "Sisal Fibre or Hemp" (see page 108) in the Bahamas and other parts of the West Indies and Mexico, and Yucatan. Mr. D. Morris's paper on Ramie or Rhea Fibre, page 85, is also well worthy of local attention.

We trust to see a considerable trade in Fibres beyond those now included in our Customs list, established ere long in Ceylon.

COLOMBO, 20TH FEBRUARY 1890.

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PREPARATION OF AND TRADE IN ALOE FIBRE IN MAURITIUS.

WE are printing on page 8 *et seq.*, a pamphlet published in Mauritius in 1882 and translated for us in that year. Its publication has been delayed, in consequence of the very discouraging results of trials with the "Death" machinery to obtain fibre cheaply from the leaves of *Fouquieria gigantea*, the very species of aloe which has been so successful in Mauritius. There it seems to spread and grow spontaneously and to be cultivated and prepared on a large scale, the export of aloe fibre from the sugar island having attained extensive dimensions. The plant could be grown to any extent in Ceylon, and the whole question hinges on the use of machines which will do good work and cheaply. Such machines seem to be available in Mauritius. In 1882, it will be observed? M. de Chazal stated that 3 per cent of the weight of leaves in fibre or $1\frac{1}{2}$ ton of fibre per acre would pay him. As tea cultivation seems likely to be overdone, some of our readers may wish to turn their attention to the cultivation of fibre-yielding plants and to the preparation of the fibres. We therefore publish the long delayed translation, and we hope soon to get further information from Mauritius, especially as to

the machinery and appliances (chemicals being deemed objectionable) used in extracting the fibre from the leaves. The mode in which Manila hemp (*Musa textilis*) is dealt with in the Philippines is thus described by Mr. Wilkinson, British Consul at Manila:—

“Two strong uprights are firmly fixed in the ground and connected by a cross bar, in the centre of which a large broad-bladed knife is fixed downwards on a block of wood fastened lengthwise on the bar; the knife has a strong handle, which is connected by a cord to a long bamboo made to act as a spring by being tied in the middle and the butt parallel and above the bar; the free end thus forms a supple and powerful spring and holds the edge of the knife firmly against the block; below the bar there is a treadle attached by a cord to the handle of the knife: the mode of operation is for the worker to stand opposite the knife placing either foot on the treadle, which he depresses, thus forcing the knife handle down and the blade up; he then places a strip of stalk (called locally *sifa*) between the blade and the block leaving only enough to wrap round a stock on the near side; he then releases the treadle and the knife by the action of the bamboo spring nips the strip firmly against the block, and on the workman drawing the strip through the pulp is left behind. The apparatus is extremely simple and inexpensive.”

“In the *Bulletin* for April 1887 (No. 4) published by the authorities of Kew, there is a great deal of interesting information regarding the Manila hemp. It is there stated that the whole supply

comes from the Philippine Islands; the imports to Great Britain 'amounts to about 170,000 bales and to the United States about 160,000 bales, equal to about 50,000 tons per annum.' The imports to Calcutta are comparatively insignificant, being probably less than 300 tons per annum. It is stated in the Kew report that a labourer working under pressure "can clean nearly 20 lb. of hemp per diem; but as a rule the quantity cleaned by one man working steadily day by day averages about 12 lb.; usually two men work together, one cutting down the stems and splitting them, while the other cleans the fibre. At the current rate of wages in 1879 one labourer's earnings were 7½d. to 8d. per diem."

ALOE FIBRE AND ITS PREPARATION.*

BY EYENOR DE CHAZAL.

(Translated by "Károly Fűrös.")

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The cordial welcome which this little book has met with at the hands of the public since its first edition, which was brought out at the expense and by the order of the Chamber of Agriculture, the sustained demand of which it has been the object in various directions,—a demand which has led to its exhaustion,—above all, the growing favour which the new industry enjoys, have encouraged me to bring out a second edition.

* De la Fibre d'Aloës, et des Récents Perfectionnements apportés dans les Procédés d'Extraction. Etude lue à la Réunion de la Chambre d'Agriculture du 19 Janvier 1882. Deuxième édition. Maurice: *The Merchants and Planters Gazette*, 1882.