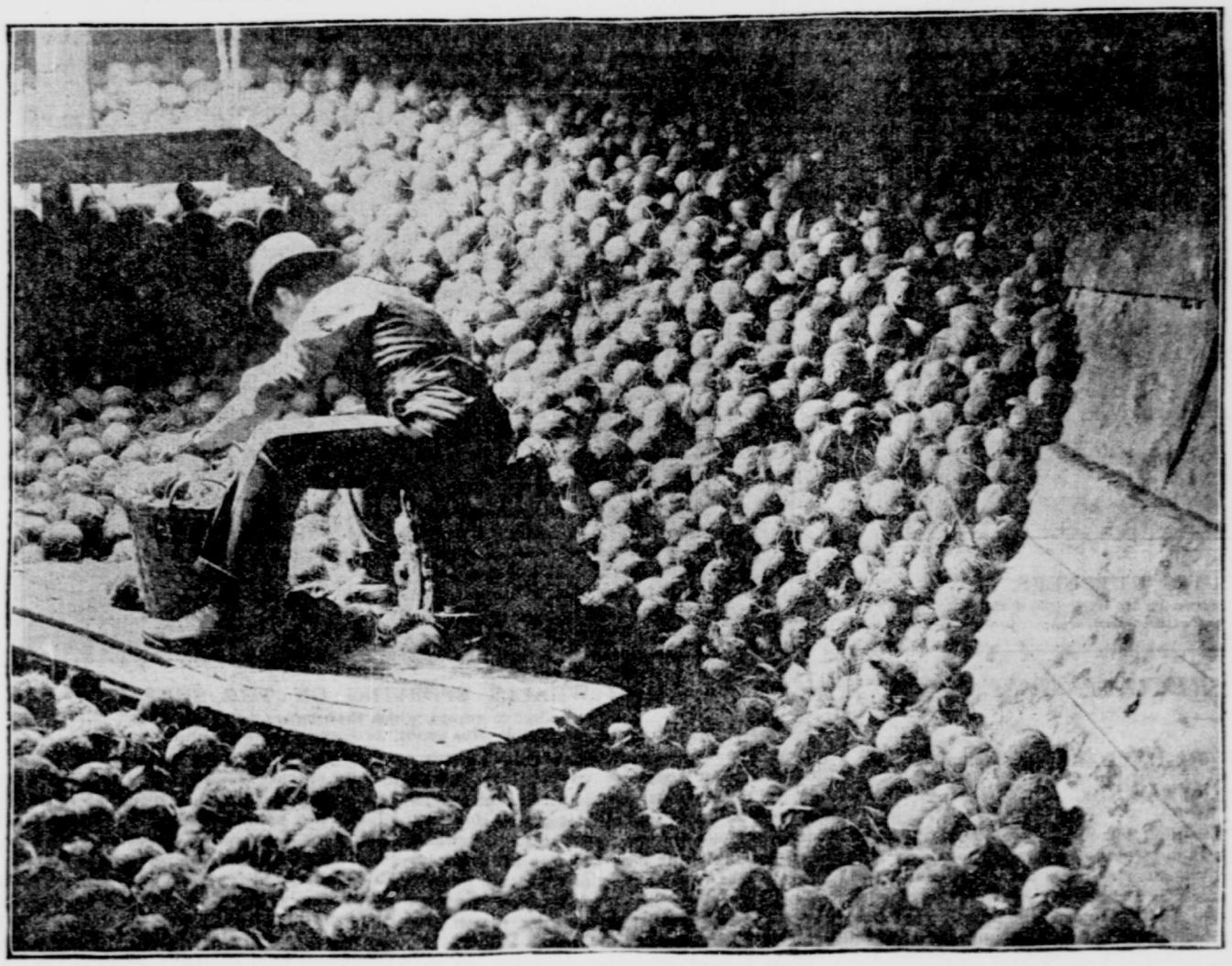

IN THE HOLD OF A COCOANUT SHIP.

MANIFOLD USES TO WHICH COCOANUTS CAN BE PUT.

Where the Supply Received in This Port Comes From—Vessels in the Trade Often Have Trying Experiences.

At the very southern end of the island of Manhattan at this time of the year the tropic and arctic zones would seem to have met. In South-st. the curbs may be heaped high with snow, yet a few feet away there are piled thousands of cocoanuts. One may even sniff a spicy odor on the wintry air as he watches the stevedores carry out basket after basket of round, brown nuts from the hold of a schooner moored to a nearby wharf.

In the cocoanut trade the traditions of the old-time sailor have been preserved. It is about the only branch of commerce between this city and the tropics which has not been invaded by the modern, workaday, unromantic steamship. Schooners and brigantines bring their cargoes of nuts into New-York Harbor just as they used to do in the years when a British flag floated over the Battery.

Whenever a cocoanut ship is moored to her pier after a period of tempestuous weather, the captain is almost sure to spin a yarn that will make a landlubber gasp. When the Nova Scotian schooner Mauna Loa was warped into her berth alongside of Pier 8, in the East River, the other day, all the sailors, deckhands, stevedores and ship chandlers in South-st. knew that the captain had some thrilling experiences to recount. The sails of the ship were in tatters, her main boom was fished near the jaws, and a bunch of firewood was bound around a break near the end of her main gaff, like the splints around a broken arm.

"Aye, aye, and we did have a bit of sea, I reckon," said the captain. "We left Cuba forty-seven days ago. We struck a half dozen storms that was like to sink us, and the old boat shipped seas like a whale's back. Twelve days ago we got within 150 knots of the Hook, when a nor'wester took us that split the sail to ribbons. We rode out that gale for eleven days. Not an inch did we budge. But we're here, and there's not a nut cracked."

Soon after the Mauna Loa reached her pier a couple of sailors sought to add interest to the captain's tale by falling to fighting with knives. Had not the mate separated them and thrown their weapons into the East River, South-st. would have had still more to talk about.

At the pier where the Mauna Loa is moored there are always three or four ships, all of which bring cocoanuts from Eastern Cuba and the British West Indies. About five piers up the river are to be found cocoanut vessels which ply between New-York and the Central American coast. Here one may listen to many a story of the San Blas Indians of the isthmus and how they hate the Americans, because Panama has taken their lands away from the rule of Colombia. The Indians liked the Colombians, because they were always able to flout their authority and govern themselves as they pleased.

Not long ago, when the good ship E. A. Sabean reached her pier, Captain Sabean, who named his ship after his son, told how an Amazonian chieftainess swam two miles out from shore and took refuge aboard his vessel. She had fled to escape a family quarrel, she said, and the captain took her to Colon.

The cocoanut still travels to the American consumer in the hold of sailing vessels, because it grows along shores where the water is shallow. It loves the sea, and thrives best where the air is redolent with the briny odor of the waves. Along the coasts of Central America and the shores of the West Indian Islands grow the trees which supply the American with his cocoanut. Thirty million cocoanuts were shipped into this country in 1902, representing a product worth $832,383. From the British West Indies came $325,318 worth, from Colombia $183,412 worth, from Cuba $175,706 worth, from Honduras $88,750 worth and from Nicaragua $13,196 worth.

When a schooner reaches the San Blas coast to pick up a cargo of cocoanuts, it sails along the coast from one harbor to another, taking aboard a few thousand here and there. There are six vessels plying between this region of Central America and New-York, and they visit such ports as Cortia, the River Diablo, Pilanchica, the Isle of Pines and the Blue Fields, further north. The nuts are brought to harbor for shipment in small sloops, each holding about ten thousand cocoanuts. The sloop owners buy the nuts from the Indians along the shore for about half a cent apiece. Mules laden with nuts are driven out to the sloops, and these patient beasts of burden will wade in up to their nostrils without showing any nervousness. When a ship arrives in New-York with about four hundred thousand nuts in its hold they are taken out in baskets and knocked one against another to determine their quality. If they strike with a sharp click they are sound, and are thrown into bags labeled "select." If they are cracked and strike with a dull thud, they are thrown aside as "sprouts." If small they are set apart as "culls." When a dozen men are rapidly sorting cocoanuts on a South-st. wharf they make a distant passerby imagine he hears the rattle of musketry.

There is no tree so widely distributed throughout the tropics as the cocoanut. Even on remote atolls of the South Seas, which geologists say were only recently formed by the subsidence of a volcano and the growth of coral up from its base, one finds the cocoanut. The parent tree leaning over the beach of one tropical island drops its fruit into the sea, to have the nut carried away perchance half way round the world. Then in some faraway place the waves cast the cocoanut ashore to sprout and propagate another forest after its own kind. The cocoanut as it tumbles from the tree and the cocoanut on a South-st. wharf differ as much as a chestnut burr and a chestnut. The hard shell is originally encased in a fibrous hull, which the native shucks off before he sells the nut to the fruiterer. Within its hard, woody hull the ripe nut holds a transparent liquid, which forms one of the chief beverages of many savage races. In the South Sea Islands the natives ferment the cocoanut milk and procure a mildly intoxicating liquor. When the nut is permitted to stand a long time after picking, the milk becomes white, and it is in this state that the Northerner knows it best. In the health resorts of the Bahamas, cocoanut milk is frequently prescribed for invalids, who drain as many as a dozen nuts in one day.

Many pagan people regard the cocoanut as of divine origin, because it is so useful. It supplies almost all their needs. With its trunk they build houses, with its leaves they thatch their roofs, the fibre of its shell they weave into clothes, the hard wood of the nuts they cut into bowls and saucers, its rind is their food, its milk is their drink, and its narcotic root they dry and smoke.

In modern commerce the cocoanut may be adapted to as many although not as vitally important uses as among tropical savages. From the pulpy rind is manufactured the desiccated cocoanut for pies and cakes, or cocoanut oil, from which a soap is produced that forms a suds with salt water. The oil also furnishes a sort of butter, which one finds on the tables of Hebrew restaurants of the East Side. The fibre is used for cordage and for stuffing mattresses and couches. Even the hard, woody shells in some States are ground up to adulterate allspice and black pepper. The State Board of Health of Connecticut recently examined 147 samples of pepper, and found that twenty-one were adulterated with ground cocoanut shells.

TESTING THEIR CONTENTS.

One sharp knock together, and the expert knows the quality of the meat inside.

UP FROM THE STEAMING HOLD.

The cocoanuts are removed in baskets to the pier, where they are assorted.