The New York Sun began publishing in 1833, becoming the first successful penny daily by emphasizing local news and sports. By 1834 it had the largest circulation in the United States, with sensational and sometimes fabricated scandal coverage. In 1897, they published the famous exchange of letters determining that “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.”

On August 12, 1918 (above), the paper published a letter by David A. Curtis (1846–1923), whose Queer Luck: Poker Stories from the New York Sun had been published by Brentano’s in 1899. “Let some genius make banana flour that will keep,” Curtis wrote. “Who will find the answer?”

Three days later, the paper published a reply by artist Louis Eilshemius (at right), promising to “think on the matter” and meanwhile offering up a variety of recommendations for both growers and eaters of bananas.

On October 1, Curtis returned to the argument, at some length: “Concerning the value of this banana flour there is no possible question.” But two days later, “Louis The Forgetful” settled the matter. . . .
"Why want a flour out of bananas any way? Are they not best in their natural state? I prefer them so."

Published October 1, 1918

Professor Rusby, dean of the College of Pharmacy of Columbia University, is recognized all over the world as a leading authority on the food values of vegetable products. He said to me the other day in the most matter of fact way that the day would come when the banana would be one of the principal items of the diet of the laboring man all over the world. In that day the present high cost of living will be considerably lessened, for banana flour can be produced at a much less cost than wheat flour, which fact is respectfully referred to the Department of Agriculture.

But the banana is by no means the only food supply which nature produces spontaneously and which is capable of increase and improvement by cultivation. It is even doubtful whether it is the best or the most abundant.

Professor Rusby not long ago surprised the audience before whom he was lecturing by offering to wager that he could support his family entirely on the natural products of five acres of uncultivated land anywhere in the vicinity of New York city. Perhaps not many New Yorkers realize that there are many such areas within a hundred miles of here, but there are, and though none of his hearers ever had thought of them as producing good, wholesome food without cultivation, one took the bet. They knew that Professor Rusby knew what he was talking about, if anybody did. Even he, however, did not offer the suggestion as one that would be of tremendous importance to the community at large. Nor did he recommend the idea for the adoption of the heads of other families generally. He was talking about the neglected food supplies of the world.

One of these, perhaps the only one that ranks with the banana in importance, is the root known in different parts of South America as the mandio, manioc, mandiosa and yuca, and in the West Indies and the United States as cassava.

It cannot be said of the cassava that it has been entirely neglected, any more than has the banana. Neither have the possibilities of its improvement been overlooked by the Department of Agriculture. On the contrary, some of the forms, in which it reaches the consumer are well known, and the records of the department show that the plant has been cultivated in Florida for over thirty years. The available supply of it is so enormous, however, its value is so great, and the utilization of it has been so small, that it is certainly to be classed among the comparatively neglected supplies.

It is known to the American housewife in the forms of farina, of tapioca and of starch. What is not generally known is that cassava flour can be made into most excellent bread that will keep indefinitely (Professor Rusby has some at the Zoological Gardens that was made eighteen years ago and is still palatable), and that it can be produced in practically unlimited quantities at a much, less cost than wheat.

Thousands of tons of these two super-excellent foods are annually suffered to decay unused, yet whole nations are striving for foreign bread land in a field of usefulness open to American enterprise.

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"Louis the Forgetful."

He remembers that the best way to prepare bananas is not to.

To the Editor of the Sun—Sir: All poets are butterflies, the Greek emblem for the soul. And yet the poet differs from the real butterfly in that he is willing to sip again at flowers of former delight.

I had forgotten about bananas all last month. More important ideas arose in my mind. The war, the painting of immortal pictures and sundry letters to the Sun. "D. A. C." letter made my mind return to bananas.

Why want a flour out of bananas any way? Are they not best in their natural state? I prefer them so.

The Samoans and others in Africa live on them. They have no bread. I myself never eat more than three to four slices a day, right here in the city, and I think the utter abstinence of the cereal in my diet would not put a nail in my coffin.

There are more important things to develop than flour out of bananas.

LOUIS M. EILSHMANS, Supreme Spirit of the Spheres.

New York, October 2.

Published October 3, 1918