

THE ISLAND OF GOMERA

EL GUARAPO

by HERBERT NOWAK

Our friends abroad are keenly interested not only in the magnificent landscapes of the Canary Islands but also in the typically Canarian cooking. I make it a practice, therefore, to induce visitors of Gomera to taste our palm-honey. The "Costa Canaria" has time and again devoted space to Canarian cooking, to which I might add a description of another Canarian speciality. It is called guarapo and, after refinement, "meil de palma" or palm-honey. Guarapo is produced by the dangerous work of climbers of healthy palm trees who climb to their tops and remove a portion of their crowns by cutting off the uppermost branches near the trunks. The milky juice thus obtained is called guarapo. It is collected between sunset and sunrise only, as the juice would be spoiled by drying up in sunlight. In one night, a palm tree yields about twenty liters of guarapo, which amounts to about 1800 liters in three months. Then the tree must be left alone for four or five years, otherwise it will die. Particularly in Vallehermoso in the island of Gomera much guarapo is obtained. There the palm trees are climbed with or without ropes. You probably saw such palm tree climbers in films on islands in the Pacific, but even films cannot show all the difficulties of the work involved. The job of the climbers is so dangerous that one is tempted to call out to them to stop it.

Palm honey is made of guarapo by boiling it until the white milky juice becomes brown and the surface of the liquid presents a "golden" hue. Five liters of guarapo yield about 1 1/2 liters of palm honey, which amounts to a yield of about 550 liters of palm honey for a period of three months, during which guarapo is taken from a tree. A liter of palm honey is sold at a price of 25 to 30 pesetas. Guarapo is collected between April and September when there is no rain, as rain impairs the quality of the juice of palm trees. Palm honey resembles syrup. It is viscid and sweet, and is eaten with bread or mixed with gofio, another speciality of the island. It is nutritious and a valuable item of food used in Gomerian households. My Gomerian friends say that palm honey is made in Gomera only. The name guarapo seems to date from the aboriginal period, although this has not been scientifically proved.

