

Reminiscences of a recent Tour in the West Coast.

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The following stray notes made during a recent tour in the coconut tracts of the West Coast are written in the hope that they will be of use to readers of this journal and will add to our present knowledge of coconut cultivation.

1. *What costs little is generally little esteemed*:—Stem bleeding disease of coconut trees:—The practice of driving iron nails right into the stem of coconut trees attacked by bleeding disease is said to be a preventive. How far this practice will assist its prevention is worth investigating by the Mycologist.

2. *Custom is the guide of the ignorant*:—White ants attacking coconut seeds:—For dread of white ant attack in coconut nurseries, some ryots keep teak (*Tectona grandis*) leaves over and above the nuts in the nursery. While constructing storeyed houses in Malabar the usual custom is to spread teak leaves thickly above the timber ceiling before spreading earth to make the upper floor. The object is to prevent the timber from being attacked by white ants. How far the teak leaf is a repellent of white ants is worth investigating by the Entomologist.

3. *A man must plough with such oxen as he hath*:—Heaping up of earth in small mounds in coconut gardens: This practice is in vogue in all the coconut gardens bordering the backwaters of Cochin and Travancore. There are hardly any cattle maintained by the coconut garden owners of these places. The advantages obtained by this operation are briefly these. (1) A greater area of the soil is exposed to weathering action. (2) The weeds are turned over and incorporated with the soil. (3) Surface wash is prevented and the retention of silt in times of annual flooding favoured. (4) Thorough drainage of the soil is effected. (5) The activity of soil bacteria is encouraged.

4. *Necessity is the mother of invention*:—Damage done by rats to coconuts: At times in some gardens the damage done by rats to coconut trees is incalculable. An efficient method of preventing rats from climbing the trees is to coil barbed wire for 6 to 9 inches round the stem at a height of about 10 feet from the ground.

5. *Practice bears out theory*:—The benefits of a systematic cultivation of coconut gardens: One coconut garden about 10 acres in area in sandy soil near 'Kootay' about 8 miles north of Ponnani belonging to a rich landlord was found kept completely clean. Merely by a frequent stirring of the soil and a removal of weeds the general appearance of trees was improved and also the yield. This confirms the experience of Kasargode Farm and the value of cultivation in coconut gardens and keeping them free from weeds is well substantiated.

6. *No rose without a thorn*:—The Herculean nut of Mr. Thomas: The girth of this nut was found varying from 24 to 32 inches and the weight of the whole nut with the husk from 4 to 6 lbs. One lb. of copra is obtained from each nut. Its oil percentage is 68. But the yield is not at all high. Seed nuts of this and several other varieties can be had from Mr. Thomas, Pallicai, Kayankulam, Travancore.

7. *People are blind followers*:—The Chentengu: It is seen that a high medicinal value is attributed to one particular variety of coconut called Chentengu. (Chen = Red; tengu = coconut). At present everywhere red or light red coloured nuts and even brown coloured nuts are largely used for medicinal purposes according to their local availability, but the special variety of Chentengu, with the recognised medicinal properties is the one which has a red colour inside the husk. The epicarp or the outside portion will be dark green in colour. This is a very rare variety found in parts of Travancore. Collection of seed nuts and the planting of the variety in different places is desirable.

8. *Practice makes perfect*:—Lowering old coconut trees:—The ryots of Travancore take considerable pains to secure a heavy yield

even from old and aged trees. Old coconut trees are lowered very carefully *in situ* without difficulty. They say that this encourages a vigorous growth subsequently and is conducive of longevity and unintermittent fruitfulness, although there will be a retardation in growth for the first one or two years. In Malabar and South Canara, this practice is never noticed. It is a pity that most of our ryots do not bring up the coconut tree with the amount of care commensurate with the benefits they derive from it.

9. *The coconut tree:—the Kalpaka Vriksha of Kerala:* It well deserves this appellation only in Cochin and Travancore. Every part of it is turned to good account. Of these the fibre industry deserves special mention. That the husk of the coconuts is not its least valuable product will be evident when one travels along the backwaters of Cochin and Travancore. The fibre is found suited for the production of a great variety of articles not only of utility but even allowing of elegance of workmanship. It is found sufficiently fine even for the loom; and mattings of different textures and with coloured figures and shapes are made of it at Aleppey and Mattanchery.

10. *A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:*—The dwarf variety of coconuts planted in rows on both sides of the main road in Trichur Town (Cochin State) was found coming up well. Some of them were found bearing fruits abundantly and the bunches were so huge as to reach the ground. Two kinds of trees were observed, one bright yellow and the other dark green.

Conclusion. In Cochin and Travancore a family of four members owning about 50 trees can in an ideal condition maintain themselves in a fairly decent way. The coconut trees of these States excel those of Malabar and South Kanara not only in the vigorousness of their growth and in their yielding capacity, but also in the quality and quantity of oil yielded, which is in great demand and highly valued in foreign markets.
