

ORANGES GALORE—AND FRUIT CULTURE
GENERALLY IN CEYLON.

We have long been aware of orange trees growing and producing fruit exceedingly well in certain of our planting districts—more especially in the comparatively dry Uva divisions. In Lower Hewaheta, too, in the olden days we have seen some splendid trees covered with golden fruit. But certainly never in the history of the island have we had such a revelation of luxuriance as that made by a Rangala planter elsewhere,—“25,000 mandarin oranges from two trees in one year!” The statement sounds incredible, and were it not attested to us by the name of a well-known planter, we should say there had been exaggeration. But it is absolute fact and it ought to set a good many practical men a-thinking that in certain of our hill districts, a very limited grove of orange trees might prove as reliable a source of income as a very much bigger acreage of coconuts. We have related how, in Florida, we found an ex-Udapussellawa coffee planter, content with his ten acres of oranges, assured that if they turned out well, they ought to give him a clear income of from £400 rising to £800 a year. Ten acres of the Rangala “mandarins” ought to beat this by a long way, even although we are far distant from such a market as Florida commands—in the season when foreign oranges are out of it—in New York and other big towns—with cheap transport from the groves to the American Covent Garden. Still, it is impossible to doubt that there is a very considerable market in Ceylon, including the port of Colombo, for good fruit and more especially oranges. We recall a month last year when, for invalids, no oranges worthy of the name, could be purchased under 25 cents each in Colombo. See what “North of Kandy” in a letter today says about fruit as well as vegetables. Oranges are getting a very high reputation among the faculty; and indeed we can recall the saying of worthy and clever Dr. Dickman of Kandy, twenty years ago, in bemoaning the quantity of medicine he was called on by his planting patients and others to prescribe:—“They will have ‘it you know; nothing but a big bottle and a ‘nauseous draft will assure them they get value ‘from their doctor; now if I myself feel ‘seedy,’ I ‘take an orange; if quite out of sorts, I take ‘two; and if very bad three or four—with the ‘best effect possible!’ There can be no doubt of the wholesomeness of the fruit, or of the fact that every man, woman and child in the Colony might probably, with great advantage to health, consume one hundred times the number of oranges they now do in the year. So, surely, we are safe in urging an extension of orange cultivation, among both Europeans and Ceylonese. There are other fruits, too, that might be far more freely planted; for instance, peaches and figs, in the Uva districts especially. Asking not long ago an experienced planter what a waste piece of land amidst the Happy Valley patawas could be made to grow,—“Why,” he said, “planted up with fig trees, that three acres would give tons of fruit for the supply of Nuwara Eliya, Nawalapitiya, Gampola, Kandy and Colombo markets.” Why then is there not far more done in fruit culture within the Principality? Are there none of our enterprising trained young planters (“creepers” even of some local experience) who can command a little capital and go to work to form 10 or 20 acre groves for oranges, peaches and figs?

THE BEGINNINGS OF COCONUT PLANTING
IN CEYLON.

HOW THE PALM GOT TO CEYLON.

The coconut palm is by no means indigenous to Ceylon. Though the most striking and ubiquitous of all plants over a great part of the lowcountry, the palm is nowhere found that its planting cannot be accounted for; and unlike the cinnamon bush, or rather tree, it can nowhere be discovered in a wild state. De Candolle, the greatest authority on the subject, places the original habitat of the coconut palm in the Eastern Archipelago somewhere in the neighbourhood of Sumatra and Java, and surmises that nuts floated thence both East and West. Eastwards to the islands of the Pacific and the coast of Central America, and Westward to Ceylon and the East Coast of Africa. The native tradition that locates the earliest specimen or grove of this palm in the neighbourhood of Weligama, on our Southern Coast, is in strict accordance with what might be expected under De Candolle's theory. The tradition is that a king of Ceylon was a leper, or afflicted with some skin disease, and that he (Kusta Raja) was cured by sea-bathing and the milk of the coconut, or the use of the expressed oil. Curiously enough the *Mahawansa* (the ancient Sinhalese history of Ceylon) does not contain nearly so many references to the coconut as it does to the palmyra palm, although the latter now, does not cover nearly the area occupied by coconut. One shrewd surmise why the *Mahawansa* has so little to say about the coconut, hazarded by Mr. H. Nevill, is that the practice of toddy-drawing after a time, and its distillation into spirit, would prejudice the priestly historians against the palm and its cultivation. Be this as it may, Mr. Nevill notices that the *Mahawansa* (XLII. chapter) records how King Aggrabodhi I. about A.D. 589 caused “a coconut plantation of three yojanas (about 36 English miles) in extent” to be formed, probably between Dendra and Weligama, and so it is surmised that his statue was cut out of the rock near the Weligama Vihara as a memorial of the King who introduced coconut planting into Ceylon!

* We are indebted for the next link in the chain of local coconut planting to the intelligent Atapattu Mudaliyar of the Colombo Kachcheri. Looking over his English copy of the *Mahawansa*, Mudaliyar Solomon Seneviratne came on the passage where it is related that the Minister of Prakarama Bahu the Great formed a coconut plantation between Bentota and Kalutara, one yojana or 12 English miles in width. The original passage bearing on the planting is worth transcribing as follows:—

Thence this great minister proceeded to the port of Bhimatittha. And there he built a bridge, eighty-six cubits' span, at the mouth of the Kalanadi* river; one of about one hundred yaththis' † span at the village Kadalisena; ‡ one of forty yaththis' span over the Salaggama river, § and one of fifty cubits' span over the Salapadapa river. ¶ Thus did he build these and other bridges at divers places where it was difficult to cross over; and likewise also he made numerous gardens and halls for preaching and the like, and did even give away much alms and hold feasts (in connection therewith).

Afterwards this great minister of the king formed a large coconut garden, full of fruit and fine shade, and gave it the famous name of Parakkama Bahu;

* The Black river, Kalu-ganga.

† A yaththi is equal to seven cubits of two spans to the cubit.

‡ Kehelsen, Kehel-lenava?

§ Salgamu-ganga.

¶ Salruk.