

## PLANTING NOTES FROM KELE- BOKKA, CEYLON.

October 6.

The weather for the last two months has been very wet here and nearly all the estates in the district is, I believe, much shorter in their tea than in the corresponding months of last year. The flush seemed to collapse altogether and three or four days' plucking a week was sufficient to keep it in hand. An improvement has now set in, in both flush and weather, and there is every indication of the beginning of the N. E. monsoon setting in. Tea below 2,000 feet elevation has flushed well I hear during August and September. In only the higher elevations has there been a serious diminution. There is one thing I am struck with in this district and that is that coolies are settled and we have not that continual restlessness and moving about so common in most other districts. There are head kanganis who have been on estates here for 20 and 30 years and on this particular one for over 40 years! Labour is recruited direct from the Coast as it should be and there is very little here of that vile and pernicious system of granting "tandus." Advances too are very low; in short the district is an example and shining light to all others.

Mr. H. Bressay of Nilloomally is expected to arrive from home in the district with his bride on 1st prox. and will be welcomed by a large circle of friends. On handing over then to Mr. Bressay, Mr. H. L. Blacklaw will take charge of Dangkande, Batotta, the former Superintendent, Mr. J. S. Nicolls, having left to take up an appointment in Wynaad.

### BLENDING AND ESTATE MARKS.

The question raised with reference to the use of the names of estates in our London Letter is a singular one. We do not know how it may be viewed by our planting and mercantile community. For ourselves we can only discuss it in the light that outsiders must regard it. Put into few words the point at issue thus resolves itself. Is it legitimate that teas grown on other estates should be scheduled by their purchaser by the name of some particular garden of which he may be the owner? We are told that the practice of doing this is not an uncommon one, and that it has been acknowledged to have prevailed from the days when coffee was king. It must be evident that, presuming teas so scheduled to come again into the market, their repurchaser must buy under a false impression as to the locality of their growth. This fact should, we think, satisfy us that the practice cannot be morally defended. The argument on the other side is that the purchaser of such outside tea, being himself an estate owner, is warranted in labelling such teas as being shipped from his estate. But in reply to this it must be apparent that such labelling would convey to ninety-nine out of every hundred buyers, the belief that the tea was the production of the estate, the name of which had been so employed. Can this conclusion be contested? We should say that it cannot. And if it cannot be, the practice, as it seems to us, must stand condemned. For, manifestly the repurchaser does not get the article he imagines himself to be buying.

We do not know how far this alleged practice prevails among estate proprietors; but if it be at all common, it must follow as of course that a considerable amount of Ceylon tea is being made to "sail (through the markets) under false colours." We cannot think that this can be desirable; nor

can we bring ourselves to believe that the practice is any but a most exceptional one. Purchasers no doubt sometimes place considerable reliance as to the quality of the teas they buy, upon the name of the estate under which they are sold. We might instance many of such estates, the names of which at the present moment, would probably add a penny of value to their produce. It is to be believed that this addition would not be paid were it known that the tea was not absolutely grown upon the estate itself. It might be the case, of course, as it probably in most instances is, that the teas so vended are fully up to the standard of quality grown upon the sponsor estate. It would scarcely serve the purpose of any proprietor to godfather teas of inferior quality to those by which he had made and sought to retain his reputation. It is upon such a basis, no doubt, that the practice we have referred to would be defended. But on the other hand, it must be apparent that it may be possible by such a course to build up a false reputation. It can be conceived that by purchasing teas of a high class and packing them under the name of an as yet unknown garden, the production of this may be given a repute which, if it stood on its own merits alone, would not be deserved. Hence it must be manifest that the course indicated may be made to serve an improper if not absolutely dishonest purpose. It would have seemed to us, therefore, that it must be impossible of defence. And yet we are told that it has been both excused and defended by at least some men of standing among our estate proprietors. We are surprised to learn that such is the case. Morally, in our view, the practice is not to be defended. Further, we doubt much if it could be demonstrated to be commercially wise or advantageous. It has been shown that a fictitious reputation might be built upon it. Now, although for a time this might prove commercially valuable, it must be certain that it could not be permanently maintained, and that the inequality of shipments that must ensue, must end in pulling down the reputation as fast as, or faster than, it had been achieved. However exceptional the practice may be, therefore, we trust it will be discontinued altogether.

### COCONUT PROPERTY IN THE WESTERN PROVINCE, CEYLON.

Notwithstanding the present protracted drought and its consequences in reference to next year's crop, there can be no doubt of the very high estimation in which coconut property is held in the Western Province and the adjacent divisions of the North-Western Province. We hear it stated on good authority that Mr. Oliveira has made a very special bargain in his purchase of Waljapala coconut estate of 204 acres at a good deal less than Mr. Rickards had paid Mr. Cooke. A year ago it realized R77,500: the recent sale was at R62,500. In the interval Mr. Rickards had neglected the place and at last he had to make a sale. Hence the difference in price. But a coconut garden does not take any permanent harm from the neglect of a year or so, if justice is then done to it, and so the present proprietor can be congratulated on a really very good bargain. Then the Morapolla coconut garden near Henaratgoda purchased from Mr. Andrew de Silva by Mr. F. Phillips, covering 80 acres, has realized R30,000. Finally, Perth estate in the Panadura district, of 900 acres—575 of coconuts, 40 acres cinnamon and the rest forest-reserve—has been sold by representatives of K. Hurmusjee to a Syndicate for R110,000 which ought to be a bargain, only the

place has been rather neglected. Perhaps the most valuable coconut estate in the country is that of Mr. W. H. Wright at Mirigama which is already coming into liberal bearing with the trees seven years old. Mr. Wright would not sell this property at any price under R600 an acre. But then he has given the greatest possible justice to his palms in selection, planting and cultivation. We hear from the Kurunegala district very good accounts of the prospects of the coconuts on the Delgolla estate. There have been fine rains on the place and in two years' time, it is said the palms on this estate will be very fine. There can be no doubt that as a permanent investment in Ceylon, nothing approaches the coconut palm under suitable conditions; and the Ceylon Tea Plantations Coy., Ltd. have shown a wise example in investing their surplus funds in "coconuts" under the direction of so experienced a veteran as Mr. Wm. Jardine.

#### FIBRES:—RAMIE AND NEW ZEALAND FLAX.

In view of the reported glut in the European markets, it seems superfluous to write about fibres. And yet what can be the meaning of the activity we notice in the Australian Colonies and also in forming Companies even in England? Indeed, we may suppose that fibre production is ere long to attract increased attention in Ceylon, if it be true that a Company has been formed in London (with Mr. Digby among the Directors) to promote the cultivation and manufacture of ramie more particularly in this island. So far as production is concerned, this country may well be considered to be a paradise for fibre plants: the question hitherto has always been how to secure the profitable extraction of the fibre. From a paper recently published in the *Australasian* we extract some information bearing on this point and also a reference to New Zealand flax which grows well in the hill country of Ceylon—specially on the Uva side:—

##### CULTIVATION.

The planting and cultivation of rames, or rhea, resembles somewhat that of the raspberry, and the plant is also similar in appearance and manner of growth. Plants are set out in rows at convenient distances for working the land. They are placed in rows about 15in. apart; these soon become one continuous course of young canes, and they may be cut 12 to 18 months from time of planting, and, with proper cultivation and attention, should give two or three cuttings annually. According to some experiments made with the plants by the firm referred to, one hundred stalks with leaves weighed 32 lb., which yielded, when stripped of foliage, 16 lb.; when decorticated and the fibre separated from the woody portion of the stalk, there remained 1 lb. 7½ oz. of green decorticated fibre. After the final treatment there were 10 oz. of dressed fibre, and, according to these experiments, the yield per acre would be about 2,235 lb. of good fibre and 395 lb. of tow. The good fibre is estimated at 4d. to 5d. per pound, the two at 2d., and, according to the prices named—4d. for good fibre and 2d. for tow—the returns per acre would be £40 10s. This fibre is one of the strongest known. It has many times the strength of hemp, and is said to withstand a greater jerking strain than a steel strand of the same thickness. It is grown largely in China, Japan, and also India to a more limited extent. It is known in the trade as Chinese grass. It is largely used at present for adulterating silk fabric, and enters into competition with the finer class of cotton material. The price debars it from coming into a more general use. The opinion of those who are most acquainted with the various fibres is that, when more perfect machinery is available, rhea will become one of the most valuable commercial vegetable products we have. It can be propagated in various ways, either by

seed, cuttings, or shoots; the latter is the most general, and those who are entering into the cultivation of fibre will do well to secure a few sets, and gradually extend their area from these. The market at present is limited, and it would be advisable to work cautiously, as these engaged in the manufacture of the fibres are cautious in departing from the usual lines, as it is a serious matter for them to make alterations in the expensive machinery which is found in those manufacturing establishments.

In many parts of America ramie is cultivated to a limited extent, but the trouble which is met with there is also found here, namely, the want of proper machinery for treating the product in a mere expeditious manner. According to the returns of the Patents Office of the United States there have been upwards of 300 patents registered recently for the treatment of this and other fibre-producing plants. Many of these have considerable merit, but cannot be said to reach that stage of perfection that is desired.

One machine used in Australia is known as the "Keir," and is capable of treating 500 lb. of decorticated fibre at a single operation, and of being charged twice per day of eight or ten hours.

Then as regards New Zealand Flax (*Phormium tenax*) we are told:—

##### METHOD OF PLANTING.

From the root system of the plant each shoot strikes out from the parent root and forms, as it were, a perfect system within itself. In planting out each one of these forms a set or plant. The number taken from each depends on the variety, and also as to whether it is intended to destroy the parent plant or not. It is a good system to have one known variety planted, as the class of fibre produced will probably be of a more uniform quality, and also the treatment will be more easily carried out; and where the parent plants can be allowed to remain it is wise to do so. The system adopted by those who have planted differs somewhat, but the following may be taken as a criterion. It is given by a Mr. Hirst, who has planted out 24 acres. He states as follows:—"The flax is planted in rows 6 ft. apart, with a space for carting of 10 ft. at every fourth row. Three plants are placed in each hole, well rammed, and the holes are 6 ft. apart. The contract for digging the holes and planting—the ground having been previously cleared, but not ploughed—was 9s 6d per 100 holes. The plants cost 6s. per hundred for procuring, and were gathered under the direction of an experienced gardener, who devoted some time to attaining a knowledge of his business." The returns from a plantation of New Zealand flax depend on conditions. If these be favourable a small return may be expected in two or three years from planting, but it should continue to increase for several years.

##### CUTTING.

In cutting, the centre of the plant is usually left, and only the outside or matured leaves taken. This course should be recommended, as when the plant is deprived of all foliage its growth is seriously checked, and sometimes totally destroyed. Many useful experiments are recorded as to the effect of cutting, and the universal opinion is that the plant should not be deprived of all its foliage for the reason given. The usual price paid for cutting the leaves is from 10s to 12s per ton of green leaves, but much depends on the condition or character of the crop worked on. As we have before stated, the flax is gathered from self-sown crops principally, and where this is found evenly grown the labour of gathering is much less than if scattered or intermixed with defective samples.

The after-treatment of the raw product is one that has given considerable trouble and anxiety to the New Zealanders, and does so to the present day. The fibre is one that is capable of being brought to a very fine state, and may be worked up in many forms, even to the spinning of coarse, strong clothing, but little of this class of material is manufactured from it, its chief use being that of cordage making. The method of extracting the fibre from the raw material differs