

IRRIGATION OF COCONUTS

' To a Ceylonese coconut plantation proprietor belongs the credit of introducing irrigation for the coconut palm on an extensive scale as a full account (given in the *Tropical Agriculturist*, Vol. 1887-8, page 687) will show. We quote part :—

" Mr. Akbar is proprietor of the Siramgapata and Tursina estates, covering 614 acres in the Katukenda division of the Negombo district, Alutkuru-korale. His average yearly crop has been from 900,000 to 1,000,000 nuts. On this property he has expended about £ 1,000 in machinery, chiefly powerful force-pumps, with some 15,000 feet of cast-iron piping, 4 inches diameter, besides 12,000 feet of other spouting. The property being some 150 feet above the Mahaoya, which forms its boundary, the water of the river is pumped up and distributed in channels among the coconut palms, with a result which, after personal inspection, has astonished so old a cultivator and planter as Mr. W. H. Wright. During the first day's work some 20 acres of very dry land were irrigated, and the effect on the drooping palm-trees was almost immediate and very striking. The coconut-palm is a very thirsty-plant, and has the faculty of very quickly appropriating liquid brought within its reach, so that, on this occasion, it seemed to drink up the irrigating water at once. Mr. Wright has no doubt that the experiment will prove a thorough financial success in giving bigger crops of nuts, steadily, season by season, while maintaining the trees in full vigour. Mr. Akbar also shows an example of capacity and enterprise, we learn, by manufacturing his own iron-work, while, we suppose, he is the first Ceylonese to lead the way with an experiment on an extensive scale, such as above-described, in irrigating coconut land with river water, distributed by force-pumps". The experiment continues (1895) to be successful, Mr. Akbar utilising in the wet season steam power which drives his pumps in the dry, to work saw-mills

(*Tropical Agriculturist* (1887-8), p. 687, quoted in *All about the Coconut Palm*, 1885.

' IT APPEARS THAT COCONUT ESTATES ON A LARGE SCALE WERE PLANTED ON THE SOUTH-WESTERN COAST OF CEYLON LONG BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE PORTUGUESE. SEE 44TH VERSE OF THE 86TH CHAPTER " BHIMA-TITTHA " IN MODERN BENTOTA. " KALANADI " IS THE KALUGANGA. THE WHOLE OF THE COAST LINE FROM KALUTARA TO BENTOTA FORMED ONE COCONUT GARDEN, AND WAS NAMED AFTER THE KING WHO CAUSED IT TO BE PLANTED.

' IT IS VERY INTERESTING TO FIND THAT THE SINHALESE OF THAT DATE HAD FOUND THE BEST SOIL IN THE ISLAND FOR COCONUTS TO PLANT THE ROYAL GARDEN. IT IS POSSIBLE, AS YOU MENTIONED TO ME, THAT ON THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COAST, THE COCONUT FIRST GREW FROM NUTS WASHED ASHORE FROM THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO '.

Extract from *All about the Coconut Palm*, 1885 edition.