

# COCONUT CULTIVATION BY IRRIGATION

10th March, 1888

WHEN recording the important events for 1888, there is no question that what took place in the Mahaoya Valley on the 10th March will rank as one of the principal events of the year. It was bruited about for the past 12 months that heavy machinery was being removed to a coconut estate in the valley belonging to a native gentleman, but for what cause or purpose was not quite apparent. The month of March, however, saw the completion of the first machinery for irrigation purposes on a coconut estate belonging to Mr. Akbar, M.M.C., and his brothers, at Katukenda, adjoining the famous Badalgama property of Dr. Elliott and in the vicinity of other properties, I believe the most extensive in Ceylon. An engine of 30 horse power working a pair of double motion pumps throwing 32,000 gallons per hour, fixed on the banks of the Mahaoya. The engine room, so beautiful and clean with a gorgeously painted ceiling fit for the finest drawing room in Colombo. Eighty tons of cast iron pipes laid with a main pipe of 5 in. branching in different directions of 5 in., 4 in., and 3 in., with galvanized piping of 7 in. carrying water to the different sections. The pump working at nights carrying water to at least about 30 reservoirs cut on every rising ground and from there distributed over 240 acres, giving each tree at least 10 gallons of water.

I was always sceptical about the yield of 100 nuts per annum per tree that your veteran authority of the valley used to preach, and having pretty well moved about in my time of life from Tangalla in the Southern Province to the confines of Chilaw I never saw any coconut estate of any great extent in one block that in my opinion gave over 50 nuts per tree per annum. But here was to be seen : a block of about 240 acres of as fine a land with 60 trees to the acre, the yield being 97 nuts per tree per annum. I need hardly say that with the grand improvement just effected of preventing any lengthened drought, this being the great drawback of the district, I expect the yield to be three fold in a couple of years. In fact even at present one small portion of about five acres had over 150 nuts plucked per tree per annum for the last three years.

The contrast between this property and the neighbouring one belonging to one of our millionaires is apparent at a glance, and Mr. Akbar, in inaugurating the occasion of the completion of the works for which he so long planned and schemed, invited about a score of his friends to rejoice with him as it were. The bar, merchants, brokers, planters, agriculturists, and even an editor, were represented, and a sumptuous breakfast was given in a very handsome summer-house built on the bank of the river.

The whole estate comprises 700 acres, out of which 600 acres are planted but only 240 acres have bearing trees, the annual yield of these is at present over a million nuts ; what will it be when the full 600 acres are in bearing ? A competent authority valued the place at £40,000.

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