



MALAYAN PLANTING TOPICS.

The Straits Times, 26 May 1933, Page 17

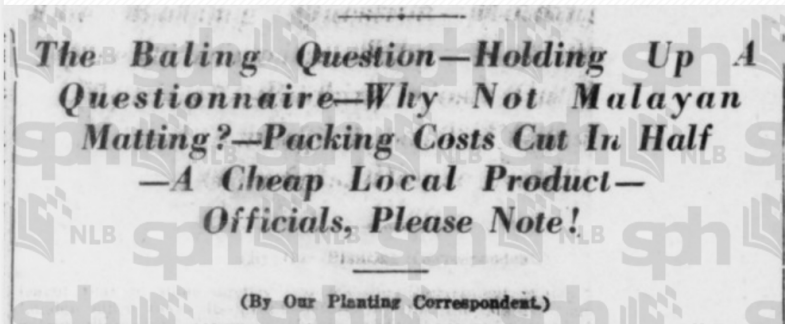
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MALAYAN PLANTING TOPICS.



In my notes of April 21 I discussed the question of whether rubber should be packed in wooden cases, as is done on most European estates, or whether it should be baled.

I quoted the description given by Mr. G. H. Carnahan, president of the International Rubber Company, of the way in which a typical Singapore rubber cargo is treated on its arrival in New York, and I also quoted an opinion expressed by the Director of the R.R.I. that "the packing of raw rubber in wooden cases is an unnecessary expense and that cheaper baling materials.....are quite suitable."

A year has elapsed since a letter was sent to the London advisory committee of the R.R.I. suggesting that a questionnaire on the subject of baling should be sent to all leading manufacturers, and we are still awaiting the result of that inquiry.

"Vested Interests."

SINCE writing the notes referred to above I have had a talk with the head of a local agency house about the reference I made to "vested interests" as being a probable obstacle to the adoption of baling.

He frankly agreed with me that the selling of cases did originally constitute one of the most profitable lines of agency house business but he declared that today the margin of profit was so small that it could hardly be considered. My friend did not go on to say whether he thought the explanation lay in the forcing down of prices by the makers of the Malaply case, but I cannot help thinking that the two events are not unconnected.

From another source I have since

learnt that in some agency houses the London office takes its profit before invoicing shipments of cases to Malaya, and accordingly the local office does not know what the margin of profit is. No doubt that is not a general practice but it is

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17 August 1940 - Baling Of Rubber For Export Instead Of Packing In Cases EXPERIMENT BY THE RUBBER RESEARCH INSTITUTE From Our Planting Correspondent ANY possibility at present towards reducing estate production costs not only deserves, but also demands, the closest attention of planters. One of the latest efforts in...

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23 February 1934 - Is Restriction Nearer? February Prophecies --^4 Latex Discovery --Good News From Jaya Company Notes. (By Our Planting Correspondent.) mHERE Is no question being asked so frequently, and left so unsatisfactorily answered, as "Are we going to get restriction and, if so, when If we are to accept..."

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22 September 1933 - f\NE wonders how many planters have digested In full the report of the R.R.I, commission of inquiry, which Is of such great Importance to the rubber Industry and concerns an institution owned by that Industry and financed by It The report Is not easy reading. It consists...

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MALAYAN PLANTING TOPICS.

8 December 1933 - F these days when many planters are on the look-out for some quickgrowing grass or plant to help to restore impoverished soils, particularly

...to not a general practice but it is followed in certain offices.

For Transhipment?

MY agency house friend who originally brought up this question made another interesting comment. He gave it as his opinion that there would always be a market for wooden cases for the European market, because where rubber has to be transhipped from London to other destinations cases have distinct advantages over bales.

Where rubber was invoiced straight to New York from Singapore and was intended for immediate use, my friend pointed out, bales no doubt served the purposes well enough, but where it was required for stock purposes rubber in cases was likely to be preferred.

Here I may recall that Colonel Eaton, in his article on this subject in the R.R.I. Journal, took a different view. "There does not appear to be any valid reason," he said, "why rubber packed in bales should not be stored satisfactorily, especially in view of the fact that a layer of rubber is now invariably used as a wrapping round the contents of the cases or bales."

New York Arrivals.

WHATEVER objections to bales there may be, they cannot apply to a large proportion of rubber shipped from this part of the world, for Mr. Carnahan has stated that 70 per cent. of the rubber arriving at the port of New York during the latter half of 1932 was packed in bales. Mr. Carnahan also gave several very convincing reasons why that was so, but I need not repeat them here.

Possibly the local committee of the R.G.A. may think it worth while to suggest to their London headquarters that statistical information should be collected to show the quantity of baled rubber arriving in London.

Mengkuang Matting.

A SUGGESTION made by Colonel Eaton which attracted me was that matting could be used for bales and that such matting "could probably be made locally as a village industry from locally grown material. "The alternative is hessian jute imported from India and created with a mixture of tapioca flour and sodium silicate, but obviously a Malayan product will be preferred if it is usable.

Since this does seem to be a real opportunity for helping the Malay peasantry by providing them with a market on rubber estates, I have made inquiries into the question of obtaining locally made grass matting and the information I have collected may interest other planters.

This Malayan matting is made, as many people know, chiefly from a reed which is sometimes called screwpine and is commonly known to the Malays as mengkuang. This plant thrives best in low-lying areas and apparently has no objection to swamps subject to flooding.

It must be between two and three years old and from six to eight feet high before material can be obtained from it. The long leaves that grow out from the stem are cut off and good-quality leaves are selected—those which are not too old and not too young.

How It Is Made.

THE first process is to slit off with a knife the thorny-edged sides of the leaf and also the pithy centre of the leaf. The withered leaves are then smoothed out with a piece of flat wood to make them soft and are cut into strips with a sort of knife-comb, the smoothing-out process being performed again afterwards.

Finally the material is soaked or "ret-

on steep hill sides from which bracken and stagmoss are being removed, and where it is a matter of conjecture as to what will...

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9 February 1934 - Bulging Rubber Cases "Eastern Plywood"—A Hit At Malaya? Low January Crops An E.M.'s Criticisms. (By Our Planting Correspondent.) 4 RECENT move on the part of shipping interests which planters should note is that an extra charge is being made for bulging rubber cases. If cases are...

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ted" in water for three or four days, dried in the sun and smoothed out. Then one has strong, silky grass-like fibre which is highly suitable for making matting and which, according to Colonel Eaton, is strong enough to stand the use of hooks in handling cargo.

We have here a plant which can be found growing wild at the edges of most swamps in this country and which could easily be cultivated if necessary. The making of mengkuang straw is one of the oldest kampong industries, so much so that at the Sultan Idris College the Malay guru of tomorrow is taught the use of this material as a recognised and important part of the curriculum. Finally we have a large potential market for this product in the rubber industry.


Creating A Market.



HAVING regard to the opinions on baling expressed by Colonel Eaton and Mr. Carnahan, and to the large amount of rubber which is already shipped in this form, one cannot help asking whether it is not possible to create a demand for this mengkuang matting in preference to coir matting imported from India, and thus give useful employment to a large number of Malays.

I am told that if one wanted to purchase a large quantity of mengkuang matting at the present time one would have to go to private dealers, who only exist in the Malacca and Port Dickson districts. Even there it would have to be a matter for arrangement, and the dealer would require time to collect the material from the kampongs.

Where large orders are concerned buyers are very much in the hands of the middle-men, who are more or less able to fix the price, there being no definite market for the product. Until recently one of the few big buyers was the Education



Department, which bought the material for the Malay schools, but now each school has to meet its own requirements.


The present price, if small quantities are bought, is about 35 cents per bundle (made up from fifty leaves.)

A Co-operative Job.

NO doubt planting companies could be found to give this local matting a fair trial and the matter ought to be taken up by some Government agency. It would appear that officers of the departments of Agriculture and Co-operation are in the best position to conduct investigations.


The Co-operative Department is already running marketing societies to deal with eggs and arecanuts produced on Malay holdings, and possibly it could arrange for a reliable supply of mengkuang matting for estate factories. The matter is at any rate worth looking into.

Much Cheaper Costs.



A rough calculation of costs is decidedly in favour of this matting. Assuming that one packs about 224 pounds of rubber in a bale one would first compress it in a collapsible press, giving a bale the following size:—19 inches by 19 by 24. For export purposes ten such bales would make up a shipping ton.

The size of the matting required to cover one of these bales would be approximately 6¼ by four feet which would cost roughly forty cents. Probably that price could be lowered if the middle-man's profit were cut out. In addition one would require signode strapping, which costs less than .05 a pound.



We therefore have a packing material for rubber costing not more than .16 of a cent per pound, against .32 of a cent paid by most estates today. Moreover the cheaper material has the following advantages:—no making up of cases prior to packing, minimum of breakage during transit, and comparative freedom

from foreign materials such as spacers when destination is reached.

"Massing" Objection.

THE objections which might be raised to baling have been set out fully by Colonel Eaton. The most important one appears to be that even though rubber has been pressed before being baled it may not retain its original shape in the hold of a ship.

Colonel Eaton denies that this "massing" would occur and points out that pressure on the lowest bales of a pile twenty feet high would be less than that used in pressing the rubber into cases on an estate. In any case the fact that so large a proportion of the rubber arriving at New York last year was baled shows that no serious difficulties are likely to be raised by manufacturers.

Shipping Opposition.

OPPOSITION from those who deal in cases is to be expected, and possibly there may also be indirect pressure from shipping companies, who would lose freight charges on casing material now imported from Europe.

Agency houses whose shipping connections are one of their main sources of revenue would be particularly open to pressure of this sort, and this appears to be a clear case of trying to serve two conflicting interests. That this should be so is one of the serious faults of the agency system, but it would not be unreasonable to demand that if such a decision had to be made the interests of the estate should come first.

It would be a matter for directors to decide, but in those companies where the directors of agency houses sit on the boards of the companies they serve an impartial decision would be difficult. Nevertheless this question of baling, and the possibility of saving money by abandoning packing in cases, should not be overlooked by any board of directors at the present time.

An Unfortunate Delay.

HERE one may venture a query as to whether the conflict of interests between agency and estate may not explain the delay in dealing with the R.R.I. suggestion of a questionnaire. It is certainly time that something definite was published on that matter. But we will take the fairer view and assume until we hear something to the contrary that shipping interests will not be allowed to influence the London committee of the R.R.I. in dealing with this questionnaire.

Selling Local Matting.

THE adoption of baling instead of packing in cases is one thing, however, and the adoption of Malayan matting is another. It is the latter question with which I am particularly concerned in this article, and I hope that enough has been said to show that the prospects of opening up a new market for the Malay peasant are hopeful.

I suppose it is not exaggerating to say that several hundred thousand dollars are spent annually in this country on imported casing and baling materials, and while opinion in the rubber trade is inclined to believe that a certain amount of rubber will always have to be packed in cases it is reasonable to suppose that much more rubber could be baled than is shipped in this form at present.

As already suggested, there might be outside opposition and possibly long-established prejudice at Home to overcome, but the incentive of economy is a powerful one, and if it can be shown that money can be saved and manufacturers pleased by shipping rubber in bales covered with Malayan matting we shall have achieved one of those "internal adjustments" leading to cheaper marketing

which were urged upon us recently by Mr. J. G. Hay.

Local Share Points.

A BRIEF analysis of dollar rubber company results during 1932 may interest readers of these notes who live outside Malaya.

Out of thirty-six companies only five paid a dividend to their shareholders last year. The highest payer was Hamilton with three per cent. Kamasan, Kedah and Parit Perak came next with two and a half per cent., and Sungei Ramal gallantly paid one per cent.

The contrast between these results and those recorded by local mining companies is remarkable. Out of fifty-seven mining companies nineteen paid dividends last year, Raub Gold heading the list with 45 per cent. Petaling Tin came next with 19½ and Malayan Collieries was close behind with 16½. Then there was Kampong with 10 per cent., four companies with 7½, four with 5¼ and the remainder with 2½ or less.

In years gone by an increase or decrease in the price of one of our staple products was invariably followed by a corresponding movement in the other, and although we have almost forgotten what a substantial rise in price means it does seem today that history is repeating itself, although there are obviously factors influencing the meteoric rise of tin which are entirely absent from the rubber market and presumably always will be absent until we get a control scheme in being.

