

THE SILK COTTON TREE.

There are two species of plants which furnish the silk cotton, or the kapok of commerce, growing in the Island of Ceylon. One, the more commonly found tree, is the *Eriodendron anfractuosum*—Singhalese, Imbul, and Tamil, Elavum, and the other is the *Bombax Malabaricum*, the red cotton tree, or the Katu Imbul of the Singhalese and the Parutti of the Tamils.

Both these trees grow wild in Ceylon, but the former is more common than the latter. The *E. anfractuosum* thrives well in the warmer parts of the island up to high elevations, and is found much in cultivated places. The tree attains to very large dimensions, often growing to the height of 80 feet. The trunk is straight, and the branches are borne on the top of the tree; the bark nearer the base is covered sparsely with thick prickles, which form into small knot-like masses as the tree grows old. The timber of this tree is very light, and hence is only adapted for the purpose of fuel, but of late it has been sawn into planks and used in the manufacture of tea boxes.

The plant in its third year begins to bear. The flowers, which are of a fairly large size, with a thick whitish corolla and a cup-shaped thick green calyx, are borne on the trees once a year in February-March, and the fruits are formed very soon, as they are ready for plucking in April, May and June. During the flowering time flying foxes frequent the trees, as they are very fond of the young blossoms, but their ravages do not spoil the crop to any extent. The fruits are long and cylindrical, about five inches in length and three inches in circumference. These fruits are filled with a downy soft silky cotton, the staple very short and curved, and the whole is interspersed with black shot-like light seed, which separate when dry. In the dry state the outer coverings of the fruit separate easily, and, if not plucked, the silky down is wafted by the wind. When the fruits begin to dry they are collected by men, who ascend the trees with long sticks. These fruits are dried, and the first operation done is the removal of the dry outer coverings. Thus cleaned, the down with the seed is packed in bags, and is sent to the mills for a final cleaning, when the down is carefully sifted and the seed removed. The last process is that of packing, which is easily done by the common baling machines, and then the product (kapok) is ready for export.

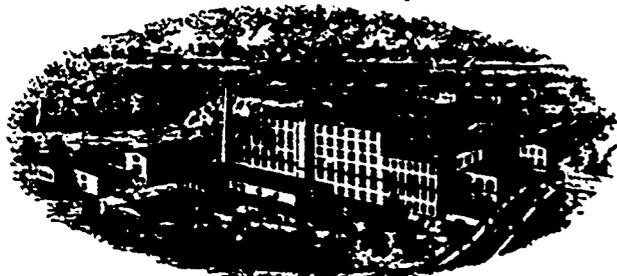
Sometimes the product is prepared outside the mills, by drying and hand-picking, but if it is to be exported, baling has to be done at the mills. Locally kapok is largely used for stuffing pillows. The staple is so thin that it is considered to be unfit for weaving purposes.

The export trade in kapok in Ceylon is of very recent origin, probably not more than ten years. Previous to this the product had only a local demand for the purpose of stuffing pillows, cushions, etc.

The current price of uncleaned kapok is Rs. 6.00 per cwt. in Colombo, and cleaned Rs. 26 to Rs. 30.

There is a large demand for the article in Australia, where it is used in the manufacture of pillows and cushions; it is also

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