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How Edwards Got Manila Hemp to Panama

Successful Transplantation of Monopoly Fiber Plant

Editor's note.—Manila hemp has ceased very recently to be a Philippine farm monopoly; Japanese have transplanted it to Sumatra, where the plantations already yielding high grade fiber will furnish seed for extension of the industry, and the following extract from *The Official Record, U. S. Department of Agriculture*, tells of America's success in starting hemp in the Panama Canal Zone. *The Philippines will not soon take second place as a fiber region, but their planters must bestir themselves and modernize their methods to meet the new competition. In the Fiber Standardization Board, as now organized by law, grading is thoroughly attended to; the misgivings in markets abroad will no doubt soon give place to business confidence, as they should. For hemp planters to follow the example set them by sugar planters is the next essential step.*

A collection of approximately 1,400 select ed plants of six of the leading varieties of abaca, or "Manila hemp," has been brought by H. T. Edwards, Bureau of Plant Industry, from the Province of Davao, Philippine Islands, to the Canal Zone and planted there. This achievement is the successful culmination of two years' effort on the part of the department to establish these plants in tropical regions other than the Philippine Islands.

Abaca, or "Manila hemp," is the raw material from which Manila rope is manufactured. The entire world supply of abaca, with the exception of a few hundred bales, is obtained from the Philippine Islands. The production of abaca is one of the leading industries of the Philippines,

Produce and the exports of this fiber in 1924 were nearly 400,000,000 pounds. The annual consumption of abaca in the United States is about 175,000,000 pounds.

The present production of abaca is barely sufficient to meet the world demand for this fiber, and there is a tendency toward a decrease, rather than an increase. Many of the abaca growers are now planting coconuts in fields that were formerly in abaca, as coconuts require less labor than abaca and there is shortage of agricultural labor in the abaca provinces. Two different plant diseases that have appeared during recent years have either damaged or entirely destroyed the abaca crop on limited areas. It has been apparent, in view of these conditions, that an effort should be made to establish the abaca industry in tropical regions other than the Philippine Islands. Frequent attempts have been made in a number of different countries to grow abaca from seed, but the seedlings ordinarily do not come true to type and the results obtained from this work have been quite uniformly unsatisfactory.

In 1923 a small shipment of abaca plants was made from Manila to the Canal Zone, and in 1924 a second shipment was made Manila to Washington, D. C., but none of these plants survived the climatic changes and other hardships incident to the long journey.

During the early part of 1925, through the efforts of the office of traffic manager, arrangements were made for the routing of a freight steamer from the abaca-producing Province of Davao, in the southern part of the Philippines Islands, to the Canal

Zone. It was believed that with this direct transportation it would be possible to successfully ship growing abaca plants from the Philippine Islands to the American Tropics.

Having made these arrangements for direct transportation during the months of July and August, 1925, this collection was loaded on the S. S. *Ethan Allen* at Malita, Davao, and brought by Mr. Edwards to the Canal Zone, arriving at Balboa on October 3.

This collection of plants was obtained from five different plantations and includes the leading varieties of abaca in Davao Province. In order to determine the relative value of different kinds of propagating material, and also to ascertain the best methods of packing, the shipment included seed, buds, suckers, and rhizomes. The seed was shipped both in cold storage and packed in charcoal. Approximately 500 buds, suckers, and rhizomes were planted either in soil or sphagnum, about 100 suckers and rhizomes were packed in charcoal, and between 800 and 900 rhizomes were wrapped in paper and excelsior and shipped in crates.

Of the total shipment of 1,438 plants, including buds, suckers, and rhizomes, 1,052 plants, or 73.2 per cent, were alive, and 769 plants, or 53.5 per cent, were in good condition when the shipment arrived at its destination.

Some of the plants in this shipment have been planted temporarily at a quarantine station situated about 9 miles from the town of Bocas del Toro on Columbus Island, near the eastern coast of the Republic of Panama. The remainder has been placed in the Plant Introduction Gardens at Summit, Canal Zone.

With the possible exception of an occasional plant in greenhouse collections, these plants are believed to be the only abaca plants, other than seedlings, that are now growing in tropical America.

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