

Growing Sumatra Tobacco at Sarunayan, Cotabato

By "SUNSET" COX

If the truth were known it is probable that the Dutch tobacco growers of Sumatra are much more worried over the reports of Sumatra wrapper tobacco being successfully grown in the Cotabato valley than the Davao hemp planters are about abaca being grown in Sumatra. Judging from late reports from the government tobacco experimental station at Sarunayan, Cotabato, the Dutch tobacco men have something real to worry about. It is seven years since the first experimental station was started at Pikit, and three years since it was transferred from Pikit to Sarunayan, down the Rio Grande river from Pikit half-way to Cotabato, the port and provincial capital. In these few years it has been proved that beyond question Sumatra wrapper equalled as good as that grown on the island of that name can be grown in this section of the Philippines, down in southern Mindanao. The tobacco from there recently marketed in Manila proves it. More than 1000 kilos brought top prices and had the buyers asking for more.

The present crop, now well toward the harvesting stage, also proves it. It is against the laws of the Dutch government for seed of the Sumatra leaf tobacco to be taken from the country. Nevertheless about half a pound of the precious seed was brought to Manila in 1921. It was worth its weight in gold. Just at that time the tobacco station near Pikit was under way and a thimbleful, no more, was sent down there. It was planted carefully and tended and nursed and sheltered until harvest-time came, then curing time, and fermenting time. Then they knew. They had it.

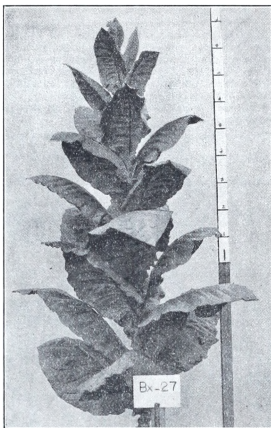
They had been experimenting with Sumatra from Florida the previous year, it had turned out well. Now they knew that the genuine Sumatra could be raised in the Philippines. Several years of experimenting by the tobacco experts followed, and it was decided that the land down near Sarunayan was better adapted to the purpose. This land is rich, loamy mould identical with that of Sumatra. It is back some six kilometers from the Cotabato river (the Rio Grande), and high enough to be safe from the floods.

Three years ago a small appropriation was accordingly made available, and Mariano Gutierrez, one of the tobacco experts of the bureau of agriculture, was detailed to establish a new station there. It was a hard job. The site was distant from the river, there was only a cart trail to it and that was almost impassable during rains. Labor was scarce. In record time, however, tobacco planting started.

The third crop has now been harvested, with the result already mentioned. It is proved that the Philippines can raise its own Sumatra leaf, although the Cagayan valley has never been able to do so, a new era has begun for the tobacco grower of these islands.

The Tabacalera Company (Cia General de Tabacos de Filipinas) has been greatly interested in the work being done in Cotabato with the Sumatra leaf, especially after having tried its cultivation on their own Isabela and Cagayan plantations. After it was proved conclusively at Sarunayan, the Tabacalera company sent Mr. J. E. Hasselman, their tobacco expert, to Cotabato to observe the work being done there and report upon it. His report stated that he was satisfied that Sumatra wrapper tobacco equal to that raised in Sumatra was now being grown at the Cotabato experimental station, and that he saw no reason why it could not be grown upon a large scale. It is therefore possible that the Tabacalera company will take active steps to develop the industry in that province.

Mariano Mansa, chief of the division of plant industry of the bureau of agriculture, is greatly interested in the Cotabato work of his division and is aiding Superintendent Gutierrez in every way possible. He has recommended that the appropriation for the station be increased mate-



"Sumatra" in the P. I.

rially, in order that this important industry may be given every possible chance to demonstrate itself. Another shipment of Sumatra leaf is expected soon from Sarunayan; this is also expected to bring top prices.

At the time of the visit of the Colonel Carmi Thompson party to Cotabato he was given a half-dozen hands of the Sumatra tobacco from Sarunayan. It was immediately taken over by the Colonel's secretary, who hails from Kentucky originally and is a judge of good tobaccos. He was amazed and pleased, stating that it was the finest he had ever seen. He asked for, and was given, full information concerning it.

This station at Sarunayan is two kilometers from the colonist center of Bual, where hundreds of Ilocano homeseekers have settled and taken up homesteads. They are all accustomed to

the growing of tobacco, men and women alike. Thus the labor question is an easy one. Gutierrez is an Ilocano himself. He is the bureau's expert in tobacco.

Comfortable houses now are provided for the superintendent and his assistants; the laborers are well taken care of, and the homes of the colonists nearby are well-built and comfortable. The road from Lumupog, on the river, to Bual, is now under construction. It passes through the reservation. Launches and steamers on the Rio Grande river are numerous, hence the tobacco station employs get their mail and supplies fairly regularly.

Datu Diangan of Bual, the most influential Moro chief in this section, is progressive and very friendly. His men, a thousand of them, are building a part of the Lumupog-Bual road. The advantage of the road is obvious. At times it has cost the datu a peso a cavan just to transport palay from Bual to Lumupog, nine kilometers, by sledge. The datu spends much time at the station watching the Sumatra growing, he and his son Mantil, a graduate of the Philippine Normal School. They can see what this may mean to the Moros some time, this new tobacco which brings such a fancy price.

Planted first in seed beds that are carefully covered, it then is set out in prepared ground, a little hole having been made for each plant, at equal distances. When it flowers special care is needed, the pollenization is effected by hand and each flower is protected by a paper or muslin sack to prevent strange or improper pollenization from other plants.

Beautiful tobacco, this Sumatra grown in Cotabato. Three meters high when mature, with some of the broad drooping leaves 48 inches long and 24 inches wide. A good cutter can make wrappers for twelve cigars from one leaf. When cured it is a delicate golden brown, soft and satiny in texture, the ribs and veins small and scarcely noticeable; that is one of the characteristics of the Sumatra leaf. The last sold in Manila brought a little more than P4.50 a kilo. No wonder that these Ilocano farmers are happy, in their own provinces they get only a fraction of this price for tobacco.

Scientific tobacco growing calls for constant experimentation, therefore Gutierrez has experiments under way at all times. He has genuine Havana tobacco growing, but finds it improved by crossing it with Sumatra. The Florida Sumatra is also improved by mixing in a strain of true Sumatra, it makes a hardier plant, good for both wrapper and filler.

There are now three pure Sumatra strains at Sarunayan, one pure Florida-Sumatra strain, and five hybrid strains evolved by crossing the pure plants in various ways. All bring top market prices and are highly praised by the tobacco experts of the bureau of internal revenue and the largest cigar companies of Manila. Seeds

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and seedlings of these plants are supplied gratis to the colonists and Moros in the district thereof, all of whom are now engaged in planting their own crops of the improved tobacco. This is the first year that the station has had sufficient seed and seedlings for free distribution.

The curing sheds, and there are many of them, are all built according to the latest approved plans. The employees who look out for the curing and packing are all experienced men, and many of them have homesteads where they will soon be growing tobacco for the market themselves. They have, of course, written back to their cousins to come down to Cotabato and preempt homesteads too.

As those who have visited the Ilocano provinces of La Union, Cagayan and Isabela are aware, the women there do much of the work, not only in the tobacco fields, but in stripping and grading and selecting. The wives and daughters of the Ilocano colonists are doing the same in the Cotabato tobacco district; they make the cigars which their brothers and husbands are building up their new farms.

Not only tobacco, but other useful plants and crops are being experimented with at Sarunayan—coffee and cacao, for example. They do well, especially Robusta coffee, and seeds of that are being distributed in the neighborhood. New varieties of corn and sugar cane, also, and garden vegetables; but the tobacco is the real money crop. Considerable effort, however, is being made to cultivate the chalmogra tree, from which is obtained the oil used for the relief or cure of leprosy. Trees obtained from India as seedlings are doing very well indeed.

The annual allowance for this Sarunayan farm is only P18000, out of which comes the salary of the superintendent and his assistant, so they have to do the best they can with the balance. Therefore practically everything is homemade. The wagons, the harrows, the wheelbarrows even, besides a dozen little clever contrivances invented for the proper planting of tobacco seeds and seedlings, things to make the work easy and exact. Several of them seem clever and useful enough to be patented.

Of all the colonies in Mindanao this colony near Bual seems the most prosperous, with the best future in prospect. It borders on the Pikit colony, which is included in this statement, but with the difference that at Pikit the colonists are grouped together closer, making almost a Filipino settlement, while here at Sarunayan Moros and Christians live and work side by side on the very best of terms. Datu Dilangalan himself is partly responsible for this, and in part the colonists themselves.

From a little hill near the Constabulary station at Camp Ward, near Bual, one can look off northeast toward the Bukidnon boundary over a broad expanse of beautiful land, well watered but almost as level as a floor—all just exactly the same kind of land that is being cultivated and settled here at Sarunayan—and all virgin soil awaiting the homesteader, the homesteader. It is wonderful land, only needing to be scratched to bring forth its riches, land for thousands of the land-hungry people of the north. A road will tap that rich valley just as soon as people begin to settle there, an extension of the Lumupog-Bual road already spoken of. Then the way will be open for the cultivation of Sumatra wrapper in ample quantities.

Scores of Christian Filipinos who have come to Mindanao in government positions have seen the future of this Bual district and have taken up homesteads, resigning from their positions as soon as their homesteads are well underway. Dr. Villafuerte, the president of the sanitary district of Pikit, is a homesteader; so is Ernio Coriño, of the auditor's office. Dozens of others, formerly with only a monthly salary, now have Mother Nature as their cashier.

Business men, Filipinos, are coming in also. In the little town of Bual the first stores have just started and are doing a good business. Many of the owners are both traders and homesteaders, for their business must be mostly bartering as yet, exchanging goods for farm products, tobacco and palay.

It was in connection with one of these stores that an interesting fact was observed. While riding along the cart road a dozen or so carts with a supply of goods, seemingly for a general store, were passed. Moros nearby had loaned their carts for this purpose, without pay. The Moros, it was said, gladly loan the Christian colonists carabaos and other work animals for months at a time, so they can get their homesteads started quicker.

Datu Dilangalan uses two Fordsons to cultivate his great rice fields, and is planning to put the first P. U. trucks on the new road when it is opened for traffic. He is also a delightful host, even overlooking some of the teachings of the Koran. The Ilocanos brought down with them from the north the art of making *bassi*, the Ilocano beverage which cheers, and almost the first thing they planted was sugar cane for this purpose. Moros are learning to like *bassi*.

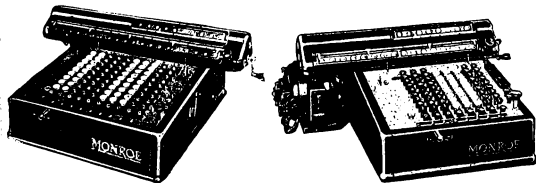
Dr. J. W. Strong, the rubber planter of Basilan, recently returned from a trip to Sumatra. Everywhere he went on that journey he was

asked, seriously, "Is it a fact that they are growing Sumatra wrapper tobacco in Mindanao, and if they are where did they get the seed?" It will be a great day for Cotabato when the first big cargo of Sumatra tobacco is shipped to the United States, and Americans learn that the wrappers of their cigars were grown in an American territory.

THE TREND OF PRICES

Reflecting the prospects for smaller crops, agricultural prices have shown important advances, thus narrowing the unfavorable spread which has existed between agricultural and non-agricultural commodities. While the results to the farmer are uncertain, by reason of the smaller yields, the movement is significant as perhaps reflecting the turning point in agricultural prices. For the first time since 1924 agricultural commodities have become an attractive speculation for the rise, and to some

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extent at least the increases reflect a real gain in agricultural purchasing power. That the state of unbalance between agriculture and industry would sooner or later be rectified has been inevitable. Moved by the disparity of return, capital and labor that could be spared from the farms have been gradually turning away from agriculture and into industry, which means that fundamental factors have been slowly shaping themselves for an improvement in agriculture, quite apart from the changes in which the war and its factors have intervened. Largely because of the rise in farm products, which has offset declines in other commodities, the price indexes give evidence of a stability

that is somewhat misleading. Apart from the rise in the grains and cotton there is no evidence that the gradual downward trend of prices has been checked. In fact a number of important commodities have shown further declines. Included among these are copper, lead, rubber, silk, coffee, and pig iron, while steel prices are none too firmly established at the present levels, which are below those of a year ago.

Whether or not the coal strike will eventually become a factor in prices remains to be seen, but the first three months of the lay-off have caused no disturbance in the trade.

—National City Bank: Current Report.

Gradually we came to know the stranger, his hopes and failings, vices and virtues. We took his name to be an adopted one. "My moniker is B—," he said, and as B—we accepted him. Ordinarily he was a man of even temper, but under stress of emotion he displayed a lurid and unexpurgated vocabulary which could best be interpreted by a series of exclamation points and dashes.

This eloquent flow was once provoked when he was mounting a balky horse. A lady who chanced to overhear the stranger's remarks hurled anger back at him and condemned him in terms almost as robust as his own; then she noised her opinion abroad. However, we did not pay much attention to her anathemas, for we knew there are exceptions to every rule. Furthermore, she was not popular with us. She was one of those women who think all men are created being born so the desired to put pants on the Venus de Milo and clothe the statuette of fountains. Many old-timers no doubt still remember her, and chuckle over her crusading proclivities.

B—was, as I have intimated, a handsome rake, with a heavy dark mustache and x-ray eyes. He not only talked well, but betrayed an excellent education by quoting scraps of Latin and other dead languages. He dearly loved an argument, if it related to doctrinal theory. But his rare lapses into autobiography disclosed nothing whatever about his home or his people, the few good books he possessed had all their flyleaves removed. We opined that these missing leaves had borne his real name, and in the manner of the border we concluded that what that name was was none of our business.

His duties as *encargado* of the plantation were not onerous. But he lived on there, in the cogan-thatched hut hard by the spider-legged *camarines* for the rice, back of which were the deep mud wallows loved by the slate-skinned carabao. Things looked as if B—had met with misfortune on life's way and did not think further struggle was worthwhile. After a certain age, no matter what the cataclysmic experience, there is no real change in the soul of a man.

He had a whimsical theory that life was a journey, a path down which the soul trod, a trail that had its beginning and end; and one could make it joyfully or not, as his cosmos taught him and his digestion dictated. A wife and family made, he contended, slow going; foot-free one traveled the faster to his predestined goal. But fast or slow, happy or sad, one did come at last to the point where all journeys ended. He was also optimistic about his wild

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The End of the Trail

By PERCY A. HILL

It happened twenty years ago, in Nueva Ecija, when that province was still in the making. True, it had been looted off the line of Pampanga a century before by a royal governor who baptized it with the name of his native province in distant Spain. But excepting a nucleus of old towns in the southern part and a fringe of ancient settlements along the rugged coast of the Pacific, Nueva Ecija twenty years ago was to all intents and purposes a new country. It was a succession of *cogonales* and forested creeks in the northern part, a paradise of the deer and wild-boar hunter. Where towns had been built, life was little more than a change of seasons, seed-time and harvest. The struggle for existence was never keen, fever and epidemics kept the population stationary.

News was a month old when it came, which was not too often; the elders of the towns and villages had not yet been taught a new way of sucking eggs by the younger generation supplied with imperfect knowledge from school-books. There was a simple life, for they did not then possess the oratorical leader who now, in a kind of feudal magnanimity, refers to them as *my people*. But their latent curiosity was insatiable, given the least morsel to gnaw upon.

A stranger coming into one of those towns over the sun-burnt trails was instantly the object of this curiosity. A few moments after his arrival, if he were at all communicative—and indeed it was difficult to be otherwise unless accompanied by a retinue of servants, themselves animated newspapers—his errand, reasons or motive, right or wrong, would quickly become the property of all the inhabitants. They all had a wonderful capacity for absorbing news, after the manner of the ancient Greeks. Time, however, has run its ceaseless course. Most of the rude forefathers, the *matandas*, now rest peacefully in the campo santos; a change, inevitable, has come in with the new generation addicted to book-learning, stump-speaking and flamboyant neckwear.

Nowadays the people of Nueva Ecija pay little attention to the stranger within their gates; such is civilization, take it or leave it. But twenty years ago things were different, and when a swarthy, close-knit *Americano* rode into a certain pueblo one day, with a pack-pony of supplies, the curious were on tiptoe with anxiety. The stranger, indifferent to the emotions he had raised, dismounted leisurely and sought out the *presidente*. This factum hastily donned his official coat, grasped his cane, badge of his office, and, still slipperless, presented himself before the new arrival. Courtesies were exchanged, and the two presently repaired to the *presidente's* house. Proffered liquid refreshment, the stranger mixed himself a drink that would now put crumps in the Comptroller, and gulped the beverage down with audible appreciation. His worthy host explained his thirst by the torrid and dusty trail he had traveled. Talk began after the inner man had been further satisfied with the usual visitor's meal of chicken and rice.

The stranger, puffing a postprandial *Londres*, told the *presidente* he was about to become a resident of the town; he would be in charge of a deserted plantation at Irurlong,

a vast tract of virgin land that paid taxes to the government but remained immaculately virgin of gain to its absentee owners.

The plantation lay in a valley between cordilleras of lofty mountains. It comprised both hill and dale and bore to the uninitiated all the outward signs of an agricultural paradise. The stranger presently made his abode in one of the thatched huts on the place; but he also, so to speak, maintained a town house, in order to be in more convenient proximity to the Chinese *tiendas* stocking the native firewaters, *ginebra* and *vino*. His breakfast, it came to be known, was often a Kentucky breakfast—a loaf of bread and a bottle of hard liquor. The bread he was wont to share or give whole to masterless dogs, that ignored his bibulous failing and appreciated his liberality. They met his advances with frank waggings; their confidence was more easily gained than that of the townspeople.

These townspeople held somewhat aloof, not yet having found out who the stranger was, or what. Some opined he was a doctor, seeing him sample many bottles; and others, that he was a Protestant preacher, a *barbub-sabon*, which literally is soap-suds, from his copious and expressive oratory. But still others thought that he was a miner, looking for the fugitive, mother lode. On one of my occasional visits to the town, indeed, the justice of the peace confided to me in a confidential whisper that he had found a *mina de tanso*, which would be a brass mine! He desired me to go in with him in preempting this discovery before the handsome stranger should find it himself.

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