

INDIGO.

(*Indigofera tinctoria.*)

The following paper read before the Ceylon Agricultural Society on the possibility of producing natural Indigo to compete with the synthetic dye is of especial interest for its latent possibilities.

Synthetic Indigo is a bye-product of coal-tar and although extensively used it has not entirely replaced the natural indigo.

For silks and high class textile goods the natural dye is still preferred for its durability as a fast dye.

As the indigotine, or blue colouring matter, varies with cultivation and preparation from 20 to 90% there does appear an opportunity for producing an improved standard dye. It is very probable too, that in preparing the Indigo in the form of paste there is considerable saving over solid or cube Indigo which is the result of sterilizing. (Singularly, some years ago, great efforts were made in Singapore to produce solid or stick Indigo which failed).

Locally, the plant is grown from cuttings and not seeds, so that it may improve the cultivated product if seeds were tried instead of cuttings.

Formerly the cultivation was extensive but has gradually dwindled to almost nil, possibly due to a combination of causes.

When Indigo was extensively cultivated in Java and Sumatra it was known that its cultivation improved the soil for tobacco, sugar and other crops.

It certainly deserves careful experimental trials for green soiling with rubber, but if intended as a Catch-crop, a good water supply is essential and prospective crops assured before embarking on the apparatus necessary for its preparations.

R. D.

Ceylon as an Indigo Country.

Interesting Paper.

Baron Schrottky—then read an excellent paper entitled, "The cultivation of Indigo in Ceylon," in which he said:—

The object of the paper on Indigo, which you have permitted me to read to you to-day, is to arouse interest in an industry which, for some time past, has been considered moribund, if not dead.

The natural indigo industry, at one time one of the most prosperous industries in the East, has been practically ruined by the competition of a synthetic dye.

Adolf von Bayer discovered in 1880 a method of producing from coal tar products a substance identical in every respect with indigotine, the chief dyeing principle in the indigo of commerce, in which it is found to the extent of about 60 per cent.

The Badische Soda and aniline Fabrick acquired Bayer's patents, and in 1897 brought into the market a synthetic indigotine at a price