

Weeping Coconuts

IN FIJI, by W. H. HODGE

In late August of 1958 I had the pleasure of making a short visit to the Botanic Gardens at Suva (Viti Levu) in the Fiji Islands. Besides seeing the Gardens, one of the primary purposes of the visit was to locate, if possible, viable seed from the one remaining specimen of the rarely cultivated Marquesan *Pelagodoxa Henryana* which is still growing in this Garden. Though that latter mission failed, my hospitable guide, Mr. John Parham of the Department of Agriculture at Suva, pointed out a very interesting "weeping" form of the common coconut palm, *Cocos nucifera* (see illustration). The plant has been growing in the Botanic Garden at Suva for some years.

To my own mind, this weeping form of the coconut is of interest simply as a botanical curiosity. Certainly unlike many other weeping forms of plants this is nowhere near as attractive as the normal type of coconut palm. The weeping habit is exhibited by the leaves themselves, but particularly by the lateral pinnae. The individual fruits of this weeping form are considerably smaller in size than in the regular coconut variety. In general, the overall appearance of the plant was to me unthrifty, almost as though the palm was ailing. As a matter of fact, apparently little is known about this weeping type and its habit might conceivably be the result of some unknown physiological disturbance.

In recent correspondence (dated November, 1958) Mr. Parham has written further about the Suva Garden example. He states

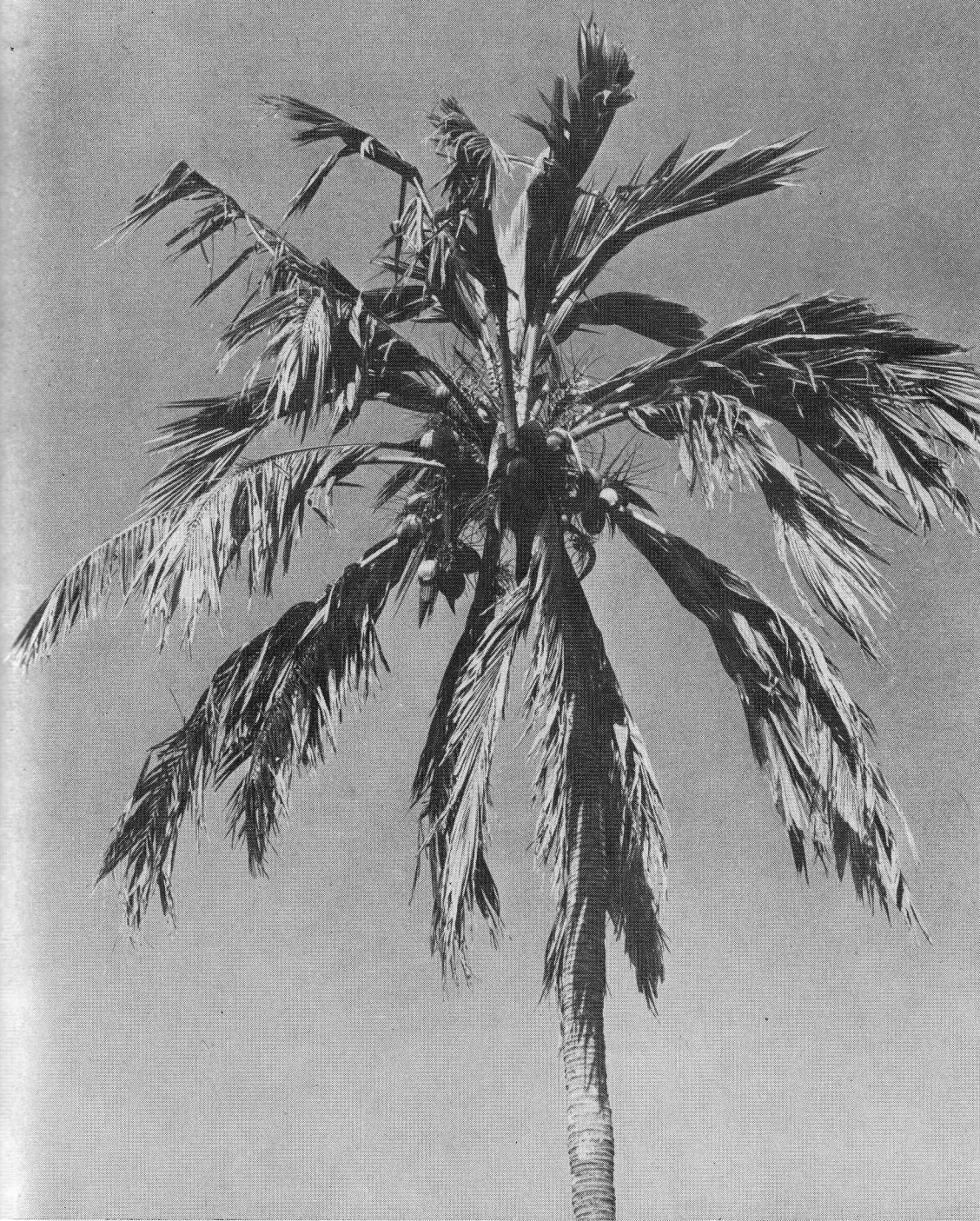
"I know very little about the weeping coconut, but I think that it does breed

true as, a few weeks ago, I came across a group of five weeping palms in a coconut plantation. It seemed fairly obvious to me that the nuts must have been all collected from one parent palm and planted together when the plantation was established. The nuts are much smaller than those of the ordinary coconut palm. Mr. Leslie Wishard of Kamuela, Hawaii has made it his hobby to collect coconut varieties and he was greatly intrigued by the weeping coconut. He has succeeded in growing some from nuts I sent him in 1956.

"These palms are known from a number of different places in the Fiji Group. The man in charge of the gardens (at Suva) told me that they always collected the nuts from the palm and that they always produced weeping coconuts. I must say, though, that I don't know what he does with them as the one in the Garden is the only one I've seen in Suva."

IN FLORIDA, by STANLEY KIEM

There are several examples of the "weeping" form of the coconut in South Florida. In Key West, one may be seen on White St. and Petronia Ave., another in front of a housing development at Peary Ct. just off White St. Fronds of these palms do not seem to be smaller than those of normal coconuts but the several fruits opened did have a smaller nut inside. I removed the small nuts from their husks and planted them in the greenhouse in January. They sprouted nicely and have developed into healthy plants even though the nut was a bit less than one-half the size of a normal one. A few nuts from Key West germinated several years ago. They have not yet begun to divide their leaves though I somehow doubt that this would be a pure strain.



69. Weeping coconut, Botanic Garden, Suva, Fiji Islands. Photo by W. H. Hodge.

One palm at Southwest 25th St. and Southwest 3rd Ave. in Miami has leaves that are only partially affected. A

much better example is in the back yard of a home at 81 Northeast 53rd St., Miami. So far as I know, the last has



70. Weeping coconut at White Street and Petronia Avenue, Key West, Florida. Photograph by Stanley Kiem.

not yet produced any coconuts. It is my impression that the ends of the pinnae are stiffer in the plant at 53rd St. than in those at Key West.

I have also seen these "weeping" coconuts in Haiti and again last March in Yucatan, although the Yucatan plant was not as characteristic as the others.