

PART II.
Ceylon.

I trust that the appointment of Foresters and strict supervision of the forests will now effectually arrest the evil. The replanting of the blocks in places easy of access will be proceeded with, and I shall endeavour to introduce largely the growth of teak into the Island. The Dutch were well aware of the value of this tree, and made extensive plantations of it. Some of the piles recently taken out of the Mātara Bridge, of Ceylon teak, although after fifty years' use, were perfectly sound in the core; and there are several bridges in the Southern Province with teak beams and planking, thoroughly sound though laid down fully half a century ago.

I do not expect at first to recoup the expense of the forestal establishment by corresponding increase of revenue; but I have no doubt that the revenue will increase, and that each year will, if the Foresters do their duty efficiently, add to the wealth of the Island by the preservation of existing forests and by the replanting of large tracts now denuded of all valuable timber. With this object I propose to establish a large number of small nurseries in connection with the tanks under the irrigation guardians. This will involve but a very trifling expense, as hardly any would exceed a quarter of an acre in extent.

Thirdly, the sale of forest land at inadequate value.

On this point I need say but little, as I trust the practice has been finally put an end to. It has been too often the custom for Government Agents, in order to swell the revenues of their Provinces, or perhaps from carelessness and indifference, to allow fine forest land in the most accessible places to be sold at the upset price of £1 per acre. This has prevailed in the Southern and North-Western Provinces. The land is bought, not by cultivators, but by timber dealers, merely for the sake of the trees, a portion of which fully repays the whole cost of the land. The block, when the timber is cut out, is allowed to lie waste and to become overgrown with close pestilential jungle.

The remarks of the Auditor-General, Mr. Douglas, apply forcibly both to this and the preceding head:—

“To sum up this portion of the subject, the evil at the root of the whole timber question would appear to have been the policy of Government in endeavouring to obtain for the moment the maximum amount of revenue out of its forests, with the minimum of expenditure, if indeed it may not be said without any expenditure at all, leaving the future to take care of itself. The end of such a system is very obvious, and unless effectual measures are taken to prevent it, is not far distant.”

Fourthly, the want of proper reserves of Crown forests being maintained in the coffee districts.

To this subject your Lordship's Despatch is chiefly directed, and I am glad to be able to reassure you on the main point of Dr. Hooker's letter, that the clearing for coffee cultivation, both in regard to what has been cleared and what is likely to be cleared, is so infinitesimal (though doubtless large in acreage), compared with the enormous extent of forest above the height at which it is supposed coffee can be cultivated, that no apprehension whatever need be felt as to any injury to the climate arising on this account.

It is generally considered that coffee planting cannot be pursued with advantage at an elevation much beyond 5,000 feet, but the great mountain ranges in the Central Province run up to between 7,000 and 7,500 feet, leaving a zone of 2,000 feet untouched. On ascending the top of the highest mountain, Pidurutalágala, 8,296 feet, which is clothed with wood to the summit, the eye wanders over a tract of apparently unbounded forest, amid which the tilled patches are almost lost.

I have requested the Surveyor-General to furnish me with an estimate of the forest cleared and standing in the Central Province. It is only a rough estimate, of course, but it will at once show your Lordship that the great bulk of the mountain woodland is untouched.

	Acres.					
Coffee land sold	..	..	..	..	..	395,645
Planted	..	..	..	..	..	210,170
Private forest standing ..	..	..	..	..	..	85,475
Private chenas and patanas ..	..	..	..	..	..	100,000
						395,645
Unsold chenas, waste lands, forest, and heavy jungle ..						1,657,620
Lakes	..	..	..	..	..	48,000
Rivers	..	..	..	..	..	14,000
						1,719,620

The total number of acres of coffee land sold in the whole Island is estimated at 450,000 acres, of which 231,000 are planted. The total number of acres of forest and heavy jungle is estimated at 6,192,389 acres; while chenas, waste lands, lakes, and rivers are taken at 7,513,855 acres.

As only an infinitesimal proportion of these chena and waste lands are not under vegetation, your Lordship will perceive how small a proportion of the soil of Ceylon is exposed to desiccation,