

and I regret to add that the amount of forest still available for coffee is but of small extent, unless cultivation under shade is adopted, and coffee planting is carried on in comparatively low districts.

When addressing my Council last year, I had made every inquiry into the climatal branch of the subject, and did not allude to it, believing it to be unnecessary; and I have the full authority of Mr. Thwaites to state that he has no apprehensions in regard to the climate being affected by the coffee clearings, past and to come, but that he considers it to be highly expedient that reservations of Crown forests should be maintained, especially on the crests of the hills in the coffee districts, and in the hill districts immediately facing the dry low land of the northern and other portions of the Island.

I entirely concur in the views of Mr. Thwaites, not only for climatal reasons, but in the interests of the planters themselves. Nothing can be more short-sighted than clearing the crests of the hills. The mischief arising from doing so is felt not only in the loss of valuable soil, which is at once carried away from the plantations by the torrents which rush down from these hill tops; these reserves also act as screens against the wind—one of the great drawbacks to the success of the crop—and they maintain springs and moisture, which are of great value to the planter. The want of fuel, too, in a few years after a plantation is cleared, makes itself felt, and the coolies are dissatisfied and unwilling to remain if compelled to go long distances to obtain sticks to cook their provisions. Moreover, wherever there is a native population, it is an act of downright cruelty to them to allow tracts of forest land, especially those small patches which grow in the vicinity of the grassy prairies, known here as “patanas,” to be cleared.

In these patches the natives obtain their fence sticks, wood for fuel and for building, and shelter for their cattle, and it is almost tantamount to expulsion to clear them. On the other hand, their fertility makes them to be sought after by the planters.

Before the receipt of your Lordship's Despatch, I had issued instructions to the Government Agent of the Central Province on this subject. You will see by them that I have desired that in all future sales of forest land for coffee planting, reserves of Crown land are to be maintained, the crests of the hills are to be preserved, and the wooded ravines in the “patanas” are to be generally excluded.

The Government Agent for the Central Province, Mr. Parsons, and the Surveyor-General, quite concur in my views upon this subject, so much so that there would henceforth have been no need for these instructions; but I considered it necessary that there should be no doubt as to the policy of the Government for the future, and that these definite instructions would enable them to resist the constant pressure to put up lots of land which it is expedient to retain as the property of the Crown.

In regard to that portion of Dr. Hooker's letter referring to the denuded condition of some of the smaller West India Islands, I may take this opportunity of mentioning that Sir Hudson Lowe, when in Ceylon, imported from Brazil the lantána as an ornamental plant. It is now overspreading the Island below a certain elevation, between 2,000 and 3,000 feet. It is stated that the moisture retained in the soil by the dense vegetation of this plant, combined with the humus formed by the decay of its leaves, is already renovating land abandoned and worn out. Mr. Thwaites is of opinion that it might be introduced with advantage into these West India Islands, and ultimately prepare the soil for the replanting of them.

May I request your Lordship to allow me to lay your Despatch and Dr. Hooker's letter, with my reply, before the Legislative Council, should I consider it expedient to do so, and also to permit Dr. Hooker to see these remarks on his letter. If Dr. Hooker had been in the Island during the almost constant rain which has prevailed in the coffee districts since May, he would not be apprehensive of the desiccation of Ceylon.

I am, &c.,

W. H. GREGORY.

P.S.—I enclose for your Lordship's information rules which I have issued for the guidance of Conservators of Forests.

Enclosure.

RULES for the guidance of CONSERVATORS of FORESTS.

It will fall within the duties of the Inspectors of Forests,—

1. To ascertain and mark down the localities in which the forests have been least disturbed; to find out the kinds of trees occurring in them; and to arrive at some kind of calculation as to the proportion respectively of those trees which are of most value. In cases of difficulty in determining the kinds, specimens should be sent to the Pérádeniya Botanic Garden for identification: a small branchlet with a few leaves upon it would be sufficient.

2. To devote particular attention to those forests from which much valuable timber had been already taken. It would, no doubt, be found that a considerable number of young trees of the most important kinds were growing upon the land. These should be the objects of especial care, and worthless scrub and entangling creepers should be cleared away from about them, so that their growth be unimpeded. It should be borne in mind that much time and trouble may be saved by taking care of valuable young plants already in existence, instead of raising fresh supplies from seed for the same localities.