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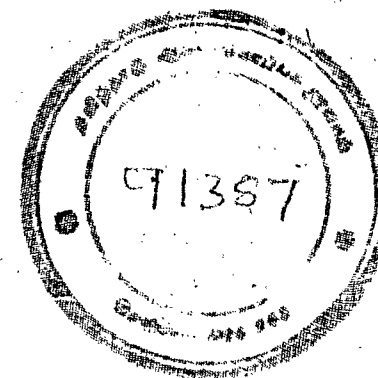
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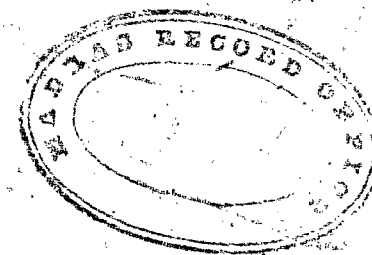
R E P O R T
on the
AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS,
CAPABILITIES & PROSPECTS
of the
Neilgherry District.

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REPORT

ON THE



AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS, CAPABILITIES,
AND PROSPECTS

OF THE

NEILGHERRY DISTRICT.

BY

W. R. ROBERTSON, M.R.A.C.

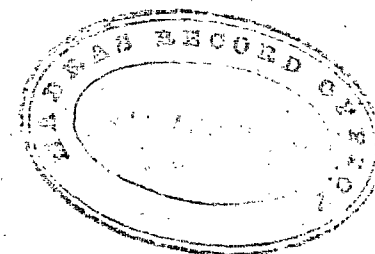
SUPERINTENDENT OF GOVERNMENT FARMS, MADRAS PRESIDENCY.

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MADRAS:
PRINTED BY E. KEYS, AT THE GOVERNMENT GAZETTE PRESS.
1875.

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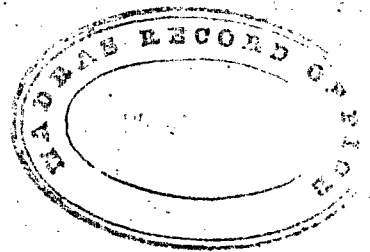


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THE
AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS, CAPABILITIES, AND
PROSPECTS

OF
THE NEILGHERRY DISTRICT.



INTRODUCTION.

IN a Government Order, dated the 22nd of September 1871, I was directed to proceed to the Neilgherry District, when my duties elsewhere would permit, in view to making such inquiries as would enable me to report to Government on the agricultural conditions, capabilities, and prospects of the district, especially with regard to the breeding of horses, cattle, and sheep; to the facilities for establishing small farms on the European system; and to the improvement of the husbandry of the hill-people. I was also directed to give some attention to the planting operations that had already been undertaken, in view to the production of coffee, tea, and cinchona bark, and was requested to contrast the prospects of these enterprises, with the probable results that might be secured by farming on the system followed in Great Britain. In compliance with these instructions, I proceeded to the Neilgherries in the latter part of January 1872, and remained in the district pursuing these inquiries until nearly the end of March. I again returned to the Neilgherries in October of the same year, and devoted that month and the next to similar investigations, and, in the present year, while on privilege leave during a portion of July, the whole of August and September, and a portion of October, I was again able, on the spot, to give much attention to this important work. I have thus been engaged in these inquiries altogether about 7½ months, of which only 4½ months was when on duty. A shorter time would have sufficed for collecting the information I now submit, had it been possible for me, while on duty in the district, to devote my whole time to the work; but I had, at the same time, to conduct my ordinary duties in Madras, and these demanded much attention, and unfortunately the state of the weather, during greater part of my second visit, was very unfavorable for out-of-door work. I had originally intended to draw up the report in a way that, while it would furnish the special information needed by Government, it might, at the same time, be useful to persons newly settled in the district, and with this object I collected a large amount of general information which appeared likely to be of use in this way: however, as the report is now urgently required, I have been obliged most reluctantly to abandon my original intention, and will now confine myself to making such observations as seem to bear specially on the questions suggested in the Government Order under which I acted. Though I was not able to make such a thorough investigation as I had desired, my observations having been made at different seasons of the year, over a period extending to nearly three years, will, I trust, be more reliable than if, with greater opportunities for making them, my knowledge of the district was confined to the experiences of but one season only. Unfortunately, though I have resided in the district during eight months of the year, I have not witnessed the full burst of the south-west monsoon; I regret this, as its influence extends over the greater part of the Neilgherries; I am, therefore, as far as regards the effects of this monsoon, obliged to base my opinions on the meteorological registrations of the district, and on information obligingly supplied by several gentlemen who, from a long residence in the district, were well qualified to furnish such information.

desirable, the body of the soil being left undisturbed and only broken up once in every second or third year : one advises that manure should be applied on the surface of the ground in space immediately around the stem of the plant, and then covered with a few inches of soil; others again condemn this practice, as they say that, when manure is applied in this way, roots of the shrub are encouraged to grow too near the surface of the soil, rendering the plant liable to injury during a drought ; others recommend that the manure should be buried in holes or trenches amongst the trees, but this also in turn is objected to by many, on the score of waste caused by the manure passing into the sub-soil beyond the reach of the plant, while manure is always too far from the trees for whose benefit it is intended : one recommends deep holes amongst the trees in which silt may be washed, and in which leaves, &c., may collect, to afterwards taken out and used in manuring the adjoining trees ; others altogether condemn these deposit holes, as they say that, during heavy rain, they become full of water, and the flowing over, accumulates and forms ruts down the slopes, causing a great loss of good soil. One planter advises that the trees should be pruned before they bear their maiden crop ; another advises that the trees should be pruned while in blossom ; while a third condemns both practices and would prune only in the brown wood. Of course, there must always be a considerable difference in the practice pursued on coffee estates situated under widely differing conditions, and it is quite possible to reconcile these apparently conflicting opinions, as the conditions with in this district are so varied ; but it is not unusual to find two planters, whose estates are similarly situated, adopting a very different practice. Systematic experiments are much needed, but they would cost but little, and most planters have ample leisure for watching and recording the results of such experiments. As I have previously observed, a coffee estate as now managed absorbs an enormous amount of capital, the bulk of which is expended on labor ; the capital on a well-conducted estate of moderate size when in full bearing is generally from £40 to £50 per acre. This is more than double the amount of capital needed on a farm in England on which the very superior agricultural practice is followed, or about four times the average capital employed per acre in British agriculture. The capital of the coffee planter is not nearly so secure as that of the British farmer, an attack of disease or insects may entirely destroy the coffee plantation, leaving the planter no alternative but to abandon the place, or again expend £20 or £25 per acre in planting it afresh, and wait four or five years until the new crop begins to bear. If he chooses the first alternative, he may possibly by selling the estate get Rupees 5,000 for a property which has cost him Rupees 40,000, and there are many instances of this sort. In British agriculture the losses are never so disastrous ; the farmer, who understands his profession, can always realize from 50 to 70 per cent. of his capital, as it is invested in so many ways, on so many objects, each of which always possesses a market value. The life of the coffee planter is attended with many drawbacks, and he must, if an European, incur serious expenses in the occasional visits of himself or family to Europe, while he cannot, like the English farmer, continue the active management of his estate in his old age, but must look forward to a period when he must retire to his own country, for which he must make a due provision ; though many planters continue to enjoy health up to, and passed, middle life, they

of the *Myrtus tomentosa* which are perfect, those of the *Berberis tinctoria*, those of an *Eleagnus* allied to the *E. argentea*, those of the *Monocera tuberculata*, those of a *Physalis*, those of the *Toddalia aculeata*, &c., &c.

Wheat, barley, and oats, flourish also there, beyond all expectation, and almost without care. Their produce is generally of a good quality and much esteemed. Barley especially possesses the necessary qualities for brewing beer. Mr. Davis, settled at *Kulhatty*, was making some when I passed that way; it appeared very good for a first trial.

Hemp and flax succeed equally well on the Neilgherries; they vegetate so rapidly, that at the end of three months they may be harvested: incalculable advantages might be derived from the culture of these plants. The potato also bears at the end of three months, and even less; it possesses qualities which are not to be found elsewhere; a flour is extracted from it which is much esteemed.

What cogent reasons there are then to settle on these delightful hills, and form regular plantations of all the precious vegetables of which I have just been speaking. What a mine of wealth for that man who has the good sense to devote himself first to the study of the different branches of agriculture! Let no one be mistaken, what I have just said is not nonsense as might at first be supposed, but the result of a deep conviction founded on a thorough knowledge of the localities. I have not visited the Neilgherries as an amateur, but as a naturalist and agriculturist. Besides being a foreigner, I can have no object in imposing upon any one. Let people only judge for themselves, and they will soon be convinced of the truth of my statement.

Ootacamund Rainfall from 1867 to 1872.

Months.	1867.	1868.	1869.	1870.	1871.	1872.
January ...	—	4.50	—	0.51	1.95	—
February ...	0.40	—	—	—	0.60	—
March ...	1.10	0.10	2.04			

