

A REVIEW OF PRESENT IDEAS ON HARD PRUNING

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In recent years it has become evident that ideas on pruning, especially at the higher elevations, were many and varied. In years gone by "hard pruning" had become a term of opprobrium, and there is no doubt that, done repeatedly or as a firewood-gleaning operation, much damage was caused. The Pathologist expresses in the Oil Spot paper in this issue of the Tea Quarterly his condemnation of hard pruning into thick wood, where this is undiseased and does not warrant removal on grounds of sanitation.

This is the crux of the matter. How best to treat a bush with badly rotted limbs or even trunk. Some ten years ago the growing tendency was to prune the bush high and with as little cleaning out of small branches as possible. This was often applied to bushes with frames badly rotted. Reference to our Annual Reports since 1958 will show that the Agricultural Chemist deplored this practice in two of the old manurial trials on St Coombs and attributed to it the worsening of existing damage, probably originating in sun scorch. In the preceding issue of the Tea Quarterly (September 1963, pages 127-143) the Entomologist expressed a somewhat similar opinion, the concern there being mainly with Shot-hole borer as the primary cause of rotted wood.

Opinions in the Industry now seem to be moving towards acceptance of a series of two or three hard or very clean prunes, as part of a deliberate rejuvenation policy for tea with rotted frames. We have been fortunate in obtaining articles from three Superintendents who, independently, have put this type of pruning into practice for varying periods and under varying climatic conditions. The similarity of expression of views is notable. Particularly the warning that this operation should not be done if it is not to be supervised properly. Also that it should be followed up by generous manuring and reasonably gentle treatment until the new shoots have gained their anticipated vigour. The titles of the papers exclude the low country from consideration, of course, but a point which calls for particular mention concerns the elevation range over which this pruning has been done, with apparent success. Too often is the view expressed that bushes at high elevations in the wetter districts might "get away with it", but that casualties would be too many elsewhere. This is certainly not borne out by the good recovery, seen by the author, in Uva at 2,800 feet elevation and in Galaha at 2,200 feet. The fact that lungs would seem to be necessary at such elevations is to be noted, as are the comments of one Superintendent on the control of shot-hole borer after hard pruning.

There is much yet to learn about the physiological and agricultural implications of this type of pruning, or indeed of pruning in general under present-day conditions. Not least in importance would be a clarification of the terms used in describing pruning. The term "clean pruning" for example now has such a wide range of meanings as to be of very little use. It may be that "rejuvenation pruning" could find acceptance to describe the range of types of pruning which aim to remove diseased and degenerate parts of a bush, in such a way that the formation of a new frame is permitted or stimulated.