

THE INTRODUCTION OF TEA INTO CEYLON.

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Details regarding the introduction of tea into Ceylon will always be of interest. The following extracts are obtained from the Annual Reports furnished by Dr. G. H. K. Thwaites, while Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens (1857-1880) by courtesy of the Curator, Royal Botanic Gardens.

1859.—“If it should be thought desirable to establish an Experimental Garden on the Hills, for the purpose of cultivating the quinine plant, other important objects might be carried out at the same time, which cannot possibly be effected at this inconsiderable elevation. . . . The Tea plant might have a fair trial given to it, not as regards its successful growth, but as to a cheap mode of its propagation.”

1861.—“We are in a position to be able to furnish, from the numerous plants now in this garden, a considerable quantity of tea seeds, should they be required for experiments in the cultivation of this plant in the Island.”

1862.—“The supply of seeds of all kinds for distribution has been well kept up, and Tea, Tobacco, flower and vegetable seeds have been sent out in some considerable quantity during the past year.”

1866.—“The disposition amongst planters to attempt the cultivation of tea to some considerable extent in the Island is becoming more and more decided, and it has been determined that an experienced planter shall proceed under the auspices of the Government and on a mission from the Planters' Association, to inspect and report upon the cultivation and preparation of tea as carried on in the Tea Districts of India. At the request of the Planters' Association I have drawn up a paper of suggestions as to the points upon which attention should be particularly directed and information obtained, laying much stress upon the importance of ascertaining, by observation of facts connected with the gathering of the leaves and the quality of the produce, whether the difference of climate, necessarily obtaining on account of the difference of latitude, between Ceylon and the Tea-Producing Districts of India, is likely to operate disadvantageously in Ceylon as regards the profitable cultivation of Tea.”

“In addition to the information likely to be obtained from India, it would be very desirable to get, if possible, trustworthy accounts of the cultivation of tea in Java, which possesses a climate so similar to that of Ceylon; and I would take the liberty to suggest

that an application from this Government to that of Java would probably result in our being favoured with valuable communications on this subject."

"An advertisement having, at my request, been inserted in the Government Gazette, stating that small quantities of Tea seed would be given to planters applying for the same for the purpose of forming nurseries of the plant, I have the pleasure to state that all our available seed was applied for, and since my last report more than two hundred pounds in weight have been in this way distributed. Our trees are likely to produce a fresh crop of seeds before very long, and we shall have a much larger supply to send out when the numerous young plants here and at Hakgala commence to bear seeds."

1867.—"The interest felt by Planters in the subject of Tea Cultivation in the Island, has been unequivocally shown by the circumstance of a considerable amount having been subscribed towards paying the expenses of a gentleman commissioned by the Government to proceed to the tea districts of India, for the purpose of acquiring information to enable him to report upon what is most essential to be known with reference to the cultivation and preparation of Tea in those districts. This gentleman has returned to Ceylon, and his interesting Report has been printed at the Government Press. It embodies much valuable information, and is very full on the important subject of the amount of labour required upon a tea plantation and its average cost. It will no doubt be referred to with much advantage by those who may feel inclined to embark in the cultivation of tea in Ceylon."

"The Tea plants at the Hakgala Gardens, amongst which are a few of the Assam variety, are growing vigorously. I have written to the Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden, asking him to be so obliging as to send me a case of plants, as well as a supply of seeds, of what is called the Hybrid variety, which is considered in India to be the kind most desirable for cultivation."

"A good many Tea seeds have been distributed during the past year."

1868.—"There is every symptom of the cultivation of this plant being taken up with some spirit before long. Some Tea sent to England, which had been prepared by a Planter from the ordinary China Bohea Tea plants, was thought highly of by the London Broker, and it is believed that the samples referred to can be easily improved upon. I hope that arrangements will be made before long for the instruction of some intelligent natives in the Establishment and elsewhere in the Island, not only in the proper management

of the plant under cultivation, but also in the proper mode of preparing the different kinds of marketable Tea. There are now several localities in the Central Province where there are a good many tea plants which could be experimented upon, and the number of localities will no doubt before long be greatly increased."

"I am expecting to receive very shortly from the Calcutta Botanic Garden, by direction of the Indian Government, a supply of seed from the Assam Hybrid Tea, which I propose to distribute in certain quantities to Planters, who will undertake to raise and cultivate the plants carefully, and if called upon to do so, to furnish this Establishment, when their plants are sufficiently old, with similar or larger quantities, as may be agreed upon, of ripe seeds for our further distribution. The seeds of this variety received some months ago from Dr. Anderson, having been sent in moist earth in a close glazed case, all germinated, and young plants raised from them are now growing vigorously at Hakgala, and a few in this garden. Some plants of the Assam tea, which came in the same case, are all growing exceedingly well at Hakgala. This latter variety does not appear to succeed at so low an elevation as that of Peradeniya, and the plants we had here have all been sent to Hakgala, where they quickly revived from their weak appearance."

1869.—"The small plantations at Hakgala are growing most vigorously, and will be gradually increased, to enable us to supply demands for seeds, which it is generally expected will by-and-by be made for them."

"Seeds of the common China tea can now be supplied from Peradeniya and Hakgala in considerable quantity, and before very long I hope that the Hakgala plants of the Assam and of the Assam Hybrid teas will be producing seeds abundantly."

1870.—"The small plantations of tea both at Hakgala and at Peradeniya are in flourishing condition. An abundance of seed is being produced upon the trees; and at Hakgala moderate supplies of seed of the Assam Hybrid variety can be had, if applied for by persons wishing to form nurseries of this valuable kind upon their estates. The tea plant thrives so luxuriantly upon our hills, at an elevation slightly above that suitable for Coffee cultivation, that it is difficult not to believe that their slopes will before very long be covered with thriving tea plantations."

1871.—"Both in this and in the Hakgala Garden the different kinds of tea are propagated to some extent for the purpose of supplying seeds to persons applying for them, and who will undertake to sow them, and to cultivate carefully the plants raised from them. Tea seems to be slowly getting into cultivation here, and I am glad

to be able to announce that an experiment on a tolerably large scale, and with the proper appliances, is about to be made in the preparation of the leaves by one of our principal planting firms. It has been suggested that, as there are several plantings of tea on different estates, it might be desirable to obtain from the Assam Tea Districts two or three respectable men who are experts in manufacture of tea suitable for the English Market. These men might instruct a certain number of planters and intelligent natives in the proper system of preparation of the tea, from picking the leaves to their being ready for exportation as the finished article of commerce."

1872.—"The cultivation of tea is making rapid advances in the Island. The manufactured article is pronounced to be of excellent quality. It makes a bright clear infusion, is fragrant and palatable. The Assam Hybrid variety, which was introduced into the Island a few years ago, grows most luxuriantly both in this garden and Hakgala, although the difference of elevation is more than 3,000 feet. Of this kind, which is most in demand, additions to our plantings are being made as rapidly as possible, with the object of the production of good supplies of seed for distribution, as imported seed cannot be so well depended upon for germinating as that recently gathered from the trees. Of the ordinary China tea, a great abundance of seed can now be procured from either garden."

1873.—"The cultivation of the Assam Hybrid variety is getting rapidly into favour, and but for the comparatively small number of plants and seeds procurable in the Island, added to the difficulty of obtaining from India really good seeds for germination, tea cultivation would advance more expeditiously here. There cannot be the least doubt, however, that these difficulties will not long operate as a check, the climate of the Island being so admirably adapted for tea-growing. The Assam Hybrid variety grows equally well at Peradeniya and at Hakgala, and our plantations at both places are being considerably added to, in order that we may be prepared by-and-by to issue fresh seeds in large quantity. Of the ordinary Bohea type of China good supplies at a very moderate charge are obtainable at both our gardens. I would strongly recommend trials being made of this hardy plant on abandoned coffee estates, rather than that weeds should be allowed to take possession of the land. There can hardly be a doubt that the expense of such a step would be more than repaid, if tea is one day to become, as it most probably will, one of the most important staple products of the Island."

1874.—“Cultivation is progressing most rapidly in the Island. Extensive clearings of forest land have been made in different directions for forming plantations even up to considerable elevations upon the hills. Planters are generally obtaining their seeds from India, but a good many plants and seeds of both Assam Hybrid and China teas have been distributed during the past year from our two gardens. The plantings of the Assam Hybrid kind are being extended both at Hakgala and Peradeniya, in order that good seeds may be available for distribution to those not willing to incur the risk of getting so perishable a seed from India.”

1875.—“Supplies of seeds and a few thousand plants have been sent out during the year from Peradeniya and Hakgala, but planters generally, notwithstanding the risk of transport of so perishable a seed, would seem to prefer getting from Assam seeds for the numerous plantings now being made in the Island.”

“It is now a well-established fact that commercial tea of a very superior quality indeed can be produced in Ceylon.”

1876.—“Tea plantations are rapidly making themselves visible in the upper portions of many of the Hills of the Central Province. The shrubs exhibit a very healthy appearance. The Assam Hybrid variety is in most favour for planting, and there is very little demand for the ordinary Chinese kind.”

1877.—“Tea cultivation is progressing rapidly in several districts of the Island, and at different elevations. As it is so well understood that a very superior finely flavoured tea is capable of being produced in the Island, planters are doubtless giving their best attention not only to encouraging the luxuriance of the trees, but also to ascertaining the very best mode for the preparation of the leaves. A large number of plants and seeds have been distributed from this garden.”