

**THE WYNAAD AND THE  
PLANTING INDUSTRY  
OF SOUTHERN INDIA**

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The Wynaad and the Planting Industry of Southern India by Francis Ford

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FRANCIS FORD.

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*Price One Rupee.*

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## PREFACE.

In these days when the investor finds difficulty in obtaining remunerative interest on his capital without sinking it below the ground and surrounding it with all the risks attendant on mining speculation, it is opportune to draw general attention to the advantages offered by the cultivation of tea and coffee in the hill tracts of Southern India. This pamphlet deals especially with the Wynaad, but what is written in it applies in many respects to the Nilgiri Hills, the Shevaroy Hills and the Lower Pulney Hills in the Madras Presidency; to the uplands of the Mysore Province; to the Nelliampthies range in Cochin; to the Peermaad, the Anamallais and the other hill ranges of Travancore. There is ample choice for any man who would invest his money in coffee or tea cultivation in Southern India, or who would adopt the life of the planter.

It will be noticed that no intricate calculations have been given in the chapters on tea and coffee cultivation, to which special attention may be drawn. The figures quoted are few and plain, and are based on actual experience. It were easy to prove on paper by the multiplication table and the simple rule of three that there is no more paying enterprise than growing thistles in the desert of Sahara, and I doubt not some asses would be found eager to rush into the wilderness to crop the promised bounty. Statistics dealing with cultivation, while being well within the truth, are always very fallacious, unless a man possesses actual experience, and therefore knows exactly how far they are to be trusted.

The most important figure quoted is the cost of placing a lb. of tea in the London market. This is stated to be just under 5*d.* per lb., for this was the actual cost last year on an important tea estate in the Wynaad. This compared with 7·33*d.* which

was the average cost in Assam of putting tea on the London market during 1894 by the forty Companies alluded to on page 40, is extremely favourable. It must be borne in mind that the Wynaad is admittedly as favourable as Ceylon in respect to climate, soil and distribution of rainfall; it is far superior to both that Island and Assam as regards a cheap labour supply; and again, if we except the more favoured districts of Ceylon, in regard to cheap transport and proximity to the sea-board. A good trunk-road, at present kept up by Imperial funds for military reasons, runs through the district; from the head of the ghaut to the Calicut Custom house the distance is only thirty-nine miles, and there is an excellent and cheap cart service between the coast and the hills.

I have stated elsewhere that I believe it to be wiser for a Company rather than an individual to undertake the cultivation of tea, for the larger the acreage, the less heavy falls the cost of a factory; and in these days a well-equipped factory at the outset is, I maintain, an essential of success. This difficulty is of course overcome by starting central factories, only before one is erected a certain number of planters must guarantee to open out a certain acreage within a given time.

Coffee is better suited for the single individual, in that in these days of high prices a planter may reasonably expect to enjoy a very good income from an area which he can comfortably manage himself. Instances could be given of planters who have been making out of an estate of 150 acres during the last five years an average income of well over £1,000 per annum.

The planter's life offers for a youngster with a small capital greater attractions possibly than any other. Good climate, good sport, good friends and good prospects are all here; and if at the end fortune does not crown him, he will at any rate be able to look back on a career full of happy hours, staunch friendships and jovial reminiscences. There is not a community in the world that has stronger *esprit de corps* than the planters of the tropics. Good-will and kind-heartedness abound: hospitality with them is almost a fault. A grumbler at trifles and passing cares the planter is, but let reverses come, trials that test the mettle of the heart, and no man will bear them more lightly and bravely. With gangs of labourers working on his plantation, servants round the



house at his beck and call, with horse in stable, dogs in kennel, and gun and rifle on the rack, he lives in quaint baronial style, himself a very parody of an English country gentleman, one of the olden times.

The attitude which the Government has in the past assumed towards the industry is extraordinary; quite incomprehensible indeed when we bear in mind the protestations of Viceroys and Governors that they desire in every way to encourage private enterprise. In Southern India until some three years ago the planter was ignored by the local Government; it was idle for him to ask for assistance in the interests of the industry, even though he might be supported by the District officers. The reply that he practically received was this:—"You have come to the country avowedly to make money; you must accept things as they are; otherwise you are free to return whence you came." The demeanour, implied by these words, can hardly be termed sympathetic or encouraging, and it is this demeanour of Government which is the main reason why the mineral resources of Southern India remain undeveloped; why manufactures lag behind; and why the Natives of the country do so little in their private capacity to open out new industries or to extend old ones. If the Government treats with contempt men of its own race, who are reclaiming the jungles and increasing the public revenues, is it likely, they ask, that we, the natives of the land, will meet with greater encouragement at its hands? So it comes about that Government, disproving its words by its actions, finds difficulty in inducing private enterprise to come to its help when it requires it. And then it is astonished.

In Southern India, as I have stated elsewhere, Lord Wenlock has inaugurated a new and a more generous policy towards the industry. If only the Government of India were to follow this example, the enterprise would stand on a surer basis than it has ever done before. There are certain grievances under which its labours, and no one who has studied the facts of the case denies their genuineness. District officers have testified to the necessity of affording relief; the local Government has urged that action be taken, but the Government of India has persistently refused, and with marked curtness, to do anything. It is this brusqueness and want of official civility which has irritated

planters so greatly. They are fully aware that a remedy cannot be given to them by a stroke of the pen, and that there are difficulties surrounding the enactments they suggest; they are willing, as they have stated in public again and again, to give every consideration to Government, but hitherto it has refused to enter into any palaver with them; it holds itself entirely aloof.

The following state of affairs was laid before it only this year. The words cited are those of the Secretary of the United Planters' Association :—

“The planting industry has assumed very large dimensions in the Native States and fresh capital is annually being employed in opening up the waste lands. The cultivated area in the three States of Mysore, Travancore and Cochin, amounts to 1,32,200 acres with an annual expenditure of Rs. 93,78,000. The average amount of advances now outstanding on these properties is Rs. 30 per acre, or Rs. 39,66,000, of which Rs. 10 per acre, or Rs. 13,22,000, are considered bad or have been written off within the last four years. The greater portion of this large loss is due by coolies and maistries now residing in British territory, against whom under the existing law there is absolutely no remedy.”

It was prayed that the Government of India would take some steps to put an end to this system of fraud which, as the law stood, planters were unable to prevent. The Government of Madras strongly supported the request of the United Planters' Association. It remarked that a perusal of its letter left no doubt as to the magnitude of the interests involved, and the gravity of the loss to which the planters were exposed in consequence of the present condition of the law. It added that the mischief did not end with the loss by the planters of sums which amount in the aggregate to an enormous total; the facility for fraud which the contiguity of British and foreign territory provided must unquestionably have a most demoralising effect upon the large cooly population employed on the various estates.

In the face of all this, the Government of India refused briefly and curtly. It ignored the gravity of the pecuniary loss and its demoralising effect, and merely stated that, as eight years previously the Government of Madras had expressed an unfavourable opinion on extradition for breaches of contract, it saw no reason to move in the matter. A flimsier reason for refusing to do justice cannot be imagined; it was tantamount

to a refusal without assigning any cause. It would never have been dreamt of, in the face of the local Government's support, had there been the faintest desire on the part of the Simla authorities to accord the least encouragement to the planting enterprise of Southern India. The policy of the Government of India in this respect is foolishly wrong; there is nothing to justify it. No one, and most certainly not the planter, wishes the Government to coddle the industry; all that is asked for is fair treatment and sympathetic consideration.

If in the following pages, it may perchance appear to the reader that the painted paragraph has been too readily employed in describing the scenery of the Wynaad and the delights of the planter's life, let it be remembered that so much of the pamphlet was written amid a crowd of pleasant memories of bye-gone days. An endeavour has been made to convey some adequate idea of the wonderful wild beauty of this land of a thousand hills, so warmly testified to by visitors. The life of the planter is not an unending succession of jovial days, free from care and trouble; but it offers a bright and manly career beneath the open sky. Nothing more than this is maintained. As in the busy mart and crowded city fortune ebbs and flows, so too among "the mountain-meadows, the woods and the waterfalls" of the Wynaad.