

**THE TRIBES INHABITING THE
NEILGHERRY HILLS; THEIR SOCIAL
CUSTOMS AND RELIGIOUS RITES:
FROM THE ROUGH NOTES OF A
GERMAN MISSIONARY**

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The Tribes Inhabiting the Neilgherry Hills; Their Social Customs and Religious Rites: From the Rough Notes of a German Missionary by Anonymous

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EDITED BY A FRIEND.

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MADRAS:

1856.

THE  
NEELGHERRIES,  
AND THEIR  
INHABITANTS.

About thirty-six years have elapsed since the late Mr. John Sullivan, who was then Collector of the province of Coimbatore, was tempted to make an excursion into these wild regions, at the solicitation of the hill-people themselves; and ultimately to build the first of those neat English-looking residences which now stud the wide valley of Ootacamund in hundreds. The Collector, it is said, was making his usual tour in Collegal, a talook lying on the Mysore frontier, and there met a party of Badagas who had come to dispose of the produce of their fields. One of the party, seeing how Mr. Sullivan was suffering from the heat, invited him to visit the Blue Mountains, for there, said he, "it is so cold that water becomes transformed into glass!" The Collector was not slow to avail himself of the invitation, and the result, as we have before said, was the establishment of that delightful sanitarium which bears the name of Ootacamund.

It appears that prior to this two Civilians from Malabar had penetrated into these hills in pursuit of a gang of Moplah smugglers, but had retired when the object of their errand was accomplished. A Mr. McLeod seems also to have made an excursion into them, and many Badaga children, who were born on the day that he made his appearance there, were called after him, and retain the name of McLeod to this day !

To Mr. Sullivan, however, first occurred the idea of rendering the Neilgherries a place of resort for the European invalid. Where Stonehouse, (which was built by him) now stands, there was formerly a Toda mund, called by the Badagas "Hottegemund," and this gave its name to the whole valley. Other houses began rapidly to spring up, and the expectations of the residents that European products might be raised without difficulty, led to the establishment of a Government farm on an extensive scale in the Kaity valley. The project however was eventually abandoned, the return having proved far less than was anticipated. It seems doubtful whether, if carried on in European style, farming on these Hills will ever yield sufficient to make a man's fortune, though doubtless a moderate living might be gained by it. The bungalow at the Kaity farm was after-

wards occupied for some time by the Governor of Pondicherry.

At a subsequent period, Lord Elphinstone, then Governor of Madras, fancied the spot for the erection of a dwelling house, but met with great difficulty in effecting the purchase of the ground, on account of the objections raised by the Badagaa, who had from time immemorial sacrificed a buffalo calf every year to a deity supposed to be present in an old decayed tree growing in that locality. It used to be the boast of the old headman that the Governor once came in person to ask for the site, and that he maintained his rights against him. It is said that what His Lordship could not accomplish was afterwards secured by his Lordship's steward, who fêted the Badaga chiefs and when he had got them into good humour, persuaded them to give up the land on condition of receiving an annual fee of 35 Rupees. The objections of those who had a prescriptive right to the soil being thus removed, his lordship obtained the land on a lease for 99 years. No sooner was the transfer concluded than his Lordship began to enlarge the old building, and in course of time converted the property into one well worthy of a nobleman's residence. The house was magnificently furnished, the exquisite taste of the late Count D'orsay



having been called into requisition for this purpose; the grounds were tastefully laid out, and the whole assumed the appearance of a beautiful English Manor house—full of enchantment and attraction to the exiled European, a perfect oasis in the surrounding waste.

In 1845, or about that time, the property was purchased by the late Mr. Casamajor of the Civil Service for 15,000 Rupees, and about 10,000 Rupees more were expended by him in alterations. This excellent and respected gentleman soon established a school for the education of the Badaga children, but so little were the hill tribes able to appreciate the value of mental culture that it was necessary to offer them a *douceur* of one anna per diem for every child sent to the school, before any parent could be induced to allow his offspring to attend. The injurious tendency of this measure, was in some degree counteracted by making the lads work for a few hours in the day in the garden, the payment for attendance being looked upon as compensation for such labor: but the precedent was an exceedingly unfortunate one, and its effect has been to hinder the work of education among the people; for they are impressed with the idea that they confer a favour by permitting their children to be taught, and the

generality of them therefore keep them back in the hope of inducing the missionaries to return to the old system of the master paying the pupil to come and be educated. At one time there were about a hundred boys in the school, all of whom were paid for attending.

Much sympathy was shewn by Mr. Casamajor, with the Missionaries of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, some of whom were frequently living under his roof and enjoying his hospitality. At his death, he left the greater part of his property to the Mission,—of which he had been a liberal supporter while living,—but the house itself was advertised for sale. A year passed without any suitable offer being made, and at the end of that period it was purchased by the Basel Society, for 10,000 Rupees, the position being central and well adapted for the head-quarters of the Mission, although the house was, in size, far beyond the requirements of the few missionaries located there. The Neilgherry branch of the Basel Mission is supported by the interest of the money realized from the sale of the property, that sum, having, in accordance with the late Mr. Casamajor's will, been invested in the funds for that purpose.

No sooner had Kaity become the property of the

Basel Missionary Society than orders were sent from Germany to dispose of such of the fittings and furniture as were unsuited to a Mission House. Carpets, curtains, marble chimney-pieces, and other decorations were therefore sold at public auction, and about 4,000 Rupees were thus realized. Such was the result which in the course of a very few years followed the enormous outlay expended upon the property by the late Governor of Madras. The house was a good deal altered during Mr. Cass-major's time, and now but little remains to remind the visitor of the gorgeous mansion of former days.

But who shall say that the property, which has thus, in the providence of God, passed into the hands of a Missionary Society, has lost any of its dignity by the transfer? It is true that it no longer forms the residence of viceroyalty, but it enjoys a higher distinction than this in being the abode of the children of the King of kings, and because from its walls there go forth to the perishing heathen around the honored delegates of the Prince of peace, preaching the gospel of reconciliation and glad tidings of good things. It is upon such excursions as these that the facts narrated in the following pages have been gleaned from the lips of the hill tribes themselves.