

COFFEE-PLANTING
IN
CEYLON.

280.

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IN

CEYLON.

BY

ALIIQUIS.



"Quid faciat lætas segetes."

VIRG. *Georg.* i. 1.

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FYTTE THE FIRST.

I.

THE BRITON has cross'd the ocean's foam,
In LANKA's island to make his home ;
To the stately ship he has bidden adieu,
And he speeds, in the frail and quaint canoe,
Through the silvery surf, to the verdant strand
Where plume-like palms o'ershadow the land,
And white walls gleam through quivering green,
And an armèd fort o'erlooks the scene,
Where commerce plies the busy oar ;—
A joyful man, he leaps on shore.

II.

He has quitted the town with its dusty glare,
Has cross'd the hot lowlands, and breathes cool air
Amid forest-clad mountains and "pattenas" bare ;
Delighted he gazes, as one in a dream,
On mountain and forest and rushing stream ;
And flinging his arm aloft he cries,
" This wild I will change to a paradise ! "

III.

Through the tangled wood he threads his way—
It is dusk as twilight at mid noonday ;
The serpent-like woodbine from tree to tree
Hangs twisted in coils so gloomily ;
But a path through the jungle, cloven by force,
Marks the elephant's track to the watercourse ;
And up, still up, by diminishing rills,
To their birth-place amid the highest hills,
Where the shelter'd valleys wind and spread
Round the misty crown of the mountain's head,

He searches the forest both up and down ;—
The soil is black, and the trees are brown
With the moss of ages :—“ ’T is good, ’t is good !
Whirl the axe and fell the wood ! ”

IV.

The axe resounds on the gum-trees tall,
They stoop, rend, crackle, and, crashing, fall.
See that monarch of ages, o’erlooking the glen,
As a chieftain predominates over his men ;—
Around and beneath him, on either hand,
Great trees, though half sever’d, still motionless stand.—
Now watch for the blow which shall lay him low—
A forest goes down in his overthrow !
Roaring and thundering, down they swing,
Their mightiest branches splinter and ring ;
With an earthquake’s dint they smite the ground,
And drown, in their fall’s far-echoing sound,
The cheer of the wood-cutters crouching around.

FYTTE THE SECOND.

CHANGE THE SUBJECT, CHANGE THE MEASURE :

VARIETY 'S AKIN TO PLEASURE.

I.

The forest now is fell'd, the lopping ended,
And trunk and branch lie withering in the sun ;—
For three months **LABORIE** has recommended
To let them dry, ere firing be begun ;—
Else a “ bad burning ” may be apprehended,
Which makes expenses very high to run
In clearing up ; so wait, and watch the weather,
And burn your fellings all clean off together.

II.

Your seedling Nursery need not be expensive.
Transplant from thence, soon as two leaves unclose,
To one that 's deeply trench'd and more extensive ;
There set your little plants in equal rows.
This transplantation gives good roots, and hence, I've
Found, as a rule, the tree more quickly grows.
Trace paths through the fell'd forest, build your houses,
And huts, too, for your coolies and their spouses.

III.

Be careful with your roads—make them in plenty
With winding zigzags where the ground is steep :
Take easy gradients—say, one foot in twenty ;
One in sixteen 's the steepest you can keep :
When rain in torrents down their slopes is sent, I
Fear stiffer gradients would not stand the sweep.
In cutting through fell'd timber, you 'll discover
The wood cuts easier ere the burning 's over.

IV.

And all this time you 're building, wattling, dabbing,
And carrying " māāna " from the breezy hill ;
Making a garden, fencing it with stabbing,
Conducting water from the neighbouring rill,
Putting in plantains ; and to obviate grabbing
By coolies, let them also have their will
Of ground for yams or plantains, one or other ;
For hunger is of theft the fertile mother.

V.

I now suppose you settled, housed, and knowing
That all your buildings are secure from fire ;
With February's sun the land is glowing,
The dry breeze blows ; just as you would desire,
The timber dry as tinder ; all things showing
The very state your purposes require.
Round to the lower edge ten coolies run
With flambeaus—puff! ten " kindlings " are begun.

VI.

Smoking at first in desultory patches,
Then lighting up, they gather and they glow,
Crackling and roaring, until he who watches
Can see them meet and mingle; on they flow,
A line of billowy fire, which swiftly catches
Leaf, branch and trunk, and hails their overthrow
By spouting flames, up-whirling to the sky;
The dun smoke spreads its cloudy canopy.

VII.

Down shower the sparks; the lurid air is glowing,
As o'er the hills advance the fiery surges,
Like desolation fiercely onward flowing;
The dry wood feeds the flame, the strong wind urges,
Rocks burst like thunder, till its farther going
Is stopp'd at last by the green forest's verges;
And smouldering logs, black stumps, and heaps of ashes
Mark where it was, illumed by fitful flashes.

FYTTE THE THIRD.

I.

The burning was complete on vale and hill ;
But, whether from the heat or the exertion,
The next day I was taken very ill,
And have of weakness had a long reversion ;
So, in the intervals of draught and pill,
I, to relieve the languor of inertion,
Began to study how they rule " our Eden,"
And now—think, with the Chancellor of Sweden !

II.

“ Our legislative ” is a sand-bag rampart
To screen the ruler from responsibility ;
Behind its inert mass he sits in comfort,
Firing off *ordinances* with facility.
Should any of them prove of dangerous import,
Or seem to risk prosperity’s stability,
The ruling power disclaims it : “ Heaven forbid it ;
“ It was not *I* ;—it was the *Council* did it.”

III.

Old-fashion’d roads, o’er which one slowly creeps—
Lamenting that, by folly overthrown,
Our ruin’d railway is but scatter’d heaps,
And stores of useless iron, wood, and stone ;
Our “ Immigrant Commission,” which still keeps
Taking our money, though no good is done ;—
All these I pass, though much reform be wanting ;
And turn to our own business—Coffee-planting.

IV.

Now stretch your line along the scorch'd-up ground—
A deep-sea lead-line is the thing exactly ;—
Your planting-pegs are ready, piled around,
And all in cooly-loads tied up compactly.
For marking off the line, five feet is found
To be about the distance ; but, in fact, I
Must say, 't is matter for consideration,
With reference to soil and elevation.

V.

The lining done, the holing now commences.
Dig large deep pits, full two feet wide and deep.
Insist on this, regardless of expenses ;
The benefit you in the end will reap.
All planters know (who have not lost their senses)
That many heretofore had cause to weep
That e'er they follow'd those who recommended
Small holes—a fault which cannot be defended.

VI.

Draw drains diagonal across the hills,
To save your surface-soil from wash of rain ;
Lead them to run into the natural rills
Or dry ravines ;—the *slope* of every drain,
One in sixteen to twenty ;—less steep *fills*,
And steeper ruts the soil. I must explain,
In hard ground we allow a steeper play
Than in loose earth, which would be wash'd away.

VII.

And as the time comes on for April showers,
See everything in readiness for planting.
Fill up the holes soon as the welkin lowers.
Plenty of healthy plants are not a-wanting ;
Pack them in sheaves : and mind, the evening hours
Are best to plant in, when the sun is slanting
Towards the west ; for then the cool fresh night
Will nurse the plants and set them up all right.

VIII.

In planting, you disturb again the ground
Enough to hold the root ; and plant it *deeply* ;
Replace the soil, and, ere you press it down,
Draw the plant upwards.—I 'm not planting cheaply,
But carefully ; and it can well be shown
That thus the tap-root will keep straight, and steeply
Will find its downward way, without a twist.
This care will to your mill bring ample *grist*.

IX.

Then press the earth around the stems quite hard ;
Replace the planting-peg to mark the station ;
So, should some fail, which all your care can't ward,
Still of their pits you 'll have the indication.
I know not any way the plants to guard
From nibbling deer, which have a strong vocation
For eating the young shoots ; but ask your neighbours,
And have a hunt to lighten up your labours.

FYTTE THE FOURTH.

I.

'Tis pleasant sport, that hunt in the wild-wood !
Five leash of hounds, and half-a-dozen guns ;
Each marksman posted as it seemeth good,
In pass or gully, to command the runs ;
A whimper first, then the loud bay for blood,
When open all the deep-mouth'd dogs at once ;
A crash and rush, as bounds the mighty buck
Past the "*first gun*:" but he is not in luck ;

II.

For, right and left he fires, without avail.
The eager dogs chide on, the elk breaks cover ;
Along the grassy slopes they run his trail,
And gain upon him ere he can cross over
Beneath the waterfall ; he does not quail,
But turning in the pool, he pinks old Rover
The foremost hound, and boldly stands at bay,
With hoof and antler ready for the fray.

III.

With glaring eye and wild erected mane,
The stately quarry battles for his life.
The baffled dogs, half swimming, yell in vain ;
And bounding on, to mingle in the strife,
The foremost hunter gains, with desperate strain,
The deep stream's margin,—there unsheathes his knife,
And warily descends the slippery rock,
Which seems to vibrate to the torrent's shock.

IV.

But having now regain'd his strength and wind,
The buck clears at a bound the torrent's bed,
And leaving hound and hunter far behind,
Goes off again "*full split*"—his nostrils spread,
His antlers laid along his back.—You'll find
Wild creatures look on man with special dread ;
Though arm'd but with a knife nine inches long,
Our friend has scared this beast so large and strong.

V.

And down the glen he sweeps, through bush and brake ;
The streaming hounds pursue, all mute with speed ;
But just before he can the jungle make,
Whose thorns would check the dogs and help his need,
A rifle's crack has made the echoes wake.
This time the will is follow'd by the deed ;
The buck bounds high in air, then stumbles—stops ;
One scrambling struggle more, and down he drops.

VI.

Whoop-whoop ! the scatter'd hunters straggle in,
Dabbled, and dank, and splash'd with many a stain ;
Some tatter'd too ; for who the race would win
Must heed nor thorn nor thicket, but must strain
Through rough and smooth, wet, dry, and thick and thin.
None otherwise the foremost place can gain !
Cheroots are lighted while the deer is broke—
Your planter's always ready for a smoke.

VII.

The hunt's renew'd, and other elk are found ;
And some, perchance, succumb to knife or rifle :
And of the small red-deer, the sport to crown,
Some few are bagg'd ; and this is not a trifle,
For they're a nibbling vermin ;—I have known
Acres nipp'd down by them, and long'd to stifle
The little rogues ; but they are very cunning,
And scarcely show themselves at all in running.

FYTTE THE FIFTH.

I.

Enough of idle sport : our plants are growing ;
So we must set to work and build a store,
And make a "barbecue," the former showing
Its long front north or south, that so the more
Of sunshine, when from east or westward glowing,
May reach the drying-ground : let every floor
Within your store be of well-season'd wood ;
Chunam or asphalt is not half so good.

II.

As for the kind of store that you should make,
You 've lots of timber, and had better use it ;
For, I can tell you, brick and mortar take
A heavy outlay ; though, if free to choose it,
Sinking expense, for permanency's sake
Brick may be better ; still I would refuse it ;—
Three hundred pounds will build a timber store,
While one of brick would cost you nine or more.

III.

Your store should be all open or all close,
As from the weather you deem most judicious.
By endless doors and windows I suppose
A climate of mean drought, and that your wish is
To let the dry winds in, excluding those
So damp, they 're only suitable for fishes.
In places where the weather 's wet all through,
Perhaps you 'd better have a "*Clerihew*."

IV.

The plants are growing ; you must " stake and tie "
In windy places ere it 's time to top them,
Which should be done at about three feet high,
Or something less where you 're obliged to prop them
Against the strong wind's sway.—Don't trust the eye,
But give a measure to the men who lop them :
The central and two upper shoots you crop,
A cross thus forming at each bush's top.

V.

This topping cruciform is the most fitting,
For so the summit of the tree don't die ;
Its stem is thus preserved from risk of splitting,
When, laden with red fruit so heavily,
The upper boughs are such a leverage getting,
That, if the top be dead, the stem gives way.
All weeds, shoots, cuttings, bury near the trees ;
For no manure is of more use than these.

VI.

Now as to pruning, hints you will procure
 From MARAH, LABORIE, and R. B. T.
 The last, though clever, is sometimes obscure,
 “ *Winding* ” a mystic “ *thread around the tree,* ”
 Which, if you follow not, you ’ll spoil, he ’s sure,
 “ *The equipoise of its consistency;* ”—
 Unless your art with nature forms a junction,
 You ’ll cause, he says, “ *in-si-di-ous defunction* ” !

VII.

But pruning is a most important thing,
 And the prime rule is to begin in time ;
 ’T is easier to keep right at first than bring
 Order from out disorder : in this clime,
 Soon after topping, shoots and branches spring
 In wild luxuriance ; trim them, like my rhyme !
 It ’s just as well that you should bear in mind,
 That “ as the twig is bent, the tree ’s inclined. ”

VIII.

Store, pulping-house, and cisterns are completed ;—
The month of March arrives—has it been snowing ?
A stranger's eye might really well be cheated ;
But yours is gladden'd !—every branch is showing
As if with new-fallen snow it had been sheeted :
With gratitude and hope your heart is glowing ;—
'T is the first *blossom*—harbinger of crop,
To give an income and your outlay stop.

IX.

The jasmine odour scents the morning air,
The busy bees are ransacking the flowers ;—
This is the first reward of all our care.
May Heaven protect us now from thunder-showers
To dash the blossom, leaving branches bare—
Marring our hopes ; may better luck be ours,
And weather neither over-dry nor wet,
But softly moist, to make the blossom *set* !

FYTTE THE SIXTH.

I.

Small pin-head clusters we can now discover ;
The fruit has set ; these are the nascent berries.
The intervening stages pass we over ;—
First like green peas, then olives, then ripe cherries,
O'er which you gloat as fondly as a lover,
Whose love, like yours, with *expectations* varies.
Arrange your gangs the several fields to suit ;
Pick row by row, and only the ripe fruit ;

II.

“Set on the water!”—the big wheel revolves,
The pulpers jingle, and the cherries sink
Through that Creswellian crusher, which dissolves
Union of pulp and parchment; and as shrink
The ruby heaps, and the squeezed pulp evolves
On one side, the deep cistern to the brink
Is fill'd with viscous “parchment”;—let it lie
One day, then wash it white as ivory.

III.

Pass we the drying, houseing, bagging;—you,
If wise, won't bother to dry over-much.
When the chipp'd parchment shows the bean *pale* blue,
Pack and despatch:—when in your agent's clutch,
The thorough drying it is his to do,
Like a good curer; let him act as such,
And cure it carefully; and ship it *early*,
Ere the monsoon sets in so wet and surly:—

IV.

That is, if you intend to "ship and draw,"
Perhaps you 'd better "sell upon the spot."
My *canny* manager says, "Of the twa,
The second way is still the surer shot."
But no opinion can be worth a straw
Unknowing the conditions; and I 'm not
Writing to teach you how 't is best to sell
Your coffee,—only how to *grow* it well.

V.

This has in part been done; and, in conclusion,
I draw attention to some needful things,
Perhaps too lightly touch'd, in the confusion
Of urgent work;—and as your Pastor brings
The heads of his discourse to one fine fusion
Before he finishes, and thereby flings
Light on the points he deems the most essential,
I too will try;—may I be as potential!

VI.

First, as to weeds, there can be *no mistake*—
 These should be kept down from the very first—
 Never allow'd to flower—or else they shake
 Their seeds all round :—since first the earth was cursed,
 This task has been upon us ; we must take
 Time by the forelock to avoid the worst,
 Most fatal injury ; and, to succeed,
 Must gather out and bury every weed.

VII.

Without manuring there can be no culture—
 None, I repeat, that 's worthy of the name.
 You should not treat your land as does the vulture
 His bare-pick'd carrion ; no—but, on the same
 First well-selected land, you should consult your
 True interest, and let your steady aim
 Be the improvement of this first plantation,—
Not to exhaust, relying on migration.

VIII.

For, if you only have the means and taste,
Your tropic dwelling may be render'd charming
By planting trees and grass ;—this is no waste,
But true economy and proper farming.
Your lawns will feed your cattle, and be graced
By groves the noontide sultriness disarming ;
So plant,—in mind Sir Walter's adage keeping,
“They will be growing, Jock, when ye are sleeping.”

IX.

Our aim being permanent and large production,
It follows we must cultivate with care,
Using all means and aids for the construction
Of a sound system duly to repair
The waste of cropping—that is, the effluxion
Of phosphates, and, in fact, the wear and tear.
Our duty's plain, though many seem to scorn it—
Not to deface God's earth, but to adorn it ;

X.

Not like the locust flitting o'er the land—
 Before us verdure, and behind a waste.
 Ev'n thus the Yankees, as I understand,
 Grasping at wealth with an insensate haste,
 Have cropp'd and flitted with a ruthless hand :
 Their devastating progress may be traced
 By ruin'd farms, thus barbarously wreck'd
 From greed of gain, by no instruction check'd.

XI.

Just so their *Union*, which once *loom'd* so great,
 Is hastening on to premature decay :
 It seems as if that monstrous bubble's fate
 Were fast approaching ; one by one give way
 Its vaunted institutions ; State from State,
 Like ill-compacted building, falls away :—
 Contempt is mingled with commiseration
 For those loud boasters who could "*whip creation.*"

XII.

They 'll get to the Heptarchic state ere long !
Some centuries hence they may be civilized,
After long interchange of mutual wrong ;—
When rowdyism and greed have been excised
By the sharp sword of conflict, and the strong
Reign of just laws, at last, is duly prized,
They may emerge from out these various stages
Free as the English—in the middle ages ;

XIII.

And so, progressively, they may improve,
Until they come to rank with decent folk.
And this disruption is but the first move
In breaking from their necks the galling yoke
Of brutal mobs, escaping from the groove
Where intellect is dragg'd beside the spoke
Of ruffianism's foul wheel, dishonour'd, bound,
The sport of vulgar rowdies yelling round.

FYTTE THE SEVENTH.

I.

But *Cultivation* is our present theme,
Let North or South outbully or outwit ;
And so I will propound my simple scheme
To gather and to husband all things fit
For nourishment of plants ; and first I deem
Essential to our purpose a huge pit
For sweepings, weeds, twigs, leaves, and pulp and juice—
All things, in fact, that can be turn'd to use ;—

II.

And near, the stable and the cattle-shed,
With drainage into this capacious bin.
No fear that any sickness should be bred,
If only you from time to time sift in
Well-pounded charcoal, which, being duly spread
Over the mass, forms an absorbent skin ;—
Not only thus the noxious vapours fixing,
But husbanding the goodness of your *mizen*.

III.

Of foreign or extraneous manures
You will avail yourself as you see fit ;
The benefit which any kind ensures
Set off against the cost of using it.
Crush'd bones give sustenance which long endures ;
Quick-lime is very useful all admit ;—
Not dolomite, but coral from the sea,
Which, with a railway, might be *carriage-free*.

IV.

Salts of ammonia and other things
 Can be imported, if they'll only pay ;
 Use first the substances which nature flings
 Spontaneous at your feet ;—as for the way
 To apply manure, encompassing with rings
 The several trees is that which I should say
 Is the most perfect ; but for cheapness' sake
 An easier method you had better take.

V.

In first manuring, *trench* it in the row,
Across the hill, midway between the trees.
 Be sure too near the stems you do not hoe,
 Cutting large roots ; no, have a care of these—
 Their loss is fatal ; and I do not know
 A thing less apt a planter's eye to please
 Than a great hole close by each stem, in which
 A *dollop* of manure the coolies pitch !

VI.

This is not cultivation ; yet I 've seen it
Where such a thing I little thought to see :
The difference is very great between it
And what I advocate, that every tree
Should have its portion, with whole roots to glean it
To the last morsel with facility.
The second time that you manure, you still
Take the same plan, but *up and down* the hill.

VII.

There 's one more subject I have yet to mention—
The stirring up or digging of the soil ;
This is not certainly a new invention,
But old as is man's destiny to toil.
The question is, how best to do this trenching,
Yet neither roots nor spreading branches spoil
By pickaxe-handle nor wide-cutting spade ;
And so a fitting implement is made—

VIII.

A long, sharp-pointed, heavy iron bar,
Which, driven with force into the harden'd ground,
Is then wrench'd down, and from a bursting star
Upheaves, in loosen'd clods, the earth all round.
This, on the whole, is the best way by far,
From long experience, that I have found
To break and mix the stores of rotten wood
And ashes, and supply the plants with food.

IX.

And then the broken, up-turn'd clods of earth
Absorb and sip in every bead of dew ;
And creeping mists, which would be little worth
To baked-up soil, now yield their tribute too ;
And when of moisture there has been a dearth,
There 's nothing that will help your bushes through
So well as this, save frequent irrigation—
Which can't be done on any hill-plantation.

X.

And now I say farewell ; my simple rhyme
May help those inexperienced in planting.
For twenty years, in CEYLON'S fervid clime,
I toil'd and sweated ; if success was wanting
To anything I tried, at any time,
The cause, I 'll say, although it may seem vaunting,
Was that I knew not then what 's here set down
As needful to secure the Planter's crown.

THE END.

