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No. 154.

ST. HELENA.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1894.

(For Report for 1893, see Colonial Report [Annual] No. 125.)

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ANNUAL.

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Governor GREY WILSON to Mr. CHAMBERLAIN.

The Castle, St. Helena,

August 13, 1895.

SIR,

THE 1894 Blue Book of this little Colony of 4,000 souls, which I herewith transmit, exhibits such hopeful indications as to relieve me from the charge of over-confidence if I express the opinion that the low-water mark of the Island has been passed.

The decline of the prosperity of the Island was coincident with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and to that event nearly all our misfortunes have been attributed. That steam largely replaced sails, and that the canal diverted a large proportion of the Eastern traffic from this route, cannot be denied. A closer investigation of the history of modern merchant shipping, however, reveals the fact that, at the same time, increased competition so greatly reduced the profits of owners as to render necessary the utmost vigilance in curtailing expenditure.

Small ships, being much more costly in *personnel* than large ones, gave place to vessels of ever-increasing size. Preserved provisions improved in quality and were shipped in larger quantities at the cheaper European ports of departure. Water storage was extended and improved, and the two or three days' holiday which nearly every captain coming from the eastward took in St. Helena was, in the hurry and rush, crushed out of the voyage altogether, or reduced to a stay of as many hours. Vessels are now in every way better found than formerly, and the ship chandler's bill that in the good old times raised no comment would in these days have serious consequences for the captain. The opening of the Suez Canal looms large and clear, but these facts must not be lost sight of.

The garrison of the Island consisted in 1869 of 448 men, and in 1870 it was reduced to 178; and this fact, I confidently assert, was the direct and immediate cause of our misfortunes.

The chequered history of this Island, from its zenith in Napoleonic times to its very severe depression of modern times, is not that of a natural rise and fall, but should rather be regarded as the inevitable relapse from fictitious inflation.

It is true that since the days when the East India Company's extravagant aid was withdrawn the Island has continued to decline;

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but it must be remembered that, when that change took place, very nearly the whole of the landed proprietors and upper classes, who were famed for their lavish hospitality, found themselves either involved in, or on the verge of, bankruptcy, and, being the product of what I have previously termed fictitious inflation, they were not likely to possess either the energy or the resource necessary to combat the changed condition of affairs. They certainly made no attempt to do so, and spent their time in extolling the past and feasting their memories upon the grand times that were gone.

Many of this class have only passed away in recent times, and they have, I doubt not, in a measure contributed to check the natural growth of enterprise which elsewhere characterises British colonists.

The position of St. Helena assures to her, however, in my opinion, prosperity in the future, as a coaling station, as a dockyard, and as a link in an ocean cable.

Beyond a few tons of guano, the Island until 1892 exported nothing, it being quite as, if not more, difficult for a sailing ship from the north to reach St. Helena as the Cape. It follows that the freight on coal sent by sailing ship to this place must necessarily be higher than to the Cape; but so soon as steam colliers replace sailing ones the freight to St. Helena will be 1,700 miles cheaper than to the Cape, and, as land suitable for the storage of coal can be acquired here at a very much lower rate than at the Cape, it should be possible for us to supply coal at a much lower price than they can possibly do. I wish it could be more generally known that St. Helena is an entirely free port save to vessels who land or ship cargo.

That the rocky bay adjoining Jamestown is admirably suitable for the construction of docks, experts have attested. The ground would cost nothing. The climate is in every way suited to European mechanics. The growing steam traffic to and *via* the Cape, and the requirements of Her Majesty's service on the West Coast of Africa, render it, to my mind, certain that the construction of docks in St. Helena must be undertaken.

The construction of docks will, however, occupy time, and it seems probable that before their completion St. Helena will form one link in an ocean cable. The large number of vessels passing here, bound for the Azores for orders, since the Portuguese laid a cable to those islands, is sufficient indication of the importance this Island would assume if connected by cable with England. Men-of-war from the West Coast, which now entirely lose touch with the Commander-in-Chief while at St. Helena, could remain here to recruit, until wanted. Commander Hewetson in his report says, "Nothing could more strikingly illustrate the want of a cable than the recent departure of H.M.S. 'Phœbe' for Sierra Leone (1,700 miles) in order to telegraph to the Commander-in-Chief at the Cape, the captain at the time being most anxious to remain at the Island and avoid the West Coast owing to the large amount of sickness among his crew."

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Five hundred and three vessels were sighted during the year (1893—516), and of these 195 called (1893—199) and 221 traded with licensed boatmen without calling (1893—193); and, although the number of vessels calling was four less than in the previous year, their tonnage rose from 273,344 to 280,634 tons. 12 vessels of war and transports called (1893—14).

The American whaling fleet shows a marked decline, and, as it is largely manned by Islanders, though not, I regret to say, owned by them, our loss has been considerable. The low price of oil and the general mercantile depression account in a great measure for this falling off.

If, however, commercial depression has adversely affected that portion of our population who are dependent upon the sea, it has been propitious for a still larger class. The unprecedentedly low rates obtaining in the wholesale markets of the world have reduced retail prices, still in most instances very high, to a figure never hitherto approached, and, as we are consumers only, the gain to all classes has been immense, while the consequent increased importation has very favourably affected our Customs revenue, which is levied upon the bulk, and not upon the value.

Revenue and Expenditure.

No changes were made in the duties or taxes.

The revenue and expenditure for 1894 were—

Revenue.			Expenditure.		
		£			£
Customs	-	4,688	Administration	-	5,224
Taxes	-	652	Pensions	-	1,769
Rents	-	794	Hospital	-	881
Other sources	-	3,028	Total	-	7,874
			Surplus	-	1,288
Total	-	9,162	Total	-	9,162

Stamps to the value of 1,904*l.* sold and repurchased have been struck out of both sides of the above account.

For the three years ending 1891 we had recurring deficits, but for the last three years we have had a surplus, and our assets are now 18,066*l.* and our liabilities 16,232*l.*

Legislation.

Three Ordinances were enacted during the year:—

- No. 1.—Relating to game and wild birds.
- No. 2.—Relating to the harbour.
- No. 3.—Supply.

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The Game Law has been framed in the interest of sportsmen and for the protection of wild birds. The Island partridge is probably the "chukar" of northern India, and the ring-necked pheasant is from the same locality. Though it is not known when they were introduced, Cavendish speaks, in 1588, of there being on the island "a great store of partridges and likewise no less " plenty of pheasants, very big and fat."

Shooting commences on March 1st for partridges, and on April 15th for pheasants, and terminates on May 31st; rabbits may be shot at any time, but only by the holders of licences during the game season. The cost of a game licence is 3*l.* for the whole season, and 1*l.* for visitors for seven days.

The Game Law also protects all wild birds, but permits averdevats, canaries, cardinals, and Java sparrows to be taken or killed by licensed persons during four months of the year.

I found it necessary to extend to the indigenous "wire bird" of St. Helena (*Ægialitis Sanctæ Helenæ*) absolute protection, and to the sea birds (of which at least eight are indigenous) additional protection; and this has been done by the Ordinance.

The wire bird differs very materially from the small plover, which is generally distributed throughout the continent of Africa, and which has never been seen here.

In connection with game, I may mention that during 1894 five wild ducks came to St. Helena and remained seven or eight days. This is a somewhat remarkable circumstance, seeing that the nearest mainland is 1,200 miles distant.

The Harbour Ordinance confers upon the harbour master, a retired naval officer, additional powers to allocate berths to ships, and control the boats and boatmen, and generally to facilitate and improve the work of the port.

Pensions.

The pension list still occupies a disproportionate position in our balance sheet.

Of the total expenditure of 7,874*l.*, no less a sum than 1,769*l.* fell under that item.

Imports and Exports.

The value of the imports was 31,777*l.*, nearly 7,500*l.* less than in the previous year; but the low wholesale rates obtaining during the year, to which I have already alluded, fully accounts for this nominal decline.

The value of the exports, excluding specie, was 1,177*l.*, and, in addition to this, whalebone and oil to the value of 14,717*l.* was transhipped in the harbour.

An interesting item, that of potatoes, first appears in our Export returns in 1892. The exports during the last three years have been:—

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Year.	Bags.	Value.
1892 - - -	570	£ 355
1893 - - -	320	207
1894 - - -	1,160	772

Greater attention has been paid in recent years to the importation of reliable seed, and it has been found that the Cape will relieve us in large quantities of really good potatoes, such as are now produced.

It is satisfactory to note that the importation of wine, spirits, and beer declined during the year.

The figures are:—

Year.	Wine.	Spirits.	Beer.	
	Gallons.	Gallons.	Hogsheads.	Dozens.
1891 - - -	6,088	1,489	164	212
1892 - - -	6,387	1,688	301	273
1893 - - -	7,318	2,068	366	1,603
1894 - - -	7,187	1,931	173	232

The consumption per head shows a considerable decline:—

	1890.	1894.
Beer - - - - -	25 bottles	12·2 bottles
Spirits - - - - -	2·6 "	2·9 "
Wines - - - - -	12 "	10 "
Tobacco - - - - -	1·75 lbs.	1·77 lbs.
Sugar - - - - -	67 "	106·3 "

Population and Vital Statistics.

The health of the Island was very satisfactory with the exception of infantine mortality, which was high. The death-rate of 18·8 per 1,000 is so ordinary as to invite no comment; but an examination of the figures yields a result sufficiently remarkable to justify my submitting some details, which demonstrate the extent to which our able-bodied ranks have been depleted by

ST. HELENA. 1894. emigration, while they bring out in extraordinary relief the remarkable healthiness of the Island.

The death-rate of those under 10 years was 43·6 per 1,000.

The death-rate of those over 10 and under 70 years was 6·3 per 1,000.

The death-rate of those over 70 years was 126·6 per 1,000.

Hospital.

The hospital was entirely re-organised during the year, under the able supervision of Miss Rose A. Blennerhassett, of Mashonaland fame. Skilled nursing was previously unknown, and, as the Island occupies the position of an ocean hospital for passing ships and many cases are landed in a deplorable condition, this improvement has had marked results, not one sailor having died in hospital during the year. 113 cases, of whom 41 were sailors, were treated, and only three deaths occurred. The average number of deaths during the previous 10 years has been 9·6, and the lowest seven.

Tristan d'Acunha.

In April I visited Tristan d'Acunha in the flagship "Raleigh." This little island lies about 1,500 miles almost due south of St. Helena and about the same distance west of the Cape of Good Hope.

I found the 61 inhabitants, consisting of 18 males, 23 females, and 20 children, under the nominal control of the aged Peter W. Green, in excellent health and desiring the help of the chaplain rather than of the doctor of the ship.

The climate is an admirable one, and the general condition of the inhabitants leaves little to be desired from a material point of view. For many years the Rev. Edwin H. Dodgson lived and laboured there, apparently quite content with the frugal fare, and even reconciled to only one annual mail, brought by a man-of-war. Mr. Dodgson went to England in 1892, and the closing of the school which he conducted is much deplored.

The live stock consists of 600 cattle, 500 sheep, a few pigs and donkeys, some poultry, and a large number of geese.

The potato crop is largely relied upon, and those we procured were of good quality. The settlement consists of stone-built cottages scattered over a common, lying at the foot of the precipitous and lofty mountain, and their whole style of life reminds one of the crofters.

The inhabitants are total abstainers, not perhaps from choice so much as from necessity, and they certainly form a strong argument in favour of teetotalism.

Occasional expeditions are made in open boats to Inaccessible Island, 20 miles distant, for seals, which they rely on for their lights.

The albatross, which formerly abounded in Tristan d'Acunha and furnished large quantities of eggs, has now quite disappeared, owing to the wild cats, which are very numerous, and which it

may now be hoped will devote themselves to reduce the plague of rats. ST. HELENA. 1894.

Savings Bank.

The number of depositors in the bank has more than doubled during the past 10 years (72 to 145), and the deposits have more than trebled (4,000*l.* to 13,000*l.*). The bulk of the working classes, however, prefer to invest their savings in one or other of the numerous Friendly Societies.

Education.

The improved financial condition has enabled us to provide assistant teachers for all the Government schools, a much needed and long deferred reform.

Military Expenditure.

The cost of the garrison, which consists of engineers, artillery, and infantry, was borne entirely by the Imperial Government.

Meteorology.

I transmit a report, by Mr. H. S. Hands, of the meteorological observations of the year, which show a marked improvement upon the records of the previous year. The initial difficulties experienced with the anemograph have been overcome, and the records are now continuous and (I think) reliable.

The greatest wind pressure during the year was 11·5 lbs.; but this only continued for one hour. 97·5 per cent. of the year was windy and 2·5 per cent. calm. The maximum heat recorded in the country was 82 and the minimum 48.

The rainfall was:—

Centre of Island,	39 inches.
East ,,	24 ,,
West ,,	33 ,,

These figures confirm previous observations and demonstrate the remarkable variation of the rainfall in a range of only seven miles.

Conclusion.

The Island has been entirely free from serious crimes. The condition of the people has improved, and, if remunerative employment can be found for the large number of unemployed women and children, we shall have solved one very great difficulty. The establishment of a fish-curing factory is now being promoted as a purely commercial operation, and in that form it presents very much greater prospects of a satisfactory solution than as a philanthropic undertaking. The great abundance of excellent fish, and the absolute security of the fishing fleet which the absence of all atmospherical disturbances here affords, should greatly conduce to its success.

I have, &c.

W. GREY WILSON.

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METEOROLOGY, 1894.

Rainfall.

The record of rainfall compares very favourably with the previous year, the totals being :—

	1893.	1894.
	Inches.	Inches.
St. Matthew's Vicarage (Central), altitude 1,900 feet approx.	40·344	39·078
Longwood (East), altitude 1,780 feet -	28·070	24·600
Woodlands (West), altitude 2,050 feet -	31·770	32·960

The greatest amount fell, as has been the case since the record was begun there in 1892, at the first station, and the greatest daily record, 1·65 inches, was recorded at Woodlands on the 31st May.

A marked difference of 63 per cent. occurs between the first and second stations, but this may be accounted for by their situation. The former is nearly surrounded by hills and in closer proximity to the highest peak, whereas the latter lies on a nearly level plateau.

Barometer.

The greatest atmospherical pressure, 28·264 inches, occurred on the 26th June, and the least, 28·020 inches, on the 2nd March; so that the absolute range of the barometer during the year was only 0·244 inches.

Temperature.

The mean absolute maximum temperature recorded during the three years' observation at St. Matthew's Vicarage was 77·2, and the mean absolute minimum 50·7; showing the extreme range in that period to be, on the average, 25°. The difference between the hottest and coldest months was 9° which may be taken as the difference in temperature between the town and country.

The absolute maximum registered in 1894 was 82°, and the absolute minimum 48°, in February and August respectively at Woodlands.

Wind.

Much more satisfactory results were obtained than in the previous year from the anemometer erected at St. Matthew's Vicarage in the beginning of 1892.

The mean monthly record was 18 miles an hour, corresponding to a pressure of 1·6 lbs. on the square foot. The force of 50 miles, or a pressure of 11·5 lbs. on the square foot, was registered for one hour only on the 25th September, and is the highest recorded since observations have been taken. The lowest recorded was eight miles an hour, or a pressure of five ounces on the square foot.

The average number of days the wind blew from the south-east was 55 per cent.; from the south-south-east, 27 per cent.; from the east-south-east, 11 per cent.; and from variable quarters, 4·5; with 2·5 of calm days.

H. S. HANDS.

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