

AN INTERIM REPORT ON BLISTER BLIGHT SITUATION FOR THE INFORMATION OF AGENCY HOUSES

(Reprinted for Information)

A short *communique* has already been issued to the Press, of which the following is an amplification:—

Since the beginning of the present week a sharp increase in the amount of infection on young growth has occurred on tea situated at elevations of 3,000 feet and above in localities where mist or rain has been experienced to any considerable extent recently. The badly infected areas are often sharply localised in accordance with the mist distribution, but there is in addition a general, though less serious, increase in other areas.

The Institute has advised all estates above 1,500 feet to concentrate as large a proportion as possible of the annual pruning programme into periods which will cause recovery from pruning, between bud-break and tipping, to occur in dry weather. The extent to which such a policy is adopted, in spite of its practical disadvantages, naturally depends upon the extent of the loss from blister blight that is feared.

There has been a general effort to adjust pruning programmes to meet the novel conditions that result from the presence of the blister blight disease. Never-

theless, the sharpness of the recent rise in infestation underlines the very serious potentialities of the disease. The Institute therefore desires once again to draw the attention of those interested, who have not as yet taken steps to avoid wet weather recovery from pruning, to the serious risks that are being run.

Areas of tea are at present to be seen being clean pruned in the up-country wet zone side by side with badly affected first year fields. Unlike fields that have already reached the tipping stage, such areas may suffer from the death of young buds as they develop on the pruned frame. If this occurs, crop will be lost for months, rather than weeks.

At lower elevations, where the monsoon rains are regularly punctuated at intervals of a few days by periods of bright hot sun, the risks may not prove as great as in wetter districts, provided shade is kept in strict control by frequent lopping.

It is therefore recommended that all programmes which still involve wet weather pruning be subjected to repeated review. The advantages of granting a wide local discretion in delaying pruning, or altering the programme of field work at short notice, will be very apparent.

Concentration of the pruning programme demands a far higher number of pruners than normal, and attention is drawn to the possibility of using learners for light pruning where a temporarily lower standard of work might be accepted.

The type of pruning to be adopted has been discussed elsewhere (*Tea Quarterly*, Vol. XIX, Part I, May 1947, pages 23-25) but two points require amplification. Firstly, lung pruning is desirable, at least at elevations below 3,000 feet, the lungs being cut back at tipping time at or above the *tipping* level and care being taken that some leaf is left on the pruned lung branch.

Secondly, in those cases where some wet weather pruning is *inevitable*, the risks involved could be materially reduced by adopting the policy, as a temporary expedient, of skiffing twice in a cycle. For example, a field which must unavoidably be pruned in July 1947 would be skiffed, on the slope, at a height in the centre of the bush of 2 in. to 1½ ins. above the tipping joint, the cuts being rather above this on the upper side and below it on the lower. The slope is intended to facilitate the *thorough* removal of the numerous soft banjis which are produced for about 3 rounds just after the bush comes into plucking, a process which is essential if yield is to be maintained. Plucking should be close, and commenced immediately leaf appears on the skiffed surface. It is desirable, if possible, to plan in advance for adequate labour to be available to deal promptly with the "banji" rounds. The second skiffing of such a field might be carried out 15 or 21 months later in order to avoid interference with the normal dry weather pruning programme of December-January, 1948-49.

If the estate programme permits, a higher skiff might be given as a temporary measure to extend the cycle. In neither case should small branches below the pruning level be cleaned out.

The importance of choosing fields for such treatment that have an eastern aspect, controllable types of shade, and are not situated in a mist belt, requires no further emphasis.

This note is intended not to create alarm, which is essentially unproductive, but to underline and extend advice already given on the subject of the modification of cultural practices to meet the existing situation.

(Sgd.) F. R. TUBBS.

(Sgd.) Roland V. Norris, Director,
Tea Research Institute of Ceylon, St. Coonib's
Talawakelle, 27th June, 1947.

AFTERNOTES

(1) Copies of this Memorandum were sent to all district and sub-district P.A.'s.

(2) At elevations above 3,000 feet large upright branches left as lungs will, if allowed to grow freely, compete with the growth of the tippings shoots in the centre of the bush. Large lungs are quite un-

necessary at high elevations, and the "fringe" branches referred to in the Conference Proceedings are quite sufficient.

(3) Tipping is not, of course, carried out after a cut-across such as that discussed above, the new shoots being plucked to one leaf. If the first pluckings are at all late, panjis will form and crop be lost.