

entirely covered with forests, the trees drooping over the tremendous precipices that overhang the sea. Now nearly the whole of the indigenous vegetation has disappeared, except on the upper part of the Central Ridge, and is only very partially replaced by introduced plants, in consequence of the soil having been washed off from its rocky foundation since the destruction of the forests.

When the island was discovered, no mammals existed there, and vegetation dominated everywhere; but the great anxiety of the early voyagers to provide meat for future travellers, who, by design or accident, should visit such remote places, led to the introduction of hogs and goats; and the latter, chiefly, effected the destruction of the native vegetation. They were introduced in 1513, and multiplied so rapidly, that in 1588 Captain Cavendish states that they existed in thousands, single flocks being almost a mile long.

In 1709 trees still abounded, and one, the native Ebony (*Melhania melanoxylon*), in such quantities that it was used to burn lime with. In 1745, however, the governor of the island reported to the Court of Directors of the East India Company that the timber was rapidly disappearing, and that the goats should be destroyed for the preservation of the Ebony, and because the island was suffering from droughts. He was instructed not to destroy the goats, "as they were more valuable than Ebony."¹ Another century elapsed, and in 1810 another governor reports the total destruction of the great forests by the goats, which greedily devour the young plants and kill the old by browsing on their leaves and bark, and that fuel was so scarce that the Government paid for coal (and this in a tropical climate) £2729, 7s. 8d. annually. Still, even then, so great was the amount of seed annually shed, so rich the soil, and so rapid the growth of the native plants, that the governor goes on to say, that if the goats were killed and the island left to itself, it would in twenty years be again covered with indigenous vegetation.

About this time the goats were killed, but another enemy to the indigenous vegetation was at the same time introduced, and which has now rendered it certainly impossible that the native plants will ever again resume their sway. Major-General Beatson proposed and carried out the introduction of exotic plants on a large scale, the results of which are revealed in the continuation of this sketch.

It is not a little remarkable that, except in the general way indicated, almost nothing was known of the vegetation of St Helena before the beginning of the present century. The singular *Pelargonium cotyledonis* was introduced into English gardens as early as 1765, but when Linnæus described it in 1771, he recorded it as a South African plant, though its origin was known in this country. On the homeward route of his first voyage, Cook touched at St Helena and remained a few days; yet the botanists, the two Forsters, either collected very few plants or subsequently lost their collection, for in his report on the botany of the Atlantic Islands,² G. Forster cites only six species from St

¹ Tracts relative to the Island of St Helena, by Major-General A. Beatson. London, 1816.

² *Plantæ Atlanticæ ex insulis Madeira, S. Jacobi, Adscensionis, S. Helenæ et Fayal Reportatæ in Comment. Soc. Gætt., ix. (1787), pp. 13-74.*