

The Trans Nzoia

By R. E. TUGMAN.

LEAVING Eldoret and travelling northward, after some thirty miles, the visitor obtains his first view of one of the most attractive districts in East Africa. From the summit of Matunda Hill a glorious vista is obtained of the surrounding country. The winding course of the River Nzoia, demarcated by the trees on either bank, can be traced in the foreground. Beyond it, undulating downs, a patchwork of cultivation, stretch on the one side to the foothills of Mount Elgon towering in the distance, and on the other, to the Cherangani Hills.

This is the District so aptly named the Trans Nzoia.

Its history as a settled District is a short one, and it is only some seventeen years since the first settlers travelling by ox wagon from Londiani, commenced the development which, except for the period of the war, has never ceased to increase by leaps and bounds. Apart from these few pioneers, it can be truly said that the District is a Post-War one, and its connection with the Great War is strengthened by the fact that the majority of its settlers took up their holdings under the Soldier Settlement Scheme.

In spite of a distance of some 100 miles from railhead and the difficulties of transport, over tracks cut through the bush, these first settlers were quick to realise the potentialities of the soil and the amenities of the climate, and that faith, in spite of periods of depression, has, it is maintained, been amply justified. To-day there is a

Until the building of the Uasin Gishu and Kitale Branches of the Uganda Railway, the marketing of bulk crops such as maize and wheat presented many difficulties, but since the advent of rail transport large strides have been made in cereal cultivation, the yield per acre comparing favourably with any other district in the Colony. Experiments are now being carried out in the growing of sisal and cotton and it has already been proved that tobacco can be successfully produced when marketing conditions return to normal.

It is one of the most promising features of the development of the District that farmers are continually endeavouring to establish fresh sources of profit from the soil, and, with its astounding fertility, it is believed that there are many avenues yet to be explored which may easily open up a still more attractive future to the enterprising farmer. The country has been described by experts as first class pasture land and already dairying is profitably carried on on a small scale. With the enforcement of fencing and dipping regulations and the eradication of tick-borne diseases, this may well prove to take a high place in prominence in the District's future.

To the European settler the Trans Nzoia presents many attractive features. The climate is equable and sunny; the mean temperatures are about 75°F. by day and 60°F. by night. The heat during the day is seldom

population of over one thousand Europeans including women and children, of which nearly 500 adult males are engaged in farming operations. Approximately one hundred thousand acres are under cultivation, of which three-quarters is under maize, and the growing of coffee is already firmly established, some nine thousand acres being devoted to the cultivation of the berry which has brought Kenya into such prominence in the commercial world. In spite of the comparative youth of the District, it now occupies fourth place as a coffee growing area in Kenya, and the success which has attended that cultivation is proved by the satisfactory annual increase in the acreage planted. The slopes of Mount Elgon and the Cherangani Hills are now recognised as eminently suitable for coffee, and the regularity and dependability of the rainfall and the absence of the more serious pests do away with the chief anxieties of the planter. Moreover, the close proximity of native reserves solves the labour problem; in fact, quite often the supply of labour is greater than the demand.

uncomfortable and the coolness of the evenings make it possible to enjoy wood fires. The average annual rainfall over the last six years has been forty-five inches, distributed fairly evenly throughout the year. The months of December to February are, however, usually "dry," and in July and August the heaviest rains are experienced.

As a healthy district, the Trans Nzoia is second to none. The death rate since 1920 has averaged 8.4 per thousand as against 9.39 in South Africa and 12.6 in England. Malaria, as is the case in most parts of Africa, exists, but as development has increased and permanent houses have been erected, so has the prevalence of malaria diminished, and to-day strenuous efforts on the part of the Health Authorities, working in co-operation with the settlers, have resulted in a great improvement in conditions. Children thrive wonderfully in the Trans Nzoia and their appearance is one of its finest advertisements. Infectious diseases are very rare.

As the farming development of the District has proceeded, the establishment of Kitale Township has kept pace, and those responsible for its birth were sensible enough to benefit by the mistakes of other earlier settled districts and, instead of the jumble of corrugated iron atrocities which go to constitute townships in some other parts of the country, Kitale presents a neat, orderly, and sound impression which benefits both the visitor and the resident from the healthy and the aesthetic points of view. The first buildings were only erected some four years ago, but to-day the main street is one to be proud of. The Kitale Hotel is one of the finest buildings in the Highlands, and the newly erected Government School, situated on high ground overlooking the Township, is a typical example of Sir Herbert Baker's much admired art.

There is a small but attractive church near the residential quarter, and the building of a European Hospital is in contemplation. An aerodrome is also in course of preparation, and already visits have been received from aeroplanes.

From a business point of view, Kitale is especially well served. There are two Banks, an excellent general store, several hardware merchants, garages, a Bakery, a Printing Press, a Coffee Curing Works, etc., etc. Further, there are several grain merchants established in the Township for the handling of the maize and wheat produced, and also two Timber Yards at which the timber sawn by mills on Mount Elgon is retailed.

A newly formed Chamber of Commerce deals with commercial problems as they arise.

There are several Doctors, Dentists, and Lawyers resident at Kitale, so the Professions are well represented.

The social side of the District is well looked after. Besides the Kitale Club with its comfortable building and its tennis courts and nine-hole golf course, there are other Clubs in the Cherangani, Mount Elgon, and Kama Koia districts for the convenience of settlers further afield. Games of all kinds are played, and the Trans Nzoia has

an enviable record where sport is concerned. Big Game shooting can still be obtained on the slopes of the Mountain, and the trout fishing under delightful conditions has many devotees.

Kitale is now well served as regards communications. There are four trains per week inwards and outwards; four telegraph and post offices, and a telephone service by means of which it is hoped later to link up the whole district.

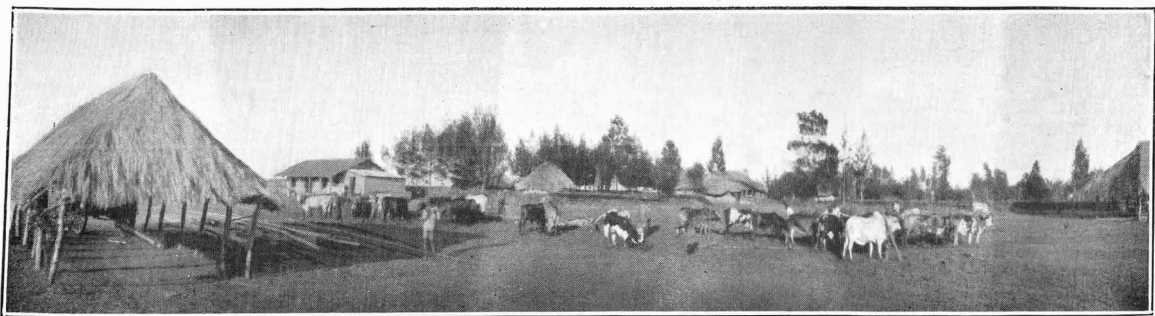
The roads have improved greatly during the last few years, and are now controlled by an Elected District Council which employs its own staff and administers the funds available. Motor transport has to a large extent replaced the slow moving ox, but nevertheless the reliability of the latter is often resorted to in long periods of wet weather.

Politically the Trans Nzoia is very much alive. District Associations discuss current matters of importance together with domestic farming problems, and a Central Organisation in Kitale keeps in touch with similar bodies operating elsewhere. The Member for the District on the Legislative Council, the Honourable Lieutenant Colonel J. G. Kirkwood, C.M.G., D.S.O., has represented the district for the last three and a half years, and to him is in a great measure due the credit for the rapid strides both the District and the Township have made during that period.

In conclusion, in spite of world uncertainty and depression, the Trans Nzoia is still a glade in the forest where peace and tranquillity can be enjoyed under almost ideal climatic conditions. To the farmer with moderate capital a better mode of living can hardly be contemplated. A return on capital invested, a reward for hard work, a comfortable home in which children can be brought up in health and happiness, social intercourse with one's own kind—surely these advantages amply requite for the absence of some of the recreations and amusements obtainable under European conditions.



Residential quarter. Kitale.



Farm scene, Kitale.



Kitale main street.

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