Correspondence.

To the Editor.

LIBERIAN COFFEE PLANTING.

DEAR SIR,—Now that the planting of this product is being taken up rapidly, there has been some discussion as to the distance the plants should be put out. When first introduced it was planted 12 feet apart—a ridiculous distance. In its native habitat there are veritable giants requiring even more space than a circumference of 30 feet. There even are exceptional trees here, and in very rich localities, I can point to certain trees in the island of exceptional growth, both topped and untopped trees, covering much ground and yielding crop at the rate of 20 cwt. per acre! In really good and new soils 6½ feet apart is a fair distance, but 5 feet by 5 feet is a much better distance, and in very poor soils 5 by 4 or 4½ by 4½. But even in the latter soils 5 feet apart is preferable, and the plants should be aided after two years with manure. Where cacao is planted, it is, of course, a sheer waste to allow the intervening ground to yield nothing, and Liberian coffee can well be put out and made to yield up to the 8th or 10th year, when the cacao will then only need ground as orchard trees. Much of the little existing Liberian coffee plots want treatment sadly. Not so much as to manuring as handling and pruning. The tree is best topped at 5½ feet, not lower than 5 feet certainly. The lower primaries die out very slowly; the upper and last set particularly grow out and throw excellent secondary and tertiary branches forming an immense umbrella covering the ground. To attain this the use of the knife for suckers, bad wood, and spindley off-shoots is indispensable. All this has to be attended to after the first bumper crop in 3 to 3½ years has been taken in. Five years hence the best selling tea estates will be those with a reserve of cacao and Liberian together or separately of one-fourth the extent of the estate at least. It will be very desirable that all those who have had some experience with this coffee should occasionally furnish hints and help each other to carry on its cultivation *properly* and *thoroughly* and not in a spasmodic and experimental fashion as hitherto. T. S. T.

P.S.—In 1880 or 1881 a field of 32 acres in the Kalutara district was planted 6 feet by 6 feet. The "sprinkling" or maiden crop was little over 300 bushels of *parchment*, which, at R4·25 per bushel, was a damper. The coffee was rooted up sharp, and never gave its bumper. Six feet apart was even then held as too far, and the soil too cabooky and not fit for coffee. The pulper used was an experimental one of Messrs. Walker & Co., and I believe it has been considerably improved since the enterprise in the Straits began to rise. We must not be beaten, so long as even a small percentage of coffee planters are still in the island.

PLANTS AND NITROGENOUS FOOD.

DEAR SIR,—*Re* your para about the "fertilizing action of electricity," there may be said to be three known sources from which growing vegetation derives its nitrogenous food: (1) what may be called the common source, namely, from decomposing organic matter which yields first ammonia and then, by oxidation, nitric acid: (2) the nitrogen compounds following upon the union of nitrogen and oxygen in the atmosphere under the influence of electricity; (3) the third and last, and most recently discovered source is traceable to the action of certain organisms called "bacteroids" which occupy the root tubercles, found on certain leguminous and other plants and are able to bring about the combination of the elements of the atmosphere. There is no doubt that the prevalence of thunderstorms exerts no little influence on the fertility of our tropical soil. Visitors from the West have wondered how the white sand of cinnamon estates can support a healthy growth of the spicey bush as well as of luxuriant forms of wild vegetation, where the soil is practicably destitute of organic matter which should supply the necessary nitrogenous food. The most reasonable explanation of vegetation flourishing on apparently pure mineral matter is that the soil's supply of combined nitrogen is due to the influence of electric discharges in the atmosphere, since there does not seem to be sufficient evidence for supposing that "bacteroids" are present in such situations as agents for the supply. There is no doubt that the "mild" monsoon, without the usual accompaniment of Jove's artillery, is proportionately bereft of its fertilizing power.—Yours truly,

AGRICULTURIST.

CEYLON TEA AND NEW MARKETS BY AN INDIAN TEA PLANTER.

July 18th.

DEAR SIR,—I have watched your paper with keen interest on tea matters, especially as regard new markets. You are determined to push your teas as they are, and with very good reason too I must admit, as I believe that the bulk of your teas, though not equally strong to the Indian teas, are really more suited to the majority of consumers.

Your teas are not so well suited for mixing, so that practically India has the burden of supporting and "passing off" the 30 to 50 millions of China tea. This little operation equalizes matters; India makes stronger tea, but the whole average of India and Ceylon will be very much alike.

I see that you are divided between Tom-toms and Bonuses. Some of you would "bruit" your teas and pour them through the eyes and ears of your intended customers. Others again would get at the "taps" (so to speak) and by the pressure of a percentage, would turn on the Ceylon, and turn off the China tap.

I myself am only a common or garden planter of India. Perhaps you really do try and make tea to suit all tastes, and I know nothing of it. And my interest in the matter is simply that (the common one) of trying to get one's self heard. Beyond that I, amongst many others, make poor tea. I think that this tea could be sold better if it could be landed where it is wanted instead of where it is not wanted. As a last resource it occurs to me that many of us (of both Continents) have to put up with 6-penny averages; we sell some tea indeed as low as 5 pence. I will whisper it that we have even got the handsome sum of 4 pence at times for tea over which we spent much energy. I don't see many China tea sales, but it is easy to guess that they are not much below us in price. Now we have two alternatives, firstly the one that we have chosen.

And that is to imitate "strong" Indian teas. We emulate the appearance and the characteristics of strong teas, and the result is 4d, 5d, 6d per pound. The second alternative is to emulate China, and supposing that certain teas of China get 6½, 5½, 4½ pence per pound, we might I think make the same teas and get no lower prices that we do now.

But this change in tactics would get our foot into America and other new markets.

Q. Would America take imitation China tea?

A. Yes; at a smaller price per pound.

But is it not reasonable to suppose that we could and would improve on the China tea and let the consumers have it at the same price as they now pay.