

To the objection which some hold that in the lowcountry there is no depth of soil, and that the estates will soon be worn out, I have only to put forward the argument that Ceylon planters have proved themselves too clear-headed and business-like to neglect the obvious remedy of manure which, when suitably applied, will generally make up for what the soil lacks in depth or richness.

I take no objection to the clearing up and felling of the few reserve acres belonging to estates already in cultivation, but to the buying and felling of large tracts of Crown forest or native chena land for the purpose of planting tea. (Since penning the above I have seen the Report of the Kelani Valley Railway Commission, and the statement there made of the immense increase of yield expected in 3 years' time, which lends additional force to my argument.)

Another fatal practice is that of hungering after large profits by coarse plucking and large yields with low prices; in truth an unwise short-sighted policy! It is this hunger after speedy fortunes that is helping to hurry the market down, down, down, and losing for Ceylon her once fair name for superiority. How much better will it not be in the long run for tea planters to pluck good medium leaf (not necessarily fine leaf) and get good prices even though at first smaller profits! And though smaller, are they not likely to be more permanent, or is it even a fact that they are smaller?, for the difference in price between good and poor liquoring teas is now probably large enough to counteract the former advantage of "quantity." It is this inferior stuff, with 'sooty-sack' leaf and 'posts-and-rails' which is undoing us and may eventually prove our ruin.

A great deal of energy (with which I am in sympathy) is now being expended in gaining new markets in North America and elsewhere; but no amount of new markets will compensate for the evil done by selling rubbishy tea, and it is the superior article which will be the most likely to capture them. The enemy is at the door, and it behoves planters to set their houses in order and prepare for the fight, the way to commence which is to forswear coarse plucking and the making of common teas.

I had intended to add a note upon the vexed question of overproduction, but as my epistle is long enough already, I will close; though perhaps I may make that the subject of a future letter.—I am, sir, yours faithfully, OUDEIS.

AN INDIAN TEA PLANTER ON "NEW MARKETS FOR TEA."

DEAR SIR,—Regarding the advisability of making tea to suit new markets, up to now I have seen this policy advocated only by "Siward," by myself, and by the writer of the article on page 744 of *Tropical Agriculturist* of May 1st, 1894, and he states that the planters "must pander to the public taste." I don't like the word "pander" as it has usually an unfavourable significance. Is there anything derogatory in suiting the public taste? The whole cry now is that Indian teas are "too" bitter and strong; but the slightest reference to past records, such as the *Indian Tea Cyclopædia* of 1881, will prove that Indian tea has become so from the strong pressure exerted by our "market" to obtain the maximum of strength. And the result is that our medium teas go down on their own merits, our poor teas and our rivals are supported by our strong tea. Our best teas go for very moderate prices considering their status; they would obtain more favour if taken for consumption pure, i.e., if made

fit for it. There may be many ways of getting our teas better liked—which alone would increase the consumption? One method is simply *maturing* the tea by careful keeping. If every estate could be made to keep *one per cent* of its tea for one year, and this matured tea could be bulked (in several grades and qualities and prices) and offered to the consumer, I have no doubt that such tea would rapidly gain favour and get good prices and lead to an increase of consumption. There would be no adverse criticism as to bitterness, in fact it would come as a surprise to the consumer. This maturing is done by circumstances, that is to say the delay in distributing the crop; but once it leaves our hands, no special care is taken to keep it airtight.

So, again, one way of testing the possibility of making tea to suit any market would be to induce each estate to make one per cent of its crop on samples supplied. One per cent even if sold at low rates would affect no particular estate very grievously, but the mass of tea would be sufficient to test the scheme.

In imitating any particular sample one most important fact is overlooked; it is that the experimenter attempts to make "OLD TEA," and failing to do so throws up the sponge. You get a sample made in China and it is probably 5 or 6 months old by the time you get it; it has been opened and closed several times, and yet one expects to make a similar tea. I very much doubt the possibility of getting the peculiarities of *old tea* into newly-made tea. I have some Orange Pekoe three years old, and I would defy any one to imitate it. So either we must wire to China and get samples posted with the utmost despatch, or we must taste our imitations several months after making, and try and recollect the flavour and taste, &c., of the sample which we try to copy. Your Associations talk seriously over the various schemes laid before them as to the conquering of New Markets, but I see that the scheme of making tea to suit public taste has not as yet been discussed by any public body. I believe that many planters hold the views given above and they should now declare themselves. Any leading planter who will give his opinion with the force of his *own name* might start the movement. And if sufficient force is brought to bear, it might be taken up by the Associations.

We have to fight China, Japan, Java, and we must combine to do so. No amount of anonymous writing will get anything done.

It looks ominous that so far only the *Indian Planters' Gazette*, "*The Planter*" and myself in your columns have advocated the making of tea with the deliberate intent of suiting the consumer. I argue from this that Ceylon takes no interest in the matter.

But what guide have you that your present style of tea is the best suited to anyone out of the market, and out of the mixing, blending and hocus-pocus business. If you are convinced that you cannot change with benefit to yourselves you will naturally go on with booming and boasting, as that seems to be your last resource. But "Siward" said let us ignore small men and small things—apparently you think that there is no greater measure than handing round tea in cups, and putting up big posters with pretty pictures on them. At home those who know cry out at the harm done by our teas. The increase of lunacy in Ireland is attributed to our teas; America has refused our teas for many years. What need to say mere except that where China tea can be got good it is the national beverage; witness China and Russia.

