

ment is certain, and the price will not for years go below R6 per bushel and most probably for ten years it will average R10 per bushel. With the failure of Arabian coffee came the cultivation of cinchona, along with tea, in a small way and as an experiment, and to many then a very doubtful one. It is now the staple product, but though the plant is not troubled with many enemies, the profits from its cultivation is lessening, and before another five years are over further extension will almost cease. The opening of new markets will some years hence meet the excessive supply. The benefit in a small way will be for the future proprietors, but as for the profits in future being as much as it is even now, that is a very doubtful matter. Ceylon is not the only tea-yielding country. When Arabian coffee failed the cry was: "Serve the planters right, why did they put all their money into one product." It was then sheets and sheets of coffee wherever you went in the Central Province chiefly. It is now "sheets and sheets" of tea in several provinces. With Exchange improving even slightly some day, scarce Tamil labour costing an advance of about R30 per head and the price of tea gently dropping what will be the profit is a sum that can be easily worked out. The only remedy against small profits is planting other products in places where it is feasible. Why have cardamoms been neglected? At a much smaller rate per lb. than they now fetches, they pay. Then again the market for croton has not been over-supplied. Those who have the means would do well to open in suitable soil and climate with the certainty of a very fair profit for years to come both Cacao and Liberian Coffee or even Cacao, Arcanuts and Coconuts at once. Liberian Coffee begins to yield early enough and the first three years' yield if it does not leave a margin of profit will leave amply to cover the cost of its cultivation and of Cacao together leaving the property unencumbered and worth at least R400 to R600 per acre. Tea Companies are plentiful now and generally provide in their Articles of Association for the cultivation of other products, but very few of these Companies have as yet ventured to open special estates or even portions of existing estates with other products. The Ceylon Tea Plantations Company has set a good example in opening a large property of Coconuts and Liberian Coffee and clearings of other products. By so doing it will weather any storm that may come and not as the late Ceylon Company, Limited, did not, with its auxiliary of sugar estates, *not in Ceylon* but in a land miles away! I am not trying to increase the alarm about tea. It will hold out for a long time yet; but the profit will be far from what it has been and its extended cultivation must not only be stopped, but many acres of it abandoned as yielding too little per acre to make it pay and as only increasing the bulk to be exported. Many who started with this cultivation arrived at a certain income from a certain acreage. Low prices reduced the possibility of this income and to secure it, the acreage is being extended, and matters are getting from bad to worse by thus adding one *chief item* contributing to reduced prices. Surely many have the means to look about and try other products and that *promptly* on their own properties besides acquiring other places singly or in company. As matters stand now an acre of an estate of Cacao, Liberian Coffee and general products is likely to yield as much profit as 3 to 4 acres of average tea.

The move to deter Government from selling land is a foolish one. Restriction of Government land sales will seriously injure the advancement of the cultivation of other products, which Ceylon is beginning to need very much now. The condition

might be made that such lands are not to be planted with tea. There is a stretch of land from the Western sea coast to the Central mountain range available for other products; but with such revenue officers and Government Agents and more especially Assistant Agents as we have, the sales of thousands of acres of small blocks of Government land lying in and between lands belonging to private parties cannot be easily and promptly effected for the benefit of all. The prompt appointment of Crown Land Commissioners is much needed and these Assistant Agents must be relieved of much of their present work and be employed otherwise in the police and other departments. They are, as a rule, stumbling blocks in the way of intended cultivation of any products. The moment Ceylon's present export of Cocoa is quadrupled and 250,000 cwt. of Liberian Coffee finds its way out, then and there alone will then be some sound prosperity such as Ceylon had before, but has never had in the best days of the tea enterprise.

ADIDAH.

THE EXTENDED CULTIVATION OF TEA: A WARNING.

SIR,—I regret to see that still many acres of Crown Forest and chena land are every year being bought for the extended cultivation of tea, in the face of falling prices and the likelihood of supply soon exceeding demand; and this apparent recklessness and short sightedness is due primarily to the following cause.

Planters, be they proprietors or superintendents, residing on high elevation estates, opine that their estates by reason of the better flavour and higher prices obtained, will be able to survive any period of depression longer than those of low elevation or which have less advantage in soil. In other words that the latter in any coming crisis will go to the wall first, leaving, after the horizon has cleared, a freefield to the former as survivors. And on the reverse side of this picture are the low-country planters, who imagine it is they who have the advantage, and stake their hope in their superior yield and consequent less cost of production, to pull them through the coming crisis. Each party, though not desirous of seeing the other go under, yet are confident in their superior position.

So this reckless and fatal game continues. As land is offered possessing in the purchasers' eyes some peculiar advantages for tea cultivation, it is greedily seized and opened in feverish haste, on the off chance that these presumed advantages will enable them to hold their own in the coming trial of strength, and rising out of the scramble victors, like lusty cocks to flap their wings and crow defiance to the world. But I would warn them against hugging this delusion to their breast, lest one day they wake to find they have been nourishing a serpent and it has bitten them. And each party would do well to weigh all facts fairly in the balance, before they make themselves quite sure of the truth of their deductions.

Leaving out of account those estates which by their published dividends prove themselves really far and away above the ruck, let us compare say the Dimabula estates with those in the Kelani Valley. As far as the general public can surmise from published accounts and brokers' statistics, the advantage is neither with one nor the other: for every high country estate which shows a big dividend, a low country one can be put against it with one equal. The former have good prices with a yield of about 400 to 450 lb. per acre, and also a dearer transport than the latter, which have lower prices but a yield of 500 to 600 lb. per acre.

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.