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978-1-108-04624-4 - The Tea Industry in India: A Review of Finance and Labour, and a Guide for Capitalists and Assistants

Samuel Baildon

Excerpt

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THE TEA INDUSTRY IN INDIA.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE *raison d'être* of any book ought to be that there is room for it, and also that it is needed. It is in such a belief that I have again ventured to seek the patronage of those interested in the Indian tea industry; and I may say that the belief rested, in the first place, on the representation of a firm of London tea-brokers, that such a book as I have now written would be of use at the present time. Thinking over the remarks made in this regard, I found that a wide field was open to me—one that, so far as I was aware, had not been opened up, and which, from the Indian side, it seemed to me, could not very well be opened.

I thought, also, that if I could combine with (what I hope is) an impartial view of the Indian tea industry, information useful for the guidance of capitalists and young men wishing to become tea-planters, I should be supplying a want which I well knew existed. By the

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kindness of Messrs. W. and R. Chambers, I am allowed to state, that various inquiries from different parts of the United Kingdom have been addressed to them on the subject of appointments, climate, openings for capital, &c., after the appearance in their *Journal* of short sketches of life in the Indian tea districts: which inquiries have been handed to me for reply. I have therefore striven to meet this want.

In reviewing my previous little work—*Tea in Assam*—the Editor of the Calcutta daily *Statesman* was kind enough to characterize it as “interesting.” In my present endeavour I have remembered this, and have tried again to deserve such commendation. Class works are necessarily somewhat heavy in their reading: and knowing this, I have sought to make the subject as entertaining as was possible. This will explain the insertion of the chapters, “The Planter on Leave,” and “The Social Phase of Tea-drinking.” There is a great deal that is not cheerful in a tea-planter’s life; and I have consequently thought that a proven picture of the goal to which, I suppose, all men look—*i.e.* leave of absence—would perhaps act as a mental tonic to those that required one, and reconcile existing unpleasantnesses by a cheerful hope for the future.

Since returning to England, some three years ago, I have continued my connexion with Indian tea. I think I may say, that in this time, and by the aid of knowledge acquired in the Indian districts, I have been enabled to see some points, essential to the successful continuance of the industry, in a clearer light than could

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be obtained by men wholly resident in India, either through the medium of the press, or private correspondence. Planters naturally side with planters, agents with agents, and owners with owners, when anything is wrong ; each section believes in its own infallibility, and in the error of the others ; and until they pass quite out from either of the cliques mentioned, they must continue to look upon most questions in a false light. I have found that many matters between the growers of tea and its consignees here, need to be reconciled. Also, that from want of a clearer knowledge of factory management and agriculture, planters have been often unjustly treated by Calcutta agents and London boards. Equally, I have been compelled to believe, that for lack of information, or consideration for the frequently secondary position held by agents in India, planters did not think quite as charitably as they might of their employers, who were supposed sometimes to *dik* the lives of managers, until existence—more particularly under the well-known ethereal conditions of life in the Mofussil—was not worth having. It is scarcely necessary to say, that—especially in the present almost critical state of the Indian tea industry—nothing could be more detrimental to the common interest, than diverse, irreconcilable opinions, which must inevitably result in heartburnings, bickerings, and discord. It is surely a need of the greatest magnitude, that there should be perfect union and accord between the entire staff of each interest ; because, if the owners and the agents, or the agents and the planters, persist in pulling in different

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directions, the interest must, as a natural sequence, suffer, or, more probably, fail altogether. I have endeavoured to show the individual interests at stake, and the expectations of each section of the management. In seeking to explain, and thereby remove, some of the obstacles to a more harmonious working, I have never lost sight of the fact that, however willing he might be, it was absolutely impossible for any one writer to make suggestions for the better management of an industry of the enormous extent of that of tea, and for him to be right upon every point. No one man could so thoroughly and completely grasp the situation; and I am far from wishing to set myself up as a re-organiser of what has been previously well organised by men far more capable than myself. Where a need of alteration has arisen, so far as I can see, it is through a change having occurred in the original order of things, when the organisation was equal to the occasion; but as in some cases, that need does not seem to have been altogether recognised, I have taken it upon myself, to the best of my ability, to point it out.

The labour question being one of, if not the most important considerations in some districts—and these the largest—I have tried to review the matter in its entirety, showing the errors which exist, and a means of remedying them. While I do not expect an unqualified acceptance of my suggestions, I certainly hope that some definite action may result from them.

In endeavouring to prove that in India, and not

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China, the tea-plant has its home, I know I have written matter which, in itself, cannot result in any *tangible* good to the Indian tea industry. But the present age is essentially one of discovery in research ; and if India can be proved—as I hope I have proved it—to be the home of the tea-plant, Indian planters will have a strong base-point on which to reasonably establish their assertion as to the superiority of their produce. And I think I shall not be insinuating weakness, if I say that the industry on which I write needs all that can be said in its favour. It is as yet only a child, striving against the Chinese giant ; but, fortunately, the natural order of things is for the giants to die before the vigorous children.

There will be found in the following pages, I think I may say necessarily, a good deal of a personal pronoun of the first person singular. Its use has been avoided wherever possible, but there is plenty of it remaining, nevertheless. I mention this, lest any reader should think I am not aware of the fact.

In the course of my work I have felt that the extent of the subject written upon was considerable ; but no point has been advanced without careful consideration. I therefore hope that my work will result in the establishment of a better understanding between parties concerned in the tea industry, where it can be established, and that the suggestions made will, in some instances at all events, prove serviceable.

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CHAPTER II.

INDIA THE HOME OF THE TEA-PLANT.

DOUBTS have been expressed in the last few years as to the accuracy of the general belief that the tea-plant had its home in China.

It must be admitted to be rather late in the day now to advance theories as to the nativity of a plant whose cultivation has been carried on for centuries; at the same time there will be nothing lost by looking into such records as exist, to see what information can be obtained on the subject.

Theorists are always eminently convincing to themselves; so in the present case, I know one individual who feels quite sure—no matter how general or ancient be the belief to the contrary—that India is the natural home of the tea-plant.

Ball, in his exhaustive and valuable work, *The Cultivation and Manufacture of Tea*, says (p. 15), “It may be here proper to remark that on the authorities of certain Japanese authors, a doubt has been raised by the Dr. Von Siebold, an intelligent botanist some years resident

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in Japan, as to the tea-plant being indigenous in China. All are agreed that it is of exotic growth in Japan, and was introduced into that country from China in the sixth century, agreeably to Kaempfer, or the ninth century (which seems more probable), according to Von Siebold."

The early history of the tea-plant is surrounded by the cloudy legends and mythological narratives of the imaginative Chinese. One writer says, "The origin of the use of tea, as collected from the works of the Chinese, is traced to the fabulous period of their history. . . . The earliest authentic account of tea, if anything so obscure and vague can be considered authentic, is contained in the *She King*, one of the classical works of high antiquity and veneration amongst the Chinese, and compiled by their renowned philosopher and moralist, Confucius. . . . In this treatise (*Kuen Fang Pu*), in the article "The Ancient History of Tea," an absurd story is related of the discovery of this tree in the Tsin dynasty. In the reign of Yuen Ty, in the dynasty of Tsin, an old woman was accustomed to proceed every morning at day-break to the market-place, carrying a small cup of tea in the palm of her hand. The people bought it eagerly; and yet from the break of day to the close of evening, the cup was never exhausted. The money received, she distributed to the orphan and the needy beggar frequenting the highways. The people seized and confined her in prison. At night she flew through the prison window with her little vase in her hand."

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Another (legendary) version of the origin of the tea-plant, is, that in or about the year of grace 510, an Indian prince and religious devotee named Dharma, third son of King Kosjusva, imposed upon himself, in his wanderings, the rather inconvenient penance of doing without sleep. The little Chinese narrative says that the Indian gentleman (who must have differed vastly from his countrymen of the present day), got on very comfortably for some years; until all at once he gave up, and had forty winks on a mountain-side. Upon awakening, Dharma was so grieved to find that he could not move about for years without going to sleep, that he pulled out his eye-lashes and flung them on the ground. Coming round that way later on, he found the offending lashes had grown into bushes, such as he had never before seen; and his long ignorance of sleep not having taken all the curiosity out of him, he nibbled the leaves, and found them possessed of an eye-opening tendency. He related the discovery to his friends and neighbours, and the tea-plant was forthwith taken in hand.

This, the most generally accepted indication of the first notice of tea in China—vague and legendary, I admit, but nothing more accurate is obtainable—uses the name of Dharma as the promoter or creator of the tea-plant. The actual records speak positively of such a man, saying he was a native of India, probably a Fakir, and that he crossed to Japan. Kaempfer states upon the authority of the Japanese chronicles, that tea was introduced into that country by a prince of the name of Dharma.

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It will be advancing no theory to say that many mythological legends are based upon actual occurrences. In this year of enlightenment, 1881, we do not, of course, believe that a man named Dharma—especially an Indian—lived for years without sleeping, any more than we do that the tea-plant came out of his head; but it is possible, and even very probable, that the plant was brought to the notice of the Chinese by Dharma, just as it was to that of the Japanese by the same person. And when the ancient history of China is studied, one is quite prepared to find that a matter of past discovery or introduction has been enshrouded in a fanciful record verging upon, if not actually clothed in, the allegorical, while at the same time indicating the actual. Yet, do what we will, we are, of course, guided by conjecture; by reason of which, at this late date, it is difficult either to prove or deny the existence of the tea-plant in China anterior to, or through the agency of Dharma.

Briefly, the matter stands thus. The most feasible of the Chinese *legends* on the subject, makes the existence of the tea-plant in China to have originated with Dharma, who came from India in A.D. 510. The Chinese *chronicles* tell of such a visitor during the reign of Vũ Ty, A.D. 543, stating that he came from India and crossed to Japan. The Japanese chronicles record the visit, and say Dharma introduced the tea-plant to that country. The Chinese and Japanese versions of the first phases of tea in their respective countries are thus attributed to a native of India. If we enter into the

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conjectural domain of “perhaps,” there will scarcely be a limit to surpassing whatever we may advance. I will therefore venture only one “perhaps,” and I feel quite sorry to do even that, having no doubt that Dharma was a very respectable individual, when doing the tea-plant business in China, at the time that England was divided into several kingdoms.

My one “perhaps” is this; and I think all who understand the Indian character at the present time will admit that it is not a far-fetched one. Perhaps Dharma, finding he was introducing to the Chinese an unknown plant, possessing peculiar properties, accounted for its existence in true Oriental fashion in a way not lowering to his own importance in the eyes of a superstitious people.

Mr. Ball says (p. 17), “Recent discoveries in Assam also seem to justify the assumption, if nothing to the contrary be known, that it (tea) has spontaneously extended its growth along a continuous and almost uninterrupted mountainous range, but of moderate altitude, nearly from the great river the Yang-ese-Kiang, to the countries flanking the south-western frontier of China, where this range falls in with, or, agreeably with the opinion of a well-informed and scientific author, Dr. Royle, forms a continuation of the Himalayan range. But in those countries, as in every part of China, if found in the plains or in the vicinity of habitations and cultivated grounds, it may be fairly assumed that it was brought and propagated there by the agency and industry of man.”