

HOW TEA CAME TO CEYLON

By D.M. Forrest

(Extract from a *Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea* – Published 1967)

"Wherever tea trees grow, the place, whether a mountain or a valley, is sacred."

'DRINKING OF TEA: RULES OF HEALTH'

Japanese, Twelfth Century

Sooner or later some crew-cut scholar, burrowing away in the computerized library of a Middle West University, will devote a few years to sorting out the legends which surround the origins of tea, and publish the results in the form of a heavyweight thesis. Pending these much-needed excavations, however, the cause of accuracy and common sense would be well served if everyone writing about the tea plant were content to state simply that *Camellia sinensis* was cultivated, and the infusion of its leaves enjoyed, throughout the Chinese Empire a very long time ago.

The present writer, at any rate, is quite happy to take up the story as recently as 1834. This was in fact tea's great moment of destiny, when the first step was taken by which it ceased to be the exclusively 'China drink' welcomed to England by Samuel Pepys about 170 years before. The moment, in other words, when, with the Manchu Empire crumbling and the East India Company's monopoly at an end, the time had come to make a completely fresh start in supplying the people of the West with tea.

The period was propitious. In the seething, proliferating cities and towns of the new industrial era, there was an almost explosive demand for a cheap and stimulating drink which would offer the whole family an alternative to the stupefying tyranny of beer. Tea until then had been on the whole genteel — the only article (together with a few sweets for the children) which Miss Matty, after the crash of the Town & County Bank, could without derogation offer for sale by retail to the ladies of Cranford. Now the teapot stood ready on every kitchen hob; it was the natural medium for modest hospitality ('Won't you take a cup of tea, my dear?'); and of course a glorious steaming weapon in the armoury of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association!

Whether or not Lord William Bentinck had these considerations in mind on 24 January 1834 when he signed his famous Minute calling for a Committee to investigate the possibilities of growing tea in India, he clearly believed he was on a rising market. Almost directly the Committee had been set up, its first Secretary, G. J. Gordon, was dispatched to China to seek tea seeds and plants, and was succeeded by the famous Dr Wallich, of the Botanic Gardens, Calcutta.

There was a political, as well as a commercial, aim behind Lord William's initiative. The Province of Assam, nearest region of India to the Chinese tea districts, was then 'a wild land,

misgoverned and scantily populated'. Government wanted it to be placed on a settled, prosperous footing and was prepared to offer liberal terms to anyone prepared to cultivate its waste spaces; note too that this invitation was extended to Indians from other Provinces and not merely to Europeans.

The broad result of all this was that tea, from being an immemorial smallholder's crop in China and (marginally) in adjoining countries, was transformed within a decade or two into being the great plantation crop of British India. That word 'plantation' is crucial. Virtually from the start the objective was what we now call 'factory farming'.

True, there was one brief rush up a blind alley. Though the world talks universally of a tea 'bush', *Camellia sinensis* in its natural state is a tall and quite sturdy forest tree, growing in some instances to over 30 ft in height — it can in fact be seen doing so on a number of tea



estates so that the free-flowering branches may supply the planter with his seed (*Plate 17b*). It is only subdued into a bush by having its head chopped off to suit the convenience of the rather small-statured tea-plucking ladies — waist high for them is round about 3 ft 4 in.

Now this tree and its somewhat complicated cousinhood are native to the forests of South-East Asia over a very wide area, as Kingdon Ward and many other botanical explorers have shown. Already some ten years before the Committee held its first meeting, reports had come in of wild tea growing in Assam itself, though Wallich was skeptical about specimens sent down to him — he thought

they were more probably some other species of camellia. Mainly for this reason, the claim to be the first discoverer of Assam indigenous tea was hotly contested between C. A. Bruce,

who with his brother Robert provided these early exhibits (1825), and Lt. Andrew Charlton of the Assam Light Infantry, who wrote his first memorandum on tea trees found near Sadiyah in 1831, and finally convinced the Committee with specimens submitted towards the end of 1834. Meanwhile, as the result of a circular sent to local officials in March of that year, the whole subject was in effervescence; district commissioners were asked for news of any 'tea tracts', as they were called, and soon reports came flooding in.

So numerous were these 'tracts' that there were not lacking advocates for a system of burning off (or hacking down) the jungle in such localities and letting only the tea grow up again. But the blind alley quickly closed, and the first tea actually manufactured in India was produced on the plantation system. This was from bushes which had started life as forest seedlings but had been transplanted into a nursery set up for the reception of China plants. It must be added that it is still far from clear whether and to what extent these tea tracts represented completely wild tea or were the remains of ancient cultivation by the people of Assam, to whom the virtues of the plant had been known from a very early period.

And what of G. J. Gordon and his China jat seeds and seedlings so arduously collected and dispatched to Calcutta? The neck-and-neck competition between China jat and Assam jat provides an exciting phase of tea's history. Scientific opinion was much divided — Wallich led the pro-Assam party, but one of his most forceful technical colleagues, Assistant-Surgeon Griffith, was in the opposite camp. Gordon's first consignments arrived at the very moment when the exploration of Assam wild tea was at its height, and the result was that he was quickly recalled. Nevertheless, he had already (as we say) 'started something', and no fewer than 42,000 plants grown from his seeds were distributed in Assam, the sub-Himalaya region and in South India.

Many of them died, and attention was switched to the Assam jat; nevertheless more China seeds and plants continued to arrive — in 1841 William Prinsep reports some 7,000 China plants 'just received'. In at least one case, Dr C. R. Harler informs us:

“In order to work up or reclaim the Assam plant as rapidly as possible, wild and China tea were interplanted. This led happily to the death of both varieties. Subsequent experience showed that neither the China plant nor the China hybrid does as well in North-East India as the indigenous plant.”

Assam *jat* ... China *jat*... It is high time that the non-technical reader should be given some explanation of such terms as these, which are part of the very fabric of the tea industry; indeed we have not yet formally introduced *Camellia sinensis* itself.

For myself, I find this name (which in its full botanical form is *Camellia sinensis* (L) O. Kuntze) more than a little vexatious. Tea is a camellia, agreed; but up till as recently as 1950 the name of the plant had always incorporated, through all vicissitudes, the word *thea* - Tea — used in the first, though not the second, volume of Linnaeus' '*Species Plantarum*' (1753). *Camellia thea* ... *Camellia theifera*. ... *Thea sinensis*... nothing to be said against any of these. Now,

only one genus is recognised, and for technical reasons which need not concern us here*, the 6th Botanical Congress at Amsterdam (1933) finally robbed the tea plant of its distinctive title, and decreed that the Tea *Camellia* should be the Chinese *Camellia* and nothing more!

* *The full story is told in Robert Sealy, A Revision of the Species Camellia, (London, Royal Horticultural Society, 1958).*

Bidding the botanists a rather chilly farewell, we can now turn to the breeder of tea plants and the terms that are familiar to him. Dr Harler gives a clear account:

'The planter recognises three varieties, China, Assam, and Indo-China, and hybrids between all three. Within the Assam variety, five types are recognised, the light- and the dark-leaved Assam, the Manipuri, the Burma and the Lushai. The Indo-China variety is sometimes referred to as the Cambodian or Southern form. ... The Planter does not speak of varieties, types, races, agrotypes, ecotypes ... he uses the vague term *jat* (Hind. — caste) for any group, though agrotype might be a better term. Tea seed is sold under the name of the estate on which it is grown, and this is also spoken of as the *jat* of the seed, but here the name has no botanical significance unless the true *jat* or agrotype is linked with it.'

Harler goes on to sketch the characteristics of the various *jats* — the China, with its many stems and its small, frost-resistant leaves; the Indo-China, single-stemmed, its leaves smooth and slightly serrated, a likely contributor of 'quality' to the high-grown Ceylons; and the five Assam *jats*, among which he gives the palm to the Manipuri and the Assam dark-leaved.

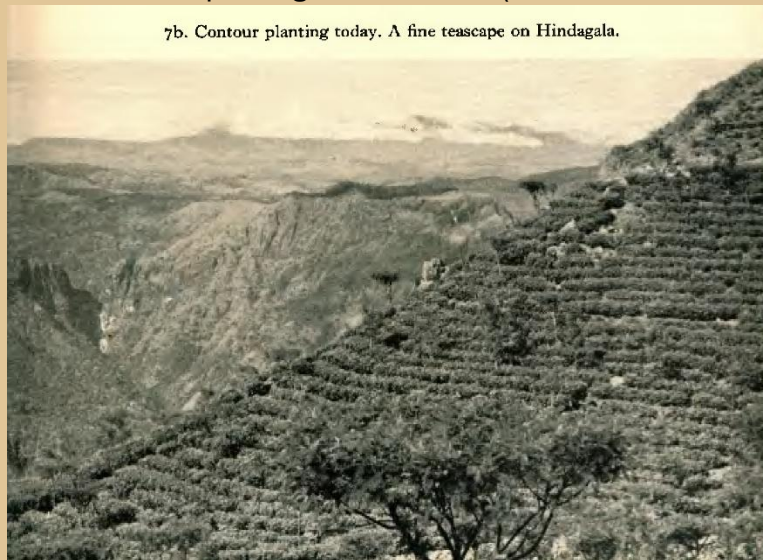
The most unobservant wanderer through the average Ceylon tea estate can detect these varied influences among the hybrids which surround him, and which can produce enormous and disconcerting variation in bush yields in a single field*.

* *Dr C.P. Cohen Stuart in his A Basis for Tea Selection (Indonesia, Buitenzorg Research Station, 1919) is scathing about the early methods of choosing seed both in India and Ceylon, and describes the latter as 'an awful medley of tea hybrids'.*

In particular, he will note the persistence of the China *jat*. Most theorists take a poor view of this tough little northerner, so much better suited to resisting the winter frosts of China, the Himalayan foothills and the Caucasus, than providing the rich yields which the climate and soil of Ceylon seem designed to encourage. Yet it has its friends. 'A hardy warrior,' said one planter, gazing down at a wind-pinched denizen of one of his bleaker fields and brushing his hand across its meagre flush, 'not at all to be sniffed at — or rather, its liquor should be sniffed at — so delightful on the nose!'

It is not the intention to pursue here the tremendous story of the tea industry of India; this has been done by various hands, and currently, in magisterial form, by Sir Percival Griffiths. We would only note two points vital to Ceylon's own story: The 'factory farming' aspect of the enterprise, already referred to, and the long-lived nature of *Camellia sinensis*, as revealed in plantation conditions.

Setting out a 'field' of tea is not quite like any other agricultural operation in the world. It is an *oeuvre de longue haleine*, as French writers say about their wordier theses; you are planting neither a wood, nor an orchard, nor a shrubbery, yet the result shares the nature of all three, and its life is immeasurable. The jungle tree puts down its great root and rears its sturdy stem; the rows sweep along the contours (or should do! — 7b) as neatly as young apple trees in



Kent; and when time and the pruners have done their work the picture is nearer to laurels *en masse* than to any other known vegetation.

And once the tea bush has come into bearing, it remains your master and your slave for almost as long as you choose to let it (and there a danger lurks!). Unlike coffee or cocoa, for example, it is not just a question of waiting for an annual crop to ripen and to be gathered in one furious operation,

because of course what you are essentially doing to the tea bush is to keep pruning it lightly every few days year in year out (as well as drastically every so often) and converting the 'prunings' into the hard black aromatic substance known to the world as tea. The bush may become diseased or die, and have to be replaced, or a whole field may be replanted from time to time, at great expense, with a higher-yielding strain, but the 'garden' (India) or 'estate' (Ceylon) remains substantially changeless; on that particular portion of the earth's surface, tea has dug itself in. The rigidity which this long-lived nature of the tea plant tends to impose on the economy of any country dependent largely upon it, such as Ceylon, is something to be borne in mind by every reader of this book. It has been estimated that despite all 'supplying' and replanting, up to 70 per cent of the tea bushes now being plucked in Ceylon are (for better or worse!) those put out by the pioneers before 1885.

How long before did it all start? A good deal earlier even than the year 1867, which for reasons which will be fully revealed in the next chapter, has been chosen as marking the commencement of *A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea*.

We can safely ignore the various references to indigenous 'tea' growing in various parts of the island back in Dutch and even Portuguese times, since it is 99 per cent certain that whatever leaf may have been infused, the result was some sort of tisane and not tea. On the other hand, it would be surprising if some traveled man did not bring back to Ceylon a specimen of the interesting and useful *Camellia sinensis* and try it in his back yard — after all, that is the way the vicarage gardens of England became so strangely populated with yuccas and monkey puzzles and pampas grass in the nineteenth century! By a happy chance, we know of at least one such incident in long-ago Ceylon. It was during 1816 that the Rev. Mr.

Ringletaube wrote to the Rev. James Richards, a newly arrived missionary who was then trying to settle in the island:

“It would go a great way with Government to sanction your stay in Ceylon if you could point out a plan of great national import. An idea has struck me. In the garden of Mr. Cripp, Master Attendant at Colombo, I am told grows the TEA PLANT. Were you to offer that you would introduce the culture of this most valuable PLANT in Ceylon, somewhere near Colombo (for instance, at Caltura where Government has a piece of ground well fitted, which formerly belonged to my kind host, Mr. Moyard) perhaps the offer would take.”*

**Communicated by Mr Wykeham Dulling. `Mr Cripp', by the way, was in fact Mr Chrisp, friend and predecessor of James Steuart, the 'father' of the Colombo agency house system.*

Whether the Master Attendant really had an authentic tea bush in his garden and whether Mr. Ringletaube's suggestion was followed up we are unlikely ever to know, but there may be a link between this story and the alleged existence of tea bushes in Ceylon's former botanic gardens at Kalutara. In any case, a tenuous chance of putting Ceylon twenty years ahead of Assam seems to have been missed.

For solid tea-planting news from the island, we have to wait those twenty years, but not much more! In December 1839, tea became part of the history of the famous Royal Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya, near Kandy. It was this great foundation (focus until the coming of the Tea Research Institute of all progressive ideas about the cultivation of tea) that received and sowed the first authenticated batch of tea seeds to reach Ceylon. The story has often been told how some of the resultant young bushes were sent, rather inexplicably, to Nuwara Eliya — at that time known only as a health resort — and planted out on the land of the Chief Justice, Sir Anthony Oliphant. The true sequence of events can, however, be pieced together from two sources, and though still incomplete is at least understandable. The first is the Peradeniya Administrative Report for 1886 by Dr. H. Trimen, the then Director. Remarking that anything about tea, 'which has now stepped into the first rank of our exports', had become of interest, he goes on as follows:

“This is the proper place to put on record the facts with regard to the first introduction of Assam tea into this Colony. In December 1839, Dr. Wallich, the eminent Indian botanist, at that time at the head of the Calcutta Botanic Gardens, sent to Peradeniya seeds of the then recently discovered "Indigenous Assam Tea"; and these were followed in February 1840, by 205 plants. In May, the then Superintendent at Peradeniya, Mr. Normansell, sent several plants to Nuwara Eliya, and a man was supplied to look after them. This was after a representation to Government that tea was likely to prove a "new and profitable speculation" and a "valuable source of revenue". Again, in April 1842, another installment of Assam plants was received from Dr. Wallich, and in October some of these were sent to Mr. Mooyart at Nuwara Eliya, with directions for cultivating them.

“I had often wondered what became of these, and by accident in London I met the gentleman to whose care they were committed, the Rev. E. F. Gepp, at that time tutor to the son of Sir A. Oliphant, Chief Justice of Ceylon. He informed me that in October 1842, he received the plants from Mr. Mooyart at Nuwara Eliya, about thirty in number, and cleared a piece of jungle

for them on Sir Anthony's land there; they were doing well when he left the Island a few years after. Mr. Gepp thinks the ground was somewhere in the neighborhood of the present Queen's Cottage, and it will be worth a search to discover whether some of the plants may not be still in existence."

So here we have quite a lot about the how of the Nuwara Eliya venture, if not the why. Fortunately, Trimen adds a footnote which directs us to our second witness: "Since writing the above I find that Mr. Gepp communicated these facts in a letter to the London Times, dated August 19. He is however mistaken in supposing the plants to have come from China."

Before following this up, however, it should be remarked that in the absence of data at Peradeniya it is not possible to say what was done with the plants which did not go to Nuwara Eliya, except that from later evidence they almost certainly formed the basis of a permanent nursery in the Botanic Gardens. Nor can we amplify Trimen's statement about the 'representation' made to Government, nor establish just how Mr. Mooyart came into the picture (he was evidently a member of the ancient Dutch burgher' family of that name, which according to the *Ceylon Literary Register* had become extinct by the 1880s).

Now to *The Times* and Mr. Gepp. In 1886 a Colonial and Indian Exhibition was held in London, and *The Times* gave a notice of it in its issue of 18 August. In describing the Ceylon Court, reference was made to the first tea plants having been brought to Ceylon from China in the 1840s. This stimulated two 'Letters to the Editor', both of the highest relevance to our story. Here is Mr. Gepp's, slightly abbreviated. It is dated from High Easter Vicarage, in Essex, the day after the notice had appeared in *The Times*:

"Sir, I have read with much interest the article in "The Times" of August 18th on the Ceylon Court of the Indian Exhibition in which it is stated: "Tradition says that tea was introduced into Ceylon by the Dutch during their occupation of the island, but we only know for certain that the first plants were brought from China somewhere in the 'forties". This latter statement is quite correct. I was residing in Ceylon during the years 1842 to 1845 and it was in the early part of the year 1843 when I was living at Newera Ellia [sic] with my pupils (one of whom was Mr. Laurence Oliphant) that I cleared about half an acre of jungle land at the back of Sir A. Oliphant's house for the reception of a score or so of tea plants which had been forwarded from China to the Botanic Gardens at Peradeniya by way of experiment. The directors, fearing that the temperature of Kandy would prove to be too hot for the plants, sent them up to me and I think that I may fairly claim to be the first tea-planter in Ceylon. The site which I selected was at an elevation of about 6,300 feet. The trees were flourishing when I left the island in 1845 and I heard of their welfare some few years afterwards, but whether or not they are in existence at the present time I cannot tell. At any rate the experiment was successful as proving not only that the soil of Ceylon was congenial to this plant, but also that it would flourish at an elevation 50 per cent higher than the extreme limit of the growth of the coffee plant."

The notable point here is of course that, according to Mr. Gepp, Nuwara Eliya was chosen under the definite impression that Assam tea would not flourish in the temperature of Kandy

(about the same as much of Assam). How long the 30 plants continued to thrive we do not know. A further tradition that some of them at least were planted on what later became Naseby Estate should also be mentioned here.

The other letter to *The Times* was this:

"Sir, As it would appear from the article on Ceylon in "The Times" of yesterday that some uncertainty exists as to the exact date of the introduction of tea into that island, permit me to supply the following authentic information. My late uncle Mr. Maurice B. Worms brought the first tea plants from China to Ceylon in September 1841, and formed a nursery of them on his estate at Pusellawa (vide Sir J. Emerson Tennent's "Ceylon", Vol. 2, Chapter 7). Samples of the tea grown there were often sent by Mr. M. B. Worms to friends in England and found to be excellent. Owing, however, to the objection to the importation of Chinese labour and to the then ignorance of the Cingalese as to the art of preparing tea, its cultivation remained for many years in abeyance. The extent to which it has latterly developed your article admirably describes.

GEORGE DE WORMS

Milton Park, Egham.

August 19th, 1886

A significant signature! Because this letter leads us straight to the first instance of tea being actually manufactured in Ceylon, though not on a practical scale. In the pioneering days of coffee as well as tea, the names of the Worms brothers, Gabriel and Maurice B., constantly crop up. They were German Jews from Frankfurt-am-Main, their mother being the eldest sister of Baron de Rothschild, and they planted on several estates besides the one in Pussellawa, which they had named after their distinguished relatives*. In 1841 Maurice went on a voyage to China and brought back a number of cuttings — at least that is how they were described, though unless someone had anticipated the Vegetative Propagation process by 85 years, they are more likely to have been rooted seedlings. They were China *jat* of course, and were duly planted out on Rothschild. A field on Condegalla (now a Division of Labookellie Estate) was also planted with China tea seed, and it was stated as recently as 1954 that some remains of this China clearing 'could still be seen by travellers using the Ramboda Pass route to Nuwara Eliya'.

** According to Ferguson's account, this was done at the Rothschilds' request. The two families were certainly in touch, as is shown by a letter which I have seen through the kindness of Mr Edmund de Rothschild and Baron Charles de Worms (great-grandson of an elder brother of Gabriel and Maurice, who became a Baron of the Austrian Empire and assumed the participle). This was written by Maurice to the House of Rothschild and was evidently the second of two letters describing the landscape and products of Manila, which he had visited on his way to China the previous year. The writer of the letter to The Times, by the way, was the and Baron de Worms.*

It was on Condegalla that the retired Assam planter, W. J. Jenkins, carried out his first experiments in manufacture which, as we shall see, James Taylor so proudly claimed to surpass, but Rothschild appears to have been the scene of the Worms brothers' own pioneering in the production of made tea. It was there that Emerson Tennent saw their bushes 'in full bloom' and recorded the fact in his book. According to an endlessly repeated legend (as dim as the origins of China tea itself), they brought a Chinese worker over to help

them and the result was a batch of tea which cost them a guinea (some versions prefer £5) per lb. to produce. Tea is la Rothschild, truly! Shaken, it seems, by this experience, the Worms brothers concentrated thereafter on their highly successful output of coffee.

From 1840 to 1866-7, the records of tea experiments in Ceylon are somewhat scanty, but the trail can be picked up here and there. For example, the Worms influence seems to have extended as far as Uva, for long afterwards we find James Irvine claiming that 'on Kottagodde Estate I cultivated for many years a small piece of tea planted by Mr Bartlin from the same China seed introduced by Mr Worms on Rothschild estate'. Irvine goes on to say that though no tea was ever made from it, it was 'regularly pruned and flushed freely'; he adds an interesting suggestion that 'besides these there were many isolated patches of tea in Uva, all of which grew freely'.

A very early instance of a tea bush (or bushes) being imported direct from China in a Wardian case has been kindly communicated to me by Mr D. L. Armitage, a member of the old Ceylon planting and agency house family. A scrap of paper which has come down to him attributes this to John Jumeaux of Grandpass, Colombo, father of Louis Jumeaux the Judge, and father-in-law of Mr Armitage's great-grandfather, John. As the 'Wardian case' for transporting plants (a glass container with a little soil in it) was not developed by Dr N. B. Ward until about 1830 and John Jumeaux died in 1850, the episode must have taken place within that period.

Again, one has frequently read the unadorned statement that, almost simultaneously with the Worms brothers, a Mr Llewellyn (sometimes described as 'of Calcutta') 'introduced a selection of Assam indigenous shrubs on Pen-y-lan Estate, Dolosbage'. I have not been able to unearth any contemporary evidence for this, but fortunately there is a sequel. In the course of a tour in 1885, A. M. Ferguson tells us he visited 'Mr. Blackett's estate of Pen-y-lan'. Here, he says:

'I saw some of the original tea trees, either indigenous or first-class hybrid, grown by Mr Llewellyn nearly 40 years ago. A slip taken from one of those trees about seven years ago is now itself a fine tall tree which has yielded and is yielding abundance of seed. But in days not so long gone by, so little appreciated was the enterprise which Mr Llewellyn came so near to establish, that a good many of the fine old tea trees were cut down and converted into rafters for buildings!'

How tantalising it is — that mysterious '*came so near to establish!* . . .' Then, some years after Mr Llewellyn's 'near miss' the new product was given a trial on what is now North Punduluoya Estate (not far from Condegalla, as it happens), where, according to an obscure footnote in the *Ceylon Directory* for 1885, 'Mr P. D. Millie says he had tea planted in 1861'^{*}. * In his own writings, unfortunately, Millie makes no mention of this.

Observe, however, that when the Directories begin to take independent note of tea acreages (round about 1875) Punduluoya is shown as growing nothing but coffee, nor

is there any registered on Pen-y-lan until a good deal later, so evidently the fine old seed-bearers there were (quite properly) excluded from the count.

That applies equally to some other very early tea in Dimbula and Yakdessa. This was the subject of a highly circumstantial letter written from Beaconsfield Estate, Maskeliya, in July 1879, which seems to have got pigeon-holed in the office of the Tropical Agriculturist and to have been dug out rather apologetically in July 1883! It appears over the signature 'J. D. W.' — clearly J. D. Watson, who had been a leading figure in Yakdessa earlier on.

This is what he says, and there is no reason to disbelieve him:

'I happen to know the oldest tea in Dimbula and Yakdessa, next door to Windsor Forest. The oldest tea in Yakdessa is on old Nagastenne and the oldest tea in Dimbula is on old Radella, Lindula. In both cases the bushes must be over 30 years old [this would carry us back at least to 1850], and anyone interested in the future of tea in Dimbula and Dolosbage would do well to visit the districts first before jumping at conclusions. They will then have an idea what Dimbula and Dolosbage may be like 30 years hence. The Nagastenne tea is only about 10 minutes' walk from Stow Easton bungalow, and the Radella tea on the roadside going up to Upper Radella; in both cases growing on old abandoned lands. I must say that the Radella bush is the finest, largest, oldest and best that I have ever seen.

The last time I went to show a gentleman interested in tea the old abandoned tea on Nagastenne in 1874, it was still in life, and what took my fancy to it, when I first saw it in 1870, was that it was flourishing, and though it had been at one time surrounded by coffee, the coffee was nowhere to be seen, but the tea had a sprinkling of seed on it, which I got gathered and secured, and put into a nursery on Horagalla, and which came up splendidly.'

Watson goes on to mention later nursery experiments on Seaforth, which will be described in their proper place.

There was early planting, too, on Charles Shand's Barra Estate, starting with a consignment of China jat seed sent over from Chittagong by 'an old coffee-planter Mr A. Grieg' in 1864. Eight acres of land seem to have been planted out, but the tea was allowed to go wild, and though a small sample was made in 1872 and received a valuation of as. 4d. in London, serious cultivation did not start on Barra until 1881.

These are all most interesting bits and pieces, but there is still not enough in them, one would think, to provide much of a market for the seeds which Peradeniya announced it was in a position to supply in 1861, 'should they be required for experiments in the cultivation of this plant', and which were in fact sent out 'in considerable quantity' during the following year.

On the other hand, one should never overlook the very curious reference in the story of Loolecondera itself to James Taylor practising the processes of tea manufacture in about 1866 on '*some old tea bushes in my garden*'.*

* The question arises, how old? Taylor did not build his Loolecondera bungalow (apparently on a virgin site) until 1856, and he never mentions planting tea up to the break in his correspondence at 1860.

Does this suggest that perhaps more of the primeval coffee-men than we now realise grew a few plants round their bungalows and even plucked and consumed the proceeds, very much as their descendants may drink home-grown coffee from a few 'pet' trees at the present day?

The most one can say is that the idea of tea-growing was certainly in the air in Ceylon, though floating about rather thinly, from the middle of the century onwards. There must have been many occasions like that day in 1864 when J. Mitchell of Kelburne Coffee Estate, Haputale, pointed out to a fine expanse of forest land behind Baker's Farm* and said that if only he had the capital he would have bought it with a view to opening a tea plantation; or when another Visiting Agent, standing maybe on the heights of Moray, Dalhousie, Forres or Strathspey, and speaking surely in a strong Scots accent, declaimed 'Mark my words if the slopes of Adam's Peak do not before many years elapse present one of the finest expanses of tea cultivation in the world'. Of course, he was right about Maskeliya as a potential tea district, though his startling prophecy had to wait a quarter of a century to be fulfilled!

* This became in fact the later Mahagastotte Estate, now incorporated in Pedro Group.

In all this wishing and wondering about tea while coffee was still in its full glory, Ceylon was only sharing in a world-wide movement of interest and experiment. Apart from attempts, which go back to Linnean times and which we need not treat too laboriously, to naturalise a few tea bushes in such unfriendly territories as Sweden (Uppsala), England (Syon House, Middlesex), France (Saumur) and various parts of the United States, the slender foundations of many successful ventures of the future had been laid by 1850. Japan and Formosa, of course, were already well in the field, the former being almost as venerable a tea country as China. African tea dates exactly from mid-century, when there were experimental plantings in Natal (now out of the tea picture); Trans-Caucasian tea from 1847 (Sukhum Botanic Gardens on the Black Sea); South American from as early as 1812 (Brazil). Even Australia emerged with trial plantings, but the main deterrent there was the cost of labour — the situation remains the same in 1967.

However, none of these offered such natural propinquity and attractive harbourage for the wandering tea plant as India's small but fertile tropical neighbour, Ceylon.