

Points for the Tea Trade.

The following very interesting paper was read by Harold Lambie before the Hamilton Retail Grocers' Association at a recent meeting of that body:

In the first place, I take it that you gentlemen are only interested in the class of tea which are best suited to our district. All I need to know, and what interests both of us most, is what we can sell to the best advantage, and what gives the best satisfaction. Of course the subject of tea covers a much wider ground than this, but this is what we, as grocers, are more interested in. We all know that the minor divisions are very varied, and I should say that they are oftentimes best unknown. From my experience I think I may state as a fact that we are a black tea drinking people; when I first came to this country, 20 years ago, Upper Canada was a green tea drinking country, but now we have become black tea drinkers.

One of the points which is of great importance to us, in my opinion, and one which is very much overlooked as a rule, is what kind of water rules in the district in which we live. Different district teas will liquor entirely differently in different localities, according to the water. Now, practically throughout the province, or this peninsula at any rate, we have hard water, and I would say to you that there are certain Congous—the finest teas grown in China—that you cannot get anything out of in hard water. This I think is something worth paying attention to. With your permission, I will tell you what Congous draw best with the water we have. They are what we tea men call North China Congous, the leading brands being Monings, Niogchows, Keemums, Kintucks and Osoafs, but the vast majority are commonly called Monings. Why this is so, and the difference between them I could not explain to you in words what constitutes a Moning Congou. A great many of you know the difference when you have the tea in your hand; you know it by the appearance and liquor; experience is the only teacher in this matter. In this district you will get the best results out of North China teas, or what are commonly called Monings. Now I will speak of the direct opposite, South China teas, or, as they are commonly called, Kaisows. Why I take Monings and Kaisows is because in the first place Monings are considered the best brand of North China teas, and Kaisows the best brand of South China teas. South China teas (Kaisows) are much less suited to this district. If we had soft water, and particularly if we had very soft water, there is no class of tea to which I could so highly recommend to you to give good results as Kaisows. But we have not soft water, and it requires very soft water to get good results out of this class of tea. Therefore, eschew South China teas, which include Kaisows, Packlums, Packlums and Soochongs—the latter are out of date now altogether.

All you gentlemen are perfectly well aware of the immense change which has come over the tea trade within the past 15 years particularly within the past seven or eight years. Fifteen years ago the amount of tea sent from China into London alone—which is the tea market of the world—was about 170 million pounds. The amount then sent from India, including all brands—the number is legion now—was not over 20 million pounds, and the amount sent from Ceylon was infinitesimal; it did not amount to 1,000 pounds. What is the position to day? China sends to London about 70 million pounds, India sends from 100 to 120 million, and Ceylon from 50 to 55 million pounds. You see from this the immense revolution that has taken place in the tea trade. The imports from China include greens as well as blacks. Now why is this? Simply because China is a badly governed country. I know that from what I read about her. I was never there. We all know that her rulers have taxed everything they could; they have imposed both internal and export duties. Also machinery has super-

seded cheap labor. India and Ceylon make their teas by machinery almost entirely. And also the peculiar soil of these countries produces much more pungent and stronger tea than China's soil does. China has been burning the candle at both ends; they have been working out their soil and taxing to the utmost the greatest product of their country, until they have ruined their trade. And also, in trying to compete with Indian tea, they have sacrificed the quality of their tea, and lost their trade thereby. I am not a particular lover of Indian and Ceylon teas. I admire their qualities, they are very valuable; properly used they are invaluable; but I tell you, gentlemen, there is this about them which we must bear in mind; of course, we are traders, not physicians, and we sell as a rule what pleases the public best, but Indian and Ceylon teas are fruitful of dyspepsia; they are very powerful and need to be used judiciously. Perhaps it is out of place for me to say this, but it is just as well to recognize what is going on. When I am asked for Indian and Ceylon teas, I sell them if possible, but the use of Indian and Ceylon teas is going to make the nation a race of dyspeptics, when they are largely used, because they are so impregnated with tannin, and this wears away the stomach. Still these teas—Indian and Ceylon—form the principal part of the tea trade, and the demand for them is increasing every day. Of course the figures which I just gave you are only approximate, as the quantity varies continually. Now what I was going to say is this: We as traders have to deal in Indian and Ceylon teas. I recognize their value. They are indispensable to a man who wants to sell a good Congou at a moderate price. But I think as a rule they are not judiciously used in this country. I think we are drifting very much towards the use of Indian and Ceylon teas intact, by which I mean unmixed, and I do not think it a good way; there is a much better way of using them. We all here have blends no doubt. The majority in this room perhaps make their own blends, others buy them, and I think the majority, if you will forgive me speaking so frankly, make a mistake in making their own blends, as they have not sufficient experience, I never made a business of blending, and do not deal in blends, but I recognize their value, and a man must have experience to make blends. You will perhaps allow me to tell you what I think make the best blends, and where I think a great many errors are made. In the first place a great mistake is made in mixing a very fine tea with a common tea. A man will have something which he made a mistake in buying, and of which he wants to dispose of; it is unsaleable, but he must work it off. It is usually poor stuff; in fact it naturally is. Now this man is very apt to buy something fine to mix with it. If you will allow me, I will try to make my ideas plain to you by using the old time phrase, first introduced by Panch, I think by saying "Don't." Don't mix a common tea with a fine one. If you want a medium tea you will buy it very much better as a medium. Sell the poor tea for what it is worth, but do not spoil a good tea by mixing the common tea with it; the rasp of that common tea will stand out every time. The fine quality of the upper grade which you bought will be lost in the smokiness, or whatever it may be, of the common tea.

There is one other thing on which I feel very strongly—I glean it from what I hear in the sample room—and that in the use of scented teas, which were very much in vogue at one time. Gentlemen, don't use scented teas; they are villainous. The only use for them is when you are in a district where water will not bring anything else out. That is the only use of scented teas in my opinion. You will spoil anything you put a scented tea into. It is to my mind an abomination to put a scented Orange Pekoe or Capri into a good Congou, and I think as a rule your customers will agree with me. If you want to use a scented tea put it into a common Congou. If you have some old nasty flavored goods which it is im-

possible to sell, put in a scented Orange Pekoe or Capri, but never put them into a good Congou. You probably know as well as I do that the scented teas have an artificial flavor entirely. It is only a common tea which is given the scent by means of a flower, "Caula" is the name, I think. Its flavor is altogether artificial, and the leaf which is so impregnated has no practical value; good tea leaves are not used to make scented teas. Of course every man is, or should be, interested in the work in which he is engaged; he likes to know all about it, he likes to understand it, and he has a certain sense of his own worth, and I was going to say, possibly he overrates his own knowledge. I know I have been that way myself, I thought I knew a great deal more ten or fifteen years ago than I do now. And blending is a thing which a man must make a study of, and I think that as a rule the retail grocer of this country has far too much to attend to to make his own blends of tea, and that it can be far better done for him by men who are in the business and make a study of it. I hope I do not offend in speaking so frankly. One man's judgment is as good as another's when he has had experience. And in my judgment you will find your blends much better made by men whose business it is to make them than if you made them yourselves. Of course there are exceptions. A man may have a keen sense of smell and a fine taste, and such a man no doubt could make some very happy combinations, but this is not the rule. I would say to you, be chary of blending. When you find a man that offers you a blend that suits you taste and suits your customers' taste, let him do the work. He can possibly buy his primary goods cheaper than you can, and he has a better collection of samples to choose from than you can get. When you are blending, however, there are one or two things I would like to point out to you which I think are wrong, although very old-fashioned. I have heard formulas of blends now and again from private dealers, and I read them occasionally. Some men say, "I put so much of this and so much of that," and my opinion is that as a rule there are several very bad mistakes made. I will say to you that what I consider a good blend of Congous is the North China tea with Ceylon—these will give the best results. Do not use Assam tea unless it is very mild and free from that particular astringency which is found in so many Assam teas. As a rule use North China Congous (Monings) and Ceylon teas. If you use Assam, be particular that they are not harsh, unless you are making up a very common tea where you want astringency. I have heard men say, showing me a sample of a very nice, rich blend of Ceylon, "I use so much of that, say three pounds, put in common Kaisow Congou, and I use about three pounds of good strong Assam." Well, gentlemen, the good strong Assam is damnation to that blend—it is going to kill the beauty of the Ceylon tea which they put in; they put in a beautiful thing and kill it with a bad thing; they ruin the Ceylon by the Assam. It is like putting a drop of creosote into a gallon of wine—you will taste it. Unless you are very careful, it is an absurdity to put an Assam and a Ceylon together, and to me, and I am a little fond of the trade, it is always an aggravation to see them spoil some really good goods in this way. My advice is, never mix these teas. I think I will not say anything further in regard to blending now, but if you will ask any questions I shall be only too glad to answer them. It is a large subject, and one that it would take a long time to explain.

Now there is one thing which I think we as a body are making a mistake about. I do not know how you regard it, and you will accept my remarks with mitigation at any rate. I refer to package teas. I do not quite understand why the trade are selling package teas. I do not refer more to the retail trade than to the wholesale trade, but it does seem to me that the handling of package tea is an injury to the grocer and the grocery trade. I do not see