

# CANADA'S NATIONAL TEAPOT

40,000,000 Lbs. of Tea Every Year, and the Price is Still Going Up

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

CANADA'S teapot is one of the great national facts. History proves this. It was America's teapot that made Canada the beginnings of a nation. In 1775 the people who were to belong to the family of Uncle Sam chucked into Boston Harbour a shipload of tea for which they were asked to pay taxes without having members in a British Parliament. That tempest in a teapot worked out to the American Revolution which ended in making the United States one half of North America and Canada the other half. By a curious coincidence, to-day the United States has no great love for the teapot. The whole amount of tea imported into the United States in a year is a hundred million pounds, which makes a little over one pound a year per head of population.



The amount of tea annually consumed in Canada with less than a tenth of the population of the United States is 40,000,000 lbs.; an average of five pounds per head of population. So that Canada may claim to rank among the teapot nations. The American people go as strong on coffee as Canadians do on tea. Canadians are weak in coffee. Canada uses the coffee pot only to the extent of about one pound per inhabitant yearly.

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NOW the price of tea, as every householder knows, is going up. Since the war the price has gone up ten cents a pound, which is a bigger advance than has taken place in anything but some of the main staples of production affected directly by the war. What is the reason? No armies are camped on the tea plantations of India, China, Japan and Ceylon. There is no interference with production and no real scarcity of tea leaves. The tea plantation growers have not gone to war. There is no blight or pestilence on the plantations. In fact, the tea growers are as well off to-day as they ever were, producing as much tea as ever—and at the same time getting more for it. Tea goes freely over the seven seas, while cotton is held up and regarded as contraband of war. Tea is coming into Canada as freely as it did before the war. The only difference is in the rates of insurance caused by the risk of war. The cost of raising tea is no greater than it used to be. Nothing changes much in those far-away, dreamy highlands where the tea-plant is the chief means of existence to millions of people. But the world is drinking tea in 1915 more than it did in 1914; and the reason is the war. The United States is not tipping over the teapot more than usual. Canada is not telling her fortunes in teacups more than she did before the war. But Europe has gone over to the teapot. And if Europe takes a notion to boost the consumption of tea, Canada must pay more for her yearly 40,000,000 lbs. and the United States for its nearly 100,000,000 lbs.

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THERE are a few places in Canada where the economies and the psychology of tea are as well understood as in any part of the world. We have no Liptons in Canada; but we have a few men who have as much to do with the tea trade in this country as Sir Thomas Lipton has with the tea business of Great Britain. Among these captains of tea Mr. P. C. Larkin, head of the Salada Tea Co., has perhaps the best claim to being a pioneer who has built up his tea trade to proportions that make it one of the most popular businesses in Canada. Mr. Larkin has been called "the tea king of America." Nobody round his big tea-leaves and teapot establishment down in the lower part of Toronto was responsible for the title. Mr. Larkin himself, in a little unpretentious office away from the street, has no particular interest in being regarded as a big chief. He is a practical, steam-hammer sort of man who has learned most of what he knows in business, mingling with people and studying public questions. He manages to keep his own opinions, has plenty of them, and has no objection to handing them out upon occasion in a frank, businesslike fashion quite devoid of frills or sentimental decorations. Once in a while he takes a hand in a newspaper controversy and when he does he ranks as a hard hitter that knows how to put the "punch" behind the opinion.

Business has been Mr. Larkin's great school, and in business he ranks as an originator. He began

life in the grocery trade when the grocer dug a scoop into a tea chest and ladled out a pound of tea into a piece of brown paper on the scales, and the farmer's wife carried it home, thinking she had a pound of good, fresh tea, when it was pretty weatherbeaten, shopworn stuff. Tea in those days travelled from wholesaler to retailer and from retailer to consumer in bulk as it does from the plantation to the wholesaler. It was handled in bulk, just like sugar and coal-oil and vinegar.

The Canadians who still buy tea from the grocer's scoop and weigh scales are very scarce just now; and the fact that tea has come to the certified lead-packet stage when it can be bought and handled as easily without waste or deterioration as a jar of pickles, is due in a very great degree to Mr. P. C. Larkin. It was said of him not long ago by a writer in a well-known Canadian paper:

"The story of how the young traveller in groceries persuaded his customers that selling tea in bulk was antiquated and introduced British packet tea from Halifax to Vancouver is one of the romances of Canadian business."

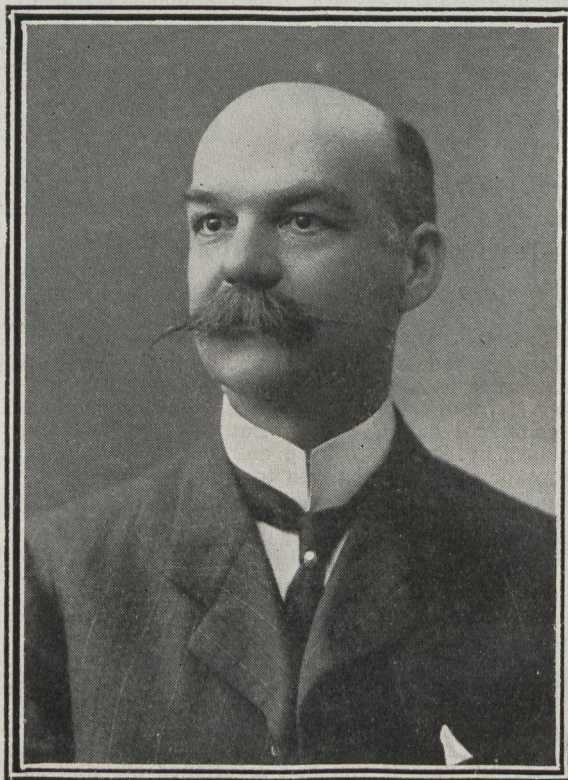
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BUT Mr. Larkin has never recognized any romance in his business. He is too practical. He was fifteen years advertising Salada tea in Canada before the public generally got to know much about it—at least in Toronto. In those days he sometimes made it a practice to go into a store and buy something that he asked to have sent down to the Salada offices.

"How do you spell that, sir," asked the clerk almost invariably. And, "where are the offices, sir?"

That was probably before that big electric, alternating sign went up over the establishment spelling out SALADA to the people on the ferryboats.

"No," said Mr. Larkin bluntly, when interviewed by the "Courier" on the subject of tea and the war, "tea is not after all so much of an economic problem to the average person, even in Canada where we consume five pounds of tea every year per head of population. See—a good cup of tea requires only a sixteenth of an ounce of good tea leaf. One pound of tea, therefore, is good for 256 cups of tea. An extra few cents on a pound of tea means much less to the consumer's cost of living than an extra cent a



Mr. P. C. Larkin says that the price of tea will keep going up.

loaf on bread or a few cents a pound added to the price of meat."

The mathematical problem he did not take time to work out. But suppose that the average adult in Canada takes two cups of tea at a meal, or six cups of tea a day. That means a pound of tea used in about forty days for the average tea-drinker—unless the tea-leaves are used twice as they are by some people. Which works out to more than nine pounds of tea in a year for a person who drinks six cups a day. And of course as children don't as a rule drink tea and a large number of people take coffee from one to three times a day, it is quite necessary for the habitual tea-drinkers each to get away with somewhere between nine and ten pounds

of tea each year, if the consumption of tea in Canada is to be kept up as it has been for the past three years to about 40,000,000 lbs. a year.

"A great many people drink nothing else but tea," said Mr. Larkin. "Many retail grocers don't bother keeping coffee, because they find no demand for it. Coffee is more expensive, is much harder to make, and the average coffeemaker is by no means as successful as the average tea-maker in getting a good brew."

No one who has had experience with the general run of coffee served out at restaurants and hotels and even private homes, could find much to criticize in that statement. In the United States coffee is one of the alleged fine arts; in Canada an experiment.

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MR. LARKIN went on: "The price of tea has gone up ten cents a pound since the war. It is still going up. It will continue to go up. And if the war should stop to-morrow I don't think the price of tea would go down again to anything like what it was a few years ago."

"Why?" he was asked.

"First of all," was the reply, "because tea began to go up some time before the war. It had to go up or the tea-grower must raise tea at almost no profit, if not sometimes at a loss."

In the days when the standard of living was lower than now, tea was less of a beverage in some of the great consuming countries. Tea on the plantations became somewhat of a drug on the market. Buyers at the auctions did very little bidding up. A half a cent a pound advance at an auction was considered rather startling. The tea-grower had very few ways to reduce the cost of production. If he degraded the quality of his tea the tester refused it; and the smelling and tasting nerves of the tea-tester are as acute as the scent of beasts of prey. In the street end of Mr. Larkin's office there is an open tea-room with a battery of tea-cups, a couple of green teapots, a kettle on a gas-stove, a pair of scales and a line of tea-packets open. Here the tester gets in his fine work trying out the qualities of teas from various plantations and varying altitudes, in order to get the particular blend that he is after up to his own standard.

"So," continued Mr. Larkin, declining to be diverted from the track by any casual queries, "when tea-growing became relatively unprofitable the growers ceased to extend their plantations. Some of them went into rubber because there was more money in rubber. And rubber also went down. You can find the same thing on Canadian farms. If wheat or beans or cattle or hay go to top prices everybody wants to produce wheat or beans or cattle or hay. The price goes down again—naturally; though not in so marked a degree as in the price of tea."

"How does the visible supply affect that?" he was asked.

"Well, in the case of tea, there is no great visible supply as there is in wheat or cotton. Tea is a perishable product, very sensitive to climatic changes. Great bulks of tea can't be stored for long periods of time. The production of tea is as nearly as possible direct from the plantation to the teapot, and the tea-plant is constantly growing; so that to keep the standard of a tea-blend up it is necessary to be continually testing. When the production of tea ceased to expand the price began to go up. That began a few years ago. In five years the price of tea has advanced on an average about fifteen cents a pound."

"And about ten cents of that is since the war—why?"

"Well, the armies are drinking tea," he said. "Tea is the easiest thing to make for an army. No army can be bothered with coffee, because it is too much trouble. Before the war the Germans were low tea-drinkers. Now the German armies are drinking tea. The French and the Russian and the British armies are tea-drinkers. And you may be sure that in an army camp there is no great economy but a great deal of waste in the use of tea."

"Had the prohibition of alcoholic liquors much to do with the relative consumption of tea?"

"Very directly. Russia was always a tea-drinking country before the war. Since the suppression of vodka the consumption of tea by civilians has gone up. The same will apply to any country where prohibition is enacted. In England when the consumption of beer began to decline the consumption of tea went directly up. And, of course, England is a great tea country, in spite of the tax of sixteen cents a pound."

It was quite obvious that habits of tea-drinking formed in the trenches or as the result of prohibition, will be very largely kept after the war is over.

"So I don't look for any drop in the price of tea, at least not for some time to come, when the war is over," said Mr. Larkin. "I cabled my London buyers the other day to go up a penny a pound, for I must have the tea—because people in this country are tea-drinkers. It may be—nobody can tell at present—that with the upward trend in tea prices growers will increase their plantations to such an extent that the price will go down again. But at present I can't predict any such thing."