

### Blended Tea.

It is sometimes asked by those who are not acquainted with the trade why various sorts of tea should be mixed together before they are offered to the public, any more than it is found necessary to mix different wines together, such as ports with sherries or with clarets. The difference, however, is clear. The public require a distinctive flavor with wine, which can be readily maintained through the skill acquired in centuries of experience in the vineyards. The industry is also conducted on a large scale, so that in reality the ports, sherries or champagnes of commerce represent, as a rule, a number of blends made before the wines reached this country; but with tea, on the other hand, it is perfectly impossible from the novelty of the industry, and its small scale among the Indian or Ceylon planters who now mainly supply us, to ensure uniformity of quality from year to year. In fact, as is well known hardly two chests are alike in a parcel of Indian teas when they originally reach this country. As retailers cannot therefore secure continuity in any distinctive flavor from any special growth, they have to obtain it by blending. The remedy suggested by some, to the infinite amusement of those acquainted with the subject, is that the grocers should grow their own teas. The economical value of this suggestion would be only equalled by the grocer being advised to make his own boots or hat. But, putting that aside, such a remedy would only add tenfold to the existing necessity for blending, as the tea crop of any particular estate is, broadly speaking, never alike two years running.

Tea, indeed, varies almost infinitely in flavor, quality and strength, while on the other hand, the public demands almost absolute uniformity in these respects. The produce of any one estate or group of estates is rarely alike two years running, and even were this difficulty possible to remove, little would be gained. The public demand runs upon a sort of neutral flavor in tea, which can only be secured by mixing together the produce of various districts, or even of countries, so far apart as India, Ceylon, China and Java. Further, while the public objects to any pronounced or distinctive flavor in tea, it still more strongly objects to any alteration in the character of the flavor of the infusion supplied. Hence, before the consumer's cup is reached, the leaf must of necessity be very extensively mixed, and in the mixture lies the whole secret of success or failure in the tea trade. Nor is blending likely to decrease, but, on the contrary, it is likely to increase, when teas of such marked different characters are offered as the fine, delicate Coagous of China, the strong, savory Darjeelings, the thick, pungent Assams, and all the varieties produced in Ceylon, in Java or in Japan. When teas came chiefly from China, there were not nearly the differences which now exist, when India and Ceylon supply the bulk of our consumption. If so, there is more than ever room for the skill of the blender. It must be remembered that the old "chop" of 300 or 600 chests of China tea, really represented an extensive and elaborate system of blending, carried out first in the interior, and then at the hong or warehouses at the shipping ports.

The old idea of tea mixing was to mix several kinds of China Congou together, and to add Scented Orange Pekoe and Oolongs in certain traditional proportions. That came the day of thick Indian tea, and of the infusion which its enemies call tannin. The charge is partly just, but whether it be so or not, if the public like that substance in their tea, those who cater for them must supply it. The result, at any rate of the new supply, is that the public have to a great degree turned from the old and more delicate flavors, and gone on to something much stronger. Those who have not been quick enough to swim with the stream, have suffered materially in their trade. There is also little doubt that a great many

retailers who undertake to blend teas, are, to put it gently, not successful in their mixtures, and thus give an opening to more skilled competitors. In these days when specialization is more and more essential in business, such openings are eagerly sought, and the amount of competition in the tea trade has been of late years increased a hundredfold.

In the old days of high duties and small supplies, when the leading retail price was 4s., 5s., or even 6s. per pound, tea was naturally the sheet anchor of the grocer, particularly as it was then the custom to sell sugar at a loss. Now that tea has fallen to a quarter of such prices, the old percentage of profit, even if it could have been maintained, would obviously have yielded only one quarter of what it used to do. But the old percentage of profit, far from being maintained, has probably been reduced by quite one half, so that the grocer probably does not on the average get more than a fourth, or even a fifth of what he used to get out of a pound of tea; the labor and many other expenses, be it noted, being still the same, or more.

The increased competition is not always of an unskilled nature. A tailor or a bookseller, or even a butter man might not make much of tea blending, but many of the wholesale dealers who have carefully studied the subject are beyond doubt masters in their art. It follows from the above that there is less inducement for the grocers to study the tea trade, and, on the other hand, an increasing necessity for them to do so, if they are to blend successfully the growing varieties of tea, so as to meet the newer forms of competition.

Grocers having a large connection and sufficient capital find no difficulty at all in coping with the new conditions. They can buy at the right moment and hold their hundreds or thousands of pounds' worth of suitable stocks; they can blend tea successfully, keep it long enough in the bins to assimilate, study the tastes of their locality and defy external competition. But all this has to be done on a sufficient scale and presupposes a relatively large capital and much skill and personal attention.

At the present time the grocer is becoming more a general storekeeper, selling all non-perishable articles of food and drink. This tends to lock up an increasing amount of capital, and to be a severe drain upon a man's time and abilities. Hence, the increasing practice of delivering goods ready for use to the retailer, and no longer requiring preparation by him. The grocer does not now mix his yellow sugar or chop up his tilters, and the infinite variety of ready-packed or bottled goods in a shop would amaze the tradesman of a former generation.

For the reasons named above, the tea trade has begun to undergo a similar change with all but the larger buyers. The blending, and even the packing, are done for the grocer, and the tea is handed to him ready for sale.

We have more than once pointed out in these columns that it seems a serious error for grocers to sell tea in packets, and especially to act as agents for the sale for others. Tea fresh out of the chest must not only be cheaper and better than in packets, but it seems a short-sighted policy for the grocer to abandon his position as the direct caterer to the public and to become a servant to another. Besides, if packed tea at once becomes known by any special mark, it can just as well be sold by the draper, the bookseller or the chemist, or, indeed by any other retailer. Blended teas, however, stand in quite a different position. The grocer can buy and sell it while preserving his complete independence of action and of position, and his hold upon the public.

That portion of the trade who do not deal largely in tea, and a good many of those who do, but who do not find it worth their while to take much trouble, and to lock up much capital on this branch of their trade, have, therefore, of late, taken to the purchase of blended tea, and there seems every possibility of the prac-

tice rapidly growing. Indeed, the demand from even large buyers for teas ready for use has been so great for some time past that the leading London wholesale dealers have been unable to meet the enquiry. The saving of money is to many a material consideration, for a man can buy his three or six or more chests, when and as he wants them; instead of keeping in stock and incurring rent upon hundreds of pounds' worth of tea at a time. Further, the turning of some part of his premises at intervals into a dust-bin and his men into dust men, all comes to an end, if tea arrives ready blended. Again, done on a large scale, and by machinery, the blending process is necessarily cheaper, while the product is more even and better matured when dealt with and stored in greater masses. Above all, when the mixing is done by a dealer in a large way of business, with skilled tasters, large capital, and the command of the chief market in the world, the result is better than if a retailer, with much fewer opportunities, attempts the same thing.

As was natural, the new demand for blended teas from the grocer was at first met, not by the larger and older wholesale houses—for the trade is eminently a conservative one—but by smaller dealers, who, having less to lose from any new departure, were more venturesome. The older and larger houses have now entered the field also. In these days every new want has to be met, and while meeting as energetically as ever the old demand for original parcels by those who have the money, skill and time necessary to blend their own tea, there can be no reason why the large wholesale dealers should not sell blended tea to those who want it. The two classes of buyers are to a considerable degree, it is true, distinct, but that is no reason why the requirements of both should not be met from the same source. Some, no doubt, of the older houses may hesitate in publicly taking a new departure of this sort, but it is no secret in the trade that almost without exception, they are glad enough to do the same thing privately. For our part we see no reason whatever for any secrecy about it.—*Produce Markets Review*.

### Toronto Dry Goods Trade.

The features that prevailed a week ago are still the same. Travellers are doing well. There are very few buyers coming in, but many of them are being heard from in the way of reports. The weather has continued very favorable, and stocks of winter goods have been reduced to a much lower point than usual. In home goods there have been no changes to note. Everything is steady to firm in tone. The Canadian tweed manufacturers are showing samples and booking orders for fall tweed dress goods. They are showing in the carrels' hair effect tartans, knicker, diagonals, medium checks. It is yet early in the season, and all the new styles have not been shown. The newest effects are the shot, which have never been made here before. Tartans are also shown in greater number. Shots and Tartans promise to be among the most popular designs. The latter will no doubt receive a special impetus on account of the popularity of silk tartans in blouses. Jobbers have begun to make spring shipments of dress goods. A few went out a week or two ago, but all the houses are now in full swing.—*Empire*.

The actual result of the operations of the Canadian Pacific railway for 1892 are officially stated as follows: Net earnings, \$8,420,347; add interest earned on deposits and loan, \$293,603—\$8,623,950. Deducting the fixed charges occurred during the year, \$5,102,018, the surplus was \$3,521,932. From this two supplementary dividends of one per cent. each were made, \$1,300,000, leaving a surplus carried forward of \$2,221,932. Surplus of previous years \$4,701,599, total surplus carried forward \$6,923,531.