

TEA.

The use of Tea as a beverage in China is of an antiquity beyond record, and is as universal as it is ancient; from the emperor to the lowest peasant or labourer, all alike drink tea, varying only in quality. That consumed by the common people must, however, be not only of an inferior class, but very weak; as the native attendants on Lord Macartney's embassy were continually begging the refuse leaves, which had been already used by the English, because, after pouring fresh water over them, they obtained a better beverage than what they had usually an opportunity of enjoying. On the other hand, some tea presented by the emperor Kien-Long to Lord Macartney was found to want somewhat of the astringency which the British tea-drinker is accustomed to look for and to value in the infusion.

Thrice at least in the day every Chinese drinks tea, but all who enjoy the means have recourse to the refreshing beverage much more frequently; it is the constant offering to a guest, and forms a portion of every sacrifice to their idols. It is made in China as with us, by pouring boiling water on the dried leaves; but the Chinese use neither milk nor sugar.

Mr. Ellis, in an account of one of Lord Amherst's visits of ceremony to Kwang, a mandarin of high rank, says, "The tea served round was that only used on occasions of ceremony, called Yu-tien: it was a small leafed highly flavored green tea. In Lord Amherst's and Kwang's cups there was a thin perforated silver plate, to keep the leaves down, and let the infusion pass through. The cups used by the Mandarins of rank, in form resemble coffee-cups, and are placed in a wooden or metal saucer, shaped like the Chinese boats."

From Mr. Ellis' *Journal* we also transcribe the following passage, descriptive of a plantation, and of the Chinese method of irrigation. "Our walk led us through a valley, where we saw, for the first time the tea-plant. It is a beautiful shrub, resembling myrtle, with a yellow flower extremely fragrant. The plantations were not here of any extent, and were either surrounded by small fields of other cultivation, or placed in detached spots; we also saw the ginger in small patches, covered with a frame work to protect it from the birds. Irrigation is conducted by a chain-pump, worked by the hand, capable, I think, of being employed in England with advantage. An axle, with cogs, is fixed at each end of the trough, over which the flat boards pass, at the end of the uppermost axle cross bars are attached, serving as a wheel; to these again handles are fixed, which the man works, using each hand alternately. The labour is light, and the quantity of water raised considerable. The view from the top of the mountain repaid the labour of ascent. The scene was in the true mountain style, rock above rock in endless and sublime variety. This wildness was beautifully contrasted by the cultivation of the valleys, speckled with white cottages and farm houses. We had been observed from the low grounds by the peasants, and on our descent were received by a crowd

who followed us with shouts, that might, had it not been for their subsequent civility in offering us tea, have been taken for insolence; as it was, they certainly were merely the rude expressions of astonishment."

In Japan, where tea is also a beverage common to most classes of persons, they reduce it to a fine powder, which they place before the company, in a box forming part of the tea equipage. The cups being filled with warm water, the powdered tea is taken from the box, on the point of a knife, and thrown into the cups, which are then handed to the company.

It remains only to give a short account of the introduction of tea into England, and of the progress of a trade, which to use the words of Mr. McCulloch, is, considering its late rise, and present magnitude, the most extraordinary phenomenon in the history of commerce. The Dutch are said to have brought tea to Europe early in the seventeenth century, but there is no trace of its being known in this country until after 1650; in 1660 it is coupled with coffee, chocolate and sherbet, in an act imposing a duty of eight pence a gallon on all quantities of these liquors sold in coffee houses. That it was, however, in no very extensive demand, even among people of fashion, and as a foreign luxury, may be conjectured from a memorandum of Pepys, who says in his *Diary*, "25th September, 1661, I sent for a cup of tea, a China drink, of which I had never drunk before."

Three years after, two pounds two ounces of it were considered a present which it was not unworthy the king (Charles the Second) to receive from the East India Company, and in 1667 that company, for the first time, gave an order to their agents to send some on their account, to England, limiting the order, however, to one hundred pounds of the best that could be got. The price of some brought from Holland about this time by the Earls of Arlington and Ossory, distinguished noblemen of the court of Charles the Second is said to have been 60s. a pound.

The tea trade in England did not make much progress during the early part of the eighteenth century, for the importation between the years 1700 and 1710, amounted to less than 800,000 pounds. It was still a scarce luxury, confined to the wealthy: it was made in small pots of the most costly china, holding not more than half a pint, and drunk out of cups whose capacity scarcely exceeded that of a large table spoon. It is probably to this period, or somewhat later, that we may refer the anecdote, if true, of the country lady, who receiving as a present a small quantity of tea, in total ignorance of its real use, looked upon it as some outlandish vegetable, boiled it until she thought it was tender, and then, throwing away the water, endeavoured to eat the leaves.

Those of our readers who may wish for more information respecting the progress of this important trade than our limits enable us to give, will find it in McCULLOCH'S *Dictionary of Commerce*, to which valuable work we are indebted for some of the materials