

1934
Name Robert H. Halloway. (1st Prize)
Date of Birth [REDACTED]
Address 50, Thurleigh Rd.,
Wandsworth, London S.W.12.
School "Bea" L.G.O. Secondary School
Upper Tooting, S.W.17. 1934

Life on a Ceylon Tea Plantation

As a prelude to an essay about a tea-plantation, a short note on the history of tea itself is interesting. There are many legends about it in Chinese mythology, some dating its discovery as a beverage at about three thousand years B.C., but another states that it was brought from India at about five hundred years A.D. It was a source of revenue of the Chinese Government in the ninth century. But it was not until about eighteen-sixty, that it became a common beverage. The total yearly green leaf crop of Ceylon is over seven hundred million pounds.

If one went a train journey from Matale in the north to Maputale in the south, of the tea-growing districts, at first sight it would be like being in a Dutch garden, rows and rows of tea bushes, no boundaries to mark the end of one estate, and the

beginning of another. But high up there would be seen virgin jungle, untouched by the hand of the tea planter, and with dangerous panthers lurking in the midst. Rocks would be seen jutting out in wild grandeur, and then it would be noticed that those bushes clinging to the almost vertical hillsides were also tea bushes; then, as the train sped on, a factory might be described, or the white house of the owner, nestling among the trees. Perhaps our traveller might be visiting one of the owners, so let us turn our attention to what he would see.

The factory is most striking, for this building is not the grey, dingy thing of the town. It is a long, low building, clean without and within, and tended by either natives or Europeans, all wearing white. Outside the ground slopes in all directions, giving a pleasing outlook above and below. Near the factory there is the owner's house, and near-by the huts of the natives. These are not the hovels of the ordinary native village, but are built under government regulations. The climate is not too hot, because most of the

plantations are above three thousand feet, as height improves the taste of the tea.

The life of the native workers is very happy. Most of them are Tamils from Southern India. Rice is sold to them at less than cost price, gardens are provided, and the keeping of cows encouraged. On the large estates there are permanent hospitals, while on every estate there is a resident dispenser, who makes medicines free of charge for the labourers. While their mothers are at work in the fields, the babies are cared for in special crèches. This is why so many Tamils from Southern India flock to the tea estates. There are about five hundred thousands of them in Ceylon. While our traveller is drinking wine at the owner's house, let us follow the coolies during a typical day.

Early in the morning they are mustered, and told off to their various duties. It is a very picturesque scene. The men and women stand about, or mend baskets. The children chatter together as they sit on the ground or play with some bright bead or mirror. Goats walk unconcernedly about, cropping the grass. The garments vary, but most are white. Some wear a

skirt, others a tunic; the women have a shawl which they can pull over the head as a protection from the sun. The men wear turbans, usually white.

Soon they disperse to their various stations, and the fields are a scene of industry. The women go to the fields that are to be plucked, and start their difficult work under the hot sun. Only the buds and upper leaves are taken. The men divide into several groups. One group goes to the fields and forks the ground.

Another group goes to a patch of jungle, and is soon at work felling trees and clearing the undergrowth. This is not carted away, but left to dry for fuel. In the afternoon this same party goes to the Northern field, which has not been bearing well. This, under the direction of the owner, they prune to within eighteen inches of the ground. In about three to five months, this will be ready for plucking. Meanwhile it has been discovered that a drain is blocked, so a third party of men goes to dig it out, and also to prepare holes, in rows four feet apart, for the new plants arriving from a nursery next week.

They will not finish their work to-day, for they have three thousand holes to dig to

every acre. The owner doubts the success of his planting, for it will be three to seven years before the leaves can be plucked, a process repeated every seven to fourteen days. The yield will be about a thousand pounds per year per acre.

Now let us return to the women. As soon as they filled their baskets, they took them to the factory, where the leaves are allowed to dry on shelves of bessian called tats. They are allowed to wither for sixteen to twenty-four hours. They are then rolled for about three hours. This breaks up the cells containing the flavour and strength. After being allowed to ferment slightly the leaves are dried on wire trays under which pass blasts of hot air. They then assume the colour known to the public. During manufacture they have lost seventy-five per cent of their weight. The tea, however, has still to pass through one more process. It is sorted into grades, the most common being:-

* See end.	(i) Broken Orange Pekoe	30%
	(ii) Orange Pekoe and Pekoe	26%
	(iii) Broken Pekoe	40%
	(iv) Dust	3%
	(v) Wastage	1%

The best grades are Broken and Orange Pekoes, being the finest

6

leaves. The tea is then packed in aluminium-lined boxes, sold and shipped to England, where it is on sale to the public.

Thus our journeyings ended, we wish our imaginary traveller and observer, a good cup of Empire Tea.

Books	{	"A few facts about India Tea"
		(Indian Tea Association)
Consulted.	{	"Ceylon - The Tea Industry"
		(British Empire Exhibition)

Well thought out.