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## CHINA'S TEA TRADE.

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**W**ILL THE WAR in China affect the tea trade?

This is a matter which is agitating the merchants, and which will soon be of interest to tea drinkers all over

the United States. The tea buds have already sprouted, and by the first of May the new crops will begin to come into the market. Fast steamers are now on their way from Europe and Russia to China. They go by the Mediterranean and Suez canal, and they stop at Ceylon and Singapore. They go from thence to Shanghai and up the Yang-tse-Kiang 700 miles into the interior of China. They stop at the city of Hankow, which is the greatest tea market in the world. Here they load as quickly as possible and steam back home as fast as they can. These tea ships run a race every year, and the steamer which gets in first receives the highest price for its tea. The first of the tea crop is considered the best, and should the Yangtse river be closed by war in May it will result in a great loss to the tea merchants. The prices of Japanese tea will certainly be increased, and its export will probably be greater than ever. The Japanese tea is by no means so good as that of China. It is nerve-exciting, and if it stands it becomes bitter. The majority of people of the country do not know what good tea is. They like green tea, and they mix the green and black together in a most barbarous way. They think they are paying a high price when they give \$1 for a pound of tea, and it will be surprising to many to know that there is a tea in China which is worth \$25 a pound, and I have heard of tea which cost more than \$100 a pound.

### PRESIDENT HARRISON'S \$150 TEA.

Perhaps the most costly tea ever brought to this country was some Indian tea which was presented to Benjamin Harrison while he was President of the United States. It came from a great tea company in Ceylon, and it was presented in a tea caddy made of an elephant's foot, which had been hollowed out into a beautiful box. This contained several pounds of tea of a very choice variety, and in the center of the box there was a little casket containing a

handful or so of tea which was worth \$150 a pound, and was perhaps the costliest tea in existence. The tea outside of this was delicious, but the \$150 tea was a drink for the gods. President Harrison showed the tea to his friends, and now and then had a drawing made for those who were closest to him.

One day a western Senator who knew as much about tea as a cow does about chocolate caramels spent an evening at the White House. During his stay President Harrison spoke of this wonderful tea and said he would give him a bit of it, supposing, of course, the man would understand that he would have a drawing made and they would sip together. He sent one of the servants for the precious casket of one hundred and fifty dollar tea and handed it over to the Senator to examine. The Senator took it and looked at it, and then said, "I am much obliged, indeed, Mr. President, and I will take it home to the madam." He thereupon put the box in his pocket. One of the President's official family, who was present at the time, told me of the incident, and I asked him as to what the President did.

"What could he do?" was the reply. "He couldn't ask the man to give it back, without offending him, and the result was that he carried away the box, which was worth more than its weight in gold, and which I venture was no more appreciated by the people who got it than the poorest of the Japanese variety."

### WHAT GOOD TEA IS.

The Chinese tea which we get for a dollar a pound brings about twenty-five cents a pound in China, and what the Chinese call good tea is worth at least a dollar a pound wholesale in China, and it would bring in the United States two dollars a pound. Tea which costs ten dollars a pound is by no means uncommon among rich Chinamen, and there are some Chinese nabobs who serve up fifty dollar tea to their guests. The man who knows nothing of tea, but thinks he knows a good deal, wants the liquor to be dark colored and considers this a sign of strength. The best Chinese tea is often as clear as crystal, and the color of good tea should be a very light yellow, hardly as dark as light amber. The first leaves of the tea plant are the tenderest and the first picking, of course, brings the most money. We use every year about eleven million dollars' worth of Chinese tea, and we are fast becoming big consumers of Ceylon and Indian tea. I have traveled through the tea district of the Himalaya mountains, and have tasted the tea which grows on the border of Tibet. This is said to be the national home of the tea plant, and it is claimed

that the tea was taken from here to China and there grown. The English now have vast tea plantations in India and these are increasing every year. The Chinese do not think that milk or sugar should be used with tea. Boiling water should be poured over the tea, but the tea should by no means be boiled. I was treated to a cup of tea during a visit I made to How Qua, the famous millionaire of Canton. This man is said to be worth fifty million dollars, and the tea which the servants brought in was about the color of Georgia pine.

### CHINESE TEA DISTRICTS.

The Yangtse-kiang is the river which runs right through the center of the Chinese empire, cutting the country almost in half. I was told that the best teas were raised south of this river, and that no good tea could be grown above it. The great central tea market is, as I have said, is Hankow. Here there are vast tea factories and tea warehouses, and the very air is filled with tea. I visited many of the factories during my stay, and the methods of preparing the tea for market are by no means of an appetizing nature. Just outside one of the largest establishments I saw a half-naked coolie who had pulled off his gown and was picking out of the seams certain unmentionable animals, which he cracked between his fingers and ate. A moment later I saw that same coolie, with his pantaloons pulled up to his knees, standing in a box of tea which was about to be shipped to England, and treading the leaves within it in order to pack them closely to ship them. A dozen other coolies, also in their bare feet, were engaged in the same work. The weather was warm, and the perspiration was rolling down their yellow skins, and was, I judge, readily absorbed by the tea in the boxes. In another part of the establishment I saw a lot of Chinese girls, who had feet no bigger than your fists, picking over tea. Their feet, which was bandaged, were half-covered with the leaves of the second grade tea, which they had thrown down down into the baskets below them, as they, rapidly handling the leaves, sorting over each and every one of the thousands of tiny bits of green before them. At Amoy I was told that a vast amount of tea was spoiled about a year or so ago. It was so ruined by dampness or something that the Chinese would not use it. The factors then spread it out on the dirty wharves where it was mixed with all kinds of foul stuff, and dried for shipment to America and England. I have heard it stated that the tea grounds of some Chinese restaurants are taken out and redried and in some cases shipped to America. I doubt this very much, but