The Chairman and Directors of the Assam Co. Ltd. have great pleasure in asking you to accept a copy of the History of the Company from 1839-1953, and hope that you will find considerable interest in reading it.

They believe it shows how much British interests, enterprise, courage and finance have, over the years, contributed to India’s well-being.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY
1839-1953
THE HON. PETER FARQUHARSON REMNANT.
Elected a Director 1936, and Chairman from 1942 until today.
A HISTORY OF
THE ASSAM COMPANY
1839-1953

BY

H. A. ANTROBUS
Author of
"A History of the Jorehaut Tea Co. Ltd.
1859-1946"

PRIVATELY PRINTED BY
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1957
WHEN I was invited by the Board of the Assam Company to write their History, I felt it a great honour to be selected for such a task. I knew that such a History would not be an account merely of the founding, development and progress of a single company. The Assam Company is not only the premier tea company of India, but it is the genesis, the ma-bap (mother and father), of the whole Tea Industry outside China.

From a study of the writings of the historians of Assam, such as J. P. Wade, R. P. Pemberton, John Butler, William Robinson, Sir Alexander MacKenzie, Sir Edward Gait, S. K. Bhuyan, one finds that they take their historical account to the point when tea had been discovered as an indigenous plant of the province, and they refer in general terms to its subsequent expansion as a potential industry.

The Assam Company being the pioneer of this key industry of Assam makes its History an important part of the history of the province, for it carries on to relate the story of the development of this industry where the early historians have left off.

The chief material and the authentic basis on which the History is built up is the Company’s Minute Books, leather-bound tomes in a wonderful state of preservation. The magnitude of the research through these books will be understood when it is mentioned that for more than the first twenty years there were two Boards of Directors—one in London and the other in Calcutta—and that they met as often as not every week. The London Board had one Annual General Meeting held in May; the Calcutta Board Half-yearly General Meetings held normally in August and January. On each of these three occasions of meeting a printed Report and Accounts were issued. The Accounts accompanying the London Reports were made up to a different date from those for the Calcutta Reports. This disparity in dating of Accounts as between the two Boards is explained by the fact that they were issued to different shareholders, for there were two Registries, one in London for roughly two-thirds of the shares issued in England, and the Registry in Calcutta for the balance of the shares issued in India. The London Board decided the dividend to be paid, which was paid in sterling to the shareholders on the London Registry, and the same dividend was paid to the shareholders in the Indian Registry in its equivalent in rupees.

It is through such a maze of detail that I have tried to steer a straight course in recounting the History of the Company as it unfolded itself.

The London Minutes were the soul of brevity. That great personality,
Mr. Walter Prideaux, who, first as the Company’s Secretary, then as Director, and finally as Chairman served so loyally for forty-eight years from the Company’s inception in 1839 until he had to resign in 1887, when he was nearly blind, believed in keeping his Minutes to the barest essentials. The most crucial decisions of the Board were disposed of by: “The Secretary’s draft reply was submitted and approved.” The copies of the Letter Books in which such vital decisions were made have been destroyed long since.

Difficulties of research and compilation are measured by their reward. This has been fully commensurate with the time and labour expended. The archives of the Assam Company have enabled me to fill in many blanks in the early history of the Tea Industry, to correct and put in their right perspective incidents already known, besides bringing to light quite new facts about happenings and persons.

There are many ways of planning the writing of a History. Which is the best way is probably a matter of personal opinion. In planning this history, I have endeavoured to keep three main objects in view:

1. The chronological development of the Company.
2. The story.

The opening chapters on Assam relate to the early history of the province up to when the tea plant was discovered.

“Discovery of the Tea Plant,” etc., recounts what was known of tea in Assam before the Assam Company came on the scene and the controversy that existed over the relative merits of the China and indigenous plants. These chapters are the background, the setting of the stage for the play to follow.

1. “The Formation of the Company” covers the first two years (1839-1840) after the inception of the Company. There follow chapters in five-year periods for the first twenty-five years of the Company’s existence and in ten-year periods thereafter. The shorter five-year periods were chosen for the earlier years because the Calcutta Minute Books gave more detail of happenings then, and also because it is those early years of which there is least known generally of the development of tea. After the first slump of 1865-1866, tea production became general.

Any reader, therefore, who wants only to read the history of the formation, development and expansion of the Company over the years as it happened, will find that in the chapters dealing with “The Formation of the Company,” and each chapter subsequently dealing with the years in their chronological order, is all that he will require. It will be found, however, that in these chapters there is related that part of the story as it affects the deeds and misdeeds of the notable individuals who chiefly influenced the administration of the Company.
2. The story is what people look for most. The writing of the story and anecdote is one thing—to know where to bring it in to the account is not so easy, remembering that the book is a History. To pick them out and put them in the main description of the progress of the Company would mean digressions that would detract from that historical value. I have left the stories where they are told in the chapters on Staff, Transport and Communications, Labour, to mention only a few. It is personalities that help to make history, and their triumphs as well as their failings go to make the story.

3. As a necessary part of information as a book of reference, statistics of the Company’s crop, prices, profits, dividends, etc., are given. In the Appendix are quoted old letters and reports which may be of interest to some. To judge by the reception my previous book on the Jorehaut Company received, at least in the tea districts, the account of each individual member of the staff in Assam is often referred to, especially in settling hotly disputed assertions about people who were in the province before them. I would have liked to have repeated such a record of the individuals of the European staff of the Assam Company, but when I state that this would have involved an account of no less than 430 members, it will be realised that it would mean many pages that would have rendered the book unwieldy. The account of the staff has had to be confined therefore to a chronological list only of all their names and the years they served.

There are, however, names of many men who are almost legendary in the Tea Industry, or who are otherwise notorious, that it would be an omission not to give some account of what is known of them. The selection of the members for inclusion in this list has not been confined to those of meritorious service only—some are more noteworthy for their iniquities.

There are many ways of spelling place-names in India, and particularly in the early days. Stations as spelt then are now sometimes quite difficult to recognise. I have adopted throughout the Government or official spelling; the only exceptions will be found when making a quotation from old documents, when the spelling as it is found in such original record is written.

In the old printed Accounts and in Minutes where reference is made to payment of money, “Company’s rupees” are mentioned. This refers of course, to the Honourable East India Company’s rupees, to distinguish that official currency from Indian State coinage, the relative value of which may have varied. This is up to 1858, when the Government of India was vested in the Crown.

The early Minutes of the Assam Company have cleared up many facts
concerning the early history of the Tea Industry which were in doubt when I wrote my History of the Jorehaut Tea Company Ltd.

I would express my thanks and appreciation to all those who have helped me in my researches and with their advice. I would like to mention them all by name, but as this is impossible I must thank especially two past members, H. C. W. Geach and J. R. Clayton, the former being good enough to read the manuscript and fill in many details of local information; J. Q. Healy, the present General Manager, who in spite of his heavy duties has found time to answer my many enquiries; and G. Houldey, the Company’s Secretary in London.

There was reported to the Company what appeared at first sight the inconsequential fact that there had come into the custody of the Guildhall Library a small collection of documents relating to the early history of the Company. The Librarian and Curator enquired if the Company had in its early records anything to supplement the story revealed in these papers. The officials of the Library realised that these papers were of importance, not merely in respect of tea, but more generally as valuable London archives contributing to the City of London’s economic history.

The Library described the material as a “small collection” of manuscripts, which judged by their vast archives was correctly a relative term, but to the Assam Company it represented a considerable record of its earlier operations. The analysis of these papers was a rich reward for the hours spent in their close examination, and what they revealed was fully commensurate with the time spent on the investigation.

Walter Prideaux was not only the Secretary of the Assam Company. He was by profession a Solicitor, and was also Clerk to the Goldsmiths’ Company, which accounts incidentally for his earlier communications being addressed from Goldsmiths’ Hall.

The story of how these papers came into the custody of the Guildhall Library is that the Goldsmiths’ Company, in the spring of 1954, deposited with the Library a portion of their own archives. The clerk of the Goldsmiths’ Company, Walter Arbuthnot Prideaux, M.C., grandson of the Assam Company’s original Secretary, deposited also other archives which were in his custody as a Solicitor, and amongst them were the above Assam Company’s papers.

Far from being what was conjectured at first some inconsequential private papers of an individual, these documents were found to be some of the most vital and revealing in the Company’s history.

Apart from Walter Prideaux’s own draft copy of the Company’s Deed of Settlement, with corrections and amendments in his own handwriting in 1839, and the subsequent draft Deeds when the Company was reconstituted as a Sterling Company some twenty-five years later, there
were found copies of letters of March-May 1839 from the Company's Calcutta Agents, Cockerill & Company, disclosing, I believe, for the first time, who really were the people who formed the Bengal Tea Association with whom the Assam Company amalgamated. There were verbatim Reports of the Annual General Meetings 1862-1864; private letters between members of the Board and the Secretary or Chairman; draft paragraphs of what was written to the Calcutta Board, and, most important, voluminous reports and printed letters to shareholders from Henry Burkinyoung and others, and from the Board, during those difficult years for the Company, from 1861-1868.

The information gleaned from these papers has enabled me to clarify many matters that were previously obscure or in doubt.
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(in pocket at end of volume)
EDITORIAL NOTE

At the request of the Chairman and Board, of which I was a Director from 1943-1954, I undertook to sub-edit Mr. Antrobus' very detailed MS—owing to my knowledge and training as a Printer in Edinburgh from 1898 to 1914—in order to reduce the final bulk of the volume. It is not a very enviable job to tamper with the conscientious work of another man, but I should like to take this opportunity of assuring the author that I have been scrupulous in avoiding any marked disturbance of the even flow of his careful planning and work: and having read firstly the whole MS and then the slip proofs and page form to check references and detail, I hope I have succeeded in my task without detriment to himself in any way.

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E. M. Murray

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PETER F. REMNANT
Chairman
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Peter F. Remnant
Chairman
CHAPTER I

ASSAM

BEFORE embarking on a History of the Assam Company and its formation in 1839, it is necessary to give some account of the country, its condition and its inhabitants, where the first experiments in the cultivation of tea were to be carried out.

Starting from its earliest trading settlement in India, the government of the whole country was in the hands of the East India Company, known more familiarly as John Company. In 1784 the British Government at home established a Board of Control to superintend the administration of the Court of Directors of the East India Company. This Court comprised a Committee of twenty-four members, with a President chosen from amongst the shareholders. The Capital of the Company was £6,000,000 sterling.

In 1813 the Charter Bill was passed in the House of Commons, and under this Act the Company's control of its territories and revenues was renewed for twenty years, including its monopoly of the trade in tea with China, though other trade monopolies were abolished. This Bill was replaced in its turn by the Charter Act of 1833, for a period also of twenty years, and under it all trade monopolies were abolished, which opened the door to commercial private enterprise.

The four main principles in this new Act, affecting trade and the individual, were:

(1) The Company retained its political rights of directing the affairs of the East India Empire under the superintendence of the Board of Control.

(2) It should cease to be a commercial Company, and in consequence thereof give up its monopoly of trade in India and China.

(3) That the trade of those countries should be free for every British subject.

(4) That British subjects should on certain conditions be allowed to settle in British India, which was before strictly forbidden.

The third and fourth provisions which allowed British subjects to trade and settle in India were important, for they had been excluded previously. As regards Assam, this would account for so few British or other foreign merchant adventurers in the province, but it is necessary to explain in the light of what follows how it was that before the lifting of
this ban Robert Bruce was trading in Assam and was the first to penetrate as far as the Muttock and Singhpo countries.

It would seem that Robert Bruce was privileged as an employee of the East India Company, in his capacity as Major in the Bengal Artillery, to be in Assam. There is nothing to indicate, however, whether he resigned his official post or was on pension, but he took up his residence in Assam.

In these early years India was divided into the three Presidencies, of Bengal, Bombay and Madras. The Governor of Bengal was also the Governor-General of India. Assam was part of the Presidency of Bengal, and was under the local jurisdiction of the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East Frontier.

The Charter Act came up for review in 1853. It was not renewed, however, as formerly for twenty years, but “until Parliament should otherwise direct.” The shock felt in England by the events of the Mutiny gave the East India Company its death-blow. It was realised that the system of double government could continue no longer, and the Government of India Act of 1858 declared that India was to be governed by and in the name of the Crown. Earl Charles John Canning was appointed Viceroy and Governor-General.

It is necessary to give this brief account of the Government of India under British rule before writing of the more ancient history of Assam, because the period of this narrative of the Assam Company commenced and was for the first twenty years of its operations in the time of the East India Company.

To the average man at home in the early 1800's, India was an Empire acquired through a victorious feat of arms, for it was only half a century earlier that the British Government, as the Honourable East India Company, had become masters of Bengal against their French rivals. To such, however, the North-East Frontier conveyed nothing. If he was interested enough to enquire, he learned probably that it was just a vast, fever-infested, jungle area. The Burmese Wars may have wakened in him some interest as they affected the fortunes of British military operations, but he did not regard it probably as of major consequence.

It was otherwise, however, with the Administration in India itself, where the North-East Frontier was a subject of preoccupation for the Government to decide whether to side with one or other of the contending factions in Assam, or to be impartial and leave them to fight out their own destiny.

The Ahoms were a race from the North Shan States of Upper Burma, and they conquered Assam in 1228, when Sukapha was put on the throne as the first king. The Ahoms ruled Assam for rather less than six hundred years—except for varying periods totalling about twenty-six years between 1639 and 1682, when the Moguls conquered Assam. The Ahoms
were rulers of Assam until 1838, and were a virile race. They are described by S. K. Bhuyan in his *Anglo-Assamese Relations 1771-1826*:

... the factors which enabled the Ahoms to consolidate their power in Assam, and to maintain it for such a long period were mainly their militaristic cult, their highly developed political sense and their religious toleration, detachment and neutrality. Politics and military achievements were considered as the only path to fame and fortune. ... For several centuries the Ahoms remained aloof from the Hindu influences of their surroundings. They followed their old rites and ceremonies, and maintained to some extent their intercourse with their original homeland in Upper Burma.

Many of the present-day Assamese of the province must be descendants from these Ahom conquerors, for the above authority tells us:

... He (Sukapha) and his followers had left their women folk in their Shan homeland as being incapable of the strenuous life of adventurers, and they were therefore compelled to marry from among the women of the conquered tribes, the Morans, the Barahis and the Chutias.

For centuries Assam was the arena of continual warfare and forays between the Ahom and Kachari Rajas, and subject also to the raids and incursions of the hill tribes, the Nagas, Mishmis, Miris, Arbors, Dafias, etc., from their fastnesses in the hills which border the plains of Assam on nearly all sides.

The intrigues and rivalries of the Ministers at the Courts of the Assam Rajas were the cause, more often than not, of much of this internal warfare. In the reign of Chandra Kant (1810-1818) history records:

The principal Ministers of State, who had themselves seated Chandra Kant on the throne, headed a rebellion against him of the most formidable character and contended in Arms with varying fortunes for the possession of the capital and the control of the revenues. Failing to obtain aid from the British, who continued to hold aloof from Assam affairs, the Raja's party had recourse to the Burmese, and Chandra Kant was twice indebted to that power for material assistance. Purundar Singh, a prince of the royal house, the most able amongst the various pretenders who sought to get possession of the throne, was driven out by the Burmese in 1816 and took refuge in British territory. The Burmese proved, however, to be but dangerous allies. The price demanded by them for their aid was more than Chandra Kant was willing, or able, to pay, and he soon became anxious to get rid of them. A futile attempt to shake them off resulted in the expulsion of Chandra Kant himself and the elevation by the Burmese, of a new Raja in the person of Jogeshwar Singh.
In invoking the aid of the Burmese the Ahom Rajas were hardly calling on the assistance of a foreign power, for they themselves were originally invaders of Assam from the Upper Shan States and to this extent it could be said that they were calling upon people of their own country of origin.

Whether it was the Moamaries, a sect of one of the hill tribes that first overran the country, or the Burmese who invaded Assam, the result was that the condition of the country when it was taken over by the British was deplorable.

Even in their own country the Assam Rajas were cruel and ruthless to their people, and more so to any of their opponents who fell into their hands. These cruelties were nothing, however, to the atrocities perpetrated by the Burmese.

In 1824, when British troops were endeavouring to drive the Burmese out of Assam, there is this account from Gait's History of Assam:

Colonel Richards, the British commander, had established his headquarters at Koliabur but, when the rains set in, the difficulty of obtaining supplies compelled him to return to Gauhati. The Burmese thereupon re-occupied not only Koliabur but also Raha and Nowgong, and, in revenge for the friendly disposition which the Assamese had shown towards the British troops, they pillaged all the surrounding country and committed appalling atrocities on the helpless inhabitants. Some they flayed alive, others they burnt in oil and others again they drove in crowds into the village Namghars, or prayer houses, which they then set on fire.

The terror with which they inspired the people was so great that thousands fled into the hills and jungles to the south, where large numbers died of disease or starvation and only a small remnant, after enduring unspeakable hardships, managed to reach the plains of the Surma valley, where several of the submontane villages are peopled by their descendants, who still talk pure Assamese.

Those who escaped the Burmese themselves were liable to become the victims of bands of native marauders, who wandered about the country disguised as Burmese, whom they emulated in their barbarities, and on to this scene of chaos descended also the wild hill tribes to add their weight to the unspeakable miseries and sufferings of the hapless inhabitants, who fled in all directions, leaving the country depopulated.

The Burmese had taken possession of Assam from 1779, and although they were attacked by armies under various Ahom rulers, it was not until the British Government decided to intervene through the first Burma War that the country was restored to peace. It was by these military operations in Burma itself, after the successful defeat of the Burmese attack on Rangoon and the advance up the Irrawaddy of an army under General
Archibald Campbell, that he dictated the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 by which the King of Burma ceded Arakan, Tenasserim, Upper Assam, Cachar, Jaintia and Manipur to the British.

Even whilst the country was in this turbulent state there were some British residents. Robert Bruce was one, and his appearance on the scene about 1820 is recorded in E. A. Gait’s History of Assam.

For more than a year Purandar Singh had been busy collecting a force in the Dooars, which then belonged to Bhutan, with the aid of a Mr. Robert Bruce, who had long been resident at Jogighopa, and who, with the permission of the Company's officers, procured for him a supply of firearms and ammunition from Calcutta. Towards the end of May 1821 this force with Mr. Bruce in command, entered the country from the Eastern Dooars, but it was at once attacked by Chandrakants’s levies. Mr. Bruce was taken prisoner, but was released on agreeing to enter the victor's service. In September Chandrakant sustained a defeat at the hands of the Burmese and retreated across the border. He rallied his men in the Goalpara District and Mr. Bruce obtained for him 300 muskets and nine maunds of ammunition from Calcutta. He returned to the attack and, after inflicting several defeats on the Burmese, reoccupied Gauhati in January 1822.

Jogigopha is a small village, with a few partly brick houses, the usual small shops and a police station, situated at the west of the Manas River on the north bank of the Brahmaputra nearly opposite Goalpara. The main occupation of the inhabitants appears to be fishing. There is no evidence now of its past history, but in years gone by it was a trading centre of considerable importance because of its situation on the boundary of Assam and Bengal, for what is now the District of Goalpara was then a part of Bengal. Robert Bruce's activities as a ruler and adventurer are referred to in more detail in the chapter dealing with "Pioneer officials."

When the country was placed under British authority its administration was entrusted in 1823 to Mr. David Scott, who had been appointed Agent to the Governor-General for the whole eastern frontier from Cachar and Sylhet in the south, to the Sikkim country in the north, but excluding the Muttock country. The Muttock country is described as that tract of land that lies to the south of Sadiya in the angle between the Brahmaputra and Bari Dihing rivers and inhabited chiefly by persons of the Moamaria sect and governed by a chief called the Bar Senapati.

The capital of the British-administered part of Assam was Rangpur, close to Sibsagar. Amongst Scott's other appointments he was Special Civil Commissioner of North-East Rungpore, that is Goalpara and the Garo Hills, and Judge of Circuit and Appeal in the Zilla of Sylhet. A vast territory with a multiplicity of offices which, with the means of transport then available, must have been too much for any man in the climate of Assam.
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David Scott died in 1831 at the early age of 45 and was buried at Cherrapunjee, where there is a tomb to his memory recording the indefatigable and eminent services he rendered to the province of Assam. It was said of Scott that if the scene of his labours had been in North-West or Central India, where the great problem of Empire was then being worked out, he would have occupied a place in history by the side of Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe.

Almost before the Burmese had been driven out of the province, British troops were stationed in Assam, not only for the maintenance of law and order but to protect the inhabitants of the plains from the incursions of the wild hill tribes. There were garrisons at Gauhati and Sadiya, in the Brahmaputra valley; at Silchar and Sylhet in the Surma valley. Sadiya was held by a regiment of native infantry aided by two gunboats, each mounting a 12-pounder gun, manned by the Royal Naval Brigade which patrolled the river.

Craft of the Royal Navy so far up the rivers of Assam may be a matter for surprise. Gunboats are described as small vessels of light draught, fitted to carry one or more guns in the bow, impelled by sail or sweeps. Although steam-propelled vessels were in use by the Navy much earlier (the first steamer used in war in the East was the Diana, built at Calcutta and launched in 1823), it has to be assumed that these gunboats were manoeuvred by sail and sweeps. To bring such craft from Calcutta to Assam must have been an arduous task against the current of the Brahmaputra. In one account it is recorded that from Calcutta to Sadiya by country boat took about three and a half months, a distance in a straight line of some eight hundred miles, but considerably more than that taking into account the very tortuous route by tributaries of the Ganges or through the sunderbunds and up the Brahmaputra itself.

It was the policy of the Government to restore the administration of the province to native rulers. They knew, however, that they could not withdraw British troops altogether, for this would be certain to lead to a revival of the internecine disturbances which had brought the country previously to the verge of ruin. It was decided, therefore, about 1831-1832 to instal a native ruler to independent control of one part of the province and to retain administration of the other to provide the revenue required for the maintenance of an adequate British garrison.

According to A. Mackenzie's The North-East Frontier of Bengal the choice of a native ruler was very limited:

... had any of the Native royal house shown real capacity or ability to govern with acceptance by the people, there can be no doubt that he would have been forthwith installed as Raja. The Assam princes were, however, mere worthless debauchees and the security of our Eastern districts made it necessary to retain strong military control of this part of the frontier...
ASSAM

In implementation of this policy, early in 1833 the whole of Upper Assam from the Dhunseri River, excluding the Muttock country and Sadiya, was made over to Purandar Singh. This division of the country was made by Government, based on recommendations submitted by David Scott before he died, and it was he who put forward the name of Purandar Singh, then a young man of about 25, for the high office of Raja. It was left to Scott’s successor, Mr. T. C. Robertson, to make the final selection in consultation with his officers, Major White and Lieutenants Mathie and Rutherford, against the only other rival, Chandrakant. Jorhat was then made the capital of the new state. The British Government maintained direct political relations with the Chiefs of the Muttock country and the surrounding hill tribes with a garrison and Political Officer at Sadiya.

A condition of Purandar Singh’s appointment as tributary ruler of Assam was the payment to the revenues of the province of an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000. In less than three years he defaulted in his payments. On investigation, his administration was found to have failed utterly. He oppressed and misgoverned his subjects, and his rule generally was distasteful to the bulk of the population. There is in McCosh’s Account of Assam (1838) this parody on the Raja’s regal court:

... In that whilst he resided at Jorhat and designated himself Swargadeo, or Lord of Heaven, he lived in pomp and tawdry splendour—his nobility reduced to beggary or to exist on bribery and corruption, his Kingly Court more resembling a parade of a company of strolling players than anything imposing or sovereign.

In 1838, Purandar Singh was deposed and pensioned off, his territories reverting to British administration. With this, the whole of Assam came under British administration, which is an opportune place to quote the concluding account from S. K. Bhuyan’s Anglo-Assamese Relations 1771-1826:

The occupation of Assam forms an interesting episode in the expansion of British Dominions in India. The conquest was unpremeditated, and in a way, it was forced upon the British, who had for many years deliberately refused to assume any control over the affairs of Assam, though such control was within easy reach of accomplishment. The Company had throughout, respected the integrity of Assam as an independent territory, and had uniformly disowned any move that tended to disrupt the authority of the Swargadeo Raja of Assam.

The incorporation of Assam in the Company’s Dominions was the result of circumstances which had been produced neither by the conquerors nor by the conquered, but by their common enemy the Burmese. A singular feature of the conquest is the absence of any preceding conflict between the
Assamese and their new rulers, so that when the British occupied the country, the inhabitants entertained no acrimony or bitterness, which is generally occasioned by remembrance of past enmity.

Mr. T. C. Robertson, on being transferred to Bengal in 1834, where he became subsequently Deputy Governor, was succeeded in the office of Governor-General’s Agent and Commissioner of Revenue on the North-East Frontier by Captain Francis Jenkins, eventually General Jenkins.

There were many Government officers in the province who assisted and encouraged the founding and development of the Tea Industry in Assam, but foremost amongst these was Jenkins, under whose direction C. A. Bruce held his first appointment as Superintendent of Government Tea Barries in 1836.

In China, tea was a centuries-old and a flourishing industry. It was a bold step, therefore, to venture into competition with that country, particularly as the first essential for the successful cultivation of tea is an adequate supply of labour. It is difficult to conceive, therefore, conditions more unfavourable for the founding of a similar industry in India than were the conditions in Assam in the 1830’s. Assam was a country delivered only recently from rapine and internecine warfare; its indigenous population had been decimated whilst what little remained was demoralised and scattered from its native soil. It has to be remembered also that slavery existed to a considerable extent and most of the domestics, both male and female, were either slaves or bondsmen who for a few rupees had been enthralled by mortgaging their bodies, and for want of means of accumulating the original sums, increased by exorbitant usury, continued in bondage for life. The unfortunate subjects of this disgraceful system were bought, sold and even mortgaged like any other article of property. In the event of their death, their hard masters seized upon their descendants or their nearest relatives, whom they kept in bondage, and so from generation to generation. One of the chief measures introduced by Mr. David Scott was to call for a census of all the slaves in Lower Assam, followed by a summary investigation into the rights of the owners to hold in slavery those whom they claimed as slaves. This investigation was attended with much discontent and distrust among the proprietors of slaves, but under its operation no less than 12,000 individuals were released from soulless bondage.

With the attainment of relative peace, however, agriculture, the natural occupation of the inhabitants, revived, though for many years the native cultivators as well as the British or foreign pioneers of tea or any other commodity were subject to the head-hunting raids and incursions of the wild hill tribes. The protection of the plains of Assam against these tribes is a subject by itself, but as from the earliest times down to, say,
thirty-years ago their raids were always a threat, a brief reference to some of these raids is called for.

It was a gnawing form of warfare, in most difficult, jungle-clad, precipitous, hill country, that smouldered for years. There were many minor punitive expeditions against these savage people, but there were a number of their incursions which required fairly considerable military operations to suppress or punish.

In 1825 the Singphos ravaged Sadiya and the Dibrughar area almost to Rangpur near Sibsagar. It was against these Singphos that the expedition under Captain Neufville, with a body of native infantry and two gunboats, advanced in 1826. They proceeded as far as twenty-five miles up the Noa Dihing River to Tengapani, and with the gunboats guarding the river crossing the attack against the Chief, Duffa Gaum, was successful.

The commander of these gunboats was Lieut. C. A. Bruce, R.N., who became subsequently the Superintendent of Government's experimental tea gardens and after that one of the Superintendents of the Assam Company.

There was the very sudden Kamti rising in 1839, when Colonel White was murdered amid most of the garrison of Sadiya wiped out. In 1859 Colonel Hannay commanded a large force against the Abors, on whom he inflicted adequate punishment for their previous raids, down to the Abor expedition of 1909-1911 and the Kuki rising in 1917-1919.

History generally does not take much account of these operations which were so vital to the security and peace of the province, and there is a tendency therefore not to recognise, or it may be to forget, the debt that is owed to the courage and endurance of the men who suffered such hardships in the prosecution of this peace-making, in a foul climate, against savages who were so elusive in their own difficult country and who had always on their side the advantage of surprise and ambush.

When the actual triumph over barbarity had been effected and the tribes settled to peaceful means of livelihood, there followed the years of fine work by the Indian Civil Service in the administration by the Political Officers of those inhospitable and scattered, or “backward,” areas as they are designated politically to-day.

From time immemorial the method of cultivation of the land by the ryots (peasantry or local inhabitants) had remained unchanged and could be described as the minimum of exertion that will obtain the least production from the soil, and in his native surroundings the ryot carries on the same methods to-day.

In the earliest days of British administration the method of collecting revenue was to parcel out the area in each District into blocks called
“Mauzas” or “Mahals,” and the dues realisable were collected by Mauzadars, Chaudaris or Patgiris who were appointed by the collectors of the District. The province was divided into the Districts of Kamrup, Durrung, Nowgong, Sibpur or Lakhimpur, Mattak and Sadiya. For revenue purposes the land was divided into various categories, the chief amongst which were: Basti, or homestead, assessed annually according to District at Rs.3 to Rs.1.8 per pura (a pura being 1.3 acres); Rupit, or land on which rice was transplanted, assessed at R.1 per pura; and Faringati, or land growing dry crops, assessed at 4 annas a pura.

It was computed in those days that a man and wife with two children would consume two maunds of rice a month, with rice at 8 annas a maund, and allowing another rupee a month for other necessities an income of Rs.3 a month provided existence. Although the land rent was so moderate and the cost of living for the ryot so low, yet, through neglect or indolence to cultivate his land adequately or whatever other cause, the majority seemed to come eventually under the malign influence of the Mahajan, or shopkeeper. It may be that the first step on this path was taken in dire necessity caused by a bad harvest, forcing him to appeal for a loan to meet the land rent due and to provide the minimum to sustain life. Once in the hands of these usurious Mahajans he had no hope of ever extricating himself, for to meet their exorbitant rates of interest alone, his anticipated crop was mortgaged each year, whilst the Mahajan, by varying his rates of interest, saw to it that the principle could never be paid off. Through legislation and economic factors, such as getting a better price for such of his crop as he produced in excess of his own requirements, the ryot did become better off, but with an improving social status bigger demands for expenditure on marriage, festivals and funeral ceremonies, etc., are made by the customs of his community, so he continued for a long time the unwilling victim’s still of the usurious demands of the moneylender, though he appeared to accept this as a normal condition of his existence.

In its revenue policy Government was anxious to avoid the zemindari system of Bengal, whereby large tracts of agricultural land got into the hands of the rich Indians and was by them sub-let to the ryots, with the consequent usury on advances and the ultimate suppression of the real agriculturist, whilst these owners did nothing to expand the potentialities of the province as a whole. It would seem that the land settlement decided upon eventually by Government failed to abolish, in some Districts of Lower Assam, disabilities similar to the zemindari system of Bengal.

It may have been the consequence of the earlier demoralisation of their ancestors and the outcome of unsettled conditions, but Government officials in the province were candid in their opinion that “... the more
influential members of the indigenous population had minds little more enlarged for any beneficial purpose than the meanest of their slaves and could inculcate no useful instruction whilst they carry with them only more superstition and litigation.”

Government conceived the idea, therefore, that if they could not get from the inhabitants of the province that general improvement of the country, both moral and physical, then it was essential to introduce into what they admitted to be “such a wild land, long misgoverned and scantily populated,” foreign enterprise, industry, capital and skill. Government were prepared, therefore, to sacrifice immediate gain in revenue if they could thereby attain some form of long-term expansion of the province, for its agriculture and other resources, which they knew were inherent in its fertile soil. They offered very liberal terms, therefore, to any competent parties willing to undertake the cultivation of the waste lands of Assam. The adjective foreign, as applied to these Government communications in 1836, meant then anybody who was not an indigenous resident of the province. As foreigners, Government would have welcomed equally Indian pioneers from any other province or state in India who were prepared to stake a claim and work it. The conditions for holding land were the same for all.

To take up land in those far-off days called for courage, endurance and fortitude and withal some of the gamblers’ instinct to take a chance with the unknown.

In more recent times, over one hundred years after the establishment of the Tea Industry, one has heard the specious implication that land was granted by Government to Europeans to the exclusion of Indians. This is not borne out, however, on reference to the correspondence between the Board of Revenue, Bengal, and District Officers in Assam, from which was evolved the terms of land settlement which were enacted finally by Government. In a country so unsettled and depopulated, it is no wonder that there was no competition for the acquisition of land. What incentive was there for the intelligentsia from other and more settled parts of India to venture into an unknown jungle country, to exercise their zemindari practices, when they could do this in more favourable conditions in their own country? The agricultural and commercial possibilities in the development of tea was unknown to them, and they were not interested.
CHAPTER II

DISCOVERY OF THE TEA PLANT

Although the East India Company enjoyed a monopoly of the tea trade with China, it was interesting itself nevertheless in the possibilities of growing tea in India. When Parliament abolished its monopoly with China in 1833, it turned its attention to India more seriously.

This must have inspired Lord William Bentinck’s original Minute of 24th January 1834, to the Council of the East India Company, in which he proposed the formation of the Tea Committee to investigate the possibilities of growing tea in India.

Years before this, there had been reports of the tea plant growing wild in India. First amongst these was one from Sir Joseph Banks, about 1788, followed by those of Colonel Kyd and Dr. Goram. Lord Bentinck’s Minute was based, however, first on an undated report by a Mr. Walker putting forward proposals for the cultivation of tea in the Nepal hills with the object that “... It would much contribute to the consumption of British manufactures and increase the prosperity of our Empire in the East and also annihilate the Chinese monopoly which it is the object of these proposals to destroy.”

In justification of his selection of the hills of Nepal, Mr. Walker referred to the Honourable Mr. Edward Gardner, then a Resident of the East India Company at the Court of Nepal, who in 1816 found the tea plant flourishing in a garden in Khatmandu. This was presumably Colonel Gardner, one of the successful Commanders under General Ochterlony in the conquests of Nepal in 1814-1816.

Secondly, on Dr. N. Wallich’s observations on the cultivation of the tea plant for commercial purposes in the mountainous parts of Hindustan which Wallich drew up at the request of the President of the Board of Control for Indian affairs.

This report was written in London and is dated 3rd February 1832.

Dr. Wallich was the most notable botanist in Bengal and was in charge of the Government’s Botanical Gardens at Calcutta. It was his inflexible belief that the tea plant would grow nowhere but in a country with soil and climate that conformed to those conditions under which it was believed that the best tea was grown in China. These were a temperate climate, warm but not so tropical as would be found in the plains of India, with frost and snow in the winter months and above all an elevation of not less than 3,000 feet.
DISCOVERY OF THE TEA PLANT

In justification of this belief he pointed to what he considered was the failure in other countries to produce tea successfully. Having regard to Dr. Wallich’s dominating influence on the development of tea in India and his contribution to the introduction of the China plant, it would seem as well to record what cultivation of the tea plant had been undertaken in countries other than China about the time Wallich wrote his report of 1832, and before dealing in later pages with the proceedings of Lord Bentinck’s Tea Committee in Calcutta and the subsequent discovery of the tea plant in India.

TEA IN MALAYA

In his report Dr. Wallich refers to the total failure of the attempts made by a Mr. Brown to cultivate tea in Penang. This Mr. Brown had an estate at Silugar and imported Chinese from Canton to superintend the undertaking. The finished tea that was produced eventually Wallich described as very inferior and the infusion had acquired the very appalling property of a nauseating and even slightly emetic drug. Dr. Wallich ascribed this failure to the possibility that plants of a particular variety which did possess these properties, which the Jesuit Missionaries told him did exist in China, had become unfortunately the stock of Mr. Brown’s plantation. In his opinion this failure was due also to the fact that Penang was a tropical country with its highest hill not exceeding 2,500 feet. In writing thus about Penang, Dr. Wallich was quoting from personal experience, for he had been to Malaya in 1820 and 1829.

There are some flourishing tea estates in Malaya to-day.

TEA IN JAVA

Continuing his observations, Dr. Wallich said of Java that similar trials had proved equally fruitless, and further that no better results had attended the experiment of the Dutch Government in the southern parts of Ceylon.

No record has been found of this early experiment in Ceylon, though it is believed that about 1805 the tea plant was reported as growing wild near Trincomalee, but in his reference to Java in 1832 Wallich’s judgment as to success attained in that island would seem to have been premature, for Mr. G. J. Gordon, who had been despatched by the Tea Committee to visit China, wrote to Wallich from Macao on 24th July 1834 that he had learnt from the Agent to the Dutch Company that they had three to four million plants and that the Company were so sanguine of success that they were extending their plantations vigorously. This tea was produced from China seed and was said to be “of good quality between Pekoe and Congou.”

The cultivation of tea in Java is in fact the story of a pioneer’s per-
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severance and success over great difficulties in establishing the tea plant. That pioneer was J. I. L. L. Jacobson, whose operations, under the aegis of the Dutch Government, can be said to have started from the date of his arrival in Java from Holland on 2nd September 1827.

In consideration of the fact that in 1839 the Calcutta Board of the Assam Company were in negotiation, through Agents in Batavia, to secure the services of Jacobson as their Superintendent, it would seem only just to give some account of this great Dutchman’s early work in growing tea in Java to compete with China and whose knowledge and services the Assam Company coveted. Jacobson’s interest in growing tea in Java in teeth of competition with China and his rise to eminence as the first European tea planter started from his knowledge of the finished product from China, for he was an expert tea taster and merchant. He owed his instruction in the buying and selling side of the trade to his father, under whom he commenced learning in 1814. When he arrived in Java in 1827 he was in the service of the Dutch Trading Company, and was commissioned by the Dutch Government to collect from China all the information he could about the cultivation and manufacture of tea.

The first five hundred plants were imported by the Dutch Government from Japan and were planted in Buitenzorg, but it was soon found that these were inferior to the plant from China. Jacobson produced his first samples of black and green tea in 1829 from these five hundred bushes of Japanese plants. In that year also he brought the first few plants from China.

China was very jealous of its tea production, and although in his capacity as taster and buyer Jacobson had easy access to the tea merchants of Canton, it was quite another matter to get into the “manufactories,” as they were called, to gain first-hand knowledge of how tea was made.

In his endeavours to obtain seeds, plants and Chinese workmen for tea and tea-chest making, and get them safely to Java, he had to circumvent the thousands of spies who were always watching with suspicion foreign visitors to that country. These expeditions, spread over some six years, were not accomplished without running considerable dangers. On one of his last trips to China he records that his Chinese interpreter and factotum was seized by the Mandarins and taken prisoner. He was ransomed subsequently, however, through the Dutch Consul at Canton. Jacobson, having been warned, had sailed earlier with his valuable collection of seeds, plants and workmen.

Jacobson records that in January 1832 he had acquired all the workmen and hundreds of thousands of tea plants. He made one further expedition to China and in February 1833 returned with another set of workmen and millions of seeds, all of which were placed under his care.

In 1832–1833 there occurred the massacre of Chinese at Krawang,
DISCOVERY OF THE TEA PLANT

alleged by some authorities to have been caused by the imported Chinese tea workers. This is refuted in Jacobson's writings on the Tea Industry, for he averred that the disturbance was created by Chinese of the lowest class, amongst which there were none of his tea makers. These lived some distance away, but they may have been drawn into the fracas and suffered in the killings.

It is true that the Tea Industry did decline after this favourable start given to it by Jacobson, but this was due more to the Dutch Government's agrarian fiscal policy than to any want of success in growing tea in Java. The Industry virtually faded out, and it was not until the 1870's that its revival began, but its success there was handicapped by the indifferent quality of its production. It was not until another twenty years or so had passed that with the importation of seed from India and Ceylon and the gradual elimination of the old China plant the Dutch East Indies Industry rose to being, outside China, the third largest tea producer in the world.

TEA IN BRAZIL

In reviewing the possibilities of growing tea in India, many of the botanists referred to for opinion mention the growth of tea in Brazil, where it was alleged to have been introduced from China some time about 1810. It was never produced on a commercial scale. Even Captain Jenkins, in writing to the Tea Committee on 26th February 1835, likened the Garo Hills in Assam to the country in the Brazils where tea had been so successfully introduced.

So much for early tea cultivation and production in places other than China at the time the Tea Committee issued its first circular of enquiry.
CHAPTER III

THE TEA COMMITTEE

On its inception in 1834, the Tea Committee comprised James Pattle (Chairman), J. W. Grant, R. B. Mangles, J. R. Colvin, C. E. Trevelyan, C. K. Robinson, Robert Wilkinson, Sir Robert Colquhoun, Dr. N. Wallich, Radhakant Deb, Ram Comul Sen and G. J. Gordon (Secretary). On the departure of Mr. Gordon to China, Dr. N. Wallich acted as Secretary to the Committee.

One wonders at this date what were the qualifications which guided Lord Bentinck in his selection of these persons to form his Committee, for until 1833 British subjects were prohibited from trade and residence in India except with the approval of the East India Company; his choice was restricted therefore to members of Government service. R. D. Mangles was at one time officiating Secretary to the Government of India. He was subsequently a Director of the Assam Company in London. Relying on Thacker’s Guide to Calcutta, C. K. Robinson was an architect, for in referring to Calcutta residences, it is mentioned in regard to No. 12 Garden Reach, which was the residence of the Chief of the Bengal Nagpur Railway, that it was “distinguished above all others for its classic elegance. It was erected after a design by C. K. Robinson, to whose architectural taste the City is indebted for some of its noblest buildings.”

C. E. Trevelyan was in Government service, but in what capacity has not been traced. Nothing is on record regarding J. R. Colvin, Robert Wilkinson or James Pattle.

Of the two Indian members, there is no account of Ram Comul Sen. Relying, however, on Early History of Calcutta and assuming Radhakant Deb is the Sir Raja Radhakant Deb, he was one of the founders of the Hindu College and was a member of its Managing Committee for thirty-four years. In those days, English education was viewed with jealousy and even alarm by the Hindu community, but the Raja used his influence in its favour and made the College a success. He was Vice-President for a time of the Agricultural-Horticultural Society of Calcutta. The Raja’s greatest work and one which gave him a world-wide reputation, was the encyclopaedic Sanskrit-Bengali Dictionary, the compiling of which took him over forty years.

In response to the Committee’s Circular of 3rd March 1834, which was addressed to, amongst others, all District Commissioners, the recorded replies came chiefly from Commissioners in hill stations, who, basing
their recommendations on the then known requirements of the tea plant, formulated on the information furnished by Dr. Wallich as to climate, soil and elevation, advocated the suitability of their respective situations, geographically and climatically, with suitable elevation above sea-level. Amongst these, Dr. H. Falconer, who was Civil Surgeon and in charge of the Botanical Garden, Saharanpore, was emphatic that tea would not grow in the plains. He suggested the valley of the Dhoon.

There is no doubt that credit for the first knowledge of the existence of the tea plant in Assam must go to Robert Bruce, for he was in the province in 1823 and got into touch with the Singhpo chiefs, who knew of the plant.

Robert told his brother, Charles Alexander Bruce, about it, but the fact that the latter reported the matter to his superior officer, Captain Francis Jenkins, did not come to light until Bruce had already been appointed Superintendent of Tea. In a letter to Jenkins dated 20th December 1836, he wrote in response to Jenkins' request for an account of his past services:

At the breaking out of the Burmah War, I offered my services to Mr. Scott then Agent to the Governor General, and I was appointed to command Gun-boats. As my command was at Sadiya, I was the first who introduced the tea seeds and plants and sent them to Mr. Scott and other officers below. My late brother who was in Assam before the breaking out of the War, had previously informed me of their existence; and it was I who verbally informed you of it, and officially brought the subject to your notice in 1833, giving a description of the method of making tea by the natives. I was the first European who ever penetrated the forests and visited the tea tracts in British Sadiya, and brought away specimens of earth, fruit and flowers, and the first to discover numerous other tracts.

Jenkins took no account of Bruce's report of 1833. This was probably before the news of the abolition of the East India Company's monopoly of the trade with China, and the discovery of tea in India was therefore of less significance; or he may have been influenced by the fact that the specimens sent down for identification by his predecessor Scott had been pronounced as a camellia and not the real tea, and he judged therefore that the matter was not worth pursuing.

When, however, Jenkins received the enquiry from the Calcutta Tea Committee, he told them of his knowledge through C. A. Bruce of the existence of the tea plant in Assam. In the meantime, Robert Bruce had died.

There was a Lieutenant Andrew Charlton of the Assam Light Infantry at Sadiya, another of Jenkins' officers, who was interested in the flora of the province, and who, working on his own, had come across the tea plant.
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In the Proceedings of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society in Calcutta there is recorded this letter, to a Dr. John Tytler of Calcutta, dated 21st January 1832, in which Charlton, after referring to the presence in the country of gum copal and caoutchouc, says:

The tea tree grows in the vicinity of Sadiya, most remote of the British possessions towards the East in Assam, and adjacent to the Burma territory. Some of the natives of Sadiya are in the habit of drinking an infusion of dry leaves, but they do not prepare them in any particular manner, although the leaves are devoid of any fragrance in their green state, they acquire the smell and taste of Chinese tea when dried. The tree bears a flower very like that of the wild rose but much smaller.

The Tea Committee’s Circular Letter reached Jenkins at his headquarters at Gauhatti, where it was shown to Charlton, and there followed these letters:

Copy of Letter from Lieutenant Charlton to Captain Jenkins, dated 17th May 1834.

With regard to the Circular from the Tea Committee which you showed me at Gnowatty, I have much pleasure in communicating the little I know of the tea plant of Assam. I was informed about three years ago of its being found growing wild in the vicinity of Beesa, at the foot of a low range of Hills, and in the subjacent plains, from whence I obtained three or four young trees, which I gave to Dr. John Tytler in Calcutta, with a view to their being planted in the Government Botanical Gardens. I have since understood they decayed soon after.

The soil where they grew was described to be alluvial like most parts of Assam, and the trees rising to the height of 12 or 14 feet were either at the foot or a small distance up the Hills, but never on the summit, from which I inferred a sheltered situation to be most favourable. The aspect was generally southerly or South-east. I am sorry I cannot give you a minute description of the plant, not having it now before me, but so much I recollect, the leaves were about 2" in length and one in breadth, alternate elliptic, oblong and serrate, the flower white, very like that of the wild rose, but much smaller. The seed I have not seen. It was described to be contained in a red round three-lobed capsule, the lobes detached or bursting along the upper sides with a single seed in it. From what I have seen of the tea plant in different parts of the world, and lately in New Holland, propagated by seeds brought direct from China, I have little doubt but that that found near Beesa is a specimen of tea, and though it may be spurious or even a camellia, as Dr. Wallich suggests, its growing there indigenous and in great abundance affords good grounds for supposing that the introduction of the Chinese plant into Upper Assam would be attended with success. I have not had an opportunity of making any experiments on the leaves; they are devoid of smell in their green state, but acquire the fragrance and flavour of Chinese tea when dried. The Singhpo’s
and Kamptees are in the habit of drinking an infusion of the leaves, which I have lately understood they prepare by pulling them into small pieces, taking out the stalks and fibres, boiling and then squeezing them into a ball, which they dry in the sun and retain for use.

I have written to Sadiya for a specimen of the tea prepared in this manner, and plants and their seeds. I will send you some if I am able to procure them, and write to you on this subject more fully by and by.

(Signed) — A. CHARLTON.

Copy of a private letter from Lieutenant Charlton to Captain Jenkins, dated Suddya, 8th November 1834.

I have now the pleasure of sending you some seeds and leaves of the tea trees of Assam, and am sorry that the unsettled state I have been in for the last three months had prevented my sending them so soon as I intended. The leaves you could have had before but I was anxious to make them into something like tea, the best test that the tree is not a camellia as Dr. Wallich imagines. It appears coarse owing to the leaves being large and much too old, which could not at the time be obviated; at the end of the cold weather when young leaves are on the trees, I hope to send you as good black tea as one generally receives from China. I will make experiments in the interim in the art of preparing green.

The tree I now find is indigenous in this place as well as Beesa, and grows wild everywhere and there all the way from this about a month’s journey to the Chinese frontier Younan, where I am told it is extensively cultivated. One or two people from that Province have assured me that the tea tree grown there exactly resembles the species that we have here, so I think there can be no longer any doubt of its being bonafide tea. What a pity that there is no means of communication between Suddya and Younan. A good land road made only as far as Hookum, and there are no natural obstacles of any consequence to prevent it, would afford an outlet for British merchandise into the very heart of China.

(Signed) — A. CHARLTON.

Copy of a note by Captain Jenkins on the back of the above, dated at Gowlatty, 22nd November 1834.

I have only time to send this and to say I have sent a jar of tea leaves and a box of tea seeds to Gowlatty by today’s Dak. I hope you will see from the seeds that there is no doubt ours is genuine tea as it appears to me.

Here was conclusive evidence of the existence of the tea plant in Assam, and on this the Tea Committee made their report to Government.

From the Members of the Tea Committee to W. H. Macnaghten, Esq., Secretary to the Government in the Revenue Department, dated 24th December 1834.

SIR,

We request that you will have the goodness to submit to the Right Honourable the Governor General in Council, the enclosed copies of the
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Reports which we have received from Captain Jenkins dated the 7th and 19th of May, and from Lieutenant Charlton dated the 17th May; also a subsequent communication from Lieutenant Charlton dated the 5th of last month, together with the samples of the fruit and leaves of the Tea Plant of Upper Assam, which accompanied it, and some specimens of the leaves previously received.

(2) It is with feelings of the highest possible satisfaction that we are enabled to announce to His Lordship in Council, that the tea shrub is beyond all doubt indigenous in Upper Assam, being found there through an extent of country of one month's march within the Honourable Company's territories from Suddya and Beesa to the Chinese frontier province of Yunnan, where the shrub is cultivated for the sake of its leaf.

We have no hesitation in declaring this discovery, which is due to the indefatigable researches of Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Charlton to be by far the most important and valuable that has ever been made on matters connected with the agricultural or commercial resources of this Empire. We are perfectly content that the tea plant which has been brought to light will be found capable under proper management of being cultivated with complete success for commercial purposes, and that consequently the object of our labours may be before long fully realised.

(3) It is proper to observe that we were not altogether unprepared for this highly interesting event. We were acquainted with the fact that so far back as 1826 the late ingenious Mr. David Scott sent down from Mannipore specimens of the leaves of a shrub which he insisted upon was the real tea; and it will be seen from the enclosed Reports from the Agent to the Governor General on the North Eastern Frontier, and his Assistant, that a similar assertion was strongly urged in regard to the existence of tea in Upper Assam.

Still we feel ourselves bound to suspend our decision on the subject until we should be in possession of the fruit of the reputed shrub, the only test on which to guide us. We knew that several species of camellia were natives of the mountains of Hindustan, and that two of these were indigenous in our North-eastern Frontier Provinces, and taking into consideration the close affinity between the two genera, we were disposed to accept that the alleged tea would prove nothing else but some sort of camellia.

We have at length obtained the fruit of the Suddya plant from Lieutenant Charlton, and we are enabled to state with certainty that not only is it a genuine tea, but that no doubt can be entertained of its being the identical tea of China, which is the exclusive source of all varieties and shades of the tea of Commerce.

With the view of exhibiting the peculiarities in the structure of the fruit on which depends entirely the difference between the tea and camellia, we have desired of our officiating Secretary to enclose a sketch of the fruit of both with explanatory remarks.

(4) We beg leave most respectfully to submit the preceding facts to the particular consideration of Government, and earnestly recommend that in the first instance and as early as may be practicable, one or more scientific
gentlemen properly qualified for the investigation, may be deputed into Upper Assam for the purpose of acquiring on the spot the greatest variety procurable of the botanical, geological and other details which as preliminary information are absolutely necessary before ulterior measures may be successfully taken with regard to the cultivation of the tea shrub in that country.

We also beg to express our opinion that it would be highly desirable to adopt forthwith the plan suggested in Lieutenant Charlton’s last letter of the 5th November of establishing a communication with Yunnan by means of a land route at least as far as Hookun, since independently of all other advantages, it would materially facilitate the operations of the Scientific Deputation which we have recommended should be sent to Upper Assam with as little delay as possible.

(5) We anticipate that the execution of the recommendations we have made need not be attended with any considerable expense; but it appears to us with reference to the very great importance of the occasion, that the only consideration which should have weight is that the money which may be required should be faithfully and economically applied to the purposes for which it may be granted.

This report is quoted in full because of its importance.

The question of who should be given the credit for the discovery that the tea plant was indigenous to India has been a matter of controversy for years. This report shows how credit was given to Lieutenant A. Charlton. By the specimen of seeds as well as leaves, he did certainly provide the final and conclusive evidence. His letter of 21st January 1832 to Dr. J. Tytler shows that he was one of the earlier discoverers. Before setting out the merits of each claimant’s title to the honour of being the discoverer, it is quite remarkable to read in paragraph 3 of the report that the Tea Committee did know of the previous evidence that had been submitted but none of it was to them justification for coming to a conclusion.

There is no doubt that it was Robert Bruce who had the first knowledge of the existence of the tea plant some time about 1823. This knowledge he imparted to his brother, C. A. Bruce, shortly afterwards.

Considering next the letter dated 20th December 1836 quoted above, from C. A. Bruce to Jenkins, it is to be noted that he informed the latter that he sent seeds and plants to “... Mr. Scott and other Officers below...” —that is before he told Jenkins verbally of its existence in 1833.

In the Tea Committee’s report it says, “... We were acquainted with the fact that so far back as 1826 the late ingenious Mr. David Scott sent down from Manipore specimens of the leaves of a shrub which he insisted upon was the real tea. . . .”

The statement that Scott sent these from Manipur does not mean necessarily that the specimens were found in that district. Scott’s juris-
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diction as Agent of the North-East Frontier extended from Sylhet to the Muttock country, and beyond to Bhutan. It is probable, therefore, that these specimens could have been those sent by C. A. Bruce, as mentioned in his letter to Jenkins of 20th December 1836. All communications would have been sent to the Agent wherever he was on tour and passed on by him from that station to Calcutta.

This report recommends to Government the deputation of scientific gentlemen to investigate the botanical, geological and other details of Upper Assam which was in fact done.

To summarise the evidence in this controversy after Robert Bruce had imparted his knowledge of the presence of tea, there is C. A. Bruce who failed in his endeavours to get the discovery recognised officially, as far back probably as 1826 but certainly again in 1833. Lieutenant A. Charlton, starting later than C. A. Bruce, had discovered tea, but had been more fortunate in getting his specimens of both leaves and seeds identified correctly by the botanical authority in Calcutta.

Some authorities who have written on this subject ascribed all the credit to Jenkins. It was certainly one or other of his officers who made the discovery, but Jenkins himself was only the medium of passing on to Government their reports and specimens.

So much for the question as to who was to be given the credit for the discovery of tea, but it was C. A. Bruce who did all the pioneering work of finding out how to grow and make tea. All that he found out on this important subject was duly sent to his senior officer, Captain Jenkins, starting with his first report written some time in 1837, which was submitted to the Tea Committee by Jenkins in his letter dated 5th October 1837. In this, he emphasised to the Committee what a valuable contribution this was to their knowledge on the subject. This was followed up two years later by Bruce's well-known treatise of 10th June 1839.

It was not until years afterwards, in 1842, that this controversy was settled officially by the presentation of Gold Medals to Captain A. Charlton as the first to discover the tea plant and to Jenkins for bringing the subject to official notice.

There is no information as to how C. A. Bruce reacted to this award. At the time it was made he was Superintendent of the Assam Company's Northern Division. That he regarded himself as the man of destiny who really discovered tea and had set it on the road to success is obvious from the final paragraph of his report of June 1839 (See Appendix 3.):

In looking forward to the unbounded benefit the discovery of this plant will produce to England, to India—to millions, I cannot but thank God for so great a blessing to our country. When I first discovered it, some 14 years ago, I little thought that I should have been spared long enough to see it become likely eventually to rival that of China, and that I should have to
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take a prominent part in bringing it to so successful an issue. Should what I have written on this new and interesting subject be of any benefit to the country, and the community at large, and help a little to impel the Tea forward to enrich our own dominions and pull down the haughty pride of China, I shall feel myself richly repaid for all the perils and dangers and fatigues that I have undergone in the cause of British India Tea. (Appendix 3.)
CHAPTER IV

SCIENTIFIC DEPUTATION TO ASSAM

The deputation to Assam of an official committee of enquiry was sanctioned by Government on the recommendation of the Tea Committee in their report of 24th December 1834, but this recommendation was not the outcome of the Tea Committee's own deliberations. It had been suggested to them previously by Jenkins in a letter dated 3rd March 1834, before Charlton had produced his evidence of the existence of the tea plant in Assam.

It is of interest to recall that in making his recommendation for the line of country in which such a deputation should conduct their enquiries Jenkins was working on the essentials as to climate, soil and elevation, as propounded by Dr. Wallich, and for this reason he suggested, "in the most forcible manner" as he expressed it in his letter, that the deputation should consider as suitable country for the cultivation of tea the mountainous territory commencing from east of the Jhantia Raj, where there was an elevation of 2,500 to 4,000 feet in the valleys and up to 6,000 to 8,000 feet on the hills; that the geological structure was of clay and slate; that camellias grew there in abundance, and that this line of country between Cachar and Assam was contiguous with the Chinese provinces of Sechuan and Younan where the best China tea was grown.

Jenkins' original suggestion for the scientific deputation was made for them to discover if the tea plant existed, but the Tea Committee's recommendation was that the deputation should, whilst confirming Charlton's discovery, collect on the spot "... the greatest variety procurable of botanical, geological and other details ... before ulterior measures may be successfully taken with regard to the cultivation of the tea shrub in that country."

The Tea Committee, in their letter of 12th March 1835 to Government, nominated for this deputation Dr. N. Wallich; Assistant Surgeon J. McClelland, of the Bengal establishment, as geologist; and Assistant Surgeon W. Griffiths, of Madras, also as botanist. The appointment of these gentlemen was approved by Government, and they were to receive remuneration of Rs.500 monthly each for their special and arduous duties, together with the aid of Government establishments for their travelling and guards, etc.

The deputation did not proceed direct to Upper Assam, where the tea plant had been discovered, but followed the recommendation made by Jenkins that they should be in Cachar by 1st November and from
there travel overland to Gauhati and thence by water via Bishnath to Sadiya. In this way Jenkins got the deputation to examine in the first place his line of thought mentioned above as to the best country for growing tea, that is the hill country between Cachar and Assam.

The deputation left Calcutta on 29th August 1835, and their first report was written from Cherrapunjee sometime in October, in which Dr. Wallich refers to the variety of the vegetable forms found in the hills around and the immense botanical and geological collections they had made under the indefatigable zeal and research of W. Griffiths and J. McClelland. It was at Chattak that McClelland spent some time analysing samples of China tea soils imported by Gordon and comparing them with soils found in the country around Cherrapunjee.

From Cherrapunjee they proceeded by road to Gauhati, where they met the boats that were to take them for the rest of the journey to Sadiya.

It is necessary to mention at this point that C. A. Bruce had been appointed to take charge of Government's experiments and to be responsible for the preparation of nurseries to receive seeds and plants imported from China by Gordon and which had arrived in Calcutta in January 1835. Bruce had even then explored considerably in the Muttock and Singpho countries and had discovered many tracts containing the indigenous tea plant. It was C. A. Bruce, therefore, who was the guide to the deputation in their investigations.

The fact that Bruce was appointed to this office of Superintendent of Tea Culture at a salary of only Rs.150 a month suggests that this office under Government was, to begin with, only supplementary to his appointment as Commander of Gunboats.

The deputation visited the tea tracts found in the Muttock country, and there is a record that Dr. Wallich visited Nadwa and Tingri, and that McClelland inspected the tracts at Kusudoo, Keyhung and Ningrew.

After this the deputation was split up in accordance with their terms of reference, which appear to have contained instructions that they should return to Calcutta via Ava, for the purpose of examining the country on that route for botanical and geological information. W. Griffiths was detached from the deputation to accompany Captain Hannay on the latter's next visit to Ava from Sadiya. Captain Hannay was Commandant of the 40th Native Infantry at Sadiya and was virtually Political Agent on the Burmese frontier. It was only possible to venture into that country under military escort.

In the meantime, Major White, who was stationed then at Jorhat, reported to Dr. Wallich, in a letter dated 24th December 1835, that the tea plant had been found at a place called Gabroo Parbut, about eighteen to twenty miles away. In making this report, Major White was relying
upon information given to him by Raja Purandar Singh, who told him also that Kacharis, which he called the best labour in Assam, were to be found quite close to Gabroo, and that the Raja would give every assistance in procuring these labourers.

After leaving the Muttock district, Dr. Wallich and McClelland proceeded through the country east of Sadiya to examine the areas near the Dibroo and other rivers where the tea plant was reported to exist, and from there to Gabroo Parbut, en route to which place they planned to arrive at Bishnath by 15th March 1836.

It was Dr. Wallich’s opinion that after this the deputations’ labours, as far as they concerned the examination of the tea plant in Assam, would terminate, at least for that season.

McClelland was detached from the deputation to examine the geological formation between the Dihong and Dhunseri rivers, with the intention that he should proceed through the Mikir Hills to Dimapur to explore the possible coal and lime deposits in that area.

In a letter to Jenkins dated 15th March 1836, written from Bishnath, Dr. Wallich gave a summary of his views on what he had seen of the tea plant in Upper Assam and at Gabroo Parbut. He expressed the opinion that the plant in these two localities had travelled originally from China, and in this view he said he found support from Major Grant’s advice that tea had been found in Manipur state.

As a result of what he had seen in Assam, Dr. Wallich admitted that the lowest class of tea could be produced profitably in the plains, but he asserted:

At the same time, I beg to repeat what I have already had several occasions to intimate to you now that I suspect we shall have to ascend much higher elevations than those where the tea has been hitherto seen in Assam to meet with localities subject to a decided winter of six weeks to two months duration before we can expect to find the more valued and superior sorts of tea, and it is to such localities that we must chiefly direct our attention in the establishment of our new Plantations.

In this summary there is no reference to the subsequent controversy about the merits or otherwise of the China compared with the indigenous plant, but having regard to present-day fine-quality teas that come from Darjeeling, the high-grown districts of Ceylon and the Nilgheris in Southern India, he was right as to elevation being necessary for the best-flavoured teas.

Wallich’s report concludes with a long eulogy of C. A. Bruce, in which he said:

It is of the utmost importance that a trustworthy and properly qualified person should be nominated for the charge of the forests and for carrying
into effect the above provisions and subsequent steps; and whose duty it should be to visit the forests frequently and in succession, and to report on their progressive condition.

Believing it to be impossible to find someone equally qualified with Mr. C. Bruce in point of experience, zeal and bodily constitution, it is my intention to recommend that gentleman in the strongest manner I can to the Tea Committee for the charge of the Assam forests; the more so as I have every reason to believe that you agree with me entirely in this matter... the excellent character which he deservedly bears amongst us all, his extreme strength of constitution which has enabled him to encounter the fiercest jungles at seasons when it would be fatal for anyone else to come near them; all these considerations combine to render him eminently qualified for the duties in question.

It is not possible to be precise regarding Griffith’s explorations in Assam and Burma. He was detached from the tea deputation towards the end of February 1836; he concluded a visit to the Mishmi Hills in December 1836 and he met Captain Hannay at Namroop Pathar on 12th February 1837 to proceed on his projected visit to Ava. This was not the town of that name in Burma, but was used loosely in those days to denote the Burmese territory beyond the Assam frontiers.

In his journey from Namroop through the Patkoi Hills, he remarked that no tea was found to exist in these hill areas, but he ascertained that there existed an abundance of coal of excellent quality and that putao, (petroleum), was present also, and this was one of the factors which satisfied him that, contrary to the prevailing contention, tea was not essentially a hill plant.

It is not known for how long or how far Griffiths explored into Burma, and his report is undated, but it was submitted to Government by the Tea Committee on 5th September 1837.

As the report on tea is marked Part VII, it forms presumably a section only of a more voluminous account of his scientific investigations into parts of Assam and Burma. His report was contentious and critical, not only in regard to the subject of tea in Assam but of the opinions expressed by other botanical authorities and of his contemporaries in the enquiry. Griffiths was quite aware that the views he expressed might be resented in some quarters, hence the remark in his report, “... he hoped his observations would be taken in the proper light, that they will not be received as originating in a spirit of scepticism, but as a strong wish to protect the interests of the Government he had the honour to serve.”

In amplification of his agreement that the indigenous plant of Assam was the true tea plant, he pointed to the fact that Assam, in the configuration of its land, its climate and in the presence there of other plants, was similar to the best-known tea provinces of China. He disagreed with Dr.
Wallich that a hilly elevation was necessary, and expressed the opinion that the Himalayas were not so well adapted as the plains of Assam for the cultivation of tea. Griffiths was insistent, however, that for success it was essential to import the best China seed, for he averred that even the inferior kinds of China plant would lead to the production of a better marketable article than that of the wild or jungly stock from the indigenous plant. On this account he condemned the Tea Committee’s action in having recalled Gordon from China. He visualised the desirability of a long-term policy of hybridising the imported China with the local plant.

In contrast to Wallich’s eulogy of C. A. Bruce’s qualifications, Griffiths was scathing:

> From the remarks I have made as to the importance of improving the Assamese plant, it will be evident that certain qualifications are necessary in the person who has the general superintendence of the whole plan. It has been generally allowed that the superintendence of any given plant requires at the least a certain degree of practical knowledge, and if this be combined with some theoretical knowledge, the chances of success are much increased. Now, it may be fairly asked how are the above qualifications fulfilled in the instance of the present Superintendent of Tea, Mr. Bruce? The question may appear invidious, particularly to those unacquainted with Assam; but the answer is obvious; indeed, to do Mr. Bruce justice, I believe he does not pretend to possess either one or the other. As a zealous, hard-working person, Mr. Bruce cannot be well exceeded; and to these good qualities, he adds those of a tolerable acquaintance with the natives of Upper Assam, and of the Assamese language so far as colloquial intercourse with the lower orders, and the possession of strong physical powers.

Contrasting the culture of tea in Java, where it was under the superintendence of a qualified botanist, he said of the superintendence in Assam: “It is directed by a person who was brought up to a seafaring life and whose long residence in Assam has been devoted entirely to mercantile pursuits and the command of Gunboats.”

As if seeking to disagree with what Wallich, and for that matter Jenkins, had written regarding the climate of Assam, “... relative to this point, I may observe that the idea of the extreme insalubrity of Upper Assam is totally unfounded, at least so far as Europeans are concerned, and has originated from persons of timid habits in whose eyes blades of grass are death-bearing toorais.”

At this stage in his report Griffiths made the following suggestion as an alternative to the employment of Bruce: “... The last point I would beg to urge is the placing of the scheme under Captain Jenkins, the Head Authority in Assam, who in addition to his well-known zeal for the welfare of the Province under his charge, adds a degree of scientific knowledge which few possess.”
Griffiths did not appreciate apparently that as a Government experimental scheme it was already under Jenkins' administration, but it would seem a somewhat fatuous suggestion to think that Government would transfer such a senior officer as Jenkins from his successful administration of a vast territory to superintend what was then only a few patches of tea plants in the jungle.

Having in some essentials disagreed with Dr. Wallich as the leader of the deputation, Griffiths then turned on some of his contemporaries in other parts of India:

I cannot conclude this part of my report without adverting to the extremely desultory manner in which the question of tea cultivation in India has been treated by every other author who has written on the subject with the exception of Mr. McClelland. To what conclusion but one can one come when we find an authority who has been supposed to be acquainted with the question in all its details, stating very gravely that a temperature between 30° and 80° is requisite; and when we find that this is as gravely taken up by a more popular and philosophical author. True it is that neither had seen the tea in its native state when the statement was made, but equally true it is that neither can show a single datum in any of the authors; who have noticed the tea as it exists in China, on which to found such a curious and rather broad statement. From such loose data, such indeed as are generally supposed to be inadmissible into questions of scientific import, it is that a station between Mussoorie and Deyra Doon is stated to be particularly eligible.

On what may not be a wholly exhaustive subject of the working of the scientific deputation, McClelland's report has not been seen, and although he was the geologist of the party, he did from the above excerpt from Griffith's report write on the subject of tea. The deputation would seem to have confirmed only that the tea plant was indigenous to Assam and that the country of Upper Assam and its climate was similar to that of some of the tea-growing districts of China. But the one strong recommendation which they did make, that all future planting should be with China seed in preference to the indigenous plant, has been referred to since as 'the curse of the Tea Industry.'
CHAPTER V

THE CHINA PLANT AND ITS INTRODUCTION INTO INDIA

The Industry, having in its infancy been saddled with this incubus of the China plant, it is of some historical interest to recall such detail as is known of the first importations.

One of the first acts of the Tea Committee was to send their Secretary, G. J. Gordon, to China, to collect information about the cultivation and manufacture of tea in that country and to acquire seeds, plants and tea makers. He sailed from Calcutta in the Water Witch in June 1834.

It is not known what qualifications Gordon had for this mission; it is stated only that he was late of Mackintosh & Company of Calcutta. Such a mission into the Celestial Empire had its dangers and hazards, for as mentioned in reference to Jacobson’s mission to that country on behalf of the Dutch Government in respect of tea cultivation in Java, the Chinese guarded jealously the secrets which gave them the monopoly of supplying the world with tea. When Gordon, as Secretary of the Tea Committee, was detached from that office to go on this mission to China, the Tea Committee co-opted Dr. N. Wallich, then in charge of the Government Botanical Gardens, Calcutta, an eminent botanist and the only one with knowledge of this subject on the Tea Committee, to act for him. There is record of some reports from Gordon to Wallich in which the former told what he had seen or heard of tea cultivation in Java.

In the Proceedings of the Annual General Meeting on 2nd June 1862, Captain A. Henderson, a Director on the London Board (1839-1865), claimed that he was commissioned to accompany Gordon on his expedition. There is nothing in the Government papers to confirm this. By reference to the chapter dealing with individual Directors, there is mention in more detail of this claim, and it would seem that it was probably an exaggeration.

The Tea Committee’s original Circular had been issued to Government officials in various provinces other than Assam. Several had replied that the country under their jurisdiction appeared, so far as climate, elevation and other factors were concerned, suitable for what was then understood as essential for the cultivation of tea. Whilst Gordon was away in China, the Tea Committee in December of that year issued their Report to Government that the tea plant was indigenous to India and had been found growing wild in Assam. The Tea Committee decided
THE CHINA PLANT

to recall Gordon. They considered that by this discovery his mission to China was no longer necessary. Before this could be given effect to, however, the first fruits of his work in China reached Calcutta on 23rd January 1835, in the form of a consignment of about 80,000 seeds of the China plant.

On arrival these seeds were, under Dr. Wallich's direction, germinated in the Botanical Gardens, Calcutta, and the resulting plants were distributed, 20,000 to Assam, 20,000 to Kumaon and the neighbouring hill districts and 2,000 to the Madras Presidency.

Before dealing with the plants sent to Assam, the alleged fate of those received eventually in other Districts must be accounted for briefly by reference to the reports the Government received from their officials in the Nilgiri, Coorg, Mysore and Madras.

Dr. H. Falconer, Superintendent Botanical Gardens, Saharanpur, reported on 2nd May 1836 that there were 1,300 tea plants established at various places in the provinces of Ghurwal and Sirmoor at elevations of between 4,000 feet and 5,300 feet, with a further 25 plants at 6,400 feet. It was only in these districts that any degree of success attended the importation of this original seed, and it is only in what is described generally as the Kangra valley that many small estates exist to-day. They produce mostly green tea for local consumption or for sale to Afghanistan.

Of the six boxes of plants sent to the Nilghiri Hills, there were no more than twenty plants alive when they arrived, and writing from Ootacamund on 9th July 1836, the Commandant of the District was apprehensive whether these would survive. The report from the Secretary of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society in Madras advised about the same time that all the plants sent there had died. Much the same fate attended the plants sent to Mysore. Not 25 per cent. of the plants despatched ever reached their destination at Coorg and Nuggar. Survivors of the journey to those places perished soon afterwards. The unfortunate fate of the plants sent to the latter of these other districts may have been due to the fact that they reached their destination at the beginning of the hot dry season.

In distributing the plants to what can be described as these special stations where there was a Government official and a Botanical Garden to whom experimental plants could be entrusted, the Tea Committee was making use of all available facilities, but in the case of Assam, where tea was known then to be indigenous, there were no such facilities. Captain Jenkins, as the chief Government officer, had his headquarters at Gauhati, several days' journey from Upper Assam, where the tea plant grew.

In February 1835, Government sanctioned C. A. Bruce being engaged to look after the nurseries to be made for the reception of these plants, besides of course, looking for more tracts of indigenous plants.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

The 20,000 plants allocated to Assam left Calcutta early in November 1835, at which time they were ten-month-old seedlings, packed some in teak wood boxes and others in earthenware gumlaks, or large pots. They were loaded into eight country boats. The next news of the plants is in a letter dated 12th February 1836 from Dr. Wallich, who was then in Assam as one of the deputation of scientists, written from “On the Brahmaputra above the Dibru River,” to the Tea Committee, in which he reported having that day met the boats containing seedlings, which were in charge of a Sergeant Moore and two malis, gardeners, from the Botanical Gardens. As was the usual practice on such a journey, the European in charge travelled by fast paddle-canoe, whilst boats and cargo were “tracked” or towed up the river from the banks. In this way instructions sent by Wallich to the sergeant to meet him after leaving Bishnath did not reach him as he had travelled by a different channel of the river to that taken by the boats. Wallich then records:

... I have carefully instructed Sergeant Moore to halt until he gets further instructions from me. The difficulty of getting a fleet of such heavy boats of 600-900 maunds burthen much higher up the Brahmaputra at this season of the year, and the impossibility almost of their passing the reach of the river called Sillannee Mook, requiring that they should be changed to other means of transport render it very desirable to put the plants into a nursery straight away near the Dilroo (Dibru) in preference to Soyqua (Saikowa) which is situated beyond the above-mentioned dangerous point. I regret to say that a great number of seedlings have died on the way thus far owing partly to the protracted duration and difficulties of the journey, the long confinement under Choppar (bamboo mat covering) and the numerous rats which infest the boats...

Thirty-four small boxes and 2 large ones, besides 31 pots were left behind at Bishnath, as they contained altogether only 213 good plants, the remainder having perished or being in a doubtful state, which enabled Major White to discharge one of the boats, so that only seven are now retained. The sergeant has had the whole collection counted over since leaving Bishnath, and it appears that out of 20,000 plants which left Calcutta only 8,000 are surviving, considering all the circumstances connected with so large a consignment of young and tender seedlings, the tallest of them scarcely 6” in height and supported by the experience of many years, I am of opinion that the loss of three-fifths is not greater than might have reasonably been expected. The remainder still affording an ample and valuable stock for the formation of a future tea plantation.

The next account of these plants which were regarded by the botanists as forming the backbone of the future Tea Industry, comes from William Griffiths. His report is made eighteen months after the above account given of them by Wallich.
In the preliminary to the following excerpt, he criticised adversely that some plants had been transplanted into boxes which had many more casualties than those in pots, and condemned the practice of having transplanted the seedlings into these receptacles instead of planting the seeds direct into pots or gunlaks.

He emphasises the tenor throughout his report of being wise after the event:

Let me still further trace the progress of these unfortunate plants. A spot was fixed upon (as a nursery), by the Deputation at Chykwa, appearing to possess the requisite peculiarities of soil and situation. The spot was completely cleared for reception of the plants, and after a considerable time had elapsed owing to the difficulty of procuring labourers, they were at length, under the superintendence of Mr. Bruce and a mali from the Botanical Gardens, removed to their final destination. It was in August I visited the nursery with Lieutenant Millar, commanding at Sadiya, and Mr Bruce. To my great astonishment, not 500 of the plants were alive, and of these almost all appeared in the last stage of decline. The ground was literally matted down with low tenacious weeds, and it is a fact that on our arrival at the nursery, not a tea plant could be seen owing to the uniform green colour of the surface. I look upon this nursery, which would in other circumstances have contained many thousands of excellent Chinese stocks, to the existence of which I had attached primary importance, as totally destroyed. The cause of this destruction is beyond doubt to be attributed to the fact that the plants, which had for several months been under sheds, were in the nursery completely unsheltered from a sufficiently hot sun, the obvious remedy for which would have been the erection of temporary muchowns or mats by the removal of which at certain times, the plants might have become accustomed to that which was to them an excess of solar influence; and that the interval between the plants as well as round each had apparently never been subjected to the operations of a hoe or with any other instrument.

Having now sketched the fate of the nursery for Chinese plants I am naturally led to those of indigenous plants. The original nursery at Sadiya was under Captain Charlton's command, but as a very eligible spot was selected by Mr. McClelland behind that of Mr. Bruce's, the plants were subsequently removed thither, together with some plants of Mr. Bruce's; seeds of indigenous stock were likewise sown. From these shrubs the first tea ever made by Chinese in British India was procured; and although the supply was small, yet I am not aware of its having proved inferior to any subsequently manufactured. The process was seen by no-one but Mr. Bruce, and appeared to have been kept a complete secret from everyone at Sadiya.

With all its adverse criticisms, this report confirms that the first tea from Assam was made from the indigenous and not the Chinese plant. To have been able to do this from plants in a nursery, it seems fair to
assume that these plants, when put in the nurseries, were two- or three-year-old seedlings which Bruce had collected from some of the tea tracts he had found in the jungle. Another point in this report reveals Bruce as the practical man. He had no theories as to the botanical merits of the China or indigenous plant. He saw only how the latter thrived against the sickly imported China plant, and concentrated his attention on growing them to get his results.

Soon after Gordon returned to Calcutta from his visit to China, and actuated by the scientists' emphasis on the vital importance of obtaining further supplies of seeds and plants from China, he was sent on a second mission. The chief object of this subsequent visit was, however, to obtain Chinese green-tea makers. In making their application to Government for sanction of these, the Tea Committee explained that, “The Chinese of the Bohea country now in Assam, are quite ignorant of the process of making green tea. . . .”

Gordon’s second visit to China for a period of four months was sanctioned by Government in November 1836.

As a result of Gordon’s first visit, there continued to reach Calcutta small numbers of Chinamen, presumably cultivators rather than tea makers, for in a letter written by Bruce to Jenkins, dated 1st October 1836, he reported receipt of seven pots of plants brought up by these Chinamen, though Bruce did not seem particularly enthusiastic about them. He said that on arrival the plants in four pots were dead, though the others were “pretty healthy.”

Consignments of seeds and plants must have continued to arrive from China at intervals for a long time after Gordon’s second visit to that country, otherwise it would be impossible to account for the widespread incidence of the China plant that almost predominated in the province at one time. It is to be assumed that these consignments were arranged by Government, for although there is no record of the Assam Company ordering any, there is mention in William Prinsep’s report of 1841 when he visited the Southern Division gardens that some 7,000 China plants had then “just been received.”

Because of lack of more detailed information, it is possible to mention only something about the first importations of the China plant into Assam; once it was established, its reproduction was rapid, for it is a prolific seed bearer.

By 1855 the Assam Company had tea seed, mostly China, in excess of what they could use for their own plantings.
CHAPTER VI

THE FORMATION OF THE COMPANY

The genesis of the Assam Company was a meeting of merchants at 6 Great Winchester Street, London, on 12th February 1839.

It was known that it was the avowed intention of the Honourable East India Company to experiment only to prove that the tea plant would grow in India and that tea could be produced as a marketable commodity, then to leave it to private enterprise to produce it on a commercial scale.

No paraphrasing or written account of the inception of a company to embark on such an enterprise can give a better picture than do the reproductions of the first four pages of the Minute Book.*

At this first Meeting on 12th February 1839, G. G. de Hocheplied Larpent was Chairman. A Provisional Committee was constituted, comprising eighteen persons who were to obtain information about the quality and production of tea in Assam and to ascertain what support the East India Company would give to an association for its cultivation and manufacture.

Walter Prideaux was appointed Secretary.

There is a facsimile of the Merchants' Memorial to the Honourable the Court of the East India Company requesting that their Secretary Walter Prideaux be furnished with information to enable them to form a correct estimate of the probable advantages of the speculation.

The merchants who signed the Memorial comprised the names of thirteen companies and three individuals. It is possible to recognise in the names of these companies that many of them were represented by partners on the newly elected Provisional Committee, but it is noticeable that John Travers and Richard Twining, who were on that Committee, did not sign the Memorial. One might speculate that whilst in their individual capacities these representatives of two of the largest tea dealers were willing to serve on the Committee, they were reluctant to sign their companies' names to a public Memorial for the formation of a tea company that would compete with China and thus prejudice their existing business, which depended wholly on the latter country for tea.

In the Minute Book there follows four pages of "A concise statement relative to the cultivation and manufacture of Tea in Upper Assam." Who the authors were of this statement is not revealed. It was not based on information obtained from the East India Company, for the reply to the Merchants' Memorial was not received until later.

* See between pp. 40-41.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

Although more detailed and precise facts regarding some of the statements made are recorded in the previous chapters of this book, it is interesting to give excerpts from this document to show what was believed to be an authentic account of the enterprise in which these merchants were prepared to risk their Capital.

The preliminary paragraph refers to the discovery that tea could be supplied from British possessions in India to an almost unlimited extent.

It is well known that on the wildest pretence, and indeed without even an excuse of a pretence, Chinese authorities have frequently suspended our trade, and ordered the “Barbarians” as Englishmen are still popularly and unofficially styled, to quit the country, a proceeding which has often occasioned considerable inconvenience and embarrassment. Every merchant who is engaged in the Tea trade must feel that it is carried on in the most humiliating circumstances, and be desirous of getting rid of a dependence on the “Celestial Empire” by submission to which he is alone enabled to carry on a profitable trade in an article which was once a luxury, but has now become a necessary of living. An opportunity now for the first time presents itself to the English merchant to render himself and his country independent of China in trade in tea.

That the tea plant is indigenous in some remote parts of India has long been known to the scientific world; the fact was brought to the notice of the Court of Directors of the East India Company in 1788, in an able paper by Sir Joseph Banks, who suggested the practicability of introducing its cultivation in Rohiband (Rohilkund), but it was not attempted at that time.

Attempts to cultivate the tea plant successfully in situations not possessing the peculiarities of climate, and soil above mentioned have failed, or only partially succeeded. This has been the case in Java, St. Helena, the Brazils, and many other places to which it has been transplanted.

With the present establishment in Assam, consisting of about five Chinamen, and a very limited number of persons under their tuition, it is calculated that about 100 chests of tea can be produced annually. The country is reputed as being thinly populated, but no doubt is entertained as to the possibility of obtaining adequate labour, the price of which is extremely low, and process of tea manufacture is considered to be peculiarly suited to the peaceful habits of the Assamese. Chinamen may be procured in any number if proper means are used to obtain them. Chinese cultivators from Tokien form a considerable part of the emigrants to Java and Chinese labourers are employed in the Brazils.

The statement concludes with the optimistic anticipation that:

Our present enquiry has been chiefly confined to facts which tend to illustrate the subject with reference to the advantages it offers as a commercial
enterprise, and our investigations of these facts leave no doubt that the genuine tea plant of China is indigenous in Assam, and flourishes over an extent of country sufficient to supply the United Kingdom with tea; that in the judgment of persons best qualified to form an opinion, it may be cultivated and manufactured successfully as an article of commerce, and moreover that it only requires the application of European capital and enterprise to render it a great source of profit and an object of great national importance.

The next Meeting was held the following day, 13th February 1839, and was recorded as “A Meeting of the Provisional Committee of the Assam Tea Association,” held at Goldsmiths’ Hall. The object of the Meeting, at which Sir William Baynes was Chairman, was to appoint a deputation, consisting of five members of the Provisional Committee, to wait upon the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the East India Company, to learn their intentions as to their parting with their tea establishment in Assam and their making grants of land in that country.

Another meeting was held on 14th February at 6 Great Winchester Street, designated a meeting of “The Provisional Committee on the subject of Assam Tea.”

This reported the result of a deputation the previous day to the Court of Directors of the East India Company, which was regarded as extremely satisfactory, and on this the Provisional Committee was “... authorised to open Books and to receive the names of parties who may be desirous of becoming Shareholders.”

Resolutions were duly passed for a Company to be formed, to be called “The Assam Company,” with a Capital of £500,000 in 10,000 shares of £50 each, of which 8,000 were to be allotted in Great Britain and 2,000 in India.

In deciding upon the name of the Company, the Committee were aware that lime, coal and oil were in the soil, and that gold was alleged to have been found in the rivers. With an eye to the possibility that they might want to develop any one of these other commodities, the Committee decided to adopt the general designation of “The Assam Company” rather than the Assam Tea Company, although tea was the main object of the enterprise.

This was followed by another meeting on 15th February at the same address, but this time of merchants. This was merely to confirm to the merchants the proceedings of the previous meetings and to get them to elect a Committee of fifteen plus the Chairman, Larpent, and to make Walter Prideaux’s appointment Secretary of the Company instead of, as previously, Secretary to the Provisional Committee.

This Committee held their first Meeting the next day, 16th February, to pass a Resolution appointing Cockerill & Company and Boyd &
Company, Joint Agents in Calcutta, to carry into effect the objects of the Company. The Minutes of these Meetings record that a letter dated 16th February was written to these Agents, setting out in detail what their duties were to be, amongst which the chief was the engagement of the services of Mr. C. A. Bruce.

If one refers to the list of the merchants attending the first Meeting, merchants who were interested in trade with India, the Chairman’s firm was Cockerill, Larpent & Company, and it would seem natural that this firm’s opposite number in Calcutta should be selected as one of the Calcutta Agents. There is no such obvious connection with Boyd & Company.

It is remarkable what was accomplished in these daily Meetings, but more astonishing still was the nebulous information on which the Committee invited the public, or, as they designated their prospective subscribers, “persons of respectability,” to invest in the Capital of a Company which had really no foundation or constitution.

There then followed the Resolution that the first instalment on each share should be £5, of which a deposit of £2 was to be paid to the Bankers to be appointed, but the subscriber signing a book agreeing to pay all calls that may be made from time to time subject to special provisions as may be settled for the government of the Company.

The next Resolution was that the Secretary should draw up a short prospectus for distribution by members of the Committee stating the objects of the Company, and “... that no application for Shares would be received after Wednesday the 27th instant.”

That was a week after the date of the first Meeting. This was followed by a Resolution appointing a special Committee to wait upon the Board of Trade to find out on what terms they would recommend the grant of Letters Patent.

The outcome of these Resolutions was to learn at the next Meeting, on 28th February, that the Company’s request for the grant of a Charter for the inception of the Company, must be referred to the Government in India, and the Secretary was requested to prepare the necessary Memorial to this effect. After these preliminary Meetings, the Committee concentrated on the drafting of the clauses for their Deed of Settlement.

1 In the absence of an initial, it is not possible to be precise as to whom the Antrobus was who attended this Meeting. In Pigott’s London Directory for 1839, there is Edmund Antrobus, “Tea man to Her Majesty and to Her Majesty Queen Adelaide. 446 West Strand, which can have been a connection with the earlier firm of Antrobus, Greene & Russell, Tea men to His Majesty, of 480 Strand (opposite Northumberland Street.)

By reference to dates and the family history, this could have been alternatively either Gibbs Crawfurd Antrobus, brother of the 2nd Baronet, or Edmund Antrobus, afterwards 3rd Baronet, both of whom were cousins of the author.
THE FORMATION OF THE COMPANY

which was the equivalent of Articles of Association, and which other shareholders were to be called upon to sign.

In the meantime, the first deposit of £2 per share on the Company’s 10,000 shares had been subscribed, and a remittance of £5,000 had been made to the Agents in Calcutta to start operations at their end.

Before relating further developments in the formation of the Company in London, some account must be given of the Bengal Tea Association.

The Assam Company was not the first in the field with the object of cultivating tea in India and basing its formation on the acquisition of Government’s experimental tea barris and establishments. It came to the knowledge of some member of the Provincial Committee, and it was known to Government, because a mention of it is made in the Committee’s conference with the President of the Indian Board of the East India Company, that there were several people of repute and with capital in Calcutta, who were engaged in forming on a much smaller scale a company with the same purpose, which company was to be called the Bengal Tea Association.

It must have been in the letter to the Agents of 16th February 1839, mentioned above, that the Provisional Committee instructed them to negotiate with this “other party” with a view to unite their interests with those of the Assam Company. It has been found from other sources than the Proceedings of the Assam Company, that the proposal to form the Bengal Tea Association emanated from the office of Carr, Tagore & Company, Calcutta, who were Secretaries of the Calcutta Steam Tug Association and were connected later with the formation of the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited. The “gentlemen of repute” who had agreed provisionally to subscribe to the Bengal Tea Association, were:

James Pattle
Dwarkanath Tagore
Prossonoo Comar Tagore
Rustomjee Cowarjic
*J. Becher
*Major Becher
William Carr
*Moteeloll Seil
Hadjee Ispahanie

with William Prinsep as first Provisional Secretary.

Of the above members, the two Tagores, William Carr and William Prinsep, were partners of Carr, Tagore & Company. James Pattle had been Chairman of Lord Bentinck’s Tea Committee from 1834. It will be seen on reference to the chapter dealing with the formation of the
Calcutta Board that those members marked with an asterisk were elected to the first Calcutta Provisional Committee of the Assam Company.

One would have thought that the Bengal Tea Association, having put in their application in India for the Government’s properties earlier than the Assam Company, were in a stronger position to float their own concern, but perhaps the large Capital required for a commercial undertaking was better raised in London. In effect, however, the promoters of the Bengal Tea Association got all they wanted without having to raise the whole of the Capital themselves, for the conditions on which they agreed to amalgamate, and which Cockerill & Company accepted on behalf of the Assam Company, contained the following:

It was an imperative condition of this coalition that the local management and direction, be left entirely with the Committee who will govern the proceedings here (Calcutta), and that chairs in the direction in London shall be given as vacancies occur, to East India subscribers holding not less than 50 shares, in preference to all others, in the same proportion that the East India Capital (10 Lakhs—£100,000) bears to the Home Capital.

The other stipulation was that 1,400 out of the 2,000 Assam Company’s shares to be allocated to India were to be made available to the promoters of the Bengal Tea Association. The balance of 600 were left at the disposal of the Calcutta Agents. This was confirmed in the London Committee’s Minute of 19th July 1839:

Resolved unanimously that the Committee do approve of and do hereby confirm the Contract made by their Agents in India with the Bengal Tea Association, for the union of their interests, on the terms stated in Messrs. Cockerill’s letter to the Secretary of the 8th May last, and generally of all their Proceedings.

It is mentioned in the Minutes that letters were exchanged with the two firms of Agents, but there is no record of them. They must have been instrumental, however, in forming the Calcutta Provisional Committee, after which their functions ceased as all the subsequent correspondence was between the Secretary of the Committee in Calcutta and the Secretary of the Company in London.

The first Meeting of the Calcutta Provisional Committee was held on 4th June 1839. At this meeting there was confirmed the Proceedings of a General Meeting held on 30th May which had been printed and circulated for general information. A copy of these proceedings is not available, and it is to be assumed that this was the counterpart of the “Meeting of Merchants” that was held in London. The Meeting included probably those “people of repute and with capital” who had promoted the Bengal Tea Association.
At a Meeting of Merchants held at N° 6 Great Manchester

First on the 12th day of February 1839.

J. G. de Kechepied. Serpent Esq.* in the Chair.

The Chairman read the Memorial of which follows and—The paper, a copy of which also follows, on the cultivation and manufacture of Tea in India.

It was Resolved

That a Provisional Committee should be formed for the purpose of obtaining further information of any relative to the quality of the Assam Tea, the cost of the production, and other facts bearing upon the subject, also to communicate with the East India Company, and the Board of Control, in order to ascertain what support they would give to an undertaking for the cultivation and manufacture of such Tea, and upon what terms the East India Company would dispose of their experimental establishment in Assam.

And that the provisional Committee upon receipt of such information, should report the same to this Meeting forthwith, with a view to the formation of a Company for carrying the above objects into effect.

It was further Resolved,

That the following gentlemen to constitute such provisional Committee.

John Allerton Esq.*
John Adam Esq.*
Alexander Esq.*
Mr. Bayley Esq.*
Mr. Crawford Esq. M.B.
Dr. Cog.*
William Fox Esq.*
Henry Gorton Esq.*
G. G. de K. Serpent Esq.*

Thomas Mastersman Esq.*
Sullivan Esq.*
Peter Reynolds Esq.*
A. Reay Esq.*
John Seward Esq.*
Mr. Strings Esq.*
Mr. Turner Esq.*
Richard Wadding Esq.*
Thomas Wadding Esq.*

It was further Resolved, That Mr. Mastersman of Goldsmiths' Company shall be appointed Secretary to the Committee.

It was lastly Resolved.

That the thanks of the Meeting be offered to G. G. de Kechepied Serpent Esq. for his able conduct in the Chair.

G. G. de Kechepied.
To The Honourable the Court of The East India Company.

We the Undersigned, with a view to our entering into the cultivation and manufacture of the Tea of the Ayma Territory and the Importation of it into Great Britain request Your Honourable Court to signify to Mr. Walter Macdonald of Goldsmiths Hall our Agent, with our information in the possession of your Officers as may be requisite to form a correct estimate of the probable advantages of the speculation and with copies of any documents on the subject and to pledge ourselves to make no further use of the information and papers for which we apply than such as we shall be directed by your directions - We further solicit your Honourable Court, in case you shall be pleased to comply with our request to give such encouragement to the enterprise we have in view as may lead to obtaining grants of the land in the Ayma Country which may be considered best suited to our objects and such other assistance as may suit your Honourable Court may deem right.

We have the honor to be,

Gentlemen,

your most obedient humb' Serv'nts,

(Signed)  A. Colburn

F. H. Macdonald

T. W. Smith

G. H. Jervis

R. M. Lennox

A. G. Hunter

H. G. K. Nasmyth

W. B. Bannister

W. P. C. Bannister

R. L. Astle


Andrew Henderson.
At a Meeting of the Provisional Committee on the
subject of Assam Tea held at 826 Great Winchester Street
on Thursday the 14th of February 1859.

Present

G. G. de H. Sarjeant Esq. in the Chair.

John Abercrombie Esq. | A. Riggs Esq.
Peter T. Baker Esq. | John Scott Esq.
Mr. Haynes Bostock | John Thong Esq.
The Maclean Esq. | Thomas Meadows Esq.
Mr. Reynolds Esq. |

It was Resolved Unanimously,

That the result of the deputation was

received with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the houseable
board of Directors of the East India Company as now communicated,
by G. G. de H. Sarjeant Esq. is extremely satisfactory to this Committee
and warrant them in recommending the adoption of the following
measures.

1. That a company be forthwith formed to be denominated

The Assam Company.

2. That the Provisional Committee at once appointed be

authorized to open books to receive the names of parties who may be

interested in becoming shareholders and to take such further steps as

shall be necessary for forming a direction for incorporating the

company, and limiting the liability of shareholders and carrying

into effect the objects contemplated by the Company.

3. That the present capital of the said Company be £300,000

in 6000 shares of £50 each, of which £8000 to be for allotment
in Great Britain, and £2200 to be allotted in India.

4. That the Provisional Committee be empowered to treat with the

Supreme Government of India for the East India Company, or new

establishment or plantations in Assam, and that all such money as

they may accept to be communicated to a General Meeting of Sharehold
ers at as early a period as the same can be done with due regard to the

interests and objects of the undertaking.

5. That a Meeting of the gentlemen whoattended the Meeting

on Tuesday the 12th instant be convened by the Secretary at 826 Great

Winchester Street on Friday next at 2 o'clock.
At a Meeting of Merchants and others interested in the
formation of the Bengal Company held at 5, 6 Great St. Pancras St. on the 13th day of February 1839.

G. G. de H. Larpent Esq. in the Chair.

The Secretary read the Minutes of proceedings of the last meeting.
The Chairman read the proceedings of the Committee on the 12th inst.
The Minutes of the Conference with the Chairman and Deputy
Chairman of the Calcutta Company.
The Answer of the East India Company to the Memorial and
The proceedings of the Committee on the 14th inst.

It was Resolved

That the recommendation of the Committee was
by the Chairman to be adopted.

It was Resolved

That the following gentlemen do constitute the
Committee:

- G. G. de H. Larpent Esq. Chairman
- John Staiton Esq.
- John Auber Esq.
- Sir W. Burgoyne Bart.
- Sir Crawford Collyer Bt.
- Francis Tuke Esq.
- Henry Spencer Esq.
- The Masterman Esq.
- H. Rapershaw Esq.

It was Resolved

That Mr. Burgoyne & appointed Secretary to the
company.

It was Resolved

That the thanks of this meeting be offered to the
Chairman for his conduct in the chair. — G. G. de H. Larpent.
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In their several applications to the East India Company, whether by Memorial or personal interview by a sub-committee deputed to wait on the Chairman of the Court of Directors, the two main points were for Government to accord their approval to the inception of a company to take over their experimental lands and establishments and to grant an Act of Incorporation of the Company, and to limit the liability of its shareholders.

Government replied generally that they were prepared to recommend or even direct the granting of such an Act, but it would be for the Council in India to grant this. The Home Government made the stipulation, however, that they were only prepared to recommend the Government in India to exercise their legislative functions to pass such an Act provided that not less than 25 per cent. of the Company’s proposed Capital of £500,000 had been subscribed.

As soon as a Provisional Committee in Calcutta was elected, they presented a similar application to the Board of Revenue, Bengal, for the grant of an Act of Incorporation. It was not until in the Calcutta Directors’ Report to the shareholders on 31st January 1840 that it was announced that a draft of the Act had been sent by the Government in Bengal to the Home Government for approval.

This Act of Incorporation was not granted, however, until some six years later, and an account of the Company’s negotiations to obtain it is given in the next chapter.

In the meantime, the Assam Company was to produce some form of certificate to those proprietors who had subscribed to the Capital issued. This took its final form from the tentative clauses which had been suggested at earlier meetings of the London Provisional Committee.

From these there was then drawn up what is described as “A Deed of Settlement,” which every subscriber was called upon to sign on issue to him of a receipt of his allocation of shares. This was in fact the equivalent of a Memorandum and Articles of Association, the first clause of which provided “That the parties shall be a society under the style of the Assam Company,” and which gave the Board the power to increase the Capital to £1,000,000.

Having regard to the conditions under which the Company would be formed to-day with its Articles provided for under the statutes of the Companies’ Act, it is worth recounting some of the many (122) clauses of this Deed of Settlement:

The number of Directors to be 15, which can be increased to 18, one-third retiring annually, but eligible for re-election.

Qualification of a Director to be 25 shares of £50 each (an investment of £1,250).
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No shareholder except a Director, Trustee or Auditor, or under the authority of a General Meeting, to have access to the books or to interfere with the management.

Four Directors to be a Quorum.
Qualification of Auditors to be 25 shares.
One General Meeting to be held on the 1st Friday in May each year.
Secretary to be a covenanted shareholder.
At General Meetings, shareholders of five and less than twenty shares one vote.
20 or less than 50 shares—Two Votes.
50 and less than 100 shares—Three Votes.
100 shares and upwards—Five Votes.
Quorum for General Meetings to be 20 Proprietors.
No persons to be joint proprietors of shares.

To conform to this procedure of the Company in London, a “Supplemental Deed of Settlement” was drawn up in India for “. . . settling the management of the Company’s affairs in India” which proprietors of shares issued in that country had to sign similarly. This supplemental Deed varies only in its clauses to provide that “There shall be nine Directors.”

The Board were to conform with any directions for their guidance given by the London Directorate. Qualification in shares the same as London, but the proprietor had to be resident within the territory subject to the Government of Fort William in Bengal.

No shareholder could vote at a General Meeting unless he had held his shares three months previously.
When a call of shares was made, a shareholder was not liable to pay for thirty days, but after that interest accrued at 10 per cent. per annum.
In declaring a dividend, £1 sterling was taken to be equivalent to 10 rupees.

If at the time of election in England of a Director to the London Board there should then be resident in London a shareholder holding 25 shares in the Calcutta Directorate, he should, other things being equal, be appointed in preference to any other.

The first draft of the Clauses of these Deeds of Settlement were drawn up by the Company’s Secretary, Walter Prideaux, and as regards shareholders’ voting powers, they followed closely procedure in the East India Company. In formulating these Clauses, the Assam Company’s Secretary was assisted no doubt by Peter Auber, a Member of the Provisional Committee, who had been for many years previously Secretary of the East India Company.

The applications for shares were far in excess of the number available,
and the Provisional Committee had to make a proportionate allotment. The demand for shares in India had been equally keen, and the Calcutta Committee had asked if the Company could not consider increasing the Capital by creating an additional 1,000 shares to meet this demand. The London Board could not accede to this request, but when as a result of the proportionate allotment in London there was a balance over of 223 shares, it was decided to allocate these to India towards satisfying some of the demand in Calcutta. The final allocation of shares was 7,777 in London and 2,223 in Calcutta.

The sum of 5 per share had been paid on allotment. To implement Government's proviso that they could not recommend to India the grant of an Act of Incorporation unless 25 per cent. of the Capital had been subscribed, a second instalment of 7, 10s. per share was called up after the Board Meeting of 31st January 1840.

The Assam Company was fairly launched with 125,000 of its Capital subscribed or promised. Acting on their earlier instructions from London, the Calcutta Board had proceeded in the meantime to engage a Superintendent and junior European Staff, to recruit labour in India and tea makers from China, to order stores, to have boats built, to appoint Agents at various stations on the river route to Assam, and generally to put in train all those operations which they regarded as requisite for a vast undertaking. As early as October 1839 their first Superintendent, J. W. Masters, reported that he had “squatted on about 100 acres of land at Naziraghat, and had some 100 coolies clearing jungle and building huts and golahs (store houses).”

But in actual fact the Company had nothing on which to justify this considerable preliminary outlay. It had only a vague promise from Government that they would make over to it a part of their establishment, etc., arising from their experiments in tea production. Although the Government in India had indicated anxiety to be quit of their liability for expenditure on these tea experiments, and to place their further expansion with capitalists, they prevaricated in making over to the Assam Company and in granting the Company the necessary land on which to expand. These negotiations with the Government in India formed an important phase in the early proceedings of the Calcutta Board.

In accordance with the conditions laid down, the Company had raised the necessary Capital and had started to lay this out in the commencement of its operations. The Boards, both in London and Calcutta, were dismayed, therefore, that Government had not with equal promptitude made over to them. Starting in June 1839, there ensued deputations from the Calcutta Board to Government and voluminous correspondence.

A change in the person of the Governor-General of Bengal may have had something to do with the official indecision. Lord Auckland had
succeeded Lord Bentinck. The former was absent then from the province, and T. C. Robertson was Acting Governor.

From the Company’s records of these negotiations it would seem that in the initial stages the Government adopted an attitude of studied ignorance of anything to do with the Assam Company. In an interview which R. H. Cockerill, then the Company’s Chairman, had with the Deputy Governor, he had to refute first of all the assumption Government entertained that the Company was not even in existence and was not in a position therefore to make a specific application. Cockerill had to explain that not only was the Company in existence but it had raised the Capital and that they were then about to start operations.

The Chairman went to the length of enquiring whether, if Government would not make over their establishments to the Company, there would be any objection to the Company’s Agent in Assam selecting and occupying land as sites for depots, etc.

To the latter request the Government gave the same evasive reply, to the effect that there would be no objection to selecting the sites they wanted, but Government could not grant leases of such sites merely on application; they would be subject to local regulations, though he remarked naively that the Company need not fear that they would be ejected.

In respect of land in Assam, one of the Government’s difficulties was no doubt that there was no fixed land settlement; conditions for the grant of land in this province had been under consideration at least since early in 1836 by the Sudder Board of Revenue, Bengal, and the Commissioners of Revenue in Assam, and was at that time still undecided. There was even doubt in the mind of Government whether land which was covered with forest containing such a valuable plant as tea could be considered as coming in the category of “waste land.”

After all this evasion the Deputy Governor brought his interview with the Chairman to a close with the ponderous contention that the principal reason for deferring to allow the Company to have grants of land immediately was the very unsettled state of the country, and “... the probability that any eruption of the Singphos or Nagas and the cutting off of our people might cast a gloom on our operations, that would be very injurious.” He further said that the Government proposed raising a third “Local Corps” in Assam, and also forming fortifications on the frontier of the Nagas and Singhphos for the complete protection of the settlers.

This controversy with Government went on for some months, but eventually in the spring of 1840 they gave their final consent to the transfer to the Assam Company of two-thirds of their establishment, together with permission to settle on other lands. Government’s estab-
lishment and lands were transferred free of rent for ten years, at the end of which time the rent assessment was not to be higher than that for rice lands generally.

At last the Company had got something to work on, but on referring to the Report at the first Half-yearly Meeting of Shareholders held in Calcutta on 7th March 1840, there is an “Abstract of Expenditure to 31st December 1839,” which shows that by that date it had spent already Rs.1,49,978, largely on forming its own establishments, recruiting labour and supplying rice.

The Calcutta Board were apprehensive, however, that the area which the Government had retained would develop and come into unfair competition with the Company’s operations. Government gave them the assurance, however, that the small areas they had retained at Dinjoy (Dinjan) and Chubwa would be used merely as a school for apprentices, open to all parties who might require tuition, and as nurseries for the propagation of the best kinds of tea plant.

This Government scheme was placed in charge of a Mr. Duffield, an Assistant to C. A. Bruce, who appears in the earliest list of Company’s employees and whose services were transferred back to Government. Incidentally, nothing further is heard about this Government scheme. Perhaps it was abandoned after Duffield died of cholera in March 1840.

This “something to work on” which the Company acquired from Government was little enough. It is difficult to translate precisely into the terms comparable with present-day figures the area and production of tea which formed the basis of the first asset which the Assam Company acquired. The area of the tracts is given in so many yards of its length and breadth. There is then given the number of plants in each tract, but the number of plants bears no relation to the size of the tract, for the reason that a tea tract comprised an area where the plants or trees were found in their wild state. They might be growing closely together or widely spaced, but, as found, they were cut down to 3 feet, and that constituted a tea tract.

Where the distance apart of plants in these tracts was wide, it was the intention or endeavour then to “infill” with two- or three-year-old self-sown seedlings to 6 feet by 6 feet square planting. The following were the tea tracts actually worked in 1838:

No. 1 Tingri
No. 2 Tingri
No. 1 Keyhung
No. 1 Chabwa and Deenjoy

These tracts were supposed to contain a total of about 159,940 plants, which gave a crop of 4,220 lb. of tea, equivalent to about 120 lb. or 1\frac{1}{2} maunds per acre.

For 1839 these acres were expected to give only a small increase to 5,274 lb.; for 1840 the above tracts were to be increased by the addition of
tracts named No. 2 Keyhung, No. 3 Keyhung, No. 2 Chubwa, Nowholea, Tipum, Jugundoo, Ningrew. These, together with the five tracts mentioned previously, were expected to produce a crop of 11,160 lb. The actual crop produced in 1840 was 10,202 lb.

As an asset there was nothing in the way of buildings, for these were all kucha bamboo structures with mud-and-wattle walls, and thatched roof—a tea-making house cost only Rs.50.

The Company had appointed J. W. Masters as its own Superintendent. He had proceeded to Assam in June 1839, where he arrived in August and took up his residence at Nazira. Tea had been found in the jungle at Gabroo Parbut and Cherideo. From Nazira Masters set out in search of the tea plant in the neighbourhood, and to make application to Government for grants of suitable land.

Masters was the Company’s Senior Officer, and he was instructed as soon as Government made over to them to negotiate terms for the release of C. A. Bruce. This was all-important, for Bruce was the only one with any knowledge of tea growing and manufacture.

Bruce joined the Company’s service on 1st March 1840. At the commencement of operations the Company had C. A. Bruce residing at Jaipur and in charge of what was called the Northern Division, comprising tea tracts at Keyhung, Nowholea, Tipum, Jugundoo, and Ningrew, at which places tea was being produced.

Masters was residing at Nazira and making that place the company's Headquarters.

The growing of tea and its manufacture were the Company’s main object, but its first operations were concerned largely with opening up its lines of communication with its tea areas hundreds of miles from its chief seat of administration in Calcutta.

There was no regular river-steamer service, only an occasional Government steamer that went as far as Gauhati. It was part of the Company’s operations, therefore, to arrange for someone to provide food and stores at the various stopping places en route for its assistants with their labourers proceeding to Assam. At such places as Dibroo Mukh, Dikhoo Mukh and Tingri Mukh they cleared the land and erected their own store-sheds, but at the largest stations such as Gauhati, Goalpara, Tezpur and Bishnath they paid a retainer to some Government official resident there. In some cases this was the Civil Surgeon.

It has to be remembered that some of the country where this enterprise was being embarked upon was by no means secure. The Muttuck and Singpho country, particularly where Bruce had discovered most of the tea tracts, was governed still by native chiefs. In 1839 there had occurred the Kampti Rising, in which Colonel White was murdered and most of the Garrison at Sadiya had been wiped out. Bruce refers to
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This in his report as "the unfortunate affair at Sadiya." It was this incident and the alarm it created amongst Europeans and natives alike that made it necessary for Bruce to retire temporarily from the more distant tea tracts to Deenjoy and Chabwa. It was this enforced retreat from the scene of his tea operations that contributed to the short crop in 1839-1840 from these areas. It was this incident that made Bruce request that he might be supplied with arms so that he and his staff might have some means of defending themselves.

Bruce comments upon the fact that the natives were permitted to cultivate as much land as they wished provided that they paid a poll tax of Rs.2 a year to the old Senaputty's son, as Governor of the country.

The natives were not too sure, however, of the security of their tenure under a native chief, and Bruce advised that many more individuals might be induced to take up "tea grounds," as he called them, if the country belonged to the British, under whom they knew they would be protected and permitted to cultivate in security.

A further account of the Company's issue of Capital, its early shareholders and the market for its shares will be found in a separate chapter, "The Company's Shares." Similarly, details of the persons selected to the Boards in London and Calcutta, with a story of what is known of some of the more outstanding of these individuals, is given in the chapters dealing with the Boards of Directors.

If one were to assign to any one individual the credit and responsibility for the foundation of this premier undertaking in London, it would seem to be due to Gerrard de Hochepied Larpent. If confirmation of this were needed, there is the fact that his relative, Albert John de Hochepied Larpent, was in 1840 a member of the Calcutta Provisional Committee and became subsequently Chairman of the Calcutta Board of Directors.

As sometimes happens, there are others who claim the honour of being the founders of such an enterprise as the Assam Company. It is noted, however, that such claimants do not come forward usually until years afterwards, when the venture has passed through its teething troubles, has been in fact through years of trading vicissitudes, and the time this honour is sought is in years when successful trading and good dividends are announced.

As businessmen with interests in Calcutta and India, and trading with the East, it is the more obvious to assign the honour to the Larpents, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, one can only ignore other claimants' views on the subject.
CHAPTER VII

1841-1845

This five-year period opened in an atmosphere of the utmost confidence, as expressed by the Chairman of both the London and Calcutta Boards—confidence both as to the future prosperity of the Company and as to the smooth working between the two Boards. How these optimistic prophecies were to be so rudely shaken, subsequent events will relate.

At the General Meeting held in May 1842, which covered the working of 1841, the London Chairman (Sir George Larpent, Bt.), said:

In the Report which your Directors had the honour of submitting to you at the last Annual General Meeting they stated that they looked to the then present year as likely, in some measure, to enable them to judge of the probable results of the expenditure already made and of the future prospects of the Company. Your Directors are happy in being able to commence this Report by stating that in this expectation they have not been disappointed. The enterprise in which we are engaged, which for its novelty and the absence of correct data as to its prosecution was necessarily, when first embarked on, to a great degree an experiment, appears to your Board no longer a doubtful success, if conducted with prudence and economy.

The Chairman in Calcutta, Henry Chapman, at the General Meeting in October 1842, stated in his Report:

The local direction of the Assam Company on this third occasion of meeting the Shareholders in India, feel much satisfaction in being able to state their continued confidence in the ultimate success of the undertaking. In the review of the past 12 months' operations many highly favourable circumstances present themselves for notice, whilst the difficulties and causes of discouragement which attended the early Proceedings of the Company have materially decreased.

This optimism continued into 1843 with the following opening paragraph of the Report issued by the London Board:

Your Directors continue to conduct the general management of the Assam Company with unceasing interest and they commence their Report on this occasion of meeting you, by expressing their unabated confidence in the ultimate success of the undertaking.

Such was this confidence that the Directors paid a dividend of 3 per
cent. or 7s. 6d. per share. This was 3 per cent. on the Capital that had then been called up, which was £12, 10s. per share out of the authorised £50 per share. This dividend was paid in pursuance of the Board's policy "... of applying the proceeds of the tea produced year by year in the payment of dividends on the stock of the Company and they propose, when the produce of the past season shall have been realised in like manner to divide the amount amongst the Shareholders."

It is true that the proceeds of tea sold when the Accounts were made up to 18th April 1843 did amount to £3,599 and the amount of the dividend was £2,585, and at that date the realisations could only have been in respect of the tea made in 1841.

It was all very well for the Board to lay down a policy of this nature, but it was extraordinary that to justify their confidence in the undertaking, and presumably to encourage the shareholders to pay up the current and several subsequent calls that they knew would have to be made, to pay them 7s. 6d. per share in dividend and immediately ask for another £3 or £4 per share for the next instalment. There was no deception, however, that this would be the procedure, for, at the General Meeting held on 6th May 1842, the Chairman said "... but while they feel themselves justified in holding out a prospect of a Dividend at no distant period, the Proprietors must bear in mind that it will be necessary to add to the Capital of the Company by further calls, in order to give effect to the great object of their enterprise, namely, the cultivation of the Tea lands of which they are in possession."

There would seem no doubt that the Board's optimism was based on a very nebulous idea of the real facts. This is evident from the Directors' Report of 1843, based on the working of 1842, when the first set-back to their confidence makes itself apparent. Up to that time they had no data about the cost of cultivation and manufacture on which to base any opinion. The chief concern of the Superintendents in Assam was to justify their existence by emphasis on the areas which they had cleared of jungle round the tracts of tea which they had found growing wild.

In spite of the Calcutta Chairman Wm. Prinsep's visit to the Company's properties in 1841, which constitutes probably the first of anything that can be likened to a Visiting Agent's Report, he could do nothing much more than record what he saw and was told. The Board in London were, in fact, in total ignorance of facts on which to form an opinion of the Company's assets. This doubt and uncertainty was expressed publicly in their Report to shareholders of 1843, which states:

It must be evident to you that from the novelty of the enterprise this was necessarily a work of time and that at the commencement of our operations we could only form a general opinion that there was every probability of the undertaking being one of profit.
The word *probability* in the Report is printed in italics and constitutes that first doubt that things were not according to the Board’s previous confident anticipations.

The Board’s endeavour to acquaint themselves with first-hand information of what was really happening was the issue of a questionnaire to each of the three Superintendents—to Masters at the Southern Division, to C. A. Bruce at the Northern Division and J. P. Parker at the Eastern Division. The answers were a voluminous report from Masters and a combined, equally long one from Bruce and Parker from the Northern and Eastern Divisions. These reports, consisting as they did of many pages as reproduced in the Company’s printed Accounts, are remarkable for the detail into which they enter, and it is perhaps more remarkable still that the Superintendents were able, under the conditions in which they lived, to devote so much time to correspondence.

These particular reports were written in the months of July and September, and assuming correspondence was left for attention until after sundown, the writers must have experienced considerable discomfort writing in the light of a kerosene lamp, even assuming they possessed some sort of hand-operated punkah. Masters, in acknowledging the Board’s request for this detailed information, wrote:

> I have pleasure to receive your very polite letter of the 16th December 1841, for which please to accept my best thanks and allow me now freely to address you relative to the queries which have been forwarded to me. . . .

In the circumstances one might wonder if the wording and tenor of what Masters wrote was what he really thought of this request for so much information.

The rising doubt about the Company’s position is evident from the Chairman’s remark that “cost of clearing land, erecting buildings, procuring labour and conducting other operations had greatly exceeded what the Directors at first anticipated.”

Then again, the crop from the Southern Division had fallen short of the estimate by a considerable quantity, and this Masters ascribed to over-plucking

> . . . by explaining that being very young (the bushes) had suffered partially from overpicking in the former year, and that although his precautions against the repetition of this serious injury have reduced the crop of 1842, he feels confident of the realisation of his expectation of the amount of the produce of 1843.

In the matter of the total tea produced at this time, 10 per cent. was green tea, and of the black tea, over half of it comprised the two lowest
grades designated bohea and compoi. Such a proportion of poor tea is not surprising when consideration is had for the method of plucking such hard, old leaf and the time it must have taken to transport it to the main "making houses," as the factories in those days were called.

It was in the years up to 1845 that the most profligate extravagance occurred in local expenditure. There was a Superintendent at each of the three Divisions, plus six other Europeans in the Northern Division, three in the Eastern and no less than eleven in the Southern Division, besides which there were two Indian Dewans or Land Agents on Rs.200 a month each. Although from the highest-paid Superintendent on Rs.800 monthly to the newest-joined apprentice on Rs.35 monthly the average pay of this supervisory staff was not more than Rs.200 a month each, the total was nevertheless a relatively heavy overhead expense.

There was no denying that the Superintendents had cleared land at much expense and far in excess of the capacity of the labour force to plant out and keep in being. In 1842 there were 666 acres in the Northern and Eastern Divisions said to be under tea, with only about 240 acres in bearing and producing about 2 maunds per acre. In the Southern Division there were 1,645 acres under tea, plus another 666 acres cleared and Masters expected to make the latter up to 2,666 acres by the end of 1843, but he had not the seed; and to plant out self-grown seedlings procured from the jungle was a slow job. In this Division there were 800 acres (338 acres of which were being plucked for the first time in 1842), the crop from which was overall only half a maund per acre.

There was the suggestion that the Company should limit its area to about 2,666 acres and expenditure to £30,000 a year for this area.

In 1843 there appears the first mention of the necessity for effecting economies in working the gardens in Assam, but the Board were without knowledge of how this could be effected, and in the absence of this they had recourse to the opposite by appointing a "Comptroller" over the whole of the existing Establishment, including the three Superintendents. This increase in overheads was only a temporary measure, however, for it was to be followed by the dismissal of their other senior staff.

Added to these doubts about the proper management on the Estates came the realisation that the steamer Assam, on which so much money had been spent and on which had been built up such hopes of profitable working and accelerated communications, was a failure.

It is necessary we should notice some disappointment relative to the Iron steamboat, adverted to in our last Report and constructed to improve our communications between Calcutta and the Tea Districts.

The demand for freight and passages on the Brahmaputra and the produce of our gardens not being yet on a scale sufficient to meet the heavy expenses attending the working of so large a boat and her size being considered too
large for the River, the local Board in Calcutta have determined to dispose of the vessel and in the meantime have employed her on the Ganges. Should they succeed in effecting a sale it is expected that a steam vessel more adapted to the objects of the Assam Company will be purchased, as the Local Board, as well as your Directors, still look forward to the introduction of steam as being indispensable to the safe and expeditious conveyance of our produce.

In the London Board's Minutes at this time there were increasing references to shareholders defaulting in their payment of calls. The Act of Incorporation limiting the liability of shareholders had not been passed, and under the Deed of Settlement which every shareholder had signed, delays in payment of calls incurred interest at 10 per cent. from the date the call was due to date of payment. These factors and the Board's expressions of uncertainty about local management must have made shareholders apprehensive, for some refused to pay the third call of £3, 10s. per share asked for in 1842.

This must have meant a drastic decision for the individual shareholder. At that time £16 per share had been paid up, and it was at the General Meeting of 1843 that the Board obtained the sanction of the Meeting to declare 75 shares "forfeited to the use of the Company."

The market price of the Company's stock must have declined appreciably after the original issue, for in 1843 there were 243 shares still unallotted, and at the same Meeting the Directors obtained sanction to sell these at the best price obtainable. In none of the Proceedings is the market price of the shares quoted, as an indication of the fall in confidence that the public had in the Company's affairs.

In 1844 doubt and uncertainty increased until the Board, with their lack of knowledge of the real facts regarding local administration in Assam, became apprehensive as to how they were going to make out a case for submission to shareholders at the Annual General Meeting. This they did by the issue of a Circular Letter dated 23rd April 1844, the opening paragraph of which read:

The Deed of Settlement prescribing that the Annual General Meeting of the Assam Company shall be held on the first Friday in the month of May, we circulate this Report for your consideration before we assemble on that occasion. We feel, however, that it will disappoint your expectations, because, doubtless, you anticipated, as we had hoped, that your Directors would be able to lay before you such a statement of the past transactions and future prospects of the Company as might enable them to recommend, and you to determine upon, a decided course of proceeding. We are not, however, as yet in possession of the information indispensable to place you in a position to come to any safe resolution in this respect. We therefore
consider it to be our duty upon the present occasion, to explain to you briefly the actual situation of your affairs, and to recommend that the General Meeting, which must, as we have stated, be held on Friday the 3rd of May, be adjourned, until we receive the Reports from India, which will we doubt not, be of such a character as to shew clearly what line it behaves you in practice to take.

Since we last met your Directors have seen much to diminish the confidence which they expressed at the last Meeting, in the ultimate success of the Company; that confidence was necessarily founded on statements and calculations, prepared in the Province where our operations are carried on. These data have since been altered by the parties who supplied them, in many material respects, and the produce of the year has fallen short of the estimate in respect to quantity by more than one third, at the same time, the current expenses of the Company appeared not to be diminished.

Under these discouraging circumstances, the Local Directors took a step, originally suggested to them by us, which was manifestly the wisest that could be adopted. Having removed from the service of the Company, those of the Officers in Assam who misconducted themselves, they deputed to the Province with supreme power over all the Establishments, Mr. J. M. Mackie, a gentleman of high standing and character, upon whose judgment and integrity, the most entire confidence could be placed.

With the Circular were submitted a Statement of Accounts for the year 1843, and at the statutory Meeting of 3rd May 1844 only the necessary and formal business was transacted. Only the Minutes of the London Board’s proceeding record that this Meeting was held; no printed report was issued.

In the above extract from the Board’s Circular one would draw the conclusion that the officers in Assam who were the cause of their discomfiture were the three Superintendents who had been dismissed and that their office had been taken over by this Mr. J. M. Mackie. Details available from the Proceedings of the Calcutta Board do not bear out this supposition. In July 1843 J. W. Masters resigned, or as the Calcutta Board’s resolution put it, “...that his own discharge from the service of the Company be accepted and recorded.” From the tenor of the Calcutta Proceedings at that time it is clear that the receipt of letters of censure in which the Board expressed their loss of confidence in him had exasperated Masters beyond endurance.

The incident had arisen out of a visit that J. P. Parker made to the Southern Division, and in his report to the Board he proposed the enormous reduction of Rs.5,000 a month in the expenditure on that Division, which Masters assented to without offering any explanation for keeping up an establishment so much in excess of actual requirements. At a time when the Company’s finances were in a parlous state, that a saving of such a sum was possible without affecting efficiency made the
Directors very angry, and they commanded Mr. Masters’ attendance before them in Calcutta.

Masters’ reply to this command is recorded in the Calcutta Minute of 15th July 1843, that he

... refuses to come to Calcutta unless allowed his full salary, with all travelling expenses without the smallest retrenchment, declines any further communication with the Assam Company and will pay no attention whatever to any instructions the Directors may honour him with. Has given over charge of the Division with all accounts, books, treasure etc. to Mr. 1st Assistant Grose until he receives orders from Mr. Parker.

The foregoing is what is recorded in the Calcutta Board Minutes, but what Masters actually wrote on 1st July 1843 was:

... and in reply to inform you, that from this date I decline all further intercourse and connection with the Assam Company, and so far as the Southern Division is concerned, you may consider the Assam Company as knocked up, it will be impossible to restore it under the present system of management.

At the same time C. A. Bruce had been censured similarly and was equally irritated, but his reactions were not so vehement as were Masters’. His reply was that he “protests against such censures being applied after all in the service have risked their lives in performance of their duty, very discouraging and will not tend to make the assistants more zealous.”

The Secretary was instructed to acknowledge his mild protest and other recent communications from Bruce: “intimate to Mr. Bruce that it is expected he will see the propriety of adopting a more respectful tone in his communications to the Board.”

Bruce continued in the Company’s service for some time longer.

J. P. Parker, Superintendent of the Eastern Division, took over the Southern Division from Masters for a short time pending the arrival of J. M. Mackie, but he had “... in consequence of the dissatisfaction recently expressed...” become disgruntled, and resigned. He would only remain, he told the Board, until he be relieved by a more competent person.

Having got rid of Masters, being able to retain for a time only the services of J. P. Parker and having thoroughly irritated Bruce, they were left with J. M. Mackie on whom to pin their faith for their local administration.

Who Mackie was or what his past experience had been in agriculture in India, or his knowledge of tea planting, is not revealed. His only qualification for the post of Chief Superintendent over such a considerable territory is stated in the London’s Board Circular of 23rd April 1844,
that he was "... a gentleman of high standing and character, upon whose judgment and integrity, the most entire confidence could be placed."

Mackie was taken on by the Calcutta Board, and his services were obtained only after hard bargaining and after an interview with the Board. He was engaged finally in June 1843, and reported his arrival at Nazira on 29th October, when he took over the Southern Division from Parker, and the latter proceeded next day to make over charge of the Eastern Division to Bruce.

The Board were undoubtedly right in suspecting gross local mismanagement, but they were most unfortunate in the plunge they took of picking an outsider in Mackie to retrieve their position towards their shareholders, or perhaps it was that they expected too much in too short a time.

Mackie only reached Nazira at the end of October, and having regard to the time taken for communications between Assam and London, the Board should not have been so impatient or optimistic as to expect to receive from him by April 1844 a comprehensive report "of the actual position of their Concerns, with his [Mackie’s] counsel for their future management in the event of his considering it prudent to persevere with the enterprise."

It might be fair to suggest that the London Board’s anticipation of getting a report so soon was an indication of their lack of appreciation of conditions in Assam.

From the most southern to the most northerly and eastern of the Company’s territories, was a distance of one hundred miles. Even a straight journey of such a distance with the means of transport then available, an elephant at three miles an hour, could not be accomplished in under five or six days at the best time of the year; but Mackie, in this territory had twenty tea tracts or barries to inspect and report upon, to say nothing of the several other depots stations on the river on the maintenance of which the Company’s money was being spent. After the reports had been written it would be possible to get them to Calcutta in a fortnight. Another two weeks for consideration by the Calcutta Board, and then by the fastest route another two months to reach England.

The Company was in a real quandary, for it relied solely upon Mackie’s report to enable it to explain to shareholders the awkward position in which it found itself, and the last sentence of the preceding quotation indicates that it was even then contemplating the extreme step of having to close down altogether.

The London Board were at no pains to conceal what little they knew of the real position and how much they relied on a report from someone who was literally unknown to them, and of whose knowledge
of the problem they could have been equally unaware, when they confessed:

... that your Directors, being without the means necessary to satisfy their own minds in respect to the proper course to be taken, cannot pretend to advise you in the matter. They propose therefore, to call you together again on the earliest possible day after they receive Mr. Mackie’s promised Report, when they trust to be able to lay a clear Statement and equally definite recommendations before you.

To satisfy their own minds, they could depend only on what the Calcutta Board replied to their requests for information. Even what the Calcutta Board told them regarding the financial position could hardly have been very accurate when it is realised that the Account Books in Calcutta were years behind in being written up.

The Chairman of the Sub-Committee, J. Deans Campbell, appointed to look into this aspect of the Company’s affairs, reported in 1843 that the books were then only ten months in arrears.

In the meantime, the Calcutta Board had trouble amongst themselves, for during 1843 no less than six out of the nine Directors constituting that Board resigned. It would not be right to take this definitely as wholesale desertion, for there are so many reasons which cause businessmen to be absent from Calcutta. But the Charter limiting the liability of shareholders had not then been granted, and there were good financial reasons therefore for disposing of shares which would automatically disqualify for a seat on the Board. At the General Meeting at Calcutta on 6th May 1844 there remained only three Directors who had served on the Board for any length of time—Henry Holroyd, Chairman; William Storm, Deputy Chairman; and Henry Burkinyoung. Four new Directors were elected to bring their number up to seven, two short of the number required under the Deed of Settlement.

It was this depletion of the Board by resignations, combined with very conflicting statements of production and costs which they had received from Assam, that was the cause for postponing or not holding a General Meeting in Calcutta in 1843.

From this depressing outlook the London Board looked round for some relieving rays of hope. They went into the details of the teas produced in 1843, taking comfort from the fact that they realised an average price of 3s. 1d. per lb., and drew attention to the best breaks having been sold for as much as 5s. 2d. per lb. These teas were pronounced as comparable with, if not superior to, the very best imported from China. The quality and prices, they said, had very nearly compensated for the reduction in quantity, which loss in crop... had occasioned your Directors so much discouragement.” It remained only to prove that the cost of
production in Assam could compete successfully with that of China, and they looked again to Mackie's report to solve this doubt.

How near the Company was then to the end of its tether can be realised from the Board's admission that the finance they had was only the funds remaining from the last call-up of Capital, which, with the proceeds expected from the sale of tea in transit and to be produced, would suffice for all demands likely to be made, but only "... until we next meet and no further calls will be made until your Directors can show sufficient grounds to prosecute the enterprise."

The Board's announcement in May 1844 that out of the 7,563 shares in England, on which a call of £4 per share had been made in November 1843, there remained still 1,024 shares on which the amount was unpaid is perhaps an indication of the way shareholders were deserting what they must have regarded as a sinking ship.

Another General Meeting of shareholders was called for 19th July 1844. This Meeting is referred to as the Adjourned General Meeting from that held on 3rd May. The Report is not in the usual booklet form of the Assam Company Accounts, but is in the nature of a Circular Letter to shareholders issued by order of the Board over the signature of the Chairman. It is recorded that the Report was read at the meeting by the Chairman.

What the Board had to tell the shareholders was dismal in the extreme; they had depended so much on Mackie's report, and as this was not forthcoming even by the date of this Adjourned Meeting, they were lost. They could only record with regret that Mackie had had to quit Assam on account of ill-health and that even since his return to Calcutta he had been too ill to submit a formal written report. What the London Board could not have known then was that the Board in Calcutta had dispensed with Mackie's services from 30th June 1844.

It has to be assumed that Mackie's dismissal was solely on grounds of ill-health, but there is nothing recorded in the Calcutta Proceedings except the bald statement that he had accepted their letter terminating his services. Presumably, therefore, the long.looked-for report was never written!

In the straits in which they were placed it is obvious that the Board were anxious to be able to tell their shareholders that they did have somebody in the way of a "new broom" in charge of the administration in Assam, and one capable of giving effect to the drastic forms of economy which the parlous state of the Company's affairs demanded.

For this assurance and for such other less dismal information they began to lean heavily upon the Board in Calcutta, with which body they were, however, in other circumstances and at subsequent times, so often at variance. Being nearer the seat of operations and more in touch with local
of the problem they could have been equally unaware, when they confessed:

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For this assurance and for such other less dismal information they began to lean heavily upon the Board in Calcutta, with which body they were, however, in other circumstances and at subsequent times, so often at variance. Being nearer the seat of operations and more in touch with local
details, the Calcutta Board were not so pessimistic as were their opposite numbers in London. In their report, therefore, the London Board said:

The local Board to guard against being left without a head in carrying out the objects of reform for which Mr. Mackie was deputed, had fortunately appointed Mr. Hodges to accompany and assist him; and it has been left to that gentleman to carry out the proposed measures of economy, and to conduct the Company’s affairs in Assam; his conduct in which so far as experience justifies an opinion, appears to have been marked with ability and prudence.

It might be an injustice to say that the London Board were catching at a straw in announcing their reliance on an unknown person in Mr. Hodges to carry out the vital economies which alone could save the Company. The Calcutta proceedings say nothing about Hodge’s qualifications; there is not even the information usually furnished that he was recommended by, or known to, somebody connected with the Company in Calcutta. There is the bare Minute that he was appointed an assistant in the Company on Rs.300 monthly and was told to prepare immediately to go to Assam with Mr. Mackie, but they were undoubtedly shaken, and this is reflected in this report of July 1844 in which the Board have to rely on the more cheerful statements of the Calcutta Board whilst confessing past gross extravagance.

... the local Directors assure us that they are of the opinion that the affairs of the Company are not only not irretrievable, but that notwithstanding the misconduct and lavish expenditure of their Officers in Assam, the Assam Company will yet, under prudent management, become a profitable and important concern.

The London Board quoted their Calcutta colleagues in suggesting that no more money, in the way of further calls on shares, would be wanted from the Proprietors during the year, as by drawing against the shipments of tea to the extent of half its value in London they would have sufficient funds. In spite of this assurance there then appears the first mention of getting rid of the responsibility of the Northern Division, which proposal had emanated originally from the Board in Calcutta.

They propose, after the produce of this year shall have been realised, to let out the land of the Northern Division, having satisfied themselves that the disadvantages which we labour under there, render it undesirable to work them ourselves, and to confine their operation to the Southern Division...

This major step was postponed, however, as by such economies and good management as had been effected the previous year in the Southern
1841-1845

Division they hoped during 1845 to do the same with the Northern Division and turn those properties into a profitable undertaking.

To justify their having any more faith in such a tottering enterprise the London Board referred to a General Meeting of shareholders in India at which, after the position of the Company’s affairs had been fully set before them, a resolution was passed by the shareholders expressing the opinion that the Calcutta Board should continue to operate the Company and authorising them to carry on to the extent of expenditure that would be covered by the probable return from the crop, calculating the value of the tea at 10 annas a pound. The shareholders in Calcutta asked that a further Meeting should be convened for a convenient date in November 1844 at which the future extent of the operations of the Company would be reviewed.

From this dismal picture the London Board at the General Meeting the following year, in May 1845, broke forth in another wave of optimism:

Your Directors are much gratified in being enabled to lay before you, on this occasion, such a Report of the state and prospects of the Assam Company as they feel assured cannot fail to be considered highly satisfactory, in comparison with any statement which they have hitherto been enabled to make.

There had certainly been drastic cuts in expenditure in 1844. The outlay on the Southern Division had been reduced to under £8,000 for a crop of 120,422 lb., making the cost rather less than 1s. 4d. per lb., and to £4,700 on the Northern and Eastern Divisions for a crop of 61,222 lb., or a cost of 1s. 6d. per lb. It is not possible to quote precisely what these crops sold for as one year’s proceeds are included in those of other years, but at that time there was reported the sale of a considerable shipment of over 2,000 chests at an average price of 1s. 11d. per lb.

The grounds for the Board’s optimism were not solely the results of the previous year’s working but were based also on estimates of even larger crops which the Superintendents submitted. Every year since the start of operations the actual crops harvested had fallen short of their estimates, but the Board had no option but to accept what they were told. They did not think apparently to warn shareholders of a possible short fall. The estimate of 250,000 lb. for 1845 was no exception, the actual crop fell short of this figure by over 20 per cent.

In setting out these rosy prospects in their Report the Board did not fail to eulogise the Board in Calcutta for what they had accomplished:

To that Board, and the energetic measures which they adopted when there was so much cause for alarm, the entire reformation of your affairs in Assam, and their present healthy complexion, are mainly to be attributed.
They singled out for special mention the services of Mr. Alexander Rogers, who had been a Director in London from the formation of the Company until he returned to India in 1843 and became a Director of the Calcutta Board. He had a considerable stake in the Company, and when the stipendiary Secretary, Mr. R. H. Buckland resigned in 1844, he took on the Honorary Secretaryship in addition to his office as a Director. Mention was made also of the services of Mr. John Deans Campbell, who had been a Director in Calcutta since 1843 and on his return to this country was appointed to the London Board, Mr. J. Brightman resigning his seat purposely to give the Board the opportunity of having Mr. Campbell’s services.

It was at this Meeting that the Board had to report their continued failure to obtain the promised Act of Incorporation. They blamed the Government in India for the delay, or, as they put it:

... we cannot but feel that the Local Government has not treated the Assam Company with its wonted liberality in this matter; and were it not for the conduct of the Honourable Court of Directors, which has always been marked with the utmost good faith in their communications with us, we should have despaired of bringing this important matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

It was the absence of this Act to limit the liability of shareholders which contributed to their apprehension when the affairs of the Company were in such deep water. It was the reason, no doubt, underlying many of them refusing to meet the fourth call of £4 per share, for it was recorded that 335 shares in England and 53 in India had been forfeited.

After the despairing account given previously of the uselessness of their steamer, the Assam, for the purpose for which it had been built, the Board did not fail to add colour to their picture by telling the Meeting that even this “investment” had been turned to good account by earning dividends in the carriage of passengers and freight on the Ganges, plying between Calcutta and Allahabad, and also in “towing” sailing-ships up and down the River Hoogly, between Calcutta and the sea.

So confident did the Directors feel in this new lease of life provided by the prospects as they saw them that they went so far as to hold out hopes to the shareholders that, if their estimates should prove correct they would be able, when the crop of 1845 had been realised, to declare a dividend on the paid up Capital of the Company.

What rosier prospect could there have been than that expressed in the final paragraph of the report:

In conclusion, contrasting the complexion of our affairs at this time with their state twelve months since, your Directors congratulate you on their
improvement, and believe that you may look with confidence to the future management of the Local Board, and the prospects of the Assam Company.

After such concluding remarks from the Chair, the following quotation from the Auditors Report, attached to the Accounts then submitted, forms rather an antidote:

... and that the Company do stand possessed of the following Assets in England: viz Cash Balance at the Bank of England £100: Ditto at Messrs. Williams & Co £624-6-3d: Ditto of Petty Cash £171-4-2d: Ditto of Stamps £35.

An Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 11th November 1845. There is nothing in the previous Board Meeting to say for what particular purpose this extra Meeting was convened. From the tenor of the Report to shareholders it is evident that it was primarily to record the granting of the Act of Incorporation, and for the purpose of declaring a dividend.

It took Government long enough to implement their promise to make over their experimental barries to the Company, but it is only a perusal of the lengthy correspondence with the East India Company in London and the Governor-General in India, particularly the latter, that brings to light the procrastinations of the official mind and the reason for it taking from 7th March 1839, the date of the Assam Company’s first application to the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London, to 30th August 1845 to pass this Act of Incorporation.

Such an Act was something new to the Authorities, and it took time for the local advisers of the Board of Revenue, Bengal, to draft its clauses with the necessary safeguards, but after three years, on 21st April 1843, a draft was at last submitted for the Assam Company’s approval. This was returned on 23rd May approved by the Company without modification or objection. The Calcutta Board concluded naturally that it only required the Governor’s signature to pass it into law. Nothing happened, however, and in July the Board asked Government if they could please be informed if the Act was passed, so that they could tell the London Board by the next overland mail.

They received a prompt reply to say that the matter was still under consideration, but to the Board’s consternation they were told that it was because Government had objected to its own draft. There were three objections. The first was that the other crops or products “incidental to the production of tea must be specified; secondly that about one-fifth of the Company’s property ... in tangible securities ... should be at the control of Government for the protection of the public, and lastly that the Company be prohibited from raising money by any other means than by a fresh issue of shares.”
This led to interviews with Government officers and interminable correspondence, but the Board resolutely refused to be bound by such provisions, which would cripple the whole undertaking. This correspondence was not confined to letters from the Calcutta Board to the Governor-General in India, but representations were made by the Secretary in London to the Right Honourable Sir Henry Hardinge, Governor-General in India, then in London.

In the concluding paragraph of a long letter of explanation dated 13th August 1844 from the Calcutta Board (signed by A. Rogers as a Director and the Acting Honorary Secretary), there was a plea for a personal interview from the Proprietors to explain in detail that which had not been covered in correspondence. This brought forth from the Secretary to the Governor-General one of those infuriating communications that are written by one Department of Government not knowing what has transpired in another Department, trying to fob off an interview at any cost, by asking the Assam Company’s Secretary to submit his views in writing.

Correspondence had become pretty well as acrimonious as it could with a Government Department, and there had been no lack of indication that in these negotiations Government had failed to implement their early promises to the Company. It is as well perhaps that a personal interview was avoided.

The last recorded letter from Government on the subject was dated Calcutta, 31st August 1844, in which the Company was informed that "...the proposal for the incorporation of the Assam Company has been submitted to the Court of Directors for their reconsideration."

Almost exactly a year later the Act, No. XIX of 1845, was passed into Law and was to remain in force until 30th April 1854. So far as can be ascertained, it was in accordance with the original draft of 1843, except that the Company was precluded from engaging in the cultivation, manufacture or preparation of opium, coffee and sugar.

The fact of the Company being incorporated under a special Act of Parliament before the passing of any Companies Act was something unique in the annals of the Tea Industry. This adds special significance to the Company’s original Seal: although it was six years after the original application and inception of the Company, the date of incorporation, 1845, has been retained in the Seal, with its inscription “Ingenio et Labore”—which can be translated freely into “By Ingenuity and Hard Work.”

The fact of the Company being incorporated in India is important, having in view the controversy that arose subsequently when the London Board wanted to dissolve the Calcutta Direction.

A dividend of 10s. per share, or 2½ per cent. on the then paid-up
Capital was declared payable to registered shareholders on the books on 1st January 1845. This was in fact the payment of another dividend out of Capital. Having regard to the Company’s assets as quoted in the Auditors’ Report, it was not surprising that, at a Board Meeting on 19th December 1845, the Secretary was instructed to apply to the Bank for a loan of £5,000 to pay this dividend.

Reporting this in November 1845, the Board were candid enough to admit what little they knew then of the crop produced in that year and the expenditure incurred, though they warned shareholders of a probable shortage of crop.

Your Directors have not yet received an account of the produce of the current year and are unable to inform you of its probable amount. But in consequence of an unusual and extraordinary drought in the Province in the months in which the first pickings are gathered, which retarded the vegetation of the plants, they have reason to believe that the produce will fall somewhat short of their expectations, but to what extent they have no means of knowing.

Your Directors entertain a confident hope that the concern is now being worked to profit, although to what extent they will probably not have the means of ascertaining with accuracy until they have seen that the expenditure for the next six months continues to be kept down to its present amount.

It is difficult to understand how the Board dare pay a dividend with only such flimsy information at their command, and it was equally remarkable that they could maintain their unbounded confidence on a mere pious hope that the concern was being worked profitably!

In the actual working of season 1845 there was nothing to justify the Board’s previous optimism, the crop for that year of 194,800 lb. was short of the estimate by 55,000 lb., which was explained in their own words:

This deficit is attributable to an unusual drought which prevailed in Assam during the first manufacturing months, and the extent of the reduction occasioned by this circumstance may be estimated from the fact, that whilst in the month of March 1844, the produce was 15,922 lb., in March 1845, only 1,407 lb. were manufactured, amounting to nearly a total failure.

This emphasises the reliance that was had then, in accordance with common practice in China, upon getting a large proportion of the crop from the first flush of the season. It is true that the short crop of 1845 was due to circumstances beyond their control, yet the Board did not seem to think that, having been bitten so often in their anticipation of increasing
crop, it would be prudent to be less optimistic, instead they told the shareholders:

The Superintendents, at the date of our last advices, had not furnished the Local Board with an estimate of the produce to be expected during this season: but if it proves favourable, a large increase may be reasonably anticipated.

Even in their anticipation in so vital a matter as a reduction in overall expenditure they had to report failure. In the Southern Division there had been an actual reduction of a few pounds below the estimate, but in the Northern Division outlay during 1845 there had been over £2,000 in excess, their explanation for which was, "... this large difference is explained to have occurred partly from arrears left by Mr. Bruce. ..."

With this brief and derogatory reference to Bruce by the London Board, there disappears from the annals of the Assam Company the name of the greatest figure in the original planting history of the Tea Industry in India.

There were six members of the Bruce family connected with the foundation or earliest accounts of the Industry, Major Robert Bruce, C. A. Bruce, C. A. Bruce, Junior (a son of Robert Bruce), William Bruce, R. Bruce and D. Bruce. C. A. Bruce, C. A. Bruce, Junior, and D. Bruce were at the same time all in the employ of the Assam Company. Of all of them, however, the name of Charles Alexander Bruce stands supreme as a pioneer of the Industry. He was born on 11th January 1793 and died 23rd April 1871. He was fifty-one years old at the time when the Company dispensed with his services in 1844.

Such detail as is known of the individual members of this family are given in the chapter dealing with the Company's staff.

There is no question that the accusations of extravagance and gross mismanagement made against Bruce were justified. There is, however, one small incident that suggests that some of his proposals for economy were rejected by the Calcutta Board in favour of their own more grandiose schemes.

There was then in the Company's employ one J. Owen, a whole-time surveyor and prospector for coal. Bruce suggested that the Survey Department should be disbanded, as native surveyors were good enough for all his needs.

The Calcutta Board would not hear of it, and instructed Bruce that Owen should be put on to surveying the Dikhoo, Burri Dehing and the Brahmaputra rivers. In giving such instructions, the Board showed both ignorance of the geography of the country and of the magnitude of the task they imposed.
That incident apart, and making all allowances for Bruce's difficult task in superintending the Northern Division, where labour was so short, there is no excuse for the bad tea he produced, which was the cause of embarrassment to the London Board to explain to their shareholders.

During 1842 and 1843 the condition of the tea was so bad that on one occasion, out of a shipment of 289 chests, the bohea was sold in London for 1½d. per lb. and the compoi for 3d. a lb. Although these were the two lowest grades, at such prices and in that quantity the loss was disastrous; by present-day standards the quality of some of the tea put on the London Market from China was poor, but the inferior tea produced by the Assam Company contributed much to its financial difficulties in the early years.

In the meantime, the Board were reluctant to admit to their shareholders the inferiority of the Company's production, and so they blamed the market for the low prices and made comparison of these prices with those paid for teas from China, their rivals in tea production, whom they claimed previously to have beaten.

The teas that have been brought to sale during the past year the produce of 1844, although generally of a higher character than that of previous years, has not realised such high prices. This is mainly attributable to the low and dull state of the tea market; but it is satisfactory to observe that as compared with China teas, the prices obtained have been certainly favourable.

Whilst the Board must have known that this was not particularly convincing, they had to say something about the steps they were taking to remedy matters, and in their Report they recorded that they had sent two young men out to Assam. "... One a young Scotchman highly recommended who has been brought up as a practical and scientific horticulturist; and the other a young man perfectly acquainted with tea, for the purpose of superintending, sorting, classifying and checking of our produce."

As a matter of historical interest, these appointments were the first recruitment of European staff at home for service in tea in India. The efficiency of a horticulturist for the cultivation side of tea production might be questioned, but the young man, from apparently one of the tea brokers' offices, must be the start of that long line of those who gained their first experience of tea from an apprenticeship in that branch of the trade and who became subsequently successful tea planters.

The fortunes of the Company were on the downgrade, though they had not at this time reached bottom, but the Calcutta Board were aware obviously that matters concerning their local administration called for
investigation, and in 1845 they deputed their Deputy Secretary, Henry Mornay, to visit Assam.

... to enquire fully into all details connected with our operations there, and they state that they consider Mr. Mornay well qualified for this duty, and expect to derive from his careful observations and enquiries such a report as will enable them to introduce further salutary reforms in the existing system of conducting the cultivation and manufacture, so as to reduce the cost of our tea, and improve its quality.

Henry Mornay’s deputation to Assam had preceded the general principle which the Board laid down as a resolution of 31st December 1845, to the effect that:

... As a matter of vital importance to the interests of the Company that one of their Board, if possible, and otherwise that a competent person be appointed and deputed annually or oftener if deemed necessary, to visit the Company barrees and report in writing as well as personally to the Directors the state of the cultivation and the prospects of the Season. . . .

Henry Mornay had been on the secretarial staff in Calcutta for some years before he was appointed Deputy Secretary, so that on his departure to Assam, he was armed with at least knowledge of the gravity of the Company’s affairs.

Henry Mornay must be distinguished from his brother Stephen Mornay, who became subsequently the Company’s Superintendent. A material part of the resuscitation of the Company was due to this first visit of Henry Mornay to Assam, though in his deputation and in the appointment of his brother there was evidence of the guiding hand of Henry Burkinyoung, then a Director on the Calcutta Board.
CHAPTER VIII

1846-1850

The fortunes of the Company during the previous five years were bad enough, but these difficulties were far transcended by the misfortunes that followed. Whereas previously it had come to the end of its financial resources and faced having to admit failure, in this next period the Company tottered on the brink of utter ruin before it was rescued from final disaster by the administration of one great figure on the Calcutta Board, Henry Burkinyoung, assisted by equally notable personalities at the head of the Administration in Assam.

In view of the acrimonious controversy that ensued subsequently when the Board in London wanted to dissolve the Calcutta Board and take control of the Company direct with Assam through Agents in Calcutta, it is significant that, in their Report of the 1st May 1846, they should have told shareholders:

Your Directors must remind you that whilst it is their province and duty to superintend and control the general business of the Company, it is on the Local Board in Calcutta that your main dependence must be placed—to them is committed by our constitution the care and direction of those details of management, which distance from the scene of our operations renders it impossible for the general Directory to perform.

We believe that the present Local Board are most anxious to do their duty; and that with a watchful care upon their part, particularly over the expenditure, the affairs of the Company may be brought to a successful issue.

Whereas the Calcutta Board had been reduced in number by resignations from the statutory nine to only four or five, the London Board, realising that a Board of fifteen members as laid down in the Deed of Settlement was more than was required, passed a resolution that any vacancies occurring in their Direction should not be filled until the number was reduced to less than nine. Even this number was considered subsequently to be too numerous, and in 1851 a special resolution was passed to the effect that it was not incumbent on the Board to fill up further vacancies until the number shall be reduced below six.

There was no motive of economy in this decision, for it would seem that the London Board acted in purely an honorary capacity, only the Calcutta Board received one gold mohur for each Meeting and were fined a similar sum for non-attendance.

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The London Board were fully aware of the parlous state of the Company, and in the latter half of 1846 they appointed from amongst themselves a special Committee comprising Messrs. Fox, D. Campbell, James Warren, Weeding and Prinsep to enquire into the financial position and future prospects of the Company, and to report whether in their opinion under any system of management the concern was likely to be worked to a profit. This Committee reported:

That the data furnished by the Calcutta Direction are of so imperfect and contradictory a nature, and the details of accounts so unsatisfactory they are unable to come to such a conclusion upon the questions referred to them as will form any certain guide to the Board of the results of continuing the production of tea in Assam.

Within a few days of the recording of the opinion of this Committee the Secretary received a requisition from certain shareholders for a Special Meeting to consider this very subject.

This Meeting was held on 2nd December 1846, at which shareholders demanded the appointment of a sub-committee of members to enquire into the Company's affairs and the future management thereof. This Committee consisted of William Tite (Chairman), E. S. Bigg, Alex. Boctefeur, J. Coverdale, Henry M. Kemshead and Geo. F. Remfrey. Of these, only the last-named can be recognised as having previous knowledge of the Company's affairs. Remfrey was at one time a Director in Calcutta and a member of the firm of Solicitors employed by the Company in Calcutta. William Tite and H. M. Kemshead became Directors of the Company subsequently.

As a basis for their deliberations the Committee recorded that:

The finances of the Company supply the means of going on for another year, and, if all the promises in respect of the next season are realised, it will probably be the first the Company has known without grave and serious loss.

Although the findings of the Committee as printed and issued to the shareholders are dated February 1847, over a year after the appointment of the Committee, they were known to the London Board before the end of 1846, as is evident from correspondence recorded in the Calcutta Minutes.

The Committee's first recommendation was:

That, without a further effort, it is not expedient to dissolve the Assam Company, nor to attempt a sale of its plantations and property, further than the sale of the steam-boat and useless stores.
Henry Burkinyoung, 1856-1857.
Their findings are summarised in the following words:

The causes for the present situation of the Company in the face of these important facts, are to be attributed principally to the wide extension of the Districts in which the Company has been distributed; to the attempt to introduce labourers from China; to the loss by the building and working of the Steam-boat; and to a general most extravagant, and, in some cases, perhaps, fraudulent, administration of the Company’s affairs by their servants in Assam.

To remedy this state of affairs the Committee recommended the discontinuance of the cultivation of the Northern and Eastern Divisions, and to concentrate on the six gardens in the Southern Division of Ligri Pukri, Kachari Pukri, Mazengah, Hatti Putti, Cherido and Gabroo Purbut, and to give up Rokhun Habi.

They suggested further that:

(1) To endeavour even on these areas in the Southern Division to introduce a system of native cultivation whereby the natives were to be induced by the medium of advances in cash to cultivate the various areas and deliver the leaf plucked to the Company’s “officers” for manufacture, sorting and packing.

(2) The immediate sale of the steamboat Assam.

(3) The management of the Company’s affairs by the Board in London direct with Assam through the medium of Agents in Calcutta. The Committee went so far as to say that, as it appears to them, the management of the Company’s affairs by the Board in India had failed and so the attempt should be made to carry out another system of purely English management.

Although these recommendations were supposedly the outcome of the deliberations of a wholly independent body of shareholders, it is obvious from Minutes previous to the appointment of the Committee that their findings were largely influenced by the London Board’s own views. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Board announced that they were in entire agreement with the Committee’s findings.

The London Board could not proceed, however, to give effect to the recommendations until they had got rid of the Calcutta Board; they decided to take no immediate steps to implement the Committee’s recommendations, but to wait until the end of the next manufacturing season to see if the estimates of the local Board were realised. The Company therefore faced 1847 with empty coffers. London informed the Calcutta Board of “... the absolute necessity for their entire dependence upon the proceeds of the steamer, sawmill and miscellaneous property in India... for their means of conducting Season 1847...”

The sale of the steamer Assam and the flat Naga to the India General
Steam Navigation Company for Rs.70,000 was negotiated in January 1847. The purchase price was to be settled by Promissory Notes of the Directors of that Company, maturing at various periods up to twelve months from the date of purchase. The final payment with interest was not made, however, until November 1848. The sawmill and other items were estimated to realise £300.

This first mention of the India General Steam Navigation Company calls for a digression, for that Company, which was founded in 1844, and the Assam Company, from that date, grew up together. Directors of the Assam Company were at the same time on the Board of the India General Steam Navigation Company. John Storm was Chairman of both Companies in 1847. At that period, or just earlier, both Companies suffered from mismanagement and both perpetrated the same error (or to-day it might be called a crime) of paying dividends out of Capital. But in any case, both Companies faced financial embarrassment during these difficult years. A fuller account of the association of these two Companies will be found in Chapter XXXII “Transport and Communications,” under the sub-heading “River Steamers.”

Reverting to the financial stringency as it presented itself to the Calcutta Board, Henry Burkinyoung and J. D. Campbell came forward and helped the Company out of its desperate need for ready money to carry on operations, the former by finding money from his own pocket, and Campbell by making a loan on part of the crop being hypothecated to him. The Annual General Meeting was called for 7th May 1847, at 35 Great Winchester Street, but as there were no shareholders present, the Meeting was dissolved in accordance with Clause 47 of the Deed of Settlement, which provided that this should be done if less than twenty proprietors were present. Although the Company had been granted its Charter of Incorporation, some of its procedure was covered still by the original Deed of 1840. As provided for in this Deed, the Directors carried out at this Meeting the necessary formalities of re-electing Directors and reappointing Auditors.

The archives of the Assam Company record that the Directors' Report and Accounts for 1847 is missing, but in fact such a Report was never issued: the fact that no shareholders turned up at this Meeting may have been due partly to their becoming disinterested in their investment with its heavy liability for further calls, but there were other causes at work outside the operations of the Assam Company. 1847 was a year of financial crisis throughout the country. The economic facts were that:

The rapid development of domestic production and trade in the previous half century had been accompanied by an equivalent expansion of English
commercial interests abroad. Trade with the East had long ceased to be a monopoly of the East India Company. There were by now a considerable number of English concerns large and small, in India, China, and other parts of the World as far distant, each with its own establishment or Agent at home. Their business was generally to send home the foreign produce and also to import whatever English goods they could find a market for locally.

Every opportunity for expansion was seized, for the merchants of the early Victorian period were filled with an irrepressible optimism born of the rapid progress of Commerce and wealth of the immediate past. Those engaged in financing this trade with far distant parts were still feeling their way. Where the safety line lay they had not yet discovered. Hitherto traders with Eastern countries had generally risked their own capital, for even India was still at least 4 months journey away from England; but they were now becoming anxious to take all the credit which Banking Houses could give them. Firms in the East had begun to draw on their London Houses against goods, which even if shipped, were still many weeks from England. Often shipment was not even in prospect when the Bills were drawn, and the London Houses receiving these Bills by the overland route, brought them into the market at once to be discounted in order to send more cargoes to the East. Bills drawn for India at six months' sight, or 10 months date, were extremely common and the keen competition which sprang up in Banking with the increase of Joint Stock Banks, made it easy to get them discounted.

That was the position viewed solely from the impartial point of view of the economist of the financial situation as a whole, but it reflects the London Board's optimism at that time of the Company's prospective success under private enterprise.

Due, however, to what is described as speculative mania in railway development, amongst other commercial ventures, together with a succession of bad harvests in England and Ireland, there occurred a financial crisis that brought many merchants, banks, bill brokers and others to bankruptcy.

The Assam Company was therefore, apart from the management of its own affairs, subject to these outside influences, which affected also the businessman in Calcutta. Few shareholders attended the corresponding General Meeting there, and the printed Reports expressed no criticism of the Company's Administration in India itself. It was at this low ebb in the fortunes of the Company which was probably the time when it was alleged that the Company's shares could be bought in Calcutta at 1 rupee a piece.

As a first step towards adopting their own and the Committee's recommendations for direct control from London through Agents in Calcutta, the Board opened that notable correspondence with Calcutta in their endeavour to persuade that Board to relinquish their functions.
Before recounting the facts of this controversy, the other proposals of the Committee of Members must be dealt with.

Henry Mornay, the Company’s Secretary in Calcutta, had been deputed to go to Assam towards the end of 1845, and the two questions of the abandonment of the Northern and Eastern Divisions, together with the closing down of certain areas in the Southern Division and the giving out to natives the cultivation of the tea areas generally, were referred to him. The London Board’s information that native cultivation had been adopted successfully in other parts of India was based no doubt on the procedure practised in the United Provinces for sugar and indigo.

The outlying areas of the Southern Division suggested for abandonment were Deopani, Rohkan Habi, Dubbar and Dooma Dulong.

Henry Mornay admitted that originally these factories should certainly never have been opened, but he went on to remark:

There are unfavourable circumstances, peculiar to them perhaps, not generally known, in consequence of their isolated position and the difficulty of getting rice, the coolies are paid 4 annas a month more than at the other factories, whilst the spot is extremely unhealthy; nor is the soil equal to that of most of other factories, although it is very fair land for tea. The patches of indigenous plant originally discovered were small and spare of plant, the Barrees having been filled up with plants from the jungles and seedlings. The extra rate of labour is only temporary, and will eventually be got rid of as villages increase; whilst if sanitary [sic] and other local considerations and difficulties are to act as a bar to our proceedings, the operations of the Company will always be very limited. The closing of these factories would cause a considerable decrease in the gross culture which I think should be avoided if possible as the necessary unproductive contingent charges of the concern would fall very heavy on a small crop. I think the calculations should be taken on the whole of the lands, of course keeping in view prospective expectations. If every poorah of land, which does not yield a profit, was to be abandoned, many distinct patches in our most productive factories would be given up, and a further decrease in the crops effected.

In this way, the cost of the tea in labour for cultivation would be reduced: but it would be found that the gross expenditure for all departments, as compared with the value of the crop, would be far more unfavourable than it is at present. For the above reasons, I do not think it would be expedient even under existing circumstances to close these factories.

In regard to native cultivation, Henry Mornay was definite, for in his report he wrote:

This plan, I think a very good one, if it could be carried out, and some years hence, it may be practicable, but at present it is quite impossible, even on a very small scale; it is true that this system is adopted in other parts
of India, with some articles of native produce, but it does not follow that it can be consequently adopted in Assam, where the circumstances are so totally different; in those parts of India where the plan is in force, the population is abundant, whilst in Assam it is the reverse, a circumstance which alone precludes the system from being followed. A very intelligent gentleman in Assam, who has been successfully manufacturing sugar in the Province for some years tells me that he has repeatedly attempted to get native cultivators to plant cane and supply his Mill on this system, and has offered very advantageous terms as an inducement. Although his factory is situated in Lower Assam, however, where the population is not nearly so spare as where the Company's Tea Gardens are situated, he has never succeeded in getting a single individual to enter into such an arrangement; at present I consider the plan quite impracticable.

In their Report to shareholders of 8th May 1848 the London Board admitted the weight of these arguments and decided to adopt their usual practice of taking no action.

So much for the Calcutta Board's replies to London on matters of administration in Assam based on Henry Mornay's reports to them—he returned to Calcutta on 18th November 1847. The Calcutta Board's answer to the proposal that they should abandon their functions is contained in Minute No. 12 of their Meeting on 28th April 1847:

The Local Directors are of opinion that it would not be prudent at the present time to make any change in the constitution of their Board.

The Directors would readily relinquish their functions (supposing that there is no legal difficulty to oppose such a step) if they could entertain the belief that by so doing the interests of the Company would be advanced, but they are of the opinion that it would, at the present moment, be highly injurious, while the administration of affairs in Calcutta and Assam are in a state of transition and reform, from an extended and disorganised base to a system of concentration and economy. The facts and experience that have been gained during the operations of the past and present year, are of vital importance, and their practical operation and the measures that are now in progress, would be greatly damaged by a transfer of the control from the Local Directors to that of an inexperienced Agent; and with reference to Mr. Mornay, the Directors believe that it will be impossible for the Home Board to send out an individual possessing his sound and valuable qualifications and integrity, so admirably adapted to the wants of the Company; moreover, the Directors are of the opinion, that a desirable and respectable Agency could not be found to undertake the affairs of the Company at the cost of the present Calcutta Establishment, and consequently that no economy or advantage would result from the change.

In this Minute the Calcutta Board only based their rejection of the London proposal on the ground of it being inexpedient at that time to
the plans they had in train for the reformation of the Company. The Calcutta Board were in fact in an unassailable position, for under the Charter granted in 1845 the Company was a Rupee concern registered in India. In Clause VIII of the Charter it was enacted that General Meetings were to be held at least twice a year at the principal office or place of business in Calcutta and the Capital of the Company was recited in Company rupees 50,00,000 divided into 10,000 shares of Co. Rs.500 each.

It was perhaps the knowledge of this position that inspired the sentence in parentheses in the second paragraph of the above Resolution in its reference to legal difficulties to give effect to the London Board’s proposal. However that may be, the Calcutta Board were in a position to tell the London Board that if they were so inclined they could disband themselves but they could not enforce the dissolution of the Calcutta Board. In these circumstances London had no option but to accept Calcutta’s total rejection of their proposals.

The foregoing is the ultimate effect of the London proposals, but this result was not arrived at in Calcutta without some opposition by at least one Director and some shareholders who were disposed to support the London Sub-Committee’s proposals. Mr. Samuel Smith, a Director, submitted a Minute at the General Meeting on 24th December 1847 to the effect that the shareholders in India should adopt those proposals, but he modified them to the extent that this should only be done provided that the Management in Calcutta and the control of the Superintendent in Assam should devolve upon Henry Burkinyoung. He was the only one with the requisite practical knowledge and ability for such an appointment. On this Mr. Theodore Dickens, who held the post of being the Company’s standing Counsel, pointed to the late hour at which such an important point had been raised, and he succeeded in getting the Meeting adjourned and a Special Meeting called for an early date in January 1848 for the particular purpose of reconsidering Mr. Samuel Smith’s Minute.

At the Adjourned Meeting on 4th January 1848, Mr. Samuel Smith set out his Minute at length, and although in the preamble he stated that he had consulted his brother directors (excepting Mr. Henry Burkinyoung, who had not been told), they had concurred with his views regarding the London Sub-Committee’s proposal. His Minute, however, was never put to the Meeting. Instead, Theodore Dickens, in opposing him, pointed out in no unmeasured terms the folly of throwing over the qualified and wholly trustworthy men, who had “pulled the cart out of the mire,” for some unknown and unqualified agent. Mr. Dickens concluded his remarks by saying that he did not intend to cast reflections on any party in London, but proposed that it was inexpedient to dissolve the local Board, which resolution was seconded and carried unanimously.
1846-1850

Mr. Samuel Smith, in the subsequent proceedings of this Meeting, retracted from his Minute and said that he concurred with the views then expressed by the Chairman (Dr. John Grant, a shareholder and no connection with the Company's solicitors, Grant & Remfrey), and proceeded to pay tribute to Mr. Henry Burkinyoung's work.

It is not known whether Henry Mornay had any previous experience of agriculture in India, but he was no doubt well briefed by Henry Burkinyoung for his first mission to Assam, for in their respective offices of Deputy Secretary and Director these two had worked together for some years.

As the outcome of his 1845-1846 visit, Henry Mornay was able to give the Calcutta Board in a report, which the Minutes record that he wrote in July 1846, their first real insight into the conditions of the gardens, and how they had been mismanaged. The data he furnished enabled the Board, under the able guidance of Henry Burkinyoung, to formulate a plan of reform. To put this plan into effect, Henry Mornay proceeded to Assam again at the end of 1846, or early in 1847, this time for the main purpose of closing down the Northern and Eastern Divisions.

To this extent Henry Mornay must be given credit for being the first person to contribute to the turn in the tide of the fortunes of the Company that followed. Before he left Assam at the conclusion of this second visit, he reported to the Board that he had made over to Stephen Mornay at Nazira on 28th September 1847, the latter having been appointed Superintendent by the Calcutta Board on 28th August. There is nothing in the Board's Proceedings about Stephen Mornay's previous experience or qualifications for the job, but by the way he handled the Company's affairs in Assam subsequently, it is obvious that he was well qualified.

It is true that when Stephen Mornay took over from his brother the Northern and Eastern Divisions had been closed, but his appointment at such a low remuneration as Rs.200 monthly against the previous three Superintendents drawing for those days the princely salaries of Rs.600 to Rs.800 a month each, is an indication of the extent of the drastic economies effected at the top.

There is no copy of the whole of Henry Mornay's report of July 1846, nor is there any account from Stephen Mornay of the condition of the gardens when he took over, but from the general trend of matters discussed at the Calcutta Board Meetings, it is obvious that the planted areas had received little or no cultivation.

The bushes were ruthlessly plucked where they could be got at in the heavy jungle in which they endeavoured to survive. Vacancies were more numerous than plants; where these were infilled they were choked by weeds or were hoed up when it became necessary eventually to
reduce the jungle to enable plucking to be continued. Stephen Mornay was fully alive to the necessity for getting the gardens cleaned in preparation for the next season. In 1847 he went to the extent of closing down manufacture in September, losing thereby 410,000 lb. of crop, to get on with cold-weather cultivation and infilling. Pruning as such was unknown, and to keep the bushes down to a height that would enable them to be plucked the next season they were butchered with dao and bill-hooks, in the process of which the branches of the main frame were split and broken.

It is not surprising that with agriculturally more humane treatment improved results in the crop and in condition of the bushes were attained immediately.

There was a form of deception practised by the earlier Superintendents—whether intentionally or not would be hard to prove—of sending down invoices of only their best tea, keeping that produced from the later hard leaf to follow at the end of the season, hence the oft-repeated reference to improved quality mentioned at Annual General Meetings, which were held before the complete production of the whole season had been received, and before the weight of rubbish had been packed and despatched to Calcutta.

Because of the delay in getting teas down to Calcutta, whether by country boat direct to Calcutta itself or by country boat to Gauhati and thence by Government steamer to Calcutta, consignments were subject to the vicissitudes of such a journey from climatic conditions. It was the practice therefore to examine, and if necessary repack and recondition, all invoices in Calcutta.

Some gardens manufactured their own leaf. Those in reasonable distance from Nazira sent their leaf into that station to be manufactured. This fact, plus the repacking and reconditioning in Calcutta, made it impossible to identify which gardens may have been the culprit in the production of bad tea.

On his return from Assam, Henry Mornay was given the full-time office of Secretary to the Company in Calcutta on a salary of Rs.200 a month. During his absence Henry Burkinyoung had been acting as Honorary Secretary in addition to his Directorship. At a General Meeting on 4th January 1848, Henry Burkinyoung was appointed Managing Director, at that time quite a new office, on a salary of Rs.500 monthly.

These appointments, increasing as they did the cost of the Calcutta Establishment, raised a storm of protest from the London Board, for it appeared to them that they had been made against their previous implicit instruction to reduce expenditure, and on hearing of the action taken they reiterated their vehement disapproval. They disapproved of the appointment of Stephen Mornay as Superintendent and expressed their fears that
because of his inexperience success was not likely to attend his efforts. They no doubt contrasted Mornay's new appointment with the loss of the services of a Senior Assistant, one Alexander Hart, who had been with the Company since its inception in 1839. They did not appreciate that this gentleman's services had been dispensed with for spending his time trading in elephants on his own account. All they could see apparently was the loss of a head Assistant's services at Rs. 160 a month against the appointment of Mr. Stephen Mornay at Rs. 200 monthly.

The London Board, in what they regarded as their desperate financial position, could think only of cutting down expenses everywhere and at whatever cost, whilst the Calcutta Board, with more practical vision (for they were aware that matters had begun to improve), sought to spend money where it was most likely to achieve results.

When these appointments are examined in detail, it is found that after his two years in Assam, where he did such valuable work, Henry Mornay's salary as Calcutta Secretary had, on his return, been raised by the Calcutta Board by only Rs. 50 a month. Henry Burkinyoung's promotion to Managing Director was proposed and passed by shareholders in General Meeting, and it was the shareholders who fixed his remuneration at Rs. 500 monthly.

The Company as constituted under the Charter granted by the East India Company as the Government in India was the equivalent to-day of a Rupee Company, the Proceedings therefore of the Calcutta Board were the paramount direction and the London Board had no jurisdiction over the decisions come to in Calcutta, and their protests were of no avail.

In spite of this the London Board recorded their resentment of the decisions come to in Calcutta, and they made capital of the fact that the London Directory gave their services gratuitously, and that whilst they were willing to remunerate the Calcutta Board for their extra services if the condition of the Company would enable them to do so, they suggested, as an alternative to the Calcutta proposal (which had been put into effect already), that:

... the resident Secretary at Calcutta, Mr. H. Mornay, should take upon himself the general management while a local Board of Directors, which it appears by the Charter must exist, should act as honorary only but be willing and ready to give advice whenever required, and to interpose whenever necessary, without otherwise directly interfering in the management. ...  

Having had their proposals for direct control from London through Agents turned down, was this a subtle endeavour by the London Board to make Henry Mornay their Calcutta Agent whilst clipping
the wings of the Calcutta Board preparatory to elbowing them out of office?

In the correspondence published in their Report of the Proceedings of the General Meeting in London on 5th May 1848, the London Board displayed their apprehensions which the controversy with Calcutta had brought to a head.

The underlying cause of this controversy was the fact that the London Board had lost all faith in the future of the Company whilst the Calcutta Board was sanguine that they had turned the corner and were on the way to solvency. The London Board were so obsessed with the idea that all was lost that they went so far as to ask the Calcutta Board that as they were so confident in the future, “. . . whether they, either by themselves or in conjunction with others, would be disposed to make the English Shareholders an offer for the whole property of the concern in India.”

The outcome of the controversy was that the Calcutta Board had their way, and under the form of management they had proposed the storm was weathered and the Company was carried on to become a profit-earning business.

In this period when the Company’s future was in the melting-pot and the actions taken by the Calcutta Board were looked upon with doubt by some shareholders, even in India, it is noted that the Chair at some Meetings in Calcutta (those of 4th January 1848 and 10th January 1849, for example) was not taken by the Company’s elected Chairman—Mr. John Jenkins—but by one Dr. J. Grant. It was no doubt politic that a shareholder rather than a Director should take the Chair at the Meeting that might compromise the actions of the Board. The latter Meeting was the most controversial ever held in Calcutta.

A lot of the dissension was caused by the presence at that Meeting of Mr. J. Deans Campbell. This gentleman had been a Director on the Calcutta Board originally. He had proceeded home and been appointed to the London Board. He had returned to India in time to attend the Meeting of 10th January 1849. He had been specially asked by the London Board to voice their apprehensions regarding the conduct of affairs in Calcutta, and particularly to patch up the misunderstanding, as he expressed it, between the London and Calcutta Boards. It is recorded that before the Meeting Mr. Campbell had discussed with Henry Burkinyoung the whole tenor of the adverse criticism of the Calcutta Board which he had been primed to make by London. Henry Burkinyoung had convinced him, however, that such were unfounded and that the affairs of the Company were then well on the road to recovery. This must have taken a lot of sting out of Mr. Campbell’s remarks which he did make eventually at this Meeting. What he did have to say, therefore,
was largely an expression of hope of future unanimity between the two Boards.

As a diversion from criticisms of the Direction there is one passage in Mr. Campbell's long address to the Calcutta shareholders in which he eulogised the value of Assam Tea in England and stated that he had been at great pains to introduce Assam tea to the Oriental Club, where, he added, there had been a strong prejudice against it, but he was happy to say that this was wearing away.

At the General Meeting on 4th May 1849, when the results of 1848 had shown clearly what great improvement had taken place in the Company's affairs, it is rather curious to observe how the London Board almost distorted facts to convince shareholders of the infallibility of their direction when in fact the Calcutta Board, being told that their administration had failed, had accomplished their object almost in opposition to instructions from London.

The London Board now admitted that those in Calcutta had succeeded. They would not, however, let bygones be bygones, but instead, to cover themselves against any possible repercussions, reiterated in their Report all those points of disagreement which they had had with Calcutta.

After a series of years of the most ruinous and disastrous management, causing as it has done to the General Directory, the painful necessity of frequently expressing their dissatisfaction of the proceedings of the Local Board, a decided change has at length taken place in the aspect of our affairs and the General Directory avail themselves of this, the first public opportunity of stating the gratification which they have felt from the improvement of the affairs of the Company under the recent management of the Local Board in India. The General Directory have long felt that results alone must be their main, if not their only guide, in estimating the character and ability of persons who have the conduct of a business at so great a distance as India; and the present officers of the company in India have been the first to produce the only satisfactory results that have been shown since the commencement of operations in Assam. They have kept within their estimates of expenditure—they have exceeded their estimates of produce—in a word, under the new system, the Company has worked to a profit instead of a loss, and that upon an area of cultivation of comparatively insignificant extent.

In making these observations which we consider it would be ungenerous to withhold, your Directors do not wish it to be understood that they have been entirely satisfied with every step taken by the Local Directors, nor that their opinions entirely accord. It would have been more satisfactory if the Local Directors had shown a more ready acquiescence in some of the requests and views which the General Directory have from time to time communicated to them. But having heretofore expressed openly and freely in our communications to you as well as the Local Board our dissatisfaction, and
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especially at the last General Meeting having laid before you a correspondence in which we expressed fear as well as displeasure at some steps which had recently been taken with respect to the officers of the Company in Assam, the General Directory have felt it right on this occasion to offer these observations.

Matters were improving also in the rate at which the disposal of crop was being effected. In May 1849 more than half the crop of 1848 had been realised, and on an estimate of prices the teas would fetch the profit was calculated to be not less than £3,000, and the opportunity was taken to reduce the loan from the Bank by £2,000. The original loan of £7,000 at 10 per cent. interest was a heavy burden.

In April 1850 this loan was reduced by a further £2,500 by taking advances from the Company’s Tea Brokers against tea in warehouse awaiting sale, or in ships on the way home for which shipping documents had been received. The Company’s Brokers were Thompson & Company and Gibbs & Company, and this particular transaction appears to have been put through by Gibbs & Company.

The Calcutta Board, dominated as they were by the Managing Director, Henry Burkinyoung, must have had a shrewd idea that the profit was likely to be considerably in excess of the above estimate, as was in fact the case. On this basis of having proved that on its existing area under tea the Company could be worked to a profit, the Calcutta Board submitted proposals for considerable extensions of the area under tea.

This was the subject for another bitter controversy between London and Calcutta.

The proposal put forward by Calcutta was that about 1,500 poorahs, or 2,000 acres, of extensions should be put out during the next four years, that is commencing with 400-500 poorahs in 1850. The cost was to be Rs.10,000 for clearing and planting, Rs.10,000 for upkeep during the first year and Rs. 5,000 for the importation of Bengali coolies, making a total of Rs.25,000. It was expected that some yield would be available in the third year, and it was estimated that at maturity these areas would give 300 lb. of tea per acre, quoting as their yardstick for this the fact that some areas at Cherido had given previously as much as 350 lb. per acre.

As put up by the Calcutta Board, the scheme was complete as to funds to meet this additional outlay. It was proposed to call up another £1 per share, which would provide 1 lakh of rupees and enable the balance of the debt of £5,000 to be paid off and provide finance for the first year’s outlay; thereafter, if funds available from revenue were not sufficient, further calls of 10s. per share could be made. The Calcutta Board foresaw that although it was all so gratifying that the existing
results had been attained from a relatively very small tea area under cultivation, it was essential, whilst the going was good, to take this opportunity to expand.

Although the Calcutta Board were convinced in their own minds as to the soundness of their proposals, they were submitted to the London Board with due deference, the Calcutta Board relying upon the strength of their case supported by the acquiescence of the London Director, Mr. J. Deans Campbell, who was then in Calcutta.

The following is the paragraph from Mr. Henry Burkinyoung’s letter dated 23rd January 1849:

In making this recommendation, I am directed emphatically to state to you that it is done solely as a sense of duty by this Board, and with no idea whatever of urging the Proprietors against their will to enlarge operations or further investment of capital, and we are ready to continue operations as heretofore. Holding the opinions that we do, however, were we to refrain from communicating them to the Proprietary, and after several years, the operations of the Company should, crippled as we are, still remain comparatively insignificant, the shareholders could with every justice accuse us of withholding the information we possessed, and failing to guide them to the course by which we were aware their interest would be highly benefitted in the end.

As if pandering to the London Board’s desire to appear in the eyes of the shareholders the fountain head of the Company’s administration, the letter concludes, assuming that shareholders would agree to the proposals, “... and which would be as earnestly and stringently carried out by this Board, as though it had emanated, without modification, from themselves.”

The London Board had not regained confidence and were afraid to approach shareholders with such a proposition that entailed asking for more Capital. They replied to Henry Burkinyoung’s letter on 24th March 1849, saying that:

Their own opinion is, that the Shareholders will decide to pause somewhat longer before they agree to any such extension of the existing cultivation as would entail the necessity of a further contribution, and that the time has not yet arrived when a further call even for that purpose could be made without causing dissatisfaction.

The subject, however, shall be attentively considered, and in the meantime you will bear in mind the importance of continuing to fill up the existing cultivation with seedlings, so as to bring it to the highest point of bearing.

At the General Meeting in London on 4th May 1849 the postponement of further extension until the Company was free of debt was what the Board in fact did recommend to shareholders.
The Calcutta Board felt keen disappointment at this frustration of their plans, and at their General Meeting on 25th January 1850 they were at no pains to hide their resentment. These proceedings were incidentally printed in the London Report of 3rd May, so that shareholders had full knowledge of the tenor of the Calcutta Board’s feelings on the subject. It was during 1849 that the experiment had been tried, without reference to London, of reopening some of the gardens in the Northern and Eastern Divisions on a small scale. For an outlay of Rs.2,380 a crop of 6,000 lb. had been collected, sufficient to show that under a Superintendent like Stephen Mornay these gardens, which had been closed since 1846, could be brought back into production.

The London Board’s criticism of this action was the last straw in exasperating the Calcutta Board, who wrote:

... but it appears that it was the strong fears and objections of the Home Board to the reopening of these factories which led them in the 4th paragraph of their report to the Proprietors in England on the 4th May last to express their “fear as well as displeasure” at some steps taken by the Board. We find no fault with those gentlemen for conveying to the Shareholders their own impressions, but it will be seen from this instance alone, how impossible it is for them to form correct judgements on those departments of the management appertaining to the executive functions of the Local Board, whilst it is a matter of some disappointment to us that the full and detailed information forwarded to England, and the satisfactory results obtained during the past few years, have failed to establish that feeling of perfect confidence amongst the Home Directors which we submit such communications and results might fairly have been expected to command.

It was at the General Meeting in London on 3rd May 1850 that the Board recommended finally that extensions should be undertaken:

... It appears therefore clear to your Directors that, as the prospects for the future are so highly encouraging, and so reasonably sure of realisation that no time ought now to be lost in making extensions. This should be done gradually, but commenced immediately, and your Directors have as little hesitation in recommending this step on the present occasion, as they had in the last, in advising that it should be deferred. The advice so given to you, at the last meeting, was received by the Local Directors with some disappointment; but your Directors consider that the loss of time which has been occasioned by our having deferred the extension of our cultivation has been amply compensated for by the gain of confidence which the experience of the past year will give rise to.

The delay in agreeing to extensions is glossed over, but for all the Board’s urge now for immediate action, the sanction given in May meant
that a start even with clearing land could not be made on the gardens until the cold weather of 1850-1851.

This concluded another controversy between Calcutta and London, the former urging to go forward sanguine in the growing knowledge they had gained of the possibilities of tea production, the latter holding back because of lack of confidence and having had their fingers burnt before.

In their Report of 1850, the London Board once more and for the last time had a flog at the dead horse of past mismanagement and extravagance, but whatever they may have thought, they could not do otherwise than conclude with a record of their indebtedness to the local Board for the vast improvement they had made in the Company’s affairs, and the shareholders were asked to join in a cordial and unanimous vote of thanks.

It was at this time that the local Board recommended the remuneration of the staff in India in part by a percentage of the profits earned by the Company, the beginning of a form of remuneration which appertains to this day. Whilst the London Board agreed to this in principle, they looked forward to the time when they could pay their officers in Assam entirely by commission.

The Report includes the information that the sawmill and steam engine with all its accessories had at last been sold for the sum of Rs.7,000, which was regarded as a fair price. This was the first piece of machinery ever purchased by the Company and it proved a thoroughly bad bargain. It cost originally, in 1840, £1,009, 13s. landed at Calcutta, but it had to have certain woodwork made for it in Calcutta before it was sent up. What this cost, its transport to Assam, its removal up there from one place to another and its final return to Calcutta, either because it was useless for its purpose or no one could work it, is not fully disclosed.

1847 saw the turn of the tide and in 1848 a profit was made, but what this profit was in any one particular year it is not possible to state precisely because of the way in which the accounts were made up and the lack of definite statements of garden and other expenditure in India. An indication of the gradual improvement during the previous four years can best be gathered from the total sums realised by the sale of tea.

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In 1850 Stephen Mornay had put out an additional hundred acres in
the old tea, and these existing areas were reported as being in a never
more efficient condition. From the London Board's remarks in their
Report of 2nd May 1851, one gathers that in his successful endeavours
to reduce expenditure, and at the same time increase crop, he had been
a hard task-master with his staff, for even the London Board remarked
upon the low point to which he had compressed the fixed Establishment
in Assam and on this account expressed some concern "... and the duties
of the Establishment have been laborious and unremitting."

The Board were anxious to pay a dividend, but they had now learned
cautions and told shareholders that although they could have declared a
dividend out of the surplus profits of 1850, they resolved not to adopt
such a course. They pointed to the facilities they had for extensions and
the importance of further development of cultivation and manufacture.
It was proposed, therefore, to utilise surplus funds for extensions, and in
fact to adopt then what was subsequently such a common practice in
the Industry as a whole, of extending and planting out from revenue.
With its house set in order, the next period was set fair for the Company to reap the fruits of its drastic reforms and reorganisation. At no time had it relaxed its stringent economy, whilst under the energetic Superintendent in Assam the Company was able to increase its areas in tea and consequently its crops, but this was attained only under great difficulty with the scarcity of labour. To such a degree had the European staff on the gardens been cut down in numbers, that the untimely death of the Accountant at Nazira threw the office side of the local administration out of gear, and the accounts and statements for 1851 did not reach London until after May 1852.

With the 1951 Festival of Britain and its much-advertised analogy with the Great Exhibition of 1851, it is as well to record that with the threat of ruin behind them, and prospects of better things to come, the Board were able to think of less mundane affairs. On their instructions, twenty-four small boxes of tea “... intended for the Exhibition of Industry of 1851...” arrived in Calcutta in good condition on 5th December 1850, where they were repacked and shipped to London in the Nile. In the Calcutta Proceedings of 16th June 1851 it is reported that the teas were very well displayed at the Great Exhibition, and that everyone who saw them considered them “very prefect.”

The Prize Exhibition Medal was awarded to the Company for this assortment of Assam tea.

Henry Burkinyoung let nothing deter him from keeping in close touch with the administration of the Company’s affairs. The journey to Assam and the inspection of such widely separated gardens by the only means of transport, the elephant, called for considerable physical endurance. Yet in February 1851, when it is believed he was 50 years of age, he embarked for Assam, and he was still there at the end of April. He admitted that it was only a hurried visit as he had to get back to Calcutta on other important business. His report was undated, and was addressed to John Jenkins, who was then Chairman of the local Board in Calcutta. Beyond expressing his satisfaction with the vast improvements and economies that had been effected generally under Stephen Mornay’s régime, his report was not noted for any particular recommendations. He drew attention to the danger from fire of having the Sudder Station factory at Nazira made of such inflammable local material, and regretted that lack of bricks to make a proper building and the scarcity of labour
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

prevented this work being done, and because Stephen Mornay was utilising every available coolie on the productive work of putting out new clearings and cultivating properly the existing tea.

The making of boxes had then been started at Nazira, instead of importing them from Calcutta, which was an innovation which he commended highly. The Company’s previous inability to have sufficient boxes available to get the tea packed in reasonable time after manufacture for despatch to Calcutta had been a source of much trouble and the cause of deterioration in the quality of the teas when they were left lying about for a long time in that climate. Henry Burkinyoung made reference to the general shortage of labour. Stephen Mornay had been much troubled by the operation of a concern called the Assam Coal and Timber Company, managed by a Mr. Wood, who was attracting Kachari labour from the Company’s gardens to work coal for him in the Naga Hills. Mornay was successful eventually in coming to a mutual arrangement with Mr. Wood not to entice each other’s labour. In 1850 Mornay reported that the Assam Coal and Timber Company had been dissolved and that the whole of their equipment, land, etc., could be purchased for Rs.4,000. The land was regarded as of little value, for being situated on the borders of, or in, Naga territory, it was doubtful if the authorities would recognise anyone’s title to it. Amongst the tools and implements taken over was a sawmill. This, the identical piece of machinery which the Company sold in Calcutta in 1849 for the sum of Rs.7,000, and which they now bought for something less than half the price, landed back in Assam. This sawmill, after all its travels, was finally repaired and erected at Nazira, and was actually doing good work there in 1853.

Stephen Mornay resigned in 1852, having been Superintendent since 1847. The reason for his resignation arose from one of those unfortunate incidents when a hot-tempered man resents being remonstrated with for what was considered by the Board to be harsh and hasty action with his subordinate staff.

Stephen Mornay’s name will go down in the annals of the Tea Industry as one who demonstrated that, by practical economy in working, tea could be grown profitably.

His methods were ruthless. He cut down the European staff to the lowest possible level. His own energy and capacity for work were unbounded. He drove his labour hard, cut their wages from Rs.3.8 a month to Rs.3. He went to the extreme of sacking labour if work for them was temporarily not available, and hoped to recruit them again when wanted.

When Stephen Mornay found that his ratio of green leaf to made tea rose to $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 1, he cut the pluckers for red leaf to adjust this ratio to
what he thought it ought to be, 4 to i. He even dared to stop labour
cultivating their own rice-land, as he considered such occupation of their
time was detrimental to the interests of the Company. Though his
methods were almost brutal, he got results. Out of chaos and disorganisa-
tion he brought the gardens to a state of economic production. Stephen
Mornay, for all his hard driving, must have been a likeable character,
for Henry Burkinyoung remarked that in spite of the irksome toil
imposed on his Assistants, there was a remarkable atmosphere of cord-
iality between all the Europeans, whether at work or socially.

Although the finances of the Company had so improved as to be
making profits and paying dividends, yet it was very hard up for ready
money to finance the administration in Assam. Labourers’ wages were
two and three months in arrears, which caused much discontent and
insubordination amounting to strikes. Managers and other supervisory
staff were equally without their pay for long periods.

Besides Henry Burkinyoung, William Roberts lent the Company
money, the latter at one time having advanced Rs.12,750, and the
Secretary in Calcutta, Henry Mornay, lent a sum of Rs.1,100. These
advances would appear to have been made at an interest of 10 per cent.

The loss of Stephen Mornay must have been a blow to the Company,
but they little knew then how extremely fortunate they were to be in
engaging George Williamson, Junior, as his successor.

But George Williamson’s appointment was not made without
opposition. It was one of those controversies between John Jenkins, who
was then Chairman of the Calcutta Board, and the Managing Director,
Henry Burkinyoung. John Jenkins had ideas of administering the Com-
pany which were at variance with the other members of the Board.
He opened his arguments by criticising the Managing Director:

... He finds the Local Board have no possible means of checking the
expenditure in Assam, estimating the cost of work done or even the quantity
of tea actually manufactured, but all was left to the honour of the Super-
intendent.

Excuses himself for allowing such a state of affairs to exist on the
grounds that he believed that the Managing Director was in possession of all
particulars and the necessary check was in operation.

As indicated in his Minute in the Circulating Book, he very reluctantly
gave his assent to the appointment of a Superintendent in place of Mr.
S. Mornay.

It was Jenkins’ idea that the appointment of the Superintendentship
in Assam should be offered to Henry Mornay, for, in his opinion, the
office of Secretary in Calcutta which Henry Mornay then held was a
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

sinecure and the abolitionment of this office would be a saving to the Company. He considered that all the Managing Director in Calcutta required was one person to be Accountant and Secretary whose whole time in office hours should be devoted to the Company, and not as the office was then run.

What duties the Calcutta Secretary performed other than attention to the affairs of the Company is not revealed, but that it was not a whole-time job is disclosed later by Secretaries who held other offices than that for which they were paid by the Company.

Henry Burkinyoung, who knew George Williamson’s true value, with the support of the other members of the Board, passed over this criticism and proceeded to appoint him as Superintendent.

It is rather curious that George Williamson had served the Company previously as an Assistant on Rs.100 a month for about nine months in 1849, so he was known to the Board.

George Williamson had been a sugar planter in Bihar since about 1845, so he did bring with him managerial experience of agriculture in India and a knowledge of the vernacular. The Calcutta Board were taking no chances, however, and as George Williamson came from a province where labour was abundant, and because the scarcity of labour in Assam was a major problem, they sent their Secretary, Henry Mornay, to Assam with George Williamson to confer with him particularly on this subject and to ensure, no doubt that he would understand and carry on the economical administration as instituted by Stephen Mornay.

George Williamson’s first report, dated 16th February 1854 and addressed to the Secretary in Calcutta, is a masterpiece of clear thinking of the Company’s existing needs as he saw them, with a wonderful vision of the future possibilities of the Company’s expansion. For the first time he expresses the results of one season and the estimate for the next in figures of out-turn per acre and costs per lb., such as has been the basis for computing working costs of tea companies ever since. So revealing is this report that it is reproduced in full in Appendix 5 to this book.

As an example of his methods of expression he gave the results of 1853 as a crop of 366,687 lb., or an out-turn of 180 lb. per acre, at a cost of Rs.1,29,690 or As.5/8 per pound. George Williamson went so far as to predict that from the then existing areas of something like 2,820 acres in five years’ time a crop of 750,000 lb., or a little over three muids an acre, could be obtained for a cost of As.4 a pound. (In this report, areas under cultivation are given in puras, being the equivalent of 1 1/3 acres.) It is significant perhaps that even in this first report, in comparing the condition of certain gardens in the Southern Division, he remarks that the working of Kachari Pookri is very satisfactory and that this garden
has the advantage over Mazengah and Hatti Putti in that it has fewer “vacant spaces” and in having no China plant, “... the inferior yielding of which in respect of quantity is now a well-established fact.”

Before proceeding with the chronological account of the Company’s development and progress, it is essential to pay tribute to George Williamson, Junior.

He was the greatest figure in the development of the whole of the Tea Industry in Assam, though it was as Superintendent of the Assam Company that he applied first his far-reaching principles to the agricultural side of its properties.

The fact was that the method of planting and plucking tea which had been learnt from the Chinese, who had taught the pioneers, was not applicable to Assam, and it was evident that unless new methods could be found that would yield more tea and enable the bushes to maintain that yield, tea could never be made to pay. The Company’s overall production was then 196 lb. per acre, with a maximum yield of 275 lb.

The application of the Chinese method of plucking meant that the bushes were grossly overplucked in the early part of the year, starting in March, and with the heaviest manufacture in April the bushes were exhausted, and they closed up by the end of September.

As mentioned, George Williamson came to Assam with training in agriculture in Bihar. As Assistant under Stephen Mornay from 24th April 1849 to June 1850, he had studied Mornay’s methods of tea planting.

The first principle on which George Williamson attained his success was recognition of the fact that if leaf is to be plucked, the tea bush must first be allowed to grow. It was on the insistent application of this principle when he was appointed Superintendent in 1852 that the success of the Company turned.

George Williamson in his report was very careful to stress the shortage of labour which he saw would control the operations of the Company and its future expansion. It is in this report, and in reference to labour, that he mentions the onset of competition from others: “... as many private persons are now settling in the province and engaging in the cultivation of tea and the other more valuable products. . .”

As will be revealed later on, some of the “many private persons” mentioned by George Williamson were past and even present members of the Company’s staff; George Williamson himself, together with his cousin George Williamson, Senior, and some of the Directors in Calcutta, had acquired land and were putting out gardens on their own account.

This rivalry would appear to have been quite friendly, though a firm of Bradden & Company would seem to have been rather impertinent in asking the Assam Company to lend them sheet-lead in which to
pack their teas in competition with them! The Assam Company were invariably short themselves of this essential commodity.

Whilst Williamson's most pressing need was for more labour, at the end of 1852 he stressed the fact that during the previous three years the Company's labour force had decreased by over three hundred coolies. In a letter to the Board of 9th December 1852, he emphasises the position:

... The difficulties are at present enhanced by the descent of the Bhutias into Durrang on the one hand, and the apprehension of invasion by the Burmese on the other hand, which with the ravages of cholera on all sides has created a sort of panic throughout the Province.

In the earlier days, the Company had spent vast sums on the recruitment of labour from Bengal, and with some success though at a very high cost, Rungpur, in East Bengal, had been their most fruitful source for labour outside the province. A recruiting agency was opened at Rungpur in 1852, but it was not long before this had to be closed down, for coolies were then scarce in this district because the building of the railway and other public works were then in active progress.

Everybody who had visited the gardens visualised and forewarned of the calamity that would occur if the main tea-making house with its attached packing and sorting accommodation at Nazira, built as they were of bamboos, mud and ekra walls, with thatched roofs, should be burnt down. In 1853 this disaster did occur. Very fortunately, however, there were only 7,724 lb. of tea in store at that time, and that was of the lowest-quality grades. Replacement of this building started the programme of brick-column structures that were for so long the traditional type of building in the province, whether for factory buildings, bungalows, godowns or withering houses.

In accelerating the bringing of the teas to Calcutta and from thence to London, the Company had reaped considerable benefit from the Government steamer service which operated from Calcutta to as far up the Brahmaputra as Gauhati. It was therefore a considerable set-back when in 1854 the whole of the Government steamers were withdrawn to enable them to move troops and stores in their prosecution of the second Burmese War. A war in these days was merely a domestic affair with which the Government and the regular Army dealt without help or interference from the trading community in an adjoining country. The loss of convenient transport facilities was a serious matter, however, and was made the subject of a strongly worded memorial to the authorities asking for the reinstatement of the previous steamers and for the establishment of still more systematic services. In 1855 the Calcutta Board were able to report that regular services every two months had been established, and that for the first time a steamer had, with con-
spicuous success, traversed the Brahmaputra with a flat in tow. This was quite a step forward in regular communications. Although in 1855 there was only the Assam Company’s tea coming out of the province, there was ever-expanding upward freight for an increasing number of individuals who were by then cultivating tea and exploring Assam for other produce, and there was a rising number of Government officials. It was not only the European population that was increasing. The local shopkeepers, Mahajans or Kyahas, were spreading throughout the land. The Indian General Steam Navigation Company Limited, though founded in 1844, did not operate on the Brahmaputra until 1860. Their services up to the latter date had been confined to the Ganges up as far as Allahabad, through a far more populous country with freight to offer in both directions.

The Company’s Charter was due to expire on 30th April 1855, and in compliance with regulations an application for its renewal had to be approved by all shareholders at a special General Meeting. This was done at the General Meeting on 1st March 1854. A new and extended Charter for a further twenty years was passed by the legislative Council of India, being Act No. IV of 1855. There was no material change in its provisions except a prohibition against the manufacture of salt, which was considered immaterial as the Board did not contemplate ever embarking on such an enterprise.

A picture of the Company’s change of fortune is illustrated in the dividends paid during this period of 1851 to 1855. Starting with a modest dividend of 2½ per cent. paid in 1852, there followed 3 per cent. in 1853, 5 per cent. in 1854 and 6 per cent. in 1855. These are the years in which the dividends were paid. They relate, however, to the production and working costs of the previous season. These results had been obtained from the working in 1854 of the following gardens, excluding what is described as the Nazira Experimental Garden of about five acres:

**Southern Division:** Mazengah; Kachari Pookri; Hatti Pooti; Cherido; Gabroo Parbut; Deopani and Gelakey, comprising an area of about 2,454 acres under tea cultivation.

**Rokang Division,** which is shown as a separate division in 1854 but which was considered usually as part of the southern division: Rokang; Dubba; Dooma Dullang; Burrah Gosain; Towkok and Hatti Ghur, comprising about 434 acres.

**Northern Division:** Tingri; Hoogrijan; Keyhung and Kato, of about 261 acres.

**Eastern Division:** Tippum and Hoogrijuri, about 160 acres.

The biggest garden was Mazengah, 735 acres, followed by Kachari Pookri, 614 acres, and Hatti Pooti, 429 acres.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

The whole, making 3,312 acres under cultivation, out of which 861 acres were non-bearing, producing 478,240 lb., or about 260 lb. or 3½ maunds per acre.

In 1852 Mr. William Roberts was elected to the Board in Calcutta. Henry Burkinyoung resigned his appointment as Managing Director in 1853, and at the General Meeting in Calcutta on 1st March 1854 William Roberts was elected Managing Director in his place. The latter had visited Assam in the cold weather in 1852-1853.

Mr. William Roberts’ appointment did not go through unopposed. John Jenkins, who was appointed a Director in 1846 and was Chairman from 1849, was rather a critic of the Company’s administration both in London and in Calcutta. At the above Meeting in 1854 he moved an amendment to the passing of the Director’s report, contending that the appointment of Managing Director had been conferred on Henry Burkinyoung for his special and gratuitous services and that the appointment ceased on his resignation. He did not consider that there was the necessity or occupation for both Secretary and Managing Director.

Jenkins could not get his amendment seconded and William Roberts was appointed Managing Director, though on Rs.400 a month against Rs.500 a month enjoyed by Henry Burkinyoung. John Jenkins resigned.

In the Company’s archives there has been preserved a copy of a letter dated Calcutta 9th July 1853, written by Henry Burkinyoung to John Jenkins, then Chairman of the Calcutta Board, in which he tendered his resignation as he was proceeding to Europe and because the period of his detention there would be indefinite. This is a remarkable letter and its full context is reproduced in the Appendix 4.

Whilst expressing his regret at the necessity for his resignation, Henry Burkinyoung alludes to his continued interest in the prosperity of the Company, not only because of his financial stake in it, which was considerable, but because of his desire to see achieved the object for which the Company was started—that of the introduction of tea in staple form as the product of British enterprise.

He reviews the vicissitudes through which the Company had passed and sets out the principles on which he had worked since 1846 to put in train the sound administration that he now made over to his successor.

His letter gives full justice to the abilities of Henry Mornay and the date of his appointment as Secretary as the starting-point from which the Company’s fortunes began to mend.

It has to be remembered that this letter was written to John Jenkins, and before William Roberts had been appointed Managing Director in Calcutta. It is not until about the sixth paragraph that the real object of the letter is revealed—Henry Burkinyoung’s strong recommendation for the appointment of William Roberts to succeed him.
The only other possible candidate for this office was Henry Mornay, who had conducted the Company's affairs under Burkinyoung's guidance for the previous eight years; while William Roberts' official connection with the Company dated only from his appointment as Director in 1852.

Henry Burkinyoung had already sounded Henry Mornay and was able to state in his letter that the latter was prepared to make the sacrifice of his promotion in favour of William Roberts. There then occurs in this letter the following paragraph:

In taking advantage of the self-denial of the Secretary and pressing upon your attention my nomination and recommendation of Mr. Roberts, I am aware that I may lay myself open to the appearance and suspicion of partial motives, but at the risk of falling under an imputation which up to this time of my life I have avoided, I have simply to observe that any recommendation results solely from my conviction that the interests of the Company will be essentially promoted by the united action of the two gentlemen named above as comprising the highest available practical ability for the furtherance of our enterprise.

The significance of this reference to Henry Burkinyoung's possible partiality is explained by the fact that, although he and William Roberts had been business contemporaries, in their connection with Stewart & Company, William Roberts had married a Miss Hamerton, a sister of Mrs. Henry Burkinyoung.

Although Henry Burkinyoung considered it necessary rather to magnify his own contribution to what had been accomplished during his tenure of office in charge of the whole of the Company's administration, he did at least set out the position fairly and squarely before the Calcutta Chairman. It may be that John Jenkins was rather a protagonist of the London Board's view that the Calcutta Secretary, in the person of Henry Mornay, was all that was necessary for the administration of the Company's affairs in India and that this was the motive behind his opposition to the election of William Roberts as Managing Director at the Meeting of 1st March 1854. However that may be, in the ultimate result Henry Burkinyoung must have been satisfied that with William Roberts as Managing Director, Henry Mornay as Secretary in Calcutta and George Williamson as Superintendent in Assam he was carrying out his own precept of applying to the service of the Company the highest practical ability available, and so matters rested until some time after Henry Burkinyoung was elected to a seat on the London Board in 1855 in place of Sir William Pym, who had disqualified himself for his Directorship by the sale of his shares.

At the conclusion of this period there is the position that from being reluctant at first to embark on extensions of areas, the London Board
went to the other extreme, and by putting out more and more land in tea, they were proceeding too fast. George Williamson saw clearly the danger in this with his inadequate labour force, and persuaded the Board to call a halt to these operations, so as to give him time to infill the old tea as well as the newer clearings.

The Board’s urge to expand knew no bounds. George Williamson was sent in May 1855 to explore the possibilities of opening up on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, where it was anticipated more labour would be available. As the outcome of Williamson’s report, it was decided to open up ten to twenty puras near Tezpur, which became eventually what was called Singri Parbut.

In September 1855 George Williamson was sent on yet another mission, this time into Cachar, and on his report the Company’s Cachar property was started. The development and subsequent disposal of these north bank and Cachar properties are dealt with later in their respective chapters.

In fact, in 1854, at the invitation of the Civil Surgeon, Darjeeling, the Board were asked to consider opening tea estates in that district. The Board decided, however, that it was “... not advisable to enter into speculation at present.”

During this period there were many references in the Calcutta Board’s Minutes to the pledging of shares. It appears that by arrangement with the Agra Bank and North-West Bank, shareholders could obtain advances against their shares, provided that the pledging of such shares was sanctioned and recorded by the Calcutta Board. It is to be noted that such pledging of shares was done mostly by members of the Board, suggesting that the facility was not known generally amongst shareholders.

The terms of payment were fairly harsh. The Agra Bank advanced Rs.40 per share, at a charge of 12 per cent. per annum. The market value of the Assam Company’s shares is not quoted in the Minutes, but by the end of 1856, with the improvement in the market value of the Company’s stock, such advances were obtainable on the basis of Rs.140 to Rs.150 per share.

It can be said that this chapter concludes, after fourteen years, the most disastrous period of the Company’s history.

There were vicissitudes to follow, but they were nothing to the ruin and bankruptcy through which the Company had passed. It is true that there was mismanagement and the extravagance was deplorable, but apart from these facts a lot of their difficulties were due to ignorance of the right method of cultivation. But it is in the Assam Company’s ultimate success in overcoming this absence of technical knowledge that they are the pioneers of the Tea Industry.
CHAPTER X

1856-1860

This period was one of profitable trading, with the payment of dividends rising from 7 per cent. to 12 per cent., and with crops increasing from 600,000 lb. to over 800,000 lb. These years were notable, however, for four major incidents in the development of the Company. Its vast expansion of tea cultivation; the impact of the Indian Mutiny; the recruitment of labour and the upheaval in the administration in Assam, Calcutta and London.

The Company's expansion of its tea areas in its existing Northern, Eastern and Southern Divisions had been prodigious, in spite of the controlling factor of a shortage of labour. This did not stop the Company from opening out more tea in other districts in the province where it was thought that labour would be plentiful. In this anticipation it was disappointed however, for in the Company's Annual Reports there were invariably expressions of regret that on account of insufficient labour new clearances could not be made as quickly as desired.

Yet in the five years the acreage under cultivation increased by over 900 acres and the crop rose from 707,101 lb. to 872,431 lb.

In 1860 the Company had a total of about 4,725 acres under cultivation. This was divided 4,041 acres in the Southern Division and 684 in the Northern and Eastern Divisions, including a small area at Singri Parbut, but excluding any area in Cachar, the whole giving an average of about 2½ maunds per acre. The highest yield from any one area, and they were very small ones, was about 4 maunds per acre. The Company went even further afield, and in 1856 it enquired of the Government of the North-West Frontier Province if they were prepared to make over the whole of their factories in Gurhwal and Kumaon, and if so, on what conditions.

It was perhaps fortunate for the Company that the Government were not prepared to accede to its request in respect of their existing tea areas, though they were quite willing to assist the Company to take up land for planting more tea in that province.

The ramifications of the Company's operations were remarkable. It had 25 named gardens, including those newly opened areas at Singri Parbut and Cachar. Half of these areas were, however, mere patches of under 100 acres of tea, but they did require supervision. It had not the permanent labour to cultivate these gardens and it could only get the jungle cut down sufficiently to enable people to pluck by giving out small
patches of 4 to 5 puras to local contractors, who, however, invariably went off in the middle of the rains to do their own rice cultivation and left the tea to look after itself.

There was more concentration on the gardens in the Southern Division, where there was relatively more labour, but in spite of having vast areas of virgin land adjoining its existing clearances, the Company persistently made applications to Government for more and more land. Some of these applications were not for a few hundred acres but virtually for many square miles. It was obsessed with the idea that only by taking up all the land in the vicinity of its present holding would it succeed in warding off competition from others.

Because of its isolated geographical position, the Mutiny of 1857 did not affect Assam seriously. But the country was in a disturbed state nevertheless, and Government took the precaution of sending up a Naval Brigade from Calcutta. In this operation, the authorities gave full recognition to the assistance rendered by the Company's establishment under its Superintendent, Mr. J. McIntosh. The following is a citation from the Calcutta Directors' Report dated 2nd March 1858:

... On arrival of the Naval Brigade, our elephants conveyed them from the River to the station at Seebsaugur. Provisions were collected by our people for their support, and Dr. Skipton attended their sick with commendable zeal and care. It might not be out of place to adduce the present instance as an example of the great value to Government of the establishment of European undertakings in this country; for whilst our private servants were cheerfully obedient to our co-operative proceedings with Government in the maintenance of order, the independent Contractors for cultivating our lands, the indigenous inhabitants of the neighbouring villages held off from the performance of their contracts on the plea that they were not to be paid, believing that the Europeans "were to be cut up"; so far from aiding Government in suppressing revolt, they remained utterly passive, many sympathising with their conspiring Rajah and the dissatisfied Seepoys. Had an outbreak occurred, there can be little doubt that they would have sided with the Rebels.

There were apparently three companies of one hundred men each of the Naval Brigade sent up to Assam, and one each was stationed at Gauhati, Dibrugarh and Sibsagar.

It is not the intention to recapitulate an account of the Mutiny, for that is history, but to read the Company's Minutes at this time does give a more intimate view of the anxieties that the Company experienced. From this source one learns of the pressure that the Company brought to bear on the authorities in Calcutta to send troops for the protection of their properties and to despatch arms and ammunition for their officers
to protect themselves. It is true that, in retrospect, the catastrophe of the Mutiny was insignificant in its repercussions on Assam, but how real were the anxieties of the scattered European population of that province can be gleaned from the following summary of some of the Company's Minutes at that time.

In September 1857 it had been discovered that the Sepoys at Golaghat had conspired to rise against Government and to murder all Christians. They had tampered with the Rajah, even causing him to change his gold into rupees to give to the rebels to prosecute their evil designs. The Muttucks had threatened Dibrugarh, and that place had been put in a state of defence.

Williamson, Spears and Stewart had abandoned their factories and assembled at Gauhati. (This must have been George Williamson, Senior, as his cousin, George Williamson, Junior, the Assam Company's Superintendent, was then at home on leave.)

The Superintendent was advised of the mutiny of Sepoys in Chittagong, and was warned to be on his guard against their advance into Assam.

In Chapter XXX, giving an account of the Company's property in Cachar, there is reference to these mutineers advancing into Cachar and how the Company's Manager was fortunately in the jungle when some of them passed within a few yards of the factory and did not see him. The Secretary in Calcutta duly advised the Home Board of the execution in Assam of Maniram Dutt, the Dewan of the Saring Raja, for high treason.

The lack of labour was most serious. The Company's recruiting operations were confined at first to districts in Bengal, and those chiefly on the river route to Assam. It was not only the recruiting of labour but the transporting of it by country boat on probably a two months' journey that presented such opportunities for the labour to abscond en route.

In 1856 the Government did help by reducing the rates charged for deck passengers on their steamers, and they promised that a steamer and flat would be put on the run every three weeks. On the outbreak of the Mutiny they had to withdraw their steamers altogether for commercial purposes, and it was not until the end of 1858 that their steamers were again available once every six weeks.

The Mutiny did postpone the Company's endeavours to get more labour, but as soon as the danger was past, it renewed its efforts. The earlier attempts to get labour from Bengal had been frustrated by the coolies absconding en route, or as soon as they arrived at the gardens. To encourage their Kachari labour to work consistently, the rates of
wages were increased by 8 annas monthly, bringing their wages to 4 rupees a month.

Endeavours were made to form with other tea planters in Assam, Sylhet and Cachar, and interested parties in Calcutta, an agency to recruit labour for all, and by doing so at least to diminish the keen competition which was being strongly felt from the many gardens that had been opened up during the previous six years or so. They did get agreement amongst them not to increase wages and to make joint petitions to Government to resume their steamers, but by 1860 this first attempt at concerted action in recruiting labour petered out. Thereafter, each party relied on its own establishment to get the labour it required.

At that time competition was keen, for not only was there the demand for labour for the tea districts of India, but for Mauritius, and it is recorded in the Report of 1861: "... competition has been increased by the opening of the French Emigration Agency under the recent Convention..."

In spite of this competition, the Company was successful in 1859 and 1860 in recruiting more labour from outside the province. It was able to report that it had sent up 288 coolies to Assam and 192 to Cachar, followed later by further batches of over 400 to Assam.

In 1859 there was serious trouble starting with some labour recruited from the Durrung district demanding an increase in wages, or that they should be allowed to leave the Company's service although the time they had agreed to serve had not expired. Henry de Mornay was in Assam at the time. He, with McIntosh the Superintendent, handled the situation promptly, and with the assistance of Captain Holroyd, the Magistrate, the ringleaders were caught, tried on the spot and punished. At the enquiry held afterwards, it was proved that there was no justification for the outbreak, as it was shown that under the Company's system and with ordinary industry the labour could earn 8 to 12 rupees a month, whilst the cost of foodstuffs was half what it was in Calcutta.

This influx of new labour could have come none too soon, to judge by Mr. T. E. Carter's report of 20th February 1859, in which he said that at Hatti Putti, Mazengah, and Kachari Pookri, three of the Company's best gardens:

... Some of the green leaf was left unplucked in consequence of the jungle not having been entirely cut down in June, July and August, rendering it difficult for the labourers to get well amongst the plant so as to secure the whole of the green leaf as it came out.

He went on to say:

... But in this respect the Northern and Eastern Divisions are in a still more disastrous condition, there being no hoeing contractors at all available, and
the supply of labour being much shorter than that required for plucking the leaf, so that during the rains, the cultivation of the land almost entirely stopped.

Before leaving the subject of labour, it is of interest to refer to a pamphlet issued in 1859 by the Government of Bengal calling for a detailed report from their officers in Assam on the factors which were operating against the expansion of tea planting and asking them for suggestions as to the legislative action necessary to remedy them. The pamphlet comprises the replies received by Colonel F. Jenkins, then Chief Commissioner, from his District Officers, whose letters are based on information they gathered from planters and others in their respective districts. The planters put forward various suggestions for the alleviation of their difficulties, but on three counts, all connected with labour, they were fairly unanimous.

The first and most important factor which militated against the more rapid expansion of tea planting was the acute shortage of labour in the province. As one means of getting the local villagers to come in to work they suggested that Government should increase the rent of their lands, the contention being that the villagers would have then to work harder to get the wages with which to pay the higher rent, the planters visualising, of course, that the only place to get this extra money would be by working on their tea gardens. Government did not view this proposal in the same light. Whilst they would have welcomed the increase in revenue, they saw the possibility that it might end in there being less land under cultivation, for they had to think of the many small villages remote from any tea garden. Having regard to the vast size of the province, the total area then under tea was insignificant.

The second request for legislative action was for the prohibition of the sale of opium and for the suppression of the cultivation of the opium poppy. It was admitted on all sides that the use of this drug caused much of the lassitude and indifference to work on the part of the local Assamese inhabitants.

The final factor put forward as retarding expansion was the lack of communications, and in this the most important was the irregular Government River Steamer service, particularly for the transport of labour recruited from other provinces long distant from Assam. The request was that Government should either institute a regular service or subsidise private enterprise in forming a proper service. At that time Government had only about three steamers that could be spared for the Assam route, and with these they could make only one journey every six weeks.

A beginning in the solution of this problem came the next year when
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the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited started their steamers on the run to Assam, and they bought over subsequently the Government steamers.

In writing of the Company’s trade results, it is difficult to be sure what was the profit per lb. of tea produced. It was never less but often more than two years after the tea was produced that the sale proceeds were brought into the Accounts. It can be said that during this period the average price for any one year’s crop varied between 1s. 8d. to 2s. a lb. at the London auctions, the cost of production in Assam being computed at between 4 to 6 annas per lb. landed in Calcutta.

Freight to London varied widely, due no doubt to the emergency created by the Mutiny, and was as much as from £1, 15s. to £6 a ton of 50 c.ft. A customs duty of 3 per cent. ad valorem had been imposed. The customs’ method of arriving at the value was strongly disputed, and the imposition of such a duty was the subject of a deputation to Government. The duty was finally abolished from 18th November 1860.

The Company’s method of disposing of the year’s crop seems remarkable. It was nothing unusual to despatch consignments of 600 chests in one of its own iron boats from Nazira to Calcutta, where they were accumulated whilst the Company bargained for the best rate of freight for shipment to London. 1,000 to 1,500 chests in one sailing-ship was quite common. In London, the consignments were again accumulated. In 1857 there was actually sold in one sale 3,462 chests; this was the 1856-1856 crop, and it realised an average price of 2s. 5½d. per lb.

Referring to the high prices in their Annual Report, the Directors mentioned that they were due to the Mutiny in India and to the position of affairs in China, which they anticipated would cause a shortage in supplies of tea and a further advance in price. This reference to China was the second Anglo-Chinese war, when Canton was blockaded and no tea was shipped from that port in 1857.

In this period there was started the first endeavours to apply mechanics to tea making. George Williamson had been studying the subject since as long ago as 1847. In 1853 he wrote on the subject of firing tea by steam heating instead of the usual way, over charcoal fires. Henry de Moray, when he was in Assam in 1859, turned his attention to sorting tea mechanically. This question of the application of machinery to tea manufacture with the evolution of machines, and the Assam Company’s contributions to that field of development, has been made the subject of a separate chapter. On this subject it is of interest to record that in 1855 the Company had for a short time as one of its Assistants, Mr. James
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Davidson, a relative of Sir Samuel C. Davidson, the founder of “Sirocco” tea machinery.

The loss of buildings by fire was considerable. The Hoogrijan Factory was burned down in 1856 with a loss of 5,285 lb. of tea; in 1858 the Godown at Jaipur, and in the same year the factory at Cherido. These kutch buildings did not represent a material financial loss, but there was always the risk of the loss of made tea stored in them.

The first fireproof building was shipped from England in 1856. It comprised cast-iron columns, curved half-round corrugated-iron roof, with iron trusses, and was erected at Nazira as the main tea factory.

For other buildings, flat corrugated-iron sheets were sent out from home, and building proceeded with brick columns and local timber roof structures.

The foregoing is an account of the chief developments in the expansion of the Company during the five years 1856 to 1860, but it was in the Administration in Assam, Calcutta and London that there occurred the most far-reaching and even dramatic events.

George Williamson, Junior, was granted fifteen months’ home leave on full pay of Rs.500 a month from 30th June 1856 on account of ill-health. The principal Assistant, James McIntosh, acted during his absence. In October 1857 George Williamson applied for an extension of leave for the whole of 1858, “in consequence of his health not being sufficiently re-established,” but without salary from Christmas 1857. In answer to this request, the Calcutta Board granted him the leave for which he asked, but they gave him half pay from 1st January 1858.

In October of that year, whilst still on leave in England, George Williamson resigned his office of Superintendent, and McIntosh was appointed in his place on Rs.400 a month from 1st January 1859. In August of that year McIntosh asked to be allowed to retire, but was persuaded by the Calcutta Board to withdraw his resignation. The Board came to the conclusion that their gardens were scattered over too vast an area for one Superintendent, and they proposed to transfer H. C. Gibson from Cachar to be Deputy Superintendent under McIntosh. But in 1860 McIntosh resigned, and Gibson took his place as Superintendent, so the lightening of responsibility at the top in Assam never took effect.

Whilst home on sick leave from the Assam Company, George Williamson, Junior, in 1858 was negotiating with William Roberts, who was also home on leave from the Assam Company, with the difference however that he was without pay, for the sale to him of his interests in his tea properties in Assam (which were then being maintained by his
cousin, George Williamson, Senior, residing at Cinnamara), with which William Roberts formed later the Jorehaut Company.

How far towards completion these negotiations were is clearly indicated by the fact that the London Board’s intimation to Calcutta that George Williamson had resigned his office of Superintendent was dated 25th October 1858, and William Roberts’ letter to the Calcutta Board written also from London and dated incidentally the same day tendered his resignation of his appointment of Managing Director to the Assam Company.

The Jorehaut Company was incorporated on 29th June 1859, and George Williamson took up his appointment as Superintendent of that Company on 20th February 1860.

To turn back to the direction of affairs in Calcutta; when William Roberts, as Managing Director, went on home leave in 1855, Henry Burkinyoung, then a Director on the London Board, was conveniently on a visit to India and was appointed temporarily to the Calcutta Board as Managing Director to act for him.

On William Roberts return to India he visited the Company’s properties in Assam in the cold weather of 1856-1857. He continued from then with apparently all his interests in the prosecution of the purposes of the Assam Company.

In the meantime, the Chairmanship of the Calcutta Board had passed to Mr. Donald C. Mackey, with W. J. Judge, C. Huttman, H. A. Burkinyoung, W. Spink and J. H. Allen as Directors. Henry de Mornay was Secretary and T. E. Carter Deputy Secretary and Accountant.

There ensued then what was to become a heated controversy regarding proposals that William Roberts be appointed to the London Board. It started in a letter dated 7th September 1857 from D. C. Mackey to Sir William Baynes, Chairman of the London Board.

The ostensible object of this letter was to criticise the method of accounting in London, on the ground that the annual accounts as presented to the shareholders did not show the correct profit on the year’s working. This letter mentioned that William Roberts had been granted fifteen months’ leave, and it expressed the likelihood that he would shortly retire from India.

Mackey recommended, therefore, that William Roberts should be offered a seat on the London Board, where he could assist in promoting the interests of the shareholders, or, as it was put:

The business of the Company has so much increased and has become of so much importance, that it is now absolutely necessary to engage a practical man who will bind himself to devote the whole of his time and attention to the business of the Company in London.
Mackay had the temerity, further, to criticise the London Secretary, Walter Prideaux:

We do not wish to detract in any way those services rendered by our Secretary, Mr. Prideaux, during the long time that he has been connected with the Company, but without doing so we may safely assert that his time must necessarily be so much occupied with his other avocations (as a Solicitor), as to preclude him from bestowing that constant and minute attention to the Company's affairs which they now so much require.

Nothing could have more thoroughly antagonised the London Board against Calcutta's recommendations than these adverse criticisms of their Accounts and their valued Secretary, nor have so surely strangled at birth their advocacy of William Roberts to a seat on the Board, or his appointment to any other office of the Company in London.

When the London Chairman, Sir William Baynes, received this letter, he was without the presence in London of a full Board, but he took it on himself to reply at once to the Calcutta Chairman on 19th October 1857 from his private residence at Portland Place, saying that the contents of this letter could be discussed only at a full Board, but in regard to Mr. Prideaux:

... I may safely take it upon myself to say that the suggestion therein contained of substituting Mr. Roberts in the place of Mr. Prideaux, the founder of the Company, and who from the commencement has by his ability and unwearied attention, rendered such important service, would not be for a moment entertained. I may go further and remark that I firmly believe the prospects of the Company would be generally considered to be deteriorated by the change you propose to introduce into the management of its affairs in England.

At a full Board Meeting held in London on 8th December 1857, at which D. C. Mackey's letter to Sir William Baynes was dealt with in detail, the Calcutta Board were left in no doubt as to what the London Directory thought of their recommendation regarding William Roberts:

... As to the suggestion to appoint Mr. Roberts as Managing Director, the appointment of any person in that capacity is not intended by the General Directory. The system of Managing Directors is unpopular in this country, and with justice, for it has been found by experience to be a bad system. The General Directory having undertaken for so many years the responsibility of managing the affairs of the Company, do not seek to relinquish themselves from it. They feel themselves quite competent to discharge the duties which they have assumed, and with the assistance of such officers as they may find it necessary to employ, will continue to do so as long as they have the confidence of the proprietors, which they do not doubt from the votes they have so frequently received at public meetings, they have the satisfaction of possessing.
The question of William Roberts' election to the London Board was not allowed to drop, however. It was pressed from all sides. The election of a Director was always the subject for summoning a special Court of Directors. Henry Burkinyoung gave notice on 12th January 1858 that at the next Meeting he would move the appointment of William Roberts to a seat on the Board. This Meeting was held on 16th March 1858, but Henry Burkinyoung not being able to get anyone to second his motion, it fell to the ground.

William Roberts, who was by that time at home, pressed the matter himself in a letter to the Chairman in which he enclosed also one from the Calcutta Board, likewise addressed to the Chairman, recommending his election under Clause 14 of the Supplemental Deed of Settlement.

This clause provided that if when filling a vacancy on the London Board there was a duly qualified shareholder on the Calcutta Registry who was willing to serve, he should be appointed in preference to any other person. The Board dealt with this by instructing the Secretary to acknowledge the letters to William Roberts and to the Calcutta Board, and to tell both parties in future to address their official communications to the Secretary of the Company in the usual way. They added in their letter to William Roberts, however, that there were no vacant seats on the Board and that at the present time there was no intention of increasing the number of Directors.

William Roberts was not deterred by this rebuff, but returned to the charge in a letter dated 19th April 1858, addressed to the Secretary, in which he referred to his pecuniary interest as a large shareholder in the Assam Company and his right under Clause 14 to a seat on their Board and to the qualifications as the Company's late Managing Director in India. He further added the threat that, in spite of his reluctance to do so, he would be impelled to oppose the re-election of one of the retiring Directors at the next Annual General Meeting. The Directors due to come up for re-election in May 1858 were the Chairman, Sir William Baynes, and Captain Andrew Henderson, and presumably Roberts was referring to the Chairman. In any case, William Roberts got a reply from the Board in which his threat was described as offensive. Nothing came of this threat, however, for the two gentlemen concerned were re-elected unanimously, and this unanimity included Henry Burkinyoung, who was present at the Meeting, assuming of course that he voted.

The Board replied that in regard to his election to the Board they saw no reason to alter the decision to which they had already come and of which he had been informed.

In this letter to William Roberts they added:

They cannot but feel, however, that on reflection you will perceive
that unless you entered the Direction with the cordial and unanimous support of the Directors, your joining it would be productive of injurious effects, as it would evidence the continuance of that antagonism so unfortunately set up by the Calcutta Board, and to which you have been made, or become a party.

This antagonism had reference to the harsh criticism and implied mismanagement referred to above in the Calcutta Chairman’s letter to London.

The London Board had replied in detail refuting every charge made by Calcutta, which reply was ordered to be entered in the Minutes and concluded:

In recording this Minute the General Directory are actuated with but one object, viz: to prevent the continuance of differences between themselves and the Local Directory, as the absence of unanimity of action and harmonious communications between the two Boards could scarcely fail to place the affairs of the Company in an unsatisfactory state, and they feel assured that the local Board will be equally sensible of this with themselves, and will co-operate with them with the same cordial desire to prevent such an unfortunate state of affairs arising.

In June 1858 the Calcutta Board must have withdrawn wholly from their attitude of criticism of London. This is to be gathered from a Minute in the London Proceedings of 29th July 1858 in which it is stated that the Board were happy to receive the explanation of the local Board contained in their letter No. 519. Unfortunately a copy of this letter was not recorded in either the London or Calcutta Proceedings of that date. The Board were, however, so mollified that they even said that with regard to Calcutta’s recommendation regarding Mr. William Roberts, they would consider his appointment whenever the Directors proposed to increase the number of Directors or to fill up any vacancies, and the Secretary was instructed to address a courteous letter to this effect to the local Board.

It is significant that in passing this Resolution Henry Burkinyoung was a dissentient. He was obviously not going to be a party to withdrawal of criticisms of the Administration (which he may have instigated), the remedying of which were the very grounds on which he advocated the immediate appointment of William Roberts to the London Board.

This controversy went on until the end of 1858, the London Board refusing resolutely to be coerced into appointing William Roberts. The Board had heard of Burkinyoung’s part in the formation of another Company, and if they had had a sight of a particular private and confidential circular written over the signatures of Henry Burkinyoung and
William Roberts which was issued to possible interested parties, they had just cause to be incensed with one of their own body who had used his position and experience with the Assam Company’s Board as an assurance that the new Company would be properly administered. In these days, when individuals are on the Boards of several tea companies, it might be thought that the Board of the Assam Company were unduly upset by Burkinyoung’s action, but perhaps some excerpts from that circular might put a different complexion on their attitude, remembering how jealous the Assam Company was of its premier position as the pioneer Company, and the lengths to which it went to combat competition from others.

This Circular Letter, headed Jorehaut Tea Company, was issued from 34 Kensington Park Gardens, Notting Hill, London, W., the residence of William Roberts. It is undated, but it could possibly have been issued after the Jorehaut Company’s preliminary Meeting on 24th November 1858.

Its opening paragraph mentions the recent Mutiny, and under stronger Government the permanent peace and progress of the country that would follow. This was stated as the setting for a favourable opportunity to embark on tea cultivation. The letter then proceeds:

The Assam Company’s plantations in the Valley of the Burhampooter afford a practical illustration of these views, for in spite of mis-directed labours and large unnecessary outlay, errors often attendant upon an untried field, the enterprise has triumphed over every difficulty, and proved that tea, as a staple produce, may be raised in a British Colony, and boldly enter into competition with the country (China), to which until thus demonstrated, it was supposed the world must continue to be dependent on for its supplies.

Presuming thus, the undersigned, deeming the present juncture favourable for the organisation of a new Association for the cultivation of tea in Assam, have made arrangements under which they will be enabled to give effect to their views, and to launch such an enterprise under circumstances eminently favourable and auspicious.

They hold important interests in the Assam Company, and have held the chief practical direction of its affairs. Thus the new organisation will have the benefit of the accumulated experience of the Assam Company, and in its working will start at once upon established data in the practical economy of tea cultivation.

With such evidence before them, it was no wonder that the Board called on Henry Burkinyoung for an explanation of his part in the formation of this other Company, and they wrote to him on 14th February 1859, giving him a draft of a Minute they proposed to submit at the next Board Meeting.
The text of this letter is not quoted in the Minutes, but the following is an excerpt from Henry Burkinyoung's reply dated 16th February:

In reply thereto, I avail myself of this opportunity to observe that in the event of the Board considering it necessary to record a Resolution of the nature indicated, I conclude it will of course, recognise the necessity of limiting it strictly to the statement of the facts of the case, and will accordingly expunge from the Resolution the expression “rival Company,” because that expression is entirely opposed to the intention and wishes of the promoters of the new Company, and my only object in connecting myself with it being protective of and co-operative with the interests of the Assam Company.

The difference of views that has unfortunately existed between myself and the home Board in reference to the practical organisation and representation of the Company’s interests, has created a rivalry of interests in the Company itself, and but for which it is most likely that the new Company would not have come into existence, and it is this difference of view which I think calls more immediately for prompt adjustment, and it seems to me that the interests of the Company are more seriously involved in the consideration whether it might not have been, or might not be now, a more legitimate course for your Board to waive, or relax in some degree, its views upon the point in question.

The Board took no notice of Henry Burkinyoung’s explanation and implications, and at their Board Meeting on 22nd February 1859 they passed the following resolution, which was signed by all the Directors individually:

This Board, having taken into consideration the communication made to them by Mr. Burkinyoung, one of their colleagues, that he has been assisting in the organisation of a new Company in Assam for the cultivation of tea, and a prospectus having been circulated with Mr. Burkinyoung’s name as a Director confirming the same, the undersigned Directors of the Assam Company feel it due to themselves to record in this Minute the extreme surprise with which they have received the information, and to express their deep regret at the course which Mr. Burkinyoung has taken of lending his aid in the formation of a rival Company whilst a member of this Board, a course which cannot fail to be considered most unusual, and one which appears to us to be at variance with the common principle of confidence so essential to the successful carrying out of the important interests entrusted by the great body of Shareholders to the Board of Directors.

The Undersigned moreover, consider it right to record their opinion that there is nothing in the circumstances of the Assam Company which take it out of a rule well established, and the propriety of which is generally acquiesced in, namely, that the office of Director of one Company is not compatible with that of Director of another Company formed with a similar object.
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Henry Burkinyoung resented this action of the Board, and in a long letter dated 12th March 1859, addressed to Sir William Baynes, the Chairman, he sets out his views. This is an important letter, and its full context is given in Appendix 6. In the original, it is a fine example of that copperplate caligraphy of the times and of the unhurried, flowing phraseology. It was signed by Henry Burkinyoung, but his own writing was a scrawl, difficult to decipher.

It is in this letter that Henry Burkinyoung comes into the open regarding his reason for pressing the appointment of William Roberts to the London Board.

It is astonishing to believe at this date that the object was that the gardens of which William Roberts formed eventually the Jorehaut Company should form part of the Assam Company. Henry Burkinyoung in his previous communications to the London Board, had intimated that his motives in associating himself with the new Company were protective and co-operative with the interests of the Assam Company, for in the Assam Company, as he pointed out, he held a one-eighth part of the whole stock. It is only in this letter that he shows his hand:

Under this state of things and subsequent to the 2nd August last when I addressed you on the subject of the failing practical strength of the Local Administration and the importance therefore of strengthening the Home Board, the fact came to my knowledge that certain Tea Plantations in Assam were offered for sale in the market here, through the Agency of Mr. Roberts and upon conferring with that gentleman, and finding that these concerns would become a new formation under his management, I realised at once the danger to the interests of the Assam Company and consequently to my own, if that formation took effect under new and separate interests, and the necessity therefore of acting in some way that would remove or neutralize the impending danger. The impression or wish that first presented itself to our minds to offer these concerns to the Assam Company was at once abandoned, under the belief of its inutility upon several grounds and more especially what would have been a primary stipulation in my negotiations, that of the admission into or incorporation with the Board of certain new members including Mr. Roberts to represent the new interests, without which we considered the union would be beneficial to neither party, and under the determination evinced by the Board to admit of no change and the time we had for decision being brief, we adopted the alternative of uniting our interests in the new formation and to connect with it such other interests as we could rely upon to act in a cooperative policy with the Assam Company; this has been fully accomplished and the Assam Company greatly benefited thereby compared with what its position might have been with a Company formed altogether under new and separate interests; under no circumstances could the Assam Company's position be made better or more secure except by a union with the new Company, a
measure which even if desirable or necessary the Board itself presents the chief obstacle to.

Henry Burkinyoung could not disclose to the Board previously what was in his mind until he had obtained the first requisite—the appointment of William Roberts to the Board. It seems unbelievable now that the Directors did not see, after Henry Burkinyoung’s hints, the benefits that might accrue by William Roberts’ appointment.

The Board was suspicious of a rival Company, and they were obdurate in their determination not to be coerced into electing to their body anybody whom they suspected of having any other interests. If they could only have overcome their prejudices, it is remarkable to speculate what a Company would have emanated from a union of the Assam and Jorehaut Companies.

William Roberts was in a strong position, for he had already held his preliminary meeting of the Jorehaut Company on 24th November 1858 and had issued his Prospectus whilst this controversy was taking place. Whether at this stage, in March 1859, he would have been prepared to scrap the formation of his own Company if elected to the Board of the Assam Company, or whether he would have proceeded with the inception of the Jorehaut Company, and amalgamated afterwards, is a matter for conjecture, but to the Assam Company it was a matter of “Election to your Board or I will compete against you.” In the circumstances, he adopted the latter course and founded the Jorehaut Company on 29th June 1859.

Henry Burkinyoung, seeing that his efforts to get William Roberts on the Assam Company’s Board were likely to fail, and being in no doubt about the objection his colleagues on the Board had to his holding the office of Chairman of the Jorehaut Company in addition to his Directorship of the Assam Company, wrote to the Chairman saying that he had resigned his seat on the Board of the Jorehaut Company. This took effect from 25th April 1859. His colleagues on the Assam Company’s Board were satisfied no doubt with this removal of their objections, but it did not stop Henry Burkinyoung continuing his disagreements with the other members of the Board of the Assam Company on the subject of the administration of that Company’s affairs.

If reference is made to the History of the Jorehaut Company, it can have made little difference to Henry Burkinyoung’s interest, for if not a Director of the Jorehaut Company, he was invariably present at their Board Meetings, as a visitor, a shareholder or by invitation. Henry Burkinyoung, with his 1,100 shares in the Assam Company, was probably the largest individual shareholder, and he had a considerable stake in the Jorehaut Company.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

The Jorehaut Company’s Minutes state that Henry Burkinyoung resigned so as to make it a disinterested party whilst that Board were in negotiation with him and Captain T. E. Rogers for the purchase from them of their respective shares in the Numaligarh Tea Estate.

In 1859 the London Board comprised Sir William Baynes, Bt., Chairman, H. M. Kemshhead, Deputy Chairman, with Henry Burkinyoung, Francis Fox, Captain Andrew Henderson, William Prinsep, William Tite and James Warren, Directors. It is unbelievable that some of these did not know what was going on in the development of tea companies and estates in Assam in competition with the Assam Company. Directors and Officers of the Company had been planting tea estates on their own account for years. Henry Burkinyoung’s Numaligarh was started in 1852-1853. George Williamson, Junior, owned Koliabar, which he first planted in 1856; he, with George Williamson, Senior, and the latters’ brother, Captain J. H. Williamson, shared in the ownership of Cinnamara, which was opened out in 1854, and in Oating, in 1857—all of which gardens were formed subsequently into the Jorehaut Company. It is known that T. E. Carter, the Calcutta Accountant, held extensive lands and had opened out gardens near Gabroo Pubut and Deopani.

It was no doubt to uphold the integrity of the London Board that the Directors passed that Resolution of 22nd February 1859 censuring Henry Burkinyoung for his interest in the Jorehaut Company, the fact being, of course, that his name in connection with it had been made public with the issue of the Jorehaut Company’s prospectus.

It was the publicity that the Board shunned. They had nothing to say about Henry Burkinyoung’s private estate, if they knew about it, but in their reference to “rivals” one wonders if it would be fair to say that James Warren, who signed the Resolution as an individual Director, did not do so with his tongue in his cheek, for he had acquired Chabwa in about 1850 and had been working it on his own account since.

On the retirement of William Roberts from the Managing Directorship in Calcutta of the Assam Company in 1858, Henry de Mornay was elected in his place, T. E. Carter succeeding de Mornay as Secretary of the Company. McIntosh had succeeded George Williamson as Superintendent. There had been other changes also in the Administration in Calcutta, all of which Henry Burkinyoung viewed with a scepticism for the future welfare of the Company. The Calcutta Board then comprised Donald C. Mackey, Chairman, W. J. Judge, Deputy Chairman, H. de Mornay, Managing Director, and A. T. T. Peterson, J. H. Allen, W. Spink, C. Huttmann and C. B. Stewart, Directors.

It is necessary to turn back to Henry Burkinyoung’s letter to William Baynes, the London Chairman, dated 12th March 1859, to see, having regard to subsequent events, that whilst he persistently punched home his
advocacy of William Roberts, he sets out an almost uncanny prediction of what would be the consequence of the then existing Administration.

After referring to William Roberts' and George Williamson's retirements, he wrote:

. . . and followed as these retirements have been by the numerous changes that have occurred and are still occurring in the Company's Establishment in Assam, they occasion very serious apprehensions in my mind. No organization can encounter such dislocations without serious results, and this remark applies with manifold force to a remote unreclaimed country like Assam, and at a time when our organization requires extension and strength to encounter the side of new enterprise that is setting in. The Board's policy in excluding from the Company's administration the ablest and most experienced men connected with the Company, I can characterize by no other term than that of suicidal. No combination of interests can prudently disregard and part with its chief practical elements, however numerous an administrative body may be, it is always more or less dependant upon the support and guidance of one or more practical individuals, and the Assam Company is no exception to this rule.

After referring to his previous letter of 9th July 1853, when he retired from the Calcutta Board (also quoted, Appendix 4), in which he gave his advice as to the future management of the Company, and of which he attached a copy in case it "may not have remained in the recollection of the Board," he went on to say:

. . . Thus far the Company's affairs have worked and resulted as I anticipated, but under their present aspect I have no confidence in the future, like a well-constructed machine the concern will work for a time without apparent deterioration, but the changes that have already taken place in the Local Administration and establishment combined with the exclusive policy of the Board, cannot fail to operate most injuriously if not fatally upon it.

In drafting their Report to be presented to the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting in May 1859, the Board returned to the subject of abolishing the Calcutta Board. This proposal was the subject of another letter from Henry Burkinyoung in which he said that without the addition to the home Board of a due proportion of practical and experienced members from India he had the greatest apprehension that such a step, of absorbing the powers of the local Board, would be seriously injurious to the Company.

The London Board must have had respect for Henry Burkinyoung's views, for nothing was mentioned of that subject in the Report of 6th May 1859. What they did, however, focus attention on was the formation of the Jorehaut Company:

. . . It may have come to the knowledge of shareholders as it has to that of their Directors, that during the year another Company under the guidance
of Mr. Roberts, the late Managing Director of this Company in Calcutta, has been formed, or is in course of formation in England, for the cultivation of tea in Assam. The success of the Assam Company was likely to induce others to embark in rival undertakings. In this, the chief cause of regret is the limited supply of labour and consequently the undesirableness of competition. . . .

On 30th April 1860 T. E. Carter resigned his office as Secretary to the Company in Calcutta, to which he succeeded when Henry de Momay was made Managing Director and R. S. Stanton was elected Secretary in his place. In the same year C. Huttmann had, by the sale of his shares in the Company, disqualified himself for a seat on the Board and T. E. Carter was appointed a Director in his place. Then when Henry de Momay proceeded to England, on leave to superintend the construction of sorting machinery, T. E. Carter was made officiating Managing Director; whilst thus holding office with the Assam Company, T. E. Carter had accepted in December 1859 the appointment of Calcutta Agent of the Jorehaut Company.

In Assam, McIntosh retired from 1st October 1860, and H. C. Gibson, from Cachar, took his place as Superintendent. They brought in from outside H. W. Lemarchand as Principal Assistant at Nazira. John Smith was in charge of developments in Chachar.

It was these many changes in the Administration that Henry Burkinyoung viewed with such apprehension. That his loss of faith in the future of the Assam Company was genuine would seem to be confirmed by the frequent and considerable sales of his shares as reported in the Calcutta Board Minutes during the latter part of 1860.
CHAPTER XI

1861-1865

In these days, when there are restrictions on employees owning land or doing other business on their own account, it was remarkable the extent to which everybody in the Tea Industry, and those connected with the Assam Company particularly, from the highest Administrative Officer in Calcutta and Assam to the newest joined Assistant, were, speaking generally, all in this racket of using the circumstances of their employment to open out land under tea in competition with their own employers.

Enough has been written in the previous chapter to show the extent to which this had been carried on by the Directors and others in Calcutta and by the Superintendent in Assam. It is believed that William Roberts was, however, the one exception to this, for the gardens with which he formed the Jorehaut Company were all acquired by purchase from those who had planted them out. It is known that McIntosh, the principal Assistant and subsequently the Superintendent, as well as the Assistants Vangulin and Milner, owned estates either on their own account or in partnership with others. In connection with the opening out of Singri Parbut and the gardens in Cachar referred to in the previous chapter, it would appear at first sight to have been an unsound policy of the Calcutta Board to appoint wholly inexperienced Assistants to take charge of the important work of opening up new gardens in these places so distant from the Company’s Headquarters.

On further examination, however, it becomes plain that the older and experienced Assistants would not leave the Company’s gardens to which they were appointed, because this would have meant their having to abandon the management of their own properties. They were blatant enough to have taken up their lands near the boundary or actually adjoining the Company’s grants, and it would not be difficult to guess from whence they obtained their tea seed and labour.

The Calcutta Board did nothing to check these subversive operations of their employees. They were so involved themselves in the same thing that they were reluctant to take action. Besides, with the scarcity of experienced Assistants, they had to turn a blind eye to what was going on to keep what men they had got.

Except probably to Henry Burkinyoung, nothing of this was known to members of the London Board; at least, when challenged subsequently by shareholders at Meetings, the Chairman confessed that he had no
knowledge of such activities. To get an idea, however, of the extent to which the Assam Company's rivals emanated from its own employees, reference should be made to Appendix I.

It was a fact, unfortunately for the Company, that it was the only training-ground for men to acquire any knowledge of tea cultivation, and whilst its employees used their knowledge to the best advantage in the management of their own estates, they neglected their duties to the Company.

To put it plainly, their employment by the Assam Company as Assistants gave them the necessary subsistence on which to live in the province whilst they pursued the objects of their own enterprise.

It followed naturally that the more efficient of such employees made the most of their own properties, and as these developed into sizable gardens they were able to leave the Company's employment and devote the whole of their time to their own interests. In this way, the Company was drained of the best of its staff, which led inevitably to the deterioration in the Company's gardens.

There was nobody of impartial judgment to report to the Boards, either in Calcutta or London, this aspect of what was happening in Assam. It was not until H. G. Bainbridge was brought in from outside, as related in the next chapter, that he showed to what a grave state of neglect the Company's properties had been allowed to lapse, due to disinterestedness and inertia of the staff that was left.

In these five years the Assam Company's crops ranged from $946,771$ lb. in 1861, divided as to $933,850$ lb. from Assam and $12,921$ lb. from Cachar, to $1,146,652$ lb. in 1864. The latter excluded produce from Cachar. At the Annual General Meeting in Calcutta on 20th January 1862 the announcement that the Company's crop had for the first time exceeded $1,000,000$ lb. was received with acclamation. Prices realised for the whole crops were from $15\frac{7}{4}d.$ to $25\frac{2}{3}d.$ per lb. and in 1864 down to $25\frac{1}{8}d.$ per lb.

It is difficult, however, to regard these prices as the true market value of a year's crop, for it was customary to quote them as nett, excluding cost of lead linings, freight, marine and fire insurance, and sale charges. The cost landed in Calcutta must have been under As.6 a lb.

Even the quantity of crop made for any particular year varies as between the London and Calcutta Reports, and also that which was actually weighed out. They are not even consistent from one official Annual Report to another.

Trading in these five years was, however, very profitable. Although the Company earned 11 per cent. on its Capital, after paying for everything out of revenue, including the opening out of their new areas in
Cachar and on the north bank, a 10 per cent. dividend was paid in 1861, then 12 per cent., rising to 25 per cent. in two years, and dropping again to 20 per cent. This last was paid in 1866, and was on the working of 1864. The year of declaration of dividend was always two years behind that from which the profits had been derived. A big factor contributing to these profits, short-lived as it was, was the sale of tea seed. The London Board were reluctant at first to sell their surplus seed, because they considered it would put into the hands of their rivals the means to put out gardens in competition against them. The Calcutta Board pointed out, however, that if this Company did not sell seed, buyers would procure it elsewhere, and it was a pity to lose this source of income.

Eventually, in 1862, they agreed to its sale at Rs.150 a maund for Assam seed, Rs.100 per maund for Hybrid, and Rs.50 per maund for China.

These sales added over £15,000 to the year’s profit at the height of demand, but by 1864 sales had trailed off because planters in Assam, Cachar and Sylhet were by then able to supply themselves from their own gardens.

Labour continued to be rather the controlling factor, but in spite of competition from all sides, the Company was successful in recruiting from their own Agents in the provinces in other parts of India, where labour was available, and also by sending down their own people or Sirdars to their home country, but it was a heavy item of expenditure. In 1862 they sent up 331 souls to Assam and 329 to Cachar, and two years later they acquired as many as 1,336 for Assam in one recruiting season.

The transport of the enormous number of new labourers going into Assam, for all estates besides those of this Company, called for regulations from Government to control the traffic.

It is known from other reports that the conditions in which these labourers travelled were bad, if not disgraceful. In the London Report of 1862 there is the brief statement that a great improvement had taken place in the means of transport, and that several “sanitary” arrangements had been carried out in the hope of diminishing the mortality on the passage and on the gardens.

At the General Meeting in London on 5th May 1861 Mr. John Farley Leith made a destructive criticism of the management for not getting more labour. Referring to the Directors’ Report, he said it was idle to say that labour could not be readily obtained. He quoted his fifteen years’ experience in India, and pointed out the facility with which labour could be obtained to go to Ceylon amongst other places. This was duly reported to the Calcutta Board, with a request for a full statement of the
reasons that operated to make Assam an exceptional place as regards the supply of labour.” The Calcutta Board resented this statement of Mr. Leith, which they described as most undeserved. They pointed out in reply that the labourers for Ceylon were Tamils from Southern India, a source too distant for them to recruit from. The labour for Mauritius and the West Indian colonies were altogether unsuitable for the Company’s wants, and as for the 6,000 people then being sent to Bourbon under the French Convention, these were to cost Rs.200 a head and their wages were to be more than treble the rates paid in Assam. The Calcutta Board went on to say that they did not think that Mr. Leith’s warning to shareholders was worth noticing, and added: “. . . There are not many people whose lives have been passed in India who would care to address a public meeting in reply to so practised an orator as Mr. Leith, but Mr. Mornay, Mr. Burkinyoung, and several other gentlemen at the meeting could easily have answered him had they thought fit to do so.”

Henry Burkinyoung and Mornay perhaps knew J. F. Leith when he was in India (he was Chairman of the Eastern Bengal Railway), and they thought it easier to sit back and let the storm blow itself out.

1862-1864 were years during which the controversy between Henry Burkinyoung and the other members of the Board continued, but there came to light in this period the most unpalatable incident in the annals of the Company, when the Calcutta Chairman, D. C. Mackey, and the Honorary Managing Director, T. E. Carter, had to resign in consequence of certain charges which were preferred against them.

Arising out of the latter, there was also a renewal of the proposal for the dissolution of the Calcutta Board.

These incidents occurred at about the same time and so overlapped. To get a picture of what was happening it is necessary to divide them into their separate accounts.

Before detailing these events, something should be said about the atmosphere that prevailed at these earlier meetings, both of shareholders and at the Board Meetings themselves.

At Annual General Meetings, the Chairman was able to present favourable Reports on the Company’s working, for they were profitable years and satisfactory dividends were being paid. But shareholders were, however, critical, when they even questioned whether the Secretary had in fact held the proper number of shares prescribed by the Deed of Settlement; whilst the fact that Henry Burkinyoung was a member also of the Board of the Jorehaut Company had become public property, a point with which shareholders did not omit to bait the Directors. The Board were aware, however, of the steep rise in the cost of production, and it was necessary to sound a warning that expenditure was far in excess of
the estimates. These excesses they were able to explain, however, at the Meeting in May 1862 as being due to the incidence of income tax, competition for labour and higher wages, for the Company had been forced to increase the emoluments of its European staff to retain their services against competition from other companies.

On the Board itself, apart from the atmosphere created by the controversy with Henry Burkinyoung, a cause for some disharmony at the time was when J. F. Leith, who had been elected Director in 1862, castigated the Chairman, then H. M. Kemshead, on the subject of his duty as Chairman in recording the Minutes of the Meetings, one of his points being that the Minutes were not signed, and in this he was perfectly correct. The Minutes of the Meetings commenced invariably with the statement that the Minutes of the Proceedings of the previous Court were read and confirmed, and Kemshead evaded Leith's criticism by saying that the Minute Book was not put before him by the Secretary for signature. Anyway, Leith made the Chairman go back over a dozen or so Meetings comparing the Minutes with the Agenda Book, and then having them signed by him in the presence of the rest of the Board.

To take first the case of Henry Burkinyoung and his controversy with the Board as the event to be concluded earliest in point of date; the point at issue was Henry Burkinyoung's insistence that the Assam Company had nobody in Calcutta or London who had practical experience of tea gardens. He did not profess to have this experience himself. The one man who had it was William Roberts, and in spite of the latter having got the Jorehaut Company in full swing, Henry Burkinyoung advocated still that he was the man to have on the Assam Company's Board. His co-Directors were equally insistent that no man could serve two masters. As Managing Director of a rival company, William Roberts would, they said, if appointed to the Assam Company's Board, merely sacrifice one interest for the other.

In his endeavours to get William Roberts elected to the Board, Henry Burkinyoung wrote privately to the Calcutta Chairman, W. J. Judge, for his support. At that time he was not aware of Mackey and Carter's delinquencies. The following letter from Judge in reply exposes these incidents and gives his views regarding Burkinyoung's proposal to get William Roberts appointed to the Board.

CALCUTTA,
April 1862.

My dear Burkinyoung,

I was very glad to receive your letter of the 12th March. I had before the receipt of it, read your Minute therein referred to, but I regret to say that I do not agree with you in thinking that the interests of the Assam Company would be promoted by bringing Roberts on the London Board.
I wish it to be understood that in saying this, and in the other remarks that I shall have to offer, I have no intention of disparaging him, but I do think that we have already enough of the Jorehaut Company influence on the Boards, and with every respect to yourself and Roberts, I cannot bring my mind to the conclusions that any benefit would accrue to the Assam Company from the increase of that influence.

Upon resuming my position on the Calcutta Board at the end of last month, on my return from Darjeeling, I discovered some proceedings on the part of Mackey and Carter, so objectionable in their character that I thought it my duty on the earliest opportunity, to bring them to the notice of the Board, and also to write officially to the Calcutta Secretary on the subject; and as I find that a copy of my letter has not been (though I requested that it might be) sent to Mr. Prideaux the Secretary in London, I shall by this mail send a copy to him direct, and address him on other matters on which the London Board ought to be informed as early as possible.

As you do, in your place at the London Board, have an opportunity of seeing my letters to the London and Calcutta Secretaries, I will here only allude to those portions of them having reference to the Jorehaut Company, upon which I ground my objection to the influence of that Company being increased on the Boards of the Assam Company.

The Assam Company’s office premises, servants and boats have been used for the benefit of the Jorehaut Company, and the coolies of the Assam Company have been made over in large numbers to the Jorehaut Company, by the orders of the Calcutta Agent of the Jorehaut Company, Mr. Carter, while acting as Secretary or Honorary Managing Director to the Assam Company, and I think you will admit that under these circumstances I ought rather to desire a diminution of the power of the Jorehaut Company on the Board of the Assam Company, than an increase of it.

I cannot for a moment suppose that you were cognisant of the way in which the interests of the Assam Company have been sacrificed to those of the Jorehaut Company, and I am sure both you and Roberts will do all in your power and exert all your influence to redress the injury that has been done. There is much that cannot be redressed, but something can be done in the matter of the coolies. I ask that you will at once cause 500 of the Jorehaut coolies to be made over in a batch to the Assam Company’s plantations, and that you will procure the Assam Company the service of as many more, they paying their wages for the same period of time as the Jorehaut Company have had the services of the coolies improperly made over to them by their Agents, while acting as the servant or Honorary Managing Director of the Assam Company. I do not think that this is asking for too much, and I feel confident that your and Roberts’ sense of what is just and right will not suffer you to offer less.

If I understand the theory on which you, through the agency of one of the Williamsons, formed the plantations which afterwards ripened into the Jorehaut Company, it is this—that it is better to have as one’s neighbour in these new speculations persons who have a large stock in the Assam
Company, rather than strangers, and that persons having a large interest in both Companies would desire to show assistance, reciprocally given one to the other, instead of entering into a destructive contest; but there is a fallacy in this. The shareholders in the two Companies may part with their interests in the one or the other, in proof of which I may state that since my letter of the 10th April, Mr. Carter has sold in Calcutta 200 shares belonging to you and Roberts, and as to the reciprocal aid, this seems to be Hibernian in its character—all on one side; for as I said before, while the Jorehaut Company have had the use of the Assam Company’s office, godowns, establishment, boats, coolies, and for all I know, tea seed, I am not aware of any benefit the Assam Company have received from the Jorehaut Company. I cannot bring myself to believe that you or Roberts knew of these transactions, and yet it is apparent that stores and working tools cannot be carried from Calcutta to Assam without some cost, and I should have thought that the absence of certain charges in the Jorehaut Accounts would have attracted notice.

For instance, in June 1861, there was sent up to the Jorehaut plantations in one of the Assam Company’s boats, 998 hoes, and the expenses of conveying them must have been conspicuous from the absence of any charge.

Mr. Mackey wrote me the other day inviting me to a meeting of himself and Carter, which I tacitly declined, to confer on the way in which support should be given to your efforts to have Roberts placed on the London Board, and he informed me that he understood that you and Roberts had amalgamation in view. If Mackey on your authority understands so much of course the London Board have been given to understand no less, and I have no doubt if they approve of the project and carry it out, they will take care that the amalgamation is effected on a more equitable foundation than the past transactions between the two Companies have been.

As Messrs. Mackey and Carter intend, as I believe, to give their support to your desire to place Roberts on the London Board, and in furtherance of their intention they will probably make some official communication to Mr. Prideaux, I shall send to that gentleman a copy of this letter, in order that he and the London Board may see that I do not concur in the recommendation to place Mr. Roberts on the Board.

Yours sincerely,

W. J. JUDGE

P.S. Of course, you will understand that the above suggestions are made in my private capacity in reply to your letter, and neither as a Partner nor on behalf of the Assam Company.

Yours,

W. J. J.

That letter is a preview of developments in India whilst Henry Burkinyoung pursued his controversy with his colleagues. In more than one letter Burkinyoung had explained already to his co-Directors his criticisms
and had expounded his proposals for the future. The London Board were fully aware therefore of his views, and it could have been solely with the intention of putting him off that they passed a Resolution on 15th January 1862 requesting him to put into writing any matter he had to propose regarding the management of the business of the Company which communication, when received, would be considered at a Special Meeting to be called.

Burkinyoung responded to this challenge by the production of a sixteen-page document in which he reiterated all that had happened since the inception of the Company, including his own contribution to its retrieval from disaster; its expansion under William Roberts as his successor in the office of Managing Director in Calcutta, down to the present position which Henry Burkinyoung viewed with such apprehension, and he reminded the Board of their reckless rejection of his proposals.

There was perhaps nothing new in all that Burkinyoung wrote, and it would seem that he merely took the opportunity to try to get his colleagues to share the alarm he felt in the present administration. This was just about the time that W. J. Judge was making his investigation into the irregularities perpetrated by Mackey and T. E. Carter, but news of this had not reached London then.

At a Special Meeting on 11th March 1862 Henry Burkinyoung's letter was considered and a Resolution was passed, Henry Burkinyoung and Captain A. Henderson dissenting, which meant it was passed by a majority of five to two:

... This Board having been specially summoned to take into consideration Mr. Burkinyoung's letter of the 29th January 1862, finding upon a careful consideration of it, that the only definite proposal made by Mr. Burkinyoung as a remedy for defects which he appears to think exist in the management of the Assam Company, is that this Board should connect Mr. Roberts in some way with the administration of its affairs; and considering that Mr. Roberts is Managing Director in London of another Company, formed for the cultivation of Tea in Assam, of which our late Superintendent, Mr. George Williamson, is the chief officer in Assam, and which Company is in direct rivalry with the Assam Company, resolves that it is the opinion of this Board that the proposal to connect Mr. Roberts with the Administration of the affairs of this Company, either as a Director or in other capacity, cannot be entertained. And this Board takes the opportunity of denying the allegation contained in Mr. Burkinyoung's letter that they have pursued any exclusive policy with regard to the direction, and that referring to all the circumstances in its working, quotes at once the fact that the appointments of Mr. Prinsep and Mr. Burkinyoung as Directors, are evidences to the contrary.

This brought forth a letter, dated 24th March 1862, of violent protest
from Henry Burkinyoung, the gist of which was that the statements set forth in his letter of 29th January had been ignored:

... These statements involved considerations and questions of the greatest importance to the interests of the Company; and the Board as the guardians and trustees of these interests was bound to deliberate upon them in a judicial spirit, unbiased by all personal feeling and prejudice whatsoever.

In this spirit I think the Board has not considered the subject, and hence the opinions expressed in its Resolution of the 11th instant, are not conducive to the benefit of those interests, but rather to maintain the opposition of the Board to my policy and efforts to organise a strong and effective administration to direct the Company's affairs, and to give effect to the practical development of its great resources and interests.

Henry Burkinyoung's letter of 29th January having been sent to Calcutta for the opinion of that Board meant that criticisms of it would be protracted. In the meantime, notes upon it were received from several quarters. Henry Burkinyoung's emphasis on his paramount interest in the Assam Company was somewhat discounted, as viewed by the Board of that Company, by the fact that in 1861 he had been re-elected to the Board of the Jorehaut Company without telling his co-Directors that he had done so.

With the foregoing account of the two sides of the controversy there followed the vital and acrimonious Annual General Meeting of 1862. A verbatim Report of this Meeting has been discovered amongst the "Walter Prideaux Papers" at the Guildhall Library, but what gives an even better insight into what happened at this Meeting, and which is not mentioned even in the verbatim Report, is found in drafts of paragraphs which were included subsequently in letters from the London Secretary to the Board in Calcutta.

Besides Henry Burkinyoung and William Roberts, there were two other Directors of the Jorehaut Company present at this Meeting, Parke Pittar and J. J. Stone, with the set purpose apparently of being obstructive for the former proposed and the latter seconded an amendment that the Report be not approved. William Roberts was adversely critical, and deprecated the Company having opened up in Cachar. The amendment was lost, however, by thirty-five votes to five.

William Roberts asked pointedly whether there were any other Directors on the Board who were interested in other tea companies. Captain A. Henderson confessed that he was a member of the Himalaya Tea Company of Kumaon, but as that Company was 15,000 miles away (that is the figure given in the Report, but 1,500 would be nearer the mark), his Company did not compete with Assam. James Warren was at the Meeting, but his co-Directors were perhaps unaware of his other tea interests.
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Some other speaker stated that there were members of the Calcutta Board who were engaged in the management of companies in Assam and Cachar. Even alleged that Assistants who had recently left the Company’s service had been engaged by or on behalf of members of the Calcutta Board for their own companies.

The Chairman said that the London Board had no knowledge of such things.

The denial of these allegations can only indicate how hopelessly out of touch the Board were with what was actually happening, or it was a subterfuge to evade further criticism.

The real heat of the controversy at this Meeting concentrated, however, on the fact that Henry Burkinyoung was on the Board of both the Assam Company and the Jorehaut Company.

One shareholder, a Mr. Bigge, voiced his protest in the statement: ‘. . . But it is a monstrous thing for a gentleman availing himself of our experience on this Board to form other companies of a like nature.”

Sir William Tite, a Director, put forward a Resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Bigge, that Henry Burkinyoung should resign. Burkinyoung defended himself, but refused to resign at first until he had submitted to shareholders his written statement. This refusal brought forth angry comments from different parts of the room and requests for him to resign at once.

Every past action of Henry Burkinyoung even remotely connected with the Company was used as evidence against him to force his resignation. The fact that he sold his Numaligarh Estate to the Jorehaut Company, that George Williamson, Junior, had resigned from the Assam Company to take up the management of the Jorehaut Company, and the sale of George Williamson’s estates to that Company. Finally, Henry Burkinyoung said: “In order to relieve the Board and Shareholders from what is considered to be a question of embarrassment, I will resign my seat.”

With his resignation from the Board, Henry Burkinyoung’s name disappears as an official of the Assam Company, but this controversy, which had raged already for over four years, did not come to an end immediately. In the meantime, he devoted his abilities to the Jorehaut Company, on which Board he served for another twenty-eight years.

The first after-effects of his resignation arose from Henry Burkinyoung’s promised written statement to shareholders, which was a printed pamphlet of fourteen pages headed, “A Letter on the Affairs of the Assam Company addressed to Shareholders by Henry Burkinyoung.”

After reiterating most of what he had said at the Board Meetings, he concluded with what amounts to a prediction:

... But whilst on this subject, I would wish to draw your attention to what has been passing since that Meeting. [The Annual General Meeting of 1862]
During the past year there have been important changes in the Calcutta Board and in the Establishment in Assam, which have further depleted the vital strength of the Company, and it is now in a weaker and more helpless condition for the want of experienced and practical guidance and assistance than it has been since it escaped dissolution in 1847.

During the past five years the Home Board has remained unchanged a passive witness of the constant disintegration of what was a strong, well-organised staff. The evil has now reached a climax, I fear, beyond retrieval. Had it been taken in hand whilst a tangible portion of the old staff cohered together, I should not have despaired, but in the present position of affairs I am unable to see any way out of the difficulty unless it be in a dissolution and reorganisation of the Company, but it would be of little purpose to resort to this radical expedient unless there can be a reasonable certainty of the administration devolving upon a body of men combining the needful standard of ability and practical experience in the affairs and business of the Company.

It is to be assumed that the Board counter-attacked with a similar pamphlet in defence of their administration. There is not a copy of this complete document, but there are drafts of letters and paragraphs by the Chairman, Sir William Baynes, and the Secretary, which if put together will show the tenor of some of their defence. The opening paragraph of one of Sir William Baynes' drafts, reads:

... This letter may be classed under two heads, in explanation and defence of his conduct in becoming the Director of a new Tea Company in Assam whilst holding the same situation in the direction of the Assam Company; the other the charge of mismanagement and imbecility against the London Board of Directors, which if not amended, promised to end in the dissolution of the Company.

The Chairman's draft letter goes on to deal with the London Board's proposals to do away with the Calcutta Board, with which Henry Burkinyoung did not agree, and it is an indication of the bitter enmity that existed between the Board and Henry Burkinyoung over the latter's advocacy of the appointment of William Roberts:

The great fault in Mr. Burkinyoung's opinion that the London Board has committed has been in not electing his friend Mr. Roberts to a seat at the Board, to have been followed by others of the Local Board, in other words to have transferred the Calcutta Board gradually to the London one, with Mr. Roberts, perhaps, as its Acting Manager, as appears to have been under the contemplation of those who propose him to the London Board.

But previous to this fact being brought about, the election of Mr. Roberts was to have been, apparently in Mr. Burkinyoung's opinion, the panacea for every evil.
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The Board, for reasons not necessary now to state, did not think fit to elect Mr. Roberts; but surely the experience that Mr. Burkinyoung possesses in the Company’s affairs here and in India might have been shown (in the imminent peril he now informs us the Company has been placed), in originating and proposing some measure having a tendency to avert the evil, but not during the whole time that he sat as a member of the London Board could I discover in its records any trace of his having proposed anything of such importance. Mr. Burkinyoung may urge that it was useless for him to attempt to influence the Directors, that they had always been hostile to his views, and so forth. But it was up to him to propose, and had his measure been rejected, to have recorded his Minute and put the subject at the first opportunity to the votes of Shareholders. Mr. Burkinyoung omitted to do so, but now at the 11th hour accuses the Directors, his late colleagues, of having brought the concern to ruin.

After referring again to the rival company, and to some aspects of the Company’s financial position at that date, the draft letter concludes:

I believe I can state with truth, that the Company’s affairs never wore a more promising appearance. The Augean stables have been cleansed. A Dividend of 12% on the Paid-up Capital free of Income Tax has been awarded; and this it will be remembered in the face of great mismanagement, to say the least of it in India; in the face of increased cost of labour, and in the face of a double Income Tax levied on our profits here and in India.

On this subject there is another document, undated and unsigned, headed “Remarks on Mr. Burkinyoung’s Letter to Shareholders of the Assam Company.” By its tenor and the intimate knowledge it discloses of the Company’s affairs, one would attribute it to the Secretary, Walter Prideaux.

It is a bitter indictment of Henry Burkinyoung’s conduct since he joined the Company in 1847, and refutes Burkinyoung’s contention that he was, with others, in any way responsible for the retrieval of the Company’s affairs from that date. It contains this passage:

The charge of a want of “practical strength” in the Direction, if it means anything, means that to be an efficient Director of the Assam Company it is necessary to have been practically engaged in the cultivation and manufacture of Tea or in the superintendence on the spot of these operations.

The absurdity of such an opinion is palpable. With as much reason might it be contended that to be an efficient Director of a Railway Company, a man must have been an engine driver or a Railway Contractor.

Under rules promulgated by Government, application for land in Assam would be considered only from individuals, Directors of a Company, and their personal applications were limited to 3,000 acres each, supported by their Powers of Attorney to the person making the appli-
cation. The Powers of Attorney from the Board were sent to Henry de Mornay to take the necessary action.

Henry Burkinyoung had a propensity for writing private letters to individuals he knew in India connected with the Company, and he wrote to Henry de Mornay that in the case of his Power of Attorney he was to make application for 1,500 acres only for the Assam Company, and the other half for the Jorehaut Company.

How this letter, which was dated 3rd May 1862, got into the hands of the London Secretary is not known, for no mention of it is to be found in any official proceedings, but it was used by the writer of these “Remarks”:

Such was the treachery with which Mr. Burkinyoung was acting towards us at a time when he professed that his motives for joining the direction of the Jorehaut Company whilst he was a Director of the Assam Company, had only the welfare of the Assam Company for their object.

Between the time of Henry Burkinyoung writing his pamphlet which these “Remarks” criticised and the probable date of the “Remarks,” there had occurred the dismissal of Mackey and T. E. Carter, which gave the writer the opportunity to conclude with:

It is useless for Mr. Burkinyoung to pretend that he was unaware of Mr. Carter’s proceedings. Mr. Carter was his intimate ally and connection by marriage. Mr. Burkinyoung sold his Tea Plantation to the Jorehaut Company, of which he was the largest proprietor, holding nearly one-fifth of its Capital. He acquiesced in, if not planned, the appointment of Mr. Carter as its Manager. He has profited by Mr. Carter’s conduct, to the detriment of the Assam Company, and the Shareholders will not be so credulous as to think, in the face of all these circumstances, that Mr. Burkinyoung was so disinterested in persisting to hold the Directorship in both Companies as he would have them to believe.

The Board were not unaware that conditions on the gardens had deteriorated, but they refused most obstinately to admit it. Henry de Mornay, on his last visit to Assam in 1861, found matters in such a bad way that he had asked that William Roberts should be called in to put them right. Henry Burkinyoung had done all he could to warn them, but such was their blind prejudice against him that they ignored his forebodings.

They took no action to confirm or otherwise the possibility that Mornay and Burkinyoung might be right. They concentrated their efforts on endeavouring to persuade shareholders that there was no truth in Burkinyoung’s pamphlet to them. In this the Board had the shareholders’ backing to the utmost, for the Company was making profits and paying good dividends.
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It would seem as if the Board were culpable of deliberate deception if one takes the previously quoted draft of the Chairman's letter to shareholders, in which he said that, "I believe that I can state with truth that the Company's affairs never wore a more promising appearance. The Augean stables have been cleansed, etc. . . ."

The Chairman did not realise that the Company was living on its own fat, on the production of its gardens of probably two years ago, and even if he did know, then he shut his eyes to the condition of the properties as they actually were at the time he spoke.

Whatever may have been the ulterior motives on what the Chairman, and through him the Board, wrote to shareholders, there was no excuse for the scurrilous things he wrote to the Calcutta Board, in one of which he referred to "Henry Burkinyoung's obstinacy in not giving way to his colleagues . . . his blind persistency in endeavouring to get Mr. Roberts upon the Direction"; and at the Annual General Meeting of the 12th June 1863, when the Chairman descended to making a long, derogatory criticism of Henry Burkinyoung's every action and went out of his way to humiliate him by likening him, because he had sold some of his shares, to a rat which was deserting what he said Henry Burkinyoung thought was a sinking ship. The Chairman was able to point in derision to the fact that in disposing of his shares Burkinyoung had sold too soon, for it was true that the Company had at that time reverted to paying a dividend of 12 per cent. and the price of the shares was rising much above their par value.

Henry Burkinyoung, though no longer on the Board, was present at this Meeting, and one wonders what he thought of this part of the proceedings, holding the firm convictions that he did about the Company's administration.

As will be told in the chapter dealing with the subsequent five years, retribution was to come when Henry Burkinyoung's criticisms and his prediction were proved so right.

The foregoing private letter from Judge to Burkinyoung gives a first insight into the accusations he made against Mackey and Carter, but his official indictment is contained in a letter dated 10th April 1862 addressed to R. S. Staunton, the Secretary of the Calcutta Board. In the copy preserved in the Company's archives, it extends to sixteen pages of double foolscap.

Before recounting the details of this incident, the first indication of it to shareholders was at the Annual General Meeting in Calcutta on 15th August 1862, when W. J. Judge, who had been elected to the Chair, had to announce that D. C. Mackey, the late Chairman, and T. E. Carter, the late Honorary Managing Director, had been compelled to resign in
consequence of certain charges preferred against them; and further that Henry de Mornay’s connection with the Company had ceased, the Board having found grounds for doubting the propriety of his proceedings on a visit he had made to Assam.

In the Directors’ Report for the Annual General Meeting in London on 12th June 1863, the gross irregularities which were the cause of these resignations were stated to be:

1. Appropriation of coolies recruited by the Assam Company.
2. Dealing in tea seed improperly obtained.
3. Suppression of proper entries and insertion of false and fictitious entries in the records relative to tea seed.

Carter was charged further with the improper employment of the Company’s boats for conveying stores for the Jorehaut Company, the East India Company, George Williamson’s, D. C. Mackey’s and his own gardens.

At about the same time the Superintendent, H. C. Gibson, came under suspicion of complicity with the dismissed Directors. He was ordered to hand over to the Secretary, for the Board’s perusal, all Carter’s letters to him, together with copies of his replies. On examination of these, the Board’s verdict was “... That the whole tenor and purport of the correspondence was incompatible with the relative position of each.”

Shortly after this, Gibson resigned.

These were briefly the “painful circumstances” reported to shareholders in the Company’s printed Annual Accounts.

To turn to the evidence on which Mackey and Carter came to be convicted of their irregularities, Judge in his capacity as Director was not satisfied with some of the transactions in tea seed which he saw in the accounts. This led to his making closer investigation in the Secretary’s office. The Secretary, R. S. Staunton, was put through a close examination, and as a practising Solicitor, Judge was able to do this thoroughly. In the course of this, D. C. Mackey’s and T. E. Carter’s irregularities came to light.

The poor Secretary was aware of what had been going on, but under the direction and instruction of the Company’s Senior Officers on the Board he had no alternative but to do as he was told.

Some of the scandal of what was going on got into the Press, for in the Calcutta Proceedings there is mention of an article that appeared in the Englishman reflecting seriously on the conduct of the Secretary, alleging that he was implicated in the charges against Mackey and Carter.

The Calcutta Board repudiated these allegations by stating that Mr. Staunton was not to blame, and that having regard to the peculiar
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position in which he was placed in relation to his seniors, he had behaved throughout with judgment and discretion.

Other matters that came out of Judge's enquiries were that Henry de Mornay and T. E. Carter had used the Company's secretarial office in connection with the proposed inception of the East India Company.

The most important accusation was in regard to the recruitment and distribution of labour. Judge's suspicions were aroused when he enquired at the Company's offices the whereabouts of Mr. G. A. Lewis, whom he regarded as a useful Assistant. Lewis had been engaged in London for service at the Company's Nazira office. Carter had taken advantage of this lad's ignorance of the precise purpose for which he had been engaged in London by using the fact that he was proceeding to Assam to put him in charge of batches of coolies, but with instructions to distribute them, or disembark them at stations en route other than those served by the gardens of the Assam Company. These batches of coolies had been recruited by the Assam Company's paid Agents in the recruiting districts. As mentioned already, the Company's recruiting operations had resulted at that time in the despatch of 331 souls only to Assam, whilst 329 had been sent to Cachar. The Company's proportion of acreage under tea in Assam was over five times greater than it was in Cachar, and therefore the need for more labour was far greater in the former district. Mackey's gardens were in Cachar, called Bowcarra and Mirwa. The Borakai Tea Company Limited was registered in London in 1864, whilst Mirwa is believed to be an out-garden of the Kuttal Tea Company Limited. It was Judge's estimate that during the previous two years something like five hundred coolies had been so diverted.

It was in the course of these investigations that Judge put a very different complexion on the previously mentioned incident of Mr. John Farley Leith's attack on the London Board regarding the Company's inability to get more labour. He took up the Calcutta Board's Minute in reply to Leith's allegations in which they stated: "... We have for many months been despatching as many men as we can procure accommodation for, and we shall continue to do so until our wants are fairly supplied."

This Judge condemned as a misstatement of fact:

I request members' attention to this part of the Minute for I shall show that neither at the time of that Minute had as many men been despatched to the Company's plantations as accommodation could be procured for, nor has this been done since that Minute was written; but that on the contrary, those who took upon themselves the principal direction of the Company's affairs here had before the date of the Minute and have since, diverted valuable labour collected by the servants of the Company, into other channels for the benefit of themselves and other tea planters in Assam, and
Cachar; and this with the knowledge or concurrence of the other members of the Board and this without any entry or memorandum in the Company’s books...

The next of Judge’s accusations was in regard to tea seed, in which he pointed out that Mackey had ordered 25 maunds of seed from the Company at a time when the Company had decided not to sell any seed at all. Mackey’s order, in consideration of his office, was made a special case, and he was allowed to have some seed against his original application for 25 maunds. In Judge’s investigation it was shown that he had by faking his original order for 25 to 125, and on instructions allegedly from the Board, which in his office as Honorary Managing Director there was no one to dispute, and without reference to his co-Directors, he had in various ways by correspondence direct with the Superintendent increased it to 230 maunds. At that time he had not paid for the seed, even though its price was only 50 rupees a maund. Mackey then had the nerve to suggest that out of the seed supplied he should receive compensation for 12s maunds which had been received rotten and useless.

In the return of sales of tea seed submitted to the home Board, this 230 maunds was not shown as having been delivered to Mr. D. C. Mackey but to the Bowcarra and Mirwa Tea Estates, which were Mackey’s gardens in Cachar, of which Carter had a one-third share.

Judge’s investigations revealed further that the Superintendent’s returns were for only about 500 maunds of seed all told, whereas the crop from the Company’s properties would give not less than 4,000 maunds. So whilst the Assam Company refused to sell its seed, everybody seems to have helped themselves to it. As this pilfering was done with the connivance of the Company’s officers, there was no record of the transactions. It was only when Judge had the opportunity of questioning members of the staff in Calcutta, and got written statements from them, that it came to light that James McIntosh, a previous Superintendent, had been allowed by H. C. Gibson, the then Superintendent, to gather seed for his garden “Moran,” which is described as situated some sixteen miles from Nazira, in which Carter had an interest. In the Minute Book T. E. Carter denied having this interest. It was alleged also that George Williamson, Junior, was allowed, in November and December 1861, to take two lots of about 160 maunds of seed, of which he sent one lot to Cachar and the other to his garden “down Jorhat way.”

Mackey was accused also of having suppressed from the Board the fact that he had virtually stopped all new clearances on the Company’s properties in Cachar, in spite of the fact that John Smith, who was in charge then, had told the Board that he could put out clearances to any extent for which he was supplied with the necessary seed and labour.
He did not apparently stop the Company's quota of these essential commodities from going to Cachar, but diverted them to his own garden. Those were the two main accusations in Judge's indictment. In others he refers to the dismissal of James Gibbon, the Company's engineer, whilst Judge was absent from Calcutta, and said that he could not satisfy himself that this was in the best interests of the Company. He had learnt that Gibbon had been taken on subsequently by the East India Tea Company, of which Mackey was a Director and George Williamson, Junior, the General Manager, and, moreover, that the former was in treaty for the transfer to the East India Company of Gibbons' invention of a tea-rolling machine.

The facts were, however, that Gibbon had been dismissed from the Assam Company because of his intemperance, during bouts of which he became most violent and threatened to break up the sawmill and other machinery in his charge.

It is true that there was at that time cut-throat competition for planters, and in saying that C. H. Holmes, an Assistant on the Company's Cachar property, had left because of an offer of higher pay elsewhere, Judge made capital of the fact that this Assistant had joined Mackey's garden in Cachar.

In the Company's records there are lithographed copies of letters dated 26th April 1862 from Mackey and Carter in reply to Judge's indictment of them. They refute all the charges against them, but by subtle evasion answer none of them specifically. In Carter's letter, he concludes:

Mr. Judge has been a personal friend both of mine and Mr. Mackey for many years and has sat on the Direction with us for some time. Yet after an absence of considerable duration, without the slightest notice or previously seeking explanation, he makes a most violent attack on us, devoid of the slightest foundation other than such as is afforded by the suspicions which his own mind engenders, and which as I have shown, are wholly unwarrantable.

In the concluding paragraph of a letter dated 9th May 1862, from Judge, he winds up with noting the above reference:

It has caused me more sorrow than I can well express to have forced upon me by my duties in this Company that most painful task which I have endeavoured nevertheless faithfully to perform. It is no slight thing to have to assume a hostile position in the performance of a duty against personal friends of many years' standing, but I could not in such case admit of any compromise between my duty as a Director and my private friendship.

D. C. Mackey and T. E. Carter had to admit their guilt by resignation. It was proposed to take legal proceedings against Mackey and Carter.
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as well as against any other parties concerned. Eminent Counsel were consulted in London, and a Power of Attorney duly executed by the Board was sent out to Judge with full authority to act. No action, however, was taken.

To dispose next of Henry de Mornay's implication in this affair, it was when he was at home in 1861 and towards the end of his leave he intimated that: "... In consequence of circumstances having unexpectedly occurred to induce him to remain in England..." he asked the London Board if in the event of his resigning his appointment in India they would transfer his services to the London office. He was told that if they could utilise his services they would be able to offer him only a very moderate salary, for they did not consider his appointment to the Board was necessary. After reference to Calcutta, it was decided that in any case Mornay should return to India even if only for a short period of service.

He returned to India in November 1861, and went immediately to Assam to inspect the Company's properties and to erect the machinery which he had had made in England.

It was on this visit that Mornay found that the condition of the gardens had, even at that date under H. C. Gibson, deteriorated badly. This he duly reported to the Calcutta Board. He must have found matters beyond even his capacity to remedy, and it is significant that he appealed to the Board to endeavour to get the services of William Roberts to put matters right.

Mornay's implication with Mackey and Carter was due to his having taken up land in his own name. His explanation, that he had made applications for this land on behalf of his brother Stephen Mornay, but pending receipt of the requisite Power of Attorney from him he had put the land in his own name, was considered unsatisfactory.

The Board requested that he should give them letters to the Collectors in the Districts where he had applied for these lands so that they could get them transferred to the Company.

What is inexplicable, however, is Mornay's precipitate departure from Calcutta in July 1862 without applying for leave or complying with the Calcutta Board's request.

It is true that on arrival in London he made his explanations to that Board. These were not acceptable, however, and he tendered his resignation. Having regard to what was going on throughout Assam at that time, Mornay's offence against the Company in land matters was not a particularly heinous one, but it was these latter circumstances and possibly the fact also that T. E. Carter travelled home in the same ship that added colour to his implication in these affairs.
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It does seem a pity that Henry de Mornay's connection with the Company should have come to an end in such an atmosphere, for he had done sterling work in resuscitating the Company from its darkest days fifteen years previously, and had done so much since in his various capacities to keep the administration in India on sound lines.

The local administration of the Company's gardens presented a problem, for with the resignation of the Superintendent, H. C. Gibson, the Board found themselves in difficulty to get anyone to replace him. Planters with any experience of tea were at a premium, for they were either opening up gardens of their own or in the employ of other companies at higher remuneration.

There was at home then John Smith, who had been Manager of the Cachar gardens. On a request from Calcutta he was interviewed by the London Board, who duly appointed him Superintendent. He proceeded to India immediately.

John Smith went out originally as an Assistant in 1857, and it was an indication of the straits in which the Company was placed that it had to appoint as the head of its establishment in Assam a man with only about six years' experience in tea.

Henry de Mornay, on his visit to Assam in 1861, had seen the deterioration that had set in under Gibson. With the departure of Mackey and Carter there was nobody on the Calcutta Board who knew anything about the condition of the gardens. Henry Burkinyoung knew, but his colleagues on the London Board would not listen to him. The Board would believe anybody but Burkinyoung, and they were misled by a letter dated 23rd April 1862, written by Mackey just before he had to resign, in which he refuted Burkinyoung's allegations about the deterioration in the Company's gardens.

It did dawn on the Calcutta Board eventually that matters in Assam were in a bad way and required someone to investigate. Arising out of this, there is the first mention of the use of the telegraph in July 1862, when the following message was sent from Calcutta to the Board in London:

Matters in Assam appear to be going from bad to worse. The Board consider Mr. William Judge as the best man to send to investigate and report upon the position of affairs. Mr. Judge will not come to any terms without the Board fixing remuneration. The Local Board offer to pay him Rs.25,000 to devote his whole time to their interests for six months. Reply by telegram.

These are not, of course, the terms on which Judge was appointed Agent some time later. But the tenor of the message does suggest the
desperate straits the Calcutta Board were in to find someone to tell them what was happening in Assam.

Judge, as Chairman of the Calcutta Board, sent the secretary, R. S. Staunton, to Assam at the end of 1862, following himself later on 24th January 1863. Judge’s report on his visit is a printed pamphlet of twenty-nine pages, in which he goes into interminable details of the land in all parts of the province which he regarded as essential that the company should acquire, quoting details of vague acreages and the names of obscure mouzas in which they were situated, mere names which were quite foreign to any areas which the Company then possessed. He referred to long discussions he had with the District Commissioners of Sibsagar and Dibrugarh, in regard to the applications he was putting in then on behalf of the Company. He referred to the delinquencies of Henry de Mornay in making applications for land on his own account instead of on behalf of the Company, which he discussed and probed into with these Government officials. There was not in his report one iota of constructive criticism of the local administration, not a suggestion for the curtailing of expenditure which had risen so steeply, and which was the ostensible object of his visit, or of the work or character of those individuals who were at that time responsible for the condition of the Company’s properties.

The London Board were helpless. They knew nothing of Judge’s lack of knowledge of tea garden administration, and they had no alternative but to agree to his recommendations for the acquisition of more and more land. At that time, with the wild scramble on all sides for the acquisition of land suitable, or supposedly so, for tea cultivation, it could only appear to them the right thing to do.

In this belief it is recorded in the Company’s Calcutta Report of 10th March 1864 that the Company had purchased at the Sibsagar Land Sales of December 1863, and in January 1864, 17,950 acres, and over a thousand acres in the district of Durrung, to extend near Singri Parbut.

Having regard to the unsurveyed areas of such grants, and the nebulous acreage they were supposed to contain, it is impossible to state what was the area of the land then held by the Company with these considerable additions.

It was left to R. S. Staunton to inspect and report upon the properties. He arrived at Nazira on 1st December 1862. His report, a printed pamphlet of thirty pages, is dated from Calcutta 14th March 1863. It is to be remembered that it was his first visit to Assam and that he was seeing a tea garden for the first time. How could his report be of any value? It was taken up largely by running down previous Superintendents, repeating parrot-wise what his Directors had said in regard to Henry de Mornay’s machinery, and blaming the condition of the Northern and
Eastern Divisions on Henry de Mornay, who in fact had nothing to do with it, and he recommended their total abandonment.

The harm, he did however, was in the concluding paragraphs of his Report, in which he gave vent to the flamboyant statement that:

The property of the Assam Company is the finest beyond all comparison in Assam. The Gardens contain the finest tea plants growing in unrivalled luxuriance and capable of yielding a very much larger outturn of tea than has ever yet been gathered from them.

The Directors may rest assured that the measures now being taken by Mr. Smith of stimulating the energies of his subordinates will result in the greatest advantage, for the spirit of emulative rivalry that he is busy exciting in the Assistants must lead to the best results.

No leaf will be lost this coming season should it be in Mr. Smith's power to prevent it, and if the present season should prove as favourable even as the last, I am assured he will close his manufacture in a manner as satisfactory to the Board as it will be creditable to himself and his Assistants.

The misfortune was that this was the only part of his long diatribe that was published in the Directors' Report in May 1863. What could have misled the shareholders more thoroughly and strengthened them and the Board in their opposition to Henry Burkinyoung's criticisms?

John Smith's inexperience for the post of Superintendent may have been the primary cause for his breakdown subsequently, but he had no easy task. In addition to having to pull round gardens suffering already from neglect, he was called upon to put out enormous areas of new clearances.

The Company could not be left out of the fever for tea expansion pervading the whole province. It is true that in the previous few years the Company had recruited new labour extensively, but the numbers that reached the gardens would not have done much more than make up some of the considerable shortage from which they had been suffering previously.

There was nobody on the Calcutta Board with an intimate knowledge of tea. The Superintendent in Assam was an unknown quantity. Judge, as the Chairman in Calcutta, was able to carry the Board with him in formulating a programme for 1,000 acres to be put out in 1862 and 1863, and 1,600 acres in 1863-1864. In announcing this programme, the Directors assured shareholders that this work would be done when the labour had no other employment; that the Company had plenty of tea seed of its own, and that on the whole these extensions would be made without any appreciable increase in expenditure.

Of the first year's programme, the area put out amounted to 995½ acres, which at a cost of Rs.84,000 was relatively cheap, though not quite as anticipated when the shareholders were addressed. Out of the next
year's 1,600 acres for which they planned, they did accomplish 840 acres in the Southern Division, and at Singri Parbut, whilst about 150 acres more were added to the Northern Division. The Report of 1865 stated that a further 860 acres had been put out in 1864.

The Proceedings of the Calcutta Board give no information about what was happening in the matter of cultivation on the gardens at this time, and one can only rely upon what little there is to be gleaned from the Directors' Reports to shareholders. In that dated 20th April 1865, which is the last issued by the Calcutta Board and which deals with the second half of 1864, there is a glimpse of one aspect of what was happening. The Chairman, after referring in his preamble to the unfavourable season that 1864 had been for the production of crop, stated, optimistically that larger crops were to be expected in 1865 under John Smith's administration, and he foretold that the extensions made in 1862-1863 would produce crop, albeit a small one, in 1865, and then added:

On the other hand, a large area of old plants have been cut down in order to restore them to a healthy condition, and from these plants no leaf, or but a small quantity, could be expected during the current season. The plants so cut down last year, and which before they were so treated presented an appearance of exhaustion and decay are now healthy and vigorous.

So that as far back as 1864, collar pruning of old tea was adopted as a panacea for all the evils to be found in the condition of a tea bush!

For one other aspect of local management it is possible to get a picture from a docket of correspondence between the Superintendent, John Smith, and W. J. Judge. The somewhat alarming increase in the cost of production has been mentioned already.

In his ignorance of tea garden management, Judge's way of justifying his office was to write long letters to the Superintendent demanding explanations. A lot of the excess expenditure was due to meeting calls from Government for payment for the enormous purchases of new land which Judge himself had incurred when he was in Assam.

In a letter dated 9th May 1865 it is revealed that one at least of the Superintendent's troubles was an acute shortage of cash with which to pay his labour. There are copies of letters from nearly all Managers in the same vein saying that the labour was complaining bitterly in May that they had not received even then their pay for February. The labour was restive, and they threatened "No pay, then no work," and this was at an important time when the largest quantities of leaf were due to be plucked.

It is difficult to understand this shortage of cash. It was not as on the previous occasion in 1847, when the Company was literally without funds. Trading had been profitable and it would seem that mismanage-

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ment or ignorance of procedure in the Calcutta executive was the cause. There was no doubt that the acute competition from other companies and estates had made the labour independent, for they could get higher rates of pay elsewhere; but they were tied down by their agreements with the Company, for in one part of the letter Smith says, “And it would be no great wonder if we had a mutiny among them. Certainly were they to go to the Magistrate and ask to be relieved from their agreements, he could not in fairness refuse them.”

Smith complained that the cost of living, because of the increasing number of labourers and planters entering the district, had gone up enormously. For the labour, rice was then selling at Rs.2/4 to Rs.2/8 a maund, whereas six years previously it was only As.10 to As.12 a maund.

Turning to the administration of the Company’s affairs in Calcutta, after Mackey and Carter had resigned, W. J. Judge took command as the Chairman, and he had on the Board with him A. T. T. Peterson, W. Spink, Joseph Graham and William Maitland. Peterson had a tea garden of his own in Cachar. On a tour of that District in 1862 he paid a visit to the Company’s properties, but it is doubtful if he knew anything of Assam.

After the mismanagement disclosed, the London Board turned their attention once again to reforming the whole system of administration in Calcutta. When Peterson was at home, he interviewed the Board, and in a letter dated August 1863 he gave his views on what he thought was required. Amongst other things, he was against the proposal then being formulated to manage the Company direct from London through an Agent in Calcutta. His idea was a small Board of four Directors, two to be a quorum, and the appointing of a General Manager in Calcutta under the orders of this Board who would frequently visit the gardens, and his view of the man for this job was:

The man best suited for this post would be an educated man who had considerable East Indian experience, and knowledge of the natives, and who would without fear or favour keep the servants of the Company to their work. There are many smart sea-faring men who would be well fitted for the post.

The office of Managing Director was to be abolished. This post was then vacant, as no successor had been appointed since Henry de Mornay left. He advocated the Company having its own steamer to run between Nazira and Khoostea. From the latter river station tea would be brought to Calcutta by railway.

He was for scrapping the engineering establishment in Assam, meaning the sawmill, and having this machinery re-erected in Calcutta, where
all boxes would be made, because in Calcutta wood and workmen could always be obtained.

Though these proposals did not accord with the London Board's ideas, it was something to get a line from someone in Calcutta.

The London Board, as a preliminary to reorganisation, reopened the question of disbanding the Calcutta Board altogether, which meant a complete change in their constitution from a Rupee to a Sterling Company. The first steps to this end were the calling of Special General Meetings on 25th April 1864 to change those clauses in the Deed of Settlement of 1840 which provided specifically that the management of the Company's affairs in India should be in the hands of the local or Calcutta Board, and to make these clauses only exercisable by the London Board. The requisite Resolutions were duly passed by the shareholders present.

There were, however, two European and two Indian dissentients, represented by proxy. The revised clauses were to take effect from 1st January 1865. To complete the conversion from a Rupee to a Sterling Company required an Act of Parliament to surrender the Indian Act of Incorporation in exchange for an Act incorporating the Company in England. This Act was duly passed in 1865, and it received the Royal Assent in 1866. At the same time as the Company was in communication with Government about the above conversion, they endeavoured to get passed an Enactment declaring the Capital of the Company to be £500,000 in paid-up stock, but in this they were unsuccessful. To conclude this phase of the reorganisation in Calcutta, the last Calcutta printed Report issued to shareholders in India was that dated 20th April 1865, and covers the second half of 1864 up to the time of the extinction of the Calcutta Board on 31st December 1864. The Report is signed by W. J. Judge as "General Manager and Agent of the Assam Company in India."

In recording the appointment of Judge to be the Company's Calcutta Agent under the new system of management, the London Board gave it their usual eulogy on making such appointments:

Mr. Judge is a gentleman well-known to be of high character and well qualified to perform the important duties evolving upon him. Since his appointment, he has made a visit to the Province and has now returned to Calcutta.

At the first Special General Meeting on 25th April 1864, called to dissolve the Calcutta Board and to convert the Company into a Sterling Company, the Chairman enlarged on his encomiums of Judge by saying how fortunate the Company was to have obtained the services of such an able man.

It is true that Judge had displayed considerable acumen in bringing to light the delinquencies of Mackey and Carter, which was really a
judicial matter with which he was well qualified to deal. Judge's interest in tea, apart from the Assam Company, was confined to three small companies in Darjeeling, of which he was a Director of two, and it was his habit to spend the hot weather until after the break of the rains in Darjeeling attending to his interests in that district.

The London Board judged him solely on his ability, as exposed to them, as an administrator of the law, and it was only a few months after his appointment as the Company's Agent in Calcutta, and when the Board realised at last that there was gross mismanagement of their gardens, that there ensued behind the scenes, for there is nothing about it in the official Proceedings of the Company, a most acrimonious correspondence between the Chairman and Judge in regard to his duties as Company's Agent.

The Chairman, Kemshead, wrote in strong terms to Judge that as their Agent he was to proceed to Assam to report on every garden, give his opinion on the tea and the future prospects of crop—in fact, to survey the whole scene and to report to the Board.

Judge's reply pinned on the word "survey." He averred that he was not a surveyor and that there was nothing in his terms of appointment to demand that he should visit Assam again, and he virtually refused to leave Calcutta. Judge withdrew from this attitude later and proceeded to Assam in company with Staunton. The outcome of this visit is related in the next chapter.

It was in this period that the Company effected the sale of two of its properties.

As part of the need to concentrate its operations over a less wide area, and to take advantage of the boom prices then prevailing, the Company first disposed of its gardens in Chachar.

These estates had by 1862 been extended to over 900 acres, and in the last year of their producing tea for the Company, the estates made a crop of 49,503 lb.

In official Reports the estates were seldom given a name—they were referred to merely as "Cachar." The property comprised three gardens, Mohanpore, Serisporc and Burnie Braes. Negotiations for their sale were opened in 1862. The conclusion of the sale to Mr. J. M. Grob for £60,000 is recorded at the Annual General Meeting on 17th June 1864; a condition of the sale was that the Company should retain the proceeds realised for the crop of 1862. Out of the proceeds of the sale there was distributed to shareholders a bonus of £4 per share, absorbing £37,432, and the balance was retained as working Capital. This Mr. Grob was appointed to the Calcutta Board in 1864. He was the Agent acting for the Central Cachar Tea Company Limited a company registered in Calcutta in 1863 and to
whom the three estates now belong. What is not known generally is that
the Assam Company were pioneers directly or through its employees in
the opening out of tea in Cachar and Sylhet—in Cachar through its then
Superintendent, George Williamson, Junior, in 1856, and in Sylhet through
one of its previous employees, W. H. M. Sweetland, at Malnicherra in 1857.
These facts are mentioned in more detail in dealing with the chapter on
Cachar.

At the General Meeting in London on 13th June 1865 there was
announced the proposals to sell the gardens comprising the Northern
Division to a company called the Northern Assam Tea Company
Limited for a sum of £100,000, payable in instalments extending over a
year. The properties they sold were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acres</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tingri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoogri Jan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyhung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naholia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tippum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hookun Juri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towrock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It serves no useful purpose to speculate that because of the first-class
companies and estates which have been formed by others from these
properties it was a pity the Company did not retain them. It is necessary
to regard them from the point of view as it appeared at the time the sale
was made. These properties had all been abandoned from 1843 to 1847,
in which latter year Stephen Mornay started to bring some of them back
into production, and this process had continued over some years. It was
always difficult to keep these areas under anything like proper cultivation
owing to the shortage of labour. These gardens, together with the
Southern Division, were too much for one Superintendent to manage.
It would not have been economic to have another Superintendent for
these scattered areas. The Company had been operating for twenty-five
years, and in this time, from the tea tracts Bruce found in the jungle, the
whole Northern Division had developed in that time to only those
520 acres, in contrast with the Southern Division, which had been built
up in the same period from nothing to 4,274 acres.

There was nothing to indicate then that these gardens in Upper
Assam were capable of giving better-quality tea and larger crops per
acre than those in the Southern Division. The European staff to manage
these scattered patches made working them expensive, and on the whole, this Northern Division was more of a liability than an asset to the Company.

It is possible to get an idea of the difficulty of working these gardens from a letter dated 23rd January 1865, from the Superintendent, then John Smith, to the Calcutta Secretary:

It takes the Manager seven days hard riding to go from Tingri Mookh via Hoojree Jaun, through Keyhung, Naholia, Cato, Tippum, and Hookan Jooree to Tourock, and the same number of days returning, so that it will be seen how imperfectly the Gardens can be managed, insofar as supervision is concerned.

The prospect of the economy in working that could fairly be expected by concentrating the whole of the Company’s resources in the Southern Division was a deciding factor. At the price of £192 per acre of tea, the offer was a very handsome one, even allowing for the fact that the sale was effected at the height of the boom, when fabulous prices were being paid by speculators for so-called properties that had not been in existence as areas under tea for as many months, as the Northern Division had been years in existence.

As for any confirmation of the wildness of the speculation in tea properties, the subject with which the next chapter opens, it is a point to note that in the above letter, when he made the suggestion that these gardens should be sold and put his value of them at 8 lakhs, or £80,000, John Smith said that “The Company would not need to show their returns, the prospective buyers and other speculators, not knowing, thought the properties were much better than they really were.”

Only a few particulars are traceable about the Northern Assam Tea Company Limited. It was incorporated in 1864 and its first Directors were Edmund Walter Wingrove, Colonel Thomas H. Sissmore, Percival Battiscombe, J. W. Mitchell, Henry Stavely King and James Henry Young.

Its first Articles of Association show that it started with a Capital of £54,000, and the Company acquired Medeloah, Khonika and Ramarie Estates in the Dibrugarh District, with a total area of 6,000 acres with approximately 500 acres under tea.

The company must have raised further Capital later to acquire the Assam Company’s gardens, but which they must have sold subsequently, for of these Tingri, Keyhung, Naholia and Hoogrijan are now Divisions of the Tingri Tea Company Limited. Tippum, Hookum Jurie and Towrock (Dirock) are referred to and traced to their respective companies in the chapter dealing with the Eastern Division.

The Assam Company finished up this five-year period of profitable
trading in a strong position financially with additional Capital from the sale of some of its estates, and though its properties had not been valued officially, it was known that its real worth far exceeded the paid-up Capital.

But its administration in India, with an inadequately experienced Superintendent in Assam, and in Calcutta an Agent and his Secretary with little knowledge of tea gardens was regrettably weak.

This was the set-up with which the Company had to face the future in competition with the many new rivals which had sprung up in these five years. How real this competition was can be gathered from the following list of twenty companies registered in London and Calcutta between 1859 and 1865. These are the known registered companies. Those not registered, and private estates, must have exceeded these many times over.

### Registered in London

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borokai Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmaputra Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British India Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darjeeling Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Assam Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Tea Company of Cachar Limited</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorehaut Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebong Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Assam Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Assam Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cachar Company Limited</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Registered in Calcutta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishnath Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Cachar Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durrung Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cachar Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East India Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Assam and Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahor Habi Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soom Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tukvar Tea Company Limited</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further details of that great number of individuals who were in possession of land in the Assam Company’s immediate neighbourhood,
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

and on which tea companies and estates were formed subsequently, reference should be made to the old map of 1864 reproduced in Appendix I. In commenting on this, endeavours have been made to correlate “references” on the map to what were the Company’s competitors. Emphasis has to be made to the Company’s immediate neighbourhood. The map does not show, for example, the gardens in other Districts such as Jorhat, Nowgong, Golaghat and on the north bank.

A minor incident appertaining to this period, but one which created quite a stir on the London Board, arose out of a Resolution that was passed at the Calcutta Half-yearly Meeting on 2nd March 1863 to the effect that:

Looking to the large quantity of Tea now despatched from the Estates of the Company, and to the number of Coolies sent up and the other requirements of the Company for transport, it is the opinion of this Meeting that it would be of benefit to the Company to have a steamer and the necessary flats of its own to be employed in running between Calcutta and the Estates of the Company, and that the attention of the Home Directors be drawn to this subject.

To Captain Andrew Henderson, as a Director on the London Board, this was an opportunity not to be lost to show his ability as a designer of boats and to initiate an enterprise of his own which he had long contemplated.

At a Board Meeting on 14th August 1863 he gave notice that he would call attention again to a proposal for the Assam Company to cooperate in his scheme to launch a Company to be called the “Eastern Bengal Flotilla & Assam Coal Company.” with a view to the Assam Company taking the initiative. When this came up at the next Board Meeting, it was merely regarded as a matter that should “stand over.” Henderson had been responsible chiefly for the design and construction of the Company’s first and ill-fated steamer the Assam. He was incapable of appreciating the fact that there were already competing lines of steamers on the run to Assam, and that if the Assam Company did have its own vessel and flats, it would not be so economical as the services then existing.

The Assam Company was not, however, the only one to be pestered with his nebulous schemes. There are voluminous papers to show that he importuned the Under-Secretary of State for India to get Government to guarantee to subscribe £450,000 out of the proposed Capital of £750,000, and he expected to get the public to subscribe the balance. He submitted detailed plans of a steamer 220 feet long, with four masts and sails, to tow
a flat or barge, 228 feet long, also with four masts and sails. These papers are written over his signature as “Consulting Nautical Engineer.”

It is obvious from this that Henderson was less concerned with his responsibilities as a Director for the direction of the Assam Company than he was to design it boats or draw it into his grandiose schemes.

The encouragement given to him by the Calcutta Board’s resolution was unfortunate for Captain Henderson, for at the Board Meeting on 13th June 1864 it involved him in a snub from his co-Directors that must have thoroughly damped his enthusiasm.

The Deputy Chairman called the attention of the Board to the fact that Captain Henderson was on the list of retiring Directors, and that notwithstanding his long acquaintance and regard for him, it was impossible he should propose him from the Chair for re-election unless he would undertake not to obstruct the business of the Board or to cause annoyance to its members by a perpetual recurrence of plans and schemes for steamboats and other matters which the members of the Board had jointly and individually declined to entertain. That he (Mr. Tite) was desirous to say that if the Chairman had been present this day he would have made a similar statement and have asked for a similar pledge. The Directors present assented to this view as expressed by the Deputy Chairman.

Captain Henderson regretted any unintentional offence he might have given by his anxiety on these and similar subjects, and gave the promise required.

In August 1865 Captain Henderson disqualified himself from holding office as a Director by the sale of his shares. This is the bare statement appearing in the Minutes. In the “Prideaux Papers” there are letters that go to show that he did not disqualified himself intentionally. He signed the transfer of his shares to a Mr. Balfour as security for a loan, which transfer in due course came to the office for registration. The Board had been longing for an opportunity to get rid of Captain Henderson for the above reason and others which are given in the individual account of him as a Director. It was agreed therefore, between the Chairman and the Secretary, that Henderson should be given at once official notice of his disqualification, and this was given effect to in spite of Henderson’s protests.
CHAPTER XI

THE beginning of this period was when the Tea Industry was feeling the effects of the first set-back arising from its over-rapid expansion. The conditions which prevailed were not due solely to the laws of supply and demand for tea, though they were a considerable factor. The crop from the whole of India in 1862 was some 2½ million lb. It had risen by 1866-1867 to over 6½ million. The average price realised in London had depreciated from about 1s. 7d. in 1862 to 1s. 0½d. in 1866. If the cost of production had been maintained at the figure of As.4 to 6 per lb., as it was in 1862, there would have been little ill-effect on the older-established companies.

There was bound to be some check eventually to the extremely rapid extension by the hundreds of individuals and companies who had opened out in tea in the province during the previous four or five years.

It was no doubt the success and high dividends paid by such as the Assam Company and Jorehaut Company that was the incentive for speculators to enter the field. When speculation did start, it ran riot, and as Colonel E. Money has said in his *Treatise on Tea*:

> Often in those days was a small Garden made of 30 or 40 acres and sold to a Company as 150 or 200 acres. I am not joking. It was done over and over again. The prices paid moreover were quite out of proportion to even the supposed area. 2 or 3 lakhs of Rupees (£20,000 to £30,000) have been often paid for such Gardens when no more than two years old, and 40% of the existing areas vacancies.

The Assam Company had taken full advantage of this speculation when it sold its Cachar properties and its Northern Division, and during which period it sold large quantities of tea seed which brought in an income that materially augmented its proceeds from tea.

Having acquired the property, the speculator’s first requisite was someone to manage it. If one assumes that a number of the sellers of such properties were planters, and that they left the country with their profits, the number of managers available to the speculative purchasers was therefore much below demand. The Assam Company had had its share of losses from the enticing of its employees.

One authority tells how this gap in staff was filled:

> ... People who have failed in everything else were thought quite competent to make plantations. It is true tea was so entirely a new thing at that time
that few could be found who had any knowledge of it. Still had Managers with some practice in agriculture been chosen, the thing would not have been so disastrous, but anyone, literally anyone, was taken, and tea planters in those days were a strange medley of retired or cashiered Army or Navy officers, medical men, engineers, veterinary surgeons, steamer captains, chemists, shop-keepers of all kinds, stable keepers, used-up policemen, clerks, and Goodness knows who besides. Is it strange the enterprise failed in their hands?

It was an exaggeration perhaps to say that the enterprise failed on this account, though it is true that the weakest went to the wall. 1866–1867 was a period of general depression, and the money market in London was passing through a crisis due to the abuse of Bank credit by limited liability companies when some Eastern Banks failed. In the case of tea, Banks and finance houses, more particularly in Calcutta, were demanding repayment of money lent in previous years from about 1862 during this wild speculation.

It was the cumulative effect of the number of competitors and ignorance of tea garden management that contributed to the rising cost of production by increases in wages, the higher price of stores and, more important, the cost of importing new labour.

Because of the inefficiency of its administration in Assam and Calcutta and the deplorable condition of its gardens, the Company was in no position to meet adverse trading conditions.

In the Directors’ Report submitted at the Annual General Meeting on 19th June 1866, which dealt with the crop produced in 1864, there is the first warning that the year 1865 would be far from satisfactory because of the increased expenditure, and that in addition to a short crop, quality had deteriorated. They blamed the increased costs to speculation by others, not only in opening out new estates, but in the buying and selling of properties at fabulous prices. They pointed to the loss they had sustained by the enticement of their experienced Assistants to accept employment elsewhere, and to Government regulations in regard to improved travelling conditions for labour, which had increased the cost of their recruitment.

After this warning of the decline in the Company’s prosperity (a temporary one, they assured their Shareholders), they went on to paint a brighter picture based on the expectation that by 1867 they would have upwards of 5,000 acres in full bearing, and that they would be disappointed if by that year the crop did not exceed 1½ million lb., with a larger proportion of fine teas; winding up with the pleasant expectation that in these circumstances they could look forward with confidence to declare dividends fully equal to the highest yet paid.

The Directors’ Report submitted at the Annual General Meeting of
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

28th June 1867, which dealt with the working of 1865, extends to sixteen pages, mostly of recriminations, They had to explain a loss of about £13,525 in 1865, and a further estimated loss of some £44,553 in 1866.

The Report opens with a reference to the Company's total assets and liabilities, as estimated at 31st December 1866, from which they believed the shareholders would take comfort that the Assam Company's position might be considered fairly satisfactory when contrasted with the great majority of other tea companies in India, though the position was very different from what the Directors and shareholders had a right to expect! The theme leading to their recriminations was: "We do not hesitate to admit that had the Agent and Superintendent fulfilled the reasonable expectations hoped from them, when we established the Agency in 1865, the Company at this time would have been in a much more prosperous state."

The Report then lays the blame for excessive expenditure on the ambitious programme of extensions which visualised increasing the Company's area by 2,500 to 3,000 acres "... sanctioned no doubt at the time by your Directors and approved by the Shareholders in the very natural belief that the more extended our sphere of action the greater should be the profit. . . ."

This would have proved all right but for the inefficient control of Mr. W. J. Judge, the Agent, and the culpable neglect of the Superintendent in Assam and the Assistants under him.

The London Board took credit for having called a halt to this extravagant programme of extensions, principally by putting a stop to the Agents' urgent desire to extend the cultivation of Singri Parbut on the north bank from 400 to 3,000 acres.

A programme of extensions implies naturally a considerable increase in the labour force to put them out and to maintain them. The additional labour was not to be obtained from local sources, and the Company had to import some 3,000 coolies at a cost of £20,000. The quality of this labour brought into prominence the failure of R. S. Staunton, the Secretary, and W. J. Judge, the Agent, to act up to their previous recommendations.

Staunton, when he visited Assam in 1863, had laid down that the only class of labour to be sent to the estates should be Dhangas and Boorwahs—other jats were no good. Yet he and Judge "... despatched from Calcutta the class of persons which the Medical Officers of the Company and others have entirely condemned, and to the wretched character of the labourers so selected at a time when the cost of imported labour was at its highest, we can not but attribute in a great measure the neglected cultivations."

The Board made a clean breast of the sorry condition into which the gardens had deteriorated by publishing the reports made by Staunton.
when he visited the properties in the cold weather of 1866-1867. Even allowing for the inexperience of the Calcutta Secretary, these reports do expose something of the terrible conditions of neglect into which the properties had been allowed to drift. The reports are given in full as part of the story relating to individual estates in the chapter dealing with the Southern Division.

The Board had to disclose that the deterioration had set in as long previously as 1863, when John Smith was first appointed Superintendent by the Calcutta Board before that body was abolished. (As mentioned in the previous chapter, this deterioration had in fact set in much earlier.) They had been deceived by Staunton's overoptimistic report of 1863, which had led them to expect such great things from Smith's "vigorous administration," as Staunton had described it.

They were further misled by Judge, whom they admitted they had appointed because of the spirit and intelligence he had displayed in detecting and exposing the irregularities of Mackey and Carter. Judge knew things were not as they should be in Assam. He visited the province again in 1865, but did nothing to check up on the rising expenditure. Instead, on his return to Calcutta he bombarded the Superintendent with a spate of correspondence, and then, to evade having to take any action himself, he sent John Smith home to report to the Board in person. The Second Assistant, Robert Milner, was put in charge in Assam.

It was after Smith's departure from Assam that Milner reported officially the neglected condition into which some of the gardens had fallen. Even this information, passing through Judge's hands, failed to rouse him to take any action to remedy what was wrong.

The Board in London got no satisfaction out of their interview with Smith. He threw the blame back on to Judge, by referring to the voluminous correspondence he received, the answering of which took up so much of his time to the neglect of more important work, whilst to the charge of neglecting normal cultivation of existing areas he pointed to the loss of some of his best labour to neighbouring rivals and to his disinclination to ask for further supplies of labour whilst the cost of recruiting them was so high.

He actually succeeded in proving to the Board that the condition of the gardens was due to factors beyond his control. The Board, knowing of nobody else to replace Smith, had no alternative but to send him back to Assam.

As an example of Judge's verbosity, there have been preserved copies of two of his letters written from Calcutta, dated 7th and 8th March 1866, addressed to the Chairman in London. These extend to twelve and seven pages of foolscap each, and go into minute detail of correspondence with Smith and Milner about accounts and estimates. It is obvious that
Judge relied on this exhibition of the extent of his correspondence with Assam to mask his own inability to submit proper estimates and his failure to put a check on current high expenditure. Contrary to Smith’s contention that his time as Superintendent was so taken up with answering Judge’s letters, it was Judge’s chief excuse to the Board that he got no replies to what he called his “instructions to Nazira,” and could not therefore answer the Board’s enquiries.

If these two letters from Judge are average samples of what he wrote to the Superintendent, then there was some excuse for Smith’s complaint though not even this could excuse him from the accusation of neglect of the Company’s gardens.

By the Board Meeting of 15th October 1866 the London Directors became conscious that matters had indeed gone wrong. They resolved that a competent person should be appointed to investigate the Company’s affairs in India, and they proceeded to set out in their Proceedings a voluminous statement of heads of enquiry upon which this unnamed competent person should report.

The basis of their alarm was that in 1861 the proportion of high-class tea produced was 63 per cent. The total quantity of all tea produced in the Southern Division in that year being 845,129 lb. and the expenditure £53,633 sterling, or 1s. 3d. per lb. In 1864 the proportion of high-class tea had receded to 33 per cent. and although there was a larger acreage from which tea was being produced, the total crop was 939,483 lb. and the cost in India £89,297 sterling, or 1s. 10½d. per lb.

But the Board knew of nobody competent to undertake such an enquiry. They did ask one of their members, Mr. Ross Donelly Mangles, to communicate with his son, Ross Lowis Mangles, then in India, to select and appoint a suitable person, and they gave him powers to arrange the appointment and the requisite remuneration for such an investigation. Nothing came of this enquiry in India. The newly-appointed Secretary of the Company in London, Mr. Wimshurst, then offered his services, and at the Board Meeting on 11th January 1867 “... intimated with a becoming spirit his readiness to proceed to India in the interests of the Company, and to serve in whatever capacity it may be considered useful to employ him....”

The offer was accepted by the Board with alacrity, for they visualised having somebody in whom they had every confidence adding to his knowledge and subsequent usefulness to the Board in London whilst carrying out the investigations which they knew was overdue. They offered him £500 a year in addition to the pay of £750 he was then drawing in London and all the cost of his passage and travelling expenses, whilst they agreed, furthermore, to insure his life whilst out of England for £2,000. Just when everything was arranged, Wimshurst quailed at
the prospect and asked to be relieved from his engagement, "... arising
from anxious fears as to the climate agreeing with his health."

This may have been an awkward situation for the Board in so far as it
frustrated their desire for immediate investigation, but on the other hand
it may have been a blessing in disguise, for however competent a clerk in
the Company's London office, Wimshurst was hardly a qualified person
to enquire into the operations of brutal and licentious planters or to ask
questions to W. J. Judge, one well qualified in Law though he may have
been inefficient in his capacity as the Company's Agent.

At the Meeting on 28th January 1867 the Chairman informed the
Board that Mr. Herbert Glendinning Bainbridge,

... a gentleman largely interested in tea cultivation in Lower Assam, is
about to proceed to India for a short visit on his own account, and think
Mr. Bainbridge, who is an experienced planter might be induced not only
to inspect and report upon the state and the best way of managing the
Assam Company's Gardens, but to extend his stay in India for a limited
period, taking entire charge of properties and holding the same until he
should be able to make over the management to a competent approved
Manager to be appointed by the Company.

Bainbridge was engaged on remuneration of £500 for his report on
the state of the Company's gardens and affairs generally, and £250 a
month from the date of making his report.

Starting early in 1866 and extending into 1869 was a time of great
tribulation for the London Board. They were assailed from every
direction, and because of the ruinous state into which the Company
had fallen their conduct of affairs was criticised most severely, chiefly
by shareholders in India who had closer contact with Assam and knew
more of the details of what was going on.

The leader of this campaign was at first a shareholder in India, one
Mr. W. Theobald. In the Company's printed Report there is only reference
to a suggestion by representatives of these shareholders in India to the
formation of a Committee in Calcutta to advise on the conduct of the
business of the Company in India. With this proposal the Board would
not agree. They pointed out that even after the disbanding of the Calcutta
Board there had always been an element of a Committee in Calcutta, in
the persons of W. J. Judge and R. S. Staunton, who could have been
consulted by shareholders, and now that it was proposed to put the
Company's affairs in India in the hands of a Calcutta Agency house, they
could refer to them.

In the Company's Minute Books the only reference to this controversy
with its shareholders is the mere record of the receipt of such letters
and that they were acknowledged in accordance with draft replies approved by the Board. Fortunately, some of these letters were printed and copies have been preserved. On the first letter from W. Theobald, dated Calcutta 10th September 1866, there is a note, "Printed on account of its length and not for publication. W. T."

This letter sets out to criticise the Profit and Loss Account and Balance Sheet of 1866, which dealt with the actual results of 1864 and estimated results of 1865. The point of the criticism was chiefly in reference to the Advance Account and Loss on Exchange. Of the former, Theobald said the advances should have been written off and that the latter should not have been incurred if the Directors had remitted Treasury Bills instead of drawing Bills on England. If these matters, he said, had been attended to properly, the Board would have had to estimate a loss in 1865 instead of a profit.

In dealing with the declining crop since 1863, and the falling off in the percentage of finer grades as well as with the management in Assam, he was scathing in his comments. In his reference to personalities it is obvious from his remarks that he had had full access to the Company's records in Calcutta.

Under personalities, Theobald criticised the retention of John Smith as Superintendent after the Board knew of his inefficiency and their having condoned his mismanagement by returning him to Assam. He referred to the dismissal of the Accountant, Tremearne (who was sent out from home), on the grounds of insubordination, and of the Surveyor, Bell, because, as Theobald asserted, they had had differences with the Superintendent in the submission of their respective returns of accounts and areas under cultivation.

In this reference to persons, Theobald questioned whether John Smith was devoting his whole time to the interests of the Company, insinuating that he had gardens of his own which he was managing. In further support of this contention he drew on the fact that John Farley Leith, a Director of the London Board, was using John Smith in his negotiation for the purchase of a property. In the Chairman's reply to Theobald of 3rd November 1866, he was able to show that J. F. Leith's connection with John Smith in the matter of the property (Lakwah) he was to purchase was merely to ask him to request his brother George Brown Smith to manage the property for him. This, however, was after J. F. Leith had offered the property to the Assam Company, but which it refused on the grounds that the Company preferred to make estates for itself rather than to purchase made estates. The only significant point about this transaction was that Leith was purchasing the property from Vangulin, Junior, a son of the employee of that name in the Assam Company.
Whether or not it was anything to do with this exposure of his trans-
action it would be difficult to judge, but J. F. Leith resigned from the
Board of the Assam Company in 1868 because, as he said, of the heavy
demand on his time for his other business.

The foregoing may be said to have concluded the opening phase of
the controversy between a single shareholder, Theobald, and the Chair-
man, H. M. Kemshhead, in their personal capacities.

This was followed by a letter, dated Calcutta 8th April 1867, addressed
to the London Directors individually by name and signed by 26 share-
holders representing 1,015 shares out of the Company’s total of 2,316
shares registered in India, and three of the signatories are recognisable as
members of the late Calcutta Board of Directors of the Company.

This letter, as it was signed also with the name of W. Theobald,
followed much the same lines of criticism as that gentleman’s first letter,
except that it was able to use also information furnished in the Chair-
man’s reply to Mr. Theobald.

As an appendix to this letter from shareholders there is a report by
Sir H. B. Harington of an interview he had with the Chairman in London.
The purport of this report was to question the necessity for the appoint-
ment of Colonel Beadle as an Assistant Secretary to the London Board.
He said that he went to this interview expecting to hear that matters
were not progressing satisfactorily, but he was quite unprepared for the
revelations that were contained in the Calcutta shareholders’ correspond-
ence with the Chairman, and in the Chairman’s reply, all of which he
was shown.

Harington professed that he had received from the Chairman the
most patient hearing and very courteous treatment at his interview. He
expressed the opinion that shareholders were fortunate in having Mr.
Kemshhead as Chairman, and he personally had every confidence in the
Board, but he was unsparing in his condemnation of the state of affairs
that had come to light.

. . . It seems to me to be established beyond doubt that a flourishing and
lucrative concern has been brought within a comparatively short period
to ruin, or to the verge of ruin, by the misconduct and neglect of the
principal officers of the Company, Mr. Judge in Calcutta and Mr. Smith
and the Superintendent in Assam.

From the time of Mr. Smith’s appointment in 1863 things have been
going from bad to worse, until they have now reached a state which can
only be fitly described as most disastrous.

This report of Sir H. B. Harington does not disclose any new detail
in the general condemnation of those responsible for the Company’s
plight at that time. Its purpose would seem to have been only a confirma-
tion, obtained at the original source of the Company's administration in London, of what the Indian shareholders knew.

This report concludes:

I have heard nothing of an ad interim Dividend usually declared at this time, and I should not be surprised if no Dividend is declared this year; but this may not be the only loss to which, thanks to Messrs. Judge, Smith & Company, Shareholders may be subjected. I have reason to know the question of a Call has been under consideration. I told Colonel Beadle that if a Call were made I would convene a Meeting of Shareholders in England, and propose that we should wind up the concern.

It is obvious that if we cannot work the concern excepting at a loss, the sooner we get rid of the whole thing the better. I for one am not prepared to sink any more money in the concern or to throw good money after bad.

This report is undated, but as it was an accompaniment to the shareholders' letter dated 8th April 1867 it must by reference to its context have been written in May or June 1866.

The next phase in this indictment of the Board is in a printed letter headed "Statement for the Shareholders of the Assam Company of the Position of the Company and the conduct of the Directors in the management of its Affairs" dated sometime in June 1867 and issued to all shareholders. It appears over the signature of a Committee of shareholders, comprising D. Mackinley, W. Theobald, Joseph Graham, G. Paton and D. Wilson, and was to be used at the Annual General Meeting of 28th June 1867 to assist in determining the course of action shareholders should take at that Meeting. The letter reiterates much of what has been written previously regarding the ruinous state of the Company, but being just that bit later it is able to express its cynicism about the appointment of H. G. Bainbridge as a suitable person to report on the Company's property and of the latter's appointment of A. B. Fisher as the ultimate Superintendent in Assam.

This Committee of Shareholders proposed that at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting R. D. Mangles and Walter Prideaux, the retiring Directors, should not be re-elected—particularly the latter, whom they regarded as peculiarly responsible for past mismanagement.

This threat of direct action by this Committee of Shareholders proved at the Annual General Meeting on 28th June 1867 to be quite abortive. In the presence of the full Board and about eighty shareholders, Mr. Daniel MacKinley proposed as an amendment to the resolution that the Directors' Report be received and adopted that, "The Report & Accounts submitted to this Meeting by the Directors be referred for investigation to a select Committee of Shareholders to report on the same, and that the Meeting be adjourned for 4 weeks to receive their Report. That the
Committee be constituted of the following Shareholders: George Turnbull, John Elliott, W. Theobald, Josuah Jenkins, Dr. G. W. Paton, Joseph Graham and D. MacKinley.”

On being put to the Meeting, the amendment was declared lost, there being fifteen in favour and forty against.

The opposition shareholders having lost their preliminary motion, there was nothing to obstruct the rest of the proceedings, including the re-election of R. D. Mangles and Walter Prideaux, going according to the plan arranged originally by the Board.

Turning to the Company’s affairs in India, the Board having got somebody to inspect and overhaul their properties, they proceeded to put their house in order in other respects.

They gave W. J. Judge notice that his services would be dispensed with at the end of his six months, and he was told that R. S. Staunton’s position as Secretary should be abolished.

The Board were fortunate in getting rid of Judge at such short notice, for he might have insisted on the implementation of the terms of his original engagement as General Manager and Chief Agent. His appointment to that post in June 1864 prescribed that, on his agreeing to “... devote his whole time to the service of the Company and to hold no interest or employment in any other Tea Company, the engagement to be for five years, with power to either party to determine it at the end of the 4th year or by giving one year’s provisional notice.”

For this he was to be paid a salary of £2,500 a year, and he would have to give security in such amount as would be agreed upon.

In Assam, the Superintendent, John Smith, had been given notice of the termination of his services in a letter dated 4th February 1867, but this notice crossed one from John Smith submitting his resignation, which was accepted by the Board subject to the satisfactory adjustment of his accounts.

What the Chairman, H. M. Kemshhead, thought of these two chief officers in India is best conveyed in the following extract from his letter of 3rd November 1866 to W. Theobald:

The fact is that the Agent’s conduct with respect to the Superintendent, no matter whether it has arisen from personal animosity, from want of judgment, or from a desire to shift the odium of failure from his own shoulders, has been such as to give rise to the greatest distrust. He has twice visited our Estates in Assam, once since his appointment as Agent. He thus had the opportunity of making himself thoroughly acquainted with the management and general working of the concern; yet he failed to point out to us that we were not well served, either by our Superintendent or the Assistants under him; nor did he ever suggest that he considered a change of
management desirable until a year ago, shortly after the arrival of the Superintendent in England. On the contrary, he had always led us to believe that Mr. Smith was well fitted for his position, and that it would be difficult to find a man to supply his place.

They next dispensed with the services of Robert Milner, the Senior Assistant, who had been with the Company for twenty-seven years. Milner had proved himself unfit for promotion he having failed in the acting appointment whilst the Superintendent, John Smith, was on leave in England.

To replace Judge and the Company’s office in Calcutta, they considered putting their business in the hands of one of the Agency houses. There had been received applications for the business from three firms, George May & Company; Schoene Kilburn & Company; and Begg, Dunlop & Company. At a Board Meeting on 22nd May 1867, when the matter came up for final decision, it was decided to appoint Schoene Kilburn & Company as their Agents. In selecting this firm the Board were influenced by the strong recommendation of Mr. D. MacKinley, a voluble shareholder in India. These negotiations were effected by the Board direct with representatives of these firms in London. The terms of Schoene Kilburn & Company’s appointment were for one year at £2,500 per annum from 1st July 1867. The Agreement was renewed for the following year at a reduced fixed fee of £2,000, but they were allowed in addition to charge 8s.8 for every chest of tea belonging to the Company received and shipped by them, as well as ¼ per cent. on the Sale of Bills.

In 1869 the Agreement was renewed again, but this time on a further reduced fixed fee of £1,200, the same brokerage on Bills, but the charge for shipping, etc., was reduced to 6s.6 per chest.

On the subject of appointments, presumably to strengthen the Company’s administration, but this time in London, the Board engaged the services of Colonel J. P. Beadle, an officer of the Royal Bengal Engineers. The appointment was made a few months after the resignation of Walter Prideaux from the office of Secretary of the Company and his subsequent election to the Board in place of Captain Andrew Henderson. The office of Secretary in succession to Walter Prideaux did not devolve directly on his understudy, H. W. Wimshurst; although the latter succeeded to the work of Secretary, he was never designated otherwise than Acting Secretary.

Colonel Beadle’s appointment to the London Office was neither one thing nor the other. In accepting his proffered services, the Board announced that he had been appointed in the temporary capacity of Special Secretary to undertake the entire correspondence between this country and India. He was to commit to paper his views on the future.
conduct of the business of the Company, and after that he was to attend the office of the Company two days a week, and for these services he would be paid at the rate of £200 per annum and was to work in personal communication with the Chairman. It is difficult to understand one of the provisos of his engagement, which was that he was to have nothing to do with the London business of the Company.

Colonel Beadle’s appointment was made at a Board Meeting on 12th November 1866. At a Board Meeting on 14th January 1867 he is referred to as General Beadle.

In the shareholders’ criticisms of the Company’s administration referred to above, the appointment of Beadle is condemned in no unmeasured terms as a waste of money, for the shareholders in India were fully aware of Beadle’s capacity from their personal acquaintance with the gentleman, and they could not understand the necessity for his appointment, seeing that there was an Acting Secretary of the Company in London and the late Secretary, Walter Prideaux, was a member of the Board.

This would seem on the face of it a fair criticism from the shareholders’ point of view; it was fortunate for the Board that they did not have to defend in public what does appear to have been an unnecessary addition to the Company’s expenses at a time when it was making such devastating losses. At a Board Meeting on 11th November 1867 there is recorded the fact that General Beadle’s engagement with the Company had expired on 1st November 1867, and as General Beadle had accepted an appointment in India, it is recorded:

... whereupon it was resolved that the Board of the Assam Company whilst heartily congratulating General Beadle on his selection for an appointment in India which they believed to be very acceptable to him, cannot allow themselves to part with him without expressing their sense of the great ability and perseverance with which he has applied himself to the business of the Company; and of the knowledge and experience which he has brought to bear on their affairs.

To turn next to picture what the gardens were like when they did come at last to be inspected, reference must be made to a letter to the London Board of 8th April 1867, from the Committee of Calcutta shareholders, in which they condemn the Board’s choice of Bainbridge to report on the Company’s gardens:

... With respect to Mr. Bainbridge, he is not unknown in India. His success in India has not been in Tea planting. Let enquiry be made by you as to the Lower Assam Company, of which he was the Manager.

His success, we are told, has been rather in the good fortune of taking advantage of the prevailing eagerness some time ago, of the public for tea
speculation, which is precisely the same kind of merit which placed your late Manager so high in your esteem in regard to his operations for the sale of our Cachar Estates. Mr. Bainbridge's experience (it is also considered), does not come down to the present time; he had returned to England to enjoy his fortune; he has ignored all the present available services at command on the spot and is proceeding in the selection of a new Manager without giving an opportunity for competition; he has indeed determined on a gentleman whom he named at the meeting but who is engaged at present.

It is fortunate that the London Board took no notice of this disparagement of Bainbridge, for as events turned out it was wholly unjust.

Bainbridge set about his prodigious task with vigour, and his earliest communications gave the root cause for the deterioration of the gardens as due to long-continued neglect, bad pruning and excessive plucking in the early part of the year.

His official report, a booklet of one hundred pages, was not issued until about a year after he took up the appointment, and after he had made over to A. B. Fisher.

In the meantime, he broke the news of the chaotic conditions with which he was faced in letters to the Chairman, the first of which was one dated 27th April 1867. After announcing his arrival at Nazira, and that he had taken over charge, he wrote:

Affairs are certainly in a very bad state. There is a complete want of system in every department, and the violent changes that have lately taken place have unsettled the minds of Europeans and natives. The other gentlemen who have of late years been deputed to report on the state of affairs have generally done us good here, and their reports give you very little idea of the real truth. . . . As to Mr. Staunton's Reports, I attach no weight to them at all. Coming from a man of no practical experience, you will see how far they strike at the root of the evil as my reports reach you.

Past Management. I think the Board will be surprised to learn that the present system of complete disorder and native dominance dates from Mr. Milner's short reign, and not from Mr. Smith's time. I am no partisan for Mr. Smith. I blame him much but know that Mr. Milner did ten times the mischief Mr. Smith did; he sowed the seeds which afterwards produced such a crop of thistles. He is a man quite unfit for such a charge, half a native himself in feeling, he allowed natives to get the upper hand and he will yet be a source of great trouble to us; he has a bungalow close to Nazira, and he has Gardens close to ours on one side, and Mr. Vangulin on the other, and they have an agent and ally in Mr. Lumpinyoung, whom I have ordered out at once, but as a road only divides us from the Bazaar which is Government property, all the discharged vagabonds have a harbour of refuge close by.
Then again, in a letter dated 11th May 1867, he wrote:

I am afraid you have been horribly deceived in your people. Mr. Judge sat in this house and mostly read magazines, and drew Rs.25,000. Mr. Staunton picked up what he could by corresponding with subordinates and other such dodges, and since 1865 his little game has been to get for himself the Chief Superintendent’s billet. The wheels within wheels I shall hope to expose gradually.

Bainbridge’s Report was printed, but it is not stated to whom it was circulated. One would imagine that it was not made public, for it goes into minute detail of each garden and is such a scathing exposition of mismanagement and neglect. Two excerpts will suffice, however, to give a further idea of conditions:

... The main cause of decay of this Company has been the system pursued with regard to management. This has led to the many and serious faults it will be my painful duty to explain. The cure to be permanent, must be gradual; and I can only ask the Board to be patient in the circumstances, and to support me unhesitatingly in the face of any opposition in the changes I wish to make. It is no case of half measures, and unless the Board are determined to make a complete reform, it were better I should let matters alone. Brilliant prospects, I am sure, are before the Company, if the Board will only consent to my using the surgeon’s knife boldly and determinedly. There is no alternative, I am sure. I do not shrink from the operation so long as I feel sure that the nerve of the spectators will not fail them at the crisis, and make my hand tremble, which might kill the patient.

Staff. There can be no doubt that for many years the Assam Company has been but a halting place and training school for all the fortune-hunters of Assam, who have no sooner learnt or imagined they have learnt, the work before them at the expense of the Company, than they have left the service to establish factories of their own in the immediate neighbourhood, and thus the Company has for years been breeding and nursing a host of future enemies. I attribute this greatly to the mode of payment of employees; the combined salaries and commission amounted to a considerable sum, but the salaries were low and the commission high, and consequently an inferior class of men were alone attracted to the service.

John Smith, after leaving the Company’s service, was still in Assam in 1867. He must have got wind of the adverse criticisms that were being made of his management. There is what appears to be a printers’ proof of a long letter addressed “To those Interested in the Affairs of the Assam Company,” dated from Sibsagar, 16th August 1867. It was a defence against the accusation that he was responsible for the neglect of the gardens. He was able to make replies to some of his critics which would have exonerated him from blame. What the report does reveal, however, is
the hopeless disunity between Judge, Staunton and Smith, particularly in that both men were writing direct to Assistants and subordinate staff behind the Superintendent's back. Smith was devastating in his opinion of the uselessness of Staunton's report.

To implement that part of the terms of his appointment to find a permanent Superintendent, Bainbridge negotiated with Albert B. Fisher to take on the job. The Board accepted his recommendation, and Fisher's appointment was confirmed at a Board Meeting on 8th July 1867.

After Bainbridge's preliminary sizing-up of the position, he and Fisher worked in close collaboration for some time, and it was remarkable with what speed they got matters on to a sounder footing.

It was at their joint recommendation that two important decisions were made by the London Board, as recorded in the Directors' Report of June 1868.

The first was that the Rokung Division, comprising Dubba, Mohokutie, Doomur Dullong and Khoomtai, owing to its great distance from Nazira, could not be worked at a profit, and they suggested the immediate removal of labour from these gardens to those in the neighbourhood of Nazira, and then to sell or lease the Rokung properties. The outcome of this proposal was the leasing of these gardens to Stewart Smith & Company for an annual rent of Rs.2,250. As the Board remarked: "...thus ensuring a profit to that extent instead of a continued drain on our resources."

Nothing is said about whether the Company was successful in removing the Rokung labour to Nazira. If this was accomplished, then even at such a low annual rental the Rokung gardens, denuded of the best of its labour would not seem a particularly attractive proposition.

The second important decision was in regard to what is designated the Durrung Division. The Company's interests on the north bank of the Brahmaputra comprised more than just the gardens associated with Singri Parbut, and for details of this Division reference should be made to the chapter headed "Singri Parbut." It was the joint recommendation of Bainbridge and Fisher that the grants forming this Division should be abandoned immediately.

Staunton's report on the gardens comprising Singri Parbut in 1866-1867 gives a sufficient impression of these scattered bits of tea cultivation that were then in an advanced state of neglect. The position of these properties had been aggravated by W. J. Judge's ill-conceived programme of extensions from 450 to 3,000 acres without regard to the labour position.

In the prosecution of this mad programme of Judge's, thousands of pounds it is alleged were squandered, though no definite proof of the amount so spent is disclosed. It must have been a very unpalatable decision
for Bainbridge and Fisher to make, just to abandon to jungle a property which the Company had spent so much on since its inception when George Williamson selected the site twelve years earlier, in 1856.

There can be no question, however, that this was the right action to take if reference is had to Bainbridge's report to the Chairman of 25th April 1867 regarding Singri Parbut and that it should be closed down forthwith "... as they are not only unpromising but worthless. It will be seen from this how for want of knowledge of the real facts the Board might have been misled by Mr. Judge's Utopian scheme for the expansion and sale of these properties."

The London Board had made to their shareholders so much of their expansion of area under tea as the means to more profitable trading that it was anathema to them to have to accept such an abandonment, but it may be that in their acceptance of this recommendation they were influenced by a recent change in the Rules governing land tenure.

As the outcome of the wild speculation in tea, and the applications made by speculators for grants of land far in excess of their immediate requirements, the situation developed that when many of these nebulous companies went out of business during the slump of 1866-1867, Government were faced with the fact that they were without the revenue from a vast area of land although they had received the deposits made with the original applications.

In an endeavour to rectify the position, an order was passed that purchasers of land under the new Rules be permitted to give up land they no longer required and consolidate the payments already made on the lands they desired to retain. To the extent that deposits made on vast areas of land on the north bank could be set against the Company's applications for more grants in the Southern Division, it might have been possible for the Company to have retrieved something from the consequences of total abandonment.

For the Company this was the end of a highly unsuccessful venture.

There is a report by A. B. Fisher dated 8th May 1868 which was printed as part of the Directors' Report for that year. It was written to alleviate the Board's possible alarm at the marked decrease in crop in the early months of the year. It was part of his policy of bringing the gardens back to get new growth on the bushes before plucking; in fact, he re instituted the sound agricultural methods introduced by George Williamson, Junior, twelve years earlier.

He pointed out that the previous severe plucking produced so much red leaf in the finished tea that it had to be thrown away; that in fact he would by his more lenient methods of plucking produce a greater quantity of marketable tea from the lesser weight of green leaf.

In this report Fisher mentions the first use of the Kinmond Rollers,
which were so successful. He refers also to what at that time was most important, the improved morale amongst the staff, who were then working together in the interests of the Company.

Whilst under Bainbridge and Fisher the Company’s properties were being resuscitated, the Board had to face their shareholders with an account of trading losses. The Company had made a loss in 1865 of £2,736; in 1866 £32,243; and in 1867 £15,448.

In their Report to shareholders at the Meeting on 29th June 1869, the Board were able to report that the working of 1868 had resulted in a trifling profit of £584. This was enough to give the Board the necessary confidence, and on the assumption that no material alteration would take place in the market value of the tea in London, they declared:

We think that with the crop of 1869, the unfortunate difficulties and losses with which we have had to contend will have been fully overcome, and as an earnest of our confidence in this proving to be the case, and in anticipation of the results, we do not hesitate to propose an Interim Dividend at the present time of 2½% on the Paid-up Capital, and that the same be payable on the 20th July free of Income Tax.

Whilst the Board had thus this wonderful confidence that the Company had turned the corner already, there were shareholders who questioned the wisdom of such precipitate anticipation, and at the Annual General Meeting on 29th June 1869 Mr. Daniel MacKinley moved as an amendment to the passing of this dividend that it was contrary to Law to declare dividends except on actual realised profits. His amendment was negatived, however, as were other amendments from the same party regarding the re-election of the Chairman, H. M. Kemshead, and other Directors.

It is instructive to read the Minutes of this Meeting in so far as they relate to the endeavours of the outside shareholders to displace by their own nominees those Directors already on the Board. These outside influences had apparently inveigled H. B. Bainbridge, who had by that time concluded his connection with the Company, and William Maitland, at one time a Director of the Calcutta Board, to put forward their names as substitutes for William Prinsep and the Chairman, H. M. Kemshead, whom they wanted to oust from office.

It is possible that by similar lobbying by the Board both Maitland and Bainbridge withdrew their names as candidates, and to the discomfiture of the outsiders the original proposals for the re-election of the existing Directors were passed.

At the Annual General Meeting on 29th June 1870 the Directors were able to announce that the working of 1869 had resulted in a profit of £23,342, and they paid a final dividend of 3½ per cent., making 6 per cent. for the year.
These dividends absorbed £11,229, and the balance was retained against the losses incurred up to 1867.

The Board recognised that much of the change in the fortunes of the Company were due to the exertions and skill of their able Superintendent Mr. A. B. Fisher.

The Superintendent had been able so to accelerate the despatches of tea from the gardens that practically the whole of the crop of 1869 had been disposed of in London before the closing of the Company’s accounts for the year. It was the first time in the history of the Company that this had been achieved, and it was made possible no doubt by the use of the Suez Canal, which had been opened in 1869, and by the fact that steamers were then plying more regularly between Calcutta and London. The result of the working of 1870 was a profit of £43,342, out of which they paid an interim dividend of 5 per cent. and a final of 10 per cent. making 15 per cent. for the year.

A summary of this period, 1866-1870, which concludes thirty years of trading, represents a most remarkable five years in which the Company faced again, as it did in 1846-1850, utter ruin and the possible winding-up of its affairs. The difference in the two periods was, however, that in the former it was occasioned by ignorance and extravagance, whilst in the latter, given the downward impetus of the defalcations of Mackey and Carter to start the ball rolling, the crisis was caused by the culpable neglect of cultivation in Assam and inefficiency or ignorance, or both, in the conduct of affairs from Calcutta.

Whilst this was the case with the Assam Company, one must keep in perspective what was happening elsewhere. The company most comparable in point of age and development was the Jorehaut Company, and in its History (p. 67) is recorded the fact that “the effort to increase throughout the Company both the crop and the area under tea had been accomplished at the expense of proper plucking, manufacture and adequate cultivation of that tea.”

This goes to show that other established companies were affected equally by this insatiable urge to expand beyond their capacity to maintain these new extensions with the labour available. The Jorehaut Company was just fortunate in having William Roberts to visit its gardens in 1867-1868 and to stop the rot.

The result ultimately of all this was that the Jorehaut Company had one disastrous year of loss, in 1866. The Assam Company was three years before it returned to a dividend-paying basis.

Owing to the method of keeping accounts in the earlier period as between Calcutta and London, it is not possible to arrive at figures of cost of production and realisations.

There was a period in the early 1850’s when the estimated cost of
production of the tea packed at Nazira is given as from As.3 to As.6 per lb., but it is impossible to say what this did or did not include in the way of overheads or cost of landing the tea in Calcutta or London.

With the disbanding of the Calcutta Board and the concentration of the accounts in one Annual Report issued by the London Board, more tangible figures of costs and realisations became available. It is known that when the slump in the auction price in London brought the average selling-price down to 1s. 0½d. per lb. the Company’s cost of production in 1865 was 1s. 10¾d. per lb. In 1869, when the Company had turned the corner again and was making profits after three years of heavy losses, the cost of production had been reduced to about 1s. 4½d. per lb. and the auction price was about 1s. 9d. per lb. In those years everything was paid for out of Revenue, and the figure of 1s. 4½d. per lb. included the cost of three engines, two rolling-machines, a tea drier, pulleys and shafting, as well as a sum of £4,300 for recruiting 726 new coolies. The latter representing a cost at the garden of about Rs.65 per head, a figure that was remarkably low considering that the Company had to maintain its own recruiting agents at such places as Govindpore, Khustea, Ranchi, Purulia, Midnapore, etc., for this was twenty years before the inception of the Tea District’s Labour Association for recruiting labour through garden Sirdars.

In A. B. Fisher’s report of 1868, quoted above, there is reference to the use of a rolling-machine at Ligri Pookri. In its brevity this reference is rather a disappointment. This is the machine invented by the Company’s own engineer, Kinmond, and represents the first successful application of mechanics to the manufacture of tea, but there is no specification of it. Only the following somewhat vague description of the machine is available from the History of the Jorehaut Company.

The leaf is rolled between two large metal plates, the effect of the motion being nearly identical to that of hand rolling, whilst the machine can be worked either by steam power or by bullock or pony. A machine with two pairs of plates will roll 20 maunds of leaf per day, whilst one with 4 plates will do double that quantity.

The weight of the machine for every pair of plates is 8 maunds. The size of a 4-plate machine is about 16’ long, 5’ broad and 4’ 6” high.

A two pairs of plates machine is estimated to save the labour of 30 men daily.

Fisher’s Report tells us that the first machines used by the Assam Company were driven by animal power. It was soon afterwards, however, that 3-h.p. steam engines and boilers were sent out from home to provide the motive power.
CHAPTER XIII

1871-1880

In this chapter, and those that follow, the development and history of the Company is recorded in periods of ten years. The running of tea companies had become commonplace, and the Tea Industry had expanded until the total imports of Indian tea had risen to over 40,000,000 lb. a year.

For the Assam Company, the pioneering days were behind it, and after its disastrous troubles of local mismanagement had been overcome, its recorded Minutes of Board Meetings are confined largely to accounts of the crops produced, sale prices, costs of production, profits and dividends. There was henceforth less intimate material on which to write a story.

From the inception of the Company, what would have been designated "Authorised Capital" had stood at 10,000 shares of £50 each. The shares issued had for many years stood at £20 paid up.

This meant that existing shareholders carried a liability of £30 per share. At the express desire of shareholders, at Special Meetings convened for the purpose and after the usual protracted negotiations, an Act of Parliament was passed in 1876 authorising the reduction of the liability attaching to the shares from £30 to £10, which made the Authorised Capital 10,000 shares of £30 each.

For many years the rate of exchange between India and London had remained fairly static round about 2s. to the rupee. As the rate of exchange fell below its par value, the Company benefited, and from a modest £2,135 in 1871, the profit from this source rose until in 1878 it reached £17,483.

Another extraneous source of income was from the sale of tea seed. Whilst in the 1860’s, when the Company did decide finally to sell its seed and made considerable profit, this source of income virtually disappeared with the slump of 1865 and the years immediately following.

With the revival of the tea market and the great expansion of tea planting, the demand for tea seed improved, and by 1871 sales of seed gave a profit of £1,496, which rose, however, by 1876 to £10,089.

In this ten-year period the Company showed satisfactory trading with some large profits, and dividends ranging from 7 per cent. to 35 per cent., and this in spite of wide fluctuations in the price realised for the Company’s teas at the London auctions.
In 1879, when the Company's average price had dropped to 1s. 5d. per lb., the Directors explained that the decline was due not only to the excess of supply over demand for Indian tea but that it was due to the general trade depression at that time which had reduced the purchasing power of the people.

Against this low average price, the cost of production in India was 1s. 2½d. per lb., and when to this was added the cost of bringing the teas to London and expenditure in London on new machinery, etc., there was actually a loss. The position was saved, however, by the proceeds from the sale of tea seed and the profit on exchange, the latter in that year amounting to not less than £17,481.

The Board were always optimistic of possible results, and in this year they had declared an interim dividend of 10 per cent. When the Accounts for the year were finally closed, they found that they had to dip into their Reserves to the extent of nearly £4,000 to make up the difference between the actual profit and the amount of this dividend.

In 1880 the same thing happened. The average market price went even lower, to 1s. 1½d. per lb., and although the cost production in India, with a bigger crop, had been reduced, there was again a loss, but by taking in £4,638 from tea seed, and £15,166 the profit on exchange, there was an overall profit of £13,177.

A dividend of 7 per cent. was paid, which absorbed all the profit but £76.

It would seem that this paying away of the whole of the profit in dividends was imprudent, particularly when, as did happen, the Company paid interim dividends and was caught out at the end of the year with insufficient income to meet them. But, on the other hand, all Capital expenditure was being met out of Revenue.

The gardens of the Rokung Division were still being rented from the Company. In 1871 the Board received by cable from some unnamed party in Calcutta an offer to purchase the Mohokutie Garden for £1,000. This offer was declined.

In 1875 A. B. Fisher, in a private letter to the Chairman, H. M. Kemshead, put forward a proposal made to him by John Phillips, his second-in-command, to take over the Rokung Gardens at a valuation which he, Phillips, would run as a separate entity though continuing as part of the parent Company. This proposal was turned down when Fisher disclosed that he would only continue as Superintendent for another three years and that he was proposing to recommend that John Phillips should succeed him.

With these gardens off his hands, Fisher was able to confine his attention to the home gardens nearer to Headquarters. His policy during
these years was to concentrate on the renovation of existing areas, though some new clearances on a moderate scale were made.

It is to Fisher’s credit that he undertook this irksome and unspectacular work that much increased costs without any corresponding increase in crop, but how essential it was can be gathered from the fact that over the whole 5,300 acres under tea it was computed that there were not less than 20 per cent. vacancies, and what is more, what tea there was, was in a sadly neglected condition.

It was a long, slow job, and even after Fisher retired in 1876, the good work was carried on by his successor, John Phillips.

This programme depended for its success on the acquisition of more labour, and to accomplish this vital object the Company extended its recruiting operations in spite of the keen competition from all quarters, for it was everyone for himself. There was no central recruiting organisation. The Company was assisted to some extent by the inauguration at that time of the system of giving a bonus to any labourers who on completing their three-year contract, agreed to sign on for another term.

The accounts show that in this intensive recruiting campaign the expenditure rose to as much as £17,775 in 1878. This included the re-engagement of old labour and the sum of £6,787 on maintaining their depots in the recruiting districts outside Assam.

In such a time of prosperity in the industry, pretty well everybody had embarked on similar campaigns to increase their labour force, and there is no doubt that abuses did creep into these operations under keen competition between the genuine Sirdari recruiter sent down from the garden and the Arkutti or local contractor with his unscrupulous Agents, who were ever endeavouring to entice the new recruits from the garden Sirdar, if they did not actually pimp them.

The cumulative effect of these operations in the recruiting districts meant that there must have been thousands of coolies in transit daily to Assam during the season, chiefly by the river steamers and flats, and competition for deck space for these human cargoes was keen, with the result that the over-crowding made conditions of travel for these people appalling.

Such conditions came eventually to official notice, and Government had to step in and take action to control this traffic by legislation.

The Board did not view this legislation in the light of a beneficent Government remedying what had amounted to a public scandal, but resented it as an official encroachment on what they regarded as their rights, and in the Report for 1873 they voiced their disapproval:

... and it does appear unfortunate that Government and the officials should be so desirous of interfering and interposing new rules and regulations to the prejudice of all parties interested.
A new Coolie Act has just been passed, some of the Clauses of which we are informed, the officials themselves find it difficult to understand. Fearing that this Act, if in force, might interfere in the future with the recruiting of coolies, we encouraged the Agents to take advantage of large numbers offering their services during the past cold weather, to engage a greater number than was applied for by the Superintendent.

In spite, however, of any difficulties of competitive recruiting or Government legislation, the Company succeeded in filling its requirements of labour. Judged by the extent of recruiting operations and by the standard of housing demanded for labour in more recent times, it is remarkable how it managed to provide the accommodation on the gardens for upwards of 2,000 new labourers recruited in one season, though it is true that in those days bamboos and thatch for houses were both cheap and plentiful.

Taking advantage of Government Regulations, the Board decided to redeem lands held under the old rules of 1854. This was put into effect locally, and in 1876 it was recorded that a total of 10,310 acres had been converted to Fee Simple Grants at a cost of £4,500. The Company was fortunate that it took advantage of this regulation when it did, for Government decided shortly afterwards not to sell any more land under Fee Simple.

There was the very rare occurrence at the end of the cold weather of 1878-1879, when the Dikhoo River dried up to the extent that it became unnavigable even to the smallest boats for carrying tea. It was said that the phenomenon was due to an excessively dry period. At that time there was still a large proportion of the 1878 crop waiting for transport from Nazira to the Brahmaputra, a distance of twenty-five miles. This was a tedious and difficult task which was duly accomplished, however, with only a little damage to some thirty-five chests. The incident did not, however, unduly delay the disposal of that year's crop in London.

There were several changes in the London Direction. In 1872 Sir Henry Byng Harrington, K.C.S.I., died, and his place was taken by Mr. William Maitland. In 1873 Sir William Tite died and Dr. Alexander Beattie was appointed.

In the same year William Prinsep passed away. He had been associated with the Company since its inception. He was Chairman of the Calcutta Board, and in 1841 made the first visit to Assam of anyone connected with the Direction of the Company. He joined the London Board in 1842. Major-General James Pattle Beadle succeeded him.

In 1876 Ross Donelly Mangles retired on account of ill health and Mr. George Paton was appointed in his place.
In 1878 H. M. Kemshhead tendered his resignation because of his advancing years and failing health. He had been a Director for thirty-two years, out of which he had served thirteen years as Deputy Chairman and fifteen as Chairman. A. B. Fisher, who had been the Company's Superintendent in Assam, was appointed in his place.

In 1880 William Maitland resigned and Mr. Augustin Robinson was appointed in his place.

With the retirement of H. M. Kemshhead, Walter Prideaux, the Deputy Chairman, took on the Chair, and at the Annual General Meeting in 1880 the other Directors were George Turnbull, Deputy Chairman; Alexander Beattie, M.D.; Major-General Beadle; Albert B. Fisher; George Paton, M.D.; and Augustin Robinson.

In regard to the Company's Auditors, it would seem to have been the practice to appoint two or three individuals to this office, one of whom was a permanent official. The two Auditors in 1871 were James Carson and Samuel Stephen Bankart. When the former died in 1872, Bankart carried on alone for a short period. Thereafter it became the practice to invite one of the shareholders to become the second Auditor. In this way Dr. Alexander Beattie was appointed in 1872, he being a shareholder of long standing and experience.

When Sir William Tite died in 1873, Beattie was appointed to the Direction in his place. The vacancy thus caused in the Auditors' office was filled by Dr. George Paton, one of the largest shareholders.

When R. D. Mangles retired in 1876, Dr. Paton was made a Director, and Augustin Robinson (another large shareholder) accepted the vacant office of Auditor. In his turn, A. Robinson was made Director in 1880 when William Maitland resigned.

The Directors' action in thus electing shareholders to Auditor and then promoting them to Director was criticised adversely at the Annual General Meeting in 1880 by Mr. William Maitland and C. B. Denison, who were then two shareholders but who became Directors subsequently.

From 1871 there have been preserved the verbatim Reports of the Company's Annual General Meetings, which were held first at the Terminus Station Hotel, Cannon Street, and subsequently at 5 Laurance Pountney Hill, E.C. These proceedings were taken down in shorthand by a representative of the Money Market Review, and were transcribed in manuscript, the hand-writing of which at times was none too good.

These papers give a remarkable insight into the tenor of these proceedings, and besides giving such incidental information as that in 1871 Income Tax was raised from 4d. to 6d. in the L., that the Company's shares in 1846 could be purchased at 2s. 6d. each, and that in 1875 they were worth L.53 to L.54 for a L.20 paid-up share, though with a
liability of another £30 call, these Proceedings are like reading a page from Dickens.

The speakers, and there were usually several, adopted the Parliamentary form of address by referring to “My Honourable Friend who last spoke. . . .” Speeches were freely interpolated with requests for a patient hearing. . . . “Gentlemen, I have no desire to detain you, but before I sit down I have one further observation to make. . . .” and they went on for another page or two of manuscript. The Address from the Chair commenced invariably with the observation that all material matter with reference to the year’s working was in the printed Report and what the Chairman would have to say was merely in amplification of that Report. But the remarks at some point or another degenerated into a comparison of the present time with the disastrous results of twenty-five to thirty years previously. The shareholders were appealed to from the Chair to express their satisfaction with the results and with the dividend which it was proposed to pay, which accompanied almost a challenge for anyone to show that the Report was not an honest and straightforward one with no secrets to hide. It is to be remembered that this was at a period of considerable prosperity, and no doubt such appeals for the shareholders’ commendation and the reiteration of the honesty of the Directors’ Report was an endeavour to get for the Board some compensation for bitter and nasty things which must have been said of them in previous years, when losses were being made.

Reading through the speeches made by shareholders, and divesting them of their eloquence, it is noted that on the whole they are not adverse criticisms of the Board, though the Directors obviously took them to be that, but quite simple enquiries, such as why was it necessary to spend so much on new buildings, and the need for new and larger engines each year for the previous three years, and when was such heavy expenditure going to stop. But they never seemed to get a straight answer. The Chairman or Deputy Chairman, at that time respectively Kemshead and Prideaux, probably did not know, and their replies were therefore evasive. But they seldom referred such matters to A. B. Fisher, the late Superintendent, who was on the Board then, and could have answered in detail.

In answer to an enquiry at one Meeting from a shareholder regarding a recent increase in salaries and commission to the European staff, the Chairman emphasised that it was essential to have good men and for them to be contented in their jobs, otherwise they would go elsewhere. And he added “Shareholders must remember that the Company is dependent on its staff in Assam, who work for us 14,000 miles away.” He must have calculated the distance via the Cape.

One shareholder in a somewhat felicitious mood, when seconding
the re-election of one of the Directors, George Turnbull, gave rein to his eloquence in the following terms:

I second that with great pleasure. I have enjoyed his acquaintance for some years, and his Indian character is too high for anything which I can say to enhance it. I was glad to see that Mr. Turnbull, when in India, approached so near our plantations as Calcutta, and it would be well to know how much benefit we derived from his appearance in Calcutta. It is a pity that circumstances prevented him from proceeding to the Gardens. I hope next time he will reach Assam.

This shareholder was unaware that at Calcutta the worthy Director was still some seven hundred miles from the Company’s gardens. Except for a general discussion of Company matters with the Calcutta Agent what beneficent influence on the Company’s affairs the Director’s visit to that city could have had is left to the imagination! Nobody attempted to rectify the good gentleman’s small lapse in geographical location.

Mention has been made already of a presentation to the Chairman, H. M. Kemshead, in 1871 of a sum of £250 as a token of the shareholders’ regard for his long direction of the Company’s affairs. It was left to him to select the form in which this presentation should take. Kemshead was most flattered and gratified with this recognition of his work on behalf of the Company, so much so that at the Annual General Meeting in June 1782 he brought the present to the Meeting and exhibited it on the table for all to see. As an example of the Dickensian oratory of the period, it is worth quoting the following effusion which he uttered on that, to him, most memorable occasion:

Well, Gentlemen, permit me in the first instance to refer back to our breaking up this time last year in this very room. Just at the moment of our breaking up, you were good enough to do me the honour of the very great favour of voting a testimonial to me, for services which you believed, though I did not, I had performed for the benefit of this Company. Gentlemen, I have thought it would be pleasant to you, having so voted the testimonial, that it should be present on the present occasion, and I have had it brought here from my house to this table that you may inspect the same. As a work of Art, I cannot doubt for one moment that every gentleman in the room will be pleased with it; as a presentation to myself, I am greatly more than pleased with it. Because it is so flattering to my feelings that I do assure you, there is no part of my life which I can recall with a greater satisfaction than that of having received this testimonial from your hands. I receive it, I have received it, with the more satisfaction because I believe, (yes, I am vain enough to believe,) that it has been honestly deserved, and if I did not think so, pleasing as it is to me, I would not accept it. Gentlemen, it is most gratifying to myself and pleasing to me, both to receive it as a work of Art, and to receive it as a testimonial of your satisfaction that I have done a fair duty towards this Company.
So much verbiage, but no enlightenment as to what the article was! Kemshead, the Chairman, had been a Director from 1847 and became towards the end of this period very garrulous in his address to shareholders, harping back rather pathetically to what good work he had done, but never with a vestige of a constructive policy for the future. Though it is not known how old he really was, he must have been of a venerable age, for he never failed to refer in his annual peroration to his old age, his infirmity, deafness and to his hope that he would be spared to attend another Meeting.

He was astute enough to know, however, that he was then dealing with a period of prosperity such as the Company had not known previously, and taking advantage of these circumstances he took the risk, against his own desire to remain in the Chair, of inviting the Meeting to accept his resignation in favour of a younger man. The shareholders were replete with a full dividend, and amidst cries of “No, No,” they pressed his re-election to the Chair. That was in 1876. Two years later he had to give up after the Meeting of 1877, at which he took the Chair but was too ill and feeble to address the shareholders. Walter Prideaux doing it for him. He resigned finally in 1878, and Prideaux was elected Chairman in his place.
Walter Prideaux, Chairman, 1878-1887.
CHAPTER XIV

1881-1890

These were years of profitable trading with dividends varying from 25 per cent. in 1881 to 7 per cent. in 1888, giving an average over the ten years of 12 per cent.

The crops of tea produced were consistently over 2,000,000 lb. a year, with a maximum in 1890 of 2,731,179 lb. The average prices realised on the market varied between the wide range for those days of 1s. 4d. in 1881 to 11d. in 1889. The decline in the market price was due to increased supplies from both India and Ceylon, and it is noticed in the Company's Annual Reports at that time that special reference is made to the rise in imports from Ceylon, the production from which country was by then mounting and making its weight felt.

In an endeavour to counteract the heavy weight of tea going on to the London market the Company turned its attention to effecting direct sales of its teas in Calcutta to America and Australia. Between 1882 and 1885 these direct exports varied between 16,200 lb. and 78,200 lb. The price obtained for these direct sales was not more than could be obtained on the London market, which was perhaps a little over 10d. ex Calcutta, but the Board seemed so grudging of the quantity to be offered to these valuable out-markets, and the Agents were instructed to offer not more than 2 or 3 per cent. of a year’s crop.

With the setting in of what looked like more permanent and profitable trading, made possible largely by the introduction of machinery which had reduced the cost of production, the Company started on a programme of further extensions, and commencing in 1886, a total of 1,689 acres had by 1890 been added to the cultivated area. The distributable profits of the latter years of this period had declined not only because the market price of tea had fallen but extensive expenditure on new machinery and steel buildings was still being met out of Revenue. The Board realised that if shareholders were to have a fair return on their money by way of dividends they could not in addition meet from Revenue the cost of these considerable extensions, and they decided to depart from their usual practice and pay for these out of Reserve, or, as they put it, the cost of these extensions would justify their paying some part of the annual dividend out of Reserve, and in fact, in 1887, £1,657 was taken from Reserve to make up the sum required to pay the dividend of 10 per cent.; and again in 1889 the sum of £954 was taken to maintain that year’s dividend of 10 per cent. Up to 1880 the Capital of the Company
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had included as a separate item the sum of £6,177, 10s. being the amount forfeited on 419 shares. In 1881, this was transferred to the Reserve Fund.

At a Special Meeting in 1887, it was resolved to apply to Parliament to have the Capital altered, so that the shares would be £20 each fully paid and thus eliminate the liability of a further call of £10 each the shares then carried.

At the same time the Company was empowered to raise money by borrowing up to £50,000. The requisite Act was passed in 1888 and the Accounts for that year show the Authorised Capital as 10,000 shares of £20 each, and the Issued Capital as 9,358 shares fully paid, giving a Capital of £187,160.

In regard to the administration of the Company’s affairs from Calcutta, a Minute of July 1888 records that one of the Directors, William Duncan, and the Secretary, H. W. Wimshurst, had been in communication with Jardine Skinner & Company about the Company’s Agency in India. That firm was prepared to undertake the work on the basis of a commission only on the proceeds of tea, and that they would conduct the required direct communication with the Managers of the several gardens.

It is not clear from which side these proposals emanated, but nothing further is mentioned about any change in the firm of Agents.

At about this time the name of Schoene disappeared from the designation of the Company’s Agents in Calcutta, and it became Kilburn & Company, as it is to-day.

There followed the Company’s negotiations in London with Mr. E. D. Kilburn and his partner, Mr. Brown, regarding the revision of the terms for their services in India and for a considerable increase in the scope of the work they were to do for the Company. The outcome of these negotiations was that Kilburn & Company would engage the services of a gentleman with practical experience to visit and report on the gardens; that three such inspections should be made each year, and one of these visits should be made by the partner of the firm. The then existing monthly remuneration it was agreed should not be disturbed, but that all the other work and extra responsibility should be rewarded by “... a Commission on the sums paid to the shareholders as Dividend at a rate to be mutually agreed.”

The Agreement was proposed for a term of three years from 15th November 1888.

The clause under this arrangement which provided that at least one of the visits each year should be made by a partner was hotly disputed. Kilburn & Company considered that such a stipulation was unnecessary. Whilst it was obviously very inconvenient, and though they pleaded that the partners were busy men, the Board were equally insistent that this
should be one of the terms of the arrangement. Kilburn & Company went so far as to say that this stipulation might make them have to give up the Agency. Nowhere is it stated why the Board were so insistent on this inspection by a partner. The partners of the firm were good businessmen, but that did not imply that they were the most competent to deal with the very detailed administration of tea gardens. However, the clause was allowed to stand.

John Phillips’ services had been terminated in November 1888, and under this new arrangement it fell upon Mr. Brown, who had by then returned to India, to take over the administration of the gardens from him.

On the recommendation made by Mr. Brown on this visit, the Board decided to appoint from 1st January 1891, Mr. J. P. Dunne as “the Company’s Local Agent in Assam at a salary of Rs.1,000 a month.” Thus they did away with the office of Superintendent and in his place appointed what appears to have been a liaison officer between the Calcutta Agents and the Board in London, for J. P. Dunne’s duties were thus specified:

Mr. Dunne’s functions are to extend to general matters outside the particular work of the Divisions and not to extend to any interference with the particular work of any Division or factory.

Mr. Dunne will be at liberty to report to the Agents and to the Board, and to be ready at all times to answer the enquiries of the Agents and to carry into effect their orders.

This J. P. Dunne had been engaged in Calcutta in 1868, by whom it is not stated, but presumably by the Agents, as a Second-Class Assistant, and was posted in the first place to Mackeypore. He served on various gardens for the next eight to ten years with apparently normal efficiency, though reading his record of service as given in the old Establishment Book it would seem that he was more noted for his many applications for an increase in salary, which were refused invariably by the Board, than for any great administrative ability.

To turn to matters concerning the local management of the gardens prior to the incidents related above, in 1882, the gardens suffered severely from hailstorms at the beginning of the season, the effect of which were felt still a year afterwards. In 1883 there occurred at the height of the manufacturing season a severe epidemic of cholera which decimated the labour force and interfered seriously with cultivation and tea making. This occasioned considerable expenditure having to be incurred during the next two years to the tune of over £9,000, to recruit new labour and replace the casualties from this epidemic. It would seem that in those days,
labour in the recruiting provinces was abundant, and any number could be obtained if one was prepared to spend money to import them into Assam.

In reading the Company's Minutes and the Director's Reports at this period, it is somewhat confusing to come across a new Division of the gardens referred to as Satsoeah, Gelakey, Cherideo and Rookang Divisions, with Gabroo Parbat by itself.

The scheme was formulated no doubt in accordance with the Board's proposals that the properties should be divided up and put under certain Managers who would have more responsibility in direct communication with the Board. This was before the above-mentioned arrangement was made with Kilburn & Company.

In 1886 the Board were disturbed at the decrease in crop in that year and that of the previous year. The Superintendent, John Phillips, had explained the shortage in 1886 as due to lack of rain in the early part of the year and to cool weather during July, August and September; to finer plucking; and to the necessity for easier treatment of the bushes at all gardens to enable them to recover lost vigour; these causes being especially applicable to the gardens of what he describes as the Satsoeah and Gelakey Divisions. The Superintendent predicted that this more lenient treatment of the cultivated areas would produce good results in 1887, both in quantity and quality. The Board were not satisfied, however, with these excuses, and they told the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting in June 1887 that they had come to the conclusion that considerable changes were necessary in the working of the Company, and that they had under contemplation a scheme for its reorganisation.

Unfortunately for the Superintendent, his prediction of better results in 1887 did not materialise. The production in that year showed a further decline, and although the average price obtained for the teas was 1d. per lb. more than in 1886, this was as much due to the better market than to improved quality. The Board were now sceptical of the efficiency of John Phillips' administration. In their Report to the shareholders at the Annual Meeting of 1888, they explained the poorer results as due to unfavourable climatic conditions, to finer plucking, and to "... cutting down of such bushes of the oldest gardens as required complete rest and renovation."

The doubts that the Board entertained regarding Phillips' efficiency led them to move at a Meeting in March 1888 a Resolution to the effect that "... Having regard to the unsuccessful results and character of Mr. Phillips' administration during recent years, it is not in the interests of the Company to renew his appointment as Superintendent on the expiry of his present engagement."

A. B. Fisher, perhaps not unnaturally as he had recommended Phillips
for the job, moved an amendment to retain him in his post, but in any case the question of the retention of his services could be postponed until May the following year. With the casting vote of the Chairman he got his amendment accepted.

In 1888 Douglas Newington, their senior Manager, was on leave. He had been with the Company since 1874 and had acted as Superintendent during John Phillips' leave in 1884.

He was asked by one of the Directors, Dr. George Paton, for a short report giving his opinion why the Company's out-turn had shown a steady decrease for some years past. His report is dated 4th July 1888, and the following extracts from it are revealing, assuming they are not biased, of some of the conditions which existed on the Company's gardens:

In my opinion there is only one cause, and that is from the hurried transplanting that was done in a very wholesale manner in the following years, 1872-1875. I am in a position to prove to you that this statement is correct, as I have often (to satisfy myself) had some of these plants taken up, and found in many cases that the tap root, instead of going straight down into the soil, had bent round, and which no doubt owing to being delicate, was unable to penetrate the hard ground below, so naturally this formed into lateral roots.

It is unreasonable to think that after the plant has been roughly dealt with in its infancy, that you can renovate it when it has attained the age of 16 years. I feel certain that pruning will never make them strong, yielding plants. In fact, I have seen many that have been cut down, and in return they throw up nothing more than thin bushy wood, not having the strength enough to do more.

A large proportion of these plants, which were put out 15 or 16 years ago are no bigger than a two-year-old stunted seedling. They are unhealthy in the extreme, and no style of pruning will improve them.

You must also bear in mind that the vacancies in the Company's gardens at one time amounted to at least 30%, and I feel sure off this area the yield is not more than 40 lb. per acre.

I contend that the soil in the old Gardens is not worn out. This I can prove as a percentage of the original plants remain which are still strong and healthy.

The Board may have been influenced by this in their final decision, but the Report reflects adversely on A. B. Fisher, who was Superintendent in some of the years to which his report relates.

As recorded above, Phillips' services were terminated eventually in November 1888.

As affecting Gabroo Parbut, the offer was received from Alexander Lawrie & Company in 1889 to purchase the small out-garden of Moogri Mukh for Rs.10,000, which offer the Board, however, refused. This property was wanted as an addition to the Jhanzie Tea Association's
gardens, which were in that neighbourhood. The offer had emanated probably from Henry Earnshaw, who had been in the Assam Company's employ and had subsequently joined Balmer Lawrie & Company in Calcutta, who were Agents for the Jhanzie Company.

There were again many changes in the Direction during this period, though more particularly in the latter half.

Dr. Alexander Beattie died in 1883, and out of the list of five names of gentlemen qualified by their shareholding, and who had expressed their willingness to serve, the Board elected C. B. Denison, a gentleman who had an intimate knowledge of Indian business. Mr. Denison, however, died the same year, and after reconsidering the same list of candidates, the Board elected Joseph Graham, Q.C., in his place.

In 1887 Walter Prideaux, the Chairman, retired on account of his failing health and impaired sight. He had served the Company for forty-eight years, from the date of its inception, as Secretary, Director, Deputy Chairman and finally as Chairman. His resignation was much lamented by his colleagues. His long service constitutes a remarkable record of unswerving loyalty. When the Company was on its beam ends, he cut his own remuneration and lent it money from his own pocket. He upheld the Board in all their actions against the adverse criticism of disgruntled shareholders. Walter Prideaux was deprived, however, of enjoyment for long of his well-earned retirement, for he died in 1889.

George Turnbull was elected Chairman in place of Walter Prideaux, and A. B. Fisher Deputy Chairman. At the General Meeting of June 1887, when the above appointments were confirmed, the Board announced that to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Walter Prideaux they had appointed H. W. Wimshurst to a seat on the Board as Managing Director in addition to his office of Secretary.

In extenuation of Mr. Wimshurst’s elevation to the high office of Managing Director, and perhaps in view of the fact that he had never visited India (though he nearly did so in 1867, but funkled the climate at the last moment), it was explained in the Directors’ Report that apart from his service of twenty-one years as Secretary in London, these services “... have been of no ordinary kind, owing to his special knowledge and ability in regard to machinery, which is now the life of all our factory operations. . . .”

In 1887 Augustin Robinson died, and William Duncan, a shareholder of long standing and with large mercantile experience, was appointed in his place.

William Duncan’s appointment was only made, however, after some controversy. There were two candidates for the vacancy: William Duncan, proposed by Joseph Graham; and Henry Earnshaw, proposed by
A. B. Fisher. Henry Earnshaw had been in the London office and had been sent out to Nazira in 1867 as Accountant. He went over to the planting side, and after leaving the Company’s service in 1879 was Superintendent for a time of the Noakachari Tea Company Limited and was subsequently in Balmer Lawrie & Company’s office in Calcutta.

Fisher advocated his appointment on the grounds of Earnshaw’s value as an Accountant and his ability in organisation, but Graham, in a letter which was recorded as a Minute in the Board’s Proceedings of 19th March 1888, refuted the need on the Board of any further person with accounting ability or of that organising talent which Earnshaw was said to have. What seemed, however, to have angered Graham as much as anything else was the fact that whilst the controversy was going on, Earnshaw, in anticipation of his appointment to the Board, acquired the necessary twenty-five shares to qualify him as a Director—he having previously only held three shares.

In 1888 George Turnbull and Dr. George Paton died.

Joseph Graham was elected Chairman in place of George Turnbull; in recording his vote in favour of the election of Graham, General Beadle stated that he did so because, in his opinion, the Chairman of the Company should be a Member of the Board resident in or near London. This was to remove any possible stigma attaching to the fact that A. B. Fisher, Deputy Chairman, was thus passed over, for in the usual course of events, he would have been voted to the higher office. Fisher lived at Devizes, in Wiltshire. No appointment was made in place of Dr. George Paton, as it was considered that five Directors were a sufficient number. In 1889 William Duncan died and Frederick Tendron, lately Auditor to the Company, was appointed in his place.

A notable event during this period arose out of the resignation of Samuel Stephen Bankart in 1890, who had been one of the Company’s Auditors since 1863, by the appointment of Deloitte, Dever, Griffiths & Company to be the Company’s Auditors, which firm hold that office to-day, though since 1905 in the name of Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths & Company. The appointment of this firm did not do away with what was considered, apparently, a further safeguard or confirmatory Auditor representing the shareholders, and to this office J. A. Crookenden was appointed. The office of Auditor was not a very highly paid one, for the firm and the individual divided £40 between them.

In April 1885 the Company moved its office from East India Avenue to Suffolk House, Laurence Pountney Hill, where they are to-day. The first lease of these premises was for a period of seven years at a rental of £300 a year for six rooms.

The Annual General Meeting of 29th June was held at the Company’s own offices instead of as formerly when they were held at the City
Terminus Hotel, Cannon Street. In 1893 business facilities advanced a step with the installation of a telephone at a yearly rental of £20.

In 1882 some shareholder had heard a rumour about the construction of a railway in Assam, and at the General Meeting he asked for information in a provocative question to the Board, that, "We have not heard anything from General Beadle about the Railway." The good General, a late officer of the Royal Bengal Engineers, was acquainted probably with many railway projects of the Government of India, and was delighted at this opportunity to ventilate his knowledge of his subject, and with railways in mind he emphasised naturally the necessity for coal, of which the Company possessed some valuable coal-bearing lands:

I was in hopes the thing would have escaped notice, for I really know very little about it. The Government did project a Railway which would have brought it down to our central factory and gone near our coal fields. We were then very busy making extension roads to the coal field and that scheme fell through. The Government then accepted a scheme which was proposed by some gentlemen in London, for a Railway Company in Assam which was to start from a very high point in Upper Assam and go through China. It was to be about 75 miles long and run to the coal fields which are known to produce the best coal in India. This Company has lately as I understand, been in treaty for purchasing the steamers plying on the Indus. They are getting a flotilla from the Indus which they will place upon the Assam rivers. They will first carry up the Railway, and afterwards do their best to destroy competition on the River as well as they can and promote trade in Assam. The Government have not given a guarantee, but a subsidy of about Rs. 100,000 only to help receipts when they do not rise to a certain point. But what the Company really stand upon are the coal measures, which are no doubt excellent. We hope it will come near our coal, which I believe is superior to any found in India.

To his listeners, the General's reference to a railway into China and a flotilla of steamers from the Indus must have been very confusing, even if they did attempt to understand what he said, but with knowledge of what was going on then it is possible to interpret what appears at first sight to be such nonsense. The reference to a railway "going down to our central factory" was probably a survey for extending the projected Dibru-Sadiya Railway from Makum or Ledo, which may have been abandoned in favour of the Assam-Bengal Railway route upwards via Nazira to Tinsukia, which was not built, however, for more than ten years later.

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Commencing in 1889, the Company instituted a case against one of its Assistant Managers, Charles Cromwell Bush. It sued him in the Sibsagar Court for breach of contract with damages, and for an injunction against his acquiring certain lands in the vicinity of the Company’s garden.

It was a stipulation in every employee’s original agreement that he should not apply for or take up land whilst in the employ of the Company under pain of instant dismissal. On agreeing to serve a second and any subsequent period of five years or so, an employee did not sign a fresh agreement, but by letter he accepted the revised terms of salary, commission, allowances, etc., and it was an understood thing that the clauses and stipulations of the original agreement still applied.

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There were two areas of land concerned in this case. One was an area of 589.70 acres adjoining Suntok which Bush had applied for but which the Company was able to show it had made application for previously, and had in fact already started to plant out. The other and far more important grant was 695.90 acres adjoining Gelakey and Atkhel, which lay between Bamon Pookrie and what was subsequently Lakmijan. It was the land which now forms the Behubor Tea Company Limited.

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CHAPTER XV

1891-1900

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It says something for the improved finances of the Company that even in time of a low-level record for the price of its teas in London the Company was able to balance its trading accounts instead of suffering a severe loss.

There were factors which operated against the Company in these years which had been in its favour previously in augmenting its profits.

With the decline in the price of tea at the London auctions, other companies had curtailed their extensions of tea areas, and in consequence the demand for tea seed had declined, until by 1899 income from this source had almost ceased from a previous average of some £2,000 or £3,000 a year. In the matter of exchange, the Government had stepped in and fixed the rate at 1s. 4d. to the rupee. The market for the commodity itself had gone the wrong way. The demand, even at the lower price, was for common tea, and the better-quality teas which the Company endeavoured to produce were at a discount.

The total crop produced went below the 3,000,000 lb. only once, and that was in 1892, whilst it exceeded 4,000,000 lb. in 1900 for the first time. Considerable areas of new tea were put out, for the total area under cultivation increased from 8,000 acres in 1890 to over 11,000 in 1900. The Report of 1897 recorded severe hailstorms that did much damage to Mazengah, Ligri, Pookrie Mackeypore, Bamon Pookrie and Suntok, causing the loss of at least 240,000 lb. of crop. This loss, however, is not apparent in the final crop for the year because of the increased area of young tea coming into bearing at other gardens.

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The Company's own big increase in crop of over 1,000,000 lb. during this period contributed no doubt to the overweight of tea which depressed the market, particularly during the latter years. Whereas in the previous
ten years the average price realised had varied between 1s. 4d. and 11d. a lb., in this period it never rose much above 1s. 0\(\frac{1}{2}\)d., and in 1900 reached the then record low level of 8.15d.

In 1900 the Annual Report records the very disturbed and unsettled condition of the market from various causes, which operated unfavourably for most tea companies but which affected more particularly the producers of the higher-class teas which the Assam Company has always produced. These marketing conditions at this end of the period offset the increase in crop and reduction in expenditure which the Company had succeeded in effecting.

In 1897 there occurred the severe earthquake which caused such devastating damage in Shillong and affected even more severely other districts outside Assam. It did a certain amount of damage to the Company's buildings, but it was not so extensive that the necessary repair could not be met out of Revenue.

In local administration, the demand continued for more and more new labour, particularly for the considerable programme of new extensions which had been embarked upon and which were then coming into bearing. It is noticeable that with the greater facility with which new labour could be obtained, less prominence is given to its supply in the Company's Annual Reports.

The Report for 1894 mentions, however, that a large increase in the supply of new labour had been effected at a considerable reduction in the cost per head, which improvement had been gained by a reconstruction of the system of recruiting.

The tenor of this statement might lead one to suppose that it was a reorganisation of the Company's own system of recruiting labour, whereas it was due to the inception of what is now the Tea Districts Labour Association. This Association was formed in 1892 with the object of taking over the various recruiting agencies and depots which had been set up and maintained previously by each Agency house or company, in competition with each other.

It was anticipated that if all orders for labour were given to the Association, coolies could be obtained at less cost than by individual effort, and that the contractors supplying them could be made to work in conditions which would check materially the competition which then went on between garden Sirdars and Arkutties. The Association controlled first both the operations of garden Sirdars in the recruiting districts and the acquisition of labour from contractors or Arkutties. The latter were gradually eliminated altogether, and recruiting of labour was confined solely to garden Sirdars. It is evidence of the success of this organisation that it is the only source to-day from which the whole of
the Tea Industry obtains its labour from provinces outside the tea-producing areas.

The previous chapter records the arrangement made with the Agent, Kilburn & Company, to administer the gardens by other means than through the Superintendent, or senior experienced officer at Headquarters. This arrangement, whereby J. P. Dunne was the Company's Local Agent in Assam, did not last out the year. Dunne submitted his resignation in August 1891, on account, it is said, of ill-health, but there was a hint of some mismanagement. It is true that the Company had experienced costly and bitter disappointments in some of its Superintendents. After the years of sound management under A. B. Fisher, their being let down again by his nominee, John Phillips, influenced the Board to try these other means of running their gardens.

Over many years, not only the Assam Company but other large companies have tried various forms of local administration. Besides the system this Company tried out, there have been local Committees of three or more senior Managers who were supposed to confer and formulate the local policy for all gardens, but for various reasons (chiefly disagreement amongst themselves) this system broke down in practice. Administering each garden individually under its own Manager left too much to the individuals' interpretations of instructions, which gave inconsistent results over the Company as a whole.

Experience has shown, therefore, that there is no better solution to local administration than through one senior and experienced planter at the head of affairs with the requisite organising ability.

In 1892 the Board reverted to the latter system and appointed James Sortain Hulbert to be Superintendent, but it is from this date he received the designation of General Manager, which the Company's Chief Officer in Assam has been called ever since. J. S. Hulbert was engaged in London in May 1892, on a three years' agreement, and took over charge in November of that year. His previous experience had been as Manager of the Upper Assam Tea Company Limited's gardens. He served out his three years and in 1896 his brother Frederick E. Hulbert, was appointed General Manager on a five years' agreement.

The Annual Report of 1892 states that it was found during the previous year that part of Satsoeah Division No. 2 (about 500 acres), was "... not sufficiently productive to be worth incurring the continuous and increasing expenditure of cultivation; it has therefore, after a careful investigation, been left alone for the present and the labour force on that part of the Garden has been employed in opening out the same area of Bamor Pookrie in an adjacent tract of fine land."

At this date Satsoealh No. 1 comprised Ligri Pookrie and Mazengah,
and No. 2, Bamon Pookrie and Mackeypore. Those 500 acres of abandoned tea were at Mackeypore.

This system of putting two gardens together and calling them Satsoeah Nos. 1 and 2 is confusing, as no date is assigned to when this was done, and it is only by a process of deduction that it is possible to be sure which garden is meant.

It is not until the Directors’ Report of 1893 that there are given any figures of each garden’s acreage, etc.

Bamon Pookrie is not mentioned as a garden in this first statement, but in that for 1893 it is shown as having 589 acres planted and in 1894 as having 35 acres in bearing which yielded a crop of 45,438 lb. (a rather questionably high yield for those days of nearly 1,300 lb. per acre from three or four-year-old tea!).

Mention has been made in the previous chapter about an offer from the Jhanzie Association in 1889 to purchase for Rs.10,000 Moogri Mukh, the outgarden of Gabroo Parbut. This offer was refused, but negotiations were reopened and in 1891 this small property was sold to the Jhanzie Association for Rs.15,000.

At the same time as this sale was transacted, the Company purchased from a Mr. Buckingham the small garden called Amalguri, near Mohokutie, for Rs. 10,000. This property was said to comprise about 110 acres of tea together with a grant of 700 acres of land. The seller in this transaction must have been James Buckingham (later Sir James), who was at that time Manager of Amgoorie Tea Estates, and this would appear to have been a deal on his own account. The similarity in name of his property and that of the gardens he managed was only a coincidence.

Between 1891 and 1900 there was only one change in the Board of Directors. In February 1900 H. W. Wimshurst died and James Sortain Hulbert, the late Superintendent, was appointed in his place as a Director, and he took over also the office of secretary.

Isaac A. Crookenden, joint Auditor with Deloitte, Dever, Griffiths & Company, resigned and his son, C. P. Crookenden, took his place.

The Assam Company, through all the years of its existence, has been noted for its independence in all matters relating to the Industry as a whole and for taking unilateral action in spite of the consensus of other opinion. The Indian Tea Association had by 1894 been in existence for some time, and in that year a scheme was propounded for advertising Indian tea in America, sponsored by the Tea Cess Committee and eventually by the International Tea Market Expansion Board; but in a Minute of July 1894 there is recorded the Assam Board’s decision, “... that
it is not for the interests of the Company to support the present scheme or to reconsider their former decision to that effect."

The matter was pressed again by the Indian Tea Association in 1896, but with the same effect, that the Board adhered to their former decision that they were not in a position to subscribe to the Fund.

The Board were not allowed, however, to refuse to join in this attempt at concerted action by the whole Industry to foster new markets without opposition from their shareholders.

At the Annual General Meeting in June 1897, after the Chairman (on that occasion the Deputy Chairman, A. B. Fisher) had expressed the Board’s conviction that no form of advertising in the U.S.A., unless it was backed by vast sums of money, which the Tea Industry could not possibly afford, would ever greatly influence the market in that country, a shareholder, Mr. Bulloch, pressed for a consensus of opinion amongst the shareholders present at that Meeting whether, against the expressed views of the Board to the contrary, a Resolution should not be passed that the Company ought to subscribe to the scheme, which was backed by the Indian Tea Association and to which all other producers had contributed.

The Board resented this suggested incursion on their prerogative to administer the Company’s affairs as they thought fit. As they had not received notice of such a Resolution, they refused to allow it to be put to the Meeting, but there were other shareholders who supported Mr. Bulloch in his contention, and in the circumstances the Board could not do otherwise than agree to “take the matter into consideration.”

Before the year was out the Board had agreed, obviously with reluctance, and on further representations from the Indian Tea Association they said they would contribute their mite of £200 to the American Market Fund, but even then with the reservation that they would exercise their judgment as to any future subscriptions.

It was the same in 1896 when the Indian Tea Association put forward their proposal for the employment of a scientist to enquire into the agriculture of the tea plant and its pests and blights, the outcome of which was George Watt’s _Pests and Blights of the Tea Plant_, published in 1898 and the forerunner of the present-day Tocklai Scientific Department. When approached on this subject, a Minute of 6th July 1896 is in the following terms:

> It was resolved that the Board do not feel called upon to subscribe to the proposed salary of the suggested appointment of a scientific officer to advise on matters affecting blight and the manufacture of Tea.

In the Chapter dealing with the years 1881-1890 there is recorded the arrangement made with the Calcutta Agents, Kilburn & Company, that
they should assume a greater degree of responsibility for the running of the gardens, under which one of their partners was to visit the properties at least once a year. This arrangement did not last for long, but there has been preserved a report, dated 15th March 1892, of a visit paid to the gardens by one of the Partners, Mr. William Henry Cheetham.

The preliminary to this report mentions Mr. Cheetham’s indebtedness to all the officers of the Company for their cordial assistance and hospitality in his enquiry, but more particularly to Mr. Walling, for the inconvenience he suffered by placing his elephant at Mr. Cheetham’s disposal during the period of his visit, without which “. . . it would have been impossible for me to get round the Company’s property with despatch and comfort. . . .” Henry Walling was senior Manager in charge before the appointment of J. S. Hulbert as General Manager.

Cheetham’s report concludes with the following comment:

The state of cultivation in this Company’s gardens compares favourably with that of other properties through which I passed. The Tea Houses were all upset by the annual overhaul of machinery, and in some cases by extensions and I was much impressed by the amount of work which the Managers have to get through in the off season. I hope that this may be reduced in the future, and that it may not be necessary to transfer machinery from one garden to another to the extent which has hitherto been done. I very much question whether the apparent economy is really attained in the long run.

With regard to prime movers and speaking with a long experience of such matters, I am sure that the Board in sanctioning 16-h.p. engines are acting with admirable prevision.

Smaller engines cannot be made to govern satisfactorily, and before they can be controlled by hand, put a great strain on themselves and the machinery in motion, and very wasteful as regards fuel, a consideration of increasing moment.

The concluding remark regarding waste of fuel should be considered in conjunction with the fact that the Company was able then to obtain its coal from its own “quarry” in the Naga Hills and land it at a place like Suntok for 3 annas a maund.
CHAPTER XVI

1901-1910

In these years the market price for tea dropped to the lowest it had ever been, especially for the better medium-quality teas such as the Company produced. It was remarkable, however, that the cost of production was cut down to a figure that even with the market price at its lowest point, a profit was made and a dividend paid.

After the poor trading result of 1900, this period opened with a profit of £16,267 and an increased dividend to 7½ per cent. Over the whole period profits were made, rising in 1909 to £45,648, and dividends were paid varying from 5 per cent. to 12½ per cent. with an average of 8½ per cent.

The most remarkable accomplishment was the reduction in the cost of producing the crop.

The chief factor contributing to this was the annual increase in quantity, which rose from under 3½ million lb. to over 5½ million lb. This meant a rise in out-turn of tea per acre from 4 to over 7½ maunds per acre, which was a high figure for those days, from an area of some 10,000 acres mostly rather old tea, which had received none or very little manure, and that only oil-cake.

Taking the year 1904 as an example, when the price realised was the lowest at 8-02d. per lb., the cost was 7-46, which included all London charges, Directors' fees, etc., and the upkeep of immature areas plus 93 acres of new clearances.

The result, on a margin of .56d. per lb., was a profit of £9,010 and a dividend of 5 per cent.

In the 1905 Report, the Directors, referring to the low price in the previous year, attributed this to the fall in the market and to increased taxation. This had nothing to do with Income Tax, of either the buying public or of the Company. Income Tax was based on the average profits of three years, and in 1905 the total tax paid by the Company amounted to only £770, which would be at the rate of about 1½. 1d. in the £.

What the Directors referred to as tax was the Tea Duty, which in 1905 was 8d. per lb., it having been increased from 4d. at which it had stood before the Boer War, and which was a heavy burden on an industry experiencing a slump.

As the outcome of the campaign of the Anti-Tea Duty League, which was sponsored by most sections of the Industry, the duty on tea was reduced in July 1905 from 8d. to 6d., and subsequently in 1906 to 5d.
per lb. To this first reduction in the duty was attributed a welcome though relatively small improvement in the market price of tea, particularly for the better-class teas.

Starting in 1906, first of all to provide for the planting out of Lakmijan, all new clearances were charged to a "New Extension Fund," which was opened by an appropriation of £10,000 from the profit of that year.

In the same year, the Board announced at the Annual General Meeting their intention to underwrite all its Fire and Hail Risks in India and one-third of the Marine Insurance. The premiums which would otherwise be payable in respect of such risks, together with interest on the sums set aside, would be appropriated to augment these funds.

The Company adopted also a policy of strengthening its financial position in the latter years of good profits by appropriating large sums annually to these Reserves, which it kept under their separate headings, and by 1910 it had no less than six headings of reserve: a General Reserve; New Extension Fund; Dividend Maintenance Fund; Marine Insurance Fund; Hail Insurance Fund; and a Buildings Insurance Fund, aggregating a sum of £103,782 against a then subscribed and fully paid Capital of £200,000.

From 1901 to 1910 there was a boom in rubber, and perhaps to a lesser extent in other tropical crops. Always on the lookout for a subsidiary crop to tea, the Assam Company embarked, as did other tea producers, like the Jorehaut Company, on putting out rubber. The Assam Company included sisal hemp in its experiments with other crops. With the latter crop it was hoped to utilise abandoned tea areas or land considered unsuitable for tea. It was found, however, that the Company’s soil was unsuited to the cultivation of hemp, and it gave up this attempt. The planting out of rubber was proceeded with, though it was found that neither Para nor Casteloa rubber would grow to advantage so far north of the tropics, and it confined its experiments to Ficus Elastica. This was not apparently a very ambitious venture. Progress with planting out did not go beyond a few thousand trees.

The published Reports from these years did mention that negotiations were in train to sell the Company’s coal property, which is referred to as at Borjan. Up to the end of 1910 these negotiations had been abortive. It was not until the latter years of this period that the Board had a proper report and valuations of their property, made by an expert mining engineer, and were able to appraise the value of what they had to offer. Pending conclusion of negotiations for sale, the Board did consider developing the property on their own account, and in 1903 they had a survey made for a railway line from Suntok to Borjan or Naginamara.
It was a landmark in the history of the Company that in this period they embarked on the planting out of Lakmijan. It was a notable event also that in July 1906 they acquired Tingalibam. This latter property, which had at that time been in the agency of Begg, Dunlop & Company of Calcutta, was purchased for £15,466. It comprised 578 acres of tea in full bearing, with 2,237 acres of land adjoining the Company's Towkok Division.

It was decided to spend a further £2,500 on additional equipment for this factory, making the total cost of the property £18,000. The purchase price was added to Block, and to meet this addition it was decided to readjust the Capital by issuing the balance of 642 unallotted shares. In 1907, 521 of these shares had been applied for and allotted at £32, 1s. 10d. per share of £20.

In 1908 the balance was allotted at £32 per share, bringing the Capital of the Company to the fully authorised amount of £200,000.

Local Administration in Assam was in the hands of Frederick E. Hulbert, brother of J. S. Hulbert, until he retired at the end of his agreement in 1903, when he made over to R. N. Farquharson as General Manager.

The principal policy followed in this period was one of abandonment of old and uneconomic areas and their replacement with new clearances.

The magnitude of this task can be gauged best by quoting the tea areas as they were in 1910, when out of an area of 8,060 acres of tea 25 years of age or older, 3,253 acres had been abandoned and replaced with 6,381 acres planted after 1886. This gave a total area under cultivation of 11,188 acres, including the acquired garden of Tingalibam and the newly planted area at Lakmijan.

As a step towards that economy in working and reduction of costs of production in which the Company had been so successful, some gardens which had been worked previously as separate units were amalgamated and put under one management. In this way Ligri Pookrie was in 1901 amalgamated with Mazengah; in 1902 Atkhel was absorbed into Gelakey, and the former name as a garden disappears.

In 1904, Dhole Bagan was included in Cherideo, and the amalgamated Gardens were known as Cherideo.

There is no explanation, however, why in 1910 the name of these two Gardens was changed in the Company's records to Dhole Bagan, and the name of Cherideo as a Division of the Company disappears from that date.

Considerable attention had been turned to the question of plucking and manuring. Although the market demand during more than one
year had been for common tea at the expense of good medium quality, the Board, left to themselves, would have continued their policy of making good tea. It was in 1899 or 1900 that, no doubt under pressure from the opposition at General Meetings, they gave way to a demand that more of the "commoner sorts" should be produced and gave instructions to the General Manager accordingly. This did not give the results expected, and in 1902 their fine plucking was reverted to, though in this they did try an experiment in the other extreme direction, but found that ultra fine plucking did not pay either.

From comments at General Meetings it can be established that what was called "fine plucking" was the plucking of two leaves and a bud taken at 7 days old, and the coarser plucking was 10 to 12 days leaf, taking the third leaf when available.

The Industry was in 1901 much concerned with the question of over-production, and various schemes to adjust supply to demand were considered. One was to stop plucking for three weeks in July. Another, which seems to have been agreed to, was to reduce the current season's (1901) total estimated crop by 7½ per cent. It is not certain that this scheme was ever implemented.

The question of manuring was a very controversial one. The question arose through a shareholder quoting the district of Cachar, where in 1884 some manuring of tea had been done, with good effect, but the Board as a body was against the use of manure, alleging that the Assam Company's soil was not worn out, and that even the oldest bushes still flourished.

By 1902, however, a certain amount of "top-soiling" had been done, 600 acres that year and 2,600 acres altogether to that date. This was digging out the top soil from bhils or swamps and applying it as fresh top soil round the bushes. The material for this operation was not readily available in all gardens, and it was expensive in labour. By 1904 the supply of this bhil soil was becoming exhausted, and the Company reverted to manuring on a modest scale with mustard oil-cake, with an expenditure on this item of £2,493. By 1905 oil-cake had been applied to 3,600 acres of the better portions of the older tea—the Company total area being then some 10,184 acres.

The Board had been converted from their previous conviction that manuring was not necessary by it being pointed out to them that compared with the practice of 20 or 30 years previously, when the plucking round was from 10 to 12 days, the strict plucking of 7-day leaf was exhausting the bushes unless they were manured.

The advent of the Assam-Bengal Railway had enabled oil-cake to be obtained from oil-mills in Lower Assam at a cheaper rate. The cost of oil-cake was reduced further by the Company installing a crushing-mill
of its own, getting local Indian merchants to supply the mustard seed, which the Company crushed and gave the mustard oil to the merchant as his part of the transactions and retained the oil-cake.

J. S. Hulbert visited the gardens in the cold weather of 1903, and again in 1910, when he found everything in good order, and, although copies of his reports are not available, it is evident from the tenor of the Directors' Proceedings that what was accomplished at the gardens, by the control of expenditure and the replacement of worn-out tea, showed that the local administration was on sound lines. In between these two visits by a member of the home Board, the estates were inspected twice by Mr. Archibald Grey, who was for nineteen years Superintendent of the Doom Dooma Company and subsequently a Director of the Pabbojan Tea Company Limited.

His appointment to report on the Company's gardens was made to meet the agitation from shareholders that the Company's properties should be inspected by an independent experienced planter. According to a statement at the Annual General Meeting of 1906, his first report was printed and circulated to all shareholders, but a copy is not now available. From the same source it is possible to glean that what Grey had to say was all quite satisfactory, and he confirmed the policy of replacing as soon as possible, old, uneconomic tea with new clearances, or replanting.

The completion of the Assam-Bengal Railway came as a great boon to the Industry, not only by reason of the accelerated communications it provided within the province itself and with Calcutta, but the opening of Chittagong as a seaport for direct shipment of teas to London was a big step promptly taken advantage of by tea interests, and in 1904 the whole of the Assam Company's produce, except the gardens of the Rookung Division, Mohokutie, Doomur Dullong and Koomtai, who continued to use the river service to Calcutta, was despatched by this new route.

To the Company's individual advantage at this time was the completion in 1903 of the Assam-Bengal Railway's branch line from Nazira half-way to their colliery, the terminus of which was eventually to be Naginamara.

In 1902 the Direction was depleted by the deaths of Joseph Graham, K.C., and General Beadle. A. B. Fisher was elected Chairman in place of Joseph Graham, but had to retire in 1906 on account of failing health. He died in 1907. His place as Chairman was taken by Frederick Tendron. James F. Remnant, M.P., was appointed as Director to fill the vacancy. In 1910 F. Tendron died and Arthur R. Prideaux was elected Chairman. E. A. Goulding was appointed to the Board in 1906. James S. Hulbert retired from the office of Secretary to the Company, but was persuaded to carry on as Managing Director. Henry de Russett, who had been
many years in the Secretary's office and had lately been Assistant Secretary and Accountant, was promoted to Secretary.

The Annual General Meetings of this time were notable for the stormy atmosphere in which they were conducted, due to the destructive criticism of the Company's administration by one shareholder and the manner in which he voiced his views. This shareholder was T. G. D. Reed, the holder of three shares, and an ex-employee of the Company (1862-1885).

A few brief facts regarding him are necessary to understand the peculiar and at times almost offensive tactics he adopted to obstruct the proceedings at Meetings. After an altercation with the Superintendent, then John Phillips, he left the garden without giving notice. He sought an interview of the Board in London, at which he made, from a written statement, certain accusations regarding the management in Assam but refused to give the Board his written account for them to investigate unless his demands for compensation were first complied with. He then applied through his solicitor for reinstatement in his old position with the Company. This was refused. He then instituted a case against the Company, claiming compensation. His case was compromised and settled out of Court.

Reed started his campaign of vilification in 1887. This, one could say, was a foretaste of what was to come. To begin with, there were years when he was not recorded as present at the Meetings. This can be accounted for by the fact that he was part owner, and for some years Manager, of the Nahortoli Tea Estate. He had little to say in the early 1890's when things were going well. It is suggested that it was not until he had disposed of his interest in his own garden to the Anglo-American Direct Tea Trading Company, and had retired from India, that he was able to devote his whole time to his obsession for harassing the Assam Company, and in this he took the opportunity of making it the more effective, as he thought, when trading results were on the decline.

It was an unwritten law at General Meetings that a shareholder was only allowed to speak once. If he tried to do otherwise, he was called out of order. Reed's method of attack was to read a long written statement containing screeds of questions and criticisms. Once another shareholder was able to butt in on this diatribe after it had had a fair run, the first speaker was supposed to consider he had had his say. But Reed was aggressively persistent, and disregarding all forms of recognised procedure insisted on proving his points amidst cries of "Order" from all sides of the room, and in spite of requests to the Chair from other shareholders that "Mr. Reed be no longer heard."

There is no denying that there was justification for some of Reed's criticisms, but by his method of attack he never gave an opportunity for
them to be taken into consideration. George Seton was another voluble critic who tended to support Reed in some of his remarks, but this was only at a few Meetings, after which Seton was as bored with Reed’s obstruction as anyone else. This went on year after year, becoming a notorious and embarrassing feature of the Company’s General Meetings. Neither the Directors nor the shareholders could apparently do anything about it. Reed had every right as a shareholder to attend the Meetings and to ask questions. The way he did it was indefensible, but it satisfied his obsession to be as offensive as possible.

In 1905 Reed was joined by L. A. L. Evans, another disgruntled ex-employee, who spoke in criticism of the Company, but being less persistent than his fellow-planter, he was silenced by the Chairman’s retort that the Board refused to recognise attacks on the Company by ex-employees. This had no effect on Reed, however, whose subsequent conduct brought that Meeting to an uproar. Once on his feet, nothing would deter Reed from reading his interminable criticisms amidst shouts of “Sit down,” “Shut up”—he merely raised his voice louder and louder and continued his reading. The Board just disregarded him, and succeeded in passing all the resolutions necessary to complete the business of the Meeting.

The Board in their exasperation sought legal advice in an endeavour to suppress Mr. Reed’s activities. This had been suggested to them by the general body of shareholders, but it was no good, for nothing within the Law could modify a shareholder’s right to speak at Meetings. It has to be remembered that in the meantime Reed had pestered the Company’s London office with requests for detailed information, quite irrelevant to the conduct of the Company’s business at General Meetings, and had been refused.

After the uproarious Meeting of 1905, Reed was quite unperturbed by the rebuffs he received from all quarters, and these included some of his brother shareholders who had formerly supported his criticisms. A justification Reed once gave for his attacks on the Company was that he was an “independent” shareholder, and took upon himself to represent the views of other shareholders who would not voice their dissatisfaction themselves. Reading through the hundreds of pages of Reed’s addresses at Meetings over a long period, and eliminating his references to personalities, the basis of all his criticism was that the Company spent far too much money on recruiting new labour, for the number it already had was far in excess of requirements; that it should employ Kachari labour; the Company would save thousands of rupees if it would cut its own box planking, with the machinery he alleged it possessed, from the inexhaustible supplies of timber existing in its own forests at its very doors; that it should grow its own rice instead of buying it; that the system of fine
plucking was ruinous and would end eventually in the exhaustion of the bushes and the soil.

In addition to his harangues at Meetings, Reed in 1906 printed and issued to all shareholders voluminous circulars, to counter which the Board had to publish their replies. Copies of these circulars are not available, but that such were issued is mentioned in the Company’s Proceedings.

The Annual General Meeting of 1908 must have had a humourous trend, for Reed adopting his usual tactics of reading his long screeds of criticisms, the whole Meeting of shareholders and Directors just left him to it whilst they carried through the normal procedure. Reed only interrupting his reading to record his one dissentient vote against every resolution, and in the end the shareholders stole out, the Directors retired, and left Reed pouring out his criticisms to an empty room.

In 1909, Reed adopted the same procedure, but on this occasion, after giving him ten minutes, two shareholders took the law into their own hands and threw him out, or, as recorded in the verbatim report, "ejected him from the room."

One would have thought that, discredited by his own side, shouted down and thrown out of Meetings, Reed’s ardour for continuance of his futile campaign would have been damped, but not a bit of it. Though his tenacity was worthy of a better cause, he continued his senseless obstruction.
CHAPTER XVII

1911-1920

Tough not in chronological order, the story of Mr. Reed and his impact as a shareholder on the history of the Assam Company's General Meetings must be concluded briefly.

The main theme of his harangue at the Meeting of 1911 was that the Company should grow its own rice and not have to import it to sell it at a loss to the labour. Going into considerable detail as to how this could be done, he concluded his remarks by saying, "... The smallest number of people required to make a commencement is two—a man and a woman."

This evoked much laughter from the assembled Meeting, which incensed Reed, who thereafter became just rude and was threatened again with ejection from the Meeting by the shareholders.

Reed was not present at the Meeting in 1912, and there were marked expressions of relief by shareholders that in his absence the Meeting had passed so peacefully.

In 1913, Reed resumed his criticism, this time on the cost of recruiting new labour, especially the cost of Contractors' labour as opposed to recruiting through the Company's own Sirdars.

There were other shareholders who asked questions to which the Chairman made due reply, but Reed's dissertation had not been answered, and he drew the Chairman's attention to this omission.

At the General Meeting of 1914 Reed abstained from criticism and actually seconded the vote of thanks to the staff.

He was not present at the Meeting in 1915, and the Proceedings were conducted in an atmosphere devoid of friction.

The conclusion of Reed's campaign of vilification came in 1916, and when his turn came to speak, he opened with a declaration that his name was Thomas George Dodson Reed, "the resuscitator of the Assam Company." On this occasion, he harped back to all that he had said since 1903. In spite of cries from those present that he be no longer heard, and the passing of a resolution to that effect, he insisted on his rights as a shareholder to speak, but it is evident that he sensed the antagonistic atmosphere around him, and exclaimed at last, "... All right. I will stop. Because I shall be chucked out if I talk any more, as I was in 1910."

The Board were remarkably tolerant, and endeavoured to get him to be constructive to the extent of seconding resolutions to which not even he could have any conceivable objection.
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It was not until this final Meeting that the Board revealed that though Reed had only three shares and was entitled to speak as a shareholder, he had in fact no vote, for in the Company's constitution no shareholder with less than five shares had a vote at General Meetings.

The climax to this nearly thirty years of persistent obstruction with all its exasperation to the Board came towards the end of 1916, when there is recorded in a Minute dated 23rd October the receipt of a letter from Mr. T. G. D. Reed asking the Directors to grant him an annuity.

Reed must have really believed that in his long-drawn out campaign he had been doing the Company a service, otherwise how could he have had the nerve to make such an application. It is surprising that the Board acceded to his request, by the grant of £10 a year payable in weekly instalments.

The amount of the gratuity is not of so much importance, though it would have been a generous act on the part of the Directors to grant anything to one who had been such a pestilence to them for so long, and in granting it they refrained from any recriminations. It was given merely "... in view of his present needy circumstances, and the fact that he is an old servant of the Company."

The administration of the Company's affairs in London in this period was carried on under the influence chiefly of the First World War. With the exception of 1920 they were years of profitable trading, with dividends ranging from 12½ per cent. to 25 per cent. including the bonus. In 1915 a profit of £105,626 was made, the highest ever made up to that date.

A change was made in the method of paying the dividend. Up to and including 1909, dividends were paid free of tax. In 1910 it was paid less tax at 1s. in the £. In 1911 it rose to 1s. 2d. until 1914, and then with the outbreak of war it increased in 1915 to 1s. 6½d. and mounted during the three years and after—1916, 2s. 8d.; 1917, 4s. 6d.; 1918, 5s.; 1919, 5s. 9d.; and in 1920, 6s. in the £.

In 1913 the sale of the Company's coal property was concluded, negotiations regarding which had been going on for fifteen years. It was sold to the Nazira Coal Company Limited, a Rupee Company formed in Calcutta under the Agency of Shaw, Wallace & Company. The terms were: a cash payment of £1,000; £5,000 in fully paid-up shares in the new Company, and the Assam Company's requirements of coal were to be supplied at a special price below the prevailing market-rate. This was to effect considerable economy compared with getting its coal from other collieries in Upper Assam.

In 1914 a shareholder, G. O. Bellewes, put forward a proposal to increase the Directors' remuneration by allowing them in addition to their
fees a percentage on the profits. Due notice of this resolution was circulated with the Report, and on this occasion proxies were issued also.

The proposal came at a time of prosperity when a profit of over £65,000 had been made and a dividend of 15 per cent. plus a bonus of 5 per cent. had been declared.

The additional remuneration proposed was not likely to be attained easily, looking back on past results. It was 5 per cent. on the profits when they exceeded £30,000 and a dividend of 15 per cent. had been declared, but only on the amount of profit in excess of £30,000.

At the General Meeting on 22nd June 1914 the resolution was the subject of quite heated controversy, in which not less than half a dozen shareholders took part, and several amendments were proposed. It was contended that no amendments could be moved because the general body of shareholders, and particularly those whose proxies lay on the table, would not know what they had voted for. After the matter had been fully ventilated in this protracted debate, it seems that they got to the position when there was no alternative but to vote on the original resolution. In the end the motion was carried on a show of hands, thirteen in favour and eight against, the proxies not being used.

With the rising difficulty of financing the Company's operations under war-time conditions, the Board, at the General Meeting in 1915, took powers to borrow in excess of the maximum of £30,000 which was the limit prescribed by their Act of 1888.

There was the chaos created by the operations of the German cruiser Emden in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, when it was such a menace to merchant shipping, together with its audacious shelling of Madras. It was destroyed by H.M.A.S. Sydney off the Cocos Islands.

These operations, together with the sinking of the ships City of Winchester and Diplomat with the loss of 6,000,000 lb. of tea in these two ships alone, together with others, created a shortage and the market rose very high. The lack of steamers from Calcutta and Chittagong caused a prodigious hold-up of tea at these two ports.

In the Company's bound volumes of Annual Reports there is not one for 1917. The Assam Company's Act laid down that the General Meeting must be held in the month of May or June. The Meeting was held on 18th June 1917, but adjourned because the 1916 crop had not been shipped from Chittagong, through lack of freight, and it was not in fact until early 1918 that it was all shipped. At the above Meeting an interim dividend of 7½ per cent. was declared nevertheless.

There were two Meetings in 1918; the adjourned Meeting from 1917 to deal with the 1916 crop was held on 14th May, and on 14th October the Annual General Meeting to deal with the 1917 trading.

Of the 1917 crop only 1,000,000 lb. was sold at the auctions, but at the
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satisfactory average price of 1s. 3·93d. per lb. The balance was taken over by Government at the average price of the three pre-war years, which gave only about 9½d. a lb.

Government contracted to take 66 per cent. of the 1918 crop at 8·97d. per lb. f.o.b. in India, with a refund of export duty and tea cess.

After the grumbling there had been about the hard bargain Government had driven with Industry in the previous year, and delays in receipt of proceeds, the above price was considered not unsatisfactory.

With the end of the war, it took time for business to resume normality. There was a shortage of freight, and the Meeting of 28th June 1920 had to be adjourned because of the delay in arrival of the 1919 teas. This did not cause the Board, however, much anxiety as to the results, for they had made a forward contract for the sale of the whole of that year's production to one distributor at a price of 1s. 4½d. per lb. landed in London. On the crop of just under 8,000,000 lb. this gave what was then a huge profit of over £144,000. When this transaction was put through, exchange with India was at over 2s. to the rupee. At the time of the Meeting, and before any weight of the 1919 crop had been delivered, it was on the decline and then was at 1s. 10d. per rupee.

The effect, however, of this abnormal rate of exchange, plus of course a general increase in other costs as a result of the war, is not apparent until the 1921 Report, dealing with the 1920 trading. Although the average price realised for the years' teas was 1s. 3·09d., these rising costs had meant that Assam teas generally could not be put on the London market at less than 1s. 4d. to 1s. 6d. per lb. The final result disclosed at the adjourned Meeting on 21st November 1921 was a loss on the 1920 working of £19,545.

This loss was offset, however, by an anticipated refund from the Government of Excess Profits Duty and Income Tax amounting to £78,000. With this windfall it was possible to pay a dividend of 15 per cent. against 20 per cent. altogether in the previous year.

It has to be remembered that for many companies, more especially some of the rupee companies in India, this period of 1920-1921 was a disastrous one, for the markets both in London and Calcutta could not absorb the heavy quantity of rubbish teas that were then let loose on a market recovering from the effects of the war. There is no question that this poor quality was the outcome of coarse plucking by many concerns to produce the quantity demanded by war conditions.

The position was aggravated by Government releasing for sale on the open market the stocks they had accumulated as a war measure and which they desired when the emergency was past to get rid of at any price.

Java, or now Indonesia, was in all-out production, and had captured temporarily the American and Australian markets, and with China and
Japanese competition, all three countries without the heavy burden of increased war costs, the position called for drastic measures to adjust supply to demand, and so proposals were made through the Indian Tea Association to curtail crop by at least 10 per cent in 1921.

There is nothing in the Board's Proceedings about the particular schemes of restriction that were proposed or considered. It is revealed, however, in the verbatim Report of the Meeting of 29th September 1920, that whatever was the method of limitation of output proposed by the Indian Tea Association, the Assam Company had refused to participate.

The point was raised by George Seton, who was a share broker and interested particularly in tea company shares, by asking the Chairman to express his views frankly to the shareholders present about the Board's attitude on this important question.

In his reply to this pointed question, the Chairman stated that instructions had been given already to the General Manager in Assam that for that season he was to pluck very fine indeed, which would reduce the Company's output by more than 10 per cent. Mr. Arthur Thompson seized on this to request that the Directors should inform the Indian Tea Association immediately of what the Chairman had told them, as this virtually did all that the Industry asked. It was obvious from this that the Assam Company holding out from the scheme was threatening its success. The Chairman, however, whilst agreeing to informing the Indian Tea Association of their action, would not allow the Meeting to think that the Board accepted the proposal as submitted through official channels. His statement was:

Of course our views will be sent to-day to the Indian Tea Association; but I am bound to tell you quite frankly that that is not quite what they asked us to do. They asked us to bind ourselves in writing to reduce our output by 10% this year, and 20% next year below the average of the last five years. Well, I am not prepared to give that undertaking. It would be absolutely against the interests of the Company. I think Mr. Seton will agree . . . that I have gone as far as in the interests of the Company I ought to go.

As a pointer to what was to happen some years later, a shareholder, Mr. Thorpe, at the Meeting on 28th June 1920, asked if the Company had ever considered the desirability of changing the denomination of its shares from £20 to £1. The Company's shares had been quoted on the market in 1919 at from £78\frac{1}{2} to £60\frac{1}{2} over a period of twelve months, which was the highest at which they ever stood.

In his reply, the Chairman pointed out that the Assam Company operated under an Act of Parliament. To alter the denomination of the shares, a matter which the Board had had under consideration on more
than one occasion, meant obtaining another Act, which was expensive, costing probably well over £1,000, which expenditure of the shareholders’ money, the Directors had considered hitherto could not be justified.

Many of the early-formed tea companies had issued their capital in £20 shares but had subdivided them subsequently into £1 shares, which they were able to do with little difficulty, under the Companies’ Act which governed their procedure. With the Assam Company under an Act of Parliament, the position was not so easy.

Local administration during the first four years of this period was in the hands of R. N. Farquharson until the end of 1915, when he retired and William Maxwell became General Manager.

A scheme designed to cheapen the costs of local transport was the laying down of a tramway connecting gardens with Nazira and the Assam-Bengal Railway. With oil-driven locomotives, this two-feet-gauge railway was a means of defeating the difficulties of bullock transport over roads which became impassable in the rains.

Such tramways were not an innovation, for they had been installed by other companies many years previously. The Company appreciated their advantages as the only sure means of getting plucked leaf in from the gardens to the factory, packed tea into, and stores, materials, etc., outwards from Nazira. The original scheme was for eighteen to twenty miles of track to start in 1912. By 1914 it had extended to nearly thirty miles, and over £9,000 had been spent on materials alone. The Company was fortunate in getting this scheme well under way before the advent of war.

The Chairman at one General Meeting was careful to explain that these tramways would be laid down at no extra expenditure, as the entire system would be paid for by charging each garden with its current rate of expenditure for transport for four or five years. When the initial outlay had thus been recovered, gardens would then benefit by the greatly reduced cost of transport. There is no record of what any of the more senior Managers may have thought of this scheme, which would seem likely to affect their pockets adversely whilst being of advantage to their unknown successors.

It was remarkable how local management was carried on during the war years when at one time, out of a total European staff of forty, no less than sixteen had proceeded on active service and that the gardens were maintained in good condition and increasing crops produced.

The 1919 Report records that Captain R. C. Head, M.C., and Lieutenant B. M. Rooney had been killed on active service, the latter in the Dardanelles.
This administration could not have been done without the able assistance of Kilburn & Company, the Company’s Calcutta Agents, who kept the gardens fed with their essential supplies of stores and materials, which were ever more difficult to procure as the period of the war extended.

During the early years of the war, recruiting of new labour became less successful than it had been, to the extent that it had not been possible to replace normal wastage. Thus, added to the shortage of European advisory staff, there was a dearth of labour.

In 1918 India suffered the most virulent epidemic of influenza. It affected the whole of India, and inhabitants in the towns died in thousands. The tea districts did not escape. The epidemic came at the end of September, and on some gardens work was nearly brought to a standstill. At Tingalibam, 10 per cent. of the labour force died in a fortnight. Most of the other labour which were not attacked were off work attending to and nursing those who were. It was Mrs. Mucklow, the wife of the Manager of Tingalibam, who was presented by the Board with a gold bracelet suitably inscribed as a token of their appreciation of her devoted service to the labour during this epidemic.

It was estimated that this epidemic alone caused a falling off in crop of over half a million pounds, though the crop actually harvested in 1918 does not show such a decrease compared with the previous year.

In other parts of India, added to the influenza epidemic, famine conditions prevailed. This meant a free movement of people from the famine-stricken areas, and Assam and other tea districts offered a haven from starvation in their homeland to these poor people.

The Company took full advantage of these conditions, as did others, to embark on a large recruiting campaign. Before a year had passed no less than 6,000 labourers and their families had been sent up, which not only replaced the Company’s losses through the epidemic and from other causes, but the Chairman in his address to shareholders at the General Meeting in 1919 was able to say that the Company had on its books a larger number of workers than ever before in the history of the Company.

There was no change in the persons of those serving on the Board during this ten-year period.

E. A. Goulding, was created a Baronet in 1915 and became the Right Honourable in 1919. J. F. Remnant was created a Baronet in 1918.

The Board comprised Arthur R. Prideaux, Chairman; Arthur H. Graham, Deputy Chairman; James S. Hulbert, Managing Director; Sir James F. Remnant, Bart.; and the Right Honourable Sir Edward A. Goulding, Bart.
In the Tea Industry, this was a period of extremes.

Although as the aftermath of the war there was delay in disposing of the year's crop, which necessitated the adjournment of the Company's General Meetings of 1921 and 1922 from their usual date in June to November and September respectively, this delay was not only in shipping but there were extensive stocks in the warehouses.

There was an agreement amongst producers to curtail production in 1921. Some companies may have purposely reduced their crops, but generally the year was one of unfavourable climatic conditions, which did all that was necessary. To the Assam Company, this meant a drop of 1½ million lb. compared with 1920. This low crop increased costs, but the effect was an improved market, and with a profit of £65,906 on the working of 1921, there was ushered in seven years of the greatest prosperity the Industry had ever known.

There would seem little doubt that this profit was contributed to largely by the sale of the whole of the 1921 crop to one large distributor at a very satisfactory price. This enabled the Assam Company to recover from the 1920 depression more rapidly than did many others.

A similar forward sale of part of the 1922 crop was made with the same buyer. If this was one of those transactions governed by the Secrecy Clause "N.T.B.Q." ("Not to be quoted"), it can be said that this clause was never better kept inwardly than by the Assam Company. A search of the archives merely reveals in one Minute that it was left in the hands of the Managing Director to negotiate terms with the buyer for the sale of the balance of the 1922 crop, that it was Sanderson & Company who put the contract through, and who settled how the brokerage on the sale was divided between them and the other two brokers, W. J. & H. Thompson and Shepard & Company, but the quantity sold, the price paid and terms of delivery are officially a secret still. It is said that there are no secrets in the Tea Industry, and normally the details of any such contract are soon known, if not by some sleuth of the buyer's competitors seeing the delivery to his vans from the warehouse of teas known not to be for public sale, then by mysterious information disseminated by the local Post Office in Assam and thence retailed back.

From 1922 onwards, the Company's profits rose to phenomenal figures, but by the end of 1930, owing to market conditions, the Company's trading dwindled away again towards another slump. The full effects
of the extensive profits of this period are not reflected in the amount of dividends paid in 1923 onwards because of an increase in Capital.

In 1922, the year previous to the increase in Capital, the profits had risen to the then unheard of figure of £183,105, and the shareholders had received dividends of 20 per cent. plus a bonus of 20 per cent. the highest ever paid.

It was in this atmosphere of great prosperity that the Company embarked on a change in its constitution, an increase in Capital and a reduction in the denomination of its shares.

The idea of increasing the Capital, and with it a reconstruction of the Company, was nothing new to the Board, but they had not mooted the matter themselves on account of expense and because it meant obtaining a fresh Act of Parliament.

It was persistent pressure from shareholders at General Meetings that rather forced the Board into taking action. One of the chief criticisms was that at £20 each the market for the shares was very restricted, for the market price then stood at from £69½ to £53. This criticism was reinforced by the fact that most other large tea companies had already subdivided their shares into units of £1 each.

At an Extraordinary General Meeting held at Winchester House on 16th November 1923, the necessary resolution was passed to put the old Company into voluntary liquidation and to form a new Company to be called “The Assam Company Limited,” with a Capital of £1,000,000 divided into 1,000,000 shares of £1 each with a Memorandum and Articles of Association registered under the Companies Acts of 1908 to 1917; the new Company to take over from 1st January 1924.

Each holder of one £20 share in the old Company was to be allotted 100 shares of £1 each in the new Company.

“The Assam Company Limited” was duly incorporated on 1st December 1923. Its new seal followed closely the original of 1845. The only alterations were in the name of the Company round the rim of the seal, and the inclusion of the date of inception, 1839, at the bottom centre of the shield. In making the new die for the seal, no attempt was made to modify the centre depiction of a tea bush, to conform with the flat-topped bush which was the standard shape aimed at then in the cultivation of a tea bush.

After eighty-four years’ trading, of which seventy-eight years had been as a company chartered under a special Act of Parliament (the original Charter was not granted until 1845), the Assam Company became one incorporated under the Companies Act.

It is rather strange that there are no facts or figures to show on what grounds the Directors based their decisions to increase the Capital to £1,000,000. There is a Board Minute of 23rd July 1923, reading:
It was decided that the Chairman be authorised to enquire of Mr. Maxwell whether he would be willing to make a considered estimate of the present value of the several Estates of the Company in Assam, placing a separate value on each Garden for its value and give a separate estimate for the land, plant, machinery, buildings, coolies and Gardens respectively in each case.

There is nothing about such a report and valuation ever having been received or considered. Such a comprehensive report would have taken some considerable time to prepare, and it seems unlikely that it could have been available in England by 25th September, on which date there was a Meeting—it is called a Board Meeting—to which certain critical shareholders had been invited. The adjective “critical” is used advisedly, because a Mr. George Seton was one amongst the eight present at this Meeting. A discussion took place regarding dividend, bonus shares, capitalizing reserves, and subdivision of shares—all matters relating to the forthcoming reconstruction of the Company. It would seem, therefore, that without waiting for a valuation of the properties, the Board had made up their minds to a Capital of £1,000,000. The only other Minute on the subject is that of 1st October 1923:

... The question of the reconstruction of the Company was further considered. With reference to the Capital of the new Company, Lord Wargrave suggests that the same should be £1,000,000 divided into 800,000 shares, (Ordinary, of £1 each), and 200,000 Shares, (6% Preference, of £1 each), but the Board decided that the whole issue should be 1,000,000 Ordinary Shares of £1 each.

Yet there must have been some system of arriving at the value of the properties, otherwise how was it that in the early accounts of the new Company the precise figure of £754,070 18s. 9d. is given as the amount at which the estates and gardens were acquired from the old Company under Agreement dated 21st December 1923?

The first Annual General Meeting under the new Company was held on 30th June 1924, which corresponded with the 84th Annual Report of the Company since its inception. The result was the agreeable profit of £307,839, which was on the working of 1923. Out of this, ample provision was made to Reserves and a dividend of 18 per cent. on the new Capital was declared, equivalent to 90 per cent. on the old Capital.

This result was eclipsed, however, by that of 1924, which was dealt with at the Meeting on 6th July 1925, when a profit of £346,731 was announced and a dividend of 20 per cent. plus a bonus of 5 per cent. was declared.

This was a splendid commencement for the new Company, and it
seemed to justify fully the increase in Capital, but in comparison with other tea companies, the Assam Company was now over-capitalised, and it was somewhat of a burden in subsequent years when other companies comparable in size were capitalised at half or three-quarters of the Assam Company's figure.

That, however, was not to worry the Company yet. The years 1925 to 1928 were prosperous, for profits fluctuated between £276,924 and £176,433, with dividends ranging with bonus from 25 per cent. to 15 per cent.

1929 saw the beginning of a set-back, when the profit, at £90,434 was only half that of the previous year, and the dividend was reduced to 7½ per cent.

1930 brought these years of prosperity to a close, with a profit of only £14,369, and it was necessary to transfer £12,000 from General Reserve to pay a dividend of 2 per cent.

Even at the Annual General Meeting in July 1925, which dealt with the results of 1924 when trading was good, the Chairman (A. R. Prideaux) in his address to shareholders, expressed apprehension regarding the increasing supplies of inferior teas from Ceylon and Java which had at that time the effect of causing violent fluctuations in market prices, for demand for good quality tea continued at fairly remunerative prices. He emphasised his fears by saying:

We look for Government assistance to put some check upon the import of inferior and rubbishy teas, be they of British or foreign manufacture, which are not fit to drink, and damage our market for good sound tea.

The United States have a certain standard below which inferior teas are refused import into their country, and our Authorities might with advantage follow their lead in this respect. I have asked my colleague, Sir James Remnant, to bring this very important matter to the notice of the Minister of Health, and I hope that some result will accrue from this.

It may have been somewhat of an exaggeration to say that the condition of these inferior teas was such as to come within the purview of the Health Department for rejection. It was a fact, however, that it was the weight of common tea that brought about the collapse of the market later.

In many of the verbatim Reports of General Meetings in these years, the Chairman mentioned periodical declines in the high standard of quality at which the Company aimed, and quoted the strict instructions that had been issued from the Board to the General Manager about maintaining quality. These temporary lapses were largely due to a shortage of labour at the height of the plucking season.

If this was to be a dispassionate account of an impending slump in the
Tea Industry to be correlated with the trading results of one Company, it would be necessary only to look up old market reports to recount the facts, but, as this is a history of the Assam Company, the trend of events must be those recorded by the individual, in this case by the Board as expressed in the Chairman's review, and this was biased by the policy the Company adopted. It is true that the Company did try to produce good tea, and to that extent it did not contribute to the causes of the slump. Looking at the position from this angle, it blamed others for its misfortunes, and in doing so may not have always got the true picture of cause and effect. That must be the excuse if what is recorded hereafter is at variance with official reports of this period.

In his speech at the General Meeting on 30th June 1930, the Chairman drew attention to the unprecedented difference in relative values between good-quality teas and those just below that standard, and that the range of prices in these two standards had been abnormally wide. He then proceeded:

... There was really not enough high-grade tea and a great deal too much of everything else, and medium tea downwards felt this overweight acutely. The result has been, prices for the bulk of the crops, more particularly from Assam, which are largely comprised of medium grades, have been of a much lower comparative level than ever before seen. We have nothing to complain about in the prices secured for our fine grades, which have sold well, but like all other Companies, we have had to face extremely disappointing prices for the rest, and this accounts for the lower average price secured for the year's crop.

The average price realised for the 1929 teas was 1s. 2.45d. per lb., compared with 1s. 6.06d. the previous year. In 1930 the price declined further to 1s. 1.10. per lb. During the preceding years of prosperity the cost of production had increased until these prices were unremunerative.

The review then goes on:

The late Government always spoke very strongly of their desire and intention to give preference to Empire products, but unfortunately, their words were not reflected in their deeds. If when Mr. Churchill decided to deal with the duty on tea, he had removed the duty from India and Ceylon teas only, it would have been a perfectly sound proposition, but when he took the same course with the inferior teas from Java and Sumatra, the result might have been foreseen by anyone of the most ordinary intelligence. The Dutch Government place on their own teas imported into Holland from their own possessions in Java and Sumatra, an import duty of not less than 7d. a lb. The result of the whole duty being removed in this country was that the bulk of these teas were directed to London, and our market was simply flooded with cheap teas from those islands.
With the decline in the Company’s fortunes, there returned to the General Meeting of 1931 the inevitable spate of criticisms of the Company’s administration. As is invariably the case, when all is going well shareholders do not bother to attend Meetings, but as soon as adversity comes, from whatever cause, they turn up to voice their disapproval and to make suggestions and propose remedies, so many of which are hopelessly irrelevant to the Company’s business.

They attacked the payment of commission to the executive staff in Assam; the payment of £4,000 in fees to the Directors when the whole of the Company’s profit was only £2,000; the cost of medical services in Assam. They made proposals for the peddling of the Company’s teas as Assam Tea to local grocers, because some dear lady at the Meeting could not buy Assam Tea as such from her grocer in Kensington. It all ended up with the usual felicitous expressions of goodwill towards the Directors, and a vote of thanks to everybody who had worked in the Company’s interests; but it was in contrast to the shareholders’ indifference in previous years when they were able to pocket fat dividends and had nothing to say.

There are landmarks even in the field of baiting Boards of tea companies. One such was George Seton. Mention of him has been made previously, particularly when he denied vociferously that he was a stock and share broker. Why he made this denial is not clear, for he carried on business at 120 Bishopsgate, as an outside share broker dealing exclusively in tea shares. But perhaps he wanted to be considered chiefly as a champion of the large number of inarticulate shareholders on whom his business depended. It is believed that he had at sometime been an Assistant on a tea garden in Cachar, which was the basis of his knowledge of the producing side.

Enquiry has disclosed that he was in the habit of recommending, through influential financial newspapers, the buying or selling of tea shares. The trend of this share market may have been possible of anticipation in those years, but the vagaries of the market for tea itself, and in consequence the dividend payable, were unpredictable. It may have been something to do with the upsetting of his anticipation in these matter, and the consequent falsification of his prophesies, that made him adopt an attitude of criticism of tea company management, but not only of the Assam Company, for he was regarded as a nuisance at all major companies’ Meetings. At these Meetings, his main theme was always reduction of expenditure, so that ever larger dividends could be paid, with the ulterior motive of stimulating the market for tea shares. Reading his long peregrinations, one must admit his suave laudatory opening passages, in commendation of what the Board had accomplished, before he came to the point of his criticism. As these were, in their ultimate theme, the same year after year, they
became to the long-suffering Board, if not equally so to the general body of shareholders present, a matter of boredom and exasperation.

Such an attack at one Meeting evoked the caustic comment—"Mr. Seton, do you ever agree with anything the Board of a tea company does?"

Seton's last recorded attendance at a Meeting of the Assam Company was that for 28th June 1926. It is believed that shortly after that time he sold his business of a tea share broker. He must have been bordering on 80 years of age at that time.

The Board took the opportunity at the beginning of this period of good years to appropriate from profits for the inception of a Pension Scheme. In asking for shareholders' sanction to the principle of such a scheme, the Chairman, at the Annual General Meeting of 25th June 1923 said:

I desire to explain that your Board have deemed it, not only expedient, but right, now that we seem to be entering upon more prosperous times, to take into their favourable consideration the welfare of their employees, European and native, both at home and abroad, with a view to making some provision for them in their old age; and the form that this provision would naturally take would be a Pension Scheme of some kind. To produce a satisfactory scheme, much time and thought will be required, and a considerable fund must be accumulated to ensure its being properly worked, and on a sound financial basis. If, as I hope I may assume, you all approve of the principle of such a scheme, you will, I am sure, agree to the proposed hypothecation, after a good season like the one under consideration, of a substantial sum as a foundation and guarantee for its being properly carried out. If you turn to the report, you will see that it is proposed that a sum of £25,000 be set aside out of the balance of the profits for the purpose of starting a scheme, and that, taken with the amount now standing at the credit of the Provident Fund, (which will obviously become ultimately merged in the Pension Fund), will make a total of some £55,000 upon which to commence operations.

It was some years, and after much deliberation by the Board, with the Company's auditors and actuaries, before a scheme to satisfy all parties was finally put into operation. In 1929, the amount standing previously to the credit of the Provident Fund was transferred to this new Pension Scheme.

In local administration, there were in 1921-1922 the labour troubles created by the entry into Assam of the paid political agitator. These men called themselves disciples of Ghandi, and his non-cooperation movement which affected the whole of India. In the Government report it was stated that the situation in Assam in particular was serious, for thousands of
simple and ignorant labourers, looking for the advent of the "Ghandi Raj," when all should eat without toiling and rest without intermission, were being persuaded to break their contracts, to leave their work and their possessions, in a pathetic endeavour to make their way home to their villages—often hundreds of miles away—from which they had hailed originally.

There would seem little doubt that the success of the agitator was facilitated by an influx of new labour. There had been a particularly free movement of labourers from districts in Madras, labour that was new to Assam, where there was no one who spoke their language or knew their ways. They were easy prey to the agitator, for another innovation created by this type of labour was the fact that they were recruited in large numbers for a single garden instead of a few families from different places in the recruiting districts, which is the result usually of a garden's recruiting operations. It was only necessary, therefore, for the evilly disposed to persuade one or two of the elders on each garden to move, and there followed what was described at the time as a veritable exodus. It was a terrible and pathetic incident for these innocent people. They were deluded by the political agitator into giving up their employment, but once on the move they were abandoned by him. They set out to walk, with their babies and children, to their homes in Madras, a matter of some 1,200 miles. Planters and local Government officials did their best to persuade these people either to return to their gardens or be put in trains for their destination; but the agitator got at them again at every road or rail junction, where they accumulated, and cajoled them into refusing these offers. Starting from Upper Assam as small batches, their numbers increased as they proceeded until the exodus of such numbers became unmanageable at rail-head and river stations. The matter sorted itself out eventually, but it left another undeserved black mark against the Tea Industry and its treatment of its labour, for subsequent use by those ill-disposed towards it.

This agitation and unrest did not leave the Company's labour force unscathed, but its effect was fortunately less severe than at many gardens.

In the Chairman's review in 1922, he made rather light of these troubles, saying that although there were riots and strikes on most of the neighbouring estates in the Sibsagar district,

... the fact that this Company's gardens were practically immune, speaks very highly I think for the management out there, and your Board can vouch for the fact that our native employees and coolies are as well paid and cared for, and are as well fed as any in the Province ... there would be no trouble with them but for the sinister influence of hired agitators and "bud-mashes" (bad characters) from other Districts.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

Some idea of the extent of trouble that did effect the Company's gardens is conveyed in the following Board Minute of 6th November 1922:

It was decided that a sum of about £400 be added to the commission payable to the native establishment, and a bonus of Rs.500 each to Messrs. Grant, Slaughter and Yates, in recognition of their pluck and tact in dealing with the labour disturbances in 1921.

The strong current of the Dikho River had always been a source of anxiety in its threat to cut into the Station at Nazira. In 1925 this encroachment of the river became serious, and heavy expenditure had to be incurred in the erection of sufficiently strong bunds and cement embankments in endeavours to divert the river from Nazira.

At the Annual General Meeting in 1927, it was announced from the Chair:

The most important work of bunding up the bank and diverting the stream of the Dikhoo river at our Head Station, Nazira, where it had been steadily encroaching for years past, has so far proved a complete success, and the Station has been thus saved from threatened demolition, which if it had taken place would have involved the Company in enormous expenditure and loss.

The General Manager, J. S. Ronald, retired in 1924 after thirty years' service with the Company, and was succeeded by E. E. Chalk.

With all the improvements and additions that were being made to the Company's equipment in buildings and machinery, and the need to supervise more closely the cultivation of the Company's gardens whilst paying more and more attention to the production of the best-quality teas, it was considered that with the widely separated charge of the Nazira group of gardens from those in the Rokung Division (Mohokutie, Doomur Dullong and Koomtai), as well as Towkok and Tingalibam, it was becoming too much for one General Manager to supervise. Whilst retaining supreme command still in the one General Manager, it was decided, in view of the growing office-work necessary even then by Government and official returns, that he needed to be relieved of some of the routine garden and factory supervision.

It was at this time that a very extensive expansion was made in the staff at Headquarters at Nazira, and provision had to be made for housing them. The European staff at the station had been provided with bungalows for (1) the General Manager, (2) the Accountant, (3) the Assistant Accountant, (4) the Medical Officer.

The improvement and additions to this establishment called, amongst
other things, for the building of three new bungalows, one for the Surveyor (O. Gardner), who had been living previously at Dhole Bagan, another for the Chief Engineer and the Assistant Engineer, and one for the Secretary to the General Manager, as well as a new office and engineering workshop; whilst there was also the installation to be set up at Mazengah siding.

C. M. Slaughter was deputed to be Divisional Manager of the Rokung Division (Koomtai, Mohokutie and Doomur Dullong), and Towkok and Tingalibam, whilst A. T. Halkett, who was at that time Manager of Bamon Pookrie, was given the Superintendentship of what is known as the "Home" Gardens.

There is nothing in the Company’s records to show how long this subsidiary supervision lasted, or whether it accomplished its object in the production of better-quality teas and in the improvement in the cultivated areas.

On the same theme, but to reduce the incidence of ill-health as it diminished the out-turn of labour to work, and during a period of difficulty in recruiting new labour, it was decided to appoint a third permanent Medical Officer. It is possible that this change in local administration may have been the outcome of a visit the Chairman, Arthur R. Prideaux, made to the Company’s gardens in the cold weather of 1924-1925, when the question of local policy was discussed. At the General Meeting on 6th July 1925, the Chairman gave a glowing account of the condition of the properties as he saw them, and he paid tribute to the loyalty and good team-work of the staff.

In a Minute of 2nd March 1925, the Board decided to instruct the General Manager to negotiate for the purchase of the Thakurbari Garden, and that he was to cable home the terms of purchase before acceptance.

Those were the bare facts as recorded in the Minutes of 1925. That such a purchase of another property was contemplated only shows that the Company was even then prepared to extend the field of its operations. There is no record, however, of the General Manager’s negotiations at that time. It is not until nine years later that it is possible to get some further insight into the reason for this negotiation.

It was a usual business precaution to take security from the local kyah or banker, who provided the necessary small change for payment of labourers’ wages, etc., against the Company’s hundies or cheques on Calcutta. There is a Minute of the London Board dated 26th September 1934 which tells that the security offered by one, Jewraz Chunilall, of his interest in the Thakurbari Garden was not considered sufficient.

Further local investigation into this matter disclosed that there were two members of the Indian staff in the Nazira office, Podeswar and
Lokeswar Barua, who were also interested in Thakurbari. It had been an inflexible rule of the Company that no European was allowed to have any interest in land, or in the proprietorship of another garden in the district, otherwise than in shares of a Public Company, and the Board considered that this should apply equally to their Indian employees. Seeing that many of their Indian employees had their “ancestral homes” in the province, this was an inequitable imposition, but it was the Board’s decree nevertheless, that these two employees would be allowed to retain their employment in the Nazira office only if within six months they disposed of their interest in this garden. It is believed that this property was planted originally by the Mohokutie clerk, and that it is now the Krishnabehari Tea Company Limited, of some 250 to 300 acres on the other side of the Diroi River.

The Board’s Minutes do not disclose whether a better security was obtained for their banking business, or whether their employees with a landed interest in the province were continued in the Nazira office.

In the latter half of this decade, many companies in Assam turned their attention to the possibility of emulating Ceylon in their methods of artificial withering. Large sums were spent in the construction of special buildings to give controlled reversible withering, so as to get fully withered leaf under any climatic conditions.

This innovation was considered by the Board, and on reference to the General Manager, it was suggested that in view of the very strong construction of the Bamon Pookrie factory, that building could be altered to meet the necessary conditions for controlled withering. Such a conversion, it was estimated, would cost some £6,000, plus the cost of obtaining plans from Ceylon.

At a Board Meeting on 14th May 1928, further consideration of the scheme was, however, deferred. It was not referred to again, which was perhaps fortunate for the Company, as the application of this form of withering did not for various reasons prove a success in Assam.

In the direction of the Company’s affairs in London, J. S. Hulbert, who had for so many years been respectively Superintendent in Assam, Director and Managing Director in London, resigned in 1923 his office of Managing Director, but was persuaded to retain his office as a Director. In the latter office he continued until his sudden death in 1928, by which the Company lost his wise counsels. From that date, the office of Managing Director was discontinued.

To continue having one member of the Board with intimate knowledge of local affairs, it was announced at the General Meeting of 1st July 1929 that the Board had invited Mr. E. E. Chalk to become a Director in place of Mr. J. S. Hulbert. Chalk was then General Manager in Assam, and his appointment to the Board was to take effect after com-
pletion of his term of office in Assam. He was elected a Director eventually on 2nd May 1932.

In 1928 Sir James E. Remnant, Bart., was raised to the peerage and became the Right Honourable Lord Remnant.

In regard to the Secretary's office, it is recorded at the General Meeting on 4th July 1927 that Mr. E. J. Jones was to retire after that Meeting, having then served the Company in London for fifty-four years. At the Meeting in 1929, the Chairman announced with great regret the death of their Secretary, Henry de Rusett, who had served the Company for fifty-three years. It was only at the previous Board Meeting in October 1928 that the Board decided that in view of his serious illness he should retire as from 1st October that year. In his place, Mr. B. Reeve was appointed Secretary and Accountant.
CHAPTER XIX

1931-1940

This chapter opens in an atmosphere of unrelieved gloom and depression, due to one of the severest slumps in the Tea Industry, caused by over-production in the Empire countries and by the flooding of the market with cheap tea from foreign countries, the situation being aggravated by excessive stocks from previous years already in the London warehouses. Taking heed of the warning they had had the previous year, and in spite of the cuts in expenditure that had been made to meet the situation, the results of 1931 were a trading loss of £8,703, to meet which £10,000 was taken from General Reserve.

In the previous chapter, reference has been made to the Chairman's (then Arthur R. Prideaux) outspoken criticism of the Government's action in removing altogether the duty on tea. At the Annual General Meeting on 4th July 1932, the one and only Meeting at which the Right Honourable Lord Remnant, P.C., presided as the Company's Chairman before his lamented death in January 1933, he referred to the reimposition of the Import Duty on tea into this country, when effect was given to Empire Preference by putting the duty at 2d. a lb. on Empire tea and 4d. a lb. on foreign production. He said:

There is, however, one bright spot amidst the gloom, and that is the definite abandonment of a one-sided trade system which has done our country incalculable harm. The preference given to Empire tea, though not enough, is a step in the right direction, and should help our industry, as soon as the enormous surplus at present in this country, (due largely to the rush to try and escape the duty on foreign tea) has been reduced to ordinary dimensions. . . .

The Chairman was dealing then with the disastrous results of 1931. The imposition of this preferential duty did not by itself have material effect immediately, for in the next year market conditions were no better. The Company had by the severest economies, which included the closing down of their Scientific or Agricultural Department with its laboratory and other incidental expenditure, reduced its costs of production to 9.59d. per lb. landed in London, but this was not enough. The average price realised for the 1932 crop was only 9.03d. per lb., the lowest for twenty-seven years, and there was again a trading loss of £5,773, which necessitated a further appropriation from General Reserve of £15,000.

Ever since 1931, negotiations had been in progress with the Govern-
ments of the three main tea-producing countries to endeavour to restrict output so that equilibrium could be obtained in the world supply and demand.

The results of these negotiations was the inception, with effect from 1st April 1933, of the International Tea Agreement, and with it the Indian Tea Control Act, which provided for the regulation of exports of tea from India, Ceylon and the Netherlands East Indies, the only really effective ordinance by which the production and export of tea is regulated to the needs of the consuming markets, and which operates to-day.

The effect of this was an improvement in market conditions, and the average price realised for the 1933 crop rose by over 4d. a pound, making a profit of £83,470 and a dividend of 5 per cent. There came a setback, however, when the 1934 crop came on to the London market. One effect of the regulation of crop was that the market demand turned chiefly towards common tea, and the price margin between that and the better medium quality which the Assam Company produced was very narrow. There was the effect also of heavy imports of tea from China and Japan, which countries were outside the Regulation scheme: the smaller crop allowed to be produced under the Regulation scheme had increased costs, and with a drop of nearly 2d. a lb. in the average price realised, the profit fell to £12,363, which precluded the payment of a dividend.

In an attempt to improve still further the quality of the Company's teas, the Board in 1934 wrote to the two brokers in Calcutta, J. Thomas & Company and W. S. Creswell & Company, asking them to quote their fee to taste the Company's teas and to send a representative to Assam two or three times a year during the season to inspect and report on the methods of withering and manufacture. There is no record of what these firms quoted for the work, but the Board decided finally to accept the offer of Harrisons & Crosfield to do this work, for an annual fee of Rs.5,000, plus travelling expenses for their representative between Calcutta and the Company's gardens.

It is noted that this arrangement was negotiated through the Director, John Mackie, but it is not stated what benefit accrued from this arrangement. It was discontinued in March 1936.

The turn for the better came in 1936 when the 1935 crop was sold, and at an average price of 1s. 0.52d. per lb., a profit of £73,667 was made and a dividend of 4 per cent. declared. For the next five years, market conditions settled down and good steady trading results followed, with dividends ranging from 4 to 7 per cent. each year.

A perusal of the verbatim Reports of General Meetings through these years, which opened in an atmosphere of acute depression, were followed by years of consistent profitable trading and ended in conditions imposed
by the Second World War, discloses the unpredictable attitude of shareholders, or latterly stockholders, at these Meetings.

It is axiomatic that when things are going well, or even just normally and according to intelligent anticipation, nobody bothers to attend Meetings.

At the Meeting on 4th July 1932, which dealt with the unprofitable trading of 1931, the proceedings followed a normal course in that shareholders made violent criticisms of the administration of the Company's affairs, regardless of the fact that the trading results were due to market conditions beyond the control of the Board. One shareholder, an ex-tea planter, criticised adversely the election of Mr. E. E. Chalk, and although he did not know him personally, he averred that it was during the last two years of his régime in Assam that the Company's affairs had been brought to the present sorry pass.

At the next Meeting in 1933, which dealt with the trading of 1932, when results were no better and there was another trading loss—to emphasise the inconsistency of or may one say the value of shareholders' criticisms—no comment was made, and after the Chairman's address, the various resolutions were passed unanimously without remark. In 1934 there was again no criticism from shareholders, but that was when the year's trading resulted in a profit and the payment of a dividend—and so the tenor of the meeting followed a quite normal course.

At the Meeting in 1935, however, when the results of 1934 were under review and when the profit had receded to £12,363, which precluded the payment of a dividend, the proceedings became really heated. One of the most favoured forms of baiting the Direction was to compare the Directors' fees and commission, of some £3,200, with the Company's total profit. It seemed to be no concern to these critics that the Directors' fees had been voted by previous shareholders themselves and were in accordance with the Articles of Association. It so happened that the staff in Assam and London had, on the previous year's profitable results, had their cut of 10 per cent. in salary restored, but the Directors had not reinstated their voluntary cut of 25 per cent. in their fees. It was unfortunate enough that at the Meeting in 1932 Mr. E. E. Chalk's election to the Board was opposed for no valid reason, but at this Meeting in 1935, when he came up for re-election, a shareholder moved as an amendment—knowing full well that it would not be carried, but pressing it as a protest that anyhow economies ought to begin at home—the resolution that the re-election of any Director be postponed until dividends were being paid to shareholders. The mover did get someone to second the amendment, but it was lost, and Mr. Chalk was duly re-elected as proposed originally.

The criticism was made also that most other tea companies were paying dividends, and that the Assam Company did not do so was
alleged to indicate gross mismanagement somewhere. It was true that in comparison, particularly with common tea producers, the Assam Company did not show up well, but any suggestion of mismanagement was a false premise. It was the huge capital with which the Company was saddled that precluded the payment of a dividend out of the small profit earned that year, which was the defence made by the Chairman. It was no satisfaction to the shareholders who had more recently purchased their shares at 50s., a figure mentioned at the Meeting, which were then quoted on the market at below par, to know that the original shareholders had received £100 for each £20 share they then held.

After this somewhat stormy Meeting there was, except for the hardy annual of criticising the amount of Directors’ fees at the Meeting of 1937, a respite for two years from adverse criticism at General Meetings, the reason being no doubt that shareholders had nothing to say whilst they were receiving dividends.

At the Annual General Meeting of 1937 the requisite resolution was passed converting the shares into stock of units of £1 each, and it was declared that stock certificates would be issued in respect of all transfers subsequent to 1st January 1938.

At the Centenary Meeting in 1939, which preceded the outbreak of the Second World War by only a few weeks, the Chairman, A. H. Graham, in explaining the decline in profits on the working of the 1938 season, £94,691 against £120,464 the previous year, referred to the lower market being due to the uncertainty and apprehension regarding the political situation.

He went on to announce that to mark the occasion of the Company’s Centenary it had been decided to grant the staff, both in India and at home, a bonus, based on their length of service, and that the stockholders would receive a bonus of 1 per cent. in addition to the final dividend of 3½ per cent. Some stockholders expressed their disappointment with such a meagre recognition of the occasion. As they looked at it, the stockholders were to get nothing more than they had the previous year. The distribution in 1937 had been an interim dividend of 2 per cent. and a final dividend of 4½ per cent., and to celebrate the Centenary the stockholders were to receive the same, but divided 2 per cent. as an interim dividend, 3½ per cent. as a final and a bonus of 1 per cent. Whereas the staff was to receive something extra, although that extra amounted only to £1,219, which, divided amongst so many, did not give very much to each individual. In fact, the General Manager received £50; other Managers £25, and so on down to Junior Assistants £5 each. The labour was given a day’s holiday with pay (about 9d.), but this was debited to current expenses.

In announcing their disappointment, stockholders overlooked the
fact that there was not the profit to do any more, and as it was, the Board were distributing more in dividend than they would have done in normal circumstances.

One good lady stockholder enquired how long it was since any of the Directors had visited the estates to see for themselves what was going on. (The Hon. P. F. Remnant had visited the gardens in 1936-1937.) She said that she felt the 1 per cent. bonus was rather an insult, and finished up her criticism with, "... I do not wish to be rude, but I certainly think that with the old age of the Company, we should like to have a few younger Directors. We have one on the Board (the Hon. P. F. Remnant), and we should like to see a few more, and for the other Directors gracefully to retire when the time comes."

Sometime before the declaration of war, representative Associations of all sections of the tea trade had been consulted to draw up a plan for the supply of tea to this country in case of an emergency. These plans came into operation immediately the necessity did arise. Part of the crop of 1939 had been sold on the London market in the usual way, but the bulk of it was requisitioned subsequently by Government, under the Tea (Control) Order, 1939, dated 5th September 1939. Government took over all stocks of tea in the United Kingdom upon which duty had not been paid, and requisitioned in advance all tea due to arrive after this ordinance came into effect. Government paid for these teas on the basis of the prices ruling at the London auctions during the week starting 21st August 1939. The result of the Company's trading for that year under these conditions was a profit of £129,972 and the declaration of a dividend of 7 per cent.

Commencing in 1940, the distribution of tea came under a Department of the Ministry of Food, with a Director of Tea, and long-term contracts were entered into with producers in India, Ceylon and East Africa. Under these contracts, the terms of payment were changed to the average price realised by each Company for its crops of 1936, 1937 and 1938, plus an additional allowance towards the enhanced cost of production under war-time conditions as compared with the cost of production in these three basic years.

The price of tea to the public in the United Kingdom was controlled, and rationing, limiting consumers to 2 oz. a week, was imposed. This basis of price was less favourable to the Assam Company and to tea companies generally than had been the 1939 basis, but before the Netherlands East Indies went out of production as a consequence of the invasion of these islands by the Japanese, that portion of the Company's crop that had to be sold for consumption in India was selling at a loss, and under the then prevailing regulation of crop plus increased taxation, together with increased local costs, the results of 1940 were a decline in profits to £83,564, and the dividend was reduced to 6 per cent.
In the London Directorate there were many changes in this period. In May 1932 A. R. Prideaux died, after serving twenty-nine years as a Director, of which twenty-two years were as Chairman.

At a Board Meeting following the Annual General Meeting of July 1932, the Right Honourable Lord Remnant was elected Chairman. He had been a Director for twenty-seven years. He presided at only one Annual General Meeting when the Board lost his valuable service by his demise in January 1933. Arthur H. Graham was elected Chairman in his place.

As has been mentioned already, Mr. E. E. Chalk, the late General Manager, had been elected to the Board. To fill the vacancy caused by the death of Lord Remnant, Mr. John Mackie was appointed. He was described as a gentleman of wide knowledge and experience in the Tea Industry and of the management of tea gardens. At the General Meeting of 1933, when confirmation of this appointment to the Board came up, he was visiting the Company’s Estates in Assam, a task he undertook in the middle of the rains in July, that he might see for himself the conditions there when manufacture was in full swing.

It was not stated at the time of his appointment that all his previous knowledge and experience had been acquired in Ceylon and subsequently in Travancore and Southern India, in the agency of Harrisons & Crosfield Ltd.

Mr. Mackie submitted to the Board a most comprehensive report. It is within the memory of many present Managers and Assistants how, on his inspection, he criticised all he saw by the standards he knew of conditions in Ceylon and Southern India. In this, he condemned particularly the lack of tidiness in the surroundings of the factories. It is true that, although matters may be improved now, the contrast then between the well-kept precincts, even to lawns and flower beds, of the factories in Ceylon and Southern India, were in violent contrast to conditions generally in North-East India, where the average planter regarded such refinements as an extravagance which his company could not afford, and which were contrary to his conception of “first things first,” the production of tea at a profit.

Mackie’s previous connection with Harrisons & Crosfield would account for the arrangement made with that Company in 1934 to taste the Company’s teas in Calcutta.

With effect from 1st January 1936, the Hon. Peter Farquharson Remnant joined the Board. Lord Wargrave died on 17th July 1936, after serving on the Board for twenty-six years.

John Mackie had to resign from the Board as from 31st March 1938, on account of continued ill-health. He died on 26th June of that year.
Mr A. C. S. Holmes, a partner of the firm of Wm., Jas. and Hy. Thompson, was elected to the Board in his place.

The position in 1940, the year with which this chapter closes, was that the Board comprised Mr. Arthur H. Graham, Chairman, supported by Mr. E. E. Chalk, the Hon. P. F. Remnant and Mr. A. C. S. Holmes.

With the outbreak of war, Major the Hon. P. F. Remnant joined H. M. Forces immediately, and most unfortunately Mr. A. C. S. Holmes was at that time taken very seriously ill. This left only the Chairman and Mr. E. E. Chalk, the minimum number required to form a quorum at Board Meetings—without any margin for possible eventualities. It was then that the awkward position arose that the Company’s Articles of Association did not provide for the appointment of alternate Directors. This defect was easy enough of rectification by altering the Articles of Association, and notice of a special resolution to this effect was duly issued. With the bombing of London the Company’s offices were evacuated to Great Bookham, Surrey, and there was doubt whether the original notice of the Meeting to effect the alteration in the Articles had in fact been legally sufficient. It was not therefore until the Meeting of 30th September 1941 that this necessary provision to meet the exigencies of the times was finally passed.

The London Office had moved to Edenside House, Station Path, Great Bookham, on 29th August 1939. This house was the property of the Chairman, A. H. Graham. It was conveniently empty at the time, and was leased to the Company. It was necessary to have the office somewhere convenient for administration of the Company’s affairs, and Great Bookham was chosen as the Chairman lived there.

The house was a fairly large one, and besides accommodating the London office, it housed two families for a time. Another member of the staff lived near by for a few months, whilst the then Secretary, Mr. B. Reeve, the Registrar, and another member (until called up) travelled to and from their homes. Later the Secretary and the Registrar were accommodated in Great Bookham.

The London office in the City was kept open for a time solely for dividend work, but all other business was conducted from Great Bookham until April 1943, when the office moved back to London.

As a mark of the Company’s contribution to the war effort, it was recorded at the General Meeting on 30th September 1941, which dealt with the 1940 trading, the final year with which this chapter deals, that seventeen of the Company’s Assistants and Managers and half the Company’s London office staff had then joined H. M. Forces.

Turning to matters of local administration in Assam, the voluntary cut of 10 per cent. in staff salaries was continued until after the trading
results of 1933 were known in 1934, when the cut was restored, and commissions became payable again. This had been a discouraging imposition, when on top of personal cuts the staff had to effect the severest economies in working their gardens, and they must have appreciated the imminence of disaster when they heard of the discontinuance of the Agricultural Department in the interests of economy, also the running of the Company’s workshop and engineering departments without a Chief Engineer; whilst even the medical department was depleted by first, in 1933, the number of European medical officers being reduced from three to two, and eventually the next year to only one.

So dire was the need to reduce costs in these first years of the slump that the manuring programme was cut materially. Even after the first ill-effects of the slump had passed, the Board continued their search for means of curtailing local expenditure, and from this emanated the decision, in 1937, to amalgamate Gelakey and Deopani, as well as Mazengah and Mackeypore, each as one garden, with one factory, the former at Deopani and the latter at Mackeypore.

In spite of these economies, the Company did not desist from expenditure on machinery which it was satisfied would improve ultimately the quality of its teas, and to this end it sent out four more McKeRcher C.T.C. machines in 1932, because of the encouraging reports it had received from the brokers on the liquors of samples of its teas made with the two machines sent out in 1931.

The working labour force, even with the regulated crop, had not for some time been kept up to standard, and in spite of the additional cost the Company engaged the services of Mr. Ernest Montgomery Wood, a tea planter, and at one time with the Jorehaut Company, as the Assam Company’s recruiting supervisor. His work in the recruiting districts gave something of the results desired in that by directing operations of the Company’s Sirdars, the jat of labour obtained was from a wider range of districts, as opposed to large numbers from one or two districts that had prevailed previously.

There is a very brief reference in the Chairman’s printed Review published with the Report and Accounts for 1940, that to mark the Company’s Centenary in Assam, club-houses for the Indian staff had been erected, which were much appreciated by those members.

In spite of the critical times through which the Industry was passing in the early years of this period, there was started in 1931 that great campaign which gave such far-reaching beneficial results to the whole province of Assam; the Ross Institute commenced their Malarial Survey, with the intention of reducing the incidence of that malady, which was the scourge of the country. It was fortunate for the Industry that the
campaign was financed by the funds of the Ross Institute, for otherwise, coming at the time it did, the tea companies, themselves could not have faced the expenditure, and if it had been left to them, even a commencement with the suppression of malaria would have been deferred probably for some years.

The first operations on the Assam Company’s properties were started by Dr. B. A. Lamprell in the Rookang Division with a small laboratory opened in the hospital at Doomur Dullong. The response to treatment of the labour force was immediate, for it was shown that by this first modest experiment, the deaths from malaria at this garden were reduced from thirty-two in 1929 to seventeen in 1932. These were the fatal cases only. The suppression of the incidence of the disease could only come, as it did, much later.

That was only the beginning of a wonderful accomplishment that has, over the years since, reduced the greatest scourge to the category almost of a minor ailment, and may it be said that this has been accomplished in the teeth of scepticism, from Europeans and natives alike, who had accepted for so long a dose of “bokkar” (fever), as a natural and inevitable accompaniment to residence in Assam.

THE CENTENARY

The 10th January 1939 was exactly one hundred years since the first consignment of tea from Assam was sold by auction on the London market. Details of the eight chests, the produce of the Government’s (the East India Company) experimental barries, and their sale to Captain Pidding, at the remarkable prices of from 16s. to 34s. a lb., are given in Chapter XXIII (p. 265).

To commemorate this occasion, a Committee called the Empire Tea Centenary Committee, representative of Tea Associations connected with the production of tea from the chief countries within the Empire, was formed. Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Walter Smiles, C.I.E., D.S.O., M.P. (originally an Assistant in the Assam Company) was Chairman. The celebrations opened with the unloading from lighters at St. Katherine’s Dock of six chests of tea. These were then loaded on to three elephants, and accompanied by Sabu, the Elephant Boy of the films, they proceeded as far as Tower Hill. There the chests were transferred to horse vans, which was to symbolise the change over from the East to the West, and they were taken in procession to Plantation House. At the Tea Auction Rooms at Plantation House, the Chairman of the Tea Brokers’ Association, Mr. R. R. Plowman, in welcoming the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Frank Bowater, said
This is a great day for the Tea Industry, because 100 years ago, the first packages of tea from Assam were sold at public auction in the City of London. It is the desire of all that this landmark in the history of the tea trade should be fittingly commemorated, and that honour should be done to our ancestors, who with determination and foresight laid the foundations of this great industry, which has proved not only an inestimable boon, but has become a necessity to countless millions of people.

Sir Robert Graham, as Chairman then of the International Tea Committee, after giving a brief outline of the history of the Tea Trade, announced that they had been exceedingly honoured on this occasion by His Majesty King George VI having graciously consented to accept a casket of the choicest Empire tea as a token of the loyalty and devotion of the Tea Industry during the last hundred years.

That casket was placed on view in the Auction Room before being sent that day to Buckingham Palace.

The next proceeding in this memorable ceremony was for the Lord Mayor to seal with the official seal of the City of London a similar casket to that given to His Majesty, which casket was not to be opened, however, until the occasion of the next Centenary in 2039. This casket, containing 2 lb. of tea, was then auctioned by the Lord Mayor, and after brisk bidding the £1,000 mark was soon passed and it was knocked down finally for £1,156, the highest price ever paid for tea.

The safe custody of this casket is the responsibility of the Tea Brokers' Association of London. It is normally deposited with their Bankers, but so that it shall not be lost sight of, nor forgotten, it is placed on view at every Annual General Meeting of that Association.

There remained thirty-six similar caskets of tea in chromium to be auctioned, the auctioneer being chosen by ballot. By a happy chance, Mr. W. J. Thompson, direct descendant of the first auctioneer of Assam Tea one hundred years before, won the ballot, and had the honour of conducting the sale, which realised a total of £1,072. This, together with that paid for the silver casket, thanks to the generosity of the bidders, resulted in the Benevolent Societies of the Tea Industry benefiting to the extent of £2,228.

Later that day a reception was held at Grosvenor House, which was well attended by representatives of every section of the Tea Trade, and at which Sir John Anderson (now Lord Waverley), having just served as Governor of Bengal, was the principal guest.

The foregoing was the official commemoration of the founding of the Tea Industry in Assam, with its emphasis, however, on Empire tea.

That year was equally a memorable one for the Assam Company, which was formed in February 1839 and was the first commercial enter-
prise to produce tea in Assam. On the occasion of the Annual General Meeting on 17th July 1939, the Chairman, then Arthur R. Graham, gave a brief account of the history of the Company since its inception, and although that year (they were dealing with the results of 1938) the profit made was less than for the previous year, the Board decided that, to celebrate the occasion by some tangible act, they give their staff in Assam and in London a small bonus, amounting in all to only £1,219, and to the Stockholders they give a bonus of 1 per cent. in addition to their total dividend of 5½ per cent. that year.

In retrospect, one might criticise this as an insignificant commemoration of such a memorable occasion, but it has to be remembered that though at this Meeting there was only a vague reference to the uncertainty and apprehension current then regarding the political situation, any undue generosity was not justified in the shadow of war, which broke out little over a month later.

It does not seem necessary to enlarge further on the Assam Company’s contribution to this Centenary of the Tea Industry. It was really only a landmark in the Company’s long existence which this History records.

Except for the briefest reference in the official account of the origin of Assam tea, and in the Assam Company’s Review, to Lord William Bentinck and to a “Mr. Bruce,” it seems a pity that mention of personalities in giving credit for the start of such an enterprise are not mentioned. Robert and C. A. Bruce, together with A. Charlton and Captain Francis Jenkins for the Government tea barries, and for the Assam Company, J. W. Masters, Henry de Mornay, Stephen Mornay, Henry Burkinyoung, George Williamson, Junior, and William Roberts, all deserve and should have received due recognition.
A t the beginning of this period it was a matter of coping with the complex difficulties of tea production under war-time conditions. Under various enactments, the British Government became sole purchaser of tea for the United Kingdom and for the Allied Forces and made contracts with producers for shipment of supplies to this country, it being left to each producing country to arrange supplies for their own internal consumption. Under the Ministry of Food, the distribution of tea in the United Kingdom was made under an allocation scheme to the Trade, based on wholesalers' pre-war consumption, and the price to the public was controlled under the Rationing Order. In March 1942 Java and Sumatra were overrun by the Japanese, and India and Ceylon became then the sole sources of supply to the United Kingdom and markets in the Allied countries. To satisfy these needs, it meant all-out production in these two countries. The ultimate effect of Government taking over was to invite tenders from producers in India for a percentage of their crops sufficient to meet the requirements of the United Kingdom and other markets which they had agreed to supply, and the balance of crops were sold on the Calcutta market.

Under the contracts made with Government the prices paid to companies were maintained on the basis of the equivalent average price F.O.B. Calcutta realised in the years 1936 to 1938, plus an additional allowance towards the increased cost of production, the amount of which producers, through the Indian Tea Association, had to show was justified. The gradual rise in these allowances is an indication of the enormous increase in the cost of tea production. Whilst this upward trend in cost was started because of war conditions, it continues to this day, partly because of the high cost of rice and other cereals during and since the war, but also on account of the imposition by the Indian Government of Excise and Export duties as well as the higher wages imposed under the Minimum Wages Act to labourers on tea gardens.

Starting in 1940 with an allowance of 1d. per lb. towards this increased cost, these additional allowances rose, for plains gardens to 3½d. in 1944; in 1947 it was 11d., until in the final bulk-purchase contract for 1950 the allowance was 1s. 6d. per lb.

These were the conditions in which the Assam Company operated in the war years. It was a case in which the Company, in common with all other producers was called upon to deliver the goods and put them on
the steamer in Calcutta. For these services it was paid the price according to the contract, and thereafter its responsibility for the ultimate fate of its teas ceased. Though exonerated as to the risks attending delivery, and in spite of the urgent need to produce quantity, it was a matter of some pride to the Company that the quality of the teas it produced for Government was kept fully up to its known standard for the open market.

London has always been the centre of reception and distribution to the Tea Trade. Under war-time conditions, any port in the United Kingdom was called upon to receive cargoes of tea, a commodity they had in many cases never handled before. Invoices of fine tea from Ceylon and India were unloaded at ports in the north, where they were not wanted, but were urgently required in the south, and vice versa. There were restrictions on the rail transport of tea, and of any other commodity, which prevented internal adjustment of supplies as regards quality; it appeared chaotic, but it worked, and one can only express admiration for the distributors and wholesalers who accepted the tea allocated to them, with maybe grumblings and misgivings as to the public’s reception of their blends made in these circumstances, but who nevertheless contributed so much to the smooth working of distribution of tea under war-time conditions.

These represent the methods of trading, if it can be called that, under which the Company had to carry on its administration. The price for its commodity and the responsibility for its delivery were settled, and to that extent, excepting of course the interminable returns and form-filling to satisfy the demands of officialdom, there was no scope for individual action.

Once the tea was placed on board the ocean steamer at Calcutta or Chittagong, nothing more was known of its fate, or at what port it was unloaded. What was lost from enemy action on the voyage was never disclosed.

Communications between London and Assam were irregular. Weeks would pass without any letters, then several weeks’ correspondence would arrive in one post; the duplicates by sea mail would sometimes arrive before the originals by air. There were gaps in the sequence of letters, which made them difficult to deal with. Letters would arrive marked, “Damaged by Enemy Action”—sometimes a sodden mass difficult to decipher.

As the Japanese invasion through Burma approached nearer to Assam, the censorship of letters was tightened up, and place-names, which included garden-names, were a particular target for erasure by the censor. This rendered the General Manager’s letters quite unintelligible, but it was often enough a matter for the exercise of patience until the duplicate by sea mail came in, which had as often as not escaped the censor.
The air routes by which correspondence reached this country were various, some were marked via Chan King. Various expedients were resorted to to keep communications open, which included the so-called “aerograph,” that small photographic facsimile of the typescript. But, taken over all, it was remarkable that so few letters were lost, and with the war-time slogan of “Business as Usual,” it was possible, with the loyal, though depleted, staffs both in Assam and London, to overcome all difficulties and thus enable the Board to carry on.

Under Government control it was possible, with full production of crop, to make satisfactory profits, but, to prevent anything like the war profiteers of the First World War, Government imposed the Excess Profits Tax, whereby companies were allowed to select the average of any two years’ profits made in the years 1935 to 1937 as their standard profit, and any profit made above this figure was subject to an Excess Profits Tax. In 1945 this tax was 100 per cent. of all profit over the standard. In this way dividends were kept down to normal.

Owing to paper shortage, the publication of the Company’s Annual Report in its usual booklet form had to be abandoned, and the report was issued in the restricted four-page pamphlet, which precluded the printing of the normal garden and other statistics.

By 1943, twenty-five of the Company’s European staff in India had joined the Forces. There had been killed M. R. Willows, G. L. Jackson and Capt. R. A. I. Ball—the last-named having been awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in Libya. Two others were prisoners of war.

The above is an outline of the situation on which the Company operated in London up to about the end of 1945.

Assam under war conditions is a story of the work of the Indian Tea Association in organising, with the willing co-operation of the sterling and rupee companies, the personnel and labour and other resources of the Tea Industry of the province, with the dual purpose of evacuating civilian population overland, through Burma, and the construction of a military road from Manipur to Tamu and beyond; and later what was called the Ledo Road through the Hukwang Valley into Burma. With the invasion of Burma by the Japanese, Assam, by its geographical position, became at once of supreme military importance, both as a possible means of maintaining contact with China by land routes and as a military supply base for the defence of India, no less than for counter-attack into Burma.

To many, the mere thought of an invasion of India through the heavy jungle that extended for miles on the borders of Assam was fantastic. In the chapter dealing with labour there is recounted the Company’s attempt as one of its first operations to recruit Chinese labour and tea
makers by the overland route from Yanan in China. It is true that that would have been undertaken only in their own time and at seasonable periods of the year, for such a trek through Burma could have been performed, even under such conditions, only with considerable hardship. In the mind of the Assam tea planter, however, such a journey was just ruled out as impossible, for beyond the hills on his immediate borders, inhabited by the Naga tribes which he knew, he looked upon the many miles of impenetrable jungle between him and Burma or China as a natural wall securing his peaceful occupation of the country on his side.

The evacuation of these refugees (the real number can never be known, but it is estimated that over 150,000 souls were brought safely out of Burma in the van of the advancing Japanese armies) is an epic story.

To understand the magnitude of this mission of mercy which the planter undertook in a country which he knew as hostile, it is necessary to read The Forgotten Frontier, by Geoffrey W. Tyson, C.I.E., which depicts so dramatically the tea planters' contribution to the relief of human suffering.

The vast majority of these refugees were Indians who had for years made their homes in Burma but were looked upon by the Burmese as interlopers in that country, and with the added fear of possible ruthless treatment at the hands of the invading Japanese, were inspired with the one desire to get back to their native land at whatever cost. This exodus took place in the worst possible conditions at the height of the Monsoon, in one of the wettest parts of the world. Through an unknown, almost trackless heavy jungle, infested with mosquitoes, leeches, flies and other irritants to the human body, and over steep hills, with in the valleys deep, swift, swollen rivers that lay across their path. Besides these natural obstacles, there were no local supplies of food for their sustenance, whilst diseases, dysentery particularly, took their toll of those already exhausted, starving, ill-clad people.

Besides these two main projects, as they were called, of the Manipur and Ledo Roads, and the evacuation of refugees, there was the making of landing-grounds for aircraft which the Tea Industry accepted also as part of the strategic military preparations for which they were responsible. The making of these “air strips” was often accomplished only as the result of the planter's ingenuity for improvising local facilities at his command; such, for example, as when, in the absence of mechanical means for levelling the site for an air strip, he commandeered the services of every elephant with its mahout for miles around, and marched them for days in a phalanx as animal road-rammers, until a solid surface for the landing of light aircraft was achieved.

The works which the Indian Tea Association Organisation undertook were known generally as “Eastern Frontier Projects,” and the project
of first importance was the construction of the Manipur Road. The full story of this great undertaking is graphically told in the book written by Colonel A. H. Pilcher, C.I.E., M.C., entitled Navvies to the 14th Army. To understand the vital importance of this project it is necessary only to read the foreword to that book by General Sir William Slim, with letters of appreciation from Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, General Sir Claude Auchinleck and Lord Louis Mountbatten.

Although this is a History of the Assam Company, and in this project they played their vital part, one must find a place in this record to emphasise its importance to India, especially knowing the planters' propensity when a job is done to say "Forget it" and get on with the next.

The Indian Tea Association's first assignment was to provide 25,000 tea garden labourers to the making of the road. The concentration point for this army of what has been described so aptly as navvies was at Manipur Road Station. It was previously nothing more than a wayside halt on the single-line track of the Assam-Bengal Railway, and used in normal times chiefly as a starting-point for visitors going by road to Manipur State, 133 miles away.

The Assam Company made its full contribution to this work, and contingents of labourers from its gardens were amongst the first arrivals. Each labourer was a volunteer, and set out equipped with a hoe, a dhow, blankets, his essential pots and pans, and with rations for at least a fortnight. He was fortified with the news of the special daily wage which he would receive whilst engaged in this arduous work far from his home and family on the garden. The trains carrying him down the line were packed so full that it was said to be no uncommon thing for a man to force his way in at the door of a carriage only to eject some other from the window opposite. European staff frequently accompanied their men to ensure their safe arrival; and they returned to their garden because they could not themselves be spared for permanent work on the road.

Short of European staff as the gardens already were, it was contrived that some of them should remain for varying periods on the Manipur Road, and six men were so employed whilst those remaining on the gardens took over the supervision of additional tea areas. One man did most useful work in assisting to organise the transit camps for refugees. As camp after camp was established along the jungle roadway, and the early bivouacs of bamboo and banana leaves developed into well-organised semi-permanent establishments stretching further and further into the foothills and mountains beyond, a steady flow and return of properly equipped labourers was maintained, and continued to be so maintained, from the Company's gardens until the project was completed. On the gardens, both staff and labour worked long hours, and areas of tea had to
be temporarily abandoned from the shortage of labour for plucking and manufacture.

As the scheme grew into a great enterprise, with railway sidings stretching out on either side from the original single-track line, lorry parks, ammunition dumps and all the paraphernalia of a modern army on the move was built up. An appeal was made by Lady Reid, wife of His Excellency the Governor of Assam, to Mrs. Richardson, wife of the Company’s General Manager, for the establishment of some centre for the refreshment of troops passing through the base, where no amenity of this kind had as yet been set up. The General Manager sent down furniture, crockery, provisions and other necessaries for the establishment of an unofficial canteen at a small shop in the Bazaar. Mrs. Richardson and the wife of one of the Company’s Managers camped there in the jungle in huts provided by the Army, and worked through that first Monsoon to make the canteen the great success which it became. Before the eventual handing over to Army Authorities, a mobile canteen had been provided and operated up and down the Manipur Road for many miles, and amongst the men in camps and gun sites which bordered it.

It was during the Monsoon of 1942 that the United States Forces began to arrive in Assam to play a part in the war against Japan. Their main effort was directed to the provision by air of arms and ammunition to the Nationalist Chinese, who were still sporadically resisting Japanese armies and could be supplied no longer by road. Huge areas of waste land, and in some cases even areas of planted tea were made into airfields capable of taking the largest four-engined aircraft. One such airfield was constructed on Assam Company’s land at Doomur Dullong, and the Manager there rendered invaluable assistance in its preparation over an area which was in part covered by dense jungle, inhabited only by game, and later on by organising and providing labour for its maintenance.

On the Company’s gardens around Nazira, and later in the neighbourhood of Behubor, arose an organisation which provided what was probably a unique co-operative effort between the British planter and his American Allies. This was the almost unknown “Detachment 101,” which came to play an important part in preparing the stage for the final liberation of Burma by our troops.

In August 1942 there came to Nazira, after consultation with the General Manager, a selected group of specialists, including not only Army officers and men but also men who were well known in civilian life for their pre-eminence in law, languages, geography and business organisation. Even a skilled jeweller had been asked to volunteer for this work, and his ability to design and make on the spot tiny precision instruments was to prove invaluable. This group, consisting at first of only eleven officers and nine men, selected their site as being off the beaten track, but near to
the railway and close to the hills, which it was their mission to cross. Their purpose was to organise Resistance groups amongst the Kachin tribes and arrange for espionage and sabotage wherever possible behind the enemy lines. But first came many months of preliminary survey of the conditions which would be encountered; then the recruitment and training of volunteers of Burmese and Indian nationality, and their establishment in hidden camps around the gardens of Mackeypore, Lakhijan, Gelakey and Bamon Pookrie. All these camps were made by garden labour in addition to the contingents which had been sent to the Manipur Road, until the project had become so large as to employ every labourer who could be made available without bringing tea production to a standstill.

On all these estates, the bungalows of Assistants who had been released to join the Forces became Training Centres, Officers’ Messes and Headquarters Offices. Hathi Putti Club at Mackeypore added another chapter to its long history by being converted into a rest camp, photographic centre and car-park. An airfield was built there which was known only to a few pilots engaged on this special mission, and finally a completely equipped hospital was built for the sole use of this detachment. None of this work was allowed to figure in the official list of projects on which tea garden labour was employed, and even the funds for the payment of this labour were obtained through special channels. Every Manager, in addition to his own job, worked with the Americans by directing labour, designing buildings, seeking sites for jungle camps and helping to solve the difficulties which arose in dealing with the local inhabitants, so that not only was an enormously helpful spirit of co-operation ensured but friendships were made which have lasted in correspondence to this day. A planter’s wife became confidential secretary to the Colonel, and when at last it became possible for our Forces to stage their counter-attack against the Japanese in Manipur and Burma, a self-contained and elaborate organisation existed which the planter and the Americans had worked side by side to achieve.

In 1944 came the critical battle of Kohima in the Manipur State to counter the invasion of India by the Japanese, which resulted in a complete victory for our armies. Under Lieutenant-General Sir Montague Stopford, K.B.E., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., commanding the 33rd Indian Corps, the Japanese 15th Army was flung back across the Chindwin River, and these military operations culminated in the capture of Mandalay on 19th March 1945.

During the early part of this campaign, the officers Commanding and their staffs had their Headquarters in bungalows of the Jorehaut Tea Company at Cinnamara.

During all this upheaval of war, there were the domestic problems of producing tea, and that with a depleted labour force and with lack of
European and Indian supervisory staff. No small measure of the success of the work of these projects was due to the fact that the various contingents of labour were worked in complete units, the tea garden labourers under their own Managers or Assistants whom they knew, and with their own Indian assistant medical officers. It would have been difficult otherwise to keep together and working on the job against time, as well as in a strange country, these people who had been suddenly transplanted from their peaceful agricultural pursuits.

The Industry, anticipating that there would be an upward tendency in the prices of essential foodstuffs which would bring about eventually a serious increase in the cost of living to tea garden labour, had decided on the principle that no change should be made in the basic rate of wages that existed then, but that the labourers should be compensated by a special allowance to meet any increase in the cost of living.

By the latter half of 1941 the rise in the cost of living had become so pronounced that action had to be taken in all tea districts. This increase in cost was due chiefly to the continued rise in the cost of rice, which was aggravated by the difficulty of obtaining adequate supplies of rice from Burma before that country was overrun by the Japanese; but also to a very considerable rise in the cost of all those commodities which were considered essential to maintain the labourers’ diet at the necessary level when he was working on war-time projects. Such vital foodstuffs included pulse, mustard oil, sugar and salt; cloth, for even his scanty needs in clothing, could only be obtained in a black market, where the prices ruling rose far beyond what he could afford to pay.

To meet this situation in Assam it was decided to fix the price of rice to labour at Rs.5 per maund, no matter what the market price was, and each estate had to be responsible for procuring supplies not only of rice but of the other commodities just mentioned, and issuing rationed quantities to its labour at pre-war prices, whatever they cost the employer. In this way there came into being what is referred to generally as “Concession Foodstuffs” to labour which is in operation still. It brought an irksome burden on the planter to have to make weekly issues to each of his labourers from his own godowns, which he had to see contained adequate supplies. This system ensured that each rise in the cost of living was not passed on to the labourer by a corresponding increase in wages. The employer became in effect the buffer between the labourer and the continual inflation of prices, which was of great value to the administration of the province.

The arrangement of supplies of cereals became a major operation administered through the Indian Tea Association, with Steel Bros. & Company Ltd., as bulk distributors. The planter has shouldered this
additional work for all these years, much as he dislikes being made an amateur shopkeeper.

Even after the cessation of hostilities, the problem of feeding large numbers of labourers throughout the province continued to cause anxiety. In fact, it got worse, particularly in later years when there was an All-India scarcity and imports from other provinces were not possible, and when some gardens had not sufficient supplies of foodstuffs in their godowns to meet the next week's issue to their labour. In 1944, when rice was in short supply, though not so drastically short as it became later, the experiments (or perhaps it should be called the necessary expedient) was tried of issuing a portion of the labourers' weekly ration of foodstuffs in the form of "atta" (wheat flour). To change the diet of a people used to rice was a drastic step, and many Managers viewed this issue of atta with misgiving. Contrary to expectation, however, the change was on the whole accepted readily by labour. This was as well, for the proportion of atta and other cereals in the ration was increased appreciably later on.

Compensation for the Indian clerical staff to meet the increased cost of living was given at first by a cash payment on a sliding scale according to salary. This compensation is more generally called "dearness allowance," and under this description the European has also been given this allowance instead of altering his basic scale of pay under his agreement.

This is how the present wage structure started. There had been periodical increases in the amounts of these allowances, and revisions in the scale of basic pay to European and Indian staff and labour, but the structure of pay to labour is based on a daily basic pay, concession foodstuffs and dearness allowance.

The granting of concession foodstuffs to labour brought a new item into the Company's Annual Accounts, "Cost of Concession Foodstuffs and Clothing." For the year 1950, with which this chapter closes, this item accounted for the enormous sum of £176,292, though this was not the peak of this expenditure. It is perhaps not surprising when it is remembered that at times the Company was paying over Rs.30 a maund for rice, which it was selling to its labour at Rs.5 a maund. With the recession of the War from the frontiers of India and with the completion of airfield construction, practically all the Eastern Frontier projects were closed down by the end of October 1945 and it was no longer necessary for companies to supply large batches of labour for such purposes. This was regarded at first as a welcome step towards a return to normal, but for some gardens in Upper Assam this prospect must have been viewed differently. Their tea areas had been requisitioned for airfields, and where this meant concrete runways, such areas could never be replanted; their factories, leaf houses, and other buildings had been converted to accommodate military staff.
The Second World War had ended with the surrender of Germany in May and Japan in August 1945.

The Assam Company started planning immediately the rehabilitation of its estates in the matter of equipment and buildings, for during the war their proper maintenance had not been possible. The first projected programme was for an expenditure of £150,000 for replacements and improvements over the three years 1946, 1947 and 1948. These improvements covered a wide field, not only for the replacement of equipment for the actual production of tea but for the betterment of the health of the labour force, including more and better grazing land for the labourers' cattle and an endeavour to obtain a better strain of cattle. Land was set aside also for more intensive vegetable and other food crops, for with the demands on the province for supplies of these essential commodities for the fighting forces, the ordinary labourer was suffering from malnutrition brought about by an unbalanced diet. The demand, and prices paid by the Allied Occupying Forces, precluded the ordinary tea garden labourer from procuring fish, eggs, butter or ghee, which helped normally to balance his diet.

In the midst of all this planning for better things there came the momentous announcement of the partition of India into the two Dominions of India and Pakistan.

Assam is wholly in the Province of India and was spared, mercifully, such tragedies as occurred in the Punjab, the United Provinces, Bihar, and other provinces, when communal hatred got beyond the control of what power the police and military were allowed politically to exercise, and resulted in wholesale massacre between Hindus and Muslims.

Under British rule, the two contending factions had lived for long under conditions of amicable tolerance of each other, and only at times of religious festivals did relations between them become strained; but it was fear of reprisals without the possibility of the intervention of the British impartial administration of law and order, that caused the panic for Hindu and Muslim to change their residence to that part of the country in which their respective co-religionists predominated.

Before setting down any account of the effect that partition had on Assam and its tea industry, it is necessary to mention what is described as the “great Calcutta killing.”

It can be said that this terrible happening did not affect directly the administration of the Assam Company's affairs, or any commercial concern in Calcutta, except temporarily, but it was the most alarming incident for the community of that City, and it is noticeable that in none of the official records of the Tea Industry is any mention made of it, except
something to the effect that “these events are too recent in your memory for me to recall them now.”

It is perhaps not surprising that there is no Government account, and there is, apart from the newspaper accounts at the date of its happening, only Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Tuker’s eye-witness account in his book, *While Memory Serves*.

There may be varying accounts as to how precisely the conflagration started on 16th August 1946, but it is believed generally that it was the refusal of Hindu shopkeepers to close their shops at the behest of the Muslim processionists. The next step was for members of both communities, in their vast numbers to attend, meetings in the centre of the city to listen to the inflammatory speeches of their leaders, who each abused their opponents, denounced the British and called on the latter to quit India. The goondas, or hooligans, of both sides joined in to hear the programme of what would enable them to contribute their special part in what they sensed was to be looting and arson.

The storm broke, as it does usually in any communal conflict, in the north part of the city, and it developed into unbridled savagery, with homicidal maniacs let loose to kill, maim, and burn. The underworld of Calcutta had taken charge of the city. Buses and taxis charged about the streets loaded with Sikhs and Hindus, armed with swords, iron bars and fire-arms. Manholes in the main streets were opened, and opponents thrown in alive and the cover replaced. The police and military were able to regain eventually some control of the main thoroughfares, but unseen in the labyrinth of the Bustees, looting, arson and murder continued to hold their horrible sway.

It was not until some semblance of control could be maintained and the actual killings had died down that there arose the gruesome task of clearing the hundreds of dead from the streets, which in the hot sticky Monsoon days of August, had begun to make their noisome presence felt; more particularly as it was days before many corpses, hidden in sacks and dustbins, were traced, or were recovered from tanks and sewers.

It fell to the British and Indian troops to organise this loathsome task, the execution of which in the sickening stench of decomposing humanity no words can describe.

It is not known what the total number of casualties were, but the toll of dead must have run into thousands.

Before the end of this period of carnage, the looting and destruction had extended throughout the whole of Calcutta. European and Anglo-Indian householders could not leave their houses. There they and their families remained besieged, and lived on the tinned foods in their store cupboards.
That briefly was what happened between 16th and 20th August 1946.

A year later, in September 1947, rioting broke out again in Calcutta, the origin of which is attributed, as often happened, to a very trivial incident, concerning two Hindu youths who were dissatisfied with the cinema show because of its technical defects, for which they blamed the Muslim operator and attempted to stab him.

The news of this incident spread like wildfire, and soon became a communal issue, incited, it is thought, by the Sikhs, who went about stabbing both Hindus and Muslims. It threatened to become a repetition of the killings of the previous year, particularly when the ruddy glow from looted or burning shops appeared against the evening sky. There were, however, two factors, apart from the more prompt authority given to the military and police to deal with the situation, which contributed to the suppression of the hotheads and the aversion of another calamity. First was the presence of Mahatma Ghandi in Calcutta, and his decision to fast unto death unless communal strife ceased. The other was one of those heavy rainstorms or cloudbursts which overwhelmed the normal drainage of the city and caused temporary flooding of the streets to depths in some places of three feet.

It was later on, when the boundaries of the two Dominions were defined, that the effects of partition were more fully felt by the Tea Industry in Assam, and this was in the lines of communication. In the mad rush to get from one Dominion to the other, the railway became overwhelmed with refugees, and hopelessly overcrowded trains were the target of those bent on murdering their opponents. This was at the worst in the North-West, but these conditions were reflected in what happened on the transit routes between India and Eastern Pakistan.

The railway administration broke down completely. The head and subordinate officers responsible for administration were suddenly transferred from one Dominion to the other, according to their status, and on their removal found themselves in a strange country and responsible for a railway line about which they were totally ignorant. In the matter of housing accommodation many trains and wagons were shunted on to sidings and used as temporary homes by railway officials and refugees. Conditions became chaotic.

As the first step to establishing their own identity as a Dominion, each created their own customs barriers. It was not at first the mere levying of Customs Duty, but something more like search and confiscation, or, with untutored officials, mere looting of opponents under the disguise of officialdom.

It was fortunate for Assam that the province had the alternative route by river for its stores upwards and its teas downwards. Pakistan lay right
across either route, and whilst they could avoid some of the chaotic rail route, the river steamers were subject to delay and detention even on their passage on the waterway.

Although the political consequences of partition as it affected Assam were small, these difficulties in communication gave a tremendous impetus to air travel, and nobody to-day thinks of proceeding there from Calcutta otherwise than by air, a flight of probably five hours against the old railway journey which took anything up to two and a half days.

As a consequence of war and of Far Eastern politics, the North-East Frontier has become a “live” frontier. Tibet, Communist China and a new system of administration in the Naga Hills and Manipur serve to show that Assam is no longer a geographical vacuum but a State which needs defending. It can be said, however, that one of the changes brought about by partition is the fact that the European planter has the opportunity no longer to render public service on the Local Boards, and he thus becomes a producer with no direct participation in local affairs, which is a loss to the Provincial administration.

In 1944 the then Government of India imposed an Excise Duty on all tea manufactured but not exported, of As.2 a lb., and the Tea Industry was called upon to provide living accommodation for some thirty Excise Officers to be stationed at various centres throughout the province. To an Industry that had for so long been without such official surveillance on their doorstep, this was felt to be a most irksome piece of Legislation. There was imposed at the same time an Export Duty on tea of As.6 a lb. (The proportion of Excise and Export Duty is now As.3 and As.1.)

With the granting of their independence, Pakistan imposed an Export Duty of As.6 a lb. on tea. No satisfactory arrangement could be come to between India and Pakistan to adjust the proportion of railway freight on teas from Assam, where the route passed through Pakistan on its way to the port of Chittagong, or to come to some mutual arrangement for the consignment of tea through their customs barriers without undue harassment and delay. Thus the port of Chittagong became closed for the shipment of tea from Assam, a facility which the Industry had enjoyed for over forty years, since through booking over the Assam-Bengal Railway was made possible on the completion of that line, and the port had been enlarged to accommodate ocean steamers. A factor that contributed to this impasse was that Pakistan, unlike India, did not devalue the rupee in terms of sterling. The rate in India is 1s. 6d. and in Pakistan about 2s. 7d.

In this division of tea-producing districts between India and Pakistan there were the former districts of Sylhet, Tripura and Chittagong, which then became tea areas in the Dominion of Pakistan. All other major areas were in the Dominion of India—these include Assam, Cachar, the Dooars with the Terai, and Darjeeling.
Assam and Cachar were not the only districts to have parts of Pakistan cross their railway lines of communication with Calcutta; all the other districts mentioned above in West Bengal were affected similarly, but they had not the alternative river route. Some way around this impediment had to be found, to accomplish which the Railway Commission conceived what is known as the "Assam Rail Link Project," which was the construction of a metre-gauge railway line that would obviate the transport of goods through Pakistan. It meant the construction of a new line from Kishangunj to Siliguri, 66 miles; Siliguri to Bagnakot, 22 miles, which was the western terminus of the Bengal-Dooars Railway in the Dooars, with which it connected. Then from Madarihat, the eastern terminus of the Bengal-Dooars Railway to Hasimara, 8½ miles, and finally from Ailpur Duar to Fakiragram, a distance of 45 miles, where it connected with the line to Dhubri on the Brahmaputra, from whence the river steamers completed this roundabout journey to Calcutta.

The major problem of this construction was to bridge the Teesta, Toorsa and Sankosh rivers, amongst many other smaller ones. It was a remarkable feat under Karnail Singh, the Engineer in Chief, that this 141 miles of railway were completed between 27th January 1948 and 9th December 1949, but, due to the Monsoon, with only 254 working days.

It is necessary to give some detail of the Assam Railway Link Project to appreciate the situation that arose at the close of 1949, when there was a complete suspension of all goods traffic from India through Pakistan and the Tea Industry was faced with the need to despatch the whole of its crop from North-East India and to send all requirements of the estates by that newly opened and wholly untried All-India railway line. It was evident that in the best of circumstances it was quite incapable of dealing with the requirements of Assam in addition to those of gardens in Bengal. Normal transport services through Pakistan were resumed in April 1950, and accumulations of tea and stores were gradually worked off.

In June 1950 there occurred a devastating cyclonic storm in the Darjeeling Hills. The Teesta River became swollen with the enormous rainfall, which breached the Assam rail link and carried away part of the newly constructed Teesta Bridge. By the superhuman efforts of the railway engineering staff, temporary repairs were effected to the bridge, and through running was established again by August.

On 15th August 1950 there occurred one of the worst earthquakes Assam has ever experienced. The first shocks were severe, but tremors of less violence continued intermittently over a period of more than a month. The shocks in the hills bordering Upper Assam caused extensive landslides, which dammed up the higher reaches of the Dehing and Subansiri rivers, and there resulted the unheard of phenomenon of these rivers nearly drying up in the rains. This was, however, a temporary
for the prodigious volume of water banked up behind these dams broke through eventually, and rivers came down in spate, flooding the country and doing far worse damage than the earthquake itself. Even the mighty Brahmaputra was affected, and through shoals appearing where they did not exist before, the heavy flotsam of forest trees impeded the navigation of the inland river steamers in the Dibrugarh area. In spite of the magnitude of this disaster, the recorded loss of human lives was mercifully small. The heaviest damage to tea gardens was in the Doom Dooma, Panitola and Dibrugarh areas and in North Lakimpur.

It was estimated the loss of tea production was in the region of 1½ million lb., whilst the damage to buildings and communications was thought to amount to a crore of rupees. The indirect results of the earthquake were serious, and for a time road, rail and river communications were dislocated. The movement of tea, stores, and in particular food, were brought to a standstill. The disaster came at a very unfortunate time when natural food supplies were at their lowest. The previous year’s rice crop was nearly consumed, and prices were already on the increase. The new crop would not be harvested until four or five months later, but the floods had washed away much of this. There arose then a serious threat of food shortage, and there had to be in some areas heavy cuts in the foodstuffs ration to inhabitants, for it was not only tea garden labour that was affected but in all villages in the neighbourhood of this disaster.

The Tea Industry proved again how it can rise to the occasion in dealing with an emergency. Magnificent rescue operations were carried out in some areas on the north bank, which had been more severely affected by floods, and considerable quantities of supplies and food were dropped by air to those afflicted. Tea garden labour showed, under supervision, its invaluable use in repairing essential road communications.

The effect of this disastrous earthquake on the Assam Company’s property was relatively slight. Apart from the unpleasantness, and even terror, that such visitations can impose on human beings, the most serious damage was at Khoomtai, where the water tank collapsed. The damage otherwise was confined to cracked walls, chimneys, and fallen plaster and ceilings. As in even milder ‘quakes to which Assam is always subject, it is the older brick-built buildings, so often those due for replacement, which suffer most.

A. J. Richardson was in charge of the Company’s administration in Assam until 31st March 1945, when he retired and was succeeded by J. Q. Healy as General Manager. In that year, after the cessation of hostilities, there were still eighteen Assistants on military service and due to return to the Company’s employ.

The Trade Union Movement on Tea Gardens came under the
Industry’s consideration in 1945, when it was agreed that opposition to the movement should not be offered, but that it should be the endeavour to guide it on the right lines by adopting and enforcing certain standard conditions, on the basis of which recognition of a Tea Garden Trade Union could be accorded. In May 1947 there was formed the Indian National Trade Union Congress for Labour, and in the following year the Union for Clerical Staff on Tea Gardens, the Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha. Both of these are recognised by the Tea Industry.

It was the Company’s normal policy to purchase the bulk of the gardens’ requirements of stores in the United Kingdom and ship them to India. This heading of stores covered not only cultivation tools, factory maintenance materials such as belting, paint, oil, grease, etc., but tea chests, steel work for buildings, machinery spares and replacements and tea-making machinery itself.

In the war years, manufacturers were largely diverted on to munitions and other equipment, which made these stores difficult to obtain, but steamer space for shipment to India was scarce. When, however, shipment was only allowed under Import Licence, matters of supply from the United Kingdom became almost impossible.

It was then that the Company had to turn to its Calcutta Agents, Kilburn & Company Limited, to supply the whole of the Company’s requirements of stores, materials, tea boxes and fertilisers, as well as to arrange the financing of the enormous outlay required for foodstuffs.

In accomplishing this additional task it had the co-operation of members of the Nazira staff who frequently visited Calcutta in endeavours to accelerate despatch, and whenever space on steamers to Assam was scarce, essentials were flown up. The whole was a fine job which the Agents accomplished in order to keep the Company’s tea production in full swing. These difficulties have not subsided yet, for with the national urge towards industrialisation of India, there are restrictions on imports, and companies have to make do with many items manufactured in India, the quality of which is inferior to the imported article, and the price no less. The most outstanding example of which is tea chests.

One of the difficulties of the Company’s post-war planning was the way in which these plans were sent astray through the unpredictable date of delivery of essential materials and the interminable delays in the procurement of the necessary permits, for nearly everything was subject to some Government control or other.

The first essential for the replacement and extension of buildings was steel. Unless this was fabricated steelwork, it was not allowed to be exported from this country, but had to be procured in India, where its
supply was controlled and subject to long delays in delivery. Cement was another important item that was subject to the same delay.

Manufacturers in this country were quoting two years for delivery of oil engines and electric generators as an example, whilst tea-making machinery was seldom available in less than one year. In the course of time, delivery did improve, but this, as explained in the Chairman's Statement of 1950, created some embarrassment in annual expenditure. Although the placing of orders had been correctly phased for the various items of Capital expenditure planned, deliveries had contracted into a shorter space of time, and expenditure which was planned to extend over two or three years had all to be met in one.

In his Statement to shareholders in 1949, the Chairman, the Hon. P. F. Remnant, M.P., reminded them that that year saw the completion of twenty-five years since the reconstruction of the Company, and he took the opportunity to take stock to see how far the Company had travelled since the beginning of 1924.

Although the crop is an important factor contributing to profits, it was not, at 776 lb. per acre in 1924 compared with 935 lb. in 1948, the only indication of the progress made. The Chairman drew attention to the fact that the cost of production had in this period increased two and a half times from 8.81d. per lb. to 1s. 9.35d.; but this increase in cost of over 1s. 0½d. per lb. had not been offset in this comparison by a similar rise in the price realised. In 1924 the average price for the Company's teas was 1s. 8.63d. and in 1948 it was a fraction under 2s. 6d. per lb., a difference of little more than 9d. What, however, was pointed out as being in more violent contrast to these differences was the fact that in 1924 taxation took only 8½ per cent. of the gross profits whilst in 1948 it was 69 per cent.

Against these figures of costs, the Chairman was able to show that the total Reserves had risen from £138,000 to £464,000, which had up to that date enabled the Company to take the rising costs and values in its stride without need of more capital.

Following on the Chairman's public statement, there was on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting on 6th September 1949 his felicitous reference to the loss the Industry had sustained by the death of Mr. William James Thompson, the Senior Partner of W., J. and H. Thompson, who had been the Company's Tea Brokers since its inception in 1839, and which firm still are one of the Company's Brokers, who sell rather more than half of its crop, with Messrs. Ewart, Maccaughey & Co. Ltd. the remainder.

The Chairman referred to him as a great character and individual, for which the Industry were the poorer by his loss. Mr. Thompson had for
several years moved at each General Meeting the motion according the
stockholders' thanks to the staff in the East, which he did in his own
inimitable words, and which were received always with acclamation.

Arthur H. Graham died on 31st October 1942, after serving forty
years as a Director and nine years as the Company's Chairman.

The Hon. Peter F. Remnant was elected Chairman in his place.

Arthur C. S. Holmes, a member of the firm of Messrs. W., J. & H.
Thompson, was elected a Director in 1938, but died in July 1943.

Colonel Thomas W. Pragnell, C.B.E., D.S.O., joined the Board on
1st August 1942.

Edward M. Murray of the firm of Messrs. Ewart, Maccaughey &
Co. Ltd., with 25 years' experience of the Industry and of visiting many
of the Assam Company's and other Gardens in India, was elected a
Director in September 1943.

J. W. McKay, who for many years had acted as Agricultural Adviser
and Inspecting Visitor, was elected a Director in September 1944.

Arnold Whittaker, C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S. (Retd.), for seven years
political Adviser in Assam of the Indian Tea Assoc. (Calcutta), was
elected to the Board in 1946.

Edgar E. Chalk died on 7th January 1948. He gave more than forty-
eight years service to the Company, first as an Assistant; as Manager from
1910, and was promoted General Manager in 1925; when he relinquished
that post in 1932, he was elected a Director, in which capacity he served
for sixteen years.
First Post-war Tea Auction. Held at Plantation House, Mincing Lane, April 16th, 1951.
CHAPTER XXI

1951 TO DATE

This chapter brings to a conclusion the history to date of the oldest tea company in India, but because the inner story of a given period in respect of the individual Company does not develop or come to light for some time afterwards, this last chapter can be a summary only of events in the Tea Industry generally at the time of drawing down the curtain.

Since the end of the war the Company had concentrated on rehabilitating its estates by replanting and putting out such areas of new extensions as were permitted under the tea Control Act, or as could be done with the labour available. Gabroo Parbut, which had always been a garden of relatively low yield compared with others, did not, it was found, respond to treatment to the extent that was expected, or as the other gardens had done. The Board decided, therefore, that if a good offer for the property could be obtained, it would be better to sell it and to employ the capital to the more economical work of increasing the yield and acreage of those gardens on more productive soil and which had surplus factory equipment to deal with larger crops.

As a result of negotiations put in train the previous year, a sale of Gabroo Parbut was effected in 1951 for the sum of £75,000. Thus the oldest original garden, the most uneconomical and the one which was the most difficult to supervise because of its long distance from Headquarters, passed into Indian ownership.

The most notable event of these three years was the reopening of the London auctions on 16th April 1951 after a lapse of nearly twelve years.

Government’s intention to end the system of bulk purchase of the United Kingdom’s requirements of tea and to permit its sale by public auction had been announced in the previous July, and this was warmly welcomed by the Industry and Trade as a beginning to a return to normal trading practice. The illustration depicts the scene at the Tea Brokers Association Auction Room at Plantation House on that memorable occasion. It shows Mr. A. B. Yuille, of the firm of Geo. White & Co. Ltd., selling the first tea, which was an invoice from Ceylon, for this first sale comprised teas from all producing countries.

The Assam Company’s contribution to this opening sale was a notable one, for it was the only Company to put up any tea from Assam, and its 2,482 packages comprised invoices from ten out of its total of twelve gardens, and realised an average price of 3s. 9½d. per lb. With
this quantity of tea it was able to start off again with its own distinctive pale blue catalogue as if there had been no interval since its last issue of such a catalogue for the auction in 1939. This first auction being held in April, teas offered by the Companies were mostly of 1950 manufacture.

The Company's first sale of 1951 production was on 13th September, when 241 chests from Khoomtai and Tingalibam were sold at an average of just over 4s. per lb.

The first sales were by no means the free auctions of pre-war days. Government retained control over distribution, and buyers' operations were limited in the quantity they could buy by their individual entitlements as primary wholesalers under the United Kingdom rationing scheme, whilst the public were allowed only their weekly ration. Buyers were subject also to price ceilings imposed by Government to control the price of packet tea to the public, and re-exports to markets outside the United Kingdom of teas bought on the London Market were not allowed.

It took time to get these controls and restrictions removed. In July 1952 the ban on the re-export of London-bought teas to the Continent of Europe was removed. In September the ration to the public was increased from 2½ to 3 ounces a week, and a month later tea rationing was abolished altogether. At the same time, Government control of selling prices was removed, and this made the Tea Trade free from all restrictions.

Whilst there was freedom again for the actual selling of teas in London, producers were, and still are, subject to Exchange Control Regulations as to what they may do with proceeds of these sales. In contrast with the pre-war custom of retaining in this country proceeds from the sale of tea and remitting to India such finance as was required to meet expenditure in India, under these Regulations the sale proceeds of all teas sold in the United Kingdom have to be remitted to India within six months of the date of shipment from that country. Sterling companies are allowed to retain only the amount of expenses incurred in the direct sale of the teas. They are not allowed to keep back any proceeds on account of profit; money with which to pay dividends in this country has to be repatriated from India under rules governing profits earned in India by sterling companies.

The marketing of tea in this period went through a phase so disastrous for some producers that they had to close down.

Under the bulk purchase scheme by Government during the war, when quantity was everything, and whilst Government controlled the distribution of all tea to the trade by allocation, the quality of production from many gardens had deteriorated badly. Buyers were concerned to effect improvement in the quality of the teas they offered to the public,
1951 TO DATE

and having with the abandonment of restrictions the opportunity to be selective in their purchases, this poor-quality tea became a drug on the market and was either unsaleable or was purchased only at prices which represented a loss to the producer. It is nothing new to the Tea Industry to experience periods of near collapse, usually on account of overproduction, but this one was largely on a question of quality, for good tea throughout this period sold at remunerative prices. The producers of good tea did feel the effect of the situation, however, in the prices for their lower grades and in the consequent overall reduction in the average price for the whole year.

In previous times of slump, when the cost of production was 8d. to 1s. per lb., a collapse in the market meant a loss of a few pence per pound only. But with present-day high costs such a recession in the market meant a loss of 1s. and over per lb., which is a burden that no company capitalised on the basis of costs of years ago can stand for long, so that gardens and companies went into liquidation.

It must have been about July 1951 that so many of these concerns faced with bankruptcy set about improving their quality, though this may have meant an appreciable reduction in their previous prolific crops. This in due time, and with other factors operating, had its effect, and towards the later part of 1952 market prices so improved that many who had decided that there was nothing for it but liquidation were able to continue in existence, crippled financially, as they will be for some years before they can eliminate the losses they have incurred and put themselves on a dividend paying basis.

The effect of these later market conditions was not shown in the Assam Company’s trade results until 1952. There was a record profit of £467,335 in 1950 and a dividend of 10 per cent. with a bonus of 5 per cent. This was followed by a profit of £345,124 in 1951 and a reduction in dividend to 10 per cent. plus a bonus of only 3 per cent. This lower profit was due to an increase in the cost of production of approximately 3½d. per lb., which was not offset by a higher price for its teas, which increased by only about 1½d.

The higher costs were caused largely by the rise in the cost of purchasing foodstuffs. Results might have been less satisfactory than they were if it had not been for a private Forward Contract which the Board negotiated for 3,000,000 lb. of the 1951 crop.

The full impact of the difficult marketing conditions made itself felt in the results for season 1952, when the profit fell to £157,734 and the dividend was cut to 4½ per cent.

1951 was a year of grave anxiety over food supplies for tea garden labour in all districts. In Assam, in June, July and August, at the height of the manufacturing season, the situation became nearly that of famine.
The earthquake of 1950, and subsequent floods, had depleted supplies of rice to some extent. Government had for some time previously controlled the price at which gardens could purchase rice through their Procurement Department, but through various causes, some due to factors outside the province and to earthquake relief measures, available stocks dwindled and Government procurement failed disastrously.

Garden managers were faced with empty grain godowns. The Indian Tea Association made strenuous efforts to stabilise the position by despatching supplies of rice to Upper Assam by air. Rice supplies by this route cost Rs.75 a maund, which was issued to the labour at Rs.5 a maund.

Although the River Steamer Company did magnificent work in expediting supplies of food grains, transport by this route was slow to meet the critical situation. Besides the harassment of getting steamers through the customs barriers through Pakistan, there were delays caused by the over-critical examination of shipping documents, for there was allowed no lifting of these technical formalities between the two Dominions on the grounds of human distress. To relieve the situation, river cargoes destined for stations in Upper Assam were off-loaded at places like Gauhati and rushed up by lorry over the remaining two or three hundred miles to destination. Apart from these man-made delays to the relief of a critical situation, there were the effects of the earthquake in the Upper reaches of the river mentioned in the previous chapter.

The combination of all these circumstances created for the planter an unhappy situation with his labour. For so many years the Manager or his Assistant had been the fountain-head for the settlement of all their troubles. They could not understand that the privations to which they were being subjected were due to causes beyond the “Sahib’s” control. It was only by tact on the part of the management that trouble was averted. One has to realise that the criterion by which the labourer judged everything was that he and his family should by their labours have earned a full belly until the next day. As it was, major incidents were remarkably few, but a tense atmosphere existed, inflamed no doubt by the machinations of the outside political agitator, but in spite of all these circumstances, there were many occasions where trouble was averted by only the narrowest margin.

Present high costs, and finance to meet it, have created problems which remain to be solved yet, for the Tea Industry is not working under a free economy. In every phase of its administration and trading it is subject to some form of control by the Government of India which frustrates all endeavours of producers to help themselves. Even in the matter of supplies of essential stores and materials, such as coal, tea chests and food, it can be shown that the Industry has been obliged by Government to carry its coal by the most expensive routes and to buy tea chests
on the most expensive markets; to pay high duty on chests which are imported, and to purchase the more expensive grains with which to feed its labour, which has been mentioned already.

Government have fixed minimum wages at levels against the advice of the Industry, and they take in taxes, including Excise and Custom Duties, an amount many times more than the companies and proprietors get in dividends as a return on their investment.

In October 1951 the Indian Parliament passed the Plantation Labour Act, and although this Act has not been brought into force yet, rules under it have been framed. The Industry has made its criticisms of these rules, and whilst some of its protests have received consideration, many have been ignored; but if this Act is implemented in its present form it will impose on the Industry burdens of a most formidable character. These are some of the problems with which the Industry is confronted, and they show the extent to which present high costs of producing tea have been caused by Government legislation and are beyond the Industry’s own efforts to control or remedy.

In administration on the gardens, the institution of minimum wages and other concessions to labour have created for the planter many difficulties in his endeavours to produce the commodity on which all depend. Labour has for political and other reasons come to imagine that it is privileged and that the concessions made to it are sacrosanct and divorced from any adverse industrial or trading condition that may arise.

The tea garden labourer is by tradition and inclination an agriculturist, and he has been able, in spite of all that the politician can prove to the contrary, to earn sufficient for his sustenance by working probably only four hours a day; but with the minimum wages imposed by Government, he is now so well off that even long absence from work does not affect his financial position. How can the planter in these circumstances do anything to comply with the urgent need to reduce costs?

There is now so much work involved on a garden in keeping the records imposed by legislation in regard to labour, (including the provisions under the Factories Act) in dealing with correspondence from Trade Unions and cases before a Tribunal set up under the Industrial Disputes Act, etc., that many larger companies have engaged qualified men as Welfare officers to deal whole time with these devious matters to relieve Managers of some of this burden of office work.

On many gardens, Managers have formed Works or Welfare Committees composed of senior or responsible labourers themselves, which have been shown to be most useful in dealing with matters in dispute in regard to work, or to living conditions, at the stage before invoking the help of Labour Officers, Government or the Indian Tea Association.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

One can set out the problems, but one cannot foresee how they will be resolved eventually, but the Assam Company in co-operation with all other producing companies will play its part in meeting the difficulties of the present day.

In spite of its 114 years of existence, the Assam Company, though not now the largest in point of Capital and total acreage under tea, is a vital concern still in the Tea Industry, and it is within a few acres the largest single company with all its tea produced in the Brahmaputra Valley of the province of Assam.

Mere size, however, is not the factor which makes this Company famous. It has been the pioneer of the Tea Industry in India and of private enterprise in Assam. By mistakes, mismanagement and almost ruin in the first ten years of operations it paved the way for others to reap the benefit of errors, made through lack of knowledge as to how tea should be grown in a manner suitable for the climate of Assam; by this, it has an assured place of eminence in the history of the Tea Industry.
CHAPTER XXII

EARLY CULTIVATION

The Singhpos were alleged to be the earliest known people to have made tea in Assam. They did not cultivate it, however, but collected the leaves from plants growing wild in the jungle, from which travellers’ stories tell us they made, by some unspecified process, a concoction that resembled tea.

Such travellers’ tales were hardly a basis on which to formulate plans for the production of tea on a commercial scale.

Bruce, at the outset of his appointment as Superintendent of Tea Culture, had nothing in the way of local industry, in the cultivation or manufacture to guide him. He had, therefore, to devise his own methods.

It is not until he got his first two Chinese tea makers that he was able to get even the remotest idea of how to proceed, for it was from them that he learned the practices that were used in their country, and in the absence of any other method he had to base his procedure on what he was able to glean by question and answer: this must have been a laborious process, as the Chinamen knew no English or vernacular and Bruce knew no Chinese.

In the Government’s Papers relating to the Cultivation of the Tea Plant in British India there is an account of a dialogue between Bruce and the Chinese black tea makers which took place in 1837 and which must have been Bruce’s only manual of how to proceed, and the following is a rough summary of the methods in China which he learned as the outcome of these enquiries.

PLANTING

A hole is dug 4 inches deep and 8 inches in diameter, and as many seeds as can be held in both hands are put in and covered up. This is done in November, December and January, and when the rains set in the seeds come up. If the seed is good, ten to twenty plants will come up. These are very rarely transplanted, but are allowed to grow up together as one bush. If they do transplant, it is done in the rains and four to six plants are put in close together to form “a fine bush.” These bushes are 3 to 4 feet apart in a straight line, on a small ridge of earth 8 inches to a foot high.

OUT-TURN

The plants in China were fit for plucking in the third or fourth year from seed, depending on the soil.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

In reply to Bruce's question as to what quantity of manufactured tea each bush produced in one season, the Chinaman would seem to have exceeded the bounds of possibility, and his answer is quoted:

...This varies very much. Some plants only produce two pounds weight, while others produce a pound and a half; but a quarter of a pound all round I should think the first crop; the second crop a little less, and some people never take the third crop for fear of killing the trees.

CULTIVATION OF SOIL

In this dialogue, the only mention of cultivation as such was that in China they weeded twice a year, once in the rains and once in the cold weather.

PRUNING

Nothing is mentioned about pruning to reduce the size of the bush. The Chinamen told Bruce that in their country they cut the bushes down every nine years, but they suggested that as the plants in Assam grew so much faster and were so much larger, they would require to be cut down every three years.

One can only imagine that the plants in the plucking area were large unpruned, conical shaped bushes, with the centres too tall to be reached by any plucker.

Working on these bare bones of information, Bruce was able after two years' experience to write, in 1839, his treatise on all that he knew, and in this there is his account of what could be described as planting out tea by the ordeal of fire.

...In clearing a new tract, if the trees are very large and numerous, it would be as well to make a clean sweep of the whole by cutting them and the tea plants all down together; though it would be impossible to get rid of so much wood without the help of fire. The tea plants, if allowed to remain, would be of little use after they had been crushed and broken by the fall of the large trees and dried up by the fire; but admitting all this, the leaves of trees 12 to 20 feet high could not be reached, and if they could they would be almost useless for tea manufacture, as it is the young leaves from young trees that produce the best tea. But if all were cut down and set fire to, we should have a fine clear tract at once at the least expense, and might expect to have a pretty good crop of tea one year after the cutting, or at furthest the second year, for it is astonishing with what vigour the plant shoots up after the fire has been applied, and we may by this process have from every old stock or stump cut down, 10 or 12 more vigorous shoots spring up, so that in the place of a single plant you have now a fine tea bush.
EARLY CULTIVATION

Bruce's adoption of this technique was the outcome of his observing what happened to land which had been "jhumed" by local inhabitants, "jhuming" being that form of cultivation adopted even to-day by the jungle hill tribes, and followed by them since time immemorial, of burning down virgin forest to grow one or maybe two crops of rice or other cereal, and then move on to some other plot of fresh jungle another year to repeat the operation.

It was when Bruce was conducting the Scientific Deputation of 1836 to the various tea tracts, that he saw such a "jhumed" area which had contained tea trees, and he noticed that after the natives had reaped their harvest how vigorously the tea so cut down and burned had broken out with fresh growth from the old stumps.

This was only possible when tea was found growing close together in the jungle. Otherwise, it is necessary to plant out tea to form a barree. In this event, coolies were sent into the jungle early in March to collect what were called moderate-sized self-sown plants. If these were what were described as slender, then four or five were planted close together to form "a fine bush", and from these it was estimated to gather a small crop of leaf the next year against having to wait three years for any crop from plants raised from seed. When they did do any planting out with these self-sown seedlings, it was 6 feet by 6 feet.

Bruce had observed the effect of shade on young plants, and believed that in almost any soil tea would thrive if first planted out in deep shade. Mature tea he advocated, however, being grown in the sun, because such bushes gave leaf earlier in the season and gave better tea compared with the watery liquor from bushes grown in shade. The one great aim was to get an early harvest and the greatest quantity of tea. This end was attained in the shortest possible time by discovering tea plants growing wild in the jungle, and where these were reasonably close together, to hack down all the surrounding jungle, then cut down the tea tree to within about 3 feet from the ground and to pluck leaf from the new growth that came away from the old stump. In this way, they were able to get a crop within twelve months, or at most two years, from cutting down.

This system of getting quick returns from these innumerable small patches of tea scattered over an enormous expanse of country, with most inadequate roads and other means of transport, created a difficult situation for supervision.

The extent of these numerous plots of tea and the wide area over which they were scattered can be appreciated by reference to two old maps of 1843 and 1844, which show 37 named plots that had been cleared in the Northern Division and 15 in the Southern Division. Allowance has to be made, however, for the inaccuracies in these old maps for they will not coincide with maps of the tea districts as they are known to-day.
Bruce was not unaware of the difficulties he was creating for himself for there is a report that at Keyhung he was occupied in consolidating several areas by interplanting between the tracts found in the jungle. He rather grudged doing this work of consolidation, as it took his labour from plucking, for which purpose he had all too few hands, because all the plucking was done then by men. The scattered nature of the tea areas applied more particularly to the Northern and Eastern Divisions. Although the areas at Gabroo Parbut and Cherido in the Southern Division owed their selection to the fact that wild tea was found in the jungle there, there was a greater degree of concentration at such places and at Mazengah, Hathi Pooti, Ligri Pookri, etc., which were administered from Nazira.

Some weird and wonderful experiments in cultivation and plucking were tried in 1845-1846. Picking over and sorting the leaf as it came into the factory into its different grades before manufacturing it. Stripping alternate bushes of all leaf was an instruction given to the Superintendent by the Calcutta Board. To estimate the crop it was customary to count the bushes (there were at the best only about 1,200 to the acre), calculate the produce of each in so-many tolahs per bush in green leaf, and take 4 lb. of green leaf to the pound of finished tea. When they found the crop never equalled the estimate on this basis, the ratio was increased to $4 \frac{1}{2}$ to 1, and this was subsequently increased again to $4 \frac{3}{4}$ to 1.

They tried putting out plants 6 inches apart, but as the labour could not get a hoe between them, they increased the distance to 1 foot and planted on ridges 2 feet apart.

Another method was to plant five seeds in a circle of 6 inches diameter, $2 \frac{1}{2}$ feet apart. If these came up, then the alternate circle of plants was moved and put into newly cleared land, giving a 5 feet by 5 feet clearance.

It was not until under Stephen Mornay’s régime that planting was done at about 4 feet by 4 feet, which he started in his endeavour to get 4,000 plants to the pura. It was Mornay also who attempted propagating by slips, cuttings and layering. He also tried out the use of ploughs when preparing his lands. Nothing, however, is recorded of the success or otherwise of these innovations.

It was noticed that tea grew better in shade, and when planting out seedlings, betel trees were planted 15 feet apart. The betel tree was chosen in preference to any other, but the reasons for its selection is not stated. It was George Williamson, Junior’s study of the requirements of the tea plant from the agricultural angle that revolutionised tea planting and started practices which have developed since into what is the foundation of good tea husbandry to-day. During his period as Superintendent of the Assam Company from 1852-1858 he instituted many sound practices.
EARLY CULTIVATION

Based on the procedure adopted in China of plucking leaf only at certain periods dictated by conditions in that country, it had become the practice in Assam to close down manufacture by the end of September. It was thought that to extend plucking beyond this period would be most injurious to the future productivity of the bush, remembering that in common with practice in China it was expected to produce the bulk of the crop in the first month of growth in March.

No change in agricultural practice was ever adopted without reference to the Calcutta Board for sanction.

In May 1853 the suggestion was put to the Board that plucking should be extended to 15th October instead of ceasing, as was the normal practice, on 30th September. Such a departure from normal, although backed by the authority of George Williamson, was not accepted by the Calcutta Board without weighty deliberation.

In putting forward this proposal, George Williamson said that it was not with the object of merely swelling the out-turn at the risk of injuring the permanent strength and productiveness of the bush. In this view, to pluck later would prevent the formation of so much wood after plucking ceased, "keep the bushes within reach," and save their having to be pruned every year. It could not possibly do harm to pluck those branches which would in any event be shorn off after the harvest.

PRUNING

The Chinamen had told Bruce that in their country the bush was cut down every nine years, and they suggested that because of the more vigorous growth in Assam, this operation might have to be carried out probably every three years.

There is no record of what Bruce and his successors did during the next twelve years or so to render the bush, at the conclusion in September or October of one year's production, capable of producing leaf during the next year.

Garden indents on Calcutta for cultivation tools did not throw any light on possible pruning methods. Demands from the gardens did include in 1846 such items as bill-hooks, pruning knives and Indian hand-saws. There is mention of pruning shears in use in 1861.

It is not until 1852-1858, when George Williamson was Superintendent, that some semblance of pruning as a means of preparing the bush for the next year's crop was put into practice. He laid down that one-third of the area under cultivation should be pruned each year.

It is not known what system of pruning he advocated, but it is known that years later his advice was wholly neglected. Allowing for the fact that R. S. Staunton was lacking in experience of the working of a tea garden, it is from his reports on individual gardens that it is possible to
learn something about this operation. He complained that on some gardens no pruning had been done for three years. On others, the pruning had not been completed the previous year until April, which meant that with the early plucking that was in vogue then, the plucking and pruning were being carried out at the same time.

Staunton's Reports comment on the fact that the Assistants' excuses for delaying the starting of pruning were invariably that the necessary Dhaois had not been received, which is a sufficient indication of the rough treatment that was accorded to the bush, and cause for the criticism that in some areas the bushes had an undue proportion of broken branches.

It is not until the early 1870's that it is possible to learn something from J. F. W. Watson's Prize Essay, "Tea Cultivation and Manufacture," of the evolution of the present-day hook-bladed pruning knife in the effort to improve methods of treating the bush, and this evolution is illustrated in the accompanying diagrams (Figures 9, 10 and 11 from that work), compared with the other three illustrations of present-day pruning knives.

There follows an illustration of what is referred to nowadays as a "reduced prune," or cut-back, when in the process of continued growth over a number of years the bush has got too high for the average plucker and has to be reduced in height.

PLUCKING

By all earlier accounts, plucking must have been an arduous task. One has to imagine a large conical-shaped, unpruned bush, the centre of which was out of reach of the plucker.

. . . The plucking of the leaves may appear to many a very easy and light employment, but there are not a few of our coolies who would rather be employed on any other job. The standing in one position so many hours occasioned swelling in the legs, as our plants are not like those of China, only 3 feet high, but double that size, so that one must stand upright to gather the leaves. The Chinese pluck theirs squatting down. We lie in a great disadvantage in not having regular men to pluck the leaves. Those that have been taught to do so can pluck twice as many as those that have not, and we seldom get hold of the same men two seasons running.

According to the standards laid down by the Chinese, plucking was the most complicated process, subject to great variation as to the grade of tea it was desired to produce. Some leaf should not be taken until after 10 a.m., when all the dew had evaporated. It was recognised that tea grown in the shade gave a different tea to that grown in the sun—the latter was preferred for quality and thickness in cup. Leaf was never to be plucked in the rain. It was estimated that it took 7 lb. of leaf plucked in

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Fig. 9. Rodgers latest knife.

Fig. 10. The Pruning Knife recommended. (Length of handle about 8", from bottom of blade to curve $3\frac{3}{4}$", from curve to point about 2").

Fig. 11. The Sickle-shaped Pruning Knife.

Fig. 12. Yates heavy cleaning-out Knife. 8" handle, 4" blade.
the rain to make 1 lb. of finished tea, but for leaf plucked in the sun, the ratio was only 4 to 1.

Bruce proved very early on that both black and green tea was made from the same bush. Gordon, when he went on his mission to China, was told to get the seeds of plants from the two different provinces where they grew green and black teas.

The Chinamen taught Bruce, however, that the plucking of leaf for green and black tea was quite different; for green tea only the finer leaf was taken. Almost anything was good enough for black tea.

Except for Bruce’s own writings on the subject, there was no written word on the growing of tea. J. J. L. L. Jacobson, who had been growing tea in Java from seed, with tea makers imported or impressed from China, wrote a treatise on his experiences. This was not published in Dutch until 1843, and as the Assam Company had at one time been endeavouring to engage Jacobson’s services as their Superintendent, he made his pamphlet available to them, for there is a record in the Calcutta Board Proceedings of 1st October 1841 of a translation of this pamphlet having been made by a Mr. Herkolets “. . . which affords much valuable information upon the process to be observed . . .” and a copy of it was made available for each Superintendent.

By this time the Superintendents had worked out their own technique, which they no doubt thought more applicable to their Assam indigenous plants.

The foregoing are the bare essentials of the practices Bruce had to go on. When Masters was appointed Superintendent of the Southern Division, and subsequently Parker of the Eastern Division, they had to assimilate these details from Bruce, for there is no evidence to show that they had any knowledge of tea cultivation when they were appointed.

Apart from the deplorable quality of much of the early tea produced, an account of which follows, the low yield of tea per acre was a factor contributing largely to the disastrous years the Company experienced up to 1847. The average out-turn per acre was only 196 lb., with a maximum yield at any garden of 275 lb., or 2.45 maunds to 3.44 maunds per acre.

The reason for this low yield was the severe over-plucking in the early months of the year. In proof of this it is only necessary to quote the figures of monthly yield for the year 1848, expressed in percentage of total crop, compared with an approximate monthly average yield in Assam in 1860 and to-day:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1848</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>To-day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>11.47</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>19.52</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>17.27</td>
<td>14.14</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>17.81</td>
<td>14.12</td>
<td>12.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The figures for 1860 are included to show that the evolution to present-day practice was a gradual one. The present-day figures must be regarded as an average, for with the advance in knowledge of pruning methods it is possible to plan for early or late crop.

It was George Williamson, Junior, however, who conceived the principle that if more leaf was to be plucked it was essential that the bush be allowed to grow first. His application of this principle from the time he became Superintendent in 1852 was the turning-point in the Company's successful production of tea.

In the evolution of agricultural practice in tea cultivation there is not much to record after George Williamson's time that is individual to the Assam Company. To give an idea of progress in cultivation and in the layout of a garden over the years, there are reproduced the following three photographs:

(1) "Tea Cultivation 1860-1865"
Which would represent a garden planted out 6 feet by 3 feet, but the irregular lines and many vacant spaces with round shaped bushes would make any present-day planter throw up his hands in horror and condemn the whole area to be abandoned or replanted, but it was at the date of the illustration considered a satisfactory and economical area, although it did then produce only two to three maunds an acre.

(2) "Tea without Shade Trees"
Serves to show the layout of a garden in full lines of even, square-planted tea, with flat or level-topped bushes planted down to the edge of Hoolahs, which form a natural drainage channel for such land. Well-grown tea, giving a high yield per acre, but not as great a yield as it would have given if planted with shade trees.

(3) "Tea growing under Shade Trees"
This is virtually a sheet of tea grown under shade, with the bushes so vigorous and touching that it is impossible to see the line of bushes and the symmetry of the layout is obscured by the shadows from the shade trees.

Earlier in this chapter, and in dealing with the original discovery of the tea plant, reference has been made to early written accounts on the subject of tea cultivation and manufacture. Apart from Government's
Tea without Shade Trees. Showing lay-out of rows of bushes growing down to the edge of "Hoolahs" or Natural Drainage Channels.

Tea growing under Shade Trees.
EARLY CULTIVATION

Reports and papers whilst their experiments were being carried out, the Tea Industry owes a debt to the Agricultural Horticultural Society of Calcutta, not only for the preservation in their Journals and Records of Proceedings of any information regarding tea which came into their possession, but for the encouragement they gave to anyone who would write on the subject.

The Society in 1843 presented to Captain A. Charlton and to Major Jenkins gold medals in recognition of their part in the discovery of the indigenous tea plant. In 1870 they invited planters by the offer of a prize in cash and a gold medal to submit a Treatise on the Cultivation and Manufacture of Tea.

The First Prize was awarded to Colonel Edward Money for his essay of 1870, which was published in book form and which was for years the standard work, going to a second edition. Colonel Money was at that time planting in Chittagong. The Second Prize went to Mr. J. F. W. Watson, but it is not known in which district of Assam he had gained his experience on which he based his Essay. Though less well-known as a treatise on tea, it was he who evolved the present-day hook-bladed pruning knife just mentioned.
CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIRST EXPERIMENTAL TEAS FROM ASSAM, AND THEIR SALE

The first tea from Assam ever to be put on the market was that made under Government auspices. London had for years been the one market for the only tea available, that from China; whilst the East India Company had the monopoly of supplies from that country, their only method of disposal was their auction sales.

Because of the far-reaching effects of these Government sales on the future of the Indian Tea Industry, it is of historical importance to set out in some detail what is known of these early sales and to distinguish these from the first sales of tea produced by the Assam Company itself.

QUALITY OF FIRST TEA MADE IN ASSAM BY GOVERNMENT

Judged by the present-day standard of tea sold to the public, the class of tea consumed in the early 1800's must have been very poor. As evidence of this there is the following from the memorandum submitted by Mr. John Walker, on which Lord Bentinck based his Minute of 24th January 1834 (referred to earlier in the chapter on the Discovery of the Tea Plant). It will be noted that in this extract Mr. Walker refers, also, to the potentialities of India itself as a market for tea.

We can scarcely doubt that, when the skill and science of the Europeans, aided by thermometers &c. shall once be applied to the cultivation and preparation of tea in favourable situations, the Chinese tea will soon be excelled in quality and flavour. Within the last three or four years, the quality of the tea is more uniform at every tea sale of the East India Company, where many thousand chests are sold every six weeks. Five or six chests were included in each lot, but the catalogue formerly very candidly gave the distinguishing marks of "musty," "fusty," "woody," "dusty" to almost every chest in the lot but one. The grocers mixed them as well as they could, the public complained of the quality and its price, but as they had no remedy, drank it and bought another portion with the hopes of better success. The complaint has been almost universal, that the fine teas are not so good now as some years back, but it is understood that the East India Company have exerted themselves to remedy the evil. It is not, however, in the consumption of the United Kingdom alone, that a market would be found for its produce. The whole Continent of Europe has lately adopted its use in a greater or less degree, and in many countries, such as Canada, the United States, and the Barbary Coast, the consumption has become very considerable. In the
EXPERIMENTAL TEAS FROM ASSAM

territories of the East India Company, the consumption would be prodigious. It is now used as a luxury, and a medicine in cases of sickness. The Hindoos live chiefly upon rice and flour, their only drink is water. If tea could be obtained by them at a moderate price, it would form a most refreshing addition to their domestic economy, as well as a salutary beverage in those fatal febrile affections to which the oppressive heat of the climate predisposes them. The consumption of Calcutta at this moment is considerable.

From the most correct information which can be obtained, it is not perhaps possible upon the face of the globe, to find a country so admirably situated as the districts of India, where the soil, climate and low price of labour, combined with the quiet and peaceable habits of the neighbouring population, offer such a concurrence of circumstances favourable to the undertaking.

It is interesting to follow up the contention in John Walker's letter regarding the quality of China tea then being offered for sale.

In substantiation of his depreciatory remarks, there is the conclusive evidence of a set of catalogues printed for a sale in London of 2nd April 1838, admittedly some five years later than the time at which he wrote, but on analysis they may add something to our knowledge of how sales of China tea were conducted. (See pp. 264-5.)

The pages of this catalogue measure 8 1/4 inches by 5 1/2 inches, and are comprised in a volume nearly 3 inches thick.

This tome of catalogues of 1838 deserves study in comparison with present-day tea auctions, when at the height of the season and under regulation of offerings some 70,000 to 75,000 chests weighing something like 8,000,000 lb. of tea are sold in three days' auction each week.

As advertised on the opening page of this 1838 catalogue, there is given an "Order of Sale for Monday, April 2nd 1838," and there are stated the names of the various selling brokers with details of "Quantities, Packages, and Kinds."

One might be led on the face of this opening announcement to assume that it was a one-day sale, but on reading the details further, that there were nine firms of Brokers offering a total of 176,424 packages containing a total of over 12 1/2 million pounds of tea, it is obvious that a one-day sale was a physical impossibility.

For some explanation, we turn back to the letter of John Walker, in which he refers to "... many thousands of chests are offered over six weeks," so it seems evident that this voluminous catalogue represents all tea that was available during a period.

It was not all new tea that had just arrived. The catalogue is full of what one would call to-day "re-prints," and it is astonishing to find that these re-prints are of teas that arrived in London as much as three years earlier, one invoice being marked "ex Sale February 1835."
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

The invoices were printed under the name of the ship in which they were imported, which always quoted the name of the ship's Master, and showed that the port of loading was invariably Canton. This was the port at which all tea exports were concentrated; it was in fact where the whole of the trade with China was done, as it was before the other treaty ports were opened to foreign trade.

The lots were printed in their various grades, whether black or green tea—Pekoe, Suchong, Pouchong, Congou, Bohea, Campoi, Hyson, Young Hyson, Twankay, Gunpowder, Caper, etc. Marks are given sometimes in the margin, but they appear to have little significance. They were probably shippers’ marks, for the breaks were made up of tea from many Chinese smallholdings. The need for such voluminous catalogues is found in the fact that each break was divided into lots of 6 chests and even 3 chests each. There were occasionally 10-chest and 9-chest lots, but they were more the exception than the rule. There were fancy lots, such as “7 chests each containing 12 caddies of about 2 lb. each.”

To return to the point in substantiation of John Walker’s criticism of quality, there is given as a many-paged supplement to these catalogues the “Tastings of tea for sale,” which was the Brokers’ report on every break of tea in the catalogue. It is from these that it is possible to learn that the bulk of the teas offered were described as “middling,” a convenient description that covered no doubt a multitude of sins, especially when backed by the comment, “Rather coarse and strong.” There was very little tea that earned the Brokers’ commendation as “good” tea. There were many that were described in such contradictory terms as “good, ordinary tea; rather old, burnt.” But there were others that were offered openly, marked “musty,” and “odd smell.”

The Brokers tasted and reported on every chest, for each lot had printed against it one of the marks denoting the description of each chest in the lot, by which the buyer could judge any variation. A table of these marks used by the Brokers is retained in the London Office under the title of “Explanation,” which formed the back of the front page (mutilated, unfortunately) of this 1838 Catalogue. This explanation of Brokers’ terms must have undergone revision some time about 1870.

The nine Brokers participating in this sale, and the quantities they had to offer were:

| Packages |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Clarence & Franks, 14 Billiter Street. | 1151 |
| 2. Watkiss, Smith & Hope, 133 Fenchurch Street. | 5246 |
| 3. Richard Gibbs, White Hart Court, Lombard Street. | 1713 |
| 4. Hulbert Layton & Company, 14 Mincing Lane. | 40,074 |
| 5. T. Styan & Sons. | 15,361 |
| 6. T. & R. Moffat. | 10,910 |
Of these nine firms, numbers 2, 7 and 8 are the well-known names to-day of: Chas. Hope & Son.; Ewart Maccaughey & Co. Ltd.; Wm. Jas & Hy. Thompson.

Other possible points of interest revealed in these old catalogues are the warehouses and wharves where the teas were stored: Cutler Street; St. Katherine's Dock; Fenchurch Street Warehouse (which was the West India Dock Company's Warehouse); Crutched Friars; Jewry Street Warehouses; No. 5 and No. 2 Warehouses, London Docks; Haydon Square Warehouse.

Some of the shipments were marked as from the Cape of Good Hope, suggesting that trans-shipments were sometimes made at that port.

It is not known how long it took some of these ships to reach London from Canton via the Cape, but there was no particular call for speed. The romance of the tea clippers was not to come for another twenty years.

On such a background as to the "quality" of China tea then offering to the consumer, it is not difficult to understand why the first production from Assam, in spite of its condition, came to be accepted by the Trade with such enthusiasm.

The earliest authentic account of any tea produced in Assam is in a letter dated 20th May 1835 from the Tea Committee to the Government of India, with which was submitted a sample prepared by Lieut. A. Charlton of Sadiya. The story of this historic sample is told best in the Tea Committee's own words:

Owing to the unusual and boisterous weather which has been experienced of late, and notwithstanding the precaution that had been taken before despatching the sample, by packing it in a tin case enclosed within a strong wooden box, covered with wax cloth, the heavy rains had penetrated and the tea arrived in a perfectly damp and mouldy condition. It was immediately placed in the sun and dried, and is now submitted to the examination of Government.

Considering the above unfortunate accident and likewise that the leaves were gathered from the wild or crab tree, and have not undergone a proper course of manipulation, the Committee are of opinion that the sample affords the most satisfactory evidence that the result of the active investigation in which they are engaged will prove highly important and successful. It will be found that the tea, notwithstanding what has happened to it, is equal to the ordinary black sort (Congou) in common use among the lower orders at home.
What Government thought of this first effort is not recorded. The Tea Committee were elated with this evidence of the success of their investigations.

In their Report to Government dated 12th January 1837, the Tea Committee advised that seven further tea tracts had been found in the Mattuck country and reported that C. A. Bruce had prepared five boxes of tea, a sample of which he had sent through Captain F. Jenkins to Calcutta. There is no report on this sample by the Tea Committee or Government, but in submitting it Bruce observed that it must not be regarded as a fair specimen of the best sort of tea that the Assam plant is capable of producing. It will require, he said, "... to be kept in a dry place for at least six months to take off the raw taste incidental to new-made tea; it has besides been prepared out of season and not by the proper process."

There was another sample made by Bruce and described as "Assam Souchong Tea" which W. Griffith brought with him from Assam in September 1837, and which was considered by the Committee to indicate that profitable and merchantable tea could be produced in Upper Assam.

In December 1837 there is received the first samples from any named tracts, four pint bottles containing:

(a) Souchong No. 1 from Major Gohyne's shady tract.
(b) " , " , " Chabwa sunny tract.
(c) " , " , " Deenjoy sunny tract.
(d) Paho No. 3 " , " Tingri shady tract.

(b) and (d) had broken in transit, but the contents found loose amongst the dry straw of the bungay boxes had not, in the opinion of the Committee, lost any of the aroma of good and fair tea!

The samples were sent on to the Governor-General at his camp at Jellalabad, and in his Secretary's letter, dated 15th January 1838, to the Tea Committee they are advised that in His Lordship's opinion the samples would be considered as of marketable quality if such tea could be landed in Europe in the same state in which he had received it.

These samples were sent subsequently to London, and in a letter, dated 26th September 1838, from the East India Company to the Governor-General of India, the Revenue Department advised that the samples had been submitted "... to several Houses of the first character in the London trade and also to Mr. John Reeves, formerly the East India Company's Tea Inspector at Canton ..."

The Reports are summarised in this official letter, an extract of which appears in the proceedings of the Agri-Horticultural Society of India, and they go into the minutest detail in describing the appearance of the teas, based on the grading for teas from China. What little there was mentioned about the liquor was not very flattering. At the best, it was considered
EXPERIMENTAL TEAS FROM ASSAM

that the samples were "... possessing good strength and good flavour, though musty."

The samples were valued at from 1s. 3d. to 2s. per lb., and in conclusion the letter gives the opinion that, "... On the whole we consider the samples sent very encouraging, and we have much satisfaction in being enabled to add that ... we are assured by the respectable parties to whom we submitted samples that teas of this kind, if properly manufactured and packed, would be readily purchased for consumption in this country."

There followed from this the production of the first historical consignment of tea to be put up for auction in London.

It is not clear what the size of the consignment was when it left Assam, but as repacked for shipment from Calcutta it comprised 12 boxes containing an average of 38 lb. of tea each, and the tea was described as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st Quality</th>
<th></th>
<th>2nd Quality</th>
<th></th>
<th>3rd Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paho</td>
<td>1 Box</td>
<td>Souchong</td>
<td>4 Boxes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Boxes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Box</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Box</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tea was packed in lead canisters in boxes covered with matting, secured by slips of rattan, marked in both English and Chinese, and addressed to the Honourable Court in the usual manner. It arrived in Calcutta the last day of January 1838.

The condition of the tea and its treatment on arrival in Calcutta is described best in the Tea Committee's own words, as contained in their Report, dated 20th March 1838, to the Honourable the President of the East India Company in Council, Calcutta:

... owing to a deficiency in the original packing, and the great degree of dampness to which the boxes had been exposed to during the passage from Assam, a considerable proportion of the tea was either wholly spoiled or so much deteriorated that no process, we believe, could have restored it to anything but a fair quality. We have therefore rejected all that portion as unfit to be sent home, deeming it a matter of primary importance that the value of the first samples transmitted to Europe should not be diminished by anything that might add to the many disadvantages under which they must necessarily arrive at a destination where they will in all probability have to be subjected to the severe test of examination by the first tea inspectors in London.

We beg most particularly to urge on the consideration of his Honour in Council, that not only the plants from which the leaves were gathered, still in their wild and uncultivated state, but details of the various processes
employed in preparing and transmitting the tea, must obviously have
laboured under the many and serious difficulties and obstacles of a first
attempt, but which it may reasonably be expected will be diminished and
progressively be overcome, as further trials are made. Besides which it ought
to be borne in mind that, strange as it may appear, it is by no means settled
whether it is not actually the green sort that has been prepared in the fashion
of black tea, a point which can only be satisfactorily determined when the
green tea manufacturers are set at work in Assam.

The tea in question arrived here under the designations of Paho and
Souchong. In assorting each of these into three qualities our Secretary (Dr.
N. Wallich, M.D.) has been guided partly by the opinion of the Chinese
assistant now here, and partly by his own discrimination of the difference in
the flavour and appearance of the teas after they had undergone preparation
for being repacked. Likewise by the various degrees of preservation in which
he received the cargo from Assam, the process of preparation alluded to
above consisted in gradually drying the tea over a nicely regulated coal-fire
covered with ashes. This precautionary measure, our Secretary deemed
absolutely necessary to prevent mouldiness, and consequent damage to the
tea during the sea voyage.

In the above endeavour to remedy the defects in the tea as received in
Calcutta, one can hardly conceive a way more likely to detract from the
flavour of tea than to re-fire it over a coal fire, however nicely that
may have been regulated and however cunningly it may have been
covered with ashes. Although “coal” is the actual word used, there is in
the Accounts submitted to Government by the Tea Committee for
the cost of this reconditioning an item of “charcoal for melting lead, etc., and
for drying tea,” so perhaps it was not so bad after all!

In their next letter to Government, dated 17th May 1838, the Tea
Committee reported that this precious cargo of twelve boxes had been
placed on board the Calcutta, Captain Bentley; and for those interested in
freight rates to-day, at £7, 10s. per ton of 50 cubic feet.

As much of the sailing-ships’ cargo in those days was ox-hides, the
consignment was placed in a cabin between decks, and to preserve the
contents each box had been placed in a soldered tin case and the twelve
put by pairs in six strong wooden cases. Shipped from Calcutta at the end
of May 1838, the teas arrived in London in November of that year.

Of this consignment, the contents of four boxes were used as presents
to the Court of Directors of the East India Company and for samples to
tea dealers and experts. The balance of eight chests were again inspected
in London and reclassified into Souchong and Pekoe, the latter being the
highest grade for black tea.

They were inspected by many experts both in London and Liverpool,
among whom were such famous connoisseurs as W. J. Thompson,
Richard Twining, Richard Gibbs, Sanderson, Frys Fox & Company,
TEA

FOR

Sale,

AT THE

London Commercial Sale Rooms,

MINCING-LANE.

ON MONDAY, 2nd APRIL, 1838.

3498 Packages Canton Bohea
1842 Ditto Fokien Bohea
81058 Ditto Congou
484 Ditto Ning Yong
156 Ditto Campoi
760 Ditto Caper
3925 Ditto Souchong
2005 Ditto Pouchong
546 Ditto Pekoe
1863 Ditto Black Leaf Pekoe
1596 Ditto Orange Pekoe
2839 Ditto Twankay
197 Ditto Hyson Skin
3671 Ditto Hyson
1576 Ditto Young Hyson
382 Ditto Imperial
393 Ditto Gunpowder

55491

W. JAS. THOMPSON,
Broker,
No. 1, Dunster-court, Mincing-lane.

PRINTED BY H. TEAFE AND SON, TOWER-MILL.
CONDITIONS OF SALE.

1. The highest bidder to be the purchaser, and any dispute that may arise to be settled by the selling Broker, or by a shew of hands.

2. Brokers to declare, in writing sealed up, their Principals, within seven days of the conclusion of the present series of sales, or be held responsible; and those who may execute orders at this sale for parties not resident in London, shall produce a known agent here, who shall undertake to complete the contract; in failure of which, the broker so buying shall be held responsible; and if any broker shall purchase for any person or persons under age, he shall be held responsible.

3. The Buyer to pay the following Deposit, namely, £1. per Chest, £4. per Lot of Boxes, and £2. per Lot of Small Boxes, on all descriptions, excepting Imperial and Gunpowder, and on them £1. Deposit per Chest and Half-chest, and £4. per Lot of Small boxes, at the time of Sale if demanded, or on the Saturday following the day of Sale, or on the delivery of the Weight Note; and the remainder of the Purchase money to be paid on or before Friday, the 29th June, 1838. Interest at the rate of 4 per cent. per annum will be allowed on payment of such remainder from the day of payment to the Prompt.

The Teas ex the East India Company’s Sales, to be sold on East India Company’s Terms and Conditions.

4. The Tea to be re-weighed to the Buyers, and to be delivered in Bond, with customary Tare and Draft.

5. No allowance will be made on account of any damage, rubbish, false package, or unequal goodness, found or alleged to be found after the Goods have been taken from the Warehouse.

6. All Teas sold at this Sale to be at the risk of the Sellers till the Prompt Day, unless paid for previously; Rent to commence from the Prompt Day.

7. Lot Money to the selling Broker as usual.

8. If any Buyer shall fail to comply with the above Conditions, the Vendors shall be at liberty to re-sell the Teas either by Public or Private sale; the deficiency, if any, with Interest of Money, Warehouse Rent, and all other charges and damage of every kind, to be chargeable to such Defaulters, and to be recoverable against him at law.

The Teas may be inspected at the different Warehouses, and may be sampled on production of an order for the same.
W. J. T. April 2, 1838.

**TEA at per lb. to advance 4d.**

*On show at Warehouse A, St. Katharine Docks, 5th floor, but to be delivered from Cutler Street.*

**BOHEA.**

*Per LA BELLE ALLIANCE, Arkcoll, @ Canton*

Reported 14th May, 1835.

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MARKS DENOTING THE QUALITY OF THE TEAS.

The following is an explanation of the different Marks that appear in the Printed Catalogues of Tea Sales, and which are used to denote the quality of the tea, viz.—

\[ 
\begin{align*}
\frac{4}{4} & \text{ Superfine.} \\
\frac{3}{3} & \text{ Very Fine.} \\
\frac{2}{2} & \text{ Fine.} \\
\frac{1}{1} & \text{ Good.} \\
\frac{1}{1} & \text{ Fair.} \\
\frac{1}{1} & \text{ Common.} \\
\frac{1}{2} & \text{ Very Common.} \\
\frac{2}{2} & \text{ Odd Smell.} \\
\frac{3}{3} & \text{ Bad Smell.} \\
\frac{4}{4} & \text{ Musty.} \\
\frac{5}{5} & \text{ Very Musty.} \\
\frac{6}{6} & \text{ Musty and Mouldy.} \\
\frac{7}{7} & \text{ Dusty.} \\
\end{align*} 
\]

OOC Out of Condition.
EXPERIMENTAL TEAS FROM ASSAM

T. & R. Moffat, and Mr. T. Reeves; the Liverpool firm of Steams & Rowley submitted their report through the Lord Mayor of that city.

The consensus of all these opinions was that the teas were satisfactory for a first experiment and would compete on even terms with teas of that grade from China; but they all reported that they were burnt, and in these reports there were such comments as "scorched in the cure," "powerful crude strength." In spite of all these defects, one Liverpool firm stated that they were prepared to buy 500 to 1,000 chests of such quality. The teas were valued generally at from 1s. 10½d. to 2s. per lb.

The eight chests were put up for auction on 10th January 1839; each chest was a separate lot, and the auctioneer was Mr. W. J. Thompson. The sale attracted widespread attention from all sections of the trade, and after exciting bidding, the whole of the eight chests were knocked down to Captain Pidding, proprietor of "Howqua" blend, at the following prices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot No.</th>
<th>1st quality Souchong</th>
<th>34 lb. at 21s.</th>
<th>per lb.</th>
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<td>Lot No. 2</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>28 lb. at 20s.</td>
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<td>Lot No. 3</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>37 lb. at 16s.</td>
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<td>Lot No. 4</td>
<td>2nd Peke.</td>
<td>38 lb. at 24s. 6d.</td>
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<td>Lot No. 5</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>40 lb. at 25s.</td>
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<td>Lot No. 6</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>33 lb. at 27s. 6d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lot No. 7</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>35 lb. at 28s. 6d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lot No. 8</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>35 lb. at 34s.</td>
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The story goes that Captain Pidding was induced to give these fabulous prices in a public spirited endeavour to secure a fair trial to this first production of tea from British India, and that he distributed samples of his purchases amongst his clients at 2s. 6d. per sample.

It is not stated what the weight was of these samples he distributed, but one can conceive the possibility that at 2s. 6d. each, his advertisement for his blend might have been profitable.

Reading the reports and comments on this first consignment, there is no doubt that the experts were tolerant of defects in the teas, and endeavoured to give every encouragement to the new enterprise, even in their valuation of the then market value of such teas at from 1s. 10d. to 2s. per lb. But defective as the teas may have been judged by present-day standards, there is the evidence furnished in John Walker's treatise of 1834 as to what the consumer in England was prepared to accept at that time as tea. It would be difficult to believe otherwise that on the question of quality alone this first production was ever pronounced a success.

The next consignment was one of 95 chests of black tea which Bruce produced some time in 1838.

In the Assam Company's London Proceedings of 3rd January 1840 it
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

was resolved that the Chairman and Secretary should ascertain what course the Government meant to adopt for disposing of the tea.

In the Directors' Report at the General Meeting of the Company on 31st January 1840, referring to this consignment, and to give Shareholders assurance that the quality of Assam Tea had an assured market, they said:

... It is considered by those gentlemen amongst them who are extensively engaged in the trade to confirm the opinion entertained on the examination of previous samples of the importation of the previous year, that the character and quality of the Assam Tea is of a good, strong and very useful description....

Amongst the gentlemen expressing their opinion on these early teas were Twining, Travers, Hunt and Thompson; also Sanderson & Company.

The first two gentlemen named were London Directors of the Assam Company. The opinions expressed were “read” by the Secretary at a Board Meeting, and there is no indication of what they were.

The consignment was offered by order of “The Honourable the East India Company” at the London Commercial Sale Rooms in the March sales of 1840, and was sold by William James Thompson.

First, to identify that the 85 chests offered in this catalogue were the 95 chests referred to above—it will be noticed that in the serial numbers of the chests, those numbered 1, 13, 23, 43, 62 and 74 are missing, but their place is taken by chests Nos. 90 to 95. It is possible that the missing chests were either damaged in transit to Calcutta, and therefore not shipped, or they were used as presents to the Directors of the East India Company.

 Mention has been made already of the possible method of conducting sales of China tea. The fact that this catalogue defines the date of auctioning these teas as “in the March Sales, 1840,” suggests that they were to be tucked in on some day during the progress of normal China tea sales when W. J. Thompson were selling.

A novelty of this catalogue is the inclusion of a map of the Tea Districts from which the tea came, and someone has underlined some of the names of the tracts mentioned in the catalogue.

All the tea was produced by C. A. Bruce, assisted possibly by Thomas Watkins. The names of the tracts can nearly all be recognised as those which the Assam Company took over subsequently from Government and those which Government retained. Of the former, there is Tingri, Kayhung (Keyhung), Ningroo, Jujundoo (Jugunda), Kajudoo, and of the latter Dinjuee (Dinjan), and Chubwah (Chabua). Chacha and Dinjri are not identifiable with any certainty. Each lot was a single chest and by the denoting tea tasters’ marks assigned to them, they were generally of the category “good middling,” with some qualified as “burnt.”
EXPERIMENTAL TEAS FROM ASSAM

With the exception of the final lot of one box of Minchew tea, which at this date one would not be prepared to identify, the other grades offered were the normal ones for black tea at that time.

To arrive at the date of manufacture of this Government tea, it would seem best to work backwards. The sailing-ship Canney (carrying the consignment) was reported in London in January 1840. It would have left Calcutta probably in July 1839, because five months for the voyage via the Cape was average. It was quite likely that the invoice was detained in Calcutta for inspection and reconditioning by Dr. N. Wallich, the Government botanist, before being put on board, and say two months for the journey by country boat from Dibrugarh to Calcutta.

It must have taken some further time for its transport by country boat or elephant from the widely scattered tea tracts to Dibrugarh, all of which would give the month of March 1839 as the possible date for its leaving Assam.

The tracts from which the tea was plucked were mere patches of indigenous tea trees found in the jungle and cut down to about 3 feet from the ground, and the leaf was plucked from the new growth springing up from these stumps.

For these patches of tea to produce 95 chests it must have been a full year’s manufacture, and it would seem, therefore, that this consignment was actually the produce of season 1838, two years before it was sold in London.

This time lag of two years between the date of manufacture and the sale of the tea eventually is confirmed by the experience of the Assam Company in the disposal of its crop in the years following.

There is a handbill preserved in the India Office advertising the sale by auction on Wednesday, 26th May 1841, by MacKenzie Lyall & Company, Calcutta, of the first importation of Assam teas for the Calcutta market.

... Immediately after, on account of Government, will be brought forward and likewise sold by Auction at the same place THE ENTIRE CONSIGNMENT CONSISTING OF 95 CHESTS OF ASSAM TEA.

THE PRODUCE OF GOVERNMENT TEA PLANTATIONS IN ASSAM FOR SEASON 1840

There is then given a detailed list of these 95 chests, also comprising black and green tea. From these details it is learned that they were manufactured at Chabwa, Dinjoy and Tippum Barrees.

The handbill is signed by Thomas Watkins, as Superintendent
The first point of interest in this advertisement is the statement that 35 chests were manufactured by the Singpho Chief, Ningroola, but the proviso in brackets ("aided by the Government Establishment") suggests that really the Chief had very little to do with its production. Under his command his subjects may have brought in leaf to Government factories where it was manufactured, and that to give the Chief credit for its production and the cash benefit of the sale proceeds was a Government political gesture to enlist his aid in settling the country to more peaceful pursuits and to induce him to grant land for further tea cultivation.

One eminent botanist, on reading this advertisement, thought it proved that the Singphos were actually manufacturing tea in Assam when members of the Tea Committee, including Dr. Wallich, in 1835-1836, were searching for evidence that the Assam indigenous plant was the true tea-yielding species.

The other question that this advertisement raises is: How was it that Government, after making over two-thirds of their property to the Assam Company, were in 1840 still making tea?

The names of the barries decipherable in the advertisement answer this adequately. They were the barries that were retained by Government as their remaining one-third, and so as not to compete with the Assam Company, this produce was sold in Calcutta.

There are Minutes in the Calcutta Board's Proceedings of 30th April and 22nd May 1841 in which the Chairman, then William Prinsep, proposed that the Assam Company should purchase by private treaty both these consignments before they were put up for auction. On mature consideration, the Board turned down this proposal as it was in the nature of a speculation which it was not within their sphere to embark upon. All they did was to send home to the London Board particulars of the sale, and whilst inviting the London Board's opinion, informed them of what the Calcutta Board had contemplated at the time the auctions had been advertised.

The last consignment brought to London by Government comprised 70 boxes green tea and 120 boxes black tea. The green tea was classified into the usual grades of Hyson, Young Hyson, Gunpowder, etc., and the black tea was designated Pouchong and Souchong. There were amongst
EXPERIMENTAL TEAS FROM ASSAM

these teas other grades bearing the picturesque names of Sechee Peko, Toychee Peko, Toisong, etc.

All of the foregoing tea was manufactured by Bruce on Government account. It would seem necessary to make it clear, therefore, that as the Assam Company did not receive possession of the East India Company's tracts or gardens until nearly the commencement of the manufacturing season of 1840, they had no financial interest in these sales.

The London Board watched closely the market price realised and the trend of demand. After consulting the Tea Trade, they wrote to Bruce when he had joined the Assam Company that the advice of the tea brokers and other expert opinion was that the public wanted tea that would "... taste through hard water, sugar and milk, and therefore they must have a stronger tea. The tea that would be most used would be that which would stand two liquorings far better than many of the articles from China..."

On this Bruce was instructed in April 1840 "... to confine himself to the manufacture of common and good black and green teas, such as Souchong, Peko, Hyson, and Gunpowder, experimental teas being no longer required."

With the foregoing final injunctions from the London Board as to the kind of tea Bruce was to endeavour to make, the next chapter tells of the Assam Company's own production.
CHAPTER XXIV

THE FIRST TEA PRODUCED BY THE ASSAM COMPANY; MARKETING AND THE EVOLUTION OF MANUFACTURE

This chapter recounts the story of the Company’s first production of tea, how it was sold and its reception on the Market in both London and Calcutta. It tells of the disgraceful quality of its early production, which contributed so much to the Company’s financial embarrassment in those early days. It goes on to give a picture of factory conditions forty years ago, and concludes with notes on the Company’s Tea Brokers, sale conditions, warehousing and packing.

EARLY MANUFACTURE BY THE ASSAM COMPANY

Bruce had in 1839 only two genuine Chinese tea makers, and at first he took these with him from one tea tract to another to make the tea as it was plucked on the spot. This meant, however, that with the great distances between tracts he missed getting the tea made at the proper time when the leaf was ready. He then tried the alternative of having the leaf brought in to the tea makers concentrated at suitable centres. These were at Tingri and Keyhung, where were erected his “tea-making houses.” But even then the condition of the leaf after its long transport from outlying tracts was poor. It took some long time to train the local inhabitants to learn the very intricate art of tea making. Bruce had to make both black and green tea, and this he accomplished even though his first two Chinesemen were black tea makers. This instructional staff was augmented in 1838 by the importation of two Chinese green tea makers. Following in detail the method of tea making in China, they endeavoured to produce the scented teas of that country, for there is a note in the Calcutta Board Proceedings of November 1839, of a complaint from J. W. Masters from Nazira that he had not yet “... the plants for scenting the teas.” Dr. N. Wallich was instructed to make good this deficiency, but the names of these plants are not revealed.

Bruce’s requirements of labour to produce a given quantity of tea were interesting. It was calculated that it took a tea maker and 10 labourers for rolling, panning, attending the fires, etc., to deal with the leaf from
The first tea produced
30 pluckers, and that provided the day was fine and sunny, they could produce 2 boxes of 40 lb. or 1 maund of tea in a days’ work. This was for black tea. For green tea it took 16 labourers in the factory to produce 2 boxes of a total weight of 92 lb. in a day.

The insubordinate character of the imported Chinese labourers has been mentioned in the chapter on “Labour.” Even his tea makers Bruce described as violent, headstrong and passionate, especially as they were quite aware how much he was in their power. In anticipation that more of these people were to be sent to him, he remarked that “... If the many behaved as did the few, a Thana (police station) would be necessary to keep them cool!”

Bruce became exasperated with his Chinamen, and hearing that Masters in the Southern Division had recruited some Dhanga coolies from Rungpore, he wrote to the Board suggesting that he should send his five green tea makers to Masters in exchange for some sorely needed new labour. The matter was referred to Masters, but Bruce did not get rid of his incubus.

Public taste was for China tea. It was deeply ingrained, and the public knew no other taste.

The introduction of the more coloury and stronger liquorising tea from Assam could only be effected very gradually, and without raising the suspicion of the customer that he was getting other than his customary China tea.

In this the retailer was a willing co-operator, although he had to pay a relatively much higher price for the Assam tea, it meant that he could offset this against the lower quality and lower price for his China tea. At first the grocer or retailer had to educate his customers to the new taste in tea, and as up to 1861 the quantity of tea imported from Assam represented only about 1 per cent. of the total imports from China, it was easy enough to disguise so small a proportion of the “new-fangled” Assam tea.

The first consignment of tea ever produced by the Assam Company was that for the year 1840. It was a whole year’s manufacture, comprising 171 chests weighing 10,201 lb., 146 chests of which was black tea and 25 chests green tea. Except for 16 chests of black tea weighing 1,034 lb. made in the Southern Division at Gabroo Parbut by the Assistant, Mr. Grose, the rest was from the Northern Division. The nett weight of the chests varied from 37 lb. to 115 lb., the heavier weight being of green tea.

Infinite care was taken to ensure the safety of this first offspring of the Company’s enterprise. In fact, for his shipment, the Secretary in Calcutta obtained from the ship’s agent a guarantee not to ship any sugar in the same vessel.
It was loaded in the sailing-ship Helen Mary at Calcutta in June 1841, and it arrived in London on 17th December.

Here again it was subject to further meticulous care on reaching the London warehouse. It is recorded that "... Mr. Thompson should be employed for the present to sell the tea just received. . . ."

It was not left, however, to the Brokers alone to prepare this precious consignment for sale. A committee of three Directors, Twining, Fox and Travers, was formed to advise on the subject.

The teas came up for sale on 26th January 1842 and realised prices ranging from 1s. 10d. to 4s. 3d. per lb. with an average of over 3s.

After the fabulous prices paid for the first Assam teas produced by Government, the Directors were careful to assure shareholders in their annual report that in regard to this sale:

... No fictitious value was assigned to the tea, which was carefully examined and reported on by competent judges, who considered its character fully established in the London market, and that it is no longer bought as an object of curiosity.

In paying the above prices for Assam tea, the dealers and grocers had a wide margin of profit, for the commonest bohea from China was selling retail at over 3s. per lb., and the finest Pekoes at 11s. per lb. and more.

The next shipment was one of about 30,000 lb., the produce of season 1841, contained in 421 chests and shipped in the Nankin and Lalla Rookh. It comprised both black and green tea, and of the total, 236 chests of black and 16 chests of green tea were from the Northern Division, 17 chests of black and 24 chests of green from the Eastern Division, whilst the Southern Division contributed 128 chests of black tea.

No date is given for the sale of this tea in London. It is only mentioned in the Report of May 1843, when it realised an average above 2s. per lb.

After such a favourable start to their first two years of tea production, it is difficult to appreciate at first sight why the three Superintendents, during the next four years, made such bad tea.

It would have been understandable if Bruce, with his superior knowledge and experience, had made better tea than the less experienced Masters and Parker, but they were all three culpable.

To find some explanation of this deterioration, and before dealing with the next shipment to the London market, we turn to the proceedings of the Calcutta Board for some light on the subject.

Towards the end of 1841 Bruce suggested that with all the difficulties he had to contend with in getting his tea plucked in the Northern Division, the final processes of picking over, drying and packing should be done in Calcutta. The Secretary was duly instructed to rent accommodation in the Calcutta Bonded Warehouse Association's premises.
Mr. F. Cooke, one of the Second Assistants, together with a number of native tea makers were sent down to Calcutta.

It was at Mr. Parker's suggestion that a quantity of this partly manufactured tea should be despatched from Assam in baskets with a view to saving the making of boxes in Assam and of sending up from Calcutta the lead linings for them.

The first consignment of seven baskets of tea arrived in Calcutta on 30th June 1843, and as should have been anticipated, it was very damp. It was ordered to be turned out preparatory to another firing.

The remarkable point is that there seemed to be no hurry about getting this tea re-fired. Damp they described it, it must have been hopelessly out of condition. It was not until September, two months after its arrival, that it received attention.

Towards the end of 1843 the Assistant Cooke duly reported to the Board that during the period of his engagement in Calcutta he had re-fired and packed a total of 89 chests, or 7,333 lb., of this partly manufactured tea received from the gardens.

The Calcutta godown in which these operations had been performed was given up, and that brought to a close the experiment in bringing tea from Assam in baskets and completing the processes of manufacture in Calcutta.

The three Superintendents were torn between the varying instructions received from the London Board. They were pressed to produce quantity, whilst they were censured for the large proportion of coarse tea they produced. In commenting on one of these letters of complaint from London in which the Superintendents had been urged to make only fine teas, J. P. Parker, in March 1843, wrote:

... I only wish there had been a larger quantity of fine sorts but it is not possible to manufacture only fine teas, for there must of necessity be some Bohea, when the rains come on heavily at the time of plucking, succeeded by a hot sun, which causes the leaves [that would have made Pekoe and Souchong] to grow too large before we can pluck them. Especially limited as we have been always in the first crop for want of sufficient number of hands to pluck. The coarse teas can be sent to the American market as was suggested formerly by the Home Secretary. . . .

It was the shortage of labour, both at the Eastern Division under Parker and in the Northern Division under Bruce, that was the chief cause for poor tea, but how bad this tea was will be told. In the meantime, the suggestion will be noted to send the worst of their produce to America. For some time it was always the way, when an enquiry was received for a supply of the Company's tea (and such enquiries came from
Singapore, Madras, Ceylon, and even requests from the Government Commissariat Department for tea for the troops, to try and foist on these potential customers the very worst of their production.

Whilst the Board were not conversant with the method of manufacture, the Superintendents seemed to have had only a vague idea of how to sort their teas and classify them into their proper grades. It was this lack of knowledge of the subject that induced the London Board to send out an Assistant from home with experience of the classification and packing of teas for the London market.

The earliest existing catalogue of a sale of the Assam Company's teas is that for the sale at the London Commercial Sale Rooms on 24th April 1844, which comprised 798 chests imported in the sailing-ships Sophia (190 chests) and Maria Soames (608 chests); the former reported in London in September 1843 and the latter in January 1844.

Out of the total of these two ships, 609 chests were the produce of season 1842 and 189 chests by the Maria Soames were of season 1843. It is quite remarkable, knowing the difficulties they experienced in those early days of getting tea-boxes made in which to pack the tea, and the slow transport to the despatching station on the Brahmaputra, that they were able to get 1843 tea sold in London so quickly. It meant that this tea was the produce of the months of March and April 1843.

Of these 189 chests, the Northern Division contributed 61 chests and the Southern Division 128. The lesser quantity from the Northern Division is accounted for by the longer lead from these tracts to the river station, for the Northern Division produced then the largest quantity of the annual crop, those tracts having been established longer than those in the Southern Division.

It is curious, however, that they were so particular to give the tare of each chest, which varied from 20 lb. to 41 lb. per chest throughout the catalogue; but an indication of the wide variation in the make of box is found in one break of 7 chests, the tares of which range from 24 to 35 lb.

If the Superintendents had carried on their original early practice of putting only about 38 to 40 lb. of tea in a box, it would look as though the weight of the chest was nearly as much as the tea it contained.

It is interesting to note that in these early years the tea was offered in the name of the tea tract from which it came. This was before Nazira was used as the one central manufacturing and packing station, where the identity of individual garden's teas was lost.

It is strange that no endeavour seems to have been made in this old catalogue to spell the names of the tracts or gardens consistently. The names are identifiable enough, in spite of Gabroo Parbut appearing as Gabioo; whilst Cherideo is spelt variously on different pages in the same catalogue as Cheriao, Cherardoo, Cheridor and Cherido.
 INCLUDED IN THESE SHIPMENTS ARE 25 CHESTS OF GREEN TEA FROM WHAT IS DESCRIBED AS THE TIPPUM HILLS. THIS MUST HAVE BEEN BEFORE TIPUM, HOOKUNJOORIE AND DIROK WERE DETACHED FROM THE NORTHERN DIVISION TO FORM THE EASTERN DIVISION UNDER J. P. PARKER.

AMONGST THE USUAL RUN OF GRADES FOR THIS GREEN TEA THERE IS ONE CHEST BEARING THE GRUESOME NAME OF TEA BONES, WHICH RATHER DEFIES IDENTIFICATION.

AS IT IS THE OLDEST CATALOGUE FOUND SO FAR OF A SALE OF THE COMPANY'S TEAS, IT HAS BEEN EXAMINED IN SOME DETAIL.

TO REVERT TO THE QUESTION OF THE TEA PUT UP FOR AUCTION, THERE IS THE LONDON SECRETARY'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF 10TH NOVEMBER 1843, THAT ON EXAMINING THE 190 CHESTS BY THE SOPHIA HE FOUND SO LARGE A PROPORTION OF COARSE TEA THAT HE HAD DEFERRED BRINGING THEM TO SALE, AND THE BOARD DECIDED THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE SOLD UNTIL AFTER ARRIVAL OF THE TEA SHIPPED IN THE MARIA SOAMES.

WHEN THE COMBINED SHIPMENTS WERE EVENTUALLY PUT UP FOR AUCTION ON 2ND APRIL 1844, NO LESS THAN 289 CHESTS OF BOHEA AND COMPoi WERE WITHDRAWN AS UNSALEABLE. THEY WERE DISPOSED OF AFTERWARDS THROUGH THE GOOD OFFICES OF MR. JAMES WARREN, AT 1½D. PER LB. FOR THE BOHEA AND 3D. PER LB. FOR THE COMPoi.

WHEN THE ADVICE OF THIS SALE REACHED THE CALCUTTA BOARD LATER IN 1844, THEY BECAME ALARMED AND INSTITUTED A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION. FOR THIS PURPOSE THEY CALLED IN MR. JAMES WATKINS AND MR. TERRY, THE AVAILABLE TEA EXPERTS IN CALCUTTA. THEY ORDERED REPORTS FROM MR. HODGES, THE ACTING SUPERINTENDENT, AND THEIR SENIOR ASSISTANTS, GROSE AND GUTHRIE.

BY THIS TIME, THE TEAS OF 1843 SEASON WERE REACHING CALCUTTA. SAMPLES WERE SUBMITTED TO MR. TERRY, WHO HAD TO REPORT THAT THE QUALITY WAS NO BETTER. HE RECOMMENDED THAT EVEN THE THIRD BEST GRADE CONGOU SHOULD NOT BE SHIPPED TO ENGLAND IF 8 ANNAS PER LB. COULD BE OBTAINED FOR IT IN CALCUTTA, AND THAT THE BOHEA AND COMPoi SHOULD BE SOLD AT ANY PRICE.

WHAT THE QUALITY OR CONDITION OF SOME OF THESE TEAS MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE CAN BE GATHERED FROM THE FACT THAT SOME OF IT SENT TO TULLAH & COMPANY WAS SOLD FOR ANNAS 10½ A BAG, AND THAT SOME SENT TO MACKENZIE LYALL & COMPANY, AFTER HAVING BEEN PUT UP FOR AUCTION ON TWO OCCASIONS, WAS, IN AUGUST 1844, STILL UNSOLD.

TO SUCH STRAITS WERE THE CALCUTTA BOARD PUT TO DISPOSE OF THEIR CROP THAT THEY AGREED TO A SUGGESTION, PUT FORWARD BY THEIR SECRETARY, THAT AN EXPERIMENT BE TRIED ON THE 185 CHESTS OF REJECTED, WORTHLESS TEA THEN LYING IN THEIR GODOWN, TO DAMPENING THEM WITH A DECOCITION OF TEA AND RE-FIRING THEM AGAIN! AS IF ANYTHING COULD BE BETTER THAN THE RUBBISH THEY HAD LEFT ON THEIR HANDS. NOTHING IS SAID ABOUT THE RESULT OF THIS LAST DESPERATE REMEDY.

BY 1846 MASTERS, PARKER AND BRUCE HAD BEEN DISMISSED. HENRY MORNAY
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proceeded to Assam with special injunctions to investigate the causes for the worthless tea produced. It was the outcome of Henry Mornay's enquiries and the steps he took to remedy defects in the methods of manufacture that at last brought about a great improvement. Henry Mornay was in Assam for over a year, virtually acting as Superintendent, until he was able to make over to his brother, Stephen Mornay, in 1847.

The damage, however, had already been done, for it would take something like two years before the value of the improved tea would be realised on the London market. In the meantime, there was still the bad tea of 1844, 1845 and a part of 1846, to be disposed of, and this when the Company's financial position was at its worst.

Much has been said regarding the bad tea made by the Assam Company in these years, and it was no doubt very damaging to its reputation, but 100 years ago there would seem to have been a regular trade in teas of doubtful quality.

This can be judged by the following quotation from a circular letter issued to their clients by a highly reputable firm of tea and coffee merchants in 1854. It referred to China tea:

Many of the cargoes of tea recently arrived have turned out in irregular condition owing to their being insufficiently cured. Some of these have been immediately sold (with all faults), at extremely low rates, and are well worth the attention of all parties buying for immediate use.

Tea drinking was a ceremony at which the housewife had to display her knowledge, for one is reminded that scented green tea was still being used, a pinch or so being put into the pot with the black leaf tea, according to taste. Hence the two compartments for tea in the old-fashioned tea-caddy.

By 1843 the quantity of green tea produced by the Assam Company was insignificant, and in this commodity it could not apparently compete with China. It took more labour to make green tea, which cost 20 to 30 per cent. more to produce, and the prices realised were less than for black tea.

The sorting of black tea was confined within the range of grades designated in order of value: Pekoe, Souchong, Congou, Compoi, and Bohea, all whole leaf grades, for the fannings and broken were thrown away as valueless. It was not for some years that breaks of fannings were eventually sent home, and the Board were surprised that they realised what were then good prices.

By this time the Chinese tea makers had been dispensed with, and manufacture was carried out solely by their own native Teklahs, or tea makers, who had been taught by the Chinese. The tea maker, outside his
THE FIRST TEA PRODUCED

job as such, was expected to keep a poorah (one and one-third acres) of land free of jungle.

It naturally took time for Stephen Mornay's administration to effect improvement in the quality of the Company's production. In 1847 there was some poor tea to be sold still from previous seasons, and there is recorded the following sale in Calcutta on 6th August 1847:

- 16 chests Dust Tea at As.15. 6d. per lb.
- 12 chests Bohea at As.3s. per lb.
- 3 chests Bohea at As.3s. 6d. per lb.
- 3 chests of Green Tea at As.7s. 6d. per lb.
- 2 chests of Green Tea at Rs.15 per chest.

In 1849 a welcome change to better quality and higher prices had set in. The produce of that year had realised in London prices ranging from 9d. to 6s. per lb. with an average of 1s. 11\frac{1}{4}d. per lb., excluding the sale of residue teas at the end of the season. Great play was made of the sale of one chest of Flowery Pekoe at 6s. per lb. which had been produced at one of the gardens in the Rokung Division, but on which of the three gardens is not mentioned.

At the same time, as the abortive attempt was being made to finish the manufacture of tea, its sorting and packing in Calcutta, the Board called for the opinion of Bruce and Parker, on the feasibility of sending all tea from the Northern and Eastern Divisions to Nazira to be finished, sorted and packed. The Superintendents turned this down peremptorily, saying that they saw no advantage in it. Tea from some of the gardens in the Southern Division had always been so treated at Nazira. When the working of the Northern and Eastern Divisions was abandoned in 1845, the question resolved itself, and subsequently, when Stephen Mornay after 1847 gradually resumed the cultivation of some of the Northern and Eastern Divisions and at first made only small quantities of tea, they were sorted and packed at Nazira, and this continued for a long time in spite of the progressive increase in crop from the Upper Divisions.

In 1856, when the Board wished to reverse the process and secure the identity of each garden's quality of output, by each manufacturing wholly its own leaf, there came equally vehement protests from Assam on such a change. This was when George Williamson was home on leave and the Principal Assistant, James McIntosh, was acting for him. He put up a quite well reasoned case, chiefly because it would disperse amongst the several gardens the experienced tea makers which had been laboriously acquired and taught over a long time. That is, presuming they could be induced to leave Nazira. Even with the work concentrated as it was in one place, it was difficult enough to obtain the number of tea makers required. It was argued further that for each garden to find its own labour for its factory
would reduce the labour available for plucking and cultivation, and crop would thereby be lost.

All this time, partly manufactured tea from all gardens was mixed together in the process of sorting, final firing and packing at Nazira, and consignments were despatched as so-many chests from the Company's station at Nazira. At the height of the season it took months to work off the accumulation at this central factory. Invoices comprising anything from 150 to 650 chests were forwarded in one boat, the former would be in country wooden boats and the latter in the Company's iron boats. These invoices were again accumulated in Calcutta and shipped in such quantities as shipping space was available for. On reaching London, they were warehoused and again accumulated until the Brokers, after taking time for sampling to the Trade, arranged to bring the teas to auction. This would explain why there were at times as many as 3,000 chests of the Assam Company's teas disposed of in one sale.

There never seemed any urge to accelerate the realisation of proceeds from their tea. It took sometimes three years from the time a year's crop was made until the proceeds of its sale were banked. There seemed to be no hurry even when the tea was in warehouse in London, which would not appear to have been good business, particularly when regard is had to the rate of interest—anything from 5 to 8 per cent. being charged then for loans.

As a matter of interest in dealing with the disposal of the Company's teas, permission has been granted by Harrisons & Crosfield Limited to reproduce the adjoining invoice of 3rd June 1858, representing the sale of nine chests of this Company's tea to one of their customers in Dundee, who took up six of the chests at once and left the balance for later delivery.

A feature of this invoice is the way in which the date is quoted. It was difficult enough in those days with the profuse use in office communications of the "instant, ultimo and proximo," but this use of the numerical month first and the date of that month next is confusing.

At the price of 2s. 1\ 4d. per lb. for Pekoe, which was the best grade produced, this purchase must have been a bargain, for the year 1858 was at the time of the Mutiny, as an aftermath of which, with the added trouble in China, the price of tea rose considerably.

For the next few years the quality of the Company's teas improved steadily, and with a consistent market in London, profitable sales were made; it is not known from what date the pale-blue catalogues of the Assam Company's teas, which are a feature of the London auctions to this day, originated, but actual copies have been found that date back to 7th February 1860. The Company had also been exploring the Calcutta market and had effected steadily increasing sales by private treaty at encouraging prices.
THE FIRST TEA PRODUCED

The first public auction was held on 22nd December 1861 in Calcutta, and in the Calcutta Board's Proceedings of 26th March 1862 there is recorded the following sale by J. Thomas & Company at the auction of the 24th:

- 65 chests of Pekoe at Rs.1/5 to 1/5/6 per lb.
- 68 ,, of Souchong at 1/-/6 ,, ,, ,, 
- 25 ,, of Congou at -/13/- ,, ,, ,, 
- and 56 ,, of Fannings at -/10/- ,, ,, 

which gave an equivalent average on the London market of 1s. 9½d. per lb., but with payment in ten days. The latter was a considerable advantage against the long delay before realising proceeds of sale in London.

QUALITY

For an expression of opinion of more than sixty years ago on the controversial subject of quality versus quantity, and the type and amount of cultivation necessary for tea, there is this Report, dated 18th March 1892, from W. A. Cheetham, a partner of Kilburn & Company, after a visit to the Company’s gardens:

QUALITY

I have been endeavouring to get what light I could thrown upon this all-important question. During the past Season there has been a much wider margin than usual between the best and ordinary grades, and this has contributed to the relatively small proportion of the former produce. I have also heard it suggested that Ceylon teas have fallen off in quality, and while competing directly with the lower grades of Assam, have demanded an increased quantity of fine Assam to blend with them. This latter factor may become increasingly important if it be true that the soil of Ceylon is being steadily impoverished by the onerous demands made upon it by the Ceylon system of working.

But it seems doubtful if the full difference now ruling can be maintained in view of the very general attempt which I gather will be made to produce fine tea in the Assam Valley in 1892. This threatens to materially affect the relative proportion of fine and ordinary teas brought to market. It is thus, in my opinion, an open question whether or not any radical change in the Company’s system of plucking and manufacturing should be adopted, especially as fine plucking per se has not given the improved quality which the proprietors of outside Gardens have anticipated. Moreover, it must be remembered that if the production be diminished by \( \frac{1}{x} \), the price must be raised by \( \frac{1}{x} - 1 \), to give the same gross returns, so that if the quantity be decreased by \( \frac{1}{4} \), the price needs raising by \( \frac{1}{4} \).

A proprietor in the Mungledye district tells me that his Manager cut
down the plucking to one leaf and a bud without improving the quality at all, and on resuming taking off two leaves and a bud, the quality, by reducing the amount of rolling, jumped up 20 per cent. On the other hand, at a large concern in Upper Assam excellent prices have been obtained for tea which has been rolled until all the fermentation required has been obtained in the process, the leaf being transferred from roller to roller three or four times, and passed direct from the last of these to the dryer. This system will be adopted by at least one experienced planter in 1892. It involves increased machinery, one rapid roller being required for each 500 maunds of tea produced. Again, a Manager who had found this system a great success in Upper Assam found it a complete failure when tried at another Garden in Lower Assam.

There would thus appear to be no golden rule of general applicability, and much must be left to the judgement of the individual Manager. I was disappointed not to see some of the Gardens which have a reputation for producing quantity and quality combined, such as Borjuli and Bamgaon. At the former, yield is said to be 12, and at the latter 13 maunds per acre. Both of these Gardens are said to have three coolies per acre, absolutely full plant of the best jat and rich soil. Bamgaon is surrounded on three sides by a River which floods it yearly, and leaves a deposit of rich silt, thus practically renewing the soil each year. Both Borjuli and Bamgaon are hoed at least ten times in the 12 months.

In the Jokai Company, one Garden Hukanpookrie, has been treated differently from the others, having been plucked fine, and very good prices have been obtained for the 1891 teas. The Assam Company has equal facilities for experimenting, and although as I have said, I cannot recommend any general change, I think valuable experience might be gained by fine plucking on one Garden, combining there with high cultivation.

Whilst the foregoing offers no solution to the problem, it does ventilate the subject, and shows the lines on which experiments were being carried out then. It has to be noted that the ideal for cultivation and the production of quality was 10 rounds of light hoe a year. One wonders if the phenomenon of yearly flooding and resoiling occurs still at Bamgaon, or whether this is rather a planter’s exaggeration.1

1 I am informed by Mr. E. M. Murray (a Director of the Assam Company from 1943-1954), Chairman of the Bamgaon Tea Company Limited since 1932, that this statement is substantially correct. In that year he visited the garden in company with the Manager and planned the building of a three-quarter mile bund provided with automatic sluices along the river on the western boundary, completed in 1934, since when there has been not a single case of flooding. The division was almost entirely replanted by sections and now produces up to 20 maunds and over per acre of very fine quality and make.

There are many retired planters from Assam who recollect with something akin to disgust what factory conditions were like forty-odd years ago.

The factors which were the cause largely of these conditions were the
need then to cut down the cost of production, and the enormous increase in crop which was one of the means of effecting the former, but to manufacture which the factory equipment had not kept pace.

Taking as an example the year 1910, the total production from the whole of Assam was 105 million lb. By 1918 this had increased to 171½ million lb. Even the 1910 figure was an appreciable increase on previous years.

The Assam Company’s crop for the same period shows an increase of from 5½ millions to 8 millions, or over 27 per cent. In their case there was the strict injunction to produce better quality teas. Apart from any question of factory equipment to accomplish this, there was the ever-present handicap of the condition in which the plucked leaf reached the factory.

In the early 1900’s it was believed that replanted tea, even under the best conditions, would never give more than 7 maunds an acre. Extensions of area were made on virgin land as being cheaper than replanting, and would give results quicker. This virgin land, however, was available only at places further and further away from the factory. This meant on some gardens that the bulk of the best leaf had to be carried long distances. This created transport problems, for at the best it meant the leaf being loaded into trolleys and manhandled on the tramway to the factory. Otherwise it was brought in by bullock cart, or in some cases, where the roads in the rains were mere mud tracks and would not allow even the passage of the versatile bullock cart, by packing the leaf in bags and having it carried, pannier-fashion, by a train of bullocks.

The condition in which such leaf arrived at the factory, at any hour of the night, was disgraceful, but even at that late hour, on its arrival it had yet to be spread on the racks or chungs of the withering houses by the light of “hat-butties” or kerosene lamps, or even by candle lanterns, which were thought to be safer in kutcha buildings of bamboo, with straw thatched roofs, as some of them were even then.

Such was the condition of the leaf preliminary to being manufactured.

The factories as they existed in those days were, in their original construction, composite buildings, consisting of brick column uprights, and roofs of local timber covered with corrugated-iron sheets. In their pristine design they were no doubt models of up-to-date improvement. But in the process of time they had been extended on both sides and ends by the addition of verandahs to accommodate additional equipment, when that was supplied eventually, until these structures, with their eaves reduced to something like 7 feet from the ground, were, with their corrugated-iron roofs, unbearably hot and even in the daytime relatively dark, whilst at night the conditions in which manufacture was carried on were appalling.
In those days the rolling room was perhaps the department in which these disabilities were felt least, but the condition of the rollers, due to economies in upkeep, overloaded and speeded up as they were to cope with the leaf, were examples of protesting, noisy clatter. They kept on turning, however, and it is a great tribute to the makers that these machines withstood this continuous ill-treatment.

Mention has been made elsewhere to the process of green leaf sifting and the evolution from the original “googie” to the present-day balanced sifting machine. But to follow the process of manufacture through its phases and contrasting them with the emphasis that is placed on the dangers of bacterial infection of leaf in the process of manufacture to-day, it might be astonishing to the young planter to know that the half-inch mesh of these early gookies was woven from locally made bamboo slats, and that they were continued in operation, often without cleaning, until even to the uninitiated their aroma became so offensive as to necessitate their replacement with new mesh, even at the slight additional cost that it did involve.

The fermenting room was as often as not a separate building of semi-kutcha structure with a thatched roof, cooler than the factory, perhaps, but equally if not darker still. It was the cement floor on which the leaf was spread that was the cause of much controversy, for the old planter firmly believed that much of the good quality of the liquor of his tea was due to some unknown but inherent virtue in its ripe maturity. Although it may have been slimy with stale tea juice, he would resist most strenuously any suggestion of its replacement. Hence in many a factory compound there was the eyesore of a derelict tumbledown building, the preservation of which, however, was as sacred to the Manager as any temple.

It was in the drying room, however, that working conditions were probably at their worst. The old-fashioned dryers had their drying chambers and heaters in one unit, so that there was the radiated heat from the stove as well as the exhaust from the drying chamber added to the humid atmosphere of this department. Few of these driers were fed from ground level. Machines were not fitted with automatic spreaders, every pound of leaf was hand fed to the drier trays.

The attendant on the early automatic machines was perched high up over the feed end, where he worked in darkness except for the glimmer of light from a swaying hurricane lamp. With the heat rising from the machine itself and from the hot trays on which the leaf was fed, the temperature rose at times well into three figures.

The sorting room, where more light was essential, had its own kind of discomfort from the clouds of dust rising from sorters and cutters. There were no exhaust fans, and the room being enclosed to prevent theft of
THE FIRST TEA PRODUCED

the finished tea, the dust rose and just had to settle anywhere it could. At the end of a season, in the atmosphere of the sorting room the Sirdar in charge and other operatives took on a distinctly yellow hue which they slowly lost in the months that ensued before starting the next season's manufacture.

In the height of the rains, factories worked twenty-four hours a day. Visitors to the Burra Bungalow will remember perhaps seeing as they went to bed the flicker of light from the factory where some pulley was revolving in front of a lamp, and on waking in the morning seeing the same winking light to make them appreciate how tough the going was on a tea garden at the height of the season.

Requests to the Board or Agents for more machinery, extensions to the factory and more leaf houses to ameliorate these working conditions were as often as not met with the convenient platitude that "tea was made on the bush," and the Manager was left to make the best he could with the hopelessly inadequate equipment at his command.

It was years, it would seem, before it was better understood that however good was the leaf plucked, it was only in the factory that quality was lost and proper attention was given to providing sufficient facilities to make the best of the leaf that was brought into the factory.

In mentioning these conditions that existed in tea factories in those days, it can be said that they were no worse than in other industries, but, in contrast, such conditions affected only a very small number of the total employees of an estate. The factory worker was relatively well paid, and many of them preferred working indoors, such as it was, in preference to cultivation work outside, where they would be subject to the discomforts of a hot sun and to be soaked by heavy rain, even though the hours of work to accomplish a task outside were much less than in the factory.

TEA BROKERS AND SALE CONDITIONS

With the arrival in London of the Company's first shipment of tea, Mr. Thompson was employed to prepare it for sale. For anything to do with the marketing of tea, there were on the Board R. Twining and J. Travers, who were always consulted, and as far back as 1840 Sanderson & Company were called in in consultation.

Relying on dates as they appear in the Company's transactions, it was always as Mr. Thompson that reference was made to the Brokers selling the Company's teas up to 1843, after which as a firm they were quoted as Wm. Thompson & Sons. It is not until 1863 that in the London Board's proceedings, they are referred to by their designation, Wm. Jas., & Hy. Thompson, as they are to this day and as the partners now sign the name of their firm with just those abbreviations of the Christian names. It
would have been of historical interest to find a copy of the catalogue of the first sale of 10th January 1839, which was sold by Mr. Wm. Jas. Thompson. In the volume of catalogues of China tea offered at the sale of 2nd April 1838 his name as above appears on the front page in respect of the sale of 55,491 packages. Though closely followed by such firms as Hulbert Layton & Company, and Ewart Maccaughney and Delafosse, each with over 40,000 chests, Thompson's were still the largest tea brokers in those days.

What is rather puzzling, however, is on reference to the first available catalogue of the Assam Company's tea, that of 1844, on the front page of which the names of the selling brokers are given as Wm. Jas. Thompson & Son, and Richard Gibbs.

What was the significance of this combination of force to dispose of 798 chests of tea? As recorded above, it required even more than the concerted efforts of these two firms to dispose of the disgraceful quality of some of these teas.

The combination of these two firms of brokers is the more difficult to understand if judged by their respective offerings at the sale of 2nd April 1838, when W. J. Thompson offered over 55,000 packages and Richard Gibbs a mere 1,713 packages.

There is a Minute of April 1848 recording the fact that R. Gibbs & Company had complained about the decision of the Board to employ Thompson's only as the Company's selling brokers. In reply, the Board assured Gibb's that their decision to employ Thompson's was not due to any lack of confidence, and that they would employ Gibbs & Company occasionally. They were duly given some of the Company's teas to sell, for when the Assam Company was in dire straits for money, later that year, Gibbs & Company made them a loan of £2,000 against shipping documents of teas to arrive.

In 1849 and 1850 both firms of brokers were making these advances to the Company.

There is no record after this to show for how long Richard Gibbs & Company, in addition to Wm., Jas. & Hy. Thompson, were selling the Company's teas. There is only an entry in the accounts for 1858 referring to the receipt of a balance due from "Gibbs.'"

Except for the above reference to Richard Gibbs & Company, it would seem that up to 1902 Wm., Jas. & Hy. Thompson were the Assam Company's sole tea brokers. In 1901 a share of the Company's business was given to Gow, Wilson & Stanton. Later that year, the Secretary was instructed not to limit the selling of teas to only two brokers, but to give occasional shipments to others.

In reporting the sales of tea at Board Meetings, the name of the broker who sold the invoice is not mentioned. It is only in the printed Balance
Sheet that it is possible to learn, from the balances due at the closing of the Accounts, which broker handled the teas. In 1903 Shepard & Company were given a proportion with the other two firms. This continued until 1908, when Gow, Wilson & Stanton’s name appears no longer, and the three brokers for that year were Wm., Jas. & Hy. Thompson, Sanderson & Company, and Shepard & Company.

These three firms of brokers handled the Company’s teas until well into the 1930’s when, from the Accounts, reference to them by name is omitted and proceeds due are merely referred to as from the Brokers.

Finally, there is recorded in a Minute of October 1946 the Board’s decision that of all the crop brought to the London auctions half the quantity was to be sold by Wm., Jas. & Hy. Thompson, and one-quarter each by Sanderson & Company and Ewart Maccaghey & Company Limited.

On the subject of London auction sales generally, it is remarkable what little change there has been over a period of 115 years since 1838 in the “Conditions of Sale.” The deposit was £1 per chest then, but with varying other amounts to cover the many small boxes in which China tea was packed. In 1840 it had been increased to £2 per chest, but by 1873 it reverted to £1.

“Prompt” was always three months. Interest allowed in 1838 was 4 per cent., which was increased to 5 per cent. two years later. In all these years delivery was subject to the customary “tare and draft.” It is presumed that the latter was the 1 lb. draft on each chest, as it is to-day.

It is in connection with the latter that there is recorded in the Board’s proceedings of May-June 1899 an endeavour by producers to get rid of this 1 lb. draft. It was recorded that 90 per cent. of the Indian and all Ceylon producers had agreed to the revised Conditions of Sale which discontinued the draft allowance, and the Board resolved to sign the form furnished by the Indian Tea Association for this purpose.

It would seem that this revision was never put into effect, although at that time, with the average price for Assam tea varying only between 8½d. and 9d. per lb., it would not have meant a material sacrifice for the producers. The question of the 1-lb. draft, as well as the 3 months prompt, is becoming by way of a hardy annual of protest for revision from some quarters of the trade. With the price of common tea now at over 3s. per lb., and Assam tea higher in proportion, both these conditions of sale have become very onerous, but the Tea Industry is conservative, and in spite of these conditions being so favourable to the buyers compared with those for other commodities, no change has so far been made.

WAREHOUSING

As one item in the marketing of the Company’s teas, it has to be noted that the first consignments to arrive in this country were warehoused
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at Cutler Street. In the absence of information to the contrary, it has to be assumed that this warehouse was used for many years.

In the 1880's there is reference to teas at East and West India Dock Company Limited. There was keen competition amongst warehousing companies to obtain the Assam Company's business, and in a Minute of 22nd March 1886 it is reported that the Chairman had arranged for the Company's teas of 1886 to be warehoused at Butlers' Wharf, at rates 15 per cent. below those prevailing generally at other wharves and warehouses.

In 1890 a further contract was signed to send all the Company's teas to Butlers' Wharf for a period of three years in consideration of a discount of 20 per cent. below the list of charges by other companies. But the Assam Company refused to participate in a syndicate that was to be formed for the working of Butlers' Wharf.

Relying only on the information divulged in the Board's Proceedings, there was the acceptance in 1915 of an offer from Orient Wharf to warehouse the Company's teas for the following four years at special rates.

About 1918 a small proportion of the Company's teas were warehoused at Colonial Wharf.

In 1922 there is the record of the Board's acceptance of an offer from the Orient Bonded Warehouses Limited, but the terms are not disclosed.

This was followed up a year later by some arrangement whereby the Assam Company granted Orient Warehouses a loan of £10,000 at 15 per cent. per annum for five years.

PACKING

It may seem now, with the use of three-ply chests supplied complete with all their component parts which have only to be put together on the garden, that the subject of packing was a very minor matter not worth more than a paragraph, but from the beginning, and for nearly thirty years afterwards, the supply and making of boxes was a major problem that became a controlling factor in the efficient operations of the Company.

As recounted in the chapter on "Machinery," the Company had the right idea in the purchase of a sawmill to cut box planking, amongst other work, and the failure of this machine at first through nobody being able to erect the plant or work it successfully was a great disappointment.

The component that was responsible equally at times for delay in packing was the supply of lead linings. Bruce gives details of the laborious process by which his Chinese artisans produced sheet lead. The London Board were appreciative of this necessity, and even before they had possession of the Government tea tracts, they ordered in 1839, on the advice of Mr. Alexander Rogers, £50 worth of three kinds of sheet
lead which he recommended, and with it were given full instructions as to how the sheets were to be made up as linings for tea-chests.

Before attempting to record some of the exigencies to which the Company was put to supply this urgent need for containers in which to market its product, it is as well to remember that the only criterion which the Company had to guide it in the essentials of packing was what the Tea Trade had been used to for so long, the type of box in which tea from China was packed.

To begin with, they copied with meticulous exactitude the kind of package in which China tea had been delivered in this country, even down to the decorated and coloured paper on the outside of the chest.

Bruce had received from the Government establishment, seven Chinese, of whom three were paper makers and four sheet-lead makers, and in 1841 he complained that he could not put these people to work on box making until he received block lead, tin, paint and brushes from Calcutta. So, although sheet lead was being shipped from England, Bruce had to make his own for some time.

At the time that Government made over their properties to the Assam Company in June 1840, it was stated that empty tea-boxes would be made over with other stores and materials, at Rs.14 per box, a preposterous price, for it was the equivalent then of 28s. and at this price no business was done.

With all the timber in Assam, there were not the facilities to produce planks suitable for making tea-boxes, and it is recorded that fir planks, imported presumably from the United Kingdom, were to be sent up to Assam. This was in August 1840, and the suggestion was that there was no hurry, as the commencement of packing the season’s crop did not start until November, so the “planks” would arrive in time.

A full account has been given elsewhere of the low quality and bad condition of the tea produced in these early years, and this custom of keeping the tea throughout the rains, and only starting packing in the cold weather, must have been a contributory factor, if not the real cause, for some of this bad tea.

Bruce had endeavoured to make his boxes from local wood, but with his shortage of labour it was a slow process. There was no plan to secure timber and season it, though bad packages were always excused on the ground of having no seasoned timber.

Box shooks were sent up from Calcutta and Chittagong at prices varying from Rs.1.8 to Rs.2.4 a box of sizes suitable for the lead linings shipped from Home.

The timber used for these chests was various—fir, pine, mangoe, toon etc.

In 1843 the Board had sent out 1,500 boxes from England, and enquiries
were made to import from China the boxes they used for tea, provided they could be placed on board ship at Rs.2 each.

The Superintendent did succeed eventually in making boxes in Assam, and by 1847 these were being produced at a cost of As.7 to 8 each.

If one were to judge, however, by the tare of the chests given in old tea auction catalogues, these must have been very rough uneven boxes, for the tares varied from 20 lb. to 41 lb. per chest, but the lead linings used in those days were thick, being probably 4 to 5 oz. against later 2½ oz. lead, which have been superseded since by present-day aluminium linings.

The Assam Company was relatively slow to adopt the plywood tea-chest. They were reluctant to give up ordinary wooden plank boxes obtained from local sawmills in the province. They had built up a reputation for the good quality and well-made boxes in which their teas were packed. To make up these boxes took much labour, and they were far more subject to pilferage. A clever thief, given time, could extract each nail until a shook could be removed, help himself to the contents and substitute the quantity of stolen tea with rubbish, replacing each nail again so exactly that detection on outward appearance was impossible.

The plywood tea-box, when it was adopted first, was not so popular with some blenders, because they could not be remade so easily into containers for delivery of the finished packets as could the ordinary wooden chest.

All these considerations had to give way eventually to the use of a plywood chest, for in those days the panels and fittings could be landed in Assam at a far cheaper rate than the locally made box.

The Assam Company’s mark “Am Co.,” with the name of the garden or division underneath, has varied little since the earliest days. The type of the M may have changed and sometimes it was Am Co.
CHAPTER XXV

MACHINERY

The first piece of machinery ordered by the Company is what is described as a sawmill, which in fact was a saw bench with a steam engine and boiler to drive it.

It was ordered on the inception of the Company in 1839, on the suggestion of the Board in Calcutta. There is no doubt that such a machine would have proved invaluable, not only for its primary object of cutting planks for tea-boxes but also for the cutting of timber for building purposes.

It was supplied by a Mr. Mainwaring at an original cost of £865, after much deliberation by a Sub-committee of the London Board, the same Committee that conferred and decided on the design of the Company’s steamer.

The sawmill arrived in Calcutta in September 1840. It was not a simple piece of machinery such as one would expect to be supplied to-day, for it required considerable woodwork to be built for it in Calcutta before it was sent up to Assam, and to accommodate it and the engine and boiler some extensive brickwork had to be constructed on site.

It was considered that to make the best use of the machine it should be sent up to Jaipur, where it was to be erected on the bank of the river, so that timber from the surrounding jungle could be floated down to it.

At Jaipur it arrived eventually in June 1841, having been taken up in the Company’s flat “Naga.” It was necessary to wait for the river to rise level with the bank so that they could off-load the boiler. On being landed, much of the machinery was found to be very rusty.

Even by the end of February it was still not erected, because of the lack of bricks to make its foundation.

This machine was in the Eastern Division, under Mr. J. Parker, Superintendent, and his excuse for not getting on with the erection of this important piece of machinery was lack of labour to erect it and to cut timber from the jungle for its use. The fact was that there was nobody competent to erect the machine, and so eventually, in about 1844, it was packed up and returned to Calcutta, where it was sold for Rs.7,000.

This would appear to be the end of an unprofitable transaction, but in October 1850 the Company had been feeling the competition for labour from a company called the Assam Coal and Timber Company. This concern failed, and the Assam Company actually bought back its own sawmill, together with other stores, for a total sum of Rs.4,000. Under
George Williamson’s able Superintendentship, this sawmill was at last got working and was doing good service in 1853.

Years afterwards, this one sawing unit was augmented by a larger one with a 12-h.p. engine.

In 1842 there is mention in the Calcutta Proceedings of receipt of a drawing of a “machine for rolling leaves,” invented by the Assistant—Strong. The machine was duly manufactured, for in March the next year C. A. Bruce was directed to prohibit the use of the machine, as the tea produced by it was not considered likely to obtain the approval of the London Board.

Charcoal for drying a year’s crop was always a major problem, taking as it did a lot of labour in the cold weather. George Williamson turned his attention to what he called “steam drying” in an endeavour to avoid this drain on labour. His method was hardly what one would call a machine. His first experiments were merely that he took fermented leaf and spread it out on top of the boiler to dry instead of using charcoal chulas. His first attempts, however, were not a success, for the teas were described as smelling of tar and oil. He forgot the fumes and smells generally associated with a boiler-house in those days.

His next step was to get Jessop & Company, Calcutta, to make in 1854 a steam table and boiler at a cost of Rs.310. What this really was is not known, for there is no description of it.

Little further progress was made in this endeavour to find other means of drying the tea. As late as 1856 the only addition made was that the tea, instead of lying on the boiler, was placed in wire-gauze sieves and heated over the boiler.

It was Henry de Mornay who started, in 1859, to use local-made machines of the winnower type, and with these he experimented on grading the finished tea, and in this he was successful. He was more successful, however, with the same type of machine in sorting the green leaf, because it was found that by separating the young from the old leaf the quality of the final product was much improved, for when they were rolled together, the young leaves were rolled too much and the old leaves did not receive sufficient treatment.

This was quite a step forward, and so pleased were the Calcutta Board with these endeavours that Henry de Mornay, when he was about to go home on leave in 1860, was deputed to get machinery made in England on the pattern he suggested as the outcome of his experiments.

It was agreed that as Henry de Mornay was to devote his time whilst in England to the affairs of the Company, he should draw full pay for such period. The only stipulation made was that if his inventions were patented the Assam Company would have the privilege of using them without payment of royalties.
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Henry de Mornay would seem to have genuinely accomplished some part at least of the purpose for which he was sent home. He sent out a tracing of a drying apparatus which he had designed, and the Calcutta Board were requested to forward this to the Company's engineer, Mr. Gibbon, who was to indent on the local Board for such piping and other materials as he required to set up this apparatus, which Mornay advised was to be attached to the old 8-h.p. steam engine that was supplied originally for driving the sawmill.

In regard to his fanning or sorting machines, Mornay reported in May 1861 that two of these machines of an improved construction had then been completed in England and had been tried out with perfect success in the presence of the London Secretary, Mr. Prideaux, and some of the Directors.

In reading the account of his progress with the designing and construction of this machinery, one becomes aware of the enthusiasm with which Henry de Mornay was working on these projects and that its proved success was in sight. Yet within less than a year, when Mornay became implicated with Mackay and T. E. Carter in the irregularities with which they were accused, the London Board announced that for all the expenditure the Company had incurred on Mornay's experimental machines, they were an utter failure.

How Henry de Mornay became mixed up in these irregularities is referred to in the chapter dealing with the period 1861-1865, but in regard to his machinery, to condemn it out of hand was an unfair disparagement of his work, and reflects on the Board's prejudice against him, for the machines at that time had not had a proper test in operation on the gardens.

In a letter to the Board, dated 20th July 1863, after he had left the Company and was at home, he denied the failure of his machinery and criticised as unjust the Board's decision and those who had tried out the machines. He described how the engineer and others on the garden had introduced steam heat for his drier into the top of the machine instead of the bottom. The staff in Assam had packed some of the resulting half-dried tea for submission to the Brokers for opinion.

To send home tea in this unfinished state for the opinion of the London Brokers, if not designedly done, are indications of a most surprising degree of ignorance and folly.

In regard to his sifting machine, it was reported that that had broken down, and on that account had been thrown out. Mornay wrote:

... The most successful machine is liable to such contingencies, and to report it as "utter failure" is an additional proof, to put no worse a construction on it, of the utter incompetence of those who reported on the machinery in India.
Mornay's machinery was in respect of drying and sorting. In the meantime, James Gibbon, the Company's engineer, had invented a machine for rolling which would effect a great economy in labour. There is, unfortunately, no description of this machine. The experiments made with it in the presence of the Honorary Managing Director (T. E. Carter) and the Superintendent (H. C. Gibson) gave satisfaction; so much so that the Calcutta Board agreed, on receiving a detailed specification of it, to take steps to obtain a patent of it for the benefit of Mr. Gibbon, subject to the sole proviso that in the event of a patent being granted and the machine proving efficient in practice, the Company should have the benefit of using it without payment of royalties.

Before this came to fruition, Gibbon was dismissed for intemperance and violence.

It was a point in W. J. Judge's indictment of Mackey and Carter that he was not satisfied that the dismissal of Gibbon had been in the best interests of the Company, because the East India Company, which was George Williamson's new company and in which Mackey was interested, had taken on Gibbon, and Mackey was negotiating to take up the latter's patent for the use of the East India Company. There is no question, however, that on the evidence in the Minutes at the time, the Board had no option but to take the action they did in dismissing Gibbon for his bad conduct.

It can be said that towards the end of the 1860's these embryonic endeavours to mechanise tea making began to bear fruit with the first successful tea-rolling machine.

To follow the Assam Company's part in these inventions, and its installation of machinery subsequently, it is necessary to divide the subject into the respective headings according to the process of manufacture to which they relate.

ROLLING

As soon as rolling machines came into use, rolling by hand in Assam disappeared rapidly. Rolling by hand was continued well into the 1870's in Darjeeling and other Hill Districts where there were many small gardens producing such diminutive crops per acre that a machine was redundant.

In 1867 there was tried out the first successful tea-rolling machine, one invented by the Company's own engineer, James C. Kinmond. Two of these machines were supplied for trial, and in his Report, dated 3rd May 1868, the Superintendent, then A. B. Fisher, mentioned seeing the machine working at Ligri Pookri, and that he proposed to move the small engine from the mill at Nazira to work the machine at Hatti Pooti.
An early Model of Jackson’s Cross-action Roller, showing discharge of Rolled Leaf.
An improved Model of Jackson's Cross-action Roller.
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The difficulty experienced to commence with was the application of motive power to drive the machines. They had to use animal power at first, and old ponies for this purpose were trained at Mackeypore. It was not long, however, before small 3-h.p. engines and boilers were shipped out from home to drive these rollers.

The saving in labour by the use of these rollers was considerable, as mentioned in Fisher's Report:

... 22 Maunds of green leaf were rolled off by the machine. The first rolling occupied three hours 40 minutes (the work of 44 men), and after firing in the pans, two more slight rollings were given occupying one hour 10 minutes; the whole of the tea was drying off over charcoal fires by 3 p.m. and a beautiful sample of tea was made.

As an indication of conditions and hours of work as tea making was carried on before the advent of machinery, in addition to the better tea made by the Kinmond Roller, there was the great thing claimed of it, that it would enable rolling to be finished in daylight. If rolling by hand was carried on after dark, it would mean that the slow drying of the tea over charcoal chulas went on all night and probably well into the next day.

On the success of these first machines, the Board, in 1868, ordered four more. In the next few years the Company must have put in considerable numbers of these Kinmond Rollers. In 1876 there is the first mention of Jackson's Rollers. The only reference is in the list of cheques signed at a Board Meeting on 17th June: "... Paid W. & J. Jackson—Rolling Machines—£289 : 16 : 3d."

In the same year, there is an entry of having paid Barber & Company for a rolling machine costing £190. No details of either of these machines is given.

In the Company's Proceedings for July 1880 there appears the entry of the payment of £375, 4s. 2d. to Marshall Sons & Company. This is the first record of a payment to that famous firm of tea machinery makers. It does not state for what machine this payment was made. It must have been just prior to this that the brothers William and John Jackson turned to Marshall's for the production of their inventions. Their first roller was what was called a cross-action machine, a straight backward and forward movement of the leaf, as opposed to the rotary motion of present-day rollers.

There is an illustration of one of these early machines. It is not a good picture, but it is one of the few that shows the discharge of the leaf after rolling.

The other illustration is of a later model cross-action machine which includes a feed hopper.
From these early machines there developed Jackson's Rapid Rollers. To give an idea of the extension of mechanisation in this department of manufacture, Marshall's Tea Machinery Company Limited, have from their old records furnished the information that between the years 1889 and 1900 they supplied to the Assam Company no less than 55 of their 32-inch “Rapid” Rollers.

There may have been manufacturers experimenting with other types of machines, but the principle invented by Jackson has changed little over many years, and for a long time Marshall's were the only producers.

It is a remarkable tribute to the quality of both workmanship and materials put into these machines that in the hands of unskilled coolie labour during long hours of work they have continued in service up to fifty years after being installed. These machines have been greatly improved and further increased in capacity. They were followed later by Davidson’s O.C.B. Rollers, and the Britannia machine, made by the Britannia Engineering Company Limited in India. These are the three makes used chiefly in Assam.

There is an illustration showing a battery of rollers in a modern factory. This was taken at the conclusion of the day’s rolling; the last of the rolled leaf is in the trollies ready to go to the fermenting room, and each attendant is cleaning his machine.

The advent of the McKercher C.T.C. (crushing, tearing, curling) machine, which came on the market in 1931, threatened to revolutionise tea making in the rolling department. On its first appearance it was hailed by the planter as a machine that would enable him to produce tea with good liquor in almost any state of wither or condition of leaf. Like many new inventions or processes designed for the manufacture of tea, the results obtained, because the use of the machine was not understood, led to disappointment, and after a couple of years, when the London market was nearly flooded with fibrous, stalky tea, with coarse liquors, the use of the C.T.C. machine was largely abandoned. There were some, however, more discerning, who saw the possibilities of the machine and set themselves to find out the right way to use it. In this they were successful, and many companies, particularly in Upper Assam, use them to-day. The Assam Company was cautious in installing the C.T.C., and ordered first two in 1931 and then four machines in 1932. The Company has relied on the more orthodox method of manufacture, and has succeeded in producing a standard of as high quality tea as may be expected from the Sibsagar district, and in this way it has continued its policy down the years of being noted for its quality rather than for its quantity.

Later still, there was J. R. Clayton, who some time in the 1930's invented an apparatus to be attached to tea-rolling machines to apply and
regulate automatically the requisite pressure. Owing, however, to delays in getting out patents and in obtaining the Board's sanction to its production, this apparatus did not come into general application, though a number of appliances were supplied to some gardens.

In 1933 Davidson & Company's "Sirocco" O.C.B. Rollers were tried out for the first time. Three of these 36-inch rollers were supplied, one fitted with the Gawthropp Pressure Gauge.

GREEN LEAF SIFTING

In writing of tea machinery generally, it is noticed that until quite recent times no mention is made of the green leaf sifter, nor did it, when it first came in, excite the inventive genius of engineers in Assam.

It has been mentioned above that Henry de Mornay did do something in this way, but when all his inventions were scrapped, the process would seem to have been dropped. Otherwise it would be difficult to assign a date when sifters were first used for separating the "fine mall" or leaf in its green state, after the first and second rolling, from the coarse leaf, a process which is regarded to-day as essential in the early stages of tea manufacture.

For many years after the necessity for the process was appreciated, no one thought of using anything but the locally made "googie," a several sided wooden framed cage, with wire mesh varying according to the size of the leaf to be dealt with and the fineness of the sieving desired. This revolving cage was narrower at the feed end than at the discharge; its length varied again from about 6 feet upwards, according to the respective Managers' idea of efficiency or necessity.

This was followed by the jigger-type sifter, which, except for the working parts, was also factory made, down to the balanced reciprocating sifter of to-day, an engineering job supplied complete; an evolution in type and price, the old "googie" costing perhaps as little as Rs.50 to the present-day machine costing Rs.2,000 or 3,000.

FERMENTING

As the chapter deals with machinery, a detailed description of the process is omitted. Reference has been made elsewhere to the conditions under which this process was carried out at one time. The "rung" or rolled leaf is spread to a depth of 2 to 3 inches in "beds" i.e. sections on the cement floor of a cool fermenting room. Time and temperature are important factors in fermenting tea, and in regard to the latter, in 1895 some firm offered the Company an "ice machine" to reduce the temperature in the fermenting rooms. The Directors duly discussed the
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proposition, but on this occasion they decided to defer the matter and reconsider it after experiments had been made by others. Nothing further was heard of this innovation.

DRYING

After Henry de Mornay's attempts about 1860 to produce a machine to dry tea by steam, there is mention in 1866 of a Mr. A. Robertson, who took out a patent for a steam firing machine, and the London Board resolved to order one for trial. There is no description of this machine, or information to show whether it was ever sent out for trial.

It is not until 1874 that in a Board Minute of 14th December it is recorded that Turnbull & Beadle, two of the Directors submitted a Report relative to a drying machine invented by Theodore Pridham, the Company's engineer. On this report, the Board decided to order one of these machines for trial.

There is no description of it, nor any information about its installation. There is only a subsequent Minute in 1876, after Pridham had returned to Assam, that it was left to the above two Directors to order such material as they considered expedient, to be sent to Assam "for our experimental drying machines."

In the meantime, there was a tea drier purchased for £94 and sent out in 1875, but the maker's name is not given, nor for another drier shipped in 1876 at a cost of £233.

It is suggested by the above that the Company, through its engineer, was endeavouring to produce its own make of drier in competition with others, but it would seem this was before Davidson or Jackson had produced any of their driers.

In 1884 the Chairman, at the Annual General Meeting, referred to the perfect success of the Gibbs and Barry drier. This was a machine ordered from J. B. Barry & Company in 1882 at a cost of £525. With this, the Chairman visualised that everything but the plucking of the leaf would then be done by machinery.

When one hears of the undoubted success of this machine, it is interesting to turn back to what may have been its original principle, and its contemptuous reception at that time.

In the Proceedings of the Annual General Meeting of 1872 there occurs the following conversation piece between three of the Directors:

G. PATON. "As regards drying of tea, I gave the Secretary lately a pamphlet by Mr. Gibbs on what is called the hot blast for drying hay. Perhaps it might be turned to some account in the manufacture of tea, and facilitate the process and economise the expense."

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WILLIAM TITE. “Better not try it. We have tried it.”

WILLIAM PRINSEP. “We have tried it.”

So the very principle on which tea-drying machinery is based to-day was turned down when first suggested.

Ever since rollers had come into standard production by the makers, the Company’s factories have been steadily equipped with them. Driers were a later development, but once past the experimental stage and the machines were in production the speed with which the Company’s factories were equipped was remarkable. The first driers the Company installed were two 8-tray “Sirocco” Up-drafts in 1883-1884.

During the next fifteen years or so the Company was impartial as to the make of drier it purchased. It was a question of availability, for it was anxious to get its factories equipped with machinery as quickly as possible. After its first purchase, there followed in 1885-1886 no less than eighteen 10-tray “Sirocco” Up-drafts and two Marshall’s “Victoria” Class A Dryers. In 1887 four Marshall’s “Venetians” were shipped.

In 1888 there is record of a letter from Mr. Davidson offering to send out one of his new driers for trial and report, which if approved was to be paid for, but otherwise it would be removed at Mr. Davidson’s own cost. This machine was supplied to Aitkhel Division. It proved a success and was paid for—£108, 18s. This must have been the first “Sirocco” Down-draft.

As the improved types of machine which the manufacturers were producing showed a gradual trend towards making the process of drying more automatic, whilst ever increasing their size and output, the demand from Managers was often for the older and well tried models.

This increase in size whilst retaining their principle is seen in the ordering of a 16-tray and a 20-tray Side-Drawer Up-draft in 1889, and in the following three years whilst it installed another four Down-drafts, it ordered three 16-tray Up-drafts.

At the same time, Marshall’s had put on the market their improved Victoria Drier, their Empress and Britannia machines, together with, in 1894, their first Paragon.

Of these four types of machines, the Company purchased no less than fourteen between 1891 and 1897. All these machines were fed by hand; the automatic feeder and spreader did not come on to the market for many years, and when they did come in they were at first separate machines or apparatus for attachment to those existing machines that were fitted with moving trays. An automatic feeder at a convenient level from the floor is part of the normal equipment supplied with modern machines.

From these early machines there developed gradually the more efficient and ever larger automatic pressure machines which the Company
installed throughout its factories down to the latest Marshall’s steam-heating plant in the Mackeypore factory.

SORTING

Up to 1882, except perhaps for a cutter and some form of winnowing machine, all sorting was done by hand with mostly China sieves, those remarkably well-made sieves of bamboo imported from China which were only superseded gradually by wire mesh.

In that year the Company’s engineer Pridham invented a sorting machine. There is no description of the machine, we only know that it was driven by a 4-h.p. engine. It was not, however, so much the machine itself that is of interest but the saving in labour. It was reputed that with 8 women and 8 boys this machine did the work of what formerly took 90 women and 10 men.

The sorting department of tea manufacturing has been, and still is, where hundreds of inventors have tried out their ingenuity, and each machine has had its fervent advocates for varying lengths of time and with varying financial success to their authors.

Some time prior to 1902 Samuel Molyneux Baillie brought out a packing machine which was produced in the Company’s workshops and was installed extensively on the Company’s gardens. In that year he was paid a certain sum, but the amount is not stated, in lieu of royalties on these machines. He was the originator of the firm of Baillie & Thompson, whose production of reciprocating sorting machines, amongst others, had quite a demand at one time.

Later there was J. Mucklow, who invented and produced a sorter for grading finished tea. Several of these machines were used in the Company’s factories and they were sold freely to tea estates generally. In 1912 it is recorded that Mucklow was to receive a royalty of £5 for every one of these machines used by the Company.

The purpose of these machines was to imitate the complicated motion of hand-sieving, for it was recognised that there was no better method of sorting tea into grades than could be obtained by the ordinary woman labourer in her use of the hand “soop” or China sieve, the former the small plaited bamboo scoop with which every woman is familiar in her own domestic cleaning of rice and other cereals for the family meal. Hand-sorting was the best for results in clean grading, but it was slow and demanded the employment of many hands which could be better employed in plucking leaf.

The Mucklow sorter worked quite well towards mechanising this process, but it did not last long. Like many of the jigger-type sorters, it broke down mechanically as through vibration it shook itself to pieces in time.
A Marshall's 72" Venetian Drier—*circa* 1898.

Feed-end of three tea E.C.P. Driers.
MACHINERY

MOTIVE POWER

The first motive power used by the Company for driving, were, in about 1868, the 3-h.p. engines and boilers for the Kinmond Rollers, individual units for each machine.

The installation of one prime mover to drive the whole of the machinery did not develop until later. Between 1875 and 1877, engines made by A. Chaplin & Company and Hollick & Company, were shipped out, which cost sums varying from £500 to £774 each, but nothing is said about type or horse-power of these units.

1885 is the earliest date in which it has been possible to trace, through the good offices of Marshall Tea Machinery Company Limited, that they supplied the Company with no less than five of their single-cylinder 10-h.p. Vertical steam engines, with 10-h.p. Loco boilers.

It would seem that it was the general practice in other than the Assam Company, that whatever may have been the actual requirements of any particular factory for motive power, they were, without consideration for details, given to start with a standard 8-h.p. to 10-h.p. steam engine and boiler. In writing of these old steam plants is an opportunity to pay tribute to the quality in both materials and workmanship of these installations.

It was nothing to find one of these standard units, twenty years after its original installation, driving a factory with three or four times the amount of machinery it was designed to drive when new. The engine may have coughed and groaned during the long hours it had to work, but with the safety valve of the boiler securely tied down, it continued to function!

As crops increased and more tea-making machinery was installed during the following five years, the power of these steam engines and boilers ordered by the Company from Marshall's increased to 16-h.p. and up to 20-h.p. engines, with 20-h.p. to 25-h.p Cornish and other makes of boilers.

Transporting heavy things like engines and boilers over the soft roads of Assam was always a problem, and it was an impossibility in the rains. If one goes back to the time before the railway was constructed, the only way to get such heavy and bulky items into the province was by river steamer. To make the best of the job it was necessary to time the arrival of the plant at the steamer ghat or point for unloading at the end of the rains, so that they were landed on the top of the bank almost at road level. Otherwise, later in the year when the water in the river had fallen, it would mean a tedious drag over the soft sand of the river bed and up the bank for a distance that could be as long as a mile before reaching the start of the road to the garden. The vehicle for transport was an iron
framework on four iron wheels loaned by the makers or borrowed from a neighbouring estate. Motive power for haulage were elephants, bullocks, or hundreds of coolies, or a combination of all three. Several bamboo bridges on route would each have to be shored up and strengthened to take the heavy load. A day’s progress was on occasions measured in yards rather than miles, and the total distance for this drag could be as much as thirty miles.

Starting in 1915, many gardens turned from steam to oil engines as their main motive power. The Assam Company having coal from the Nazira Coal Company almost on its doorstep, and with very special terms for its supplies from that Company, the transition to oil engines was not so important. Although it did install them, it did not represent to it the economical proposition that it was to other companies less favourably situated for supplies of coal.

When oil engines came in first, crude oil was only Rs.35 a ton, and the saving in running costs against coal for steam raising meant that at that time the cost of an oil engine paid for itself in about two years. A very different story to-day, with the price of crude oil many times more.

OTHER MACHINES

There is a Minute of 22nd February 1932 to the effect that the Secretary was instructed to apply for a provisional patent for some green leaf cutting-knives invented by Mr. Morris. (This must have been H. W. N. Morris.) At about the same time, F. C. Kraty, one of the Company’s engineers, invented a cutter which was called the “K” cutter.

In 1934 this machine was tried out in comparison with the Savages cutter. There is reference to the fact that these “K” cutters were purchased and used on some of the Company’s gardens. There is no description of either of these inventions.

In dealing with machinery used by the Company, apart from tea-making machinery, mention should be made of the oil mill which was installed at Mazengah. This plant has been mentioned previously in the chapter dealing with the period 1901-1910 in connection with early manuring, to extract the oil from castor seed for the Company to get its own oil-cake.

This mill cost £2,000, and the General Manager’s instructions were that, after charging all expenses and allowing for depreciation, the gardens were to be charged for the actual quantity of oil-cake they used, at a price that would show neither profit nor loss on the working of the mill.

Amongst items of improvement to the Company’s equipment, buildings and machinery to keep pace with their increasing crops
and towards the production of better quality, all factories, bungalows and other essential buildings had by 1926 been installed with electric light.

**Workshops**

In the chapter on Nazira as the Company’s Headquarters, mention is made of the fine workshops that exist there to-day. It is interesting to follow something of the evolution of this Department, for it was not until about twenty to twenty-five years ago that it rose to its present pretensions of a north-light structure with foundry and machine tools.

It is probable that there was always at Nazira a “mistri-khana,” translated generally as a blacksmith’s shop, perhaps a somewhat larger edition of what was found on any garden, but in which a quite remarkable standard and variety of work was turned out. Nothing seemed to baffle the ingenuity of the native craftsman, who could as readily make a new part for the General Manager’s latest American automobile as remetal an oil-engine bearing for one of the estates.

The Company’s original workshop as such was at Suntok, where, incidentally, Baillie’s packing machines were first produced. It was sometime about 1928, when E. E. Chalk was General Manager, that it was realised that something better was needed and the Nazira workshop as known to-day came into being.

There is a branch of this Engineering Department at Mazengah, where is situated the Company’s tramway siding connecting with the Bengal-Assam Railway, and it is in the workshop there that all the running repairs are done for the Company’s tramway, rolling stock and locomotives.

In a community of planters, no innovation is accepted without adverse criticism, and the new workshop was no exception to the rule. It was condemned at first for its apparent high cost and inferior quality of its production compared with what could be obtained elsewhere, a not uncommon complaint by any tea planter, as such, against his engineering contemporary! There is no question, however, that in the long run, when the workshop was able to effect repairs in an emergency, when a machine was liable otherwise to remain idle for long periods awaiting spares from Calcutta or the United Kingdom, that the planter became reconciled to the utility of the workshop, in spite of the fact that its organisation required the services of a Chief Engineer at a basic salary more than the planter could hope himself to attain.

Apart from these domestic criticisms, the Company’s workshop was a great boon, not only in keeping its own plant in operation during the war, but to outside companies and to the military services in enabling them to overcome serious machinery breakdowns.
Topics of conversation amongst planters, particularly in the rains, tend to become monotonous in their limitations of subjects to talk about, being confined chiefly to tea production and means of transport to visit their neighbours and for getting to the Club.

It is in the Club bar, over the inevitable "split," that one may hear the men discuss personalities, and having destroyed verbally their juniors and their neighbours, they then get down to the impracticable innovations of Visiting Agents and to the inexperienced imbecilities of other official visitors.

On such an occasion they do not omit to belabour the unfortunate brick dropped by the London office on one occasion, when advising the engagement of several new Assistants then on their way out, to whom they were referred as "three engineers and two gentlemen."

The Visiting Agent is usually the target for the older planter who has been in sole charge of his garden for years and resents being inspected by probably a younger man, though with wider experience of other gardens. In the convivial company of his fellow-sufferers and to uphold his prestige as a successful planter, he would exaggerate his criticism, more in jest than with malice, but anything to provide something to talk about.

The Visiting Agent was a person who did at least pay some of his visits in the rains, and to this extent shared the planters' burden of discomfort at that time of year. Taken by and large, however, the planters recognised that two heads are better than one, and they did appreciate having someone with whom to discuss their individual problems. In arriving at this happier state of affairs, one must recognise the Visiting Agents tact, which constitutes an essential qualification for his selection for the job (a not always enviable one).

As to the Visiting Director and others who pay their visits in the cold weather to make themselves acquainted with conditions on the spot, so that they may know something of what is being discussed on their return, the planter is quite impartial in poking fun at them, and though this is done also as a subject for discussion in the bar, the story savours more of sorrow than anger.

It is probably true to say that these visitors, in their written reports to Headquarters, can make a fair job of passing opinion on buildings, roads, bridges, etc., and even get away with a reference to the generally fine condition of the planted area, so long of course as they do not make suggestions about the planting of more "Broken Orange Pekoe" bushes. It would seem, however, that when it comes to machinery that many of these good people are apt to go astray, and in this aspect of their enquiries and written reports the planter and as often as not the Engineer Assistant
are sometimes hard put to keep a straight face, as when one visitor, after seeing the boiler-house, was taken through to the engine room where there were the two old-fashioned steam engines, and he enquired, “What make of oil engines are these?”

On another occasion, when the “Sirocco” O.C.B. Rollers were first installed, it was a visitor from home who was given, amongst his terms of reference, to enquire on the spot whether these machines were satisfactory and worth the extra money paid for them. His report on one garden was to the effect that “... likes the O.C.B. very much, it has no bearings, is a good mechanical job, is used for first and second rolls, and he considers it well worth the extra money.”

Whether this criticism was ever passed on to the Manager concerned is not known, but a roller without bearings would have much to commend it when the cold-weather overhaul of machinery was taken in hand!

BUILDINGS

To begin with, buildings were nothing but bashas of heavy timber or bamboo uprights, plaited split bamboo walls and thatched roofs. The risk of fire, particularly in the house used for drying or firing the tea, was very great. Hardly a year went by without one or other of these buildings being lost by fire. Attempts were made to erect more pukka buildings, but with the general shortage of labour, Superintendents were reluctant to draw their labour off tea on to brick making. There being no cement, only lime mortar was used, and lime had to be got up from Sylhet. Sadiya was a station of rising importance, and in 1841 Government had taken all the available supplies of this commodity for public buildings and military works. Very little progress seems to have been made towards getting even tea-houses made pukka. It is true that from 1843 to 1852 the Company was in such financial straits that it could not afford the money for such improvements. In the chapters dealing with Nazira as the Company’s Headquarters and Gabroo Parbut as one of the Company’s original gardens, there have been shown reproductions from early pen-sketches made on the spot of these kutchta buildings. To show what little progress was made even in the next twenty years, there is a photograph of a garden’s “station buildings,” as the collection of factory, withering sheds, office and bungalows, with labourers’ and Indian staff houses were generally termed. This must have been taken about 1860-1865.*

The open-windowed building on the right must have been the Manager’s bungalow. It is difficult to identify the other buildings for certain, but presumably the long building on the left is the factory. There was no machinery in those days, so there are no chimneys for boiler or dryers to indicate where manufacturing operations were carried on. There

* See illustration facing p. 130.
was no smoke from the charcoal chulas for drying, and the exhaust heat from these was left to find its own way out.

The condition of the tea in the foreground, which was typical of that period, is described in another chapter.

The Board were fully alive to the dangers they ran with their kutcha buildings. It has to be remembered that at this time leaf from gardens near Nazira was sent in to the Head Station to be wholly manufactured, and from remoter gardens the tea was sent in partly manufactured to be finished at Nazira. This accumulation of tea in one place aggravated the risk of loss by fire.

In 1850, even though the Company was so crippled financially, the Calcutta Board decided that something should be done to guard against this risk. A Minute dated 7th November 1850 records:

... The Secretary estimates that a puckah building of sufficient size to be of very great utility for the purpose might be erected for about Rs.5,000.

and the Managing Director's comment in seconding this was:

The sooner this building is erected the better. Should be so constructed as to ensure the greatest possible convenience so as prevent any alteration hereafter.

If this building was in fact erected, it must have had still a wooden or thatched roof, for it was not until 1855 that 25,000 feet of galvanised corrugated-iron sheets were ordered for immediate shipment to form the roof of the tea-house at Nazira. A steel-trussed roof with half-round corrugated-iron sheeting was shipped out from home in 1856.

It is only by entries appearing in the Minutes and printed Accounts for corrugated iron, etc., that it is evident that the Company's buildings were being constructed gradually of more substantial materials.

With the installation of machinery after 1867, the need arose for more and better buildings, and in 1875 materials for an "iron tea-house" costing £804 were shipped, to be followed the next year by another costing £1,053.

These materials were supplied by Hemming & Company, but no information is available about the size of the buildings or on which gardens they were erected.
CHAPTER XXVI

SOME OF THE COMPANY’S POSSESSIONS OTHER THAN TEA

As a preliminary to an account of the Company’s development of its various tea areas in Assam and elsewhere, it is necessary to mention something of its one-time possession of Gurgaon, its pioneering in coal and its operations in tea seed.

GURGAON

In February 1840 Masters reported having taken over the old Fort of Gurgaon. It is somewhat strange how Government, in a manner, threw in this property as part of their “Experimental Tea Plantations,” asking only that the Company should pay a nominal sum for some of the masonry it contained.

With the need to get as much land as possible under cultivation, Masters saw the value of the property, in the 800 acres or so of cultivable land contained within the walls of the old Fort, and by the end of 1840 10 acres had been cleared, and he planned to plant further areas with barley, wheat, tobacco, sugar cane and aus rice.

In 1841 Masters advised that he and a Government official had measured the brickwork, which was estimated to contain 307,415 cubic feet, which at Rs. 5 per 1,000 made the cost to the Company Rs. 1,537 for the acquisition of this property, which comprised the Palace, out offices, gateways, elephant yards, treasury and park walls.

Although Gurgaon as a part of the Assam Company’s possessions when it started has no connection with the development of its tea areas, it is of importance in the ancient history of Assam, but neither Government nor the Company at that time seemed to have been very appreciative of this, and they seem to have regarded it merely as a curiosity.

Gurgaon was at one time the capital of the Ahom kingdom. William Robinson, in his History of Assam, written in 1841, assigns the date of building the town and fort of Gurgaon to the reign of Chuklenmung (Suklenmung) 1539-1552. Gait’s History of Assam records that in the interminable wars between the Kacharis and Ahoms, the Kacharis in 1562 defeated the Ahoms and entered their capital of Gurgaon in triumph. During the Mogul invasion of Assam in 1662, Nawab Mir Jumila marched as far as Gurgaon.

If it so wished, the Assam Company could claim the distinction of...
having at one time possessed the buildings of one past capital of Assam and the land at Cherideo of another.

In the industrial and commercial development of the province to what it is to-day, with the capital firmly established in Shillong, one can forget that there were more ancient seats of Government.

The Ahoms looked upon Cherideo as their first capital and the most sacred place of their religion. The site of the capital fluctuated with the fortunes of war and with what race or invading army was in power. After Cherideo, the capital has been at Gurgaon, and for various periods subsequently at Rungpur (near Sibsagar), Jorhat and Gauhati.

Mr. David Scott, in his concern for the health and welfare of the province, and with a desire to establish a sanatorium in the Khasi Hills, transferred the seat of Government to the hills. At first Nungklao was selected, but this place was found to be unhealthy, and it was abandoned for Cherrapunjee, where David Scott spent much of his time and where, incidentally, George Williamson, Junior, in the latter years of his residence in Assam, resorted in the rains as a retreat from the plains. What was not to be known then was that Cherrapunjee is, as far as annual rainfall is concerned, the wettest place on earth.

It was not until 1864 that Shillong was chosen as the most delectable sanatorium and became the provincial capital.

Gurgaon is only mentioned in the first two years of the Company’s existence. It was at no time regarded as a possible site for the cultivation of tea. Masters wrote about it in February 1841; it is referred to in the Calcutta Board’s first report, and William Prinsep, the Chairman of the Calcutta Board, on his visit to Assam was impressed with the possibilities the place afforded. The following extracts are taken from these sources of information:

J. W. Masters

Three good roads leading from the Dhodar Ali by the three principal entrances to the old Palace have been cleared and repaired. The Gur or mud walls which encircle the Palace and about 800 acres of land have been cleared of the thick jungle which grew upon it, and are now passable. This mud wall is in very good condition without a break and with a living fence on the outer side will form an excellent protection from all kinds of cattle when the interior is cleared and brought under cultivation. Upwards of 20 acres of this has been cleared and upwards of 10,000 bricks have been extracted from the old buildings; new brick walls 48 ft. in length, 10 ft. in height, and 2 ft. in breadth have been built at each of the two gateways which were formerly open, and the crowns of two arches have been taken down. Were all the buildings moved and the bricks taken away the foundation of the old palace would be worth more than the sum (paid for). The Treasury is a fine strong building containing 18,000 cubit feet of brickwork requiring no further
repaired than a door; such another could not be built for less than Rs. 2,000. In connection with this is the land lying southward between the mud wall and the Dikhu river containing 235 acres; upwards of 100 acres have been cleared and are now under cultivation, part with barley and wheat, part lately planted with tobacco, the remainder being prepared for Oos-dhan. A good road has been thrown up across this land from Nazira Ghat to the Dhodar Ali. The land at Gurgaon was chosen on account of its being a desirable site for a farm, a large portion of it being high land, well watered, having a vast number of soom trees for rearing of the Moonga silk-worm, extensive brick buildings, and a mud wall enclosing 800 acres.

Calcutta Board

It is proposed to establish an extensive bazaar at Gurgaon where the old fort will probably be made available to us and where from its position the central point of most of the great branch roads, it is expected that the natives from all the neighbouring districts will soon congregate when grain, salt, and manufactures are placed there in abundance. By a system of barter for tea leaves and other natural products of the country it is hoped to establish a valuable auxiliary to the Nazira station and the services of Muneeran, the Dewan, appointed on the recommendation of Captain Jenkins who is a man of wealth and consideration, and a native of Upper Assam, would be of the greatest utility in completing these arrangements.

William Prinsep

The old palace surrounded by a high mud wall in very good preservation though it is entirely overgrown with jungle. A good horse and elephant road leads to it from the station of Sibsagar and is continued about a quarter of a mile further to the Ghat upon the Dikhu opposite to the station of Nazira. There are about 939 pooryahs comprised within this enclosure of which 142 have been entirely cleared and cultivated, and 170 are now being cleared of roots and timber. The jungle is heavy and I have recommended a cessation of the great expense of felling, removing and grubbing, merely employing a few hands to clear away and burn the young jungle and smaller trees which are useless.

The wheat and barley which I saw upon the ground were not looking well, but Mr. Masters stated that the seed reached him both too late and in bad order. The soil is rich and fit for any cultivation, particularly of sugar since the canes can so early be protected against the inroads of wild beasts.

Although this queer old building (the Palace) may be rendered habitable it can never be made a comfortable and convenient residence. There are two substantial square buildings which will answer very well for godowns, and possibly about 5 lakhs of good bricks available, of which 60,000 have been collected and 100,000 of broken pieces are being converted into excellent soorkie.

There are three Bengalee bricklayers and 8 men now employed on
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patching the worst parts of the old building so as to prevent its falling, and in repairing leaks. I would recommend the removal of a kind of verandah on one side which appears to be in a falling state and collecting from it such bricks as are fit for use, but further expense would, in my opinion, be thrown away. The natives of the country have the strongest prejudice against living in it for fear of the evil disposed spirits of the departed.

In the accompanying illustration of the Palace of Gurgaon as it exists even to-day, it gives some idea of the architecture and massiveness of this ancient building. In a similar picture dated 1905, in Gait’s History, there is shown another temple or turret in the top centre of the building where in this one there is a flat platform.

Some time ago the Palace was scheduled as a protected ancient building in the care of Government, but it is reported now to be in a sad state of disrepair.

A lot of the land surrounding the Palace and within the original walls of the Fort has been requisitioned and given out to local inhabitants and refugees from other provinces, to be cultivated for food crops.

COAL

In addition to the development of tea and the cultivation of other crops under general farming, the Assam Company were the pioneers in the discovery and the first working of Coal. These early endeavours should be described more accurately as coal “getting” rather than mining.

The geologists in the Scientific Deputation that was sent to Assam in 1835-1836 had been told of the belief that coal was to be found in the province, and thus early they confirmed its presence in quantity.

The incentive to get coal was at first for their steamer, but when the operation of this had proved a failure, they wanted coal for the boiler of their engine to drive the sawmill.

In the cold weather of 1840, Masters, accompanied by J. Powles prospected in the Naga Hills, and they reported that “... on the south Bank of the Dikhoo River ...” they had found coal of good quality and in plenty.

Coal had been found also in the vicinity of Jaipur.

J. Powles had come out to the Company’s service from Sunderland, and was reputed to understand coal “digging.”

The territory in the Naga Hills where coal had been discovered was not then under the jurisdiction of the British Government, and the Political Agent would not allow, at first, the commercial development of this area by the employment of Nagas. Powles’ abilities as a coal-miner were transferred to the area near Jaipur where there were not these official political restrictions.

Masters continued, nevertheless, to work in the Naga Hills, for there
POSSESSIONS OTHER THAN TEA

is recorded in a letter to the Calcutta Board, dated 26th February 1841, that he had sent a boat-load of coal down the Dikhoo River for the use of the Government steamer *Jumna*, at Dikhoo Mukh on the Brahmaputra. This was the steamer loaned to the Company for the use of the Chairman, William Prinsep, on his visit to the Company’s properties.

This first consignment of coal was a matter for congratulation from the Calcutta Board, as it indicated, as they thought, that the Nagas had been induced successfully to apply themselves to this new development, though this could only have meant the acquisition of coal on the surface.

The Board visualised also the possibility of mining this coal to supply Government steamers plying on the Brahmaputra. It is not certain how Government obtained supplies of coal for their steamers; it may have been that they got some from the Khasia Hills, but otherwise it must have been brought up the River from Bengal.

In 1841 coal was available at Dacca at As.6 a maund and at Jamalpur at As.10 a maund.

The Company’s steamer and the sawmill having been sold in 1847, there was not the incentive to continue their coal-getting. In the meantime, there had arrived in the province a company called the Assam Coal and Timber Company, in charge of a Mr. Wood, who had obtained some concessions from the Authorities to work coal in the Naga Hills, presumably at about the site where the Assam Company had started operations.

This company became a source of great inconvenience and loss to the Assam Company, by their enticing their Kachari labour to work for them. Writing in September 1850, it was with some satisfaction that Stephen Morlay was able to announce the dissolution of the unwelcome competitor, and that the Assam Coal and Timber Company’s sawmill, tools and tackle were available for sale. The Assam Company bought the whole outfit for Rs.4,000, which included its original sawmill that had been sold previously in Calcutta for Rs.7,000.

The Board in 1854 told George Williamson, who was then Superintendent, that they had no desire to enter into contracts for the supply of coal to other parties, and the Company’s working of the mine was only to supply enough for its own steam engine.

The working of this coal was in Naga territory, and at first there was no authority who could give the Company security of tenure of such lands. Permission to mine coal, extract timber and bamboos from these areas had to be arranged with the Naga Chieftains themselves. These agreements may have been somewhat vague, but they were honoured by both parties. They provided that there should be no interference with the lands that the Nagas did cultivate, and no infringement of the boundaries of such land that was leased or was subject to the terms of the agreement.
made with the Naga Chiefs, who were paid what would seem to-day to be a very nominal rent.

Such nominal agreements existed for many years between the Company and the hereditary possessors of the land. It was years before Government, appreciating the potentialities of mining coal in these Naga Hills, instituted more specific agreements. It was then that negotiations passed into the hands of the District Commissioner and the Political Agent of the Naga tribes, whose decision in any matters under dispute was accepted as final and binding on both parties.

The Company would seem to have abandoned its coal development, for nothing is mentioned about it for many years, though it retained its hold on the lands where it had been discovered.

The clearing of the jungle for tea extensions must have provided all the wood fuel it required for its boilers and for the tea driers when they first came into use.

Operations must have been resumed, however, about 1890. In 1892 the matter is brought to life again in the following account written by W. H. Cheetham on his visit to Assam in March of that year. This account provides the first information that enables the site of the quarry, or mine, to be definitely identified as Naganimara, or another name used in connection with the site is Borjan.

I went with Mr. Garland to the quarry where coal has recently been won. A new road from Suntok is being opened up to Naganimara on the Dikhoo. Some 800 maunds of coal had been brought down to Borjan Mukh by Nagas, a point about an hour by boat from Naganimara, and the cost is stated to be—

Winning the coal (by Bengalees) . . . 6 pies per maund.
Carriage to Borjan Mukh . . . 1 anna per maund.
Carriage by boat to Naganimara . . . 6 pies per maund.
Carriage by road to Suntok . . . 1 anna per maund.

Total . . . 3 annas per maund.

The coal will have to remain where it is until the River rises, for the dug-out in which I went up was continually grounding in the rapids. It took about 1½ hours to walk up from the riverside to the quarry where a seam of coal about 4 feet thick overlaid by some 6 feet of shale and pyrites, was exposed. The inclination of the seam appeared to be very steep, the dip being probably at an angle of 40° from the horizontal, but the country is very hilly and it would not be surprising to learn that the strata are much contorted. The Nagas had cut down the jungle all around the other outcrops, and right up to the quarry, so that I was unable to get about the hill sides, but from what I could gather, I feel satisfied that a mining expert could select better sites for mining than the quarry.

It might be necessary to bore in order to obtain sections of the strata, and
in that case it occurs to me that the presence of the requisite tools might be availed of to obtain borings of the strata on the plains in the neighbourhood of factories where the water supply is defective, so as to ascertain the best spots and the proper depth for wells. It is just possible that such borings might disclose an artesian supply.

To return to the coal, it appears to be of excellent quality, and I believe it will prove less friable than the Makum coal. There is no doubt that the Company possesses a most valuable property, and they have done wisely to work some coal, for in the event of Government taking over the Naga territory the fact of the Company having won an appreciable quantity will be a strong point in favour of their title.

At the present cost of timber, the coal at As.3 a maund would be a much cheaper fuel to neighbouring Gardens, and eventually the Railway to be constructed may prove a local customer.

If it be intended to work the coal at all, even for the supply only to the Company's Gardens, I would urge that the workings be placed from the outset under properly qualified supervision. The disastrous consequences of mining on haphazard lines have been illustrated over and over again in the Indian coal-fields, and I would impress the undoubted fact that a preliminary expenditure of say, Rs.10,000 in ascertaining the proper method of winning economically the whole of the coal, will save expense in working and loss of coal amounting to Lakhs of rupees.

I should have given this warning in any case, but I am confirmed in doing so by noticing that water had already accumulated at the quarry. It stands to reason that quarrying in a dip is merely inviting water to flood the workings. So far, of course, the quarry is a mere scratch on the hillside and no harm has been done.

Until the proper place for working the coal has been ascertained, it is useless to discuss the proper route to the mines.

I am glad to say that Mr. Garland has successfully cultivated amicable relations with the Nagas, and finds them very useful in making clearances as well as in carrying coal.

In 1898 there commenced the protracted negotiations for the sale of what the Board described as their coal property.

The information regarding these earlier negotiations is only what can be gleaned from the very brief references in Minutes, but details of offers made are seldom given.

The negotiations opened with a letter from R. G. Shaw & Company, dated 16th September 1898, asking for particulars of the property. The Board had very little information to give and had to write to Assam for details. In the meantime, they declined altogether to give R. G. Shaw & Company an option on the property whilst they sent an engineer to inspect it.

Having turned down that offer, the Board considered the possibility of working the coal themselves, and on a suggestion made by the
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

Secretary, J. S. Hulbert, of even boring for petroleum, they did nothing, but in the meantime they had received a report on their property by a Mr. James Dodd Lawther, a mining engineer, sent out from home for the purpose in the cold weather of 1900–1901.

In 1903 negotiations had been opened with the Assam Bengal Railway, but the nature of these negotiations is not revealed. The Railway was by then only one of the parties in the market for the property. It is obvious that even three years later, in 1906, the Company was undecided what the value was of its property, for in a Minute of 29th October 1906 the Secretary is instructed to write to the Railway and tell them that the Board were not prepared to fix any specific price, but that they would consider any definite offer from the Railway Company. The one decision that was made by the Board during the period of these negotiations was that the Company was not to enter into partnership or to become the promoter of a concern to work the coal. They were only prepared to consider an offer from other parties to purchase on special terms.

The Assam Railways and Trading Company were also brought into these negotiations for the property. The Assam Company had made a three-year contract—1901 to 1903—with this company for the supply of its coal. It is not stated from which of the Assam Railways and Trading Company’s collieries this coal was supplied, the price, or the route by which it was delivered at Nazira or to the Company’s several gardens. The construction of the Assam-Bengal Railway up to Tinsukia was not completed until 1903.

Negotiations between the Assam Company and Mr. Evan Alexander Jack, on behalf of the A. R. & T. Company Limited, went on during most of 1904, but culminated in November of that year by some unspecified offer by the latter company which was declined as being wholly inadequate.

In none of the recorded transactions up to this date is there a word about what the price was, or the terms for the purchase of the Company’s coal property. In June 1907 the Deputy Chairman and Managing Director interviewed a Mr. Stuart, and in confirmation of their talk, the following proposal was submitted to James Stuart at the Oriental Club. If, as might well be assumed, this was James Stuart of Alexander Lawrie & Company, it represented another potential purchaser, for there was given to him the firm offer, the terms of which the following is an abbreviation:

... on the East Bank of the River Dikhoo, extending to 2,728 acres, together with the option of about 2,000 acres in the neighbourhood, for coolie lines, buildings, etc.

The price to be paid to the Assam Company, £1,000 in cash and £5,000 in fully-paid Shares in the Company to be formed to work the property.
POSSESSIONS OTHER THAN TEA

The undertaking to supply the Assam Company with their annual requirements of coal for a term of 15 years at a rate of not less than 15% from the lowest price charged to any other customer.

Not to engage or interfere in any way with the Assam Company’s local labour.

To guarantee that the Paid-up Capital for developing the mine should not be less than £35,000 exclusive of the cash and shares payable to the Assam Company.

Finally, in the printed Report for 1913, there is recorded the conclusion of the sale of the property. Beyond the statement in general terms that the consideration was for a payment in cash, shares in the company which was to develop the property and a contract to supply the Company’s requirements of coal on favourable terms, no details are given.

It is not until in response to a direct enquiry from a shareholder at the General Meeting on 23rd June 1913 that it is stated that the terms were £1,000 in cash, Rs.50,000 in shares in the new company, but, more important, a contract for the annual supply of 3,000 tons of coal to the Company’s gardens at a price of Rs.7, or 9s. 4d., a ton, the local price being then Rs.17-8, or £1, 3s. 4d., a ton.

The purchaser was the Nazira Coal Company Limited, a company formed in Calcutta by Shaw Wallace & Company with an Authorised Capital of Rs.9 lakhs in shares of Rs.10 each, of which 74,824 were issued as Fully Paid.

In 1917 the Assam Company agreed to take a further 2,000 shares at a price of Rs.12-8 per share, provided the whole of the new issue of 30,000 shares was taken up.

The Nazira Coal Company Limited is now managed by the Associated Commercial Company Limited of Calcutta.

During and since the war, no concessions in the way of supplies or price of coal from the Nazira coal-fields have been allowed. These ceased by order of Government, and the distribution of coal from these and other collieries was put into the hands of a Regional Coal Controller. Coal was thenceforth distributed by allocations to all gardens throughout the province.

TEA SEED

As a commodity other than tea itself, and having regard to the extent to which tea seed did, at different periods, contribute to the Company’s profit, it deserves an account to itself. Reference has been made in other chapters to the Company’s seed, that was used in, for example, the first garden that was put out in Sylhet, and other districts in India, but as a commodity the demand for tea seed reflects to a certain extent the development of tea in other countries.
To commence with, the Company used all the seed available for its own plantings. This was obtained from the trees found wild in the jungle, but it soon discovered that its bushes, grown from the imported China seed, were very prolific seed-bearers. China plants begin to give seed in their second year, and some say they are capable of producing 40 maunds of seed per acre, whilst Assam plants do not give seed until the third year, and their output per acre unmanured is in the region of 5 maunds per acre.

A Minute of 1848 records that the whole of the seed available for the Company's own use were 15 maunds of Assam and 30 maunds of China, which included the seed brought in from the Northern and Eastern Divisions, which gardens were then being reopened after being abandoned temporarily.

Even at that date Stephen Mornay recommended that no more China seed should be sown, and he proposed to set aside at each garden selected bushes for seed production, which bushes would be excluded from the plucking round, but it does not appear that any active steps were taken to give effect to this sound advice.

As more seed became available, which it did rapidly, and in excess of the Company's own requirements, the Board adopted a dog-in-the-manger attitude towards the enquiries that poured in to buy their seed from the many other persons who even at that date were putting out estates, and the Board let it be known that they would not sell their surplus seed. This ban on the sale of seed was imposed as part of the Company's earnest endeavour to ward off competition from others, to which end it had also embarked on a policy of acquiring huge tracts of land near any of its existing estates.

This policy in regard to tea seed led to illicit transactions by its subordinate native staff, who stole seed and sold it to others. There is the account of a local pleader being engaged in a case against two ex-employees who stole large quantities of seed from Gabroo Parbut.

Whilst this ban was enforced strictly against the public in general, and against anyone starting operations in Assam in particular, the Board did make exceptions when the seed was required for other districts. Amongst those who benefited by a relaxation of this ban was Dr. J. B. Barrie, Civil Surgeon at Tezpur, who in an appealing letter to the Calcutta Board in November 1855, asking for 50 to 60 maunds, based his request on the fact that he wanted it for the grant of land he had taken up in Cachar, and added "that he has some claim on the Company for practical services to its Establishment, assistance in procuring labourers, and exertion of his influence whilst Civil Surgeon at Tezpur."

In granting this request, the Managing Director, William Roberts, was able to testify to the warm and hospitable attention he had received
himself from Dr. Barrie when he had visited Tezpur. In the chapter dealing with the Company's property in Cachar, details are given of the transactions in seed in 1856 with W. H. M. Sweetland, an ex-employee of the Company, when he was opening out Malnicherra, the first garden in Sylhet.

These sales were effected at Rs.10 to Rs.20 a maund.

Then there was a Mr. Brine, who was Manager of the Hopetown Tea Association in Darjeeling in 1858 to whom 40 maunds of China seed were supplied in 1859. The price was rising, for this sale was at Rs. 40 a maund. Sales to other districts during the period of this ban continued, more especially to Darjeeling, and there were sales made in 1859 to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maunds</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Dooteriah Tea Company Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hopetown Tea Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balasun Tea Company Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. H. Ferguson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playfair, Duncan &amp; Company, Limited</td>
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</tbody>
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(Whom it is believed sold his property sub-sequently to the Darjeeling Company.)

It is to be noted that all these sales were of the Company's China seed. This is of significance, because so many older gardens in the Darjeeling District refer to their original areas as having been planted with Assam seed because it was purchased from the Assam Company, and just a little later from the Jorehaut Company, but it was seed from China bushes in those Companies' planted areas, or at the best it may have been a hybrid.

The China bush is regarded as the curse of Assam. In Darjeeling it gives better quality tea than Assam seed would do, and so in selling their China seed to that District the Company were doing them no disservice.

Seed was available, even for Assam, to the favoured few who had influence with the Board, as can be learned from the chapter dealing with the period 1861-1865, but as the demand rose, more particularly from speculators in that period, before the first slump, the Calcutta Board became aware that by their refusal to sell seed they were losing profitable business, whilst they were not defeating that competition which they feared. They decided therefore, in 1862, subject to the approval of the home Board, to sell all their seed after satisfying their own requirements.

In that year the Company's profit was augmented by no less a sum than £12,783 realised from these sales of seed. An idea of the magnitude of the business may be gained from the fact that it was estimated that for 1864 there would be available 2,000 maunds of Assam, 500 maunds of hybrid and 500 maunds of China seed.

Income from this source was short-lived, however, for when the slump of 1865-1866 came, it virtually ceased.
From an almost nominal price of Rs.10 to Rs.20 a maund for its first transaction, the price rose to Rs.200 a maund for the Assam seed, Rs.150 for hybrid and Rs. 100 for China. That was packed in bags at Nazira, and many buyers sent their own people to fetch it rather than risk its transport through the usual channels.

With the return of prosperity, and with it the formation of many new and the expansion of older tea companies, the demand for tea seed was revived. From the early 1870's until about 1893 there was a profit from this source ranging up to £10,000 in 1876-1877, and over £6,000 in 1888, before it declined again. It does not follow that no business in tea seed was done after 1893. It was merely that sales did not appear in the Company’s Accounts as a separate item after that date.

At the time of greatest demand, the question of jat of seed purchased, except the rankest China, was inclined to take back place to price and quantity. It is difficult perhaps to be precise as to date, but there developed the demand for roughly three main jats or kinds; the Assam light-leaved, Manipuri, and a hybrid of these with Cha. It was many years before tea seed gardens which produced one particular kind of seed came into being. There developed gradually recognised “marks” of tea seed, grown from what was thought then to be individual strains of seed from trees of known origin.

In the years after 1880 many gardens had planted separate areas for the production of tea seed alone, and whilst in Upper Assam these were confined to the growing of what was thought to be recognised strains of Assam jat seed, there were others in Cachar particularly which made their seed gardens from seed imported direct from Burma, to form what was described as Manipuri, a dark-leaved variety which was commended for its hardiness as opposed to the delicate light-leaved Assam variety. When opening up new gardens to tea, it was of considerable importance to decide what variety of seed would suit the conditions of district or country.

It was considered that the best Assam light-leaved seed was suitable only to gardens in that district, and it would seem that of these the Betjan type, a medium dark-leaved, is the most popular in the district as it gives quality, crop, and is fairly hardy.

When, for example, the Dooars was being opened out, the demand was chiefly for the hardy Manipuri seed.

In the early 1900’s, when there was a strong market for seed for the opening out of new gardens in Southern India and in Java and Sumatra, the demand was invariably for the Manipuri seed, and companies or gardens, particularly in Cachar, which had developed reputable seed gardens reaped a rich harvest as they were able to command a price up to Rs.300 a maund for their seed, which gave them a profit on the year’s
working when sometimes their sales of tea in those days showed a loss.

To participate in this boom, many gardens in Assam selected bushes in their plucking areas which they allowed to run up as seed bearers, at first for their own use so as to avoid paying fabulous prices for seed from elsewhere, but these became virtually a source of income in any tea seed boom.

A freak boom for tea seed arose some thirty years ago when Russia decided to embark on tea growing in Georgia. Being hilly country, and where there is an annual snowfall of about ten inches, the promoters were advised to get China seed from Darjeeling, as being harder still than the same variety seed from the Plains, and more likely to survive the conditions in Georgia. There were not the seed gardens in Darjeeling to meet the demand for hundreds, if not thousands, of maunds. Gardens took the opportunity of adding to their meagre profits and collected the seed from their plucking bushes. They were paid about Rs. 150 a maund for removing an incubus from their plucking areas, for China bushes are prolific seed bearers, and for leaf production are better without this drain on their vitality.

This isolated boom was short-lived, although it did last more than one season. Shipped from Calcutta to Odessa, no information was forthcoming of what kind of condition the seed arrived in at its final destination.

The viability of tea seed is short. Whereas it is possible to guarantee 95 per cent. germination in Assam, this drops to 75 per cent. in Calcutta, and on arrival in a country, say, like Africa, 30 to 50 per cent. germination can only be expected. On reaching Georgia, the percentage of germination must have been low.

It is recognised now that there is no economy in cheap seed, and the Industry’s requirements, limited as they are by the prohibition of new extensions except those allowed under the Tea Control Act, are normally supplied from those gardens that make a speciality of growing seed of a recognised jat, and this tends to prevent violent fluctuations in supply and demand.

In 1925 the Company planted out three seed gardens of its own. No appreciable extensions of the Company’s planted areas were contemplated then, because there was no labour available; but the Industry was experiencing prosperous times, and the opportunity was taken to incur this Capital expenditure; whilst making the Company independent of outside sources for its own requirements, it contemplated having surplus seed for sale to others. In this way the Company re-entered the market for tea seed.

The three gardens were planted out at Doomur Dullong and Tingalibam with Betjan seed, and at Towkok with Manipuri seed. At Koomtai,
selected Betjan bushes were allowed to grow up in some sections of the plucking area as seed bearers.

In Mr. C. C. Chambers' report on the Company's gardens in the cold weather of 1931-1932 it is recorded that between 1925 and 1927, before the Company obtained any seed from its own barries, it used for its nurseries mostly Betjan seed, but with some Doolia, both the Assam and Manipuri varieties, from that garden. The first seed from its own barries was collected in 1928, 15 maunds from Doomur Dullong and 10 maunds from Tingalibam. This did not, however, satisfy the whole of the Company's requirements, and it continued to purchase Betjan, and on two occasions Tingamira.

By 1931 the Company became self-supporting, with 112 maunds from Doomur Dullong and Tingalibam, including 5 maunds from the trees in the plucking area at Koomtai, plus 5 maunds Manipuri seed from Towkok.
CHAPTER XXVII

NORTHERN DIVISION

J. W. MASTERS had decided on the Company’s Headquarters being at Nazira, and having set labour to clear the land, to build houses for labour and for the Indian staff, together with golahs or store-houses for grain and several necessary commodities, he had then to learn something about tea. Though Masters was by the date of his appointment the Company’s Senior Officer, he had to learn from Bruce, and for this purpose they together visited Lakhimpur, Jaipur, Rangpur (which was what is now Sibsagar) and Nazira.

This could have been only a cursory examination of the country, but it was one on which they decided on the applications that were to be made to Government for vast areas of forest land for the Company’s future development.

In the meantime, Bruce had been working eight named tracts where the indigenous tea had been found—Tingri, Keyhung, Chabwa, Dinjoy (Dinjan), Nowholea, Tippum, Jugundoo and Ningrew.

These tea areas of the Northern Division were comprised in an area within a triangle formed by Jaipur, Dibrugarh and Sadiya, in country covered with heavy jungle, almost devoid of roads, and the only means of transport on land was by elephant or by canoe on the winding rivers which intersected the whole country. Added to these disabilities, the Muttock and Singhpo country was in an unsettled state, as it was governed still by local chiefs who had paramount control over all the local inhabitants.

This was before Bruce had joined the Company, and before the appointment of J. P. Parker as the third Superintendent, and the Jaipur and Tippum areas were detached from the Northern Division and formed into the Eastern Division.

When Government made over the two-thirds of their barrics to the Company, they retained Chabwa, Dinjan, Jugundoo and Ningrew.

The Calcutta Board’s Minutes record that they received a copy of Masters’ journal on this journey he made with Bruce, but unfortunately these journals are not available. Bruce made the suggestion that in addition to leaf he would pluck from the tracts which he had discovered himself, and was working, he would get the native chiefs to collect leaves from the jungle tea plants in their respective territories and send them in to him for manufacture. In consideration of this they were to be paid a monthly salary for themselves and the value of the tea delivered by weight. In

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expectation of the possibility of such an arrangement, the Calcutta Board, in one of their early Reports, record:

... This will save the expendititure of Establishment and lead more rapidly to the extension of the cultivation amongst the natives than by any measure of our own, and become eventually the most important auxiliary of our Establishment in Assam.

Nothing came, however, of this short-cut to greater production. Apart from the likely disadvantage of the age of the leaf and its condition on delivery finally at the tea-making houses for manufacture, there were the unsettled conditions existing in that part of the country, and the indolence of the local inhabitants. On the former subject, Bruce mentioned that he thought

... the old Ningroola well inclined to work the teas of his country and deliver produce at a fixed price if a salary could be given to him, and when the old Beesa Gaum dies, as he must shortly, I think that the great internal feuds between tribes will cease.

and on the latter subject, Bruce after his transfer to the Company, wrote in June 1840:

... The Singpho's are indolent in the extreme. Starvation obliges them to cultivate or plunder. They generally prefer the latter.

As to tea, they make as much as will satisfy their immediate wants, but not for sale or barter. The Muttock chiefs are lazy also, but they make people cultivate for them. They once held a very arbitrary sway in the land, but do not possess that power now. All the sons but one of the Barah Senah Patty have been sent down to Gauhati. I believe it will be a very long while before the chiefs can be induced to cultivate tea for sale or barter.

Out of the eight named tracts mentioned above, the following with their supposed areas under tea were all that comprised the original Northern Division:

Noholia . . . . Approximately 13 acres.
Tingri . . . . " 13 "
Keyhung . . . . " 30 "
Tippum . . . . " 15 "

One might question Bruce's wisdom in cultivating such small plots in places so far apart, but one has to remember that Government's purpose was to prove that the tea plant could be grown over the widest possible area in the province. In 1840 there were no less than 36 of these tracts which had been given names according to those by which they were known to the local inhabitants.

Government were not concerned in the economics of one concern
making a business proposition of running these scattered units. That the Assam Company endeavoured to do so instead of concentrating on one or two of the more favourably situated areas on the best lines of communication, which were the rivers, was a fundamental weakness in the whole of its early administration. But it was obsessed with the idea that unless it got all these into its possession and bought up every grant of land in its neighbourhood, it would not keep off competition.

This bogey of competition was not solely a figment of the Calcutta Board’s own imagination; it was stimulated by Captain Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of the province. Although he had been instrumental in helping the Assam Company in many ways in its enterprise in the province, he was, as a good Civil Servant, more interested in attracting as many individual parties as possible to take up land in the province to bring the biggest area under cultivation. As a part of his policy he endeavoured to play off one party against another by warning Masters that as there was delay in the Company’s making official applications for more land, there was the risk that three other individuals who were likewise in the field might get in first with their applications for what he described as “the choicest positions.” He did not reveal, however, who these other parties were.

When new areas or tracts were discovered in the vicinity of the existing named areas, such as would be designated to-day a Division or Outgarden, they were given then the sonorous description of “Dependency.” Such were Kato and Balijan. When these were discovered, they were called Dependencies of Tingri.

It is not known what quantity of tea was produced at Dinjan and Chabwa, two of the gardens retained by Government, or what was the area of tea under cultivation. But they did produce some of the tea that formed part of the earliest consignment of 95 chests sold in Calcutta in 1841, as mentioned in the chapter dealing with the sale of the first tea from Assam.

All these tracts must have been discovered or opened up to cultivation between 1836 and 1839. Of those that came into the possession of the Assam Company, the oldest that were producing tea were Keyhung and Tingri. These two were bracketed together as one, and the earliest crops were in 1838, 2,263 lb.; 1839, 2,631 lb.; and 1840, 6,632 lb.

There is an interesting Report by Bruce, dated 25th June 1840, to the Secretary of the Calcutta Board. As reproduced in an Appendix to the Calcutta Reports and Proceedings of 1840-1841, the date is given as 25th June 1840, but this is obviously a misprint for 1841, first because it refers to Annual Expenditure up to April 1841, and secondly the Report concludes “... and as Mr. Parker has assisted me to make out this Report, he will not submit a separate reply.”
Mr. Parker was not appointed to the Eastern Division until December 1840, and it was February 1841 before he reached Jaipur.

At that time Bruce had been in the Company's employ for rather more than a year. The season had begun, and he estimated the crop for 1841:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Crop (lb)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tippum</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naholia</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyhung and Tingri</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 25,000 lb.

Actually, the 1841 crop was about 16,000 lb.

The great drawback against the manufacturing of tea in this Division is the few labourers that are obtainable at the proper season, in June, July, August, and September; and during these months seldom more than half the number on pay are able to work on account of the sickness that prevails in these jungles during these months. The Assistants cannot remain on their Stations, they are now sick and moving off to where they can get medical aid. A much larger quantity of tea might be produced if labourers and health could be obtained during these months at the stations.

At the beginning of 1841 Bruce had 70 Chinese. Of these, there were 9 green tea makers at Noholia; 7 green tea makers at Tippum; 5 black tea makers at Tingri; and 8 black tea makers at Keyhung. The others were packers, lead-canister makers, carpenters, and coolies.

The other labour he had comprised local villagers and Kacharis.

There is given a list of 40 tea tracts, amongst which can be recognised such well-known estate or company names as Bazaloni, Kharjan, Digboi, etc.

When Parker joined the Company, and the Gardens then under Bruce were split up into the Northern and Eastern Divisions, Bruce moved to Tingri Mukh, 15 miles from Jaipur, where he made his Headquarters, whilst Parker took over the bungalow at Jaipur as Superintendent of the Eastern Division. This move is recorded in the Calcutta Board's Report for 1841-1842.

... The extension of the line of Barries from Tingri Mukh through Keyhung Kato (Khetojan) and Naholia to Jaipur, has steadily progressed, important adjuncts being made so as to bring factories within 4 hours' distance of each other in the circle comprising the entire cultivation of 311 poorahs (4141 acres) as per survey. From the Headquarters of this Division, the communications are now so established both by land and water as to place Messrs. Bruce
and Parker within the most easy access. We have explored the Muttuck sufficiently to enable us to look forward at no distant period to the junction and concentration of Stations now separately existing, where indigenous tea has caused our locations, and application is due to be made to Government for certain grants in that District in which there is no local impediment to the settlement of the country under our own system. This is mentioned to us as the richest tea land in Assam, although excessive fertility makes the clearance very difficult. Produce is immediately available to bear a fair proportion of the expenses.

A Dewan, an influential native, has been added to the Establishment, able to command the readiest supply of labourers in this Division, and though we cannot be sanguine that we shall be able to have such available means as in the Southern Division, still difficulties will be lessened where the new roads are opened, and under the regularity now existing, the confidence of the population is daily increasing.

From the above, and other records at the time, it is rather confusing to find out precisely the gardens which were comprised respectively in the Northern and Eastern Divisions. There were so many named barries which were nothing more than patches of tea. It would seem that the main gardens in the Northern Division were Kayhung, Tingri and Noholia, and in the Eastern Division, Tippum, Hookunjuri and Dirok (or Towrock), and later Namsang. These latter gardens are dealt with in a separate account of the Eastern Division.

It is noted that the distance apart of the factories is given as four hours, which would probably be by elephant, at three miles an hour. Jaipur to Tingri Mukh would be, in a straight line, rather more than twelve miles. Jaipur, as the Headquarters for the Eastern Division, would seem a reasonable position in relation to those gardens, but if Tingri Mukh is the same as Tingri Ghat on current maps, it is difficult to understand at first why Bruce chose this place for his Headquarters, as it was four miles from his nearest tea cultivation. Perhaps, on the bank of the river, it had some amenities for him that were not available in the jungle nearer his work.

Anyone with knowledge only of Upper Assam as it is to-day must try and appreciate in what dense jungle operations were carried on, and why Bruce would have chosen the banks of a river for his residence, to get some air.

Henry Mornay, writing on 4th February 1846, reported his arrival at Nazira, after a very quick trip of six to seven weeks from Calcutta, and advised that he was proceeding at once to the Northern Division and would leave his inspection of the Southern Division until his return, "... As the season is rather advanced and in going will have to pass through dense jungle, which even at this season is unhealthy and difficult
to pass, and the roads which were formerly good are again choked with tree jungle."

It is to be noted that even in those early years it was recognised that this district in Upper Assam was the richest tea land in the province.

Figures of areas under tea and crops are given only in vague terms, but it is possible to say that in 1842 in the Northern and Eastern Divisions combined there were (translating Poorhas into acres) 666 acres under tea, of which 245 acres were in bearing and which produced an estimated crop of 48,000 lb., or 2½ maunds per acre.

In 1844 C. A. Bruce had been dismissed. J. M. Mackie had been appointed Superintendent and deputed to take over, which, however, he failed to do on account of ill-health, and J. Hodges, who was an Accountant and had been sent up to accompany Mackie on his investigations, was left to carry on as Superintendent and take over from Bruce.

Hodges knew nothing about tea cultivation. The Company was in great financial difficulties as a consequence of previous extravagance in the Administration in Assam, and the London Board were being harrassed by Committees of Shareholders.

From this date until 1846, there is little tangible record of the development and progress of these gardens comprising the Northern and Eastern Divisions. Henry de Momay, the Calcutta Secretary, was sent to Assam with the Board’s Mandate to close down these two Divisions, the accomplishment of which is recorded in a letter dated 18th January 1847, reporting that he had returned to Nazira after all operations in both Divisions had been entirely closed down, and that it then only remained to bring down to Nazira the large quantity of stores lying there.

In 1847 Henry Mornay made over to his brother Stephen. The latter gave his attention first to the Southern Division, and under his fierce administration those gardens were made to pay, and he turned the Company’s affairs from despair and ruin to profitable working. He directed his attention then to reclaiming some of the previously abandoned gardens of the Northern and Eastern Divisions.

Without waiting for the Board’s sanction, Stephen Mornay told them that in the Northern Division he was reopening Hoogrijan and Keyhung. Naholia, he reported, had been badly damaged by cattle from the neighbouring villages. He proposed to reopen Tippum and Hookunjuri in the Eastern Division. Whilst he did not intend to go to the cultivating all these areas reclaimed, he would pluck them, for which purpose he reckoned he would have just enough labour, and he expected to make a profit from these areas in the first year. He asked for Rs.1,000 a month for all this additional area, but the Board would only grant him Rs.4,000 to 5,000 for the whole of 1849. The Board recommended that to cut down expenses further still he should avoid re-establishing the
practice of supplying the labour with rice. In later advices to the Calcutta Board, Stephen Mornay explained that he reopened these areas not only to get crops from them but he had heard that other parties were seeking to get possession to work them for their own benefit, and he wished to forestall them.

When George Williamson, Junior, took over after Stephen Mornay’s retirement, he continued to improve all these areas in the Northern and Eastern Divisions. They were no longer separate responsibilities, but they and the Southern Division were collectively in his charge. Some of the directions given by the Calcutta Board would seem to have been rather short-sighted. They had told Stephen Mornay, as a measure of economy, to stop issuing rice to the labour force. George Williamson reported the disposition of the Kachari labour to leave the Company’s service and seek higher wages held out by others in the district, and mentioned particularly the terms offered by Major Hannay and Mr. Wagentrieber. He was able to check this movement largely by reinstating rice issues.

Whilst George Williamson was able to report a considerable improvement in the condition of the Northern Division, due to better cultivation, he could not say the same of the Eastern Division. Here, since the gardens had been abandoned, the Kachari labour had largely absconded and the Nagas, on whom they relied for some of their cultivation, had been engaged for a long time in a fierce conflict with a neighbouring tribe. By 1854 there were many others opening out in the neighbourhood, and it got to the position when the Company was forced to reclaim these areas it had worked previously or risk others going in and appropriating them.

From this time onwards, during a period of prosperity, there is a lack of detailed information regarding the Northern and Eastern Divisions. The names of the gardens with their areas under tea are given in various annual statements, but they were under one Superintendent, and they were treated as to crop as one entity with the Southern Division, and also with Singri Parbut on the north bank.

As the tea was finally sorted, classified and packed at Nazira, it was all bulked together and sold in London under the Company’s mark—AmCo. In fact, the prices realised, as given in the Annual Report, were the average for the whole Company, whatever the district was from which the tea came. There is no means of knowing whether in those days the quality of the tea from the Company’s gardens in Upper Assam was notably preferable to the gardens in the Southern Division. It is known, however, that the cost of production was higher then in Upper Assam, as it is now.

This account of the Northern Division concludes with the sale, in 1865, of the 520 acres of these properties to the Northern Assam Tea Company Limited for £100,000. This sale is referred to more particularly in the chapter dealing with the period 1861-1865.
CHAPTER XXVIII

EASTERN DIVISION

What came to be called the Eastern Division was really nothing more than dividing up the widely scattered gardens under Bruce into two separate charges, and the formation of the Eastern Division started with the appointment of J. P. Parker in 1841.

There is no denying that the scattered patches of tea which formed the Northern Division were difficult for one man to supervise, but it was not directly in search of a remedy for this that the decision to form the Eastern Division was taken.

The Commissioner, Captain Francis Jenkins, took a keen interest in the commercial venture in the province under his jurisdiction. He was in personal contact with both C. A. Bruce and J. W. Masters. He recommended in a private letter, dated 30th October 1840, to the Calcutta Chairman, then William Prinsep, the appointment of a Controller General "... with powers to direct the measures of all the servants of the Company in every respect, subject only to the orders and confirmation of Directors in committee."

Appreciating the time lag between Calcutta and Assam for an answer to be obtained to any enquiry, which under the most favourable circumstances was a month at least, the Board concurred in principle with Jenkins’ view, but they knew then of no suitable person competent for such an important charge.

A little later on, Henry Chapman, a Director on the Calcutta Board, submitted the name of J. P. Parker for the post, but the majority of the Board, whilst admitting the merits of Parker’s various qualifications, were not convinced that he had the right experience.

Parker was incidentally a relative of C. A. Bruce.

Chapman’s recommendation of Parker had arisen through Alexander Rogers, a Director on the London Board, who had been deputed previously in 1839 to interview Parker to ascertain on what terms he would accept service with the Company.

In what would appear to have been a compromise of Jenkins’ recommendation, the Board agreed to take on Parker and create the Eastern Division for his superintendence, as the first step before giving him full command. As recorded at the Board Meeting of the 21st November 1840:

... By this means, the Company will at any rate have what is now much wanted in the Northern Division—more effective control, a valuable
addition to the discretionary powers so particularly required in that part of the country, and the aid of Science in the erection and working of the Sawmill.

For someone new to the district and the job, Parker in his reports to the Calcutta Board does give some of the minor details of tea-garden working as practised then. It was customary to give imported labour, or Bengali coolies as they were called, advances of money to encourage them to work steadily. The Assamese were indolent, and it was useless to give them advances, but they were offered one rupee for eight days’ labour which it was thought they would accept when they saw foreign labourers coming into their neighbourhood.

It was every Superintendent’s endeavour to get the local Nagas to come in to work on the gardens. Parker had got a few, but wanted to build a bazaar at Namsang Mukh, and asked to be sent from Calcutta as a further inducement, some large white shells, nine inches in length and twelve to thirteen inches round; cowries of a particular description; a mixture of lead and tin to make armlets, and some glass tumblers. On another occasion a gang of sixty Nagas offered to come in to work, but their combined remuneration was to be one buffalo. It is not stated what the task was, or for how many days’ work this remuneration would last. In his requests for inducements to woo the Nagas to work for him, Parker went one step too far when he asked for six hogsheads of rum, of common quality, for he said the Nagas “worked all the better for a dram.” This request brought forth strongly worded protests from the Chairman of the Calcutta Board, Henry Chapman, amongst which he said, “... he objected to the Company availing themselves of the use of ardent spirits to obtain an object with an uncivilised people, because no greater curse could be entailed upon them than such a provocative to their lusts and passions.”

It is not possible from the early records to be quite sure what actual areas under tea were comprised in this Eastern Division. The names are Jaipur, Tippum and Hookunjurie. It would appear that there was no tea at Jaipur. This was merely a place where the Superintendent resided. It was C. A. Bruce’s headquarters before he transferred to Tingri Mukh, when Parker was appointed, and the latter took up his residence in February 1841 in Bruce’s old bungalow.

Parker was planting out new clearances at Namsang. There was also a garden called Towrock in this Division. This is undoubtedly Dirok, by its position as shown on old maps.

There is no mention of the acreage under tea at these different places, but the following geographical description will give some idea of the country and area which had to be supervised.

Taking Jaipur as the headquarters, Tippum was about three miles east
the other side of the Burhi Dehing River. Namsang was on the same side of the river as Jaipur, but five miles east from it. Dirok was fourteen miles east from Jaipur, between the Burhi Dehing and Dirok rivers. Hookunjurie was about ten miles south.

For running these gardens, Parker had under him no less than seven assistants. One of these, John Owen, was a surveyor, and was almost solely employed in getting coal for the Company's ill-fated steamer Assam. It is true that the areas actually under tea were very small, but most of the work was clearing new land and planting out tea. Such a staff was out of proportion, however, to actual requirements, and it is a mark of the Company's extravagant expenditure in its early operations.

One is forced to the conclusion that the Assistants could have given little of their time to the service of the Company when the Superintendent complained to the Calcutta Board that his Assistants were three months' behind in the submission of their daily Journals and Cash Accounts. This does make one wonder what, in that wild country, they did with their time!

The Calcutta Board, in 1843, were beginning to have qualms about opening out more new barries, and they told Parker to defer further operations at Namsang, but on Parker telling the Board that he had the opportunity of making contracts for clearing at Rs.27 per acre (the usual rate being about Rs.67 per acre), he was allowed to continue, but his expenditure was limited to Rs.2,000 for that year.

Parker was dismissed in 1844, and the Eastern as well as the Northern Divisions were abandoned in 1847.

It was Stephen Mornay who gradually resuscitated these gardens, and even as late as 1856, when George Williamson was Superintendent, their acreage is given as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garden</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tippum</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hookunjurie</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirok</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Namsang was not reclaimed. Except that the Tippum acreage had increased to 69 acres this was all the tea there was when the Northern and Eastern Divisions were sold in 1865 to the Northern Assam Tea Company Limited.

In closing this brief account of the Eastern Division, it is interesting to think that these small patches of tea have been developed since into such famous gardens. Jaipur and Namsang are now Divisions of the Jhanzie Tea Association Limited. Tippum is probably the Tarajan Tea Estate of the Amalgamated Tea Estates Company Limited. Hookunjurie is an out-garden of the main Division of that name of the Assam Frontier Tea Company Limited. Dirok is a Division of the Makum (Assam) Tea Company Limited.
CHAPTER XXIX

SINGRI PARBUT

In the chapter dealing with the period 1856-1860, it is mentioned that George Williamson was sent on a mission to Tezpur and Nowgong in 1855 to explore the possibility of the Company opening up in these Districts where more labour was expected to be available. After an extended tour of both Districts, George Williamson selected for the Company a site about 20 miles west from Tezpur itself, and 4 to 5 miles inland from the Brahmaputra, and he put in an application to the Collector at Durrung for a grant of land of some 2,000 acres. As another means of identifying the locality of this site, and another reason for his selection of it, George Williamson mentioned that the trunk road from Tezpur to Mangaldai would pass within a mile of where the factory would be. On this recommendation from their Superintendent, the Board sanctioned the planting out of an area of 10 to 20 puras as an experiment in the cold weather of 1855-1856. This was what became the Company’s property on the north bank called Singri Parbut.

In all the years that the Company persisted in developing this garden, it was referred to as a separate entity under the above name, and in spite of its distance from Nazira, its management was the responsibility of the Superintendent at that station.

The first plantings were a failure, due to the condition in which the seed was received from Nazira, but in a greater measure to the inexperience of the Assistant put in charge of this important initial work in a new district with inadequate labour.

In the Directors’ Report of 2nd March 1858 it was admitted that the first attempts at seed sowing had been a partial failure, due to shortage of labour, which must have been an unpalatable confession to have to make when the whole object of opening out in this District was to take advantage of the large numbers of local Kachari labourers which were reported to be available.

Mr. T. E. Carter, in his Report on the property, which he visited in 1859, endeavoured to be optimistic about it by saying that although the population in this district was greater in numbers than in the other districts where the Company operated, yet the labour available at Singri Parbut was still very limited.

Failure to obtain labour in the Durrang District was attributed partly to opposition from the local Mouzadars, who were responsible for the collection of Revenue from the local Ryots, when they saw so many
leaving their villages and the cultivation of their own lands to go to the
tea gardens. The Assam Company was not the only one competing for
this labour. Many planters besides those opening out in that District
were recruiting in Durrang for their gardens on the south bank. With the
increasing competition, malpractices soon crept into the methods of
recruiting by the Duffadars sent into the villages, for it was reported by
the Chief Commissioner of the Government of Bengal in 1859 that
". . . The Duffadars made the young men drunk, and forced advances on
them in that state, and thus seduced them away from their families and
fields. . . ."

The property suffered years of mismanagement, contributed to by
the scattered patches of tea which it comprised, but it was a misfortune
that when it did get a good man in one, Richard Bayley, the Company
should lose his services by death from dysentery in June 1859, when it had
no one else to replace him. The incident is recorded in a letter dated 2nd
July from the Managing Director, who was then in Assam:

. . . Adverts to the death of Mr. Bayley, which is a severe loss to the
Company, as he was the best factory Assistant in the service, and Singri
Parbut is again unfortunately left without a Manager at the most critical
period of the Season. None of the other Assistants are adapted to a factory
like Singri Parbut. but the Superintendent will issue detailed written
instructions to the Mohurir in charge and it is to be hoped that the plants will
be sufficiently cared for to prevent their suffering much during the Rains.

Instructions written in the vernacular by the Superintendent to a
Mohurir 150 miles away on the opposite bank of the Brahmaputra,
especially on the important subject of new clearances and their upkeep
during the rains, was hardly a way of anticipating success, and it is not
surprising, therefore, that after seven years' working, there were less than
200 acres under tea.

In a statement of land under cultivation up to the 20th September
1862, it shows that Singri Parbut had an area of about 164 acres planted
out up to 1859-1860, and 4 acres of clearances made in 1860-1861, but
otherwise there was no reference in the Company's Proceedings to this
garden.

There has been preserved, however, a Report, dated 1st May 1865,
written by R. D. Donald, who was in charge of the property, which
gives some idea of the extent of the grants.

The lands belonging to the Company comprised 3,368 acres under the
Old Rules; 8,443 acres bought in Fee Simple, and 149 acres under Rent-
Paying Pottahs, a total of 11,960 acres.

The planted areas were in such widely separated sites that it must have
been an impossible task for one man to supervise efficiently.
Singri Parbut had about 30 acres of tea.
Sera Julie, 7 miles north of Singri Parbut, in the midst of jungle and surrounded by swamps. It had been badly neglected and it was not possible to say what tea existed.

Copi Pookri was commenced in November 1863 and about 60 acres had been cleared. It was situated 4 miles further north of Sera Julie.

Dheer contained about 30 acres, and was about 2 miles west from Copi Pookri.

Gormarah, about 8 miles from Sera Julie on the banks of the Belseri River. Some 50 acres of tea, and was better off for labour, it having 30 men under agreement.

Borchalah was only started in January 1865. It contained about 30 acres situated 8 miles west from Singri Parbut and 3 miles north from the Brahmaputra River. It was anticipated that this would be the best garden of all and the most easily worked, because of its proximity to the river and being surrounded by villages.

In addition to all these bits of tea, Donald refers to the Durrung Branch which he describes as being 15 miles north from the Sub-station of Mangaldai. It comprised 1,000 acres of land bought in Fee Simple, and 100 acres in Rent-paying Pottahs. It contained about 30 acres under tea put out in January 1864.

This place, it is estimated, would be about 32 miles in a straight line from Singri. Donald comments that having recovered from the results of the supply of bad seed when first put out, it was then doing well, but being so far from Headquarters, it was inconvenient to look after.

To deal first with this nameless garden, which is referred to as the Durrung Branch, Donald reveals that this area was selected originally as a Depot from which to recruit labour for the Company’s gardens in the Northern Division, but owing to competition from private planters it was not successful as a recruiting centre. Donald recommended that the place be extended to 100 acres and then sold.

In this District, Donald was experiencing acute competition from the Durrang Tea Company Limited, which had been formed in 1864 and were pressing forward with their operations.

Sera Julie he recommended being abandoned, and any plants available from the area to be transplanted to other of the Company’s gardens in this District. The whole of his proposals visualised eventually a North Bank Division of 900 acres, but even on completion of such a programme it would mean an extended area of 100 acres here and 150 there, with several miles between each.

W. J. Judge, as the Company’s Agent in Calcutta and the sole arbiter of the fate of these recommendations to be submitted to the London Board, dealt with the Report in minute detail without making any
decision but asking Donald for further information on many irrelevant points. In this correspondence it was confusing in his references to the Company's land lying between Belsiri and Dhunsiri Rivers. The latter must have been the Mura Dhunsiri or the Jia Dhunsiri to distinguish them from the Dhunsiri in the Golaghat District on the south bank of the Brahmaputra.

Writing in August 1864, John Smith, the Superintendent, recommended the sale of the Singri Parbut Gardens. He condemned in no unmeasured terms the gentleman who had selected the site for the Company's operations in this district. As an extenuating circumstance he did say that the gentleman was at the time sick and unable to travel much, but Smith accused him, nevertheless, of:

The fact that he took advantage of his knowledge of the District to benefit himself from the mistakes made by the Company in not securing grants near the Kacharee villages.

He with a few others secured 3 years ago . . . the best positions for procuring labour in Darrang, and watched the proceedings of the Company with a jealous eye to prevent them from getting a position in the right quarter for labour.

On this background, it is not surprising to read, three years later, the following Report by R. S. Staunton, the Calcutta Secretary:

*Staunton's Report on Singri Parbut—March 1867.*

*M. W. H. Bennett, Assistant.*

A road from the Ghat to Sera Joolie was made at the Company's expense. It runs through a patch of cultivation at Singri Hill, about 1½ miles from the Ghat, which was once a Garden of 54½ puras. There is now in it not much more than 200 plants, altogether and these very poor.

This place is now abandoned, and the money expended upon it has been thrown away.

Sera Joolie is 5 miles further inland, and is approached through dense jungle. There is nothing in the appearance of the place to account for its unhealthiness. Although he expected this Garden to be in a bad state, was not prepared to find it so bad as it really is.

It is the worst Garden he has seen, although the area is 167 puras, there are not more plants than would fill 40 puras. The plants are stunted, miserable-looking things, thousands without any leaf, and look like mere sticks, yet these are the plants from which tea is expected to be made.

*Dheer.* Of the 44 puras planted, up to 15 have been destroyed by neglect. This Garden has again been cleared and planted, but he has little hopes of its success.

*Gormarah.* Of the 79½ puras planted here not more than 30 puras remain and the plants are wretched from having been long left in jungle. 20 acres were washed away two years ago, and the stream threatens further inroads.
**SINGRI PARBUT**

*Borchalla.* Of 29½ puras, not more than three are left.

*Attabaree.* A small patch, abandoned before Mr. Bennett took charge.

*Tezidal.* Some 50 miles from Sera Joolie. Bennett visits it once a month.

Communications very difficult, and he has to depend upon the assistance of neighbouring planters. Originally there were 45½ puras—now there are but 20, and the Garden will probably not pay its expenses for another three years.

**LABOUR.** Of all the labour sent here, but 99 men, 93 women, 2 boys and 6 girls remain. Besides these, there are 30 Kacharees under agreement, and from 20 to 50 villagers attend, but these come very irregularly.

Was prepared to find this Division neglected, but certainly not to find it so bad as this. When Smith visited this Division in 1864, he must have known from the soil etc. that Sera Joolie could never pay, and he is at a loss to see why it was continued. The establishment of a factory there was a monstrous mistake. It is to be regretted that Smith had not the candour to declare this years ago. He might then have saved the Company much money that has been irrevocably lost.

Old cultivation is as backward as it was eight years ago, and Donald so neglected new clearances that all would have to be done over again. Donald used to be in a state of drunken insensibility for days together, and during these fits of course, all went wrong.

Affirms Smith was aware of Donald’s habits, but protected him for private family reasons.

Our present position is this: our expenditure is Rs.30,000 a year, if not more. For this we may get back 6,000 lbs. of tea, at an average value of 2s. per lb., showing a deficit of Rs.24,000. This would certainly go on for the next five years. The Gardens might then pay expenses. Asks whether it would not be wiser to close the Division and transfer the labour to the Satsooeah where it would yield a large profit.

Selection of Singri was a blunder and most injudicious. The object was to secure Kacharee labour, and yet a spot was chosen some 60 miles distant from the place where labour was to be procured from. The Company is indebted to Mr. Williamson for this unwise selection. He, however, selected good lands in the district for himself.

Condemns the selections made by Mr. Donald.

Although on this Report the total area of the “Durrang Division” does not amount to 400 acres, it was referred to as the latter area in Calcutta Reports, and it was W. J. Judge’s ill-conceived idea that tea cultivation in this District should be extended to 3,000 acres. The Company possessed the land but not the labour for such a grandiose scheme.

There is no record of any extensions having been put out subsequent to Staunton’s Report; nor is there any information about tea ever having been produced. If there was any, it must have been absorbed in the Company’s total production. Nothing further is mentioned about the
Durrung Division until, in the Report of June 1868, the Directors announced that they had concurred with the suggestion made by Bainbridge and Fisher that the whole area should be abandoned.

Under the new rules for land Tenure promulgated at that time, the Company would have been allowed, on relinquishment of its Grants back to Government, to apply the Deposits it had made on nearly 12,000 acres to payment of rent on other lands it did retain nearer their Headquarters. Otherwise all its cultivation in this District was allowed in 1868 to lapse into jungle again.
CHAPTER XXX

CACHAR

The Assam Company was amongst the earliest to cultivate tea in Cachar, and as the preliminary to an account of its operations in this District, it is necessary to connect these to what others have written about the origin of tea in Cachar and Sylhet.

One authority gives it that:

... The first tea in Cachar was put out at Mauza Basarjan in 1856. Tea cultivation in Sylhet was begun under the direction of Mr. Sweetland at Telaghur. Malnicherra, the first Garden, was opened in 1857.

The dates or names of persons to whom grants of land were issued by Government are usually the means of identifying gardens and their original owners, but the issue of leases or grants were often made long after the date that the first clearing and planting out had taken place, though when issued finally the grants bore sometimes the date the land was applied for originally. For example, and to follow up the above extract about the origin in Cachar, it is necessary to anticipate something of what follows.

The different dating of grants might account for the fact that although George Williamson did not form the East India Tea Company until 1862, the grants were issued in the name of that Company and they were dated as early as 1856 and 1857, before the Company was formed.

One of these grants was for an area called Basangan, and as none of the authorities mention the name of any person to be credited with the opening out of the first garden in Cachar, there is evidence to suggest it was George Williamson, Junior. Although the District of Sylhet has no direct association with the operations of the Assam Company, it is of interest to record the identification of the Mr. Sweetland mentioned as a pioneer in that District. The Mr. Sweetland was W. H. M. Sweetland, an Assistant with the Assam Company from 1839 to 1842.

Telaghur is the name assigned to the place where tea was planted first in Sylhet, and Malnicherri the first garden to be put out in that District. The latter is now the property of the Sylhet Tea Company Limited, and is situated three or four miles from Sylhet town. It is probable that Telaghur is the name of the outgarden of Malnicherri now known as Tila Hatti.

In the Calcutta Proceedings there is recorded receipt of a letter from W. H. M. Sweetland, dated from Sylhet the 28th May 1856, relating to
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

an application he had made to the Company’s Superintendent in Assam the previous February to be supplied with 150 maunds of tea seed, half China and half indigenous, at Rs.10 a maund. He asked further for 150 maunds to be supplied each year for the next three years.

The Board replied that the Company had not enough indigenous seed for its own use and could therefore let him have only such quantity of China seed as would be available, but they could not guarantee to supply any given quantity in future years.

The first deliveries under this arrangement would have been in the cold weather of 1856-1857, which would agree with the date given above for the first planting in Sylhet.

Henry Burkinyoung, when he was acting as Managing Director for William Roberts in 1855, drew the Calcutta Board’s attention to the fact that others had discovered the tea plant growing wild in Cachar. George Williamson was deputed to visit the District, and was given discretion to apply for land on the Company’s behalf.

George Williamson proceeded from Nazira by boat to Sylhet, and from there a four-day journey, also by boat, brought him to Cachar. It is to be presumed that this was Silchar, but he does not mention that place by name. He does mention the Surma and Barak Rivers up which he boated.

His Report on the District is dated 9th February 1856, and was written from the Cossiah Hills, which would be possibly Cherrapunjee, the Hill Station to which he so often resorted in later years. The Report is summarised in the Calcutta Proceedings of 18th February, and some of the reasons he gave to justify the planting out in this District are interesting. He reported that although the population in Cachar itself was at that time scanty, he anticipated that the Bengalees in Sylhet, where they were very numerous, would soon emigrate to Cachar when more tea was cultivated there. He estimated that, having regard to the circumstances of the people in Cachar and Sylhet, it would be possible to get any amount of labour to work for Rs.3 a month as against the rates then prevailing in Assam of Rs.3.8 to Rs.4 a month.

Williamson discovered tea growing wild in the jungle on the south bank of the Barak, and this he pronounced to be identical with the Assam variety.

One of the advantages of Cachar compared with Assam was that the time taken to get there from Calcutta was only half that then occupied in getting to Nazira, which would be a month to six weeks to Cachar, compared with two to two and a half months to Assam. Boats and boatmen were always available in the District, together with tradesmen and artisans who could be imported from Sylhet.

In one respect, George Williamson’s Report about the District would
seem to have been deceptive, when he wrote that he had heard of the alleged discovery of tea in Sylhet, but in his opinion the importance of tea in that District had been greatly exaggerated, and that it seemed unworthy of any attention.

That it was not worthy of attention is what he told the Company, but it would seem that it was worthy of his attention on his own account, for the East India Tea Company, which he formed later out of the properties he had acquired, had Estates in Sylhet.

George Williamson believed, however, in making the most of the opportunity of his visit to this, to him, new District of Cachar, to apply for lands in his own name, which likewise were to form, later, part of the properties of the East India Company. If one takes the names of the grants in Cachar which he acquired—Indiagar, Ratanpore, Noarbund and Barsangan, for which the leases were issued in the name of the East India Tea Company between 1856-1861—it is possible to see the line of country which he explored.

George Williamson confined his exploration to the area south of the Barak River, for wild tea had not been found then north of that line, and his properties, as also those he acquired for the Assam Company, were within an area of 16 miles west and south from Silchar.

Two areas of land had been applied for in the Company’s name, but the grants for these could not be issued until the land had been surveyed, and the Company engaged an Indian in Silchar to watch its interests; to report when the land had been surveyed and the grants given a name.

In the Company’s printed Accounts, the property is never referred to by any name but the general one, Cachar. It is only from the Calcutta Board’s Minutes that it is learned that the property comprised three gardens—Mohanpore, Serispore and Burnie Braes. The nomenclature of the last-named garden, Burnie Braes, must have been a subsequent development, for in the Calcutta Records of correspondence from Cachar, it is referred to as Bunnee or Bennice; but there would seem no doubt about its identification as Burnie Braes.

What the acreage of each was is not disclosed, even in the detailed Minutes of the Calcutta Board. There were apparently two factories, or “tea-making houses”—one at Serispore and the other at Mohanpore. The gardens were widely separated, at least for one man to manage. They were situated nearly on a line from Silchar to Hailakandy. Burnie Braes was 10 miles south-east from Silchar. Mohanpore 4 miles from Burnie Braes, and Serispore 9 miles from Mohanpore.

The scattered patches of tea were dictated by the fact that they were on different grants, and under the terms of the Government leases the Company had to show that a certain percentage of the area had, by a given date, been opened for cultivation.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

The Calcutta Secretary, Henry Mornay, was sent up in January 1857 to report on the land and to arrange for commencing operations. He made then only a cursory inspection of the land, but he told the Board that there were more facilities for obtaining labour, "... as no doubt that in a well-organised establishment a large number of hands could always be obtained for the most extensive lands in a few years. ..."

The first step towards development was the engagement in February 1857 of Mr. Robert Wight as Assistant. He had absolutely no experience of tea planting, and his selection was a most unfortunate one. It seems extraordinary that in both the Company’s new ventures on the north bank in Assam and in Cachar, it should have put in charge of the important initial planting Assistants of little or no experience. One would have thought that it would have deputed one of its senior Assistants from Assam for such work. It had two or three with several years’ experience.

To keep this narrative in order of date, and before proceeding further with the development of this Cachar property, it is of interest to mention incidentally and as an echo of the mutiny of the Sepoys at Chittagong, that Wight was instructed by the District Officer to leave his post at Mohanpar and congregate with others at Silchar in case the mutineers should return to avenge their defeat. Wight did not get this message in time, however, and he reported that

... They [the Mutineers] passed within 200 yards of the Factory on the 21st (i.e. 21st December 1857), but he was in the Jungle, and so escaped them. On the following day, they were attacked and beaten off in the Tappang Bheel, close to our clearances. Three had been caught and shot.

It was anticipated that tea seed from the wild tea growing in the jungle would provide the material for their planting out, but this proved a false hope.

The Board had become even then sceptical of Mr. Wight’s competency for the job, and Mr. Wills was sent up as an Assistant to help Wight. This Mr. Wills was engaged by the then Superintendent, McIntosh, in February 1858, and all that is known of him is that he was "late of Chabwa," so at least Wills had some experience.

It was not an unnatural consequence that as Wills knew something about tea planting and Wight, his Senior, nothing, friction should have arisen. There was bickering between the two and much acrimonious correspondence, which was duly reported to the Board, the outcome of which was that Wight was sacked.

It was Wills who disclosed then that Wight, during his tenure of
office of a little over a year, had cleared only about 60 acres, of which area
he had planted 50 acres "with about 35 maunds of seed."

With the knowledge now of the limited period during which tea
seed will retain its powers of germination, there can be no wonder that the
Company's first plantings in Cachar were a failure. Seed despatched from
Nazira presumably sometime in November to December 1857, did not
reach Sealtic Ghat, 10 or 12 miles from the Company's lands in Cachar,
until February 1858.

The following quotation represents the position as Wills found it on
taking over from Wight and after dealing with the 35 maunds of seed
which Wight did succeed in sowing

... about 45 maunds remain, which he had been obliged to throw away as
useless. He attributes failure to the delay in sowing the seed; the seed being
left in their original bags for upwards of a month, after which it was to be
buried in one large pit, 4" deep ... the land was not properly prepared for
sowing. There was only a little of the underwood cleared away, and the sod
left unturned. . . .

Having got somebody in the person of Wills who seemed capable of
carrying out the development of the new area which it so desired, the
Company was most unfortunate in losing his services through his accept-
ance of a better job elsewhere, and he just told it he was leaving at the end
of June 1858. The Board had, however, engaged previously in November
1857, a Mr. H. C. Gibson, who had had previous experience in agriculture
in the "Mofussil" and who could talk the language.

He was sent up to Nazira to take over temporarily the duties of
Accountant pending the arrival of a professional Accountant from home,
and if he qualified himself on the cultivation side of operations during this
period, he was to be appointed to Cachar. His training at Nazira was cut
short after about six months, and the Board having apparently no one
else willing to take on the job in Cachar, he was appointed Superintend-
ent, and reported his arrival at Mohanpore on 2nd August 1858.

Gibson started off in a wave of confident anticipation. He expected
to sow at least 300 acres that season, and when told he might expect to
have 100 maunds of seed, he expressed the hope that he might anticipate
receiving a larger quantity, so that he could have enough sound seed to
plant as much land as he could clear. He anticipated then no difficulty in
keeping down the jungle in areas so far planted.

In 1860, when the Superintendent James McIntosh retired, Gibson was
transferred back to Nazira to take his place as Superintendent in Assam.
The Cachar Gardens were then put in charge of John Smith, an Assistant
engaged at home by George Williamson. John Smith had been at Nazira
since June 1858. Eighteen months' experience in Assam seems inadequate
qualification for charge of 300 to 400 acres and with an immediate programme to bring this up to 900 acres.

However, the planting was accomplished eventually. The fact remains that by the end of 1860 450 acres had been put out, and it was anticipated that this would be increased to the full programme of 900 acres. The seed being supplied then from Nazira was Assam indigenous.

In 1860 the Cachar properties produced 1,798 lb. of tea. There was talk even of opening another factory, but whether this was at Serisopore or Mohanpore, or wherever the then existing factory was, is not stated.

The rapid development of the Company's property was much accelerated by the considerable importation from Calcutta of labour from other Districts to augment the local inhabitants.

In 1860 the properties were visited by Mr. A. T. T. Peterson, one of the Calcutta Board who commended John Smith for having constructed roads and paths through the tea to facilitate supervision. Peterson suggested that all available labour should be employed in effecting "... sanitary improvements, which he considers absolutely necessary to render the place fit for the habitation of men..." and he went further by suggesting that the Company, as it could not afford a medical man of its own, should make arrangements with other planters to appoint a doctor at some central place, so as medical service would be available as required.

It can well be imagined that with so many prospective planters entering the District and with those established already coming into Government Headquarters at Silchar and on business connected particularly with land matters, the local Officers had to dispense an overwhelming hospitality. Peterson suggested that all proprietors in the District should contribute towards the erection of a communal bungalow on a site he proposed at Doodputtlec. Nothing came then, however, of this embryo of what has developed since into the many medical associations in the District and into the now well-known Silchar Retreat Club.

Peterson had a property of his own in Cachar, and it was no doubt to inspect this that was the ostensible object of his visit to the District, and he told the Board that in his opinion he considered their property in Cachar was the most valuable part of the Company's estates. In commending John Smith for the excellence of his work on the Company's behalf, he expressed his pleasure that the Board had recently increased his pay, as he thought it a mistake to pay a good man too little, and that Mr. Smith had received offers of service elsewhere at higher pay. He then naively remarked that but for Mr. Smith being in the Company's employ, he would have taken him into his own service at an even higher salary than the increased rate he was then getting.

It is somewhat extraordinary that in the Company's printed Accounts so little is said about the Cachar property. In statements of "Land under
CACHAR
cultivation” in the Accounts of 20th September 1860, there is the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clearances of 1858/59 Acres</th>
<th>Clearances of 1859/60 Acres</th>
<th>Estimated Clearances 1860/61 Acres</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mohanpore</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serispore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunnee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Report for 1862 Cachar is not mentioned, though there are references in the Accounts to expenditure on Establishment, coolies, etc., “in Cachar.”

In the Calcutta Proceedings of 2nd August 1862, there is recorded:
“Mr. J. M. Grob’s application for particulars relative to our Cachar property, in view of purchasing the same...”

This was the beginning of negotiations which concluded in the sale of the property for £60,000.

The sale was effected in Calcutta for an equivalent sum in Rupees of Rs.6,60,000 as from the end of season 1862, that is from 31st October, plus the outlay incurred already on account of season 1863, with interest at 6 per cent.

There was some controversy as to the final consideration, the Company claiming an overall payment of Rs.6,85,000, the buyer offering Rs.6,50,000, which was settled finally for Rs.6,75,000. The Deed of Transfer for this sum was executed on 14th May 1863. A cheque for Rs.6,75,000 was credited in Calcutta and a remittance of Rs.6,00,000 was made to London, the Assam Company retaining the proceeds of the crop of 1862, which amounted to 49,503 lb.

This Mr. J. M. Grob, who was appointed subsequently in 1864 to the Calcutta Board of the Assam Company, was Agent for the Central Cachar Tea Company Limited, a company incorporated in Calcutta in 1863.

At the time of the sale, J. H. Donald had taken over charge as Superintendent from John Smith, and the former was appointed Manager of these properties for the new company.

Donald rejoined the Assam Company subsequently, and was later on Manager of its Singri Parbut Garden on the north bank.
CHAPTER XXXI

THE COMPANY'S HEADQUARTERS IN ASSAM;
NAZIRA

ANYONE might be curious to know how and why the Company came to choose Nazira as the site of its Headquarters.

How it came about, it is possible to show, but why it was not at Jaipur, Tingri or any other place in the older-established sites or barries in the Northern Division is probably unanswerable.

The selection of Nazira was the outcome of J. W. Masters' first act on his appointment as the Company's Superintendent. In October 1839, and before the Company had acquired any land or barries, he "... squatted on about 100 acres at Nazreeghat, where he had put on about 100 coolies to clear the jungle, to build houses and golahs. . . ."

The first account of Nazira as a Sudder Station is to be found in William Prinsep's Report on his visit to Assam, the first visit of any Director of the Calcutta Board to the Company's properties, which he made in the early months of 1841, and in his Report he describes Nazira

... a large location, well chosen upon the South Bank of the Dikho, upon a sudden turn of the River, which renders it almost an island, and is therefore easily guarded. It comprises 200 puras, or acres, including a strip of land extending inwards from the neck which forms the promontory. The whole of this part of the location is at present clear of jungle, but not of the stumps and roots; some of it has been kodallied, or dug, and is capable of rice cultivation, but not apparently fit for tea.

A small nursery, however, of about 5,000 seedlings look well, and I have ordered Mr. Masters to put down a few of the Chinese seedlings now on their way up, dividing the remainder between Stations at Ligri Pukri and Gabro.

There are about 5,000 coffee plants in this Garden, looking very well and healthy; they were Mocha seedlings from Calcutta. The seed sent up from the Parmasdeah Plantation, Jessore, must have been injured en route as it failed entirely when sown last year at Nazira.

This location has been chiefly devoted to farming purposes and to the erection of such buildings as are required for a centrical depot. It has no tea barrie attached to it, nor within five miles of it, but I think there is little doubt that patches of high ground may be found in its immediate neighbourhood upon which the tea plant will thrive as soon as we have seed and plants enough to spare for the purpose.

The plan attached to this Report, prepared by Mr. Guthrie, will show exactly how the land has been appropriated; and I must say that the progress
General Manager's Bungalow at Nazira.
The Office at Nazira.
HEADQUARTERS IN ASSAM

made under Mr. Masters’ active zeal has not only done the fullest credit to himself and his Assistants, but has excited the astonishment of the Government officers who have visited it. Everything is commodious and yet plain, but the houses and offices are mere wigwams, of split bamboo with thatched roofs, where the danger from fire is very great, and the floors being scarcely raised above the surface must be damp and unhealthy in the rainy season.

Viewing the daily-increasing importance of the books, papers and accounts at this Sudder Station, I urged Mr. Masters to construct a brick room with a pucka roof in which they may daily be deposited, and to which may be attached wings for office purposes with pucka walls and tiled roofs. The bungalows and other buildings may be improved at leisure, with the exception of the Hospital, which is a very bad one, and will be renewed at once under the eye of Dr. Scott.

Prinsep’s reference to the site being devoted chiefly to farming purposes is well illustrated in a map of 1841, showing the different areas laid out for the cultivation of wheat, barley, rice, flax, etc. This is no doubt the plan mentioned by Prinsep as having been prepared by Mr. Guthrie: the original is preserved at the offices of the Company, together with the map of 1847 mentioned below.

There is the illustration “Sketch of Nazira Station,” which was made from the Gurgaon side of the river and shows the buildings of split bamboo with thatched roofs which formed the first Headquarters. It illustrates the bend in the river which made the site almost an island, and being sketched in February, when the Dikho River was at its lowest, it would give those not acquainted with the behaviour of rivers in Assam an idea of their rise during the rains, when they sometimes overflowed their banks.

The use of Nazira for farming purposes must have lapsed two or three years later, as can be seen in the next plan of the Station, reconstructed from a dilapidated original map of 1847 found in the Sibsagar Survey Office. This is the map reciting the boundaries of the land which formed the original grant from Government to the Company for a period of 20 years from 1839 free of rent. It shows an area of 26 acres planted with tea. It is difficult to account for such a large area of the Headquarters site being devoted to tea. In the old statements of areas there is recorded an area of about 5 acres at Nazira which was used for tea experimental purposes, and this is mentioned later in Staunton’s Report of 1866.

It would seem that at Nazira there was started the first Kyah’s shop; a member of the Establishment taken over from Government was one, Muneeram, designated Dewan or Land Agent. William Prinsep, on his visit in 1841, says:

I find the Native Department of the office in the most beneficial state under the excellent direction of Muneeram, whose intelligence and activity is of the greatest value to our Establishment. There is not a question regarding
expenditure or return which he is not ready to answer from Book in the most satisfactory manner. The marts which he is establishing at and around our location will, he declares, become of considerable importance. The increased intercourse with the people of the Company which it naturally leads to will give them greater confidence in us, and will raise still higher the good name we have already established.

It was the custom to send up from Calcutta various stores and commodities for resale to the labour force. William Prinsep went on to say that Muneeram assured him that on an annual investment of Rs.50,000 he would safely calculate 20 per cent. as the Company’s profit in barter.

In the early days, Nazira was not merely the Company’s Headquarters and seat of Administration. It was the centre of tea manufacture for the whole Company. It is not possible to be precise as to whether the green leaf from gardens as far as Cherido in one direction and Hatti Putti and Deopany in the other were sent into Nazira for manufacture, or whether from these gardens it was sent in as partly manufactured tea. It is certain, however, that at Nazira it was given another firing (or two), sorted, classified and packed. From the Northern and Eastern Divisions the teas must have been sent in partly manufactured, for green leaf from these gardens could not possibly travel that distance. No matter from what garden it came, it lost its identity at Nazira, and after being sorted into grades it was packed and shipped under the name of the grade only and as the Assam Company’s tea.

There was controversy for many years as to whether this concentration at Nazira was the best plan, or if it would not be better if each garden manufactured its own tea. It was many years before the latter plan came into operation.

Nazira has been rather dominated by the behaviour of the Dikhu River. In the cold-weather months it approaches a sluggish stream, but on which native craft can nearly always be navigated. In 1868 it was recorded that the river nearly dried up, and it was necessary to transport a considerable portion of the crop by road to Dikhu Mukh on the Brahmaputra, a laborious and costly alternative. In the rains, the Dikhu is a fast-flowing, dangerous river, up which small steamers can be navigated up to Santok and Bamon Ghats, some 8 miles above Nazira and near where the first rapids are encountered as the river leaves the hills.

It is a far cry from the collection of huts depicted in the sketch of 1841 to the many commodious bungalows of the European staff, the offices, workshops, godowns and shops, hospitals, schools and sepoys lines, etc., that now constitute Nazira, to say nothing of its friendly Club and fine polo ground; membership of the former is open to all the neighbouring planters.

To get an idea of the prodigious development of the Company’s Headquarters in Assam one has only to compare the old illustration
with the plan of the Station prepared in September 1952, now preserved in the London Offices.

One of the most interesting features to note is the disappearance of the bend in the river. It is believed that this took place when in a very high flood the river cut across the bend and made a new channel for itself. The origin of the flood may probably have been an earthquake, for there was a severe one which destroyed the Superintendent’s bungalow in 1868. One arm of this old bend is to be seen clearly still between the hospital and old office, and at its head lie the remains, which are marked on the plan, of two iron boats. Perhaps these are two out of the five boats mentioned in Staunton’s Report of 1866 which were then considered beyond repair.

The topography of Nazira has changed much in the years, but there are some things which have not; and on the Dikhu River the design of the native dugouts, which are paddled slowly by with their fishing nets stretched across bamboos in the bows, are the same in every detail as they were over a century ago, when the Settlement was first started, and even to-day one may see occasionally elephants being washed by the river bank as depicted in the sketch of Nazira Station in 1841.

Although there had always been the American Baptist and other Missionaries in Assam, the Board desired to provide for the spiritual needs of the growing community at Nazira, and in 1864 they offered to the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" an annual subscription of £100 a year to establish and maintain a missionary clergyman of the Church of England at Nazira.

This offer was not accepted by the Society.

In 1869 there is the following minute of 26th July:

... A letter from Colonel Foquewell was read, and it was ordered that the £100 given to the Society for the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts on the 2nd February 1865 and subsequently returned to the Company, be given to Colonel Foquewell upon the understanding that it be applied to the establishment and maintenance of Missionary Clergymen of the Church of England at Nazira, for the religious instruction of the Company’s Christian servants.

There is no explanation as to whom this Colonel Foquewell was.

But again nothing seems to have happened, and in 1877 this was followed up by the Board offering to contribute Rs.100 monthly towards the stipend of a clergyman at Nazira, such clergyman to be approved by the Chief Superintendent. The Board expressed the opinion that it was up to the European Officers of the Company and other Europeans in the neighbourhood to supplement this grant of the Company by their contributing such further sum as may be necessary to maintain such clergyman.

There is no mention of who was to negotiate for the Company for this
clergyman, or to what authority the matter was referred, and one is left in doubt as to whether anything was done at that time.

A proposal to build a church at Nazira was made by the Bishop of Calcutta in 1906, and the Board agreed that one should be put up on the Company’s land, on such terms as the General Manager in consultation with the Senior Managers should decide, but on no account was the Company’s liability for caretaking and repairs to exceed Rs.200 a year.

A clause was, however, to be included in this arrangement that, unless it was absolutely impracticable, the use of the church should be authorised at the General Managers’ discretion for use by clergyman of any denomination.

In the matter of education, there is a Minute dated March 1907 in which a donation to the Nazira High School was sanctioned. This donation was towards the balance required to complete a fund, and the Company’s contribution was not to exceed Rs.400. There are no details of what the fund was for.

An account of Nazira would be incomplete without reference to the Nazira Cemetery. It is not the oldest consecrated ground in the province, but, as a record, a list of those who have been buried there is given in Appendix 2.

It is in Nazira Cemetery that there is buried William Robinson, who came out to Assam in 1836 as a missionary to Gauhati and is described on his tombstone as the “Historian of Assam,” whose book, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, published in 1841, was for years the authoritative history of the province.

In the preliminary description to this work, William Robinson describes himself as of “Gowhatti Government Seminary,” and the book is dedicated to Major Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor-General North-East Frontier, who was responsible for bringing Robinson to Assam.

He must have been one of the first to be buried in Nazira Cemetery, but at that time it may not have been consecrated ground, for there is reference to his having been buried in “Mr. Foster’s Compound.”

At the time of compiling the original MS. of this History, there followed at this point a detailed account of all the gardens and their subdivisions in the list appended here:

- Gabroo Purbut
- Cherideo
- Ligri Pookrie
- Hathi Pooti
- Kachari Pookrie
- Deopani
- Gelakey and Atkhel
  (Mohokotie, Doomur Dulling, Khoomtaie)
- Mazengah
- Tawkok
- Mackeypore
- Suntok
- Bamon Pookrie
- Tingalibam
- Lakmijan

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Sketch of Nazira Station.
HEADQUARTERS IN ASSAM

It was, however, found that its inclusion would increase the bulk of the book by something like another 100 pp., and accordingly the Board of Directors decided that, as much of the detail was covered in earlier chapters, it would be advisable to retain this portion of the MS at the Company’s Offices meantime, making it available there on request to present or past Managers, Assistants and other members of the Covenanted Staff as well as to any Stockholder who may wish to peruse the records further.

Note.—Some time about 1866 the want of a proper survey of the Company’s gardens was much felt, and it was no doubt as the outcome of the employment of Mr. Bell, who was a qualified Surveyor, that there was produced a Map of the Company’s gardens, dated 1869, a reproduction of which can be seen at the London Offices.

This map does not include Towkok or Gabroo Purbut, and the latters’ out-garden, Moogri Mookh, which were situated some 23 and 35 miles from Headquarters, nor does it show the three gardens of the Rokung Division, for at the time of the survey these gardens were on lease to another party.

Bamon Pookrie, Tingalibam and Lakhmijan did not exist then.

The map does illustrate, however, the scattered nature of the Company’s properties and the arduous task it must have been for one Superintendent to supervise with the means of transport available then.
CHAPTER XXXII

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

When Assam first came under British rule there were only three means of transport—by boat, elephant or palkie. When possible, the river was used in preference to the others.

Some accounts of the journey to Assam of the deputation of scientists to prove that the wild tea plant was really the tea of commerce and to examine the land geologically say that the time taken was four and a half months from Calcutta to Sadiya, leaving it to be inferred that this journey was all the way by boat.

The recommendations made by Captain Jenkins to the Tea Committee in January 1835 were that the deputation should proceed to Cachar and from there ascend the Hills to Cherrapunjee, thence to Gauhati, where they would pick up boats to continue their journey to Sadiya. From reports made by the deputation, this is the route they followed, but the scientists were examining the country on the way and collecting botanical and geological specimens. The reason for the selection of this route was Jenkins’ belief that elevation was required for tea and his suggestion that the Khasia and Jaintia hills was the most likely place.

The method of proceeding by boat was for the craft to be tracked or towed by coolies from the bank when the wind was unfavourable for the use of sail, those in the boat assisting with poling, but the actual route from Calcutta is not very well defined. It is stated that in 1839 a good steamer could pass in perfect freedom at all times of the year whether via the Sunderbunds or the minor rivers descending from the Ganges. In the rains, the steamer Lord William Bentinck experienced no difficulty in ascending by the Jenai to Jamalpore and thence by the Brahmaputra to Bishnath, in February and March, however, the steamer Jumna had the greatest difficulty, first in creeping through the shallow channels to Jamalpore and then in dragging over the sands as far abreast as Dewangunge.

On such information it would be safe to assume that if steamers could make this journey at times, the country boat from Calcutta would proceed north up the Hughli and thence by the Bagahariti or some such stream to Pabna on the Ganges, and from there going south-east to what we know now as Goalundo, but which did not exist then, where the route turned north on the Jamuna to Sirajgunge, Jamalpore, Chilmari to (Dhubri is not mentioned) Goalpara and thence Gauhati.

It is difficult to say precisely how long it took to reach Assam from
TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Calcutta except within the wide margin of two and a half to three and a half months.

The acquisition of a sufficient number of boats was a difficulty. There is reference to small native boats of 300 maunds capacity costing Rs.250 each. The Company were making its own boats 40 feet long, 8 feet broad and 4 feet deep. When loaded with stores and coolies, these must have been a heavy drag, which it took five men to track against the current of the Brahmaputra. There is an account of one Assistant with a number of boats containing coolies, carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, stores, etc., and Rs.20,000 in silver, in reporting his departure from Gauhati, advising that he hoped to reach Nazira in twenty to thirty days. That was in January, when water was low and the current least, a distance of about 200 miles, and proceeding only during daylight.

It was very slow travelling within the province, whether by boat or elephant. Dr. Wallich, writing to the Tea Committee in March 1836 from the mouth of the Dessoi River, advised that he expected it would take him three days to reach Gabroo Parbut, via Jorhat, a distance of 26 to 30 miles. On the return journey he estimated to reach Bishnath from the Dessoi River in two days, a distance of about 64 miles, but going down with the current on the Brahmaputra.

The Company built in Calcutta and at country stations like Dacca a number of country boats of its own of various sizes. At other times it hired, and for a boat of 300 maunds it would have to pay Rs.37 a month for hire, and take on the crew for a year's service at a time. The number of crew varied with the size of the boat, but besides the Manji, or Serang, who was responsible for navigation and the general running of the boat, there was always a Churrundar as a member of the crew. This functionary would appear to have been one literate in his own language, able to keep an account of expenses on the journey, and was responsible for the safe delivery of the cargo. When the cargo consisted of newly recruited labour, he must have had quite an anxious time in trying to keep his cargo intact with all the opportunities the labour had of absconding at the many stopping places, besides having to account for casualties from sickness, especially cholera. There is one account of 84 newly recruited coolies being packed into small boats, sent on their journey from Dacca to Dibru Mukh, a journey that was expected to take a month.

Heavy country boats dragged up the river from Nowgong to Saikowa, a distance of about 216 miles as the crow flies, which took six weeks.

District officials, in moving from one station to another by river, used to have two canoes lashed together to make a raft for their heavy luggage. For the Officer's own convenience, and to travel quicker, he went on a khel-nao or pleasure boat, 50 ft. long, 3½ ft. wide, with a grass roof over a portion of it to form a sleeping-berth. During the day, which was the only
time they could travel, the roof was too low to permit of other than a reclining or sitting position. Travelling was not without its excitement at times, especially when boats broke adrift at night from their precarious moorings in the soft sand of the river banks.

The circuitous routes and long time taken for quite short journeys are not understood at first sight, but it has to be remembered that, except by elephant on the main bund roads, it was impossible to travel in the rains except by boat. From Tezpur to Nowgong in a straight line across the Brahmaputra is a matter of 20 to 25 miles, but it took four days to accomplish this journey in the rains. It meant going up the Brahmaputra to above Silghat to pick up the Kalang River, which passes through Nowgong, in this way making the distance some 60 miles, which against the current all the way could easily take the four days.

At other times in his travels the official’s progress would be a veritable cavalcade. On a journey from Nowgong to Golaghat through the jungle a distance of 103 miles, which was covered in ten days after having to cut their way through jungle in places, it is related that the Officer took the lead on a large elephant with a good battery of guns, to guard against the many wild animals that would be met with, followed by a smaller elephant carrying all the baggage, then a palkee containing his wife and child, with his pony led by the Syce bringing up the rear. Interspersed along the line of animals would be the retinue of servants, including the reliefs for the four or more palkee-bearers. Hearing a cry of alarm, he saw a huge Mukna elephant (male without tusks) rush out of the jungle and make for the small baggage elephant. Then, it is related, “the Mukna seeing the pony, turned and fled into the jungle in the greatest consternation. Elephants are extremely afraid of horses!”

The first mention of the Company having its own elephants is in a letter from Masters in January 1840, when he reports the arrival of two elephants at Nazira sent up by the Agent at Gauhati.

C. A. Bruce had been able to keep for a time the elephants which he had used formerly as a Government servant, but he complained bitterly, shortly after he joined the Company, that Government had retained all their elephants so that “... he is obliged to march from station to station at great risk.”

The price of an elephant, when anybody could be induced to sell one, was about Rs.300. Without elephants it was impossible to get about the country and supervise the scattered areas being cultivated.

Writing in February 1841, Masters says that when he first joined he could not get elephants locally, and though it was impossible to catch any the previous season, he had then succeeded in securing some.

The Rajah’s old Koonk at Jorhat has been repaired, a new Koonk built at Dekho Mookh and a temporary one at a short distance from Gabroo.
TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Purbut. A herd of elephants having gone off from Jorhaut in that direction and they were followed and 13 of them secured; one of which, being only a few days old died before it reached Nazira. The remaining 12 are still alive, and are getting a little tame, allowing their trunks to be handled and suffering the mahouts to get on their backs. Rs.1,025 having been expended on these.

The method of using elephants for the carriage of tea was, as reported by the Superintendent in 1847, to build howdahs strapped to the elephants back which would take six chests. This was thought to be a great saving in labour, for it had taken previously two coolies to bring in one chest from the outgardens to Nazira. This was bringing in unsorted tea to be sorted, refired and packed at Nazira. The Board sought to improve on this by getting their secretary, Henry Mornay, to design a 4-wheeled elephant tea-wagon at a cost of Rs.1,200 capable of holding 54 full chests. There is only a vague description of this wagon: the breadth of the axles between the flanges was 6 ft.; the diameter of the four wheels 5 ft. 6 in., and the width of the iron tyres 4 in. Such a cumbersome cart with its heavy load could not be used in the rains. Under the best conditions progress would be slow, but it was expected that from Mazengah to Nazira the cart would make two trips a day.

Elephants were a necessity for the working of the gardens, but they were a temptation to the Assistants, who caught them wild or bought them from natives in Assam, broke them in and then sold them.

It cost virtually nothing to keep an elephant, so by selling one for Rs.250 to Rs.300, the Assistant would be able to augment substantially his meagre salary by Rs.50 to Rs.100 a month.

Under Stephen Mornay’s regime he put a stop to this by taking away all the Assistants’ elephants, and he arranged with a native, apparently a Kheddar owner, to pay him “... Rs.15 per cubit in height for every elephant caught.”

RIVER STEAMERS AND COUNTRY BOATS

The first inland river steamer commenced service on the Ganges in 1834 between Calcutta and stations up to Allahabad. This first steamer was named the Lord William Bentinck in recognition of his having, through an official Minute to the Council, stressed the urgency of quicker transport than the more cumbersome and irksome travel by road. By 1836 the Government fleet had been increased to four steamers.

These Government steamers, though mostly for transport of military and official persons with their baggage and for Government stores to stations on the Ganges; were used for transport of commerce. Even in 1839, by which time such boats were more often available for transport to Assam, they did not proceed beyond Gauhati. The earliest mention of
the use of steamer transport by the Company is in the Calcutta Proceedings of 29th June 1839, when the Secretary reported that by the steamer Jellinghee, starting that day for Assam, there had been sent 33 packages of stores to be landed at Jamalpore. From there the Company had to make its own arrangements for the onward despatch of its consignments. It was here that use was made of the business facilities of one of the Directors, instructions being sent to Prosonno Coomar Tagore’s representative at Jamalpore to provide boats and other means for forwarding the goods on to Nazira.

Amongst this cargo of stores were agricultural implements, carpenters’ tools, medicines, etc., and for negotiations with local chiefs there were included beads, cutlery and looking-glasses as presents, together with six boxes of plants from the botanical gardens. There had been engaged the services of a lad named Peter Alexander, who went up in charge of the packages, having been given an advance of Rs.30 “for clothing and all expenses for the journey as a deck passenger.”

In 1841 Lord Auckland, the Governor-General, placed the Government Steamer Junna at the disposal of the Chairman, William Prinsep, for his visit to the Company’s properties. Prinsep was accompanied by the Calcutta Secretary, F. R. Hampton, as no other Director could spare the time for such a journey. The only accommodation for the Chairman on this voyage was the chief mate’s cabin, and the fare was to be Rs.200 for 28 days. The Secretary was probably a “deck” passenger, meaning perhaps a camp-bed on deck at night.

Dr. W. J. Scott, who was proceeding to take up his appointment as the Company’s first Medical Officer, was also a passenger on this trip. They left Calcutta sometime in February, the Chairman and Secretary returning on 25th April. The cost to the Company for these passages, including “table allowance,” was Rs.918.

To understand how these early river steamers differed from the modern faster craft which ply on the Brahmaputra to-day, one has to thank the courtesy of the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited in allowing the reproduction of the illustration taken from their original share certificate and to the following description taken from Alfred Brame’s book on that Company.

We may examine a little in detail what these early vessels were like and the conditions under which the pioneers of inland navigation fulfilled their duties. The original share certificate of the India General Co. has as its heading a very fair representation of one of the old Honorable Company’s inland steamers and its “accommodation boat” passing the fort at Allahabad. The steamer carried cargo only and provided quarters for the ship’s officers, while the accommodation boat conveyed passengers, who occupied cabins of various classes, but messed at the Captain’s table on the steamer, the
Country Boats being loaded with Tea Chests.

Two Country Boats being poled downstream.

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communication between the two vessels being provided by a gangway, which is clearly shown in the drawing. Both steamers and boats carried masts and sails to assist progress when the wind was favourable.

The accommodation boats were fitted with four first, four second and six third class cabins. A first class cabin measured 12 feet by 8 feet and accommodated two passengers who were charged Rs.300 each for the passage from Calcutta to Allahabad. In addition to this the messing charge of Rs.4 per day was paid to the Captain under the name of Table Money, and this charge formed an important source of income to the Captain, far exceeding his pay. The passage was timed to take 22 to 28 days according to the season, and thus a 1st-Class passenger could not hope to be landed at Allahabad under a cost of Rs.400, and even this did not include wines.

The Board in London, backed by urgent requests from the Committee in India, had no hesitation in appointing a Sub-Committee comprising Peter Auber, Alexander Roger and Captain Manning, who co-opted subsequently Captain A. Henderson, "... to advise upon the ordering of a steam vessel suitable for navigating the Brahmaputra."

Although a "flat" was to be built in Calcutta to be towed by the steamer, this proposed steamer was to be designed to have sufficient capacity in itself for a full complement of stores and cargo, specially to avoid the necessity of being "followed" (the word used in the first report of the Calcutta Board) by a flat. The designers could only have had in mind the type of Government steamer in use then, with their "accommodation boats." the idea being that without the accommodation boat the steamer would be faster and less expensive in coal.

The Company's steamer Assam was the first commercially owned steamer in point of date, 1842, to attempt the navigation of the Brahmaputra. The India General Steam Navigation Company Limited was not formed until 1844, and its steamers did not ply on the Brahmaputra until 1860. The Assam had a chequered career, not only in the service of the Company but subsequently when it was acquired by the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited in 1847. Its story has been thought worthy, therefore, of the section to itself which follows.

On the sale of its steamer, the Company had to fall back on the country boat or other means of transport. Its own country boats, whether they were designated bowlahs, chilmarees, budgerows or pauchways, were cheap enough to build and operate, but they could only bring down about 150 chests of the Company's produce at a time.

The Company possessed some half-dozen of these boats, but they were in bad condition. Perhaps because it thought they would not be wanted once the Company's own steamer and flat were in commission, they had been neglected, and when the Company did have to overhaul
its fleet, it received such reports as: “... found the bottom of the large red boat eaten by salt worm,” and “... having the copper torn off they are badly contrived and badly built.”

However, these were all repaired and kept in use. It was the outcome of this inspection of their country-made wooden boats that decided the Directors to purchase an iron boat, to cost about Rs.2,500, with sails, rigging, etc.

First of such boats was the Experiment, and under that name it did many years’ service. During the following ten years the Company gradually acquired a fleet of these boats, the first of which was approximately 50 ft. long, 9 ft. 8 in. in breadth, and 4 ft. 9½ in. in depth, fitted with masts and sails, and square-rigged. Except for the first two, called the Experiment and Red Boat No. 6 they were all named after rivers in Assam. They were the Dibroo, Dehing, Dikhoo, Brahmaputra, Tingri, Dhunseri, Desoi, Lohit and Borilly.

They were capable of carrying about 300 to 650 chests each. Though the Government’s steamers at first only plied as far as Gauhati, the Company’s iron boats brought the tea down from Nazira, where it was unloaded on to the steamer or into the Company’s Agents’ godowns, and they returned to Nazira with any stores or coolies the steamer had brought up. Government steamers only ran once a month or once in six weeks, but even so they were very irregular. If the boats missed the steamer, they went all the way down to Calcutta. In 1856 the Government steamers were going up as far as Dibrugarh. In that year the steamer Jumna ran on a sandbank 20 miles below Dibrugarh.

When the Company started and for more than the first twenty years of its existence, there were none of the facilities at various stations on the river route to Assam which are provided so efficiently to-day by the river steamer companies. The Assam Company had therefore to make its own arrangements.

Bearing in mind the length of the river route from Calcutta to Nazira, and the number of stations necessary at which the Company’s boats had to call on their voyage, it will be understood what a considerable item of expenditure this added to the cost of operations.

Whilst it called for a measure of trust between the up-country Agent of the Company as to the quantity and cost of provisions, stores and services given to their boats, it does make more obvious the need of the “Churrunder” mentioned previously in each boat’s crew to render to the Company an account of these services.

To begin with, the Company had big ideas about establishing stations, but in this it rather relied on recommendations made by the Government officials. This was the case when it formed Dibru Mukh in 1839 at a site near where Dibrugarh is now.
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In the Calcutta Directors' Report of the 7th March 1840:

... at the mouth of the Dibooroo River where Captain Vetch has lately formed a new station, we have placed an assistant with some coolies to form a Depot that will hereafter be in a position to reap all the advantages that may exist on the Northern border of the Muttuck country, having a fine river for purposes of traffic in small boats.

Within little more than a year after this colourful prediction, it was a very different story:

The station commenced at the mouth of the Dibooroo River has not been followed up; indeed its present necessity is not felt. This river not being in connection with any of our present barries, the Establishment which was once there has been removed to the tea barries on the Tingri.

In 1843 Bruce recommended the abandonment of even the piece of land which the Company once occupied. By this time the name had developed into Dibrugarh, and the Company had no further connection with it.

A Station was formed at Dehing Mukh also in 1839.

The Station at the mouth of the Booree Dehing must necessarily be kept up though on a small scale as long as it will be required to send labourers and stores by this route to Jaipur and Tingri Mukh.

There are three storehouses and some huts. The Assistant's bungalow was lately totally destroyed by fire while he was absent on duty; and as he was a severe sufferer in the loss of all his kit, his papers, his guns—everything but the clothes he had on, the Directors have thought fit to allow him compensation of Rs.500 for his refit, his conduct having always been proved worthy since joining the Station.

After the above account, nothing further is mentioned about Dehing Mukh. When the Company's steamer failed to operate, there was no need for this station. A place for the unloading of grain and stores had been opened in May 1840 at Tingri Mukh, on a site at the junction of the Tingri and Dehing Rivers, which became of considerable importance. It contained two large godowns, two Assistants' bungalows, an office and housing for numerous staff.

When the Northern Division was split up, it was at this site that C. A. Bruce made his Headquarters when he moved from Jaipur.

The opening of Dikho Mukh is mentioned in a Report from J. W. Masters dated 21st February 1841, in which he said:

The principal object in selecting this place was to secure a wharf for landing goods from large boats which cannot pass up the River, and the land being subject to inundation during the highest floods, it was necessary
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

to throw up a Bank to protect the Station; this was effected along the Southern bank of the Dikho, and along the Brahmaputra enclosing 60 acres of land. . . .

An Assistant's bungalow was built, together with six large godowns, and houses for labour.

The above were the Company's four sites above Gauhati, which it maintained at its own cost. It is curious that so much is made in the Board's first Reports, of the founding of these stations and that so little is said about them afterwards, or information given, except in the case of Dibru Mukh, as to when they were abandoned. The buildings were of course all kutch bamboo structures, and they cost very little, but there was, no doubt, some need for a distributing centre when it is realised that at that time there was not a vast local rice cultivation in the district and the Company had to import hundreds of maunds of rice a month from places like Pabna and Rungpur.

As tea became subsequently the theme of their Reports, their transit stations faded out of any further mention.

Gauhati was, of course, the most important river station on the route. Here the Company had for the first five or six years the services of Dr. K. M. Scott as its Agent. He was the Government Civil Surgeon. He was paid only a very nominal fee to begin with, something like Rs. 150 a year, but the range of his services was extensive. He not only attended to the provisioning of the boats going up with stores and labourers, and finding fresh crews when these intractable people refused to go beyond Gauhati, but he arranged the finance, small coin from the local treasuries, discounted drafts, and otherwise helped to keep the Superintendent furnished with means to pay his labour.

In regard to the necessity for financing the gardens with small coin, it has to be appreciated that before the advent of British Administration, the people of the province, the peasants or "ryots," had little or no use for money. The ryot rendered personal service to his landlord in exchange for the latter paying his rent to Government. Or the ryot may have paid in kind from the produce of his land. But if it was in paddy (rice in the husk), and the rent due was only a rupee or two, it was an irksome burden nevertheless to produce the quantity of paddy required when the price of that commodity was five maunds to the rupee. Even when the British took over the administration of the revenues of the province, it was necessary to allow the ryots to pay their revenue in kind, consisting of marketable and non-perishable articles such as, gold, ivory, muga silk, munjit and cotton cloth.

When the Assam Company started, there was none of the innumerable mahajans or kyahs' shops such as exist to-day, where small coin can be exchanged for Banknotes or cheques on Calcutta. There were, it is true,
Government Treasuries at Jorhat and Gauhati, and probably at Tezpur, but they seldom had coin to the extent required by the Company. It was necessary, therefore, for the Company to make its arrangements with its Bankers in Calcutta, the Union Bank, who were quite prepared to supply its wants in small coin, but the Company had to get it to Assam. The Accountant General of Bengal would only send bullion by Government steamer if one was available, and even then it did not proceed beyond Gauhati.

The Company had therefore to make its own arrangements for transport of this coin. There was no insurance cover for such a risk, and whether the bullion was sent from Calcutta by country boat, or from Gauhati after being landed there by Government steamer, it was necessary to take every precaution for its safe transit to Nazira. The coins were packed therefore in several small parcels, to each of which were attached bamboo floats in the hope that if anything untoward did happen to the boat these packages would float and be recovered.

As such places as Goalpara, Gauhati, Tezpur and Bishnath on the river route developed into trading centres, so at these places the Company was able gradually to exchange its bills for its requirements in cash. It is of passing interest to note the varying rate of discount for cashing the Company’s bills the higher up the valley that this was effected. The rate at Goalpara or Gauhati was 1 per cent.; at Nazira or Rungpur \( \frac{1}{2} \) per cent., and at Jaipur or Dibrugarh 2 per cent.

From being the Company’s nominal Agent at Gauhati, Dr. Scott developed his business at that station into something like a universal supplier, for in addition to his other services he negotiated supplies of rice from Nowgong and the Darrang Districts. He bought elephants and sent them by road to Nazira.

Dr. Scott gave up being the Company’s Agent at Gauhati in 1847, because, he said, the position of Civil Surgeon at Gauhati had been abolished. It seems improbable that a place the size of Gauhati would be left without a Civil Surgeon. It was more likely that Dr. Scott had given up his medical practice to retire on the proceeds of his business. He had some years previously offered to sell to the Company for Rs. 10,000, his estate at Gauhati, which even then comprised 600 acres of land, cultivated with small areas of sugar-cane, tea and coffee.

The Company did not acquire Dr. Scott’s property, though it did eventually possess some land at that station and had its own godowns. It did accept, however, Dr. Scott’s recommendation that Mr. James Herriott should succeed him as its Agent, on a salary of Rs. 100 a month. The Company’s own Agency was continued at Gauhati, with varying competency according to the person in charge, until 1862. Then, without any specific decision to close down, it was abandoned. Of this property there
is merely the record that the Company appointed temporarily Mr. T. E. Pinto, the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd.'s Agent, to act for the Company, which meant that the Assam Company was relieved from having to make its own arrangements on the river transit routes, this duty being taken over by the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd. and subsequently in joint operation with the R.S.N. Co. Ltd., as it is to-day.

The next station on the route from Upper Assam was Goalpara. Here, as at Gauhati, the Company in 1839 secured the services of Major A. Davidson, who was likewise Civil Surgeon at this station, to act for it at a fee of Rs.100 a year. The services he rendered were far less extensive than those required for a place like Gauhati.

Major Davidson also negotiated bills on the Company, to assist them in securing coin. Both at Goalpara and Gauhati the services of these Agents must have been invaluable, particularly when it came to pacifying reluctant newly recruited labourers, who by the time they reached these stations by country boat from Calcutta or elsewhere had become fed up. When Major Davidson gave up the Agency in 1842, a Dr. W. R. Boyes was taken on as Agent at Rs.100 a month. The next year it was decided to discontinue this Agency, the cost being then Rs.130 a month, and the little business that was transacted there could be done equally well at Gauhati.

For a short time there was a minor Agency at Dewan Gunge, in charge of a native “Naib.”

Serajgunge was opened in the 1850’s, about the time that operations were started in Cachar. The Agent was a European, Mr. Haley, who was resident at that place, and he was paid Rs.50 a month. His services seemed to have been used chiefly for procuring rice in that district and forwarding it to Assam.

These Agents had to be informed in advance of the number and description of boats and their cargoes after these had been despatched from Calcutta. There is mention in the early Minutes of small parcels being sent up to Assam by “Dawk Bungay,” but otherwise it is to be conjectured that the Government postal service, by means of dak runners, was the means of getting this information across country ahead of the arrival of the boats.

**THE ASSAM COMPANY’S STEAMER**

The story of the Company’s Steamer and flat, named respectively the Assam and Naga, is worthy of a separate section.

From the first decision of the Board to have their own accelerated service between Calcutta and Assam and the final disposal of the Company’s liability which the possession of its own steamer did become was a matter of eight or nine years.
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There were some quite legendary accusations of extravagance levelled against the Company for having embarked on a steamer service of its own at such an early stage in its development. When it became obvious that the steamer was useless for navigation of the Brahmaputra, the Board in Calcutta had to face searching enquiries from shareholders, and the Calcutta Press did not omit to criticise. The allegations that the Board purchased the steamer in light-hearted extravagance and that the staff in Assam indulged in "pleasure cruises" is not borne out by facts.

There is no doubt that, having tasted the convenience that the occasional use of a Government steamer meant to their transport problems, the Board were eager to inaugurate a service of their own. The facts which seemed to justify them in their decision to purchase their own steamer were that during the first eighteen months or so of their operations they had spent on water carriage alone the sum of nearly Rs.20,000.

They estimated that to run their own steamer and flat for a year would cost Rs.41,000. That was for six return voyages. Of this expenditure, the crew alone took Rs.11,760, for the steamer required a Commander on Rs.250 monthly; a mate at Rs.80; 2 engineers, Rs.350; and 6 stokers, Rs.300: the Commander and two engineers at least being Europeans. The round trip to Dibru Mukh was expected to take forty days, including stoppages, which meant twenty-eight days' steaming, as there was no intention to proceed at night.

During a twelvemonth it was estimated that they would earn Rs.60,000, including what they expected to get from carrying for Government, based on a calculation that there were then not less than forty persons employed in Government service who would require river transport for their stores and for themselves on transfer from one station to another. There was the carriage of specie to the various treasuries, and of Government civil and military stores generally.

The person on the London Sub-Committee who was responsible chiefly for the design of the steamer and its engines was Captain A. Henderson. The hull was built by Vernon & Company and the engines and boilers were supplied by Fawcett, Preston & Company.

The outcome of the Committee's planning was the arrival in Calcutta of the sailing ship Gemini on 8th April 1841, having on board the component parts of the "... large iron steamer with its two engines of 50 h.p. each...

The above, plus the fact that it was 140 ft. long and of 450 tons, is the only description of the vessel available. It was to be put together at a shipbuilders' yard at Howrah, under the superintendence of the engineer and boiler-maker sent out from home for the purpose.

The steamer was expected to be ready for service in November 1841, but it was not completed until about three months later.
There were no unloading facilities at Howrah, and it was for the Secretary of the Company, on the advice of Captain Henderson, to make all necessary arrangements for unloading with the aid of the ship's own tackle. In unloading one of the boilers, the ship's mainyard was sprung, for which the Company had to meet a bill of Rs.200 for repairs.

To get the components of the engines and boilers on board the Gemini, part of its deck had to be removed, and after the unloading, there being no suitable timber available to replace the decking, it was patched up for the ship's homeward voyage, and the London Board were left to meet the responsibility of replacement when the ship reached England.

The shipbuilders' yard at Howrah was owned by Carr, Tagore & Company, who were then the Secretaries of the Steam Tug Association.

The building of the Assam and the installation of its engines were solely in charge of Mr. W. Taylor, the engineer, on a salary of Rs.175 a month, and Mr. J. Parkes, the boiler-maker, on Rs.160 monthly, who were sent out from home for the purpose, but they were to expect any additional assistance they required from Mr. Heaton, who was Carr, Tagore & Company's Resident Engineer at Howrah. Incidentally, as an indication of the cost of living then, it was arranged that Taylor and Parkes should lodge with Mr. Heaton at a charge of Rs.40 a month each.

Progress on her building was slow, but by November 1841, the steamer was afloat, though with much work still to be done. In the meantime, Captain J. H. Hockley had been engaged as her Commander; coal and firewood had been ordered to be in store at various stations on the Brahmaputra, and tea was to be got ready to be brought down.

Then the great day of 7th January 1842 arrived, when H. Chapman, H. B. Henderson, Captain A. Henderson, H. Burkinyoung and Captain Scott, the Commander of the Government steamer Jumna, with the Secretary, proceeded on board the steamer Assam, for a trial trip which was reported to have realised expectations. It was considered advisable to keep a small store of English coal in Calcutta for the use of the steamer, and as there was available a cargo of about sixty tons that had been brought out in the Kestrel for the use of the Eastern Steam Navigation Company, this was purchased.

Against the original estimate of Rs.1,10,000, the Assam cost finally about Rs.1,30,000, exclusive of coal, stores and establishment—a sum of £13,000 at the then rate of exchange.

The Assam set out on its maiden voyage on 1st March 1842. Its safe arrival at Gauhati was reported on the 30th. It was reported, however, that whereas the vessel had performed satisfactorily in respect of her engines, general speed and accommodation, the greatest difficulty had been experienced with her steering. From all accounts, defective steering was a common difficulty even with the Government steamers, but in the
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The rudder was useless and the steamer became unmanageable. It must have been an unenviable and dangerous task trying to navigate the tortuous rivers of Assam in a vessel which would not answer her helm. However, she did manage to reach Calcutta, and alteration to her steering was made which was hoped would cure the difficulty. To a layman in such nautical matters there was a strange inconsistency in the performance of the Assam. While she was no good for navigating the Brahmaputra on her own, yet she appears to have been useful as a tug for taking sailing-ships up and down the river H Hughli between Calcutta and a point where their sails were effective.

After her first trip to Assam, the Steam Tug Association offered to employ her as a tug for a period of twelve months or more, paying the Assam Company Rs.1,000 a month.

This was considered by the Board, but no decision was made then. In 1842 the Board were prepared to consider selling their steamer. They called in a Mr. Seppings, the Government’s shipping surveyor, for a valuation. It is not clear whether this was Government or Carr Tagore & Company taking the vessel over as a tug. The Assam was valued at one lakh of rupees as she then lay, and it was pointed out that to convert her into an efficient tug would cost not less than a further Rs.15,000. No action was taken on this offer.

As if to show her paces as a tug, the Assam between 28th May and 10th June 1842 towed the barque Water Witch from her moorings at Calcutta down the river Hughli to Diamond Harbour. There she rode out a severe two-day gale and returned safely to Calcutta.

It may have been this performance of the steamer that decided the Board, as there was occasion to get cash sent to the gardens urgently by the quickest possible route, to despatch their own steamer on her second voyage in June 1842. The Assam was unable to proceed further than Kishnagar, her rudder proving to be again unserviceable. After considerable difficulty and risk she was brought back to Calcutta on 30th June. After this second conclusive demonstration of the vessel’s unsuitability for navigating the Brahmaputra, it was decided to put her in dock and to consult all the experts available as to what should be done.

It was, incidentally, during one of these periods when the Assam was out of commission that the flat Naga was man-handled up as far as Tingri Mukh, an arduous and difficult feat of manual labour. This was an accomplishment which did prove that the Naga by its design was quite inappropriate for the navigation of these inland waterways, and it was pronounced useless for further work of this kind.

The outcome of the deliberations of the experts, or “professional gentlemen” as they were described in the Minute, was to adopt the suggestion put forward by Captain A. G. Mackenzie of reversing the
vessel and making her present stem her stern. The reason given for this unusual operation of reversal was that the line of the bows was sufficiently fine to enable free action of the current of water on the rudder, which could not, it was found, be obtained under the bluff conformation of her stern. The only alternative would have been to add a false stem, which would have been expensive and have been attended with considerable danger, for the increased length would have weakened the vessel.

After referring to a Mr. Greaves, Civil Engineer, and obtaining his assurance, after an inspection of the engines, that they were constructed to work equally well backwards as forwards, it was decided in July 1842 to have the operation of reversal performed.

Captain A. G. Mackenzie was Superintendent of the Steam Tug Association, and was two years later the first Managing Director and Secretary of the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited when that Company was formed in 1844. Captain J. H. Hockley resigned his command of the Assam and Captain F. W. Smith was appointed in his place. He had been the Commander of the Tug Association's steamer Seetakoond.

At about this time W. Taylor, the ship's engineer, became rather troublesome. He was had up before the Board and on this first occasion he was forgiven his indiscretions. He had a relapse, however, and in February 1843 was dismissed for gross neglect of duty, drunkenness and insubordination.

The alterations to the Assam were completed in August 1842, and on a short trial run all parties on board her were of opinion that the desired improvement in her steering had been effected.

She was sent off to Assam under the command of Captain F. W. Smith. She got as far as Jamalpore only, when the Captain reported an accident to the starboard engine. It was thought at first that the accident would necessitate returning to Calcutta. Anyway, the Board gave instructions that she was to proceed upwards at any cost, and with only one engine if that was possible. A repair to the engine was effected subsequently and her arrival at Goalpara was reported on 7th September and at Tezpur on the 13th. It has to be presumed that the rest of the journey to Dikhu Mukh and the return journey were effected without further untoward incident, for she was back in Calcutta in November. It was at this time that the Board decided to try the Assam on the River Ganges between Calcutta and Allahabad, on the first of which journeys she was despatched on 9th December 1842. On this route the Assam was in competition with Government steamers, and much obstruction, which impeded her progress, was experienced at the various stations on this river.

This was not a profitable trip, and in February 1843, as there were not sufficient freight or passengers offering for another voyage, it was
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decided to lay her up. In the meantime, the Board started their negotia-
tions to sell her. They first offered her to the Government of Bombay for
Rs.1,00,000, but the offer was declined, as also was an offer made to the
Government of Bengal.

They did receive offers from the Steam Tug Association to hire the
Assam for Rs.100 a day as and when they required it. Another party
offered to hire her for five months for Rs.5,000, both of which they
refused. They did accept, however, an offer from Dwarkanath Tagore, a
partner in Carr, Tagore & Company, to hire the Assam with the flat
Naga in tow for a trip to Allahabad, he to bear all expenses but to share
equally with the Company whatever amount might be realised for freight
on that journey, and as Captain Smith had been discharged when the
vessel was laid up, Dwarkanath Tagore said he would find a suitable
Commander, which he did, offering the job to Captain J. H. Hockley.
This was a most unfortunate transaction. On the way through the
Sunderbunds, Captain Hockley cast off the flat Naga at Khulna and pro-
ceeded in the Assam alone. The Naga contained most of the freight, worth
about Rs.6,000, on which Dwarkanath Tagore expected to pay his
expenses and the Company hoped to make its profit. The Board were
furious, and at once threatened Tagore with breach of contract, Captain
Hockley being for that voyage in his employ and not a servant of the
Company.

But the Assam never reached Allahabad. It started its return voyage
from Baghalpore and reached Calcutta on 15th September 1843.

Arriving back in Calcutta, Tagore returned the compliment by
threatening the Company with the utmost rigour of the law for recalling
the steamer from Baghalpore. There was then held a Court of Enquiry,
comprising the Board of Directors, Captain J. H. Hockley, the chief mate
and the engineer of the Assam, Captain F. W. Smith, late Commander of
the Assam, together with four other Commanders of Government
steamers who had made themselves acquainted with the Assam. They all
gave written evidence duly recorded in detail in the Company’s Minute
Books.

The verdict came to was that the failure of the Assam to reach Allah-
abad with the flat Naga in tow was solely due to the inefficient fitting of
the towing apparatus, for which Captain J. H. Hockley was responsible.

It was decided to fit the Assam with “. . . towing masts and connecting
boom similar to the Government boats and to lengthen the rudder of the
steamer from 7 to 10 feet. . . .” all of which was done.

Captain F. W. Smith was re-engaged as her Commander; Carr,
Tagore & Company agreed to supply coal at the various stations en route
to Allahabad, and on 29th September 1843 the Assam and flat Naga
sailed for Allahabad.
For the next nine months the *Assam* was fairly constantly employed on the Allahabad run, occasionally being used as a tug on the Hughli, but this employment was more to keep her running, for it is doubtful if on the whole these voyages were profitable. That there were navigational difficulties even on the Allahabad run is emphasized from a report of 23rd August 1844, when the Commander, then Captain D. Mackellar, advised his safe arrival at Raj Mahal, "... after being detained 22½ hours in a paddy field, the River having risen so high that they got quite out of its channel."

In the matter of coal for the steamer, it is remarkable that they bought coal imported from England at Rs.11 per ton, which was found cheaper than country coal, and on which the steamer worked better and cheaper.

On 28th August 1844 came the first offer from the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited to buy the *Assam* and *Naga* for the sum of Rs.90,000, provided that on inspection they were found in good working order. The Board countered by asking for Rs.1,00,000 or alternatively would the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd. wait for a reply to be obtained from the London Board to their offer of Rs.90,000? The reply from the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd. was to the effect that negotiations must be considered at an end, as they were not prepared to give the price asked nor to await the result of the reference to the home Board.

At the same Board Meeting on 7th September 1844, at which it was reported that the sale of the *Assam* had been turned down, one of the Directors suggested that the home Board should be asked about the propriety of sending out another steamer. On being put to the Meeting, this recommendation for a new steamer was dissented to by three of the Directors, by Mr. G. F. Remfry, on the grounds that the Company were departing from the original purpose of their enterprise, which was to grow tea, and that the Directors would be wrong to invest capital in another steamer when the one they did possess had failed to give them that improved transport to their gardens which was the object of its purchase. The other two dissentents were John and William Storm. William Storm was Chairman and John Storm was a Director of the Assam Company at that time, and the latter was Chairman of the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited also, which had been formed that year. John Storm was elected Chairman of the Assam Company in January 1846 on the resignation of William Storm.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note the tenor of their vote of dissent. They agreed with Remfry that the first essential of the Assam Company was the production of tea; they pointed out that if the Assam Company ordered another steamer they would, by the time it was delivered, have to meet competition from the I.G.N.S. Co. Ltd. when that company had in service their fleet of six new steamers. These two,
Steamer *Tegra* and Flats passing through the opening of the Howrah Bridge, 1899.
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William and John Storm, knew the financial embarrassment facing the Assam Company, and so they suggested that the offer from the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited of Rs.90,000 for the Assam should be accepted.

Nothing came of the proposals for a new steamer, and having refused the offer from the I.G.N.S. Co. Ltd., the Assam and the Naga this time with better towing apparatus, continued to ply on the Ganges for another two years. It is doubtful if the freight and passengers it obtained in competition with the Government steamers and others ever paid for the vessel’s keep. At the end of 1846, when the Assam Company’s finances were at a very low ebb, the London Board stressed again the need to effect a sale of the steamer, as the proceeds of such a sale was the only source left to them to obtain money to carry on. They were in such straits that they told the Calcutta Board that 1,000 more or less should not be allowed to stand in the way of her sale in that emergency.

Whilst the Assam was on one of these trips to Allahabad in December 1846 (with incidentally one of the largest cargoes recorded, freight and passengers totalling Rs.10,800), there was received from the I.G.N.S. Co. Ltd. their offer of Rs.70,000 for both the Assam and the Naga, the purchase price to be settled by Promissory Notes of the Directors of that Company, maturing in three, six, nine and twelve months and bearing interest at 7 per cent.

This offer was accepted with great satisfaction by the Board, but the Company did not get its money on the due dates, and it had to put the matter in the hands of its lawyers. It was not until the Board Meeting held on 18th November 1848 that the Secretary was able to report that the final payment with interest had been received.

It is recorded in the History of the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited that the Assam had to undergo extensive repairs before they could run her. She was still in commission as a steamer of the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd. in 1854 as the Charles Allen, and under that name, after being lengthened, her machinery altered and various expedients tried she was found in the early 1860’s hopelessly out of date, but still she was kept going for some time and was renamed the Assam.

Finally, after her engines were removed, she was converted in 1864 into the flat Dehing; and so, after being built in 1840, she was still afloat as a flat in 1899. The flat Naga was pronounced useless and was sold for Rs.1,100.

There is a note written in 1917 by one of the Assam Company’s employees on the subject of the steamer Assam which records that as the receiving flat Dehing, during a severe storm on 7th May 1910, when she was moored at Bhagalpur on the Ganges, she was so badly bumped against the bank of the river that her rivets were started and she sank.

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In concluding this story of the Assam, it is essential to draw attention to important discrepancies between what is written above and other records. The chief source of information on which the foregoing account is based are the Assam Company’s own Minutes, both in Calcutta and London, and Captain Alfred Brame’s History of the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited.

There would seem no question that the Minutes of the Assam Company are the more authentic, as they state the events as they occur.

The first and perhaps most important statement which is at variance with the facts recorded above is Brame’s assertion that the India General Steam Navigation Company Limited purchased the Assam in 1844. That was the date of the preliminary offer of the I.G.S.B. Co. Ltd. which was refused. The transaction was not concluded until after 1847. The date of this transaction being 1847 upsets some of the other facts recorded in the I.G.S.N. Co.’s History.

It is written there that

The first step taken by the Directors after the Company was fairly afloat was to order two steamers, and two flats from England... but as a considerable time would elapse before the material could arrive by sailing-ship round the Cape, and as the Directors were anxious to commence operations as quickly as possible, they purchased in 1844 a steamer and a flat from the Assam Company, called the Assam and Naga respectively, for Rs.70,000...

In a footnote the author explains that

... John Storm, the first Chairman of the I.G.S.N. Co. in 1844 was at the same time Chairman of the Assam Company. This would probably account for the transaction.

John Storm was appointed a Director of the Assam Company in 1844, but he was not Chairman until 1846. That he was Chairman of the two Companies at the time the sale of the Assam was made is correct, but it was not in 1844.

Two steamers and flats were probably a sufficient fleet for a new Company to start operations on the Ganges. This makes the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd.’s purchase of the Assam a year later incomprehensible, unless of course the date of the first voyage of the new steamers on inland waters is wrong.

In writing the account of what is really a historical vessel in the annals of inland navigation of the rivers of India, one grasps naturally at information which would bring to a conclusion the final fate of the Assam, which, according to the above note, took place at Bhagalpur on the Ganges. It seems curious, however, that as the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd. did not start
operating on the Brahmaputra until 1860, and that the Assam was not converted into a flat until 1864, it should have been placed on the Ganges as a receiving flat and given the name of Dehing, an important river to the Tea Industry in Assam but of no geographical significance to people on the Ganges. Brame’s History was published in 1900, whilst the Assam was still afloat. It is not until 1939 that we learn from a brief statement made at the Annual General Meeting by Mr. H. B. Whitby, Senior Partner of Kilburn, Brown & Company, the Managing Agents of the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd., that the Assam was lost in a cyclone off Goalundo in 1901. This statement was made following the Chairman’s review of the past history of the Assam Company, which that year was celebrating its centenary.

ROADS

It is noticeable that in the early accounts of the Company there is so little mention of roads, and for that matter they are hardly ever referred to by much earlier travellers in the province. As the early pioneers found Assam, they might have assumed, justly, that none ever existed. The history of the Ahom Kings in the 1700’s tells of the construction of many roads, and by name they are the same as some that exist to-day, such as the Bar Ali, Dhodar Ali, Kharikatia Ali, Lodaighar and Naga Ali.

The earlier maps of the 1840’s show the one recognisable road, the Dhodar Ali, from what is now about Moriani, through Nazira to Jaipore. There are others not so well known, the Ghur Ali before it passes through Jorhat and afterwards as the Sawnee Ali. To the north and parallel with the Dhodar Ali there is shown Bor Barua Ali leading out of Sibsagar and developing into the Morree Ali leading also to Jaipore. There were several unnamed roads round Nazira and Sibsagar, but the above were the main roads.

One cannot be sure, except in the case of the Dhodar Ali, whether any of these roads have developed since into main roads that exist now, though it is possible to trace the Bor Ali and the Moorree Ali into the trunk road that traverses the length of the province to-day, but the construction of the trunk road was not undertaken by Government until 1866.

If one is right in assigning the period from about 1650 to 1750 as the height of Ahom power, with its creation of what was akin to another civilisation, and that whilst they built those palaces, temples and tanks which are the existing monuments to-day of that past glory, they built also the means of communication, then it would seem that the deterioration in roads that set in from that time was due to the rising spate of internecine warfare, culminating in the devastation of the whole country by the Burmese.

The Dhodar Ali, as the oldest named road, is a built-up Bund road, and there are many of the same kind which have been made since into the
main highways traversing the province. Some are now metalled, but others are full of pot-holes still and a test for any motor vehicle to negotiate. Elsewhere throughout the province, and on many tea gardens, there are the remains of huge embankments or Bunds which can be traced, though they carry heavy jungle now.

A number of these were built in the first place by some king, prince or gohain for protection against enemies, for some of them have wide moats on one side, and as their tops were always above flood level, they were used as means of communication. Their length and size are a matter of wonderment, and it is conjectured that they were built with slave labour.

Faced with the need to open up and improve his land communications, Masters was forced to do something about the Dhodar Ali, and in 1840 he spent some thousands of rupees on this Government highway between Nazira and Gabru Parbut.

Having done this work, he then appealed to Lieutenant Brodie, the District Officer, for his further assistance and for payment for these repairs, for, as Masters pointed out, there was no road in the Zillah of Jorhat that was likely to prove more beneficial to the public than the Dhodar Ali.

The reply he received, however, was to the effect that “Government were not disposed to offer any pecuniary aid in repairing the Dhodar Ali,” which might be said to have started an attitude towards maintenance which was held inflexibly by the Bengal Government for many years.

The Government of the province has changed since then, but it has always been difficult to get the Administration to grant what the Tea Industry have regarded as adequate funds for this purpose.

This commences also that attitude of the Tea Industry towards public roads of leaving them to look after themselves. A Minute of the Calcutta Board reads:

Since Government will not assist in repairing such roads, it would be imprudent for the Assam Company to expend money on roads not confined to their own particular grants.

The origin of this controversy is best expressed in the following extract from the Report written by Mr. William Prinsep, the Chairman of the Company, when he visited Assam early in 1841:

I should here remark that when Mr. Masters first located Nazira, he found this Allee (the Dhodar Allee) very much cut up by water and wild beasts, and in some places almost entirely covered with thick jungle.

He very wisely employed a gang upon its repair all the way to Gabru
Purbot, erecting substantial wood bridges over the small water-courses and placing ferries at the Rivers Jazee (Jhanzi) and Namdang, which are not always fordable. This work Lieutenant Brodie pronounced to have been thoroughly well done, and of the most beneficial importance to his district. The extent opened is about 25 miles, and has cost about Rs.5,400, and such is the traffic upon it that I declare that travelling its whole extent not a single quarter-of-a-mile was passed without finding many passengers upon it. I presume that upon a proper representation to Government, our Company will be fully reimbursed for putting such an important highroad into good repair. The branch roads that lead from it to our different Stations will remain at our own cost.

Fifteen to twenty years later there was little or no improvement in the public highways.

In a selection from the Records of the Government of Bengal relating to tea cultivation in Assam, 1859, it is learned that on the urgent representations of the planters, Colonel Jenkins as the Chief Commissioner did make request to the Government of Bengal for money to improve land communications, but the answer was always the same—there was not enough money from the revenues to improve roads in the more important province of Bengal, and it was less likely that funds could be spared for a remote wild frontier like Assam.

In support of this appeal for funds for Assam, Colonel Jenkins quoted recent developments in Cooch Bihar, a District also under his jurisdiction, where the bullock cart had recently been introduced as a means of saving labour in the transport of commodities:

This state of things arising out of an immensely increasing commerce is more or less prevalent, if I be not mistaken, throughout Bengal, and can only be remedied extensively by the introduction of machinery and substitutes for manual labour; and I was gratified to find that in Cooch Bihar since my last visit, this substitution was taking place to a very great extent by the introduction of carts. These carriages are now largely employed for the first time within my knowledge, for the carriage of agricultural produce to the River Ghauts, and will no doubt be a very sensible relief to the great trade in bulky articles going forward.

The same solution will no doubt be gradually introduced into Assam, where hundreds of thousands of labourers are daily employed in transporting the produce of their fields to the granaries, markets and ghauts, as I have more than once adverted to in advocating the speedy construction of roads in Assam.

As far as regards the tea planters, they have been adopting from the first the use of elephant carts for the transport of tea to the ghauts; and in the Jorehaut and Luckimpore Districts, their want of roads has been in great measure attended to, but as yet I think they have done little in setting an
example to the Assamese in the use of carriage bullocks or bullock carts which alone can be made available for the use of the agricultural population, and this only to a partial extent until we have a better system of roads.

It is remarkable to think that less than a century ago even that ubiquitous means of conveyance, the hackri-gharri, or bullock cart, represented a notable improvement in the method of transport in the province.

The following is from the verbatim report of the General Meeting held on 7th June 1886, when A. B. Fisher, one-time Superintendent, but then the Director who had just returned from visiting the estates, said:

The Chairman has made some allusion to my rather unexpected return, and I think I ought to congratulate you all on the much more rapid communication there is now between your property in Assam and England. I may tell you, that the last time I went to Assam from Calcutta, in 1875, it occupied 21 days to get from Calcutta to the Assam Company's gardens, and it took me 10 days to get back from the Gardens to Calcutta. On the present occasion, the whole business, going there and coming back took me just 10 days, and I think this matter of more rapid communication, of very great importance and very great satisfaction to the Assam Company generally.

The improvement referred to here that had taken place since 1875 was chiefly the inauguration of the Steamer Company's fast "Despatch Service" of steamers between Calcutta and Dibrugarh, which called at the railway terminus at the river stations at Goalundo and Dhubri. Fisher went on to point out the other advantages, particularly in the transport of labour.

Formerly we had to embark them at Dhubri or Goalundo on the Ganges and it took 20 days to get them up to the Gardens, and during that time they frequently got an outbreak of cholera, and they suffered in various ways. But now they are landed in good condition and fit for the work and we lose a very small percentage now compared with what we used to do.

In 1883 the Jorhat Provincial Railway was then in operation from Kokilamukh to Jorhat, and in 1884 the Dibru-Sadiya Railway from Dibrugarh to Makum marked the advance in internal communication in the province, and which Fisher referred to as having contributed so much to the expansion of trade generally, but more particularly to the facility these railways provided for the importation of rice for the labour, and coal from the Makum collieries for the Company's factories.

As to the Company's own means of communication, its inter-garden roads were maintained to the best of its ability with the labour and materials available. But even with the best endeavours there were some of
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these which, because of the nature of the soil, became difficult if not impassable in the rains. Ballast for making the roads pucca was only obtainable from the hills, which were too far away to make the quarrying of stone a practicable proposition with the means of transport available then.

The laying down of tramways, which the Company started in 1912, was the first solution of its own transport difficulties. These tramways are in operation to-day, but with more and more roads being shingled and tarred, land communications have improved out of all knowledge; but there are a lot of bad roads still which are, however, public roads outside the Company’s sphere of operations.

In the matter of the acceleration of road transport, it is believed that the first motor-car to make its appearance in Assam was at a garden on the north bank in 1904-1905. The Company embarked on what was then this new form of transport in 1907, when in a Board Minute of October of that year J. S. Hulbert, as Managing Director and previously Superintendent, was authorised to purchase a 10-h.p. De Dion Bouton car for the use of the General Manager in Assam.

MAILS TO AND FROM LONDON AND ASSAM, CALCUTTA

The normal voyage in the 1830’s from England to Calcutta for passengers and mail was by sailing-ship, via the Cape, which took four to five months. The first steamer to make the voyage to India was the famous Enterprise, which helped by her sails, reached Diamond Harbour, near Calcutta, in December 1825. This ship had left England the previous August, so in point of time it effected little or no improvement on the sailing-ship. The first P. & O. steamer was the Hindustan, of 2,017 tons gross, which sailed via the Cape in 1842.

The overland route to India was opened in 1830, but it took some years to develop this route to effect an appreciable saving in travelling time. In 1836 it is recorded that despatches from the East India Company’s Court of Directors in London had reached Bombay in forty-five days. At first the journey was made by sailing-ship to Alexandria, thence by caravan to Suez, and from there by sailing-ship to Bombay or Calcutta. From Bombay some mail was carried across country by dak runner to Calcutta.

By 1844 it was possible to improve on the overland route to India to reduce to forty-four days the time to reach Calcutta. This was the route taken by Sir Henry, afterwards Lord, Hardinge when he took up his appointment as Governor-General. The cost of such an accelerated means of travel was beyond the means, probably, of any ordinary individual.

This overland route for passengers and their luggage from London to
Suez was an adventurous undertaking beset with discomforts, and could have been undertaken only by the hardiest travellers. One recognised route was via Boulogne, Paris, Chalons and Lyons to Marseilles. Of this distance of something like 600 miles, 150 miles were down the river Rhone—otherwise it was by stage-coach, with only the briefest halts by day or night to change horses and to allow the passengers time to eat.

The P. & O. Company had even then steamers running from Marseilles, via Malta, to Alexandria. It was, however, the journey from Alexandria to Suez, a distance of about 250 miles, which was the real test of a traveller’s fortitude.

Those who have only passed from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea in the luxurious comfort of a liner through the Suez Canal can have no conception of the discomforts and even horrors of that journey overland in the early 1840’s.

From Alexandria the route was by a very small steamer with the most cramped accommodation on the Makmondieh Canal to Afteh, where a transhipment was made to camel transport for a short distance to the Nile, and thence again by small steamer to Cairo. From Cairo the journey was by carriage across the desert to Suez. The accommodation provided over the whole of this route was verminous, and travellers remarked that even in their discomfort from this source of irritation they noticed that the natives were not impervious to the same attentions, but that they were more content to scratch contemplatively though non-stop. The carriages from Cairo to Suez were drawn by Arab steeds almost unbroken to harness. The purveyors of this form of transport were aware that if, after the first vicious jolt of a flying start, the vehicle should be unlucky enough in its wild career to get off the beaten track, the soft sand of the desert into which the intractable animals would flounder up to their hocks would soon reduce their over-abundance of spirits to a state of tranquil exhaustion in the exertion of returning to the narrow road.

This part of the journey from Cairo to Suez took normally thirty-six hours with a change of horses at rest-houses every five or six miles with the same exciting or disconcerting starting jerk from each; but the condition of these rest-houses for the weary traveller represented only a varying degree of discomfort as one to the other, for according to how populous were the creeping, crawling inhabitants they harboured, to that extent were they a travesty of the word “rest.” The whole journey from sea to sea took over three days, allowing for necessary periods of rest, and the stage Cairo to Suez, thirty-six hours.

Compare in reverse the latter trip to-day, which by arrangement with the P. & O., when on the way home from the East can be performed by luxurious cars from Suez, over tarmac roads, in two or three hours to Cairo, where hours can be spent in sightseeing before rejoining the ship.
after its journey through the Canal, at Port Said, to which port one is taken by comfortable train from Cairo.

A railway survey across India was started from both the Bombay and Calcutta sides in 1845. By 1853, the first line, a section of the Great India Peninsular Railway from Bombay to Tana, a distance of 20 miles, was working, and from Calcutta a line had been laid as far as Ranigunge. Of the total distance between Calcutta and Bombay of about 1,356 miles, there had, by 1856, been opened to traffic 146 miles, with another 150 under construction. From Bombay to Calcutta by road was a tedious journey of six weeks. Letters on this journey were carried by runners at a cost of 1 rupee per letter.

There was no telegraph in India until 1854, when the first telegram was sent from Agra to Calcutta. Two years later the line stretched from Calcutta to Peshawar. Telegraphic communication between England and India was not established until the 1860’s. In 1869 the Suez Canal was opened to traffic.

Letters from Nazira to Calcutta took at first three weeks to a month. This was reduced gradually to eighteen days or less, until we find that at a Board Meeting on the 11th July 1840 the Directors were considering a letter from Masters dated 30th June. The acceleration in the time of receipt of letters may have been due to the Company’s request in November 1839, to Dr. K. M. Scott, its Agent at Gaullati, for an estimate to have its private dak direct to Mr. Masters.

It was reckoned that, taking all the year round, the dak or post upwards took a week to reach Goalpara, ten days to Gauhati, thirteen to Bishnath and many more to Sadiya. The route was presumably by dak-runners via Rangpur to Dhubri, thence by canoes rowed by only two men, who were relieved every fifteen or twenty miles, to Gauhati, Tezpore, Bishnath and upwards.

It was no easy task for the Company to maintain contact by known routes with the business on which it had embarked eight hundred miles or so away from the scene of their administration in Calcutta. Yet it thought nothing of the distance or difficulties entailed in arranging to bring the Chinese tea makers and labourers it required across hundreds of miles of almost unknown jungle country from Yunan in China to Assam or coal from Cherrapunjee to its steamer stations below Gauhati. The scientific delegation in 1834-35 travelled via Cherrapunjee to get to Sadiya, and the botanist Dr. W. Griffiths was undeterred by a prospective visit to Ava in Burma to prove the possibility of the tea plant having made its entry into Assam from that country and China: these pioneers added to our knowledge of the country, and their efforts have contributed to the foundation of the Tea Industry.
CHAPTER XXXIII

LABOUR

This chapter attempts to give only an outline of how the Company, in its first operations, endeavoured to meet its most urgent need for labour.

To begin with, the first need was for people from whom to learn how to cultivate and manufacture tea. China was the one country from which such could be obtained.

Government had imported for their experiments some Chinese through the original Tea Committee, and some of these were made over to the Company when it acquired the Government’s tea barriers, but the Company had to import others on its own account.

Because in some authoritative accounts of the early days of the Industry it has been said that the Assam Company imported only one batch of Chinese labourers, and that as these turned out such an intractable lot it imported no more, some further details gleaned from original documents of what it did in fact do in regard to this labour has been made the subject of the first part of this chapter.

In regard to indigenous labour, which forms the second part of this chapter, it will be shown that the Company had from the beginning the right idea in seeking its requirements from other provinces in India far removed from Assam. But its success in this was frustrated by the enormous distances to be traversed and the total lack of adequate means of transport.

CHINESE LABOUR

When C. A. Bruce took over the Government experimental tea culture in 1835, his most urgent requirement was tea makers, and the only place to get them from was China. He had leaf available from the indigenous plants, or trees he had cut down in the tea tracts he had discovered, and which provided the necessary raw material.

It was this need which emphasised the importance of G. J. Gordon’s deputation to China, not so much for the plants and seeds he could obtain but for the tea makers.

In the meantime, for clearing jungle and the erection of such bamboo and thatch buildings as formed the establishment of those days, Bruce could make do with such skill as the local inhabitants possessed, and it has to be remembered that these were confined to the jat of native available in the Muttrock and Singpho countries, before the Assam Company had established its Headquarters at Nazira. But Bruce had good reason to
complain of the indolence and apathy of these people, particularly the Singphos, who only worked under their own petty chiefs and would brook no control as to whether they worked or not. They had no inclination to work for anyone so long as they had enough rice and opium for their immediate needs. Bruce could not get labour from around his station at Sadiya, because for so long as they could earn Rs.4 a month where they were, they would not go so far as into the wilder Singpho country.

Writing from the Jorhat District on his way back from seeing Bruce and the tea in the Muttuck and Singpho country, Dr. Wallich, in March 1836, expressed the hope that the three “China Cultivators” who had already reached Calcutta would be forwarded without delay, and recommended that they be accompanied by a Chaman from Calcutta to act as interpreter, he emphasised Bruce’s need for more Chinamen in addition to these.

These were three men whom G. J. Gordon had induced to emigrate from Canton on his first visit to China. They are described as cultivators, and although Bruce’s most pressing need was for tea makers, he required cultivators also for instruction in the right time to pluck his leaf, and otherwise in the agricultural treatment of his tea plants. It would seem from subsequent events, however, that two of these at least were black-tea makers.

These people arrived at Sadiya on 1st October 1836, bringing with them from China 7 pots of plants, of which Bruce reported that 4 had died on the journey up; the other 3 “looked pretty healthy.”

The next lot of Chinese to reach Calcutta were a batch comprising 2 green-tea makers, 2 box makers and 1 canister maker. They arrived by the Futtee Salam on 1st February 1838.

These were the people whom Dr. Wallich detained in Calcutta to help him recondition the 12 boxes of tea which formed the first shipment of Indian tea to be sold at the London auctions but which arrived in Calcutta in such mouldy condition.

These Chinese insisted that their agreements provided for free passages, food, etc., whilst on board, for a voyage they understood was to take six months but which took only about two months to Calcutta. In this belief they had left the whole of their advances with their families in Canton, leaving themselves with barely sufficient clothing for the voyage. On arrival in Calcutta, therefore, they were virtually destitute.

The Tea Committee pleaded with Government to grant these people monthly subsistence allowances until they could earn full wages in their own support, revealing in substantiation of their case that these Chinamen were most disheartened at the news that two of their countrymen sent up to Assam in 1836 had died there.
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Up to this point the acquisition of Chinese labour had been on Government account; that is, the Tea Committee had made the arrangements for their importation under instructions from the Secretary to the Governor-General at Calcutta.

The Assam Company, in anticipation of Government making over their experimental areas to it, and even before Masters had established his Headquarters at Nazira, started its own endeavours to obtain Chinese labour. It threw its net wide, and in June 1839 it wrote to Shaw, Whitehead & Company and Mr. E. Bousted of Singapore, “to secure as many capable hands as can be picked up from the China Junks,” to Maclaine, Watson & Company, Batavia, to search for such men at Samarang or elsewhere, and to a Mr. Barthelchab at Penang.

The reply from one firm in Singapore was that they were sending to Cochin China for, “experienced labourers fit for tea making,” but in the meantime they were forwarding 100 iron pans together with some soldering tools and a man experienced in box making. Another firm advised that they would have to send a junk to the coast of China. In reply, the Board confirmed that they should do so and bring down one or two hundred. They wrote also to Dent & Company of Canton to the same effect. The answer from Batavia was that Chinese labourers were not to be found in Java, all their tea work being carried on by Javanese.

It has to be supposed that when the Board instituted these enquiries in Malaya they were not aware of the contents of G. J. Gordon’s letter dated 24th July 1834 written from Macao to the Tea Committee in which he mentioned that thousands of able-bodied Chinese settle annually in the Malay States, but these are driven to emigrate by the fear of starvation at home; those employed in the manufacture of tea, however, were too well paid to be desirous of bettering their fortunes by emigration.

The difficulty of language and communication with these Chinamen in their daily work in Assam was anticipated by the Tea Committee, and in April 1836 they made the proposal to Government that one, Dr. Lumqua, who was described as a Chinese physician, should be engaged as interpreter for the deputation of scientists on their visit to Assam, but Government would not contemplate employing him on Rs.400 a month and as an alternative they suggested the engagement of a Chinese carpenter with a knowledge of English on Rs.60 monthly.

At some time or another after this, Government did take on Dr. Lumqua, at a salary of Rs.400, but presumably as Chinese Manager and interpreter in Calcutta, where there was a colony of Chinese. It is recorded in the Calcutta Report dated 7th March 1840 that Lumqua’s services would be made over to the Assam Company on its agreeing to fulfil the terms on which Government had engaged his services.
LABOUR

Lumqua arrived at Tingri in June 1840, accompanied by 18 Chinamen who had been made over to the Company by Government.

Lumqua induced one, Ekan, who is described as a Chinese gentleman who has resided as a trader in Upper Assam, to proceed also to Penang, Malacca and Singapore to search for what were described as tea manipulators. Lumqua found in Calcutta a few Chinese young men to be taken on as apprentices to the tea makers already there. They were to go up to Assam in company of some Chinese carpenters.

On his way up to Assam, Lumqua wrote to the Board warning them of the possibility of being cheated by Chinamen presenting themselves as tea makers.

The Board proceeded, nevertheless, to take on Chinese from the colony resident in Calcutta. In October 1839 they engaged 9 professed tea makers and 15 labourers, who signed agreements for three years to proceed to Assam immediately on payment of advances of Rs.100 each to the tea makers and three months' pay or Rs.60 each to the others. It is interesting to note that these people were engaged on the security of four Chinese householders in Calcutta, who were to receive a bonus of Rs.2 per head for each of those who arrived in Assam and an additional Rs.3 for any who passed examination as fit for tea making.

On the way up, these people were not infrequently lost or they strayed from the boat stations, for there are reports from officials at stations such as Jamalpur advising that money had been spent "on aiding the onward journey of 2 Chinamen found adrift at that place."

The first Chinese imported by the Assam Company was in November 1839, when a batch of 50 were advised by Stewart & Company to have been shipped from Penang. Only 47 of these reached Calcutta in the Brig Tenasserim, the Master advising that 3 had failed to reach the ship before its departure.

A further batch of 64 Chinese labourers arrived in January 1840 by the sailing-ship Pala Gopuala Krishna, shipped also from Penang by Stewart & Company, and some of these, if not all, were sent up to Assam in charge of Assistant G. S. Murray and an interpreter.

Even these first recruits were a troublesome lot, for it was reported to the Board by the Superintendent of Police, Calcutta, that there had been an affray between some of them and the local inhabitants of a village near Dewangunge in which several had been wounded and in which Murray, in an excess of zeal for the responsibility of keeping together the people in his charge, was accused of opposing the police officers by rescuing his men and proceeding out of the jurisdiction of the Magistrate at Bogra, in whose District the incident occurred.

Murray reported from Goalpara on 13th February 1840 that he was proceeding onwards from that station with his batch of labourers, and
arrived eventually at Gauhati on 26th February with 105 Chinamen. Dr. Scott advised that he had returned 17 of Murray’s gang with the interpreter to Bogra, and of this lot, 9 were to take their trial for alleged assault on the police. The Board found it necessary to ask influential parties at Bogra to endeavour to compromise the matter.

In a letter dated 6th May 1840 the Secretary advised Masters at Nazira that the case against Mr. Murray at Bogra had been dismissed. The course of the law was completely reversed from anything that was expected, and on this occasion the Darogah of Police was fined Rs.10 for urging false charges.

In addition to recruiting direct from China and the Malay Straits, the Board had been in touch with people in Siam, for there is a letter from a Mr. R. Hunter of Siam, dated 14th November 1840, in which he advised that he would do his best to get “tea artificers” and, if successful, he would send them across the Isthmus from Siam to Mergui. On receipt of this information the Secretary was instructed to get in touch with some person in Mergui to arrange this despatch to Calcutta.

In the meantime, there came a warning from Bruce that he thought the Company was sending up too many Chinese. This is contained in a letter dated 16th January 1840 in reply to the Board’s request that he would assist their people going up to Jaipore. Bruce was still in Government service then, and he answered that he could not afford the time or place to do this. In justification of his warning, he said that the natives of the country were learning fast and he thought Bengali tin-box makers could be taught to work up lead linings for the chests, which only the Chinese knew really how to make.

Early in February 1840 there arrived at Calcutta by the *Asia Felix* that large batch of 247 Chinese which are the foundation of the story best known in the Tea Industry for the trouble they created.

These people had been selected, recruited or, what is quite as likely, impressed by Ekan in Malaya. They were shipped by Shaw, Whitehead & Company from Singapore. To get this batch to Calcutta alone cost over Rs.22,000, which included their sea passages from Singapore at Rs.30 a head and the cost of their food on the voyage.

Even when accepting Shaw, Whitehead’s draft, the Board complained that the people had been badly selected, that they were turbulent and dissatisfied. Taking advantage of their experience with previous batches, they had these landed on the opposite, or Howrah side, of the Hugli, where they were to be detained whilst boats and provisions were collected for their journey to Assam. They were put in charge of Mr. Duffield an assistant who had come down to Calcutta for a “change of air” and was due to return to Assam. He was joined, also, by a Mr. J. Powles, who had just been taken on as a 3rd Assistant.
Trouble began in Calcutta. At the Board Meeting on 15th February the Secretary reported that there had been a great uproar and a battle had ensued amongst the different castes of Chinese in which 5 men had been "desperately wounded." The Secretary had been amongst them to try and quieten them down, and in doing so had discovered the seat of some, at least, of their dissatisfaction. It was what is invariably the root cause of trouble with paid recruiters, extortion from those recruited. Ekan had kept for himself 3 dollars from each man's advance of three months' pay!

The Board ordered that the whole matter was to be investigated before a Magistrate and thereafter the gang was to be hurried off to Assam as soon as possible.

The case came before the Magistrate at Howrah. Those present included a Chinese interpreter, a deputation from the labourers with their petition, and Ekan and a friend. It is something to be said for Ekan that he had the courage to face up to the gang he had mulcted. The Magistrate ordered that the labourers were to proceed to Assam in fulfilment of their contract and that Ekan was to disgorge to them the 3 dollars he had extorted. The Board paid the amount and deducted it from the bonus or commission Ekan was due for their recruitment.

As if anticipating further trouble, the Board ordered that the batch was to be despatched to Assam in charge of 3 "active" Assistants and 12 Burkandozes (chowkidars or peons). The original proposal was for Duffield and Powles to be the Assistants in charge of this unruly crowd, but the former must have proceeded to Assam earlier, for his death on the way up from cholera was reported by Major Davidson, the Agent at Goalpara, to have taken place on 7th March. It was W. Milne who was in charge eventually of these people, and it was in his party of boats that Mrs. Duffield travelled up to attend to her husband's affairs.

The convoy of boats taking this batch had not completed even the first stage of its long journey when more trouble broke out. On 24th March Milne reported that a serious affray had occurred at Pabna between the Chinese and the town's people, in which two of the latter had been killed and two others were not expected to survive. The Magistrate had apprehended 57 Chinamen to take their trial with being concerned in the affray. Milne was to have proceeded on his journey with the remainder, leaving word that any who may be acquitted should be sent on. The Board arranged for a Mooktear, or legal representative, to be appointed, to see that justice was done to the Chinamen, whilst they admonished Milne for his lack of control over the men in his charge.

Matters were far more difficult than anyone could have foreseen. The Chinese refused to proceed unless their friends who had been arrested were released. It was a slow business getting the law into motion. A month after the incident they were still at Pabna expecting the case to
commence any day, but the proceedings dragged on until 17th June five months from the date of their landing in Calcutta, when they were all acquitted as none of the alleged offenders could be identified.

Though they promised to proceed, they found some excuse or other for not doing so. As usual, a few of the more turbulent spirits got at the others, the former were described as “the Chinchoo men, some 45 in number.” Milne did his best, he cajoled them, threatened, stopped their pay and provisions, but with no effect. He was instructed by the Board what action he was to take. He was told to inform the Chinese that if they did not proceed by a given date “. . . every one would be discharged and struck off the list of the Establishment for not fulfilling their written contracts,” an ultimatum which had apparently the least effect of any!

Expecting that a move would be made any day, the Board, anticipating further trouble, warned the other stations en route, starting with Dewangunge, to have supplies of provisions ready at some place, not near to a bazaar, and to pray the Magistrate to give police assistance to the Company’s men in charge.

The upshot of the whole matter was that after being three months at Pabna, this gang, with the exception of four men with whom Milne proceeded on his journey, were on the Board’s instructions dismissed. In other words, they were just abandoned on the town of Pabna. There was the natural reaction by Government demanding that the Company should pay the passages of these people back to Singapore, that they were a burden on the town and dependent on charity for their subsistence. The Company refused to pay their passages, but it was prepared to provide in Calcutta sufficient feeding stuffs to last the voyage to Singapore. The Company did promise, however, to try once more to see if any of these people would proceed to Assam.

After much haggling, some 80 to 150 were got to the stage of promising to go, though on terms higher than those arranged originally. But this endeavour fell through, and further negotiations with them were abandoned.

After this endeavour to import Chinese labour wholesale, recruiting was stopped, except to try and get a few really expert tea makers. The total cost of the experiment was Rs.29,365, a sum the Company could ill afford for the nett acquisition of four Chinese labourers.

In due course the matter had to be explained to Shareholders, and the following is an extract from the London Board’s Report at the General Meeting on 7th May 1841:

... The greater part of the tea that was manufactured in 1839 and sold here some months since was made by Takelars, inhabitants of Assam, and their manufacture was considered in every respect as good as that of the Chinese artisans. . . .
LABOUR

At the commencement of this undertaking, so little were the Board of Management in Calcutta aware that we were likely to obtain tea-makers from amongst the Assamese, that looking to the importance of getting as speedily as possible a class of labour that would be absolutely essential to us whenever we were in a stage to commence the manufacture of tea on a large scale . . . they procured at great expense and at heavy wages, several hundreds of Chinese whom they sent to Assam to be employed in our works, hoping to get such of them as were not tea makers instructed in the art. . . . These men turned out to be of very bad character. They were turbulent, obstinate and rapacious. So injurious did they seem likely to prove to the other workmen employed by the Company, that their contracts were cancelled and the whole gang, with the exception of the most experienced tea-makers and the quietest men, were dismissed.

No sooner was Lumqua settled in the Company's service than Government wanted him back. They wanted to appoint him to the category of Sub-Assistant Commissioner, but for the Company to pay his salary. The Company was quite willing to return his services, but as it would have no control over his actions it was not prepared to pay his salary. This controversy came to an abrupt close by Lumqua's untimely death from fever in Assam on 15th August 1840.

Dr. Lumqua's name should be remembered particularly for his connection with what was probably one of the most ambitious, if impracticable, recruiting schemes ever conceived, that of bringing Chinese from their country in the province of Yunan overland, on foot to Assam, a distance of some 800 miles through almost impassable country. Yunan was believed to be the Mecca, "... where tea artificers abound and whence it is understood that labourers can be procured in any number."

The idea emanated originally from Captain Francis Jenkins in letters to the Tea Committee.

There was nobody who had a better knowledge than Jenkins of the country bordering on Assam to the east, but even he could not have appreciated the trackless, mountainous country that would have to be traversed on such a journey, and the impossibility of guiding and feeding hundreds of coolies on such a long march. To such people starvation at home would have seemed preferable to the hazards of emigration by that route. Only now, from the grim story of the evacuation of Burma in the Second World War, do we know the perils and hardships of such a journey, but that was probably only half the distance visualised in Jenkins' proposal.

Like a true pioneer and good Government servant, with the development of the country in his charge foremost in his mind, Jenkins' imagination had been fired by the possibility of opening a general overland trade-route between India and China, using the Assam Company's demand for
Chinese labour as the opportunity to put this ulterior motive into operation.

The first step in this scheme was the engagement, through Dr. Lumqua, of one Ayek, a country-born Chinaman, who could speak also Burmese and a little Portuguese, who was willing in consideration of a salary of Rs. 40 a month to take a letter written by Lumqua to his brethren in Yunan inviting them over to a country where provisions were cheap, the land was rich and labour well paid for. The idea was that this messenger would carry the letter, if the road was passable, through Manipur to Bhamo Myo on the Irrawaddy River; whence he was either to go direct into Yunan or hold such communications with the inhabitants as would ascertain the possibility of getting tea labourers to emigrate. In addition to his salary, Ayek was to be made "a present of Rs. 5 for each man he induced to emigrate." Application was made to Captain Gordon, the Political Resident at Manipur, for his assistance in this impracticable mission. Gordon advised that their messenger could not penetrate the country from there to Bhamo without a safe conduct from the Burmese, which he obtained in due course from the Frontier Authorities.

Ayek started off for Manipur with two coolies armed with the necessary passes, a letter written by Dr. Lumqua to the inhabitants of the Yunan Province and presents, or, as they were called in official letters, "articles of trade," comprising silks, muslins, beads, cutlery and small ornaments to the value of Rs. 1,162. Ayek passed through Gauhati on 25th March 1840 and arrived at Sylhet.

Ayek, however, never reached even Manipur on the first leg of his journey. He was reported by Mr. Plowden, the Magistrate of Sylhet in June, to have absconded, it was thought probably to Calcutta. The Board instructed Masters to get hold of Ayek's agreement, together with a note of expenses on this mission to Yunan and to prosecute Ayek, or his sureties, for anything due.

The end of this impracticable scheme is referred to in the Calcutta Directors' Report for 1840-1841 in the following words:

The mission to Yunan was completely frustrated by the cowardice and roguery of the Chinese to whom its conduct has been entrusted. He either met with more difficulties than he expected or he never intended to act up to his engagement, for previous to reaching even Manipur he decamped, and no trace of him has since been found. His companion, a Chinese, actually found his way back over the Hills to Gouhati, and died there. The articles of trade sent to Manipur were returned and sold by auction. The Company's loss on this transaction will not exceed Rs. 1,653.

From about the end of 1840 the Company would seem to have stopped all further attempts at direct recruiting of Chinese.
LABOUR

It is not possible to say precisely by how many all these attempts at recruiting Chinese had augmented the Company's labour position. It is stated that in March 1840 it had acquired 18 tea makers, 4 carpenters and 18 apprentices. The Chinese tea makers and carpenters were paid at the rate of Rs.45 a month and the apprentices Rs.20. The ordinary Chinese labourer signed on for three years at Rs.16 a month, compared with Rs.3·8 to Rs.4 a month for indigenous labour.

It would seem that it was not only these Chinese imported by the Company who were so intractable. As soon as Bruce found that they were not vital to his tea making or cultivation, he urged the Calcutta Board to allow him to get rid of them at any price.

INDIGENOUS LABOUR

In writing of indigenous labour it is desirable to remember the different conditions appertaining to the two main divisions of the Company's properties. Under C. A. Bruce in the Northern and Eastern Divisions, situated in the Muttuck and Singpho country, there was a great scarcity of labour. He could call on only the local Singphos, of whom he had a very poor opinion for they were lazy and much addicted to opium.

It is observed that Bruce refers to his local labour the Singphos as a separate class or jat, but amongst those who worked for him there must have been many Assamese from the few surrounding villages, what are known to-day as "busti-wallahs." Taking these collectively, he emphasises their low demoralised condition due to opium, the production of which he advocated strongly should be suppressed by Government legislation. A step in this direction was taken when Government made it a condition of their grant of the Company's charter that the growth of the opium poppy was strictly prohibited.

In confirmation that a large proportion of his labour were busti-wallahs, he advised in his report on the working of his tea tracts that they would only work for him when they were not cultivating or harvesting their own rice fields. Also that he never seemed able to get the same people to pluck for him for two seasons consecutively, so that he was always having to teach new people the art of plucking.

Of his Chinese labour he admitted they were irascible and difficult to handle, and he wanted to get rid of them, but they were good at teaching their work to local people and apt at acquiring the language after they had been in Assam a twelvemonth.

In the Southern Division under Masters, in a district over sixty miles west from where Bruce was operating and in a far more settled and populous area, the position was much better, as he had the call on some local Assamese and could recruit Kacharis.
At the outset Bruce's need for labour was the greater, not only because he had a larger area under cultivation but he was manufacturing also most of the tea.

In February 1837 Captain F. Jenkins, as the Government officer under whom Bruce, as Superintendent of Tea, was employed, sent the Tea Committee in Calcutta a copy of Bruce's letter complaining of the indolence of his Singphos and, in his covering letter, gave his opinion that this apathy would speedily remedy itself when more tea was under cultivation and the Singphos were given the example of the greater industry that they would see in the more industrious races from Chota Nagpur, which it should be the aim of the Committee to import—thus indicating that at the beginning it was known from where the best agricultural labour was to be sought.

The first mention of a paid recruiter, or perhaps it should be described as the offer to a European of reward for collecting labour to proceed to Assam, is in the Board Minutes of 4th June 1839, when it was agreed to offer a Mr. Campbell of Midnapore, "... a European gentleman well versed in farming pursuits, who was willing to take service with the Company," the job of going to Chota Nagpur or Baghalpore to collect families of labourers willing to migrate to Assam. He was to be paid Rs.2 per head commission for every able-bodied man landed at "Works" (which meant presumably in Assam), Rs.1 for women and children, and for himself Rs.150 monthly for his own maintenance and for all travelling.

It was Captain Jenkins again who suggested to the Board that there was fair prospect of getting Nagas and Gharos to work for them. Upon this Bruce was asked, whether he was employed by Government or not, to give the Company assistance in getting Naga or other tribes to settle on its land for clearing jungle.

By the end of 1839 the Company had eight Europeans out recruiting. These people would seem to have been engaged in the first place solely for that purpose, but if they were successful in getting their batches to Assam they were taken on as Assistants. Besides the above Mr. Campbell, there were C. T. Reeves recruiting in the Chittagong District, W. S. Stewart in Hazaribagh, F. T. Bandant and J. George in Dacca, W. H. K. Sweetland in Bowsing, H. Busch in Rungpur and T. Pickett in Mymensingh.

The first successes were the recruitment of a batch of 400 by H. Busch, which he had engaged at Rs.4 a month each, against the stipulated wage of Rs.3-8-—. He was to march these people by land from Rungpur to Gauhati, a distance of over 160 miles. Sweetland recruited a large batch a number of whom ran away, but he reported having sent off 156 people from Bowsing, or from the neighbourhood of Bankrua.
LABOUR

Recruiting the labour was one thing, but getting them to Assam was always problematical. The supply of boats was not always forthcoming, or efficient boatmen who knew the river, whilst sufficient feeding for large numbers at stopping-places was not always available.

Although these people proceeded generally without trouble, there is reference to the necessity for putting guards on the boats to prevent desertions.

From this start further recruiting seemed to proceed normally, for those times, except for one young man who seems to have misbehaved in his recruiting operations. Although W. S. Stewart was appointed at the beginning of October 1839 to go to Hazaribagh and Ranchi, the best recruiting districts, he prevaricated so before starting, first by pleading severe illness, then that he had been cheated by a sirdar, that, by the end of November he had not even started, and the Board ordered that another man was to be sent to the District as he appeared to be incapable of fulfilling his engagement. In spite of threats from the Board to stop his pay, and even dismiss him, nothing matured until the end of December, when he reported having collected 200 Dangah coolies. By January 1840 he had secured 291 people and he hoped to make this up to 500 when he would proceed by land through Rungpur to Assam. He asked for an assistant to help him en route with so large a gang. Mr. Vangelin was sent to him. What exasperated the Board was the young man continually issuing drafts without any statement of how the money had been spent. Writing from Bankipore on 6th March, he reported that he had negotiated a draft for Rs.2,000 to enable him to purchase blankets and diet for 637 coolies and that he expected to take up this whole gang to Assam. On 18th March he passed through Baghalpur on his way to Rungpur.

Arrived at Dewangunge on 21st April, he gave the Board the lamentable news that, because of cholera breaking out amongst them, the whole of his batch had absconded in the night. The young man took the precaution of getting the Civil Surgeon at Malda to give him a certificate corroborating his story.

This loss really roused the Board, and their instructions to him were to return forthwith to Nagpur, at his own expense and endeavour to recover as many of the runaways as he could; failing which he was to adopt peremptory measures for recovering the advances from the coolies themselves, or from their sureties, and to render a full account accompanied by vouchers for all payments; until the receipt of which he would be held responsible for every rupee at his debit.

From Dinajpur, on his way back to Chota Nagpur, he wrote saying he was unable to proceed further for lack of funds to carry out the Board's instructions given to him! He submitted his accounts which show that the Company owed him Rs.4.6.1!
In an endeavour to recover something from the wreck, the Board got in touch with a gentleman in Government service at Dorunda, with the request that he would try and recover some of the advances from the coolies themselves, or from their sureties, the covenants of all the coolies having been sent to him. The Board were told, however, that the recovery of any of these advances was hopeless. They had to accept this position, but asked if the sureties could not be bound down to supply coolies next season, free of commission, if the Company then required more labour.

As if in punishment for the loss he had caused the Company, Stewart was directed to proceed to Pabna and join the Assistant, Mr. Milne, in his difficult task of dealing with the large batch of truculent Chinese who could not be induced to move from that place, as recorded in the previous chapter.

Whilst at Pabna, Stewart was accused by the other Assistants, Milne, Powles and Hart, of making use of very abusive language to them whilst labouring under the effects of liquor, and this the other Assistants reported to the Board.

A Mr. S. D. Rice, presumably a Government official in the District, was asked to deal with Mr. Stewart. That officer interviewed Milne about the affair and obtained a signed declaration from the other Assistants. Having satisfied himself that the charges against Mr. Stewart were proved he handed him the note he had been given by the Board, dismissing him from the Company’s service.

In the Calcutta Board’s Report for the year 1840-1841 it is recorded that the total cost of Mr. Stewart’s recruiting operations which produced no coolies, was Rs.10,727. This Report goes on to say that, added to the misfortunes of this loss, there was the great mortality during that very sickly season in Assam and that a large proportion of the new labour sent up were unfit for work, the exception being the labour recruited by Mr. Busch from Rangpur. This Report draws attention, also, to the fact that even the scanty population of the Muttock country was decreasing by emigration to the south, to the district round Jorhat, the effects of which were being very seriously felt by the gardens of the Northern Division (under Bruce):

... in the manufacturing season when hands are insufficient to pluck the leaves which in a short time become too ripe for manufacture and are lost. Endeavours are being made to send up gangs of Kachari settlers from Gauhati and Assamese, under agreement to serve for a fixed term; it is difficult to keep them and still more to trace them so as to bring them back to fulfill their engagements when they have deserted.

Even at this early stage in the acquisition of labour from districts outside Assam, there was experienced that handicap to further recruiting
caused by rumours in the recruiting districts that those who emigrate to
the tea districts were never heard of again because it was believed, they
had all famished and died. Mr. H. Busch reported this to the Board in a
letter from Rungpur dated 31st July 1840 and asked that a couple of
sirdars, then in Assam, especially one named Budhoo, be returned to him
to help in allaying these rumours amongst the further potential recruits
with whom he was in touch.

As indicating that difference in conditions between the North and
South Divisions, Bruce, writing in June 1840 on the subject of newly
recruited labour, mentions that he could find occupation for a good many
more, but the scarcity of rice, and feeding stuffs would prevent their being
brought into the country. Masters in the Southern Division, on the other
hand, advised that there was plenty of labour, especially in the cold weather,
though he grumbled rather at the very little work they did. He reported
that there was no scarcity of rice in his District. He had large quantities
in store which no one would take even at 2 maunds for the rupee, though
it cost him nearly Rs. 2 a maund to bring up.

At the commencement of operations the Company was importing
rice from such places in Bengal as Pabna and Rungpur, until it discovered
that rice could be obtained in any quantity from the Darrang District. It
then made arrangements for regular supplies to be sent up from this
District, which was so much nearer its seat of operations, though it had to
supply its own boats for its transport. This was got over by hiring boats
by the year.

Bruce knew he had, on the Company's grants, any quantity of land
suitable for growing rice enough to support thousands and that he would
be able eventually to command a surplus of this essential commodity, but
it took time to bring the land under rice cultivation which meant that
new labour in the first year was occupied chiefly in producing rice for
their own consumption.

In the handling of this newly imported labour, the following extracts
from letters from the Superintendents illustrate some of the methods in
1840.

Considering the enormous expenditure of the past year, a great deal more
ought to have been effected. I am not at all satisfied myself and I am often
entirely at a loss how to act. The Teklahs and Sykias and others of the
thousand titles which the foremen have, I know to be of little use, yet, if I
scold one of them or discharge him for misconduct or negligence, the
coolies will all run off and leave the most important works unfinished. I can
only hope that when we become better acquainted we may succeed better.

I have given Rs. 20 as the cost of manufacturing 100 lb. of tea. When we
are enabled to keep all our men fully employed throughout the year, this
cost may be considerably reduced. You will please to observe that these tea
makers are very great gentlemen; even those who receive but 3 Rs. per month consider themselves so, and object to do anything else but make tea. When spoken to, they threaten to leave the service if they are insulted by being asked to work. Gradually this will wear away, as we shall soon have them under our control; and if they continue saucy, we may take a convenient opportunity of making a strike for two or three months, and when they lose their pay, they will probably become sensible that they are dependent on the Assam Company for their livelihood.

As indicative of the absence of co-operation in labour matters between the Northern and Southern Divisions, due probably to lack of adequate means of communication over the long distance that separated them, the Calcutta Board in 1842 were much disturbed at the conflicting advices they received from Bruce and Masters. When sending up batches of labourers to Assam, they were sent to Masters at Nazira for onward despatch to Bruce in the Northern Division. As happened frequently, a number of these labourers absconded after arriving at Nazira, or anyway before reaching their final destination. Masters had expressed his opinion to the Board that it was unnecessary to send up coolies from Bengal. He was indifferent, therefore, to those lost, and failed to take the necessary action expected of him to trace the absconders. Secure in his own position for the time being, he was ignorant or indifferent to the frantic demands that Bruce and Parker were making to the Board in their dire need for more labour.

This exasperated the Board, and Masters was reprimanded for not conferring with his brother Superintendents in matters concerning the Company's interests as a whole.

There was another incident in 1843 when Parker refused to carry out the Board's instructions to take over three Chinese tea makers from Government. His excuse was that he could not reconcile these instructions to take on more men at high salaries who were, he said, worth nothing more than his own Assamese tea makers at 3·8 or 4 rupees a month with the Board's orders for a reduction in the cost of his establishment. Nevertheless, he was reprimanded, the Board expressing their surprise that he should have so disregarded their orders.

It was no doubt the accumulation of such incidents that culminated a little later on in the dismissal of the three Superintendents, as related elsewhere.

By various means the Company struggled along to get more labour from outside the province; by the usual channels of sending down garden Sirdars to recruit in their own country; by appealing to different Government District Officers in places where there was a surplus of population, and even in getting indigo planters in Bihar to recruit for them on payment of commission per head of the numbers forwarded.
LABOUR

What must have been the first recorded strike of tea-garden labour occurred in 1848, when Stephen Mornay was Superintendent. Unlike the many frivolous grounds on which strikes are fomented to-day, the labour had a real grievance. At this time the Company had virtually no money and the labourers' pay was three months in arrears. The labour adopted the usual practice of crowding round the Company's office and creating disturbances. They were, however, persuaded to return to work on a promise that in future their pay would not be more than one month in arrears.

The District Officers took a serious view of the situation, and threatened that if there was a repetition they would have to proceed in a summary manner and effect the compulsory sale of the Company's tea-boxes "to raise the means to pay the people," which were apparently the only realisable asset on the estate.

That is what is recorded in the Minutes, but it is difficult to understand who there was in 1848-1849 to buy tea-boxes, for so far as is known there were no other tea gardens established at that date.

Recruiting of more labour must have been stopped during the period of financial stringency, and when their pay was so much in arrears, many labourers left the Company's employ though they remained in the province. George Williamson, Junior, when he took over from Stephen Mornay, revealed that, during the three years 1850-1852, the available labour on the Southern Division alone had decreased by 327 workers, and it was his endeavour to try and get back some of these people who had left but were still in the neighbourhood of the Company's gardens.

In 1861, when the I.G.S.N. Co. Ltd. had established their regular steamer services to Assam, there is mention of batches of coolies being sent up in charge of guards to prevent their desertion, with cooks to provide meals for them and native doctors supplied by Government to attend to their welfare.

In 1864 the Industry came into competition with Government for labour. When it could not get its requirements locally, Government did not import labour from outside the province, for it did not want a permanent labour force. All they required was actually labour for their public works, which were executed chiefly in the cold-weather months. They were able, therefore, to offer higher rates, amounting at that time to about Rs.7 a month against Rs.4 to Rs.5 a month which the Assam Company was paying.

This competition was regarded by the planters with disfavour, but apart from the cost of importing from elsewhere a proportion of a garden's permanent labour force, one might wonder if there was so much in the higher wages offered by Government. The price of rice landed at
Dikhoo Mukh was Rs.2.4 a maund, which had to be sold to a garden's labour force at Rs.1 a maund, which Government did not do.

It is to be remembered that this was about the middle of a period of wild speculation and expansion of tea planting and there was cut-throat competition amongst planters themselves for labour. This applied particularly to native tea makers, for, with so much more tea coming into bearing, they were an absolute necessity and other concerns were offering Rs.7 a month and over for such men, which the Assam Company had trained, and to whom it was paying then only Rs.5 a month.
CHAPTER XXXIV

PIONEER OFFICIALS AND OTHERS

The following account of some of the Government officials and others who were connected intimately with the discovery of the tea plant in India, but who were not associated with the Assam Company as a commercial undertaking, deserve not only just recognition of their services but a tribute of appreciation for all that they did, restricted as their assistance was at times by inflexible Government regulations.

The Right Honourable Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, son of the 3rd Duke of Portland, was Governor of Madras from 1803 to 1807. In 1828 he was appointed Governor of Bengal at Fort William, Calcutta, and in 1833 Governor-General of India.

Apart from his epoch-making formation of the Tea Committee in 1834, it was his instruction to Captain Jenkins in 1832 to proceed to Sadiya to report on the resources of the country that gave Jenkins the knowledge which enabled him to confirm subsequently what others discovered or reported to him.

Lord Bentinck’s notable Minute dated 24th January 1834, to the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company in London, shows his personal interest when he wrote, in justification of the experiment to cultivate tea:

As a practical agriculturist, I am inclined to think that few of the foreign herbs and plants, that are become not only naturalised, but also the mainstay of our agriculture, &d not afford in the first instance a greater promise of successful experiment.

He then went on to say:

My own idea is, that an intelligent agent should be selected who should go down to Penang and Singapore, and in conjunction with the Authorities there, and the most intelligent of the Chinese Agents, should concert measures for obtaining the genuine plant, and the actual cultivators. . . .

The East India Company’s settlements in Malacca and Singapore were included in the jurisdiction of the Governor of Bengal, and Lord Bentinck visited those places in 1829. He thus had first-hand knowledge of tea growing as practised in Penang. Tea in Penang is referred to in Chapter II “Discovery of the Tea Plant” (p. 13).
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

Lord Bentinck has to be given the credit for suggesting an inland river steamer service.

It was Lord Bentinck who purchased from the Raja of Sikkim the site on which Darjeeling now stands. Lord Bentinck founded the Medical College, Calcutta, in 1834, the buildings of which were erected the following year. Lady Bentinck laid the foundation-stone of St. Thomas Church (Free School Street), Calcutta, in 1830, which edifice was completed the following year and consecrated by Bishop Wilson in 1833.

The P. & O. Steamship Company, which was founded in 1837, recognised Lord Bentinck's services to the opening of steam communications with India by naming, in 1843, one of their steamers the Bentinck which was a wooden-hull paddle-steamer of 1974 tons with engines of 520 i.h.p.

Brodie, Lieutenant, was a District Official under Captain F. Jenkins. He is mentioned first in a letter from Jenkins to Dr. Wallich dated 25th January 1836, in which he is designated Ensign Brodie.

In 1839-1840 Brodie was Chief Officer of the Nazira or Sibsagar District, and in this capacity was largely the authority through whom J. W. Masters had to negotiate the Company's applications for grants of land. In his above capacity he would seem to have had jurisdiction also over the granting of land further east, at Hookunjurie and Namsang.

Bruce, Major Robert, elder brother of C. A. Bruce. In different accounts of his connection with the discovery of the tea plant, he is described variously as Mr. or Major.

Having regard to the fact that until after 1833 no British or other European subject was allowed into India except with the approval of the East India Company, he could not have got into the country if it had not been for his service as Major in the Bengal Artillery, and it is recorded that he was in receipt of a pension from Government for having been formerly in the Mahratta Army.

With this background, or explanation, for his presence in Assam, it is possible to account for his subsequent entanglement in the military operations of the native rulers endeavouring to wrest the province from the Burmese invaders, and why, with his military experience, he appeared at the head of one of these parties.

As an individual, Robert Bruce is recorded as having been for a long time resident at Jogigopha—to-day merely a fishing-village on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, west of the mouth of the Manas River and opposite Goalpara. In the time of Robert Bruce it was a trading centre of considerable importance, and Bruce had a factory there.
Another trading centre was situated at a place called Assam Choky, where the Agent of the Assam Government resided and realised the custom duties on exports and imports of goods between Bengal and Assam. The old boundary of Assam came into a point between Jogigopha and Assam Choky.

The town of Goalpara, on the opposite bank of the Brahmaputra, together with what is now the district of Goalpara on the north bank were then in Bengal, so that at Jogigopha Bruce was in a good position to carry on his trade in Bengal while he made his excursions into Assam.

The old-time importance of Jogigopha can be gathered from the following description taken from S. K. Bhuyan’s History:

Goalpara on the South Bank, and Jogigopha and Rangamati on the North, were the three Eastern outposts of Bengal, from where its merchants conducted their trade with Assam. Goalpara and Jogigopha were populous towns and had streets of shops. There was a numerous Christian population at both places consisting mainly of Topazes, of questionable character.

A note explains that Topazes were dark-skinned or half-caste claimants to Portuguese descent.

Robert Bruce would seem to have got himself thoroughly embroiled in several factions striving for power in Assam, no doubt solely with an eye to trade, without any patriotic support for any particular party. It was probably his participation in these intrigues that induced him at one time to describe himself as a native of India. It was in connection with Bruce’s endeavour to espouse the cause of Brajanath, who was the contender from Cooch Behar for the throne of Assam, that it is possible to glean some idea of these intrigues. In 1814 Brajanath appeared before David Scott and was taken into custody. Robert Bruce, as one of his principal adherents, was arrested also, but was granted bail. The incident is recorded in S. K. Bhuyan’s History:

Bruce admitted having given to Brajanath a few Sirkars and other people and also some money in support of himself and his followers, as it was the custom of merchants to relieve the wants of emigrants of rank who might be recalled to power in their country.

Bruce was let off with a warning as well as Brajanath, whose subsequent conduct had been found to be satisfactory.

During the Burmese occupation of Assam, the rival Ahom rulers, Chandrakant and Purandah Singh, were contending amongst themselves to oust the Burmese and regain what they regarded as their own kingdoms of Assam.

Robert Bruce sided with Purandah Singh, and with the East India Company’s permission obtained for him fire-arms and ammunition from
Calcutta. Purandah Singh, with Bruce in charge of his army, advanced from the Dooars in May 1821 against Chandrakant, but was defeated, and Bruce was taken prisoner.

Bruce was released, however, on agreeing to take service with Chandrakant, and for the latter he obtained 300 muskets and 9 maunds of ammunition from Calcutta. In 1822 Chandrakant inflicted several defeats on the Burmese and reoccupied Gauhati for a time.

In 1823 Robert Bruce went to Gurgaon, Rungpur and Sibsagar for purposes of trade. He was reputed to be the first British merchant to penetrate so far beyond what was then the limits of British territory on the North-East Frontier. It was here that he first learned of the existence of wild tea from a Singpho chief, Bessagaum. It was the outcome of the arrangement that Robert Bruce made then for this Chief to produce specimens of this alleged tea that they were shown the following year, 1824, to his brother, C. A. Bruce, when the latter was in charge of a division of gunboats at Sadiya. Some of these specimens were sent to David Scott, then the Agent to the Governor-General, and by him to the Botanical Gardens, Calcutta, for identification. They were pronounced, however (presumably by Dr. N. Wallich), to be the same family, but not the species from which the Chinese manufactured tea.

No further progress was made in the matter until 1832 (see p. 12 et seq).

As often happens, service abroad in a particular country follows from father to son, or in the same family, and it seems possible that this was the case particularly with the Bruce family.

In the account given about Charles Alexander Bruce in the chapter on "Staff, etc.," there is a record of the known members of that family who were in the employ, or connected with the Assam Company, but there is the fact that a C. A. Bruce was at one time Commissioner to Cooch Behar in 1793. Whether this was the father or a relation of the Bruces with which this History deals has not been ascertained.

This C. A. Bruce must have died or retired by 1813, for in that year Norman McLeod was Commissioner to Cooch Behar.

In the History of the Forehaut Company there is recorded the appointment in London of one, John Bruce, to be the historiographer of the East India Company. It is said that his appeal for assistance from India in compiling this work met with scant response, although the Company itself, in 1797, gave instructions on the point to their various Agents or factories all over the East.

This lack of co-operation from outside induced John to give up his work, but he was discouraged further by the death in 1796 of his brother Colonel Robert Bruce of the Bengal Artillery, who had given him such zealous assistance.
There was a William Bruce, said to have resided many years in Persia, who in 1829 signed the Agricultural and Horticultural Society's regulations regarding their gardens in Calcutta; and there was a J. G. Bruce who was Deputy Collector, Cawnpore, in December 1847.

HANNAY, Captain SIMON FRASER, of the 40th Regiment of Native Infantry and Commandant of the Assam Light Infantry Battalion.

In regard to the discovery of the tea plant, it was believed at one time that the wild tea discovered in Assam would be found to extend through Burma and probably to China. Dr. William Griffiths, as one of the scientists sent to Assam in 1837 to follow up the Tea Committee, in an endeavour to substantiate or disprove this theory, met Captain Hannay at Namroop with the intention of proceeding over the Burmese border to Ava, which could be done only under the protection of Captain Hannay’s military escort. This information is obtained from a letter dated 2nd March 1837 written by Dr. Griffiths from the “Foot of Pakoye” (the Patkoi Hills). There is no record of the conclusions come to as a result of this venture into what must have been unknown country except to Captain Hannay.

Captain Hannay went out to Assam about 1835-1836. He was a member of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India and was a botanist of repute, for he wrote Observations on the Quality of the principal Timber Trees growing in the vicinity of Jaipore, Upper Assam. In 1848 he is referred to as Major and in 1855 as Lt.-Colonel.

As Col. Hannay he is famous as a pioneer of tea. He was an owner of tea gardens after retiring from Government service. He was the first to bring to notice the beneficial effects on the tea plant of the sau tree (Albizia stipulata), though it was not till years afterwards that Sir James Buckingham demonstrated practically the virtues of this tree as shade for growing tea.

JENKINS, Captain FRANCIS, promoted Major, Lt.-Colonel in 1831 and eventually General. Agent to the Governor General on the North-East Frontier.

Of all officials in Assam in the early days, there is none to whom a greater debt is due by the Industry and the Assam Company than to Captain Jenkins, as he was then, for all the assistance he gave, not only during the original experiments in tea culture but in subsequent years in land settlement to the Tea Industry and in its development.

Captain Jenkins succeeded Mr. T. C. Robertson in 1834 as Agent to the Governor-General. Jenkins was interested particularly in botany and kindred matters relating to the resources of the country under his charge.
He submitted several papers to the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Calcutta, of which Society he was elected a member in 1828.

In 1832 he was sent by Lord William Bentinck to Sadiya to report on the resources of the country, and it can be said that his close connection with tea commenced from that date. He guided the Tea Committee in their search for the tea plant in 1834, and was closely in touch with the deputation of scientists that followed them in 1835-1836.

Appreciation of his and other officers' services to the Assam Company was expressed at the half-yearly General Meeting in Calcutta on 7th March 1840, when Mr. J. Lattey proposed and Mr. Henry Burkinyoung seconded, "that the thanks of the Meeting are due to Capt. Jenkins and his assistants, Capt. Vetch and Capt. Brodie and also to Major Davidson, for the warm interest they have taken in the prosperity of this Association."

Scott, David, was appointed in 1823 the first Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East Frontier. Some account of his valuable services to the Province is mentioned in the first chapter dealing with "Assam." He died in 1831.

It is idle perhaps to speculate now what would have been the effect on the development of tea in North-East India if the plants sent by Scott to the Botanical Gardens, Calcutta, in 1824 had been correctly identified. These were, in fact, the true tea plants, but the botanists classified them as the same family but not the species from which China tea was made.

Wallich, Dr. Nathaniel (1787-1854), had the most far-reaching influence on the discovery of the tea plant in India and its development subsequently for the first few years.

His antecedents would seem to be obscure; according to the Rev. W. K. Firminger's book, Thacker's Guide to Calcutta, Wallich was Nathan Wolff, a Jew who came to Bengal as a surgeon in the service of the Danish East India Company in 1806. It was common practice in those days to start a career at an early age, and though it is not known what precise qualifications were required for a surgeon in the East, it does seem remarkable that Wallich attained that status at the age of 10. In the Agricultural and Horticultural Society's list of members printed in 1853 he is described as N. Wallich, Esq., M.D., F.R.S., F.L.S. London. He was elected a member of the Society in 1820. In George Watt's Tea and the Tea Plant it is mentioned that Wallich collected a form of tea plant in Penang in 1822 and again in 1829. Quoting again from Firminger's Guide in reference to the Calcutta Botanic Gardens under the Superintendence of Wallich, "... Hooker in 1848 regretted that the garden had fallen into the hands of a learned Botanist but a rather poor landscape gardener."

Wallich was appointed by Lord Bentinck to be a member of his Tea
Committee on its inception in 1834. When the Secretary of the Committee, Mr. G. J. Gordon, was sent to China to collect tea plants, seeds, etc., Wallich took over the Secretaryship in addition to being a member of the Committee, and in addition also to his official appointment as Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanical Gardens. Gordon resigned the Secretaryship in 1836 and Wallich was appointed in his place and continued in that capacity until the Tea Committee ceased to operate after the Assam Company took over Government's tea areas. During this time all correspondence from the Committee addressed to Government and officials in Assam was written from the Botanic Gardens, but it is not known where the meetings were held.

As botanist, Wallich headed the scientific deputation to Assam to confirm the discovery of the tea plant and to gather other scientific data. Some further account of Dr. Wallich's work will be found in the chapters dealing with "Discovery of the Tea Plant," "Scientific Deputation to Assam," "The China Plant and its introduction into India,"

The Tea Industry owes much to Dr. Wallich, though there are authorities who cast reflections on his reputation for his failure to identify correctly the true tea plant from specimens sent to him some years earlier than 1834, and for his insistence, in which he was backed by Dr. W. Griffiths, that the Industry should develop the imported China plant in preference to the indigenous plant found in Assam, a decision which time was to show was so wrong.

White, Major A., was stationed at Jorhat in 1835, for it was on 24th December of that year that he reported to Dr. N. Wallich, who was on deputation to Assam as scientist for the Tea Committee, that he had found the tea plant at a place called Gabroo Purbut, which appears to be the first mention of that place. Major White was transferred as Political Agent to Upper Assam and was stationed at Sadiya. In the Kamti Rising of 1839 Major White was murdered and nearly the whole of the garrison at Sadiya wiped out. There is a memorial tablet to him in the present church at Dibrugarh.
CHAPTER XXXV

BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

In recording the names of the men who administered the Company, particularly in the formative years of its existence, it is disappointing that there is little known personally of many of those who must have carried most weight in the deliberations of the Boards.

What is known has been set down in separate accounts of the Directors in London and Calcutta (until the latter Board was finally dissolved in 1866, and replaced by Agents in Calcutta). These detailed lists are now kept at the Offices of the Company, 5 Laurence Pountney Hill, London, E.C. 4, and can be seen if desired by Stockholders and relatives or descendants, by appointment, on application to the Secretary.

The Directors' services for many years were gratuitous, or their fees were of a very nominal amount. In 1860 the fees were increased to £400 a year, divided equally amongst them. It was not until the 1890's that they were raised again to £1,000, the Chairman receiving £400, the Deputy Chairman £200, and the rest divided.

In times of good trading the shareholders, in General Meeting, granted the Directors sums in acknowledgement of their services. £1,400 was so voted to them in 1864, and £1,000 in 1877.

In 1903, when trading was not good, the Directors cut their fees by £400, making the sum divisible £1,000, which was apportioned £300 to the Chairman, £230 to the Deputy Chairman and the balance amongst the other three Directors. In 1907 the full fees of £1,400 were reinstated, and it was agreed that these fees should be paid in future free of Income Tax.

Subsequent variations in the Directors' remuneration are referred to in other chapters dealing with those years when alterations were made.

LONDON DIRECTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Date of Retirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1839 tSir George Gerard de Hochepied Larpent (Chairman of Provisional Committee and first Chairman of Directors. Knighted 1841.)</td>
<td>Resigned 1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839 tSir William Baynes, Bt. (First Deputy Chairman.)</td>
<td>Resigned 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839 tRichard Twining</td>
<td>Resigned 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Election</td>
<td>Date of Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†Alexander Rogers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Elected to Calcutta Board, until 1846, when he resigned.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Peter Auber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Miles Stringer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Henry Gouger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†John Small</td>
<td>Died 1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†Thomas Weeding</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1839</td>
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<tr>
<td>†Foster Reynolds</td>
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<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1839</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Thomas Masterman</td>
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<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Edward Cockburn Ravenshaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned 1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†Francis Fox</td>
<td>Died 1855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Died 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†John Alliston</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Died 1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†John Travers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†William Cracroft</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All the above comprised the first Provisional Committee. Those with a * did not continue as Directors of the Board elected in 1840.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Date of Retirement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Died 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†William Manning, Capt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned 1847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†Ross Donelly Mangles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Re-elected 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†William R. Robinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>†Andrew Henderson</td>
<td>Disqualified 1865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Was a Director on the Calcutta Board in 1841. Re-elected to London Board 1842.)

† First original Directors

<table>
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<th>Date of Election</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Resigned 1852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Harvey Astell</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Died 1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Teed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Died 1873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Prinsep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Was original member of Calcutta Committee 1839 and subsequently Chairman, Calcutta Board.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Disqualified 1855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir William Pym, K.C.H.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Died 1868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Warren</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Resigned 1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Brightman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Resigned 1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Henry Barkley Henderson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Was a Director and Auditor on Calcutta Board 1841-1843.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Resigned 1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Parkinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Resigned 1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Deans Campbell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Was a Director on Calcutta Board from 1843.)</td>
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</tbody>
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## A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Date of Retirement</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Retired 1873</td>
<td>Henry Morris Kemshhead</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Died 1878</td>
<td>Sir William Tite, C.B., M.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Resigned 1862</td>
<td>Henry Burkinyoung (Director on Calcutta Board 1841-1853, Managing Director from 1845.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Resigned 1866</td>
<td>John Farley Leith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Retired 1876</td>
<td>Ross Donelly Mangles (Re-elected—a Director previously, 1840-1847.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Retired 1887</td>
<td>Walter Prideaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Died 1872</td>
<td>Sir Henry Byng Harington, K.C.S.I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Died 1889</td>
<td>George Turnbull (Was a Calcutta Director 1860-1862.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Resigned 1880</td>
<td>William Maitland (Was a Director on Calcutta Board from 1863-1864.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Died 1883</td>
<td>Dr. Alexander Beattie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Died 1902</td>
<td>Maj.-Gen. James Pattle Beadle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Died 1888</td>
<td>Dr. George Paton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Resigned 1905</td>
<td>Albert B. Fisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Died 1887</td>
<td>Augustin Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Died 1884</td>
<td>C. Beckett Denison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Died 1902</td>
<td>Joseph Graham, Q.C. (Was a Calcutta Director 1862-1864.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Died 1900</td>
<td>Henry William Wimshurst (Managing Director and Secretary.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Died 1889</td>
<td>William Duncan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Died 1910</td>
<td>Frederick Tendron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Died 1828</td>
<td>James Sortain Hulbert (Managing Director and Secretary.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Died 1933</td>
<td>Arthur H. Graham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Died 1932</td>
<td>Arthur R. Prideaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Died 1933</td>
<td>James Farquharson Remnant, M.P. (Later Lord Remnant.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Died 1936</td>
<td>Edward A. Goulding (Later Lord Wargrave.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Died 1948</td>
<td>Edgar E. Chalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Died 1938</td>
<td>John Mackie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Died 1943</td>
<td>Peter Farquharson Remnant (Chairman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Died 1943</td>
<td>Arthur C. S. Holmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Retired 1955</td>
<td>Col. Thomas W. Pragnell, C.B.E., D.S.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Retired 1954</td>
<td>Edward M. Murray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Died 1955</td>
<td>John W. McKay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Died 1955</td>
<td>C. G. H. Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Retired 1955</td>
<td>L. H. Gilbert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

### CALCUTTA DIRECTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Date of Retirement</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>R. H. Cockerill (First Chairman of Provisional Committee.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Theodore Dickens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>James Colquhoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>William Richard Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Major Robert Becher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>John Becher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Re-elected</td>
<td>George F. Remfrey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the above comprised the first Provisional Committee, those with a * did not continue as Directors of the Board elected in 1840.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Date of Retirement</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Prosson Comar Tagore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>James Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>William Prinsep (Elected to London Board.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Albert John de Hochepied Larpent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Henry Holyroyd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Henry Chapman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>James Cullen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Henry Augustus Woolaston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Capt. Andrew Henderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>(Was originally a London Director and was re-elected to that Board in 1842.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Alexander D. McLeod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Henry Burkinyoung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Major Henry Barkley Henderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Robert John Lattey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>James J. Mackenzie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>William Storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>John Deans Campbell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>(Elected to London Board 1845.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>George F. Remfrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Alexander Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>John Storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>Samuel Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>W. J. Fergusson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
<td>John Jenkins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

Date of Election  Date of Retirement
1848 Theodore Dickens  Resigned 1850
1848 Donald Campbell Mackey  Resigned 1862
1849 Edward Tombs  Resigned 1851
1849 Capt. W. Boothby  Disqualified 1851
1850 Samuel Smith  Disqualified 1855
1851 William Roberts
(Managing Director 1853-1858.)
1852 J. H. Allen  Resigned 1861
1852 William John Judge
1853 C. Durrshmidt  Resigned 1855
1854 John Alfred Burkinyoung  Resigned 1857
1855 Cecil Huttman  Resigned 1860
1855 W. Spink  Disqualified 1863
1857 C. B. Stewart  Disqualified 1863
1858 A. T. T. Peterson  Resigned 1863
1859 Henry de Mornay
(Managing Director 1859-1862.)
1859 H. W. Abbott  Disqualified 1860
1860 Thomas Emerson Carter
1860 George Turnbull
(Elected to London Board 1869.)
1861 G. M. Blacker  Resigned 1862
1862 Joseph Graham  Retired 1864
1863 F. C. Sandes  Resigned 1863
1863 William Maitland
(Elected to London Board 1872.)
1863 Captain W. Smith  Retired 1864
1864 J. M. Grob  Resigned 1864
1864 James Heckle  Retired 1864
1864 Captain T. Williams

SECRETARIES IN LONDON

Walter Prideaux  1839-1866  Henry de Rusett 1906-1928
Henry William Wimshurst 1866-1900  Bertie Reeve 1928-1947
James Sortain Hulbert  1900-1906  Gerald Houldey 1947-
(Elected a Director 1955)

SECRETARIES IN CALCUTTA

Wm. Prinsep (Honorary)  1839  Henry de Mornay 1848-1859
F. R. Hampton  1840-1841  T. E. Carter  1859-1860
R. H. Buckland  1841-1844  R. S. Staunton  1860-1867
Alexander Roger (Honorary)  1844-1848

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The first Meeting of the Provisional Committee in London was held at 6 Great Winchester Street, and it was in March 1839 that it was resolved to hire rooms in this central position. This was only temporary accommodation, for in May 1839 the Secretary was authorised to take rooms at 57 Old Bond Street, and here they remained until 1845, when the landlord, a Mr. Gordon, required the rooms they occupied, and the Secretary was told to find another suitable office in the neighbourhood. The office was moved to 30 Great Winchester Street, but the only record of this is found in the Board Minute of 3rd April 1846: “Paid Lopaz for fixtures in new office at 30 Great Winchester Street.”

At this address the Company remained for the next seventeen years, when in the Board’s Proceedings of 14th December 1863, it is recorded that the Company had secured new offices at 22 Great St. Helens, comprising a large Board Room and three rooms for business, on a lease for seven years at £320 a year.

At the expiry of this lease, the Company had to look for new offices again. From Christmas 1870, it took up its abode in the first floor of 2 East India Avenue, at a yearly rental of £250.

Here it remained apparently for fifteen years, until 1885, when it took its first lease of seven years of its present offices at Suffolk House, 5 Laurence Pountney Hill.

To commence with, the Company’s own offices were never large enough to take the Annual General Meetings, at which anything from forty to seventy shareholders would be present. These Annual Meetings were held until 1870 at the London Tavern, Bishopsgate. This was the famous place where the Directors of the old East India Company, until 1834, used to hold their lavish banquets at the Company’s expense.

Starting with the Annual General Meeting of 30th June 1871, the place for these Meetings was changed to the Cannon Street Terminus Hotel, until, with the more commodious office accommodation at 5 Laurence Pountney Hill, it was able to hold the Meetings there.

When the Calcutta Provisional Committee was set up, their first office was at 3 Somerset Place, but this can have been only for a very short time. It was an office cum residence for the Secretary, and was not large enough for the General Meeting of 11th August 1841, which was held at 15 Hastings Street. The office was then removed to what is described as “The Bonded Warehouse,” but this was only until 1844. It was obviously a more commodious place, for the General Meeting of 1842 was held there. The next premises were only temporary. The Company rented from
McKillop, Stewart & Company, 3 Old Post Office Street, on a month-to-month basis, paying a rent of only Rs.110 monthly.

This arrangement was concluded in 1845, when the Company took a two and a half years’ lease of 1 Barettos Lane. This remained the Company’s office for several years. In 1846, before the first lease ran out, there is a record of it being renewed for a further three years at a rental of Rs.140 a month.

These were the premises on which, or in the godowns attached, all the Company’s teas were refired, resorted and packed in that unsuccessful attempt that they once made to finish off the manufacture in Calcutta.

Anyone who has been in Calcutta until a few years ago will have seen in the back streets of the business quarters there those old two-storied buildings of probably sun-dried brick walls, well plastered, with teakwood beams and wooden floors upstairs with flat roofs of beaten soorkie, with sometimes only rammed-earth floors on the ground floor, long overdue for demolition. It would seem that over a hundred years ago they were not then in their prime, for there is recorded in a Minute of 1849 that as a result of complaint to the landlord it was agreed that the landlord should substitute with a commodious pukah portico the then rickety thatched structure which was so liable to catch fire, and for this amenity the Company had to pay an extra Rs.10 a month rent, because the landlord’s estate was in Chancery, and they were unable to incur any expense.

At 1 Barretos Lane the Company’s office remained until 1861, when it removed to 4 Chowringhee Road which it leased from Mackintosh, Burn & Company. Here it remained until the Calcutta office was dissolved in 1867 and Schoene, Kilburn & Company Limited became the Company’s Agents.

**BANKERS**

The Company’s “Deed of Settlement,” dated 31st January 1840, provided that under Article 7, “The first Bankers shall be Messrs. Williams Deacon & Company of Birch Lane, London,” and they have been the Company’s Bankers ever since.

Having regard to the age of City Guilds and Corporations, it is nothing unusual for old-established Banks to have accounts for continuous periods of over 114 years, but it is unique for a Bank to have a Company’s Account dealing solely with India for such a period.

Williams Deacon’s Bank Limited, was founded in 1771 as Raymond Williams, Vere, Lowe & Fletcher. It changed its name as various partners came and went, though always with “Williams Deacon’s” as the two first names from 1828 onwards. Then, in 1800, the Manchester and Salford Banking Company, a Joint Stock Bank established in 1836, for whom Williams Deacon & Company had been London Agents since its begin-
BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

ning, bought the business of William Deacon’s, and the combined institution known at first as Williams Deacon’s & Manchester & Salford Bank Limited, changed its name in 1901 to Williams Deacon’s Bank Limited.

Williams Deacon’s & Company must have taken something of a risk when they granted the Company a loan of £7,000 in the latter part of the 1840’s when the Company was in such deep waters financially. There were the slump years of 1865 and 1867, when the Company made trading losses and when the Bank may have looked askance at the position, but the Assam Company has been able always to be independent of outside finance, though present circumstances as they effect the very high cost of production and the delayed realisation of profits have caused a quite different outlook on tea garden finance.

In Calcutta, the Company’s banking was not so clear cut, one might say they were undefined, for the Banks were recipients only of remittances from London, and in the early years their almost immediate disbursement to meet expenditure on the gardens which had been incurred previously. One has only to remember that in some years even the payment of wages to labour, low as they were, were months behind due date.

The Company’s Account in Calcutta was opened originally with the Union Bank in 1839. A Mr. James Young, who was a member of the Provisional Committee, was at that time Secretary of the Union Bank, and he resigned “... because of his heavy duties as the Secretary of the Union Bank.”

There is a Minute of the Calcutta Board dated 3rd January 1848 in which the suggestion is made that the Company should close its account with the Union Bank, “... because of the anomalous and uncertain position of that Institution.” There is no further explanation of what this anomalous position was, but in any case the Company’s balance at the Bank amounted at that time to only Rs.3, and pending presumably a further remittance from London, this was the amount with which they opened their account with the Bank of Bengal. Up to the time of dissolution of the Calcutta Board in 1865-1866, nothing further is recorded regarding the Company’s Banking arrangements in Calcutta.
CHAPTER XXXVI

THE COMPANY'S STATISTICS

The essential statistics showing the results of the Company’s early trading, where these are available from the records, are given in the statement that follows.

For the first 30 years there has been shown in a separate column the year in which the trading result was declared. This is necessary because the profit or loss was announced on the trading of two or three years earlier. After 1870 the procedure becomes normal, in that the date of the Directors’ Report is that following the year in which the trading result was achieved.

In regard to the Company’s areas of grants and the acreage under tea cultivation, no reliance can be placed on the figures quoted until about 1892. The figures, where they are given, had been taken from the only authoritative source available—the Superintendent’s advices or from those in the Directors’ Annual Reports. How unreliable these were, however, can be gathered from the statement in the Directors’ Report of 1866:

Your Directors are unable to report that any complete and satisfactory measurements have been made of the Gardens opened out and under cultivation; they are not satisfied with the Surveyor’s work, and the plans forwarded are for the most part boundary surveys without details. . . .

In some of the earlier Reports it is stated that tea was considered to be in “bearing” the second year from planting. It is probable, however, that this refers to tea trees found on site which were cut down and leaf was taken in the second year from the new growth that broke out from the stumps. Or it may have been two- or three-year-old seedlings found in the jungle, which were planted out and plucked in the second year. Another possible source of inaccuracy in areas is the translation into acres of the old Assam land measure, mainly the poorah, which was equivalent to 1½ acres.

The average price realised in the early years must be treated with caution. No figures can be given for the years 1842 to 1846, because the Accounts for these years quote realisations for whatever tea was disposed of in that year, and this was sometimes for parts of three seasons’ crops; and then again, the price quoted in the Report is sometimes nett—that is, after deducting freight from India, insurance, dock charges, brokerage, etc.

It is not until in the Directors’ Report of 1855 that there is given a Profit and Loss Account, and in that year is shown the profit made in 1853. Previously, the published accounts gave a Financial Statement of the Company’s expenditure from the beginning in 1839 to date.
### Company Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acreage of Grants</th>
<th>Acreage under Tea</th>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Crop per acre in Bearing</th>
<th>Average Price</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Year in which Trading Result is Declared</th>
<th>Dividend</th>
<th>Tea Seed Realisations included in Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bearing</td>
<td>Non-Bearing</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>lb.</td>
<td>s. d.</td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>33,365</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>1,092</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>10,212</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>1,266</td>
<td>2,311</td>
<td>29,267</td>
<td>3 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td></td>
<td>87,705</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>181,614</td>
<td>2 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td></td>
<td>31,398</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>194,800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td></td>
<td>136,267</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>210,655</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td></td>
<td>160,334</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>241,817</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td></td>
<td>251,633</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1852</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1847</td>
<td></td>
<td>253,354</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1853</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
<td>271,427</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1854</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td></td>
<td>366,687</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1855</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Crop from Southern Division only—quantity from Northern and Eastern Divisions not available.
2. Northern and Eastern Divisions closed.
3. Some gardens of the Northern and Eastern Divisions reopened.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in which</th>
<th>Tea Seed</th>
<th>Average Price</th>
<th>Crop per Acre in Bearing</th>
<th>Acreage under Tea</th>
<th>Acreage of Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re realised in Profit</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>s. d.</td>
<td>lb.</td>
<td>Non-Bearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>18,600</td>
<td>11s 8d</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>478.238</td>
<td>3,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>10s 8d</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>983.049</td>
<td>3,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>13,008</td>
<td>12s 8d</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>707.112</td>
<td>3,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>12,790</td>
<td>12s 11d</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>765.998</td>
<td>4,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>18,612</td>
<td>11s 11d</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>810.686</td>
<td>4,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>18,311</td>
<td>11s 8d</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>880.154</td>
<td>4,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>21,530</td>
<td>14s 0d</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>1,231.36</td>
<td>4,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>21,263</td>
<td>10s 8d</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1,043.016</td>
<td>5,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>24,919</td>
<td>11s 0d</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1,165.052</td>
<td>5,477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 
1. Acreage opened out in Cachar. 
2. Crop produced in Cachar. 
3. Crop produced in Assam. 
4. Bonus of £1 per share from Sale of Cachar Gardens for £600,000. 

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in which Trading Results Declared</th>
<th>Dividend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>1,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>1,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>1,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>1,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>2,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>3,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>7,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>9,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>10,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>13,177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Price</th>
<th>Crop per Acre in Bearing</th>
<th>Average under Tea</th>
<th>Non-Bearing</th>
<th>Bearing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td>lb.</td>
<td>lb.</td>
<td>lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>1 s. 7 d.</td>
<td>942,877</td>
<td>942,877</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 s. 7 d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
<td>631,211</td>
<td>631,211</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>1 s. 8 d.</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
<td>1,331,071</td>
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*Profit insufficient to meet 10 per cent. interim dividend—balance required taken from Reserve.
### COMPANY STATISTICS

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acreage of Grants</th>
<th>Acreage under Tea</th>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Average Price</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Dividend</th>
<th>Tea Seed Realisations included in Profit</th>
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*Separate income from sale of Tea Seed is henceforth not given—such receipts are deducted from general garden expenditure.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acreage of Grants</th>
<th>Acreage under Tea</th>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Crop per Acre in Bearing</th>
<th>Acreage Price</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Dividend</th>
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<tr>
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<td>lb.</td>
<td>d.</td>
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(11) Delivered in India.
(12) This was the Trading Loss, but there was an Estimated amount recoverable in respect of Excess Profits Duty, and Income Tax amounting to £78,000, which allowed for a dividend to be paid.
(13) The dividend was paid, less Income Tax at 5s. 3d.—the bonus was paid free of tax.
(14) On increased Capital of £1,000,000.
## COMPANY STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acreage of Grants</th>
<th>Acreage under Tea</th>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Crop per Acre in Bearing</th>
<th>Average Price</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Dividend</th>
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**Average under Tea**
- 1931: 11,678 lb.
- 1932: 11,549 lb.
- 1933: 11,786 lb.
- 1934: 11,634 lb.
- 1935: 10,756 lb.
- 1936: 10,767 lb.
- 1937: 10,857 lb.
- 1938: 11,004 lb.
- 1939: 10,783 lb.
- 1940: 10,973 lb.
- 1941: 10,997 lb.
- 1942: 10,843 lb.
- 1943: 11,000 lb.
- 1944: 11,123 lb.
- 1945: 11,027 lb.
- 1946: 11,237 lb.
- 1947: 11,298 lb.
- 1948: 11,170 lb.
- 1949: 11,123 lb.
- 1950: 11,073 lb.
- 1951: 10,793 lb.
- 1952: 10,697 lb.
- 1953: 10,618 lb.
- 1954: 10,730 lb.

**Profit**
- 1931: £8,703
- 1932: £5,773
- 1933: £83,470
- 1934: £72,363
- 1935: £73,667
- 1936: £78,428
- 1937: £120,464
- 1938: £94,691
- 1939: £129,972
- 1940: £83,564
- 1941: £101,008
- 1942: £102,492
- 1943: £53,536
- 1944: £70,536
- 1945: £85,618
- 1946: £273,732
- 1947: £445,422
- 1948: £323,088
- 1949: £293,311
- 1950: £529,381
- 1951: £389,970
- 1952: £190,023
- 1953: £565,199
- 1954: £1,160,554

**Dividend**
- 1931: Nil
- 1932: Nil
- 1933: £5
- 1934: £4½
- 1935: £3½ + bonus 1%
- 1936: £7
- 1937: £6
- 1938: £6½
- 1939: £5
- 1940: £5
- 1941: £6
- 1942: £7 + „ „ 5%
- 1943: £7 + „ „ 3%
- 1944: £7 + „ „ 3%
- 1945: £10 + „ „ 5%
- 1946: £10 + „ „ 3%
- 1947: £12 (1st interim 3% tax free on capital of £1,000,000)
- 1948: £12 (2nd interim 12% tax free on capital of £1,500,000)
THE COMPANY’S SHARES

The Company’s original Capital was £500,000, divided into 10,000 shares of £50 each. As part of the bargain with Government (the Honourable East India Company) to make over two-thirds of their tea barries to the Assam Company, it was necessary to show that they were people of substance by having a proportion of their proposed Capital actually subscribed.

To commence with, there were the two Boards of Directors, one in London and the other in Calcutta. It was decided to have two separate Registries for the shares, and 8,000 shares were to be offered in London and 2,000 shares in Calcutta. Shares could be transferred from one Register to another, so that people leaving India merely transferred their holding to the London Register.

It was the London Board which declared the dividend, and the same dividend was paid in Calcutta, at what was then virtually the statutory rate of Exchange of 2s. to the Rupee.

To implement the arrangement with Government, it was decided to invite the public to subscribe £12, 10s. per share as the first call. The 2,000 shares allotted to India were taken up with avidity, and in the first list of shareholders it is interesting to note that there were nine Indians with a total of 275 shares. With this successful opening, the Calcutta Board asked to be allowed more shares and were allotted another 223. In the meantime, interest had flagged, for there is a Minute in the Calcutta Board’s proceedings of 6th March 1841:

The Secretary having found no demand for Shares in the market at present, it was resolved that the individual members of committee, do use their efforts for the disposal of the unappropriated Shares, and that the aim of the Company’s objects be brought to the notice of the most influential natives.

Even this direct action by members of the Board did not bring results, and the 223 shares were returned to London.

The urgency in all this was to get in the Capital so as not to delay the grant of the Company’s Charter, but this did not effect the issue, for the Charter was not granted until 1845.

The original share certificate was issued by the Board in Calcutta under their authority as the “Bengal Branch” of the Assam Company, that is to
say, a certificate representing one out of the 2,000 shares allocated for issue to those who wished to become proprietors in India. There was nothing on the face of the certificate to indicate that the Capital of the Company was £500,000, of which this 10 lakhs or £100,000 formed only a part.

The principal interest in this certificate is the fact that it was issued in the name of Theodore Dickens, an original shareholder who became Chairman in succession to R. H. Cockerill, who was the very first Chairman in Calcutta, but who died in 1839. The three Directors who signed the certificate were John Becher, Mutty Lall Seal and George F. Remfry.

The endorsements on the reverse show that this share was amongst others transferred to John Farley Leith, who became Director on the London Board in 1862.

There does not appear to be any record as to what happened in the issue of share certificates when the Company obtained its Charter eventually in 1845, or how the Company dealt with shares transferred from India to London, though these transfers must have been a gradual process as shareholders in India retired to this country, and when the Calcutta Board was disbanded in 1865. It is known, however, that Schoene, Kilburn & Company were given authority to effect transfers of shares in India for some time after they took office as the Company’s Agents. In 1880, the year before the Capital of the Company was amended, the Balance Sheet records that there were then registered in Calcutta holders of 130 of the Company’s shares.

A dividend was paid out of Capital in 1841, but in the meantime there had been four or five further calls made in both London and Calcutta. By 1844 it was noted that an ever-increasing number of these calls remained unpaid in spite of repeated reminders.

It was plain to shareholders that the Company was in a bad way, and being unable to gauge what the future might be, many defaulted in payment of their additional calls, choosing to write off what they had already subscribed rather than send more good money after bad.

The Board took action towards the end of 1845 to declare forfeited to the Company those shares on which the fifth and sixth calls had not been paid.

The extent of these defaults can be gauged by the fact that 325 shares on the London Register were declared forfeited, and the holders of no less than 732 shares on the Calcutta Register were given another three months’ grace in which to meet the outstanding calls, plus interest at 10 per cent.

The final result was that a total of 419 shares were declared forfeited. From this date until 1880 there was shown in the Balance Sheet this item
THE COMPANY'S SHARES

of 419 forfeited shares at a valuation of £6,177, 10s. In 1881, this amount was transferred to Reserve.

There is no official record of the price of shares in these early years. It is only in retrospect in much later years that one learns from the Chairman's Speeches or from comments by shareholders at General Meetings that in 1846 the shares could by purchased in London for 2s. 6d. At the Annual General Meeting in 1888, one shareholder commented that the Company's shares were at one time purchasable in Calcutta for 6d. and in London at the same time for from 5s. to 10s.

In the 1850's, when a change for the better had taken place, in the Company's finances, the shares were quoted in Calcutta as being worth Rs.120 on the market in 1853. In 1856 they were Rs.240 rising to Rs.320, and in 1858 they stood at Rs.325. At the height of the boom, the price rose in 1862 to Rs.465, which at the then rate of exchange of 2s. to the rupee, made them nearly double their par value.

Through the courtesy of De Zoete and Gorton, it has been possible to compile a statement of price ranges of the Assam Company's shares over a period of more than ninety years, from 1857 to 1953.

Taking the par value of the shares at £20 from 1857 to 1923, although until 1887, when they became fully paid, at that figure they carried a liability for future calls of from £30 to £10 at different periods, it will be noticed that except in 1869 and 1870 their lowest quotation never fell below par. In the whole of this seventy-six years, and at the peak of the Company's successful trading, they stood in 1877 at £75 the highest, and £70 the lowest, though in 1919 a record high figure of £78\frac{1}{4} was reached for a short period, but before the end of that year they were down to £60\frac{1}{2}.

In 1923 the record high figure of £126 per share was quoted, but this was in anticipation no doubt of the shareholders receiving, on the reconstruction of the Company, £100 in £1 shares for each £20 share held.

Since then, the share quotation has followed generally the Company's trading result, reaching, for example, the low figure of 7s. 6d. in 1932 during that slump period. In the last two years, however, all tea companies' shares have fallen in value without regard to their earning capacity or to the dividends paid.

**PRICE RANGES, 1857 TO 1953**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>26 -23 (£20 pd., liab. £30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>31 -30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>31\frac{1}{4} -29\frac{3}{4}</td>
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<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>35 -34\frac{1}{4}</td>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>39\frac{1}{4} -35</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>40 -35\frac{1}{4}</td>
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<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>52\frac{1}{4} -38\frac{1}{4}</td>
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<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>1865</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>50 -47</td>
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<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>36\frac{1}{4}</td>
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<td>1868</td>
<td>21 -20</td>
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415
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>31½-13½</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>19-17</td>
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<td>1874</td>
<td>44½-38</td>
<td>1917</td>
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<td>1875</td>
<td>57-47 (£20 pd., liab. £10)</td>
<td>1918</td>
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<td>1876</td>
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<td>1886</td>
<td>48½-41</td>
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<td>1887</td>
<td>46½-39 (£20 fully paid)</td>
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<td>1888</td>
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<td>65-57</td>
<td>1940</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>62½-52</td>
<td>1941</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>61-47</td>
<td>1942</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>49½-36</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>49½-40½</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>49½-42½</td>
<td>* In 1923, 100 £1 shares were given by new Company for each £20 share in the old Company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ASSAM COMPANY.

BENGAL BRANCH

ESTABLISHED IN 1839 UPON A CAPITAL

£10,000,000

We the undersigned Directors certify that Theodore Dickens Esq. is the Registered Proprietor of ONE SHARE in this Company having paid in his First Contribution, duly acknowledged at foot hereof: And that any Transfer of Right to this Share by Endorsement, must first be registered by the Secretary who will take the Engagement of such new Proprietor to abide by all Rules and Provisions of this Company before such transfer can be admitted as valid and complete.

Contributions paid
First 20 £20.00 2nd June 1839 W H Parry
Second 25 £25.00 1st January 1840
Third 25 £25.00 1st April 1840
Fourth 50 £50.00 1st July 1840
Fifth 50 £50.00 1st October 1840

Original Share Certificate of the Assam Co.
CHAPTER XXXVIII

ADMINISTRATION IN ASSAM

SOCIAL CONDITIONS, TERMS OF SERVICE, STAFF AND PERSONALITIES

Living conditions in the ennervating climate of Assam at the time when tea was first discovered were, by present standards, rough, and it required a strong constitution to be able to stand up to the hardships entailed. Fortitude, patience and guts were essential to continue in such conditions year after year. There was no thought of leave home. It was only people in Calcutta who could give up their business for a year who could afford to take leave, and even they did spells in the East of something like ten years at a time.

In Assam, tea was the first organised commercial enterprise backed by capital from abroad and the first agriculture carried on under European supervision. One might think that those so employed were the only inhabitants in the province. There is a tendency, therefore, to overlook the representatives of the Government of India, then the East India Company, of those great men like David Scott, followed by Francis Jenkins (who were designated officially the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East Frontier) and their junior officers the Magistrates, Collectors, Civil Surgeons, etc., stationed in places which are now the towns and headquarters of the Provincial Administration.

But even before that there were the Missionaries, who were in Assam in the early 1820’s. Mr. David Scott, in spite of his arduous duties as Chief Commissioner, did much to encourage education amongst the people and a spirit of Christianity. He used to distribute copies of the New Testament, which had been translated into Assamese by Dr. Carey in 1811.

In response to representations made by Major Jenkins (David Scott’s successor), Nathan Brown and O. T. Cutter (Cutler) of the American Baptist Mission arrived at Sadiya in March 1836 to take up missionary work in Assam.

Prior to this, a branch of the Serampore Mission was established at Gauhati, and it was to this work there came William Robinson in 1863. He became known eventually as “The Historian of Assam.” When he died in 1863, he was buried in the Company’s cemetery at Nazira. It is remarkable what was accomplished by these Missionaries in their administration to the spiritual comfort of the community in Assam.

2D 417
Before the end of the 1830’s, the American Baptist Mission had established an Institution at Nowgong for 20 orphan children, who were taught to read and write and were given instruction in the principles of Christianity. At Sibsagar, the American Baptist Mission published a monthly illustrated newspaper in Assamese, and English residents collected subscriptions and erected a handsome church at that station. There was a small chapel at Tezpur, and a church was completed at Dibrugarh. A Minister of the Church of England resided permanently at Gauhati and made an annual tour of all the stations in Lower Assam.

Upper Assam was a country still in an unsettled state, liable to raids from wild tribes, and for the individual it was certainly very isolated, yet Europeans lived with their families.

Their houses were mere “bashas,” of bamboo uprights, thatched roofs and mud and ekra walls. Distances were great, and unless on business, visits from neighbours must have been rare and confined to the dry period of the cold weather, for the only means of transport was by elephant, or by boat up the small rivers when there was sufficient water.

In his explorations for tea tracts in the Muttuck and Singpho countries, C. A. Bruce wrote to Captain F. Jenkins in October 1836 reporting his arrival at Rungagora (this is the place of that name on the Dibru River), where he called upon the Raja Burra Senapatty to get the loan of elephants and some coolies to enable him to proceed to Tingri to see the tea there.

To gain information from the local inhabitants Bruce had to make himself available at all times to their inquisitive, though maybe harmless, stares: for a white man was a novelty, and in his submission to this ordeal, Bruce remarks that “... they came flocking in to see me, so much so that I seldom retired to my humble couch of paddy grass on the ground before midnight.”

Government officials in their long and tedious journeys from station to station were not restricted to the amount of baggage they took, so long as it could be carried by boat or elephant. One such official travelled with his own idea of luxury—two glass-paned windows which he had built in to the bamboo hut which formed temporarily the residence from which he dispensed his office of Magistrate and governed the country.

Wheat and barley were grown, but otherwise Europeans must have lived on the country, chiefly on rice, eggs and the eternal “Mugher” or domestic fowl, when this could not be augmented by game from the jungle. That they lived on short commons must be evident from the fact that “ship’s biscuits” were sent up to vary their diet.

In the matter of drink, man followed the established customs of his home country, by the example set by the Army on the march, and by the habits in great towns, of imbibing what seem to us in more enlightened
days the most inappropriate beverages, like port, claret, madeira, brandy and beer. It was the case in Assam of water, water everywhere, but none fit to drink!

As a contrast to the residents' frugal fare, there is the account of the Commissariat of a small Expeditionary Force sent into the Naga Hills from Nowgong in 1845. The Force was commanded by a Lieutenant, and comprised 100 men of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry, with an apothecary to look after the sick, and a Sub-Assistant Surveyor. It was this last-named officer who, at the end of each day's march, always came in exhausted. It was thought that he had got fever, but it transpired that he was very abstemious, and satisfied his thirst by drinking from every limpid stream they crossed, and his hunger by eating sweet biscuits. To effect a cure,

... he was given a pint of warm porter, a dish of hermetically-sealed soup, and a slice of ham. Subsequently, he always joined the party in a substantial lunch of cold fowl, bacon or beef, and a glass of brandy and water. In the evening we used to sympathise with each other's sufferings over a glass of grog and a cheroot.

In the difficulties and high cost of transport, a Superintendent on Rs.500 a month might be able to keep himself going on wine, but it was beyond an Assistant on Rs.50 to Rs.100 a month to satisfy his alcoholic wants. He must have had recourse to native spirits, Lao pani or rice beer. There were two main causes for dismissal—one was insubordination and the other drink. To get sacked for drink appears to have taken rather longer.

In such living conditions in a damp climate, it is no wonder that jungle fever, as they called it, and malaria (medical reports even then differentiated between these) were rife. Calling for the doctor in the rains must have meant a wait of days for him to arrive. The patients had the alternative of going to the medical officer, which often meant travelling a long distance by either boat or elephant, no light undertaking to a body in the torments of fever. Even then, when the doctor had applied his specifics for the abatement of the fever, and presuming they were successful, the facilities available to the patient for recuperation consisted almost solely of a trip on the river for a change of air.

In spite of all the disabilities of life in the jungle, domestic occurrences took place. Major Robert Bruce and C. A. Bruce had their families, for sons of the former were employed by the Assam Company. But for triumph of domestic affairs over official duties and difficulties of travel there is the account of a Government official of the Nowgong District, when on tour by river at the end of the cold weather:

Again set out on the Kullung River to visit Jummana Mukh and Jagi in a nao, or raft formed of two canoes joined together, covered with a
bamboo and grass roof, thus forming two snug little rooms. Our progress
down the Kullung River up to Kopili was slow. After twelve days’ tedious
travelling, propelling our craft with poles, or dragging it with ropes, on the
night of the 14th March 1846, we were surprised unexpectedly by the birth
of our second son. We were then only a few miles from Nowgong, and
reached home the same day, and truly happy at the event.

From these social and domestic circumstances under which life in the
budding Tea Industry was first enacted, the terms on which the staff were
engaged were equally tough.

As a policy for new recruits, the Calcutta Board believed apparently
in the adage of catching them young and breaking them in, for they
remarked:

The climate of Assam, especially in the tea tracts, is admitted to be
inimical to the health of most classes of new-comers. It may reasonably be
anticipated that as the country becomes by degrees relieved of the vast
jungles which at present oppress it in all directions, this state of insalubrity
will gradually diminish, but in the meantime, the difficulty arising from that
source admits of it being greatly palliated by inuring a number of healthy
and strong youths to the influence of the climate. The youth itself of the
boys will prove a guarantee for their preserving their health under the
judicious care, vigilance and precautions which Mr. Bruce will not fail to
bestow upon them.

To satisfy the Company’s need for Assistants, and to procure the more
urgently required labourers, one form of recruiting both was to select
European youths from other spheres of occupation who could talk the
language and engage them in the first place to recruit labour in the
province in which they worked. If they were successful in this, and more
important still successful in landing their recruited labour safely in Assam,
they were then taken on as Assistants or apprentices.

Against this urge to recruit European Assistants, a dissentient voice
arose, for in reply to a questionnaire issued by the Board as to what
would be the total cost of establishment, cultivation, etc., for the next six
years, J. W. Masters, in February 1842, suggested though with great
diffidence, the replacement of European Assistants with Indians.

I have been overwhelmed with Assistants, many of whom have been
unaccustomed to agricultural employment, but the greater inconvenience
attending the Assistant establishment is the unhealthiness of the climate; it so
often happens that after much difficulty has been experienced and the
Assistant has become acquainted with his duty, and he and the natives are
become a little reconciled, the Assistant falls sick and is obliged to leave his
post; if another is sent the same difficulties and inconvenience are repeated,
whereas if a native is in charge of a Station, when he is unable to attend to his
duty from sickness or any other cause, I can at once put another in his place without disarranging the Establishment or stopping the work. Besides this, there is a considerable difference in the salaries. For everything relating to ground work and Bengali accounts I can procure Assistants in the country, either Assamese or Bengalis. It must be evident to the Directors that a passionate European entirely ignorant of the language and equally to every part of his duty can but be worse than useless.

It would not appear that any action was taken on this suggestion. With the exception of the engineer and boiler-maker sent out in 1841 to supervise the building of the Steamer Assam, and who worked it subsequently, there was no recruitment of European staff from England for the first five or six years of operations. It could only have been men who knew something of the country who could be induced (and the inducement one would guess was often that of dire necessity) to venture into Assam.

It is not known whether some of the earlier employees were country born, but it would seem certain that once in India the chances were that they would not be likely to see their own country again.

Assuming that they did emigrate originally from England, they knew the discomforts of a five months' voyage round the Cape, and such a voyage was common enough, but that voyage was accomplished in company with others. The journey from Calcutta to Assam was another matter. Two and a half months at least of toil in a country boat, dragging, poling, sometimes sailing up what were to them unknown rivers, relying on a rapacious crew for direction, and living on the country through which they passed, was a venture to conjure with. The variation in languages spoken on such a journey must have been by itself a cause of mental confusion. The terrors of such a journey into an unknown country, and with what must have been a very ill-defined purpose to accomplish at the end of it, can only increase one's admiration for the pioneers of tea.

There is no denying, however, that some of these journeys were unduly protracted for the individual's enjoyment. There was one who took over five months to reach Nazira. It is true that there were always innumerable excuses for delays; sickness, or absconding of the boats crew; deviations to collect food and supplies; bad weather and adverse winds, etc., so there were Assistants who spent many days at some lesser known river station, where they were free from the eye of any Agent who could report their delinquency, enjoying such amenities as the place offered as a relief from the monotony of boating.

The Board in time became aware of these escapades, and in 1857, with a view to checking them, they decreed that an Assistant's pay would start from the day he reached Nazira. Previously an Assistant was allowed his expenses for the journey, an advance up to two months' salary, and he
drew any pay due to him when he did arrive eventually. Under such conditions there was no need to hurry.

In the List of Establishment at the end of 1839, there were 2 First Assistants, 10 Second Assistants, 4 Third Assistants and six apprentices. First Assistants received 200 to 300 rupees a month salary; Second Assistants Rs.100; and apprentices a bonus of Rs.150 a year and their "table free."

It will be noticed that there was no such office as Manager. There was only a Superintendent and then Assistants graded according to experience. Even twenty years after the inception of the Company, the man acting for the Superintendent when on leave was referred to in official correspondence as "Principal Assistant."

Amongst this Establishment there were included also a book-keeper surveyor. In contrast to requirements asked of a Junior Assistant to-day, it was necessary then to be able to read and write the vernacular. The book-keeper, to be able to render his accounts to the Board in English, had to translate from the Bengali "hisabs" or statements he received from his clerical staff. The first surveyor, if he had a liking for work in the jungle, could have had, according to his terms of reference, a job for life. His instructions were to survey the rivers and to search for coal. The former was amplified by the Board later to include the Borhee Dehing, Dhunsiri and especially the Brahmaputra. All these in addition to surveying the areas of tea which were then being cultivated. For the latter purpose, C. A. Bruce advised that native surveyors were all that he required. Government surveyed the rivers eventually; other people found the coal; and the Company's own Survey Department drifted into desuetude.

In addition to the above, which would be described as European staff, there were two Indian medical assistants, one at Nazira and one at Tingri on Rs.100 a month each, with twocompounders on Rs.32 monthly. There were also the important "Dewan" or Land Agent, one Burbandee Muneeram, drawing a salary of Rs.200 monthly, who was the prototype of what is to-day the Mahajan, though he was then the go-between of the local inhabitants and their getting work on the Company's lands.

In those early days there was one other important functionary, Dr. Lum Qua, who was a Chinese interpreter, and as it was described then--"Captain of the Chinese Tea-makers, and others of that nationality then in the Province." He was engaged originally by Government, but was taken over by the Assam Company on a salary of Rs.400 monthly. He was in point of salary next to the two Superintendents.

One wonders, what for apprentices, the term "table free" or "run of their teeth" meant in those days, for even allowing that the rupee could purchase far more than now, and what they ate would have to be what could be secured in the country, the sum of Rs.15 was rather a pittance on
which to feed a lusty youth for a month. Up to the end of 1839 the apprentices were paid this sum in cash, and they had to fend for themselves, but this was to be withdrawn from the apprentices at Nazira when their "Mess House" was built, when apparently it was to be communal feeding for them.

Judging by present-day standards, Assistants' terms of service appear harsh. Everyone had to sign a Covenant binding himself to serve for five years. There was an option for renewal, but for bad conduct or any departure from the terms of the Covenant it was dismissal with a fine of six months' salary. The Board in Calcutta ruled their staff in Assam with a rod of iron, exacting by letter and spirit the terms of members' Covenants. There is the case of one Assistant who had obtained from the Superintendent leave of absence for two months on urgent private affairs in Dacca, who was called upon by the Board subsequently, in spite of the permission granted to him by his Superintendent, to forfeit half his salary. Assistants requiring a change of air under medical certificate were allowed full pay whilst so absent.

Even the sick, when they were sent on long leave to recuperate, were expected to utilise that necessary period of recovery in the interests of the Company, for in a letter to the Calcutta Board at the end of 1840, Bruce enquired

... if it would not be advisable when any sick Assistant (in whom confidence could be placed) requests change of air to order him to move from place to place and seek for coolies with their families to settle on our grants. If Mr. Grose could be spared for such a mission, he would answer well. . . .

For a European, the recruitment of labour by modern means is strenuous work, entailing camping out in the districts where the best jungle labour is to be found. By such standards it was hardly the job for sick men just recuperating from continual doses of fever.

In regard to terms of service, it may be of interest to those who have the administration of companies, and to those whose emoluments depend on commission on garden profits, which is the chief attraction of employment on tea estates to-day, to know that the Assam Company was the first to consider payment of commission in 1844.

The first scheme was a grandiose one. To set aside 10 per cent. of the profits: 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) per cent. to the Superintendent; 3 per cent. to be divisible amongst the Assistants; 1 per cent. to the tecklars (mohurirs and tea makers); 1 per cent. to the labour; and 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) per cent. to be reserved for pensions "... to decayed labourers, helpless children and women."

As it took from the conclusion of the season's working over two years to dispose of the tea in London, it was proposed for the purpose of
calculating commission to take the price to be realised for the teas at 1s. 6d. per lb., and to make subsequently an adjustment on actual figures, probably two years' later. It was decided eventually, however, that commission should be confined to the Superintendent and Assistants, with a certain sum set aside as bonuses to others. But nothing came of these proposals, for it was obvious that on the scale of expenditure then being incurred there could be no profits.

The question lay dormant until 1847, when Stephen Mornay, seeing by the turn of events that profits would be made, wrote to the Calcutta Board asking them to rescind their resolution granting commission on the grounds that "... the quantity of tea being manufactured not being the test of good management but the quality and condition of the gardens. ..."

The Minute was rescinded, but the Directors still reserved the right to adopt such means of rewarding zealous and valuable service as may appear to them expedient and equitable.

The subject was revived again in 1849, but this time with Stephen Mornay's approval, and 12 per cent. of the profits was to be put aside for distribution. The rate of commission was subject to review by the Board each year.

The commission earned on the working of season 1849 was not distributed until December 1852, and that earned in 1851 was paid in November 1854.

Another custom which the Assam Company initiated was an entertainment allowance to the Superintendent. In 1851, Stephen Mornay was granted Rs.100 a month to meet the extra expenses in entertaining "... our own Assistants when on business, Government Officials and generally of strangers."

In the 1860's, when there was keen competition for European managers and Assistants to take over the many new estates that were being put out by others, it was necessary to raise the pay of the European Establishment in an endeavour to retain their services for the Company. It is not until there appears the following statement in the Calcutta Minute Book, under date 12th October 1863, that it is possible to get an idea of the extent of European staff employed for an area under tea of nearly 4,800 acres and the rates of pay which they received.

The evolution of living conditions in Assam through the years down to the present day of almost luxury was a slow process.

Parker, when he was Superintendent of the Eastern Division, wrote to the Calcutta Board in 1841 suggesting that the houses that were to be built for Assistants should have glass windows. The Board's reply to this suggestion of an amenity was to the effect that "... it was a little too premature to supply glass windows for Assistants' houses." No one can
## SALARIES OF EMPLOYEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Amount of present Salary</th>
<th>Increase Salary</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<td>B. G. Stevens</td>
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<td>Assistant</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Pay increased to Rs. 150 and Commission as recommended by Mr. Smith</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>125</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>E. Crafter</td>
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<td>C. C. Phillips</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Middleton</td>
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<tr>
<td>W. Smith</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Evans</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>-</td>
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Including 100s. allowance for Table and Commission and commission.

4% Commission on General Scale.
Pensioned 75s.

Just raised.

Resigned and Commission.

Resigned and Commission.

Resigned and Commission.

Pay increased to Rs. 150 and Commission as recommended by Mr. Smith.
say that the expansion of the Tea Industry was allowed to suffer at the expense of the European staffs’ comfort.

One wonders what the present-day Assistant would think of the bungalow of nearly a hundred years ago shown in this photograph. It certainly has no windows, and in construction and material it was only a large edition of a coolie house. The site of the Assistants’ residence was invariably cheek by jowl with his labour, which this illustration shows. This was necessary, not only to prevent the labour deserting or being enticed away by others, but it was the sites for the labourers’ houses and the few acres of tea that were the only clearings in the heavy jungle, that would provide the least possible conditions for existence.

It was always tea first, more and more clearings and new extensions. Boards of Directors held the purse-strings tight. They would allow expenditure on putting out more tea, but they were grudging in granting money even for better manufacturing facilities, and to obtain sanction for a new bungalow or amenities for the Manager was like getting blood out of a stone.

This led no doubt to that friendly rivalry amongst planters as to who could construct the cheapest building. It was remarkable what was accomplished with local materials. Rs.7,000 was a considerable sum to spend on a Manager’s bungalow; yet one can remember those old buildings of Nahore timber posts, thatched roofs, mud and ekra walls, with window-frames and doors, all made on the spot by local “mistries” or carpenters, costing originally next to nothing but lasting twenty or thirty years. They were large, cool and comfortable.

Judging by present-day standards, such living conditions were below the amenities provided in the cities, but the planters’ ingenuity for looking after himself, aided by the domestic capabilities of his wife on the catering side, made it possible to dispense the most lavish hospitality that was available.

It is true that servants were cheap and available in any number, but they were quite untrained when first taken into service; but a trained cook (mugh) was essential. How that functionary produced a five-course meal with only a brick-and-mud stove in an outhouse as the equipment for his culinary art has always been a mystery, and when to this is added the fact that the meal was produced hot at any hour of the day or night after that prescribed as the original time for the meal. An essential at the end of a day in the heat and sweat of work was a hot bath to cleanse one in contemplation of that reviving “peg.” There were no hot-water systems then, but one’s bath-water was heated in a kerosene tin over a wood fire by the “pani-wallah” or water-man of which every bungalow had at least one on its permanent staff. Because of the iron content of the water in Assam, and according to the district, the colour of one’s bath-water varied from a faint pink tinge to a muddy brown.
An Assistant’s Bungalow, 1858.
There was then, and in many cases there exists still, one permanent fixture on the bungalow verandah, and that is the soda-water machine. The rhythmic dropping of the glass ball in the bottle as the bearer made the “belati-pani” for the day’s consumption was a part of the sounds of the jungle life to which one became accustomed.

At night, the only light was by kerosene lamp that made much more heat and smell than was to be gained from relief from the sun. To retire eventually meant going into a box of mosquito netting, with inside this box of netting a punkah pulled to and fro by an invisible hand situated on the verandah outside, and under its soothing draught one courted sleep, until human effort being what it is, the length of the sweep of that life-giving draught slowly subsided into total inactivity. One can imagine a visitor waking up in a muck sweat from the cessation of the punkah and contemplating the balance of the night being spent in discomfort, hearing, however, the booming voice of his host bawling: “Punkah tano—Sala” (“Pull the punkah”), and for the next half-hour the cooling draught is nearly enough to necessitate one having to pull up the blanket. All this was at the higher level of management, but what of the Assistant on the out-garden, whose almost sole employment was the supervision of planting out new clearances? A basha, or bamboo hut, his residence; a pani-wallah as a budding cook, and in consequence the merest subsistence for food; and for light at night, candles in empty beer-bottles. Yet those with guts lived. There were, on the other hand, many who fell by the roadside. It was to these boys such a red-letter day when they were invited to the Burra bungalow and they tasted the better things that would be the justification for their present privations. How many of these are to-day at the head of their profession?

The planters made early endeavours to provide themselves with amenities to relieve the monotony of life, and there exists still the Minutes of the Hatti Putti Billiard Club, which was formed in 1881.

The Hatti Putti Club building was last occupied as a dwelling by Dr. Caudle, who was Medical Officer 1866-1899 before he was transferred to live at Nazira. This must have been one of the earliest brick-built bungalows in the Company, and was constructed largely of the old Assam tile bricks which were taken in large quantities from the Gurgaon palace for the buildings in Nazira and its vicinity.

It was Henry Walling, who was an employee of the Company from the date of his joining as an Assistant to Senior Manager from 1867 to 1901, who founded this Hatti Putti Billiard Club in the Nazira Assistant’s old bungalow. The ostensible purpose of the Club was stated by the founder to be, to provide “refreshments and other comforts for the convenience of members and their friends.”

This Club, which is believed to be one of the earliest in Assam, is in
existence to-day, but the billiard table has ceased to exist for some time, and for many years tennis has been the main form of recreation.

The Company did what it could to relieve something of the discomfort of their existence by arranging for the direct shipment at wholesale prices of tinned provisions, etc. In the early 1870's there were shown in the Board's Proceedings the amounts they paid out monthly for such items as: £50 every month or so for bottled beer for the Assistants, and wines, presumably for Managers, to the value of £200; consignments of provisions and biscuits costing £250 in a single ship were not infrequent.

Another concession granted to the Company's staff was to allow them to remit their home payments at 2s. to the rupee. When, in 1871 and onwards, the rate of exchange went much below the above par rate and the Company was losing appreciable sums, the Board fixed the rate of Exchange for their staff at 1s. 1d. to the rupee.

In some cases, men were engaged on a salary quoted in sterling, and for an Assistant starting at £150 a year. On re-engagement, this was converted into the more normal so-many rupees a month.

To join their appointments, there was no fixed rule about payment of passages to India. Sometimes the Company paid the whole cost, but others paid half the cost, whilst a few paid the whole of their passage out and hoped to get paid back when signing on for a second period of three years. In 1892 the Company issued printed rules reviewing the terms on which leave should be taken after five years' service, when employees were granted ten months' leave. It is fairly obvious that these rules were promulgated to counter the Company's experience of members of the Staff taking their leave on never more than half pay, or for Senior Assistants half pay and half commission, sometimes with steamer passage paid, and at the expiry resigning their billets to go elsewhere, or resigning soon after their return to Assam.

Before the member went on leave, he had to sign an agreement that he would return to Assam and serve for at least another two years with the Company, failing which he would refund to the Company all the pay he had received whilst on leave.

This shows that at that time leave home was not regarded as a reward for services rendered but as an inducement for continued service.

Even on sick leave there was a limit of six months with full pay for the first three months and half pay thereafter, whilst leave on urgent private affairs was only granted in exceptional circumstances, and then without pay or allowance.

Arising probably from the case of William Garland, who sued the Company for an exaggerated amount of pay due to him on leaving, which case was decreed, however, in the Company's favour, there was a period when any member leaving the Company's service was called upon to sign
a letter acknowledging that whatever sum was due to him was received in full settlement of all and any future claims.

Some of these terms may appear harsh or parsimonious for those times, which were fairly prosperous, yet the Board were not unfair or ungenerous. There was an outbreak of some virus disease amongst members' ponies, from which they succumbed wholesale. This was traced to the insanitary unhealthy condition of the stables at Nazira, by which the Superintendent, Medical Officer and Assistants lost all their ponies. The Superintendent, J. S. Hulbert, was compensated by the payment of Rs.2,000 towards the cost of six ponies which he lost and which he valued at Rs.3,000, and an Assistant, Ardagh, Rs.200 for his pony which he valued at Rs.300, which indicates the value of horse flesh in Assam in those days.

In opening out any new country to commercial enterprise, means of communication are of first consideration, and the difficulties varied with the nature of the terrain and with climate. Assam, with its soft, alluvial soil, heavy rainfall and long distances, lagged behind most other provinces in its development of communications. It is as well to remind those who know Assam only as it is to-day, when Jorhat (Rowriah) is within five or six hours' flying time from Calcutta, what it was like, say, a little more than fifty years ago, when even to join one’s billet for the first time was an arduous journey, and to attend the weekly Club day an adventurous undertaking, and why means of locomotion was such an important topic of conversation on any bungalow verandah. The weekly Club day was not only something to look forward to for the recreation it provided but almost a necessity for the Sahib and Memsahib to get off their own matti or land and to meet other people. For the planter, his game of polo was the chief urge, the means of getting to the Club, a journey of many miles for those on the more isolated gardens, could be an adventure at any time in the rains.

It is not so very long ago that it was quite common in some districts of Assam for planters and their families to be marooned for months on their own gardens, unable to travel even to see their neighbours, by reason of the deplorable state of the roads, which became flooded in the rains and which were impossible to any means of conveyance which they possessed.

With the improvement in communications to-day, where there exist pukka roads which are negotiable at all times of the year, one is inclined to forget the earlier improvement, when the pony and buggy took the place of the elephant for general transport and for work on the gardens, and when this was replaced later for visiting and social occasions by the “Tin Lizzie,” that wonderful Ford contraption which was the only self-propelled vehicle which could fall into the gaping holes in the road and under sober direction slowly climb out on the other side.

The Assam-Bengal Railway was not constructed as far as Nazira until
Before that date an Assistant joining the Company’s service had to make the journey by steamer up the Brahmaputra, if not from Calcutta via the Sunderbunds, then from Goalundo to Dikhoo Mukh and thence in the rains by country boat to Nazira, or in the cold weather these twenty-five miles would be done by elephant.

It is believed that the last men to make this journey by elephant were E. E. Chalk (1901-1932), who from 1924 was General Manager and afterwards a Director, A. G. Savage (1901-1902) and William Rogers (1901-1908). To avoid crossing a flimsy bamboo bridge, the elephant was driven down the Nullah, when both its fore-feet sank suddenly into deep mud. All three men were sitting astride on a pad behind the Mahout. In his position astride the elephant’s neck the Mahout was easily able to retain his balance against the jolt of this sudden stop, but the foremost rider on the pad was shot over the Mahout, head-first into the mud. In telling the story, each of these three, Chalk, Savage and Roger, relate that, “Poor chap! There he was, with just the soles of his boots showing, and when he was pulled out, he made a noise like a cork coming out of a bottle! Very funny he looked, but I was glad it was not me.”

Even years after the advent of the motor-car it was beyond the purse of an Assistant to possess even a second-hand Ford, and the only means of getting his game of polo, or attending the Club for other means of recreation, was to ride there on his “kamjari” (working) pony—a distance of maybe twenty miles, play his four or five chukkas of polo, and then when he had, with adequate libations, replayed his chukkas with other members of his side, with his opponents and the spectators, the while his pony had been fed and was rested, he would then mount again for the homeward journey.

Atkhel and Deopani were two of such estates situated a long and difficult journey away from the Nazira Club. One Assistant who arrived home in the early hours after one such outing had little time to sleep before attending at his Manager’s early-morning office. He decided in the hot afternoon, with his hangover, to inspect the thatch barrie, and finding a pleasant patch of shade in an unfrequented spot, lay down and was soon fast asleep. To his considerable embarrassment, he awoke to find his Manager, who had chosen to ride that way, surveying him with a frosty eye. He started to scramble to his feet, but his Manager (a Scotstman) waved him back with the cutting remark, “Lie down again, laddie. Ye’re doing no harm there.”

Not long afterwards, it is nice to relate, that Manager went to Nazira as Superintendent and the Assistant was promoted to Manager of Deopani.

In times of stringency, when every item of expenditure is cut to the bone in an endeavour to reduce the cost of production of tea, the planter
ADMINISTRATION IN ASSAM

shows his ingenuity for getting things done without normal implements.

In one period of strict economy, a Manager was refused the cost of a lawnmower for his compound. He was determined, however, not to have a derelict lawn in the front of his bungalow. He managed to get passed by the Agents’ eagle eye for cutting down costs of stores his indent for some scythes. Being a bit of a farmer, he knew how to use them, and it was not long before he had taught his malis what they were for. The fruits of the Manager’s tuition was success, but to the casual visitor to that garden it was a peculiar sight in the haze of early morning to see these men in a row, with what appeared to be a stick, one end on the ground, jerking it across in front of them, until the mystery was explained. What these men accomplished may have been a travesty of the art of mowing, and though the process was laborious, and only an Indian would have the patience to mow an acre of lawn inch by inch, the results on the tough grass of Assam was indeed a shaven lawn.

Life in the East involves family separations; apart from the wife having to go home for health reasons and leave the husband to look after himself, there are the children to be put to school, and other reasons.

One fellow, who had sent his wife home to see the children at Christmas, determined that during her absence he was going to have a right royal time. When arrangements were in train for the annual Club Meet, it was announced that “bashas” would be erected for married couples, but the bachelors, grass widowers, etc., would be accommodated in a dormitory in a large, empty rice godown. The planter, whose name must be suppressed for obvious reasons, was not going to be behind in making himself as comfortable as possible, even in the questionable salubrity of a rice godown. A couple of days in advance of the due date, he loaded a bullock cart with a huge brass double-bedstead, with large round knobs on the four corners, a mattress, a tin bath, carpet, and other essentials to man’s comfort. He duly pegged out his claim in a corner of the godown.

After the usual strenuous games, there was recourse to the bar, where this fellow imbibed rather more than a fair ration of “splits.” In the evening, a change into evening-dress was negotiated somehow, and he proceeded then to tank up until he became a nuisance. This was luckily not of long duration before he passed right out, and he was carried away and flopped on his bed.

This incident was fairly early in the night’s proceedings and before the other inmates of the rice godown had got hotted-up themselves. About closing time for this first night’s operations a party was formed, and taking up this apparent corpse bed and all, they negotiated somehow all the geographical hazards of their route in the dark and planted him in the
middle of the polo ground, where, after throwing another blanket over him, they left him.

As anyone knows, in Assam in the cold weather there rises at night a thick white ground mist, with visibility only a few yards, which does not disperse until quite late the following morning.

In the dawn, when this fellow slowly regained partial consciousness and found himself in a cloud, with only the golden orbs of his bed visible, he thought he had passed on. A little later, feeling with his foot over the side of the bed, he was reassured somewhat at touching earth and actually seeing grass, but in the thick mist he had no idea which way to turn to regain a road or habitation. It was only shown later, by his footmarks in the dew-laden grass, that he had explored in various directions, but only within sight of what had become to him by then that offensive bedstead, for there is nothing to indicate direction in the even sameness of a polo ground.

On a suggestion put forward by the General Manager in 1904, the Board approved the formation of a Superannuation Fund in favour of some of the long-service native Assistants in Assam. To start such a fund, the Board agreed to subscribe 3 or 4 annas per acre from the general funds of the Company, the participants to subscribe a proportion of their salary, and the Company would then subscribe half the amount put in by the employees.

The fund was to be administered by the General Manager, with a small committee of Senior Managers, who would draw up a set of rules.

There is no record in the old books to show that this scheme was ever brought to maturity.

In 1909 the Company formulated the first Provident Fund for European employees and members of the native Establishment. Membership to the fund was optional, and a subscriber could elect to contribute not less than 5 per cent. or not more than 10 per cent. of his monthly salary. He could vary the amount of his subscription by giving three months' notice in writing. The Company did not subscribe to the fund, except to add to each subscribers' deposit 6 per cent. interest per annum. The accumulated funds were under the absolute control of the Company, to be invested or used by the Company at its discretion.

The fund was formulated solely to encourage continuity of service, as appears from the conditions of retirement for a member. After five years' service, and up to seven years, he could draw only 12½ per cent. of the amount standing at his credit, and so on up to service of ten years or over, when he received 25 per cent.

At this rate of repayment, it was better if a member wanted to leave the Company's service to get dismissed, for in that case he did get all money standing to his credit, less any contribution made by the Company.
The Assam Company was probably the first to formulate a Provident Fund for its employees, and this must be the excuse for the above brief statement of the terms of its first endeavour to provide for its employees' retirement. It is not proposed to follow this embryonic scheme through its various evolutions to the far more realistic provision that is made to-day for eventual retirement of faithful servants of long service.

In 1931, when the Industry and this Company with it was facing the disastrous slump of that and the following year, the whole staff in Assam agreed voluntarily to a cut of 10 per cent. in their salaries. When it is remembered that a planter relies as much on his commission as part of his emoluments as he does on his salary, and that in years when the Company makes no profit there is no commission, this cut in salaries must have meant, for some, a reduction of income of nearly 50 per cent.

This cut in salaries was maintained until 1934. During this period it was not only the Assam Company who suffered this loss of remuneration—it was one applied generally throughout the Industry, including the Calcutta Agents and London Secretarial staffs.

Added to this personal sacrifice, there was, to the conscientious managers and assistants, the disappointment that with the reduction in manuring and stringent economy in supply of stores, building materials, etc., they saw the temporary cessation of their labours to improve the gardens in their charge, by which improvement they had hoped to increase future profit, and with that their commission.

For the first few years of its life, the labourer's child goes naked, the only adornment a string and a bead. The latter is important, for attached to the string round its waist there is a cowrie, coloured bead, or some small treasure that hangs down in front to avert the evil eye.

A story goes that an older planter had been suffering a bit of tooth-ache, which he had managed with a file and other available instruments to keep in check until the visiting dentist came round, and he then had the offending tooth replaced with a single denture.

One morning he went out absent-mindedly without putting his denture in. When he returned to the bungalow to repair the omission, his denture had vanished. There was the tooth-glass on the washstand, clean but empty. His bearer, not noticing anything in the glass, had just emptied the contents out of the window. There was hell to pay. Every servant, including the cook, mali (gardener) and syce (groom) were set to comb every inch of the precincts for the missing denture, but to no avail.

Some time afterwards the Manager was at the weekly pay-table. Amongst many others, a plucking woman with her toddling infant came up to receive her due, when with his eyes staring out of his head he
shouted, “My Tooth!”—for there it was, dangling in front from the child’s string as a potent object to avert the evil eye!

Once when old R. E. Ledger was talking with one of his Sirdars about certain labour that was living in the lines, he was mystified by reference to a coolie with the name of Lejjer. He thought at first that it was something of a compliment that a labourer should name his child after him.

To satisfy himself on the point, he sent for the coolie. The poor specimen of humanity that was produced before him rather detracted from his idea of it being a compliment. It transpired, however, that the coolie was a Christian, and with their propensity to give their children Biblical names, this one had been christened Elijah, but for everyday use Lejjer was as near as they could get to it.

There was once a Head of the Government of Assam who was a keen polo-player and shikar. To his friends, however, he was more noted on the polo field as being an absolute menace, and to whom the rules of the game were a closed book. Whilst out on a shoot, he was not only a hopeless shot but at times quite an anxiety.

With all these faults in the field and in spite of his high rank in the land, he was a lovable character, and his fellow-men would not count the day complete without his company: as if to disarm all criticism, he was fully aware of his shortcomings in the field, and would join in with equal appreciation of any story told against him.

At a big dinner-party at Government House, he had sitting next to him a gushing young lady just out from home. She knew nothing about the great man except vaguely that he was a keen shot. When in due course the snipe was served, she smilingly said: “And did you, sir, shoot this?”—to which the great man charmingly replied: “Yes, I did. What’s the matter with it? Isn’t it dead yet?”

No account of Assam, with its vast jungle and many wild beasts, would be complete without reference to one at least of the many stories of tigers: the following, about the Rajgarh tiger, is related by one who was at Lakwah at the time of the latter part of the story but who is Superintendent now of a company in another district.

The original incident is believed to have taken place at the beginning of this century, or at the close of the last:

It was customary for the Manager of Lakwah to give a Christmas dinner, and of course, the incumbent of Rajabari Tea Estate, the other Division of the Company, situated about 7 miles away on the Rajgarh Ali, was expected to turn up, but what was more to send his cook to assist. The Manager at Rajabari at the time was one, Grant. One Christmas, he and his cook made
their separate journeys to Lakwah, but on the way back the cook and his pony were killed by a tiger on the Rajgarh, just after crossing the Timukh Bridge, which is about a mile from the Rajabari factory. At this point, a strip of forest lines the bank of the River, and what with cover, water, and tempting bait round about, it was a very desirable residence for a tiger.

I have no doubt Grant grieved for his cook, but by the next Christmas he was apparently out of mourning, for he again rode up to Lakwah to celebrate Christmas. In those days, when there were no cars, and one had to put in some hours' riding to get to a party, celebrations continued late, so it would be in the early hours of the morning when Grant, on his way home, once again drew near the Timukh Bridge.

There, at the same spot at which his cook had been killed the Christmas before, he was attacked by a tiger, perhaps the same one, who did not see why he should be left out of these celebrations.

Grant happened to be on a “whaler” so came off better than the cook, who had been riding a country “tat.” The charge knocked man and horse for six, and threw Grant clear. He picked himself up, and ran in the direction he was facing, without knowing whether he had a mile to run to his bungalow, or six miles back to Lakwah. He was fortunate to have been facing the right way.

In the morning, when he was capable of organising a rescue party, he found that apparently his horse had become entangled in the reins, and could not make a getaway, and the tiger had had his Christmas dinner after all.

I remember, in 1924, coming back from Rajabari in the early hours of the morning. I saw a tiger at this very same spot. It was not unusual to see a tiger on the Rajgarh, but this one did not behave according to pattern.

It was sitting erect right in the middle of the road. I was in an open car, and except for the bridge itself, the Rajgarh is 30 feet across, being one of those magnificent Ahom roads. I therefore felt that I was quite safe in going up to the tiger in a noisy, stinking car, but the thing never moved, so I had to edge over to the side of the road, and as I passed it pumped its forefeet up and down as if making up its mind to spring. However, it did nothing, but gave me a supercilious look as I passed, thinking probably of the good old days.

If personalities make History, or, as a great authority has observed, that “History is the essence of innumerable Biographies,” then the most important part of this chapter has been left to the last.

It is a pity that the need to reduce the size of this book does not permit some account being given, however brief, of all those who served the Company. The mere names of all, and the years they served, are given, however, in the chronological list of Members of the Staff, but there were many who served loyally if perhaps without distinction and whose labours contributed their part in the making of this History.

There may be some who are not interested particularly in the names of individual members of the Company’s Staff who served in Assam but
who would like to know the names of the Chief officers who were responsible for administration of the Company's affairs. To meet such an enquiry, there is given the following list:

**SUPERINTENDENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Division/Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J. W. Masters</td>
<td>1839–1843</td>
<td>(Whole Company)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. A. Bruce</td>
<td>1840–1845</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. P. Parker</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. M. Mackie</td>
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<td>J. Hodges</td>
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<td>Stephen Mornay</td>
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<td>H. C. Gibson</td>
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<td>H. G. Bainbridge</td>
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<td>A. B. Fisher</td>
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**GENERAL MANAGERS**

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<td>J. S. Hulbert</td>
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<td>A. R. Farquharson</td>
<td>1903–1915</td>
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<td>W. Maxwell</td>
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<td>J. S. Ronald</td>
<td>1923–1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. E. Chalk</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. J. Richardson</td>
<td>1932–1945</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Q. Healy</td>
<td>1945–1956</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**INDIAN STAFF**

It is unfortunate that there is so little recorded in the Company's archives regarding the members of the Indian staff. They were not engaged on any form of agreement that would have required the sanction of the Calcutta or London Boards, the Minutes of which are the only records that it has been possible to preserve. They were taken on locally by the Superintendent or Manager; their names were duly inscribed in the pay sheets of the times, or in the Khamjari book, but in the climate of Assam, and due to the ravages of white ants and other pests which make paper part of their diet, such records have been obliterated.

There is no material available, therefore, to the historian to give a detailed account by name of these important members of the staff.

It is the purpose of this section, however, to pay tribute to the vital work that these members of the Assam Company have contributed to the establishment of the Tea Industry, and without whom it was, 114 years ago and would be to-day, impossible to carry on.

It is no matter under what designation they are referred to, whether Indian staff, native Establishment, subordinate staff or Indian supervisory staff, the tribute the Company would wish to pay is not only to the Head Kerani down to the apprentice in the Nazira office and their counterparts on each individual garden but to the Mohurirs on the garden, the tea-
house Babus, the Sirdars on both the gardens and in the tea-houses, for they are together the backbone of the Administration in Assam.

Mention has been made in the previous chapter of the prototype of Indian staff in Muneeram, as amongst other things the first Kyah; Lum Qua in charge of the early Chinese tea makers; and of Indian compounders. These were the beginning of that long line of loyal and efficient services which the Company has received from generations of the same family who have succeeded one another in office. There are members of the staff to-day who can trace their ancestors back to those who served from the inception of the Company.

A contrast has been made of living conditions in Assam for Europeans nearly a century ago. It can be said that a similar contrast applied to the Indian staff. Let anyone who knows only the amenities provided in the Company's offices, whether at Nazira or on the garden, when proper office furniture, electric light and fans are commonplace, think of the days when the clerical staff were accommodated on grass mats on the beaten earth floor of the office, and the only light at night was from a "charagh," which can be described only as a cotton wick in a saucer of oil. That was even before the "hat batti" or kerosene hand-lamp. It is admitted that, even after chairs and tables were introduced in the early 1880's, many babus sat cross-legged on their chairs, with their shoes parked underneath, in the same attitude as they adopt when in their natural posture for reading and writing, as they do even to this day.

All Accounts and Statements were kept then in Bengali or Hindustani. For submission of these to Calcutta, they had to be translated into English, and when there were no typewriters, carbon papers or duplicating machines, the copying of these papers by hand was a laborious process.

Let it be remarked also that in those early days, before the advent of the cigarette in sealed tins, both Indian and Europeans smoked chiefly a "hookah," or an Indian or Burma cheroot.

From the clerical side, one turns then to the Mohurir or Sirdar of garden and factory work. Both are supervisors in their respective spheres. From labourers themselves they have risen by the exposition of superior knowledge and experience to be put in charge of gangs of labourers. Their elevation may be due also to their influence with the "Busti" or outside village, or family connection with the estate. As so much work in the field is done by women, there are also women Sirdars, elected for the same purpose.

These Mohurirs and Sirdars may be quite illiterate in English and even in their own language, but they are able somehow to render an account, though maybe only a verbal one, to the office of the work done by each member of the gang for which they are responsible. The individual of the gang knows only too well the amount of work he or she has done, and
woe betide the Mohurir who has made a miscalculation. In the case of plucking, women have the check of the weighment of the actual leaf they bring in.

In the tea-house or factory, the same delegated supervision by tea-house Babu, Mohurir or Sirdar prevails. In the old days, before the coming of more precise mechanical means appertaining to the subject of tea manufacture, the Manager relied much on the skill of his tea maker. He may have been illiterate, but by long experience, and guided by no other criteria than the crudest, he produced the crop of good-quality tea.

Then with the advent of machinery there came the col-wallah, mistri, call him what you will, artisan, mechanic—but without any real knowledge of engineering, who by some process of personal familiarity with the machine knew its every whim and eccentricity, and could coax it into continued activity that would defeat the more orthodox methods of an engineer in running machinery.

There are yet others, who have not attained to supervisory rank but who have made their humble contribution to the life of the Administration in Assam, faithful old retainers and servants who in conversation will recollect with pride and affection the days of long ago, when they were “do pica wallahs,” mere infants who were able to earn half an anna a day for doing some trivial task like catching insects; old retainers such as bungalow servants, pani-wallahs, syces, long since retired to their busties on pension from the Company, who regard it as a red-letter day when they can pay a visit to their old haunts on the garden to chat with their cronies, but more profitable to have a talk with the Sahib, for there would always be a little present and some tea to take back with him to his village.

It is the combination of all these people that goes to make up that community that gradually grows up on a tea garden, and it is their loyal services which made the expansion of the tea industry possible.
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A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

1895–1896 Charlton, G. F.
1895–1905 Playfair, M. C.
1985–1916 Farquharson, R. N.
   Gen. Manager 1903–15
1896–1921 Dickinson, W. L.
1896–1927 Mucklow, J.
1896–1910 Moran, J. P.
1897–1902 Benson, G. F.
1897–1902 Hulbert, F. E.
   Gen. Manager 1897–1903
1897–1904 Bailie, S. M.
1897–1922 Ledger, R. E.
1897–1901 McLaine, A.
1897–1898 Hemphill, H.
1898–1901 Benson, H.
1898–1918 Stewart, Robert
1899–1905 Pearce, F. N.
1899–1903 Winchester, Dr. G. C.
1900–1909 Rust, F. H.
1900–1915 Gogswell, H. N.
1901–1905 Jessett, J. B.
1901–1932 Chalk, E. E.
   Gen. Manager 1924–32
1901–1906 Sawyer, W. B.
1901–1904 Payton, H. P.
1901–1902 Savage, A. G.
1901–1908 Rogers, W.
1902–1910 Nelson, S. C.
1902–1906 Hodder, E. B.
1902–1920 Abernethy, W.
1903–1907 Moncrieff, F. W.
1903–1924 MacNamara, Dr. J. R.
1904–1934 Gibbons, J. H.
1904–1911 Smiles, W. D.
1904–1907 Brandes, J. S.
1904–1929 Gordon, C. H.
1906–1928 Baxter, D. P.
1906–1931 Horsburgh, A. W. W.
1906–1933 Lowndes, J. W. F. S.
1906–1915 Morris, H.
1906–1934 White, P. D. L.
1906–1937 Friswell, P. R.
1907–1909 Chapman, F. A.
1907–1928 Hooper, C. L.
1907–1912 Wilson, F. W.
1907–1914 Rooney, B. M.
1907–1910 Sandford, W. S. B.
1908–1918 Head, R. C.
1908–1911 Jenkins, K. G.
1909–1940 Butter, D. S.
1909–1916 Jones, K. S.
1910–1911 Humphrys, R. A
1910–1911 Lindsay, G. E.
1910–1913 Bennett, G. T.
1910–1913 Trimmer, A. E. H
1910–1913 Shenstone, W. M.
1910–1917 Moffat, M. B.
1910–1945 Richardson, A. J.
   Gen. Manager 1932–45
1911–1918 Greene, R. C. E.
1911–1913 Griffiths, R. S.
1911–1915 Raven, H. V.
1911–1944 Halkett, A. T.
1912–1915 Allen, Harold
1912–1920 Dooley, J. A.
1912–1914 Strange, R. F.
1912–1916 McKay, J. W.
   (see "London Directors")
1913–1942 Johnson, K.
1913–1915 Franklyn, F. E. H.
1913–1931 Slaughter, C. M.
1913–1935 Pim, G. E.
1914–1934 Ennis, H. E.
1914–1918 Sugden, H.
1914–1915 Warwick, E.
1915–1946 Holroyd, C. D.
1915–1919 Sager, H.
1915–1921 Pinkerton, W. A.
1915–1918 Smith, W. H. E.
1916–1917 Avent, H. S.
1916–1920 Bower, J. A.
1916–1923 Robinson, T. J.
1917–1918 Brownlow, R. J.
1917–1921 Oastler, J. F. R.
1918–1949 Flux, C. J.
1919–1950 Clayton, J. R.
1919–1924 Barker, E. P.
1919–1945 Gardner, O.
STAFF

1919-1925 Wilson, D. H.
1919-1948 Morris, H. W. N.
1919-1922 Normington, G. E.
1919-1920 Routh, D. J. L.
1919-1948 Howard, H. W.
1920-1931 Couper, J. E.
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1920-1922 Graves, J. W.
1920-1922 Locke, R. F.
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1921-1923 Michaelson-Yeates, R. M.
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1923-1937 Thackeray, J.
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1923-1936 Lightbody, A. R.
1923-1932 Morrison, A. R.
1924-1929 Smyth, C. J.
1924-1950 Lightbody, J. A.
1924-1932 Westray, V.
1924-1951 Hill, C. J.
1924-1930 Heaven, M. J.
1924-1930 Bremner, M. G.
1925-1930 Stanton, H. J.
1925-1933 Hamilton, R. A. H.
1925-1931 Grieve, R. J. R. W.
1925 Healy, J. Q.

Gen. Manager 1945 to date
1925-1932 Slaughter, Dr. H. L.
1925-1935 Kraty, F. C.
1925 Whyte, V. C.
1925-1939 Marshall, G. H. L.
1925-1936 Romer, A. E.
1926-1947 Samson, R. T.
1926-1933 Hambelton, J.
1927-1932 Starkey, H. A.
1927-1930 Cross, W. E. M. O.
1927-1931 Ransford, C. E.
1928-1931 Savage, Dr. J. M.
1928 Lumley Ellis, E. P.
1928-1936 Wilkinson, P. A.
1929-1949 Brooke, P. H.
1929-1932 Compton, L. E.
1929-1931 Fairweather, A. G. E.
1929-1939 Sibbald, D. K.
1929-1931 Harrison, A. M.
1929-1937 Yandle, A. J.
1929-1933 Hooper, E. D.
1929-1936 Shelton, F. A.
1930-1933 McFadden, J. S.
1930-1946 Marshall, T. U.
1930-1933 Hawke, W. R.
1930-1935 Grant, Dr. R. A.
1931-1935 Atkinson, J. I.
1931-1945 Lamprell, Dr. B. A.
1932-1950 Whitton, D. C. G.
1932 Smith, H. G.
1932 Martin, J. P. K.
1933-1939 Thomas, F. B. A.
1933-1942 Morris, A. G.
1933 Richmond, T. S.
1934-1946 Willis, T. A. W.
1934 White, R. B.
1934-1947 Warner, W. P.
1934-1942 Ball, R. A. I.
1934 Darby, T. R.
1934-1937 Ellison, J. W. W.
1935 Davies, C. A. P.
1936-1945 Whyte, J. C.
1936 Mowatt, D. D.
1936 Werner, R. L. H.
1936-1941 Jackson, G. L.
1936-1938 Brooks, G. E.
1936 Macfarlane, D. K.
1937 Miller, R. A. S.
1937-1946 Carnachan, G. A. G.
1937 Hall, J. B.
1937 Higham, R. G. G.
1938-1947 Lockington, J. P.
1939-1941 Willows, M. R.
1939-1946 Bramston, J.
1939 Condover, D. H. G.
1939-1948 Chapman, L. C.
1939-1951 Hobson, E. C.
1940 Middleton, A.
### A History of the Assam Company

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<td>Dowsing, W. E.</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Sawtell, L. S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER XXXIX

MEDICAL

APART from the general unhealthiness of the climate of Assam, the one thing above all others that contributed to the demoralisation of the local inhabitants was the consumption of opium.

C. A. Bruce, in his report of June 1839, after several years in the Muttock and Singpho countries, summed up the position. (See p. 474 of Appendix 3).

When the Company first started, the only medical service they had were two Indian medical assistants, one stationed at Nazira and the other at Tingri, together with two compounders. The two assistants received a salary of Rs. 100 a month each, and the compounders Rs. 16.

1840, the first year of the Company’s operations, was a most unhealthy one for Europeans and labourers alike. The Company’s Proceedings had many such entries as:

Mr. Duffield was swept off with cholera before joining the Station he was appointed to.

The Company have lost in this Division (Northern) two very able and willing Assistants in G. S. Murray and William Paton, who fell under the influence of jungle fever. Mr. Bruce was himself in the month of August totally incapacitated from the same cause; and he reports that at one time during the past Season (1840) of production, he had not a single individual able to superintend or move about among the people, who were equally sickly . . . .

During this year, Mr. Bandant died after removal to Calcutta Hospital and also Mr. A. C. Marley at Gurgong, whilst Mr. Vaughan, Gopal Gupta—a native A.M.O. and a Mr. Pickett left owing to ill-health.

The only European medical aid they could get was from the Government Civil Surgeon stationed at Sibsagar, eight miles from the Company’s Headquarters at Nazira but seventy miles from their station in the Northern Division at Tingri.

In 1841 the Sibsagar Civil Surgeon, Dr. Furnell, gave the kindest attention to the Company’s patients sent to him, but he could not always take them for lack of house accommodation.

The Company built their own bungalow at Sibsagar and they endeavoured to come to a working arrangement with Dr. Furnell for a yearly fee of Rs. 500 to attend the Company’s servants sent to him. For such a small fee the Doctor would not accept the work and asked Rs. 1,200 a year. The Board considered his demand was too extravagant.
Such was the general sickness that medicines were becoming a material item of expenditure. These were bought from chemists in Calcutta: R. Scott Thompson & Co. and Bathgate & Co. These were two of the oldest firms in this business in Calcutta. Mr. R. Scott Thompson was a substantial shareholder in the Assam Company and was present invariably at the Calcutta Annual General Meetings. Dr. David Begg was the founder of Bathgate & Co. and founded subsequently the firm of Begg, Dunlop & Co. in 1856, who were the first agents of the Jorehaut Co. in Calcutta and Dr. David Begg was Chairman subsequently of that Company in London from 1860 to 1868.

When medicines from these two reputable firms were not available and the only other source of supply was the Bazaar, the Directors became suspicious regarding the quality of these local supplies, and having got one of the Government Medical Offices in Calcutta to make out an indent for suitable medicines sufficient for a year’s supply for a population of 1,000, this was sent home for execution by Allen & Hanbury. There are no details in the Company’s records of what these medicines were, there is only mention of quinine. The diseases were mostly jungle fever and malaria, but cholera seems ever to have been prevalent and often in epidemic form. In these days when cholera is more or less an isolated disease one has to realise the virulence and epidemic form of this scourge as it was experienced in those early days. Conditions of travel then were a veritable test of endurance and of great hardship. There is the account of a march of 652 coolies from Hazaribagh to Assam, a distance in a straight line of over 500 miles with many rivers to cross. This batch when about half-way on their journey, was afflicted with cholera, and the whole gang disappeared in the night and no trace could be found of them the next day. In thus scattering over the countryside, they must have been a means of broadcasting the disease over a wide area.

The Board were alarmed at the number of casualties amongst their European staff during their first year of operations. Their Superintendent, J. W. Masters, had recommended that instead of the Company’s present system of having two Indian medical assistants in independent charge of certain areas, it would be better to have an apothecary or compounder at each station, to act under a European surgeon.

Acting on this, the Board agreed that they must have their own medical officer who could visit each Estate, deal with Indian and European patients, inspect garden hospitals, and generally supervise the compounders in charge. They engaged Dr. W. J. Scott, who had been ship’s surgeon in the sailing-ship Scotia. He was engaged for a term of three years on a salary of Rs. 200 a month. He arrived at Nazira on 1st April 1841.

With Dr. Scott’s appointment, it is possible to get an insight into some
MEDICAL

of the equipment which he required to settle himself into his new appointment. He indentured for the following:

- Amlie's *Materia Medica*.
- A small copper still.
- Test tubes and brass stand.
- Crucible, retorts and receivers, filtering paper, trough and plates.

Travelling for a sick person must have been torture, for it was chiefly by elephant or canoe on the rivers. A palki may have been used if the route was suitable. To get a sick man in from some of the tea gardens situated 20 to 30 miles from Headquarters was an arduous journey, however comfortable the howdah of the elephant could be made for the patient. In 1840, C. A. Bruce, writing from the Northern Division, advised that he was in want of two or three small boats, drawing not more than 1 1/2 to 2 feet of water, to take the sick for medical aid: “Hitherto the sick have been obliged to be sent down in two very small canoes lashed together, which itself is sufficient to kill a sick person suffering from fever.”

Then for recuperation after fever, there was nothing but a trip on the river for a change of air. Hill resorts in the province for convalescence did not develop for many years, and the first of these was Cherrapunjee, which was only approachable from Sylhet. Many sick went to Calcutta, which meant by country boat at least two months each way. Calcutta was not a health resort, but its fleshpots must have been regarded as a change. Later on, when boating facilities improved, the medical officer prescribed more liberally this form of recreation to get his patients back to work.

One can almost diagnose the severity of the case by the length of the trip prescribed. Normal recuperation from a simple bout of fever would be accomplished by a trip to Tezpur; persistent fever over a longer period might justify one to Guwahati; a severe dose a trip to Calcutta. But in extreme cases it might entail a sea voyage to Mauritius, or even to the Cape of Good Hope. Once embarked on one of these trips, there was no possible way of prophesying the date of the patient’s return to duty.

Above Guwahati, all river transport was by country boat. To hire a boat for one person was expensive; to join someone else travelling the same way meant waiting for an indefinite period. There were the Government steamers between Calcutta and Guwahati, at monthly or six-weekly intervals. One patient expressed regret at the delay in his return to duty, the sailing-ship in which his return passage was booked from the Cape, took 101 days to reach Calcutta.
Dr. Scott died at Sibsagar on 25th July 1842, after only four days of fever.

Pending the appointment of his successor, patients had to go into Sibsagar for attention by Dr. Sherlock, who had relieved Dr. Furnell as Civil Surgeon at that station. Dr. W. J. Long was appointed to succeed Dr. Scott and he proceeded to Nazira on the Company’s steamer Assam on 18th August 1842. In the cold weather months, the medical officer often had little to do, and in 1844, Dr. Long was allowed to take on the Southern Division’s correspondence at Nazira for an additional Rs. 50 monthly.

There is practically nothing recorded in the Company’s Books about medical service between 1842 and 1847. It is to be assumed, therefore, that under Dr. W. J. Long’s supervision, matters went smoothly. In 1846, Dr. Long resigned to take up the appointment of Civil Surgeon at Dibrugarh. The Company retained his services at a fee of Rs. 100 monthly, but it is difficult to understand what use he could have been to the Company at a place like Dibrugarh, for it must have taken days of travel to reach Nazira and surrounding districts where the Company had then concentrated their operations. There were, of course, Indian medical assistants for routine service, but they were not very competent or reliable.

The arrangement carried on for about two years until Dr. Burr was appointed the Company’s medical officer in 1848. He had an irascible temperament, and complaints were made that he was abusive to his patients amongst the Assistants. He made the mistake, however, of being abusive to the Superintendent, then Stephen Mornay, in front of one of the Assistants. The Superintendent retaliated and the Doctor had to resign in September 1849. It is true that this time was when the Company’s finances were at their lowest ebb and every economy had to be practised; but it is worth noticing the Calcutta Board’s attitude to a request from Dr. Burr to be furnished with a set of midwifery instruments, having regard to the approaching confinement of the wife of one of the Assistants:

... As it is uncertain when these may be required, and a long period would be occupied in referring back to Assam, the instruments must be furnished, but it is strange that for so casual and uncertain an occasion Dr. Burr should not have relied on the aid of his professional friends in the neighbourhood; the instruments in question may not be required at all.

After Dr. Burr left, there was another rather blank period from a historical point of view, when Dr. Skipton was medical officer, from 1851 to 1857. There is only an urgent request from the Superintendent in 1853 to be supplied with more quinine, his stock of this essential drug having been quite exhausted.

Dr. C. J. Simmons, in 1859, succeeded Dr. Skipton as the Company’s medical officer. In the Company’s Proceedings, the doctor’s name is spelt in every conceivable way that that name is capable of being spelt. One can
only adhere to one way, which is the above, though it may be the wrong one. It appeared that Dr. Simmons was engaged on a salary, plus commission, but having regard to the fact that his commission was computed and paid so long after the year’s operations to which it referred, it was agreed in 1862 that his remuneration should be a consolidated rate of Rs. 500 a month from 1st October 1861. It was only then that the Calcutta Board asked that the Company’s chief medical officer should visit all gardens in the North and East Divisions, as well as the Southern Division, and submit quarterly reports on the health of the Establishment and coolies, and special Reports when anything unusual should occur to require them.

There is nothing recorded, however, in the Company’s archives that gives an insight into the medical and sanitary conditions then prevailing at the Company’s properties.

It would be difficult to assign a date to the period when, as some old accounts would have us believe, the planters routine for the maintenance of health in the tropics was quinine every morning, castor oil twice a week and calomel at the change of the moon.

There is the record in the printed Annual Report that a severe outbreak of cholera occurred in 1883 which decimated the labour force at the height of the manufacturing season, interfering materially with the production of crop and necessitating an intensive recruiting campaign for new labour to replace the casualties.

A report by W. H. Cheetham, who visited the Company’s gardens in 1892 gave the following account of an outbreak of influenza and an appeal for more remuneration to the medical officer:

Influenza was very prevalent in the district and the coolies attacked by it seem very liable to pneumonia afterwards. There were two deaths from it at Towkok whilst I was there and at the neighbouring garden of Sonari out of the labour force of 150 only 5 were capable of using the hoe. It is not only during the time the disease is upon them that the coolies are incapacitated, during and for some time after convalescence they are fit for light work only. Fortunately the deep hoeing was practically completed at most of the Company’s gardens.

Medical Staff. This appears to be highly efficient but Dr. Forbes evidently chafing under a sense of being remunerated on a lower scale than other medical men in the district who are allowed to visit outside European patients. I am aware that the Board have just sanctioned an increase of Rs. 20 per mensen in his horse allowance, but he has a large district to travel over and is certainly indefatigable so that his house allowance should not be regarded as personal remuneration. I think the Board would act judiciously by granting an increase of pay of Rs. 50 a month.

They raised his salary to Rs. 500.
In reading through the records of any Company, there will crop up at some time or another that conflict of opinion between those responsible for tea garden administration and the medical officer or his staff. No matter what the cause of the disagreement may be, the matter had invariably to be submitted to the Board for adjudication, no easy subject on which to make an impartial decision.

Some times the Board had no option but to support the General Manager as the one responsible ultimately for the success of the Company’s working, and this has been known to cause the premature resignation of probably a promising young medical officer.

The Assam Company has always been large enough to employ at least one whole-time doctor, but with many other companies, though they recognised the necessity for a proper medical service, brought doctors out from home on a commencing salary as low as Rs.200 a month, but their agreement laid down clearly that their services were engaged equally as ordinary tea garden Assistants.

From those days the remuneration of medical officers in tea garden practices has improved considerably, if slowly, until to-day it can be said they are in many cases liberal.

In one important respect they now get their home leave paid by the Company, in contrast to relatively only a few years ago when a doctor was expected to find his own locum tenens and pay him, which meant in effect that the doctor got no leave pay from the Company. It was not so many years ago that there was a phase when some young medical officers, after completion of their first agreements, threw up their appointments on the ground that tea garden medical practice was a dead end, and did not offer them the scope they desired for their medical ambitions, and this may account, on reference to the chronological list of medical officers, for the short period many of them remained in the Company’s service.

This does not apply to-day, when world-wide specialised knowledge of tropical diseases is so valuable.

In reference to tea garden practices, there is the domestic atmosphere created by a doctor’s ability, and one in which the General Manager is torn between the devil and the deep blue sea. There is the doctor who has acquired an intimate knowledge of the vernacular, and who is perfectly marvellous with the labour force in getting them to take treatment, and in that way reducing absenteeism, but in whom the European Executive, and especially the ladies, will have nothing to do because of an absence of “bedside manners.”

The chief medical officer was always stationed at Nazira, whilst the second or junior doctor resided at Dhole Bagan. In some accounts there is mention of a medical officer being stationed at Cherideo. It might be thought that one medical officer for the whole of the several gardens,
MEDICAL

each with its own small hospital or dispensary, over a wide area of country, was too big a task. It would seem, however, that the more remote gardens were put in the care of the doctor employed by outside medical associations in the neighbourhood. When such an arrangement started is not certain, but in 1923, when Dr. Macnamara was at Nazira, the gardens of the Rokang Division were supervised by the medical officer of the Moran Medical Association, whilst Towkok, Tingalibam and Gabroo Parbut were looked after by the respective doctors of the Sonari and Jhanzie Medical Associations.

This system of providing the Company’s medical services was discontinued about 1925, when a second medical officer was appointed. This was followed by the appointment of another doctor, and for a time the Company was employing three medical officers. This was about the period prior to the slump of 1931. It was part of the economy campaign of this slump period that the Board reduced the medical establishment, first to two and finally to one medical officer. Dr. Slaughter was one of the victims of this cut in expenditure, when his services were terminated at four months’ notice when he was on leave in 1933. Dr. B. A. Lamprell carried on as sole medical officer until 1941, when the present arrangement came into being, of having two medical officers, one at Nazira and one at Doomur Dullong, the latter being responsible for the three gardens of what is known as the Rokang Division, Doomur Dullong, Mohokutie and Khoomtai, with Tingalibam, Towkok (and at one time also Gabroo Parbut), the medical officer at Nazira having the other eight gardens to supervise.

One of the most important medical campaigns, the first malaria survey, was undertaken in 1931, which was only made possible in this slump period by the fact that the Ross Institute undertook the work at their expense. Dr. B. A. Lamprell’s first success at Doomur Dullong, based on his preliminary survey in the suppression of malaria, is referred to in the Chapter 1931-1940.

Looking back over the years, tea garden practice has become more and more efficient, and the Company, with its two doctors, has been able to take full advantage of the pioneer experiments in the suppression of malaria, until to-day the health of everybody, and particularly the Labour, has improved to a remarkable degree. This good work may have been slowed down somewhat during the war years, due to war-time difficulty of getting supplies of drugs, and transport problems due to petrol shortage. With every garden now having its trained dhai or registered nurse, midwife and other medical services, the infant mortality rate amongst the Company’s population has been reduced to a remarkably low figure.

In 1948, the Company purchased two motor ambulances, which have
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY
done good work in transporting the many cases to and from hospital in Jorhat and Dibrugarh. The Company has its own X-ray units, one mobile. These amenities and medical facilities have, with the able work of the medical officers, so mastered disease, and what was blamed on the insalubrity of the climate of Assam, that malaria, once a scourge, is relegated to the category of a minor complaint. Cholera seldom makes its appearance, whilst kala azar, once a menace to the labour force, is now nearly unknown.

In addition to the Central Hospital at Nazira, in charge of one of the European medical officers, each garden has its own hospital in charge of an Indian assistant medical officer.

The illustration shows the Garden Hospital at Lakmijan Division, which was completed in 1948.

MEDICAL OFFICERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Names</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841-1842</td>
<td>J. W. Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842-1846</td>
<td>W. J. Long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848-1849</td>
<td>—— Burr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1851</td>
<td>A. V. Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852-1857</td>
<td>D. P. Skipton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859-1866</td>
<td>C. J. Simmons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866-1876</td>
<td>John Reid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866-1899</td>
<td>C. E. Caudle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867-1878</td>
<td>J. M. Caudle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-1878</td>
<td>A. Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878-1882</td>
<td>R. I. Bentley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878-1881</td>
<td>J. B. Ruddock</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882-1886</td>
<td>E. J. Simpson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886-1893</td>
<td>C. Forbes</td>
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<td>1899-1903</td>
<td>G. C. Winchester</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903-1924</td>
<td>J. R. Macnamara</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924-1933</td>
<td>H. L. Slaughter</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925-1928</td>
<td>Leitch</td>
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<td>1928-1931</td>
<td>J. M. Savage</td>
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<td>1929-1935</td>
<td>R. A. Grant</td>
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<td>1931-1945</td>
<td>B. A. Lampreel</td>
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<td>1941-1951</td>
<td>A. E. Thomas</td>
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<td>1946-1954</td>
<td>M. E. T. Burke</td>
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<td>1948-1951</td>
<td>S. G. O'Neill</td>
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<td>1951-1954</td>
<td>J. P. Norman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954—</td>
<td>T. W. Poole</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
THE ASSAM COMPANY’S EARLY COMPETITORS

The accompanying reproduction of a map entitled “Map showing all the Tea localities of the Assam Company and other Companies and Planters in the Jorehaut and Muttuck Districts of Upper Assam,” and dated 1864, is of historical importance and of interest to those interested in early development of tea in Assam. (See in pocket at end of volume.)

In the original there is nothing to indicate whether it is based on Government or other survey, but judging by present-day maps of the District, it is inaccurate. Although the map is dated 1864, in the process of years some persons have added notes in pencil and marked gardens by name, which has assisted identification. The references are chiefly to the names of persons who had taken up land, but it has been possible to identify these as the grants on which tea estates or companies operate to-day. It does not mean, however, that the Company or present owners of the land started planting at the date of the map. The original planting out may have been done after 1864, and the property may have changed hands more than once before the present owners came into possession. It is “References to Private Planters’ Gardens” which is the chief interest, as showing who the people were who opened out in the Company’s neighbourhood, and what a great number of them were at one time the Company’s own employees.

The “References to the Assam Company’s Gardens” are mostly a record of where applications for land under the various Rules of Land Tenure had been granted, or were at that time yet to be secured.

A Moreannee, belonging to Deguid and Others.
   This is now the Hunwal Tea Company Ltd.’s Gardens, Moriani and Nagadhoolie.

B A grant of land and garden belonging to Tucker and Braddon. (Tucker late of Assam Company.)
   This is probably the Kotalgoorie Division of the Saloanah Tea Company Limited.

C A grant of land and garden belonging to Jamieson Grob & Company.

D A grant of land and garden belonging to Oman and Others.
   These two grants are the Hoolungoorie Tea Company Limited and a part of (E) below.

E A grant of land and garden belonging to George Williamson, Jr. (late of Assam Company).
   Some person has written against this—“Begg and Horne.”
   This should be “Begg and Hall,” for this was the grant which James S. Begg and—Hall acquired from George Williamson. They divided the grant, Begg forming what is now the Dahingeapar Tea Company Limited and Hall forming what is now the Hoolungoorie Tea Company Limited, with (C) and (D) above.
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

F A piece of land applied for and granted to Todd, Baker, Oman and Others. (Todd and Oman late of Assam Company).

E. Todd left the Assam Company in 1852 and on this grant founded the Melang Estate.

Oman left the Assam Company in 1862. It is believed that Todd became sole proprietor of Melang, so presumably he bought Oman's share.

G A grant belonging to Carter (formerly of Assam Company).

This is T. E. Carter, one time Calcutta Secretary, then Director of the Calcutta Board, and for a time, Honorary Managing Director. He no doubt acquired this grant on one of his visits to the Assam Company Gardens. It would appear that this land is now the Sotai Division of the Kingsley Golaghat Company Ltd.

H Lands held by Todd and Others (formerly of Assam Company).

This is presumably the Noakachari Tea Company Limited.

I Lands held by Carter (formerly of Assam Company).

Probably land of the Seleng or Boisahabi Divisions of the Jhanzie Tea Association.

J A small grant and garden held by Mr. Straford (formerly of Assam Company).

K Mr. Robert Milner's Grant (Assistant, Assam Company).

This is now Khonikor Dallim Tea Company Limited.

L Land held by Mr. Straford.

Probably the Namsisu Out-Garden of Teok, a Division of the Kanan Devon Hills Tea Company Limited, or it is possibly a part of the Khonikor Dallim Tea Company.

M Amgoorie, held by Ingels. (Now Sold.)

This is the land taken up by Bernes and Doyne, on which they founded the Amgoorie Tea Estates Limited.

N Braddon & Tucker. (Mr. Tucker, late of Assam Company.)

This was originally the Naga Ali Tea Company Limited which was sold to the Amgoorie Tea Estates Limited and now forms an Out-Garden of the Amgoorie Division of that Company.

P Carter.

This would appear to be part of the land belonging to the Borsillah Division of the Jhanzie Tea Association.

Q Grant held by Sibsauger Company.

These cannot be traced, and it is doubtful if there are any gardens on this land.

S Holroyd, Colonel Reed and Others.

This grant cannot be traced as belonging to any tea company to-day.

T Grant held by Mr. Vanqulin, Jr., and C. H. Lane & Company.

This is the grant on which was formed subsequently the Lukwah Tea Company Limited.

U Singloo (Golaghat Tea Company).

In spite of the reference to the Golaghat Tea Company, this grant is probably now the Out-Garden of the Suffry Division of the Singloo Tea Company Limited.
APPENDICES

V Jamieson Grob & Company.
This was probably the Sonari Division of the Grob Tea Company Limited.

W Jamieson Grob & Company.
This is probably the Raja Bari Out-Garden of the Lukwah Tea Company Limited.

X Jamieson Grob & Company.
This is probably Tingalibam Tea Estate.

Of the balance of the references to private planters' gardens, only a few can be identified:

Cc Moran, McIntosh (now Wise & Company), and a piece of land held by Kyah.
This was land which James McIntosh planted out on his own account and sold subsequently to the Moran Tea Company Limited, it forms part of the grants belonging to the Moran & Sepon Divisions of that Company.

Dd Henry Jenkins, Tucker and Others.
This is the Hingri Jan Division of the Assam Consolidated Tea Company Limited.

Ee Carter's.
This is marked on the map Mahmara, which William Roberts must have bought from T. E. Carter, and on which grant the former subsequently planted out the Deepling Division of, at first, the Desang Tea Company Limited, and which was absorbed subsequently under that name as a Division of the Jorehaut Tea Company Limited.

Ff Gg Jenkins, McIntosh, Maitland and Others.

These are the Bahmum and Khowang Divisions of the Assam Consolidated Tea Estates Limited.
## REGISTER OF BURIALS IN NAZIRA CEMETERY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Burial</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Inscription</th>
<th>No. in Plan</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>James Garland</td>
<td>J. A. Garland died 18th June 1866</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Walter Smith</td>
<td>Died June 1866</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1862</td>
<td>A. F. Hawes</td>
<td>Died August 1866</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>1862</td>
<td>Mr. Hall</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Mr. Halliwell</td>
<td>D. 10 Dec. 1884—aged 33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>There is no record of the date of burial of these</td>
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<td>1862</td>
<td>Mr. Among</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>G. Invoye</td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>A. Invoye</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Infant daughter of Chas. Young</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Infant daughter of Mr. Invoye</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Infant child of Mr. Gomes</td>
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<td>1862</td>
<td>Infant child of D. Among</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Miss Invoye</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Miss Invoye</td>
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<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Miss Ogilvie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1863</td>
<td>I. P. Cazeneuve</td>
<td>Sacred to the memory of Mr. I. P. Cazeneuve, Tea Planter, Assam.—Died 31st July 1862 aged 48 years. “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.” Erected by his cousin</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>No. in Plan</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th June 1864</td>
<td>John Law</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31st July 1865</td>
<td>Mrs. Jane Testar</td>
<td>Wife of C. H. Testar, assistant clerk in Nazira office</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1866</td>
<td>Infant son of T. G. D. Reed</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Charles Raymer</td>
<td>Sacred to the Memory of Percy Edward Holroyd Roberts, second son of John Blessington Roberts, Magistrate and Coroner of Calcutta, who expired suddenly while assisting to extinguish a Fire in the Coolie Lines of Mackeypore Factory and was buried here. Born 30th June 1846. Died 8 February 1868</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Feb. 1868</td>
<td>P. E. H. Roberts</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To the memory of John Adams who died April 2nd 1870</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1870</td>
<td>John Adams</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>In affectionate remembrance of L. P. Young, Tea Planter, who departed this life on the 21st June 1875. Aged 58 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st June 1875</td>
<td>L. P. Young</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>In affectionate remembrance of Charlotte Young, who departed this life on the 20th Feb. 1880. Aged 27 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th Oct. 1880</td>
<td>R. C. Tucker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>No. in Plan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd May 1899</td>
<td>C. E. Caudle, Y.F.</td>
<td>In loving memory of Charles Edward Caudle, Medical Officer to the Assam Company for 33 years. Born 28th Feb. 1842. Died at Nazira 22nd May 1899</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th Jan. 1904</td>
<td>Mrs. A. Evans</td>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>R.N.F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Nov. 1907</td>
<td>H. Nowill</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th Sept. 1924</td>
<td>H. B. Grant</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Oct. 1925</td>
<td>J. W. Keith</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Died at Rajabarri, 4th October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>No. in Plan</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th Jan. 1927</td>
<td>George Brodrick Thompson</td>
<td>In loving memory of George Brodrick Thompson youngest son of the late Henry Brodrick and Mrs. Thompson, Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, who was killed in a motor accident at Hingrijan, Jany. 16th 1927 aged 24 years. “There shall be no more death.”</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Killed in Motor Accident at Hingrijan 16th January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd Oct. 1928</td>
<td>J. Jack</td>
<td>In loving memory of John Jacks beloved husband of Anne Coutts who died Octr. 23rd 1928. Aged 34</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Died in Nazira 23rd October 1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th Dec. 1932</td>
<td>Clive Rasenden Verey</td>
<td>To the loving memory of Clive Rasenden Verey who died at Borahi Tea Estate, Assam, on the 28th December 1932. Aged 48 years. R.I.P.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th Nov. 1933</td>
<td>Infant Son of G. Warren</td>
<td>In memory of Michael, the infant son of George and Hilda Warren. Died at Amgoorie 23rd Novr. 1933.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th June 1934</td>
<td>Edward Anthony O'Leary</td>
<td>In loving memory of Edward Anthony O'Leary, beloved husband of Elsa O'Leary. Died June 5th 1934. Aged 37 years. R.I.P.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Died as a result of an accident at Janoka T. E., Sonari, Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th July 1935</td>
<td>Ronald Frank Palmer</td>
<td>Ronald Frank Palmer of Bihubar Tea Estate, died at Nazira, 4th July 1935</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Died in Nazira 4th July 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Remarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Oct. 1882</td>
<td>J. B. Ogilvie</td>
<td>In affectionate remembrance of J. B. Ogilvie, Tea Planter, who departed this life on 2nd October 1882. Aged 42 years</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Aug. 1884</td>
<td>Kathleen Buckingham</td>
<td>To the loving memory of our dear little Kathleen, youngest daughter of Laura and James Buckingham of Amgoorie. Born May 20th 1883. Died August 1st 1884. “The Master is come and calleth for Thee.”</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th Aug. 1885</td>
<td>Douglas Whyte</td>
<td>In loving memory of our little Douglas, Died 15th August 1885. Aged 2 years F. &amp; A. Whyte. “Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Mrs. Louisa Young</td>
<td>In memory of Charles Archibald Handley Sterndale. Born 1st Jan. 1887. Died 6th June 1887. “For it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th June 1887</td>
<td>C. A. H. Sterndale</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>No. in Plan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th Sept. 1889</td>
<td>W. W. Boucher</td>
<td>“Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th Sept. 1889</td>
<td>C. E. Cooper</td>
<td>1 Cor. 1.7v. In ever loving memory of Charles Edwin Cooper. Born 11th July 1860. Fell asleep 23rd September 1889</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Nov. 1889</td>
<td>Charles Jackson</td>
<td>Died 10th Novr.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th Mar. 1890</td>
<td>Mrs. Invoie</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd July 1891</td>
<td>D. C. E. Gwyn</td>
<td>Loving memory of David C. E. Gwyn who died the 22nd July 1891. Aged 35 years. Gwyn.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th Jan. 1892</td>
<td>Mrs. Agnes Caudle</td>
<td>In loving memory of Agnes, wife of Charles Edward Caudle, who died at Hatipoti 27th. Jan. 1892. “Which hope we have as an Anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast” Heb. 6.19. “Be my last thought how sweet to rest, for ever on my Saviour’s breast.”</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th June 1893</td>
<td>Infant child of F. D. Watson</td>
<td>Born and Died at Suntok June 24th 1893</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th Oct. 1896</td>
<td>Mrs. S. Young</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Sept. 1897</td>
<td>A. D. Thomson</td>
<td>In loving memory of Allan Douglas Thomson, who died at Ligrie Pookri on the 1st Sept. 1897. Aged 2 years &amp; 20 days</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>No. in Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th Nov. 1907</td>
<td>H. Nowill</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th Sept. 1924</td>
<td>H. B. Grant</td>
<td>Sacred to the memory of H. B. Grant. Died at Atkhol 24th Sepr. 1924. “Thy will be done.” Aged 36 years</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Oct. 1925</td>
<td>J. W. Keith</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Died at Rajabarri, 4th October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Burial</td>
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<td>17th Jan. 1927</td>
<td>George Brodrick Thompson</td>
<td>In loving memory of George Brodrick Thompson youngest son of the late Henry Brodrick and Mrs. Thompson, Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, who was killed in a motor accident at Hingrijan, Jan. 16th 1927 aged 24 years. “There shall be no more death.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th Dec. 1945</td>
<td>Mrs. Tabitha D'Silva</td>
<td>In loving memory of Mrs. Tabitha D'Silva, beloved wife of Mr. H. D'Silva of Shillong. Born on 13th July 1872. Died at her son's residence at Mazengah Siding on 28th December 1945. Aged 73 yrs, 5 months, 15 days</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Died at Mazengah Siding 28.12.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Infant Child of C. Simmons</td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Died at Simalguri</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I submit this report on our Assam Tea with much diffidence, on account of the troubles in which this frontier has been unfortunately involved. I have had something more than Tea to occupy my mind, and have consequently not been able to commit all my thoughts to paper at one time; this I hope will account for the rambling manner in which I have treated the subject. Such as my report is, I trust it will be found acceptable, as throwing some new light on a subject of no little importance to British India, and the British public generally. In drawing out this report, it gives me much pleasure to say, that our information and knowledge respecting Tea and Tea tracts are far more extensive than when I last wrote on this subject;—the number of tracts now known amounting to 120, some of them very extensive, both on the hills and in the plains. A sufficiency of seeds and seedlings might be collected from these tracts in the course of a few years to plant off the whole of Assam; and I feel convinced, from my different journeys over the country, that but a very small portion of the localities are as yet known.

Last year in going over one of the hills behind Jaipore, about 300 feet high, I came upon a Tea tract, which must have been two or three miles in length; in fact I did not see the end of it: the trees were in most parts as thick as they could grow, and the tea seeds (smaller than what I had seen before) fine and fresh, literally covered the ground: this was in the middle of November, and the trees had abundance of fruit and flower on them. One of the largest trees I found to be two cubits in circumference, and full forty cubits in height. At the foot of the hill I found another tract, and had time permitted me to explore those parts, there is no doubt but I should have found many of the Naga Hills covered with Tea. I have since been informed of two more tracts near this. In going along the foot of the Hills to the westward, I was informed that there was Tea at Tewcack or near it: this information came too late, for I had passed the place just a little to the east of the Dacca river, at a placed called Cheridoo, a small hill projecting out more than the rest on the plain to the northward, with the ruins of a brick temple on it; here I found Tea, and no doubt if there had been time to examine, I should have found many more tracts. I crossed the Dacca river at the old fort of Ghergong, and walked towards the Hills, and almost immediately came upon Tea. The place is called Hauthoweah. Here I remained a couple of days going about the country, and came upon no fewer than thirteen tracts. A Dewaniah who assisted me to hunt out these tracts, and who was well acquainted with the leaf, as he had been in the habit of drinking tea during his residence with the Singphoes, informed me that he had seen a large tract of Tea plants on the Naga moun-


A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

tains, a day's journey west of Cheridoo. I have no reason to doubt the veracity of this man; he offered to point out the place to me, or any of my men, if they would accompany him: but as the country belonged to Raja Poorunda Sing, I could not examine it. I feel convinced the whole of the country is full of Tea.

Again, in going further to the south-west, just before I came to Gabrew hill, I found the small hills adjoining it, to the eastward, covered with Tea plants. The flowers of the Tea on these hills are of a pleasant delicate fragrance, unlike the smell of our other Tea plants; but the leaves and fruit appear the same. This would be a delightful place for the manufacture of Tea, as the country is well populated, has abundance of grain, and labour is cheap. There is a small stream called the Jhangy river, at a distance of two hours walk; it is navigable, I am informed, all the year round for small canoes, which could carry down the Tea, and the place is only one and a half day's journey from Jorehaut, the capital of Upper Assam. Southwest of Gabrew Purbut (about two days' journey) there is a village at the foot of the hill, inhabited by a race called Norahs; they are Shans, I believe, as they came from the eastward, where Tea abounds. I had long conversations with them, and the oldest man of the village, who was also the head of it, informed me, that when his father was a young man, he had emigrated with many others, and settled at Tipum opposite Jaipore, on account of the constant disturbances at Munkum; that they brought the Tea plant with them, and planted it on the Tipum hill, where it exists to this day; and that when he was about sixteen years of age, he was obliged to leave Tipum, on account of the wars and disturbances at that place, and take shelter at the village where he now resides. This man said he was now eighty years of age, and that his father died a very old man. How true this story is, I cannot say, and do not see what good it would do the old man to fabricate it. This was the only man I met with in my journeys about the country who could give any account of the Tea plant, with the exception of an Ahum, who declared to me that it was Sooka, or the first Kacharry raja of Assam, who brought the Tea plant from Munkum; he said it was written in his Putty, or history. The Ahum-Putty I have never been able to get hold of; but this I know, that the information about the Tea plant pointed out by the old Norah man, as being on the Tipum hill, is true; for I have cleared the tract where it grew thickest, about 300 yards by 300, running from the foot of the hill to the top. The old man told me his father cut the plant down every third year, that he might get the young leaves.

To the west of Gabrew I did not find any Tea; but to the westward of the Dhunseeree river I found a species, though not the same as that we use. If the people on the west side of the Dhunseeere river were acquainted with the true leaf, I think Tea would be found. I planted it all along the route I went, which may lead to its eventual discovery; but people should be sent to search for the plant who are really acquainted with it. I think a vast quantity of Tea would be brought to light, if this were done. A reference to the map will show how our tracts are distributed all over the country. How much Tea they would all produce if fully worked, I will not pretend to say, but in the course of this subject I will mention such matters relative to the tracts and the plants on them, that every one may make his own calculation. Until lately we had only two Chinese Black Tea makers. These men have twelve native assistants; each Chinaman with six assistants can only superintend one locality, and the Tea leaves from the various other tracts, widely separated must be brought to these two places for manufacture. The consequence is, that an additional number of labourers must always be employed to bring the leaves from so great a distance. The leaves suffer when brought in large quantities from a distance, as they soon begin to ferment; and the labour of only preparing them so far in process, that they may not spoil by the morning, is excessive. The men have often to work until very late to accomplish this. When labour falls so very heavy, and on so very few, it cannot be expected that it can be equally well executed, as if more had been employed.
The leaves last gathered are also much larger than they ought to be, for want of being collected and manufactured earlier; consequently the Tea is inferior in quality. I mention this to show the inconvenience and expense of having so few Tea makers.

The samples of Black Tea made by the twelve assistants having been approved of by the Tea Committee in Calcutta, it was my intention to have distributed the men amongst the different tracts; but the late disturbances on our frontier have prevented this arrangement, and I have been obliged to employ ten men in Assam (two others having gone to Calcutta in charge of Tea) at the tract called Kahung, which is becoming a very extensive and important Tea locality, so many others being near it, which can all be thrown into one. When we have a sufficient number of manufacturers, so that we can afford to have some at each tract, or garden, as they have in China, then we may hope to compete with that nation in cheapness of produce: nay, we might, and ought, to undersell them; for if each tract or garden had its own Tea maker and labourers, the collecting of the leaves would not perhaps occupy more than twelve days in each crop; after which the men might not perhaps occupy more than twelve days in each crop; after which the men might be discharged, or profitably employed on the Tea grounds. But now, for the want of a sufficient number of labourers and Tea makers, there is a constant gathering of leaves throughout the month; and as I said before, those gathered last can only make inferior Teas; besides the great loss by the leaves getting too old, and hereby unfit for being made into any Tea; and all this entirely for want of hands to pluck the leaves. It is true we have gained twelve Black Tea makers this year, in addition to the last; and twelve more native assistants have been appointed, who may be available next year to manufacture Tea independently, as they were learning the art all last year. We have also had an addition to our establishment of two Chinese Green Tea manufacturers, and twelve native assistants have been placed under them to learn; but what are these compared to the vast quantity of Tea, or the ground the Tea plants cover, or might be made to cover in three years?—but a drop of water in the ocean! We must go on at a much faster pace in the two great essentials—Tea manufacturers, and labourers,—in order to have them available at each garden, when the leaves come into season.

If I were asked, when will this Tea experiment be in a sufficient state of forwardness, so as to be transferable to speculators? I would answer, when a sufficient number of native Tea manufacturers have been taught to prepare both the black and the green sort; and that under one hundred available Tea manufacturers, it would not be worth while for private speculators to take up the scheme on a large scale; on a small one it would be a different thing. In the course of two or three years we ought to have that number. Labourers must be introduced in the first instance to give a tone to the Assam Opium-eaters; but the great fear is that these latter would corrupt the new comers. If the cultivation of Tea were encouraged, and the poppy put a stop to in Assam, the Assamese would make a splendid set of Tea manufacturers and Tea cultivators.

In giving a statement of the number of Tea tracts, when I say that Tingri, or any other tract is so long and so broad, it must be understood, that space to that extent only has been cleared, being found to contain all the plants which grew thickly together; as it was not thought worth while at the commencement of these experiments to go to the expense of clearing any more of the forest for the sake of a few straggling plants. If these straggling plants were followed up, they would in all probability be found gradually becoming more numerous, until you found yourself in another tract as thick and as numerous as the one you left; and if the straggling plants of this new tract were traced, they would by degrees disappear until not one was to be seen. But if you only proceeded on through the jungles, it is ten to one that you would come upon a solitary Tea plant, a little further on you would meet with another; until you gradually found yourself in another new tract, as full of plants as the one you had left, growing absolutely so thick as to impede each other's growth. Thus I am convinced one might go on for miles from one tract into another. All my Tea tracts about Tingri and Kahung are formed in this manner,
with only a patch of jungle between them which is not greater than what could be conveniently filled up by thinning those parts that have too many plants. At Kahung I have lately knocked three tracts into one, and I shall most probably have to continue doing the same until one tract shall be made of what now consists of a dozen. I have never seen the end of Juggundoo’s Tea tract, nor yet Kujudooh or Ningrew’s. I feel confident that the two former run over the hills and join, or nearly join, some of our tracts in the Mutack country. Nor have I seen the end of Kahung tract, all about that part of the country being one vast succession of Tea from Rungagurra on the Debrew, to Jaipore on the Buri Dehing. It may be seen on inspecting the map how thickly the Tea localities are scattered;—those that are known, and they are but a small portion compared to those that are unknown. There is the Namsong tract on the Naga hills, the largest that has yet been seen, and the extent of which is not ascertained. The tracts on the Gubind hills are unknown; and this is likewise the case with Haut Holah and Cheridoo; so that there is a large field for improvement throughout, to say nothing of the Singpho tracts, which may be found to be one unbounded link to Hookum; and who knows but it crosses the Irrawaddy to China? Many Tea tracts I know have been cut down in ignorance by the natives, to make room for the rice field, for firewood, and fences. Many of these tracts have sprung up again, more vigorous than before. Witness that at Ningrew, where the natives say that every thing was cut down, and the land planted with rice, except on the high ground.

With respect to the Tea plant being most productive on high or low ground, I cannot well say, as all our tracts are on the plains; but from what little I have seen of the hill tracts, I should suppose they were not more productive. In China the hill tracts produce the best Teas, and they may do the same here. Almost all my tracts on the plains are nearly on the same level, I should think. Nudwa perhaps is a little higher than Tingri; so that there is a large field for improvement throughout, to say nothing of the hill tracts, which may be found to be one unbounded link to Hookum; and who knows but it crosses the Irrawaddy to China? Many Tea tracts I know have been cut down in ignorance by the natives, to make room for the rice field, for firewood, and fences. Many of these tracts have sprung up again, more vigorous than before. Witness that at Ningrew, where the natives say that every thing was cut down, and the land planted with rice, except on the high ground.

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APPENDICES

plants. The Chinese declared to me, that the China plants now at Deenjoy, would never have attained to half the perfection they now have, under ten years in their own country.

I may here observe, that the sun has a material effect on the leaves; for as soon as the trees that shade the plants are removed, the leaf, from a fine deep green, begins to turn into a yellowish colour, which it retains for some months, and then again gradually changes to a healthy green, but now becomes thicker, and the plant throws out far more numerous leaves than when in the shade. The more the leaves are plucked the greater number of them are produced; if the leaves of the first crop were not gathered, you might look in vain for the leaves of the second crop. The Tea made from the leaves in the shade is not near so good as that from leaves exposed to the sun; the leaves of plants in the sun are much earlier in season than of those in the shade; the leaves from the shady tract give out a more watery liquid when rolled, and those from the sunny a more glutinous substance. When the leaves of either are rolled on a sunny day, they emit less of this liquid than on a rainy day. This juice decreases as the season advances. The plants in the sun have flowers and fruit much earlier than those in the shade, and are far more numerous, they have flowers and seeds in July, and fruit in November. Numerous plants are to be seen that by some accident, either cold or rain, have lost all their flowers, and commence throwing out fresh flower-buds more abundantly than ever. Thus it is not unfrequent to see some plants in flower so late as March (some of the China plants were in flower in April) bearing at once the old and the new seeds, flower-buds, and full-blown flowers—all at one and the same time. The rain also greatly affects the leaves; for some sorts of Tea cannot be made on a rainy day; for instance the Powchong and Mingehew. The leaves for these ought to be collected about 10 A.M. on a sunny morning, when the dew has evaporated. The Powchong can only be manufactured from the leaves of the first crop; but the Mingehew, although it requires the same care in making as the other, can yet be made from any crop, provided it is made on a sunny morning. The Chinese dislike gathering leaves on a rainy day for any description of Tea, and never will do so, unless necessity requires it. Some pretend to distinguish the Teas made on a rainy and on a sunny day, much in the same manner as they can distinguish the shady from the sunny Teas—by their inferiority. If the large leaves for the Black Tea were collected on a rainy day, about seven seers, or fourteen pounds, of green leaves would be required to make one seer, or two pounds, of Tea; but if collected on a sunny day, about four seers, or eight pounds, of green leaves, would make one seer, or two pounds, of Tea;—so the Chinamen say. I tried the experiment, and found it to be correct. Our season for Tea making generally commences about the middle of March; the second crop in the middle of May; the third crop about the first of July; but the time varies according to the rains setting in sooner or later.

The China Black Tea plants which were brought into Mut tack in 1837, amounted in all to 1609—healthy and sickly. A few of the latter died, but the remainder are healthy, and flourish as well, as if they had been reared in China. The leaves of these plants were plucked in the beginning of March, and weighed sixteen seers, or thirty-two pounds. Many of the plants were then in flower, and had small seeds. They are about three feet high, and were loaded with fruit last year, but the greater part of it decayed when it had come to maturity, as was the case with the Assam Tea seeds, and almost every seed of these wilds, in the past year. The seeds should, I think, be plucked from the plant when thought ripe, and not be permitted to drop or fall to the ground. I collected about twenty-four pounds of the China seeds, and sowed some on the little hill of Tipum in my Tea garden, and some in the Nursery ground at Jaipore, above three thousand of which have come up, are looking beautiful, and doing very well. I have since found out that all the China seedlings on Tipum hill have been destroyed by some insect.

The Assam and China seedlings are near each other; the latter have a much darker
appearance. I have made but few nurseries, or raised plants from seed, as abundance of young plants can be procured, of any age or size, from our Tea tracts. There may be about 6000 young seedlings at Chubwa; at Deenjoy about 2000; at Tingri a few; and some at Paundooah. In June and July 1837, 17,000 young plants were brought from Muttack, and planted at a place called Toongroong Patar, amongst the thick tree jungles of Sadiya.

In March of the same year six or eight thousand were brought from Muttack, and planted in different thick jungles at Sadiya; many of these died in consequence of the buffaloes constantly breaking in amongst them; the rest are doing well, but I am afraid will be killed from the above cause; and now that I have removed to Jaipore they are too far off for my personal superintendence.

In 1838, 52,000 young Tea plants were brought from the Nemsong Naga hill tracts, about ten miles from Jaipore; a great portion of these have been lately sent to Calcutta, to be forwarded to Madras; should they thrive there, it is my opinion that they will never attain any height, at least not like ours, but be dwarfish like the China plants. Deenjoy, Chubwa, Tingri, and Geela-Jhan tracts have been filled up or enlarged with plants from the jungle tracts. In transplanting from one sunny tract to another, when done in the rains, very few, if any, die; if the plants be removed from a deep shade to a sunny tract, the risk is greater, but still, if there is plenty of rain, few only will die. If from a deep shade to a piece of ground not a Tea tract, and exposed to the sun—for instance from the Naga hills to Jaipore—if there be plenty of rain, and the soil congenial, as it is at this place, few will die; if shaded by a few trees, less will perish, if taken from shade, and planted in shade and the soil uncongenial, but there is plenty of rain, the greater portion will live;—witness Toongroong Pater at Sadiya. If the plants are brought from deep shade, and planted in the sun in uncongenial soil, let them have ever so much rain, not one in fifty will be alive the third year;—witness 30,000 brought to Sadiya. I believe the Tea plant to be so hardy that it would almost live in any soil, provided it were planted in deep shade when taken to it. There should be plenty of water near the roots, but the plants should always be above inundation. As soon as it has taken root, which it will soon do, the shade may be removed, and there will be no fear of the plant dying.

The advantage of getting plants from the jungle tracts is, that you can get them of any age or size; nothing more is necessary than to send a few coolies early in March, just as the rains commence, and have the plants of the size required removed to your own garden; and if they are of a moderate size, you may gather a small crop of Tea from them the next year. As these plants are very slender, it would be best to plant four or five close together to form a fine bush. If the plants are raised from seed, you may expect a good crop of Tea the third year, but do not come to maturity under six years. It is said they live to the age of forty or fifty years. The Chinese way of digging a hole, and putting in a handful or two of seed, does not succeed so well in this country, as putting two or three seeds on small ridges of earth and covering them over, which I have found to answer better.

In clearing a new Tea tract, if the jungle trees are very large and numerous, it would be as well to make a clean sweep of the whole, by cutting them and the Tea plants all down together; for it would be impossible to get rid of so much wood without the help of fire. The Tea plants, if allowed to remain, would be of little use after they had been crushed and broken by the fall of the large trees, and dried up by the fire; but admitting that they could escape all this, the leaves of trees from twelve to twenty feet high could not be reached, and if they could, they would be almost useless for Tea manufacture, as it is the young leaves, from young trees, that produce the best Teas. But if all were cut down and set fire to, we should have a fine clear tract at once, at the least expense, and might expect to have a pretty good crop of Tea one year after the cutting, or at furthest, the second year; for it is astonishing with what vigour the plant shoots up after the fire.
APPENDICES

has been applied. And we gain by this process; for, from every old stock or stump cut down, ten to twelve more vigorous shoots spring up, so that in the place of a single plant you have now a fine Tea bush. I think from what I have seen of these plants, that if cut down every third year, they would yield far superior Teas; neither am I singular in this opinion, the Green Tea Chinamen having told me that they cut down their plants every ninth year, which may be reckoned equivalent to our third year, taking into consideration the size of our trees and the richness of our soil. Our trees, or plants, are certainly more than four or five times the size of theirs, and must consequently yield so many times more produce; theirs is the dwarf, ours the giant Tea. The size of the leaf matters nothing, in my opinion, provided it is young and tender; even their diminutive leaf, if one day too old, is good for nothing.

* * * *

We shall now take a comparative view of the number of men required by the Black and the Green Tea makers for one pair of pans.

For the Black Tea makers, there will be required,

- to tatch, 2 men
- roll, 4 men
- attend to the fire, 1 man
- dry, 1 man
- beat and put in the sun, 2 men

Total number of men 10

To keep these men fully at work, from twenty-five to thirty coolies will be required to pluck leaves, and they will turn out about two boxes of Tea per day, (weighing one maund, or 80 pounds) if the weather be fine and sunny; but scarcely half that quantity if it be rainy, on account of the coolies not plucking so much on a rainy, as they would on a fair sunny day. As the people of the country become acquainted with the gathering and manufacturing, three boxes, of forty pounds each, may be expected in fine weather, adding perhaps a few men to the number of coolies.

A pair of pans for the Green Tea makers would require during the first process,

- to tatch, 2 men
- receive the Tea from the pans, 1 man
- roll, 8 men
- attend to the fire, 1 man
- put the leaves in the sun and turn them, 4 men

Total number of men 16

Thirty coolies would be required to keep these men in full play, and they would turn out two boxes of twenty-three seers, or forty-six pounds each, per day; in all ninety-two pounds of Tea. If the weather be rainy, of course the produce is much less; as the gatherers then do only half work. Thus the difference between the Black and Green is, that the former requires six manufacturers less; and that when the Black Tea is finished, boxed, and ready for exportation, the Green has only undergone the first process, and is but half finished; although it is ready for exportation to any appointed place to receive the final and troublesome, as well as most expensive part of the process. Nevertheless the first part of the Green Tea preparation is easily learnt by the natives of this place in about two or three months. In speaking of the trouble and expense attending the second process of the Green Tea making, I beg to observe that it appears to me, from what little I have seen of it, that machinery might easily be brought to bear; and as Assam is about to become a great Tea country, it behoves us to look to this. The Tea half made, as above described, I am informed by the Green Tea Chinamen now with me, is put either into
boxes or baskets, with bamboo leaves between; it has to make in this state a long journey by land and water, and then to go one or more months in a boat by sea, before it reaches Canton, where it is laid aside for one or two months more, before it undergoes the second process; making in all about five months from the time it was first prepared. All that is required is to keep it dry. Now if all this be true, which I have no doubt it is, I see no reason why we could not send it to England, and have it made up there. I rather see every thing in favour of such a plan, and nothing against it. After a year’s instruction under Chinamen, it might be left to the ingenuity of Englishmen to roll, sift, and clean the Tea by machinery, and, in fact, reduce the price of the Green Tea nearly one half, and thus enable the poor to drink good unadulterated Green Tea, by throwing the indigo and sulphate of lime overboard. At all events the experiment is worthy of a fair trial, and the first step towards it would be to manufacture the Tea at Calcutta; or perhaps it would be better to let the China Green Tea makers go by machinery, and, in fact, reduce the price of the Green Tea nearly one half, and have it manufactured there at once.

Now for a word about the Lead-canister maker, who is a very important man in our establishment; for without him, we could not pack our Teas.—On two tiles about an inch thick and sixteen inches square, is pasted, on one side, a sheet of very fine thick paper, said to have been made in Cochin-China; over this another sheet is pasted only at the edges. The paper must be very smooth, and without any kind of hole, knob, or blemish. To make it answer the purpose better, fine chalk is rubbed over it. The tiles thus prepared are laid one over the other and moved backwards and forwards, to ascertain if they work smoothly. The lower tile rests on two pieces of wood, about four inches in thickness, and the exact length of the tile. The room where the sheets of lead are made must be very smooth and level, as the tiles are apt to break when there is any unequal pressure on them. In the corner of the room there is a sunken brick fire-place, the upper part of which rises just a little above the floor; into this fire-place is inserted one of the case-iron pans used for making Tea, and in one corner of the masonry is a vent hole on which in general a tea kettle stands. The pan is heated by a wood fire; an iron ladle with a handle, about six or eight inches long, answers the purpose of taking the lead out of the pan when required. The pan may hold about twenty pounds. There is also another ladle with a long handle, and holes at the bottom, to take the dross off. When lead for the sides of the boxes is required, the proportion of one maund of lead to five seers of tin is put into the pan. When well melted and freed from dross, the two tiles above mentioned are placed on the two pieces of wood, one piece being nearly under the centre, and the other at the edge of the lower tile; the upper tile is placed on the lower tile; even and square, projecting perhaps a little backwards towards the operator. The tiles being thus placed near the melted lead, the Chinaman squats down on them, placing his heels near the edge, with his toes towards the centre; while with his left hand he lays hold of the corner tile, and with the right holds the short ladle, which he dips into the boiler, and takes out about half a ladleful of the molten metal, tipping up the upper tile with the left hand about three inches, at the same time assisting this operation by pressing on his heels and gently lifting his toes. The upper tile being thus raised he dashes in the contents of the ladle between both, lets go with the left hand, and presses on with his toes, which brings the upper tile with some force to its former position over the lower one, and occasions the superfluous lead to gush out right and left and in front. The upper tile is then raised like the lid of a box, while the lower one rests on the piece of projecting wood underneath, and a fine thin sheet of lead, nearly the size of the tiles, is taken out, and thrown on one side; the upper tile is then gently lowered down, another ladle of hot lead dashed in, and so on in quick succession, about four sheets of lead being made in one minute. The lower tile projecting a little beyond the upper one assists the man to lay the ladle on, and pour in the metal firmly and quickly. To vary the operation, the man sometimes stands up and places one foot on the upper tile, working with his heel and
toes, the same as if both feet were on, and just as quickly. Many interruptions take place, such as examining the papers on the tiles, rubbing them with chalk, turning them round, and reversing them. Sometimes half a split bamboo is placed in front and under the tiles, with a piece of paper on it, to receive the lead that falls down, so that it may not come in contact with the ground. This lead is every now and then taken up and put back into the boiler. A maund of lead may make about twelve or thirteen boxes, which will hold forty pounds. There are also two other tiles, about a cubit square, these are used for making the tops of the canisters, which are generally of tin only, but can also be made from the above mixture. It is necessary in making this sheet-lead, to hold the sheets up and examine them; for if not properly prepared, there are sometimes a number of very fine holes in them, which are not perceptible when lying on the ground or table. On this account the first twenty sheets of lead are thrown aside and rejected, even without any examination. When the tiles have become nice and warm, it is then the fine and even sheets, without holes, are obtained. Before a sheet-lead canister can be made, it is necessary to have a model box made to fit into the wooden box, that is to hold the sheet-lead canister; on this box or shell the sheet-lead canister is made. It has a hole at the bottom to prevent any suction in putting it in, or drawing it out of the box or canister; and instead of a top is has a bar of wood across, by which it is drawn out. For soldering, tin, with the eighth or twelfth part of quicksilver, and some rosin are used. The wood part of some of the boxes is covered with paper pasted on and dried in the sun. To give the paper on the boxes a yellow colour, a mixture of paste with pulverized and sifted saffron is laid on and dried. The paper on the corners of the boxes is ornamented by means of a wooden block with flowers carved on it; on this bit of wood very thin paper, cut to its size, is placed, and a mixture, consisting of pulverized saffron, indigo, and water, having a deep green colour, is laid singly on each bit of paper with a brush made of cocoanut fibres. These slips of paper are put one above the other, twenty thick, or as long as the paper takes the impression of the carved wood below. When the corners of the boxes have been ornamented with this paper and dried, another mixture, about the proportion of four seers of oil to three seers of rosin, boiled together, is applied with a cocoanut brush over all the boxes as a finish; after these are dry they are ready for the Tea.

The following table will show the size and produce of the Tea tracts now worked, and the probable amount of Tea for this and the next season.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Tea tracts fully worked in 1838</th>
<th>Length and breadth of Tea tracts</th>
<th>Number of plants in each Tea tract</th>
<th>Average produce of single Tea plants</th>
<th>Produce in 1838</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 1 Tringri,</td>
<td>267 by 90</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4 Sa. Weight, 1838</td>
<td>260 Srs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 2 Tringri,</td>
<td>155 by 70</td>
<td>2,340</td>
<td>3-12 Sa. Wt., 1838</td>
<td>160 &quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1 Kahung,</td>
<td>480 by 210</td>
<td>1,36,000</td>
<td>4 Sa. Weight, 1838</td>
<td>680 &quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1 Chubwa,</td>
<td>200 by 160</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>4 Sa. Weight, 1838</td>
<td>410 &quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deenjoy</td>
<td>223 by 171</td>
<td>8,400</td>
<td>2 Sa. Weight, 1838</td>
<td>210 &quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From shady tracts,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,720 S.</td>
<td>The plants are small in this tract, including China plants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The probable increase of the above Tracts for 1839</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>2,637 S.</td>
<td>5,274 lbs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

471
It should be borne in mind that this is a rough calculation, and I can only give the probable amount. Most of these plants are very young, or have been recently cut down; a few years hence the plants may yield twice the above quantity. The first table exhibits the absolute produce of 1838. Now let us suppose a new settler were to take land in these arts; what would be his expenses if he were only to cultivate Tea, and had to clear land (in the vicinity of the Tea), ten times the size of Nowholea, which is.

The clearing of 10 tracts, each 400 by 200 yards,...... Rs. 2,000 0 0
7,11,110 Tea plants, at 5 annas for 300,...... 740 11 8
Planting the above,...... 474 0 0
Weeding each tract 3 times each year, at 30Rs. each tract...... 900 0 0
5 Tea houses, at 50Rs. each...... 250 0 0
200 Hoes at 1 Rupee each,...... 200 0 0
100 Axes at 1 Rupee each,...... 100 0 0
100 Daws at 1 Rupee each,...... 100 0 0
Dollahs, Challonis, &c. bamboo apparatus...... 200 0 0
8 Saws at 5Rs. each...... 40 0 0
Charcoal and firewood for baking the Tea,...... 200 0 0
40 Cast-iron pans, at 4Rs. each...... 160 0 0
Paper for Tea boxes...... 100 0 0
Chalk and Indigo...... 50 0 0
3 Maunds of Nails of sizes, at 10Rs. per maund...... 30 0 0
2 Elephants at 150Rs. each...... 300 0 0
2 Elephant mahoots at 6Rs. each per month...... 144 0 0
2 Elephant mates at 4Rs. each per month...... 96 0 0
Rice for 2 Elephants...... 96 0 0

Probable produce of all the tracts in 1840...... 5,680 11,160 lbs.

The probable produce of the above 7 tracts...... 3,043
Add the probable produce of the other 5 tracts...... 2,637

The probable produce of the above 7 tracts...... 2,637
APPENDICES

Brought forward

| Rs. | 6,180 | 11 | 8 |
---|---|---|---|
Lead for 888 boxes, at 3 seers per box, containing 20 seers, at 8Rs. per maund | 532 | 12 | 9 |
A Cooly sirdar at 10Rs. per month | 120 | 0 | 0 |
10 Duffadars, or Overseers of coolies at 3Rs. per month | 360 | 0 | 0 |
Coolies to collect leaves, 30 to each tract, 20 days to each crop; for 3 crops, or 60 days, at 3Rs. for each man per month | 1,800 | 0 | 0 |
4 Native carpenters, at 12Rs. ditto | 576 | 0 | 0 |
8 Sawyers, at 4Rs. ditto | 384 | 0 | 0 |
2 Native Lead-canister makers, at 12Rs. ditto | 288 | 0 | 0 |
Coolies to bring in timber for Sawyers | 150 | 0 | 0 |
5 Chinamen at 30Rs. each per month | 1,800 | 0 | 0 |
120 Native Tea-makers at 5Rs. each, for 5 months, or one season | 3,000 | 0 | 0 |
Freight to Calcutta, | 400 | 0 | 0 |
Ditto to England | 1,000 | 0 | 0 |

Total outlay for 10 tracts, Co.'s Rs. 16,591 | 8 | 5 |

Deduct charges that are not annual, viz.—

| Rs. | 2,000 | 0 | 0 |
---|---|---|---|
Clearing of tracts | 740 | 0 | 0 |
Purchase of Tea plants | 474 | 0 | 0 |
Planting ditto | 150 | 0 | 0 |
Building Tea houses | 200 | 0 | 0 |
Purchase of Hoes | 100 | 0 | 0 |
Do. Axes | 100 | 0 | 0 |
Do. Daws | 40 | 0 | 0 |
Do. Saws | 200 | 0 | 0 |
Do. Bamboo apparatus | 300 | 0 | 0 |
Do. Elephants | 4,304 | 0 | 0 |

Total annual outlay on 10 tracts, 12,287 | 8 | 5 |

Average produce of 3,55,555 tea plants at 4 Sa. Wt. each plant, is 444 Mds. or 17,777 Srs. or 35,554 lbs. at 2s., or 1 rupee, per pound would be, 34,554 | 0 | 0 |

Annual profit on 10 tracts, Co.'s Rs. 23,266 | 7 | 7 |

Annual outlay. | Co.'s Rs. | 12,287 | 12,28,700 | 12,28,700 |
---|---|---|---|---|
For 10 tracts | 12,287 | 1,22,870 | 1,22,870 | 1,22,870 |
For 100 tracts | 1,22,870 | 2,32,660 | 2,32,660 | 2,32,660 |
For 1000 tracts | 12,28,700 | 23,26,600 | 23,26,600 | 23,26,600 |

N.B.—The deduction of 4304 Rs. not being annual outlay, is not included in this calculation above 10 Tracts.

---|---|---|---|
Required for | 1 | 10 | 10 | 30 |
| " for | 10 | 100 | 100 | 300 |
| " for | 100 | 1000 | 1000 | 3000 |
It must be remembered that this calculation has been made on 3,55,555 plants, not on double that number as I proposed, viz. to plant them in pairs, which would certainly on the lowest calculation increase the profits thirty per cent. It should be borne in mind also, that 4 sicca weight is not the full produce of each plant; when full grown it will yield double that, or 8 sicca weight, and some even as high as 10 to 12 sicca weight. I have calculated at the rate of 4 sicca, which was absolutely produced in 1838. The plant will, I should think, produce 25 per cent. more this year, and go on increasing to what I have above mentioned. But then, on the other hand, the items which I have set down, are not all that will be required to carry on this trade on an extensive scale. The superintendence, numerous additional artisans that will be required, and a thousand little wants which cannot be set down now, but which must necessarily arise from the nature of the cultivation and manufacture, will go far to diminish the profits, and swell the outlay; but this of course will last but a few years, until the natives of the country have been taught to compete with Chinamen. It should also be remembered, that the calculation I have made on ten tracts is on a supposition that we have a sufficient number of native Tea-makers and Canister-makers, which will not be the case for two or three years to come. It is on this point alone that we are deficient, for the Tea plants and lands are before us. Yes, there is another very great drawback to the cultivation of Tea in this country, and which I believe I before noticed, namely, the want of population and labourers. They will have to be imported and settled on the soil, which will be a heavy tax on the first outlay: but this, too, will rectify itself in a few years; for, after the importation of some thousands, others will come of themselves, and the redundant population of Bengal, will pour into Assam, as soon as the people know that they will get a certain rate of pay, as well as lands, for the support of their families. If this should be the case, the Assamese language will in a few years be extinct.

I might here observe, that the British Government would confer a lasting blessing on the Assamese and the new settlers, if immediate and active measures were taken to put down the cultivation of Opium in Assam, and afterwards to stop its importation by levying high duties on Opium land. If something of this kind is not done, and done quickly too, the thousands that are about to emigrate from the plains into Assam, will soon be infected with the Opium mania,—that dreadful plague which has depopulated this beautiful country, turned it into a land of wild beasts, with which it is overrun, and has degenerated the Assamese, from a fine race of people, to the most abject, servile, crafty, and demoralized race in India. This vile drug has kept, and does now keep down the population; the women have fewer children compared with those of other countries, and the children seldom live to become old men, but in general die at manhood; very few old men being seen in this unfortunate country, in comparison with others. Few but those who have resided long in this unhappy land know the dreadful and immoral effects, which the use of Opium produces on the native. He will steal, sell his property, his children, the mother of his children, and finally even commit murder for it. Would it not be the highest of blessings, if our humane and enlightened Government would stop these evils by a single dash of the pen, and save Assam, and all those who are about to emigrate into it as Tea cultivators, from the dreadful results attendant on the habitual use of Opium? We should in the end be richly rewarded, by having a fine, healthy race of men growing up for our plantations, to fell our forests, to clear the land from jungle and wild beasts, and to plant and cultivate the luxury of the world. This can never be effected by the enfeebled Opium-eaters of Assam, who are more effeminate than women. I have dwelt thus long on the subject, thinking it one of great importance, as it will affect our future prospects in regard to Tea; also from a wish to benefit this people, and save those who are coming here, from catching the plague, by our using timely measures of prevention.
APPENDICES

Monthly outlay of the present standing Establishment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost (Co.’s Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>500 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Assistant to Do.</td>
<td>100 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Do. Do.</td>
<td>70 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chinese Black Tea maker</td>
<td>55 11 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ditto Assistant to Ditto</td>
<td>11 1 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ditto Tea-box maker</td>
<td>45 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ditto Interpreter</td>
<td>45 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ditto Tea-box maker</td>
<td>15 8 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ditto Green Tea makers, at 15:8:6 each</td>
<td>31 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ditto Tea-box maker</td>
<td>33 4 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Ditto Lead-canister maker</td>
<td>22 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Native Black Tea makers, at 5 each</td>
<td>120 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Native Green Tea makers at 5 each</td>
<td>60 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Native Carpenter</td>
<td>4 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Coolie Sirdar</td>
<td>10 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mahouts, at 6 each</td>
<td>24 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ditto Mates, at 4 each</td>
<td>16 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice for 4 Elephants per month</td>
<td>18 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sawyers, at 4 each</td>
<td>16 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Dak runners, at 3 : 8 : 0 each</td>
<td>7 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Duffadars, at 3 each</td>
<td>12 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fixed monthly expenditure in Assam     | 1,215 14 0      |
Cash paid to Chinese families in China | 131 2 6         |

Total monthly expenditure, 1,347 0 6

or 16,000 a year, not including coolies and other items. It should be remembered that this establishment has been confined to a few tracts as an experiment, and has never been fully worked. The Chinese Green Tea makers, Canister-makers, and interpreter, have lately been added to the establishment; their services have not as yet been brought into account. We are just now availing ourselves of them by making Green Tea; and as the natives at present placed under them become available, large quantities of excellent Green Tea will be manufactured. I suppose two Chinamen might qualify twenty-four natives for the first process; the second, as I have already recommended, might be performed in England, which, in my humble opinion, would effect a great saving, by getting machinery to do the greater part of the work. At all events, it never could be manufactured in Assam without a great expense, and this for want of labourers. However, it is gratifying to see how fast the Chinese acquire the Assamese language; for after they have been a year in the country, they begin to speak sufficiently well for all ordinary purposes, so that an interpreter can very well be dispensed with. Our Chinamen can speak the Assamese language much better than the interpreter can the English language. They are a violent, headstrong, and passionate people, more especially as they are aware we are so much in their power. If the many behave as do the few, a Thannah would be necessary to keep them cool.

With respect to what are called the Singpho Tea tracts, I am sorry to say we have not been able this year to get a leaf from them, on account of the disturbances that have lately occurred there; nor do I believe we shall get any next year, unless we establish a post at Ningrew, which I think is the only effectual way to keep the country quiet, and secure our Tea. The Tea from these tracts is said by the Chinamen to be very fine. Some of the tracts are very extensive, and many may run for miles into the jungles for what
we know. The whole of the country is capable of being turned into a vast Tea garden, the soil being excellent, and well adapted for the growth of Tea. On both sides of the Buri-Dehung river, as will be seen by the map, the Tea grows indigenous; it may be traced from tract to tract to Hookum, thus forming a chain of Tea tracts from the Irrawaddy to the borders of China, east of Assam. Ever since my residence at Sudiya this has been confirmed year after year by many of my Kamptee, Singpho, and Dewaneah acquaintances, who have traversed this route. It is therefore important for us to look well to our Eastern frontier, on account of our capability to extend our Tea cultivation in that direction. England alone consumes 31,829,620 lbs. nearly four laks of maunds, annually. To supply so vast a quantity of Tea, it will be necessary to cultivate all the hills and vallies of Assam; and on this very account a post at Ningrew becomes doubly necessary. A few years hence, it may be found expedient to advance this frontier post to the top of the Patkai hill, the boundary line of our eastern frontier. Any rupture with Burmah would add to our Tea trade, by taking them from Hookum, and Munkoom, and having the Irrawaddy as our boundary line. These countries are nominally under the Burmese, as they pay a small annual tribute; but this can never be collected without sending an armed force. They are said to be thinly inhabited, the population being kept down by the constant broils and wars, which one petty place makes upon another for the sake of plunder. All the inhabitants drink Tea, but it is not manufactured in our way; few, it is said, cultivate the plant. I have for years been trying to get some seeds or plants from them, but have never succeeded, on account of the disturbed state in which they live. The leaves of their Tea plants have always been represented to me as being much smaller than ours.

Muttuck is a country that abounds in Tea, and it might be made one extensive, beautiful Tea garden. We have many cultivated experimental tracts in it; we know of numerous extensive uncultivated tracts, and it appears to me that we are only in the infancy of our discoveries as yet. Our Tea, however, is insecure here. It was but a month or two ago that so great an alarm was created, that my people had to retire from our Tea gardens and manufacture at Deenjoy and Chubwa, which will account for the deficiency of this year’s crop. Things must continue in this state until the government of the country is finally settled; for we are at present obliged, in order to follow a peaceful occupation, to have the means of defending ourselves from a sudden attack, ever since the unfortunate affair at Sudiya. Before the transfer of the Tea tracts in this country can be made, it will be necessary, in justice to all parties, to know if Muttuck is, or is to become, ours, or not. The natives at present are permitted to cultivate as much land as they please, on paying a poll-tax of two rupees per year; so that if the country is not ours, every man employed on the Tea will be subject to be called on for two rupees per annum, to be paid to the old Bura Senaputy’s son, as governor of the country. This point is of vital importance to our Tea prospects up here. Many individuals might be induced to take Tea grounds, were they sure, that the soil was ours, and that they would be protected and permitted to cultivate it in security.

In looking forward to the unbounded benefit the discovery of this plant will produce to England, to India,—to millions, I cannot but thank God for so great a blessing to our country. When I first discovered it, some 14 years ago, I little thought that I should have been spared long enough to see it become likely eventually to rival that of China, and that I should have to take a prominent part in bringing it to so successful an issue. Should what I have written on this new and interesting subject be of any benefit to the country, and the community at large, and help a little to impel the Tea forward to enrich our own dominions, and pull down the haughty pride of China, I shall feel myself richly repaid for all the perils and dangers and fatigues, that I have undergone in the cause of British India Tea.

Jaipore, 10th June, 1839.
APPENDIX 4

Letter from H. Burkinyoung to J. Jenkins, Chairman Assam Co. Calcutta.

Calcutta, July 9th 1853.

Dear Sir,

Private affairs of an urgent nature render it necessary for me to proceed to Europe, and as the period of my detention there may be indefinite, I feel myself under the necessity of resigning the appointment I hold as Managing Director in this Company.

In retiring from an active connection with the Company I shall continue to feel and take a deep interest in its present and future prosperity and advancement, an interest not merely resulting from a pecuniary source which as a large holder of the Company's Stock I must necessarily feel, but in the ardent desire I have cherished for so many years to realise the object for which the Company was formed, that of successfully achieving the introduction of Tea in a staple form as the production of British enterprise. The organization now established and the able hands that preside over the administration of the Local interests of the Company, present to my mind a solid guarantee for the permanent advancement and prosperity of this valuable and interesting enterprise; entertaining however as I do this confident and hopeful estimate of the prospects of the Company, I have still present in my recollection the vicissitudes our enterprise has up to this period worked thro', and I feel anxious therefore to keep in view the principle that has been the basis of the success and prosperity that has attended our exertions during the past six years: that principle has been to seek for and apply to the service of the Company the highest practical ability available. A proportion of the success which has been achieved, has been attributed to my exertions, but to this I make a very moderate claim, my own sense of deficiency in the possession of the qualifications necessary, impelled me to seek them in others, and if any credit attaches to me for the present position of the Company, it must be ascribed to a species of good formula that has brought me in connection with men possessing the talent and ability necessary to give practical effect to our enterprise, and to whose connection with the Company I claim happily to have been the medium. It is perhaps not borne in mind to the full extent that although the Company was formed and in operation in 1839, yet between that date and 1845, a period of six years, the operations of the Company were conducted on a false basis, and during that period the whole Capital paid up £200,000 was expended with comparatively little or no results, not even that which is ordinarily gained under failure, practical experience. Out of the numerous employees that served the Company during this period of six years no striking example of practical aptitude and ability was developed nor until 1846 did the Local Board possess any practical facts or data upon which to reorganize the system of operations and retrieve the enterprise from ruin.

The appointment of Mr. Henry Mornay (our present Secretary) in 1846 as Deputy Secretary presented the first step towards the subsequent reform; after a short period of probation in the Office in Calcutta, he was despatched to Assam on a mission of enquiry into the causes of failure, and in his report dated July 1846 he presented to the Board an amount of valuable and comprehensive information and facts that at once became the basis of operations and from that time may be dated the successful turn that was given to the operations of the Company. The policy that dictated the appointment of Mr. Henry Mornay, the Board has wisely continued to recognize and practise and in the nominations to the direction that have been from time to time submitted to the Proprietors for their approval and sanction, and in the late appointment of a Superintendent in Assam the Proprietors possess a guarantee for permanent stability and future advance-
A HISTORY OF THE ASSAM COMPANY

This policy and the existing system of executive management are objects which I feel very anxious to see maintained in the appointment of my Successor.

The talent and ability and great experience of our present Secretary Mr. Henry Mornay, both in Assam and in connection with the Board in Calcutta, appear to me to give him immediate priority of claim and to point to him at once for nomination to the Managing Directorship, but I have reason to believe that if the interests of the Company rendered a sacrifice on his part of his own claims and wishes necessary, that he would be prepared to make that sacrifice and withhold his candidature for the office and under this conviction I do not hesitate to avow the desire I feel to offer the appointment to our Colleague Mr. Wm. Roberts, deeming it of the utmost importance to the interests of the Company to secure his active services to the executive management. Mr. Roberts possesses qualifications of a high standard and aided by the talent and experience of the Secretary and the high practical qualities of our Superintendent in Assam, the Company will possess in these gentlemen a combination of sound practical ability such as rarely falls to the lot of private enterprise.

In taking advantage of the self-denial of the Secretary and pressing upon your attention my nomination and recommendation of Mr. Roberts, I am aware that I may lay myself open to the appearance and suspicion of partial motives, but at the risk of falling under an imputation which up to this time of my life I have avoided, I have simply to observe that any recommendation results solely from my conviction that the interests of the Company must be essentially promoted by the united action of the two gentlemen named above as comprising the highest available practical ability for the furtherance of our enterprise.

It is the steady attention with which this principle has been kept in view that has brought the Company to its present successful and advancing position and the importance of the principle cannot be overrated. We have only to look to the general results of enterprise in this country to witness what invariably follows a neglect of this principle. In all cases Capital which has been considered a primary has proved to be only a secondary object, and that the primary want in all enterprise is the practical ability by which the application of capital is to be effected, no more striking illustration of the fact exists than in the Assam Company itself, when with twenty lacs of capital it failed to accomplish any significant practical results, and as if to shew the inherent value of the enterprise, the first practical steps for its retrieval were achieved at a time when the above capital was wholly expended and the Local and Home Boards were each in debt to the extent of £6000 and £7000 respectively.

The position of the Company at the present moment is of the most satisfactory character free and unembarassed in its financial affairs and sound in its execution and administrative organization, whilst the plantations both as regards the supply of labour and the favourable returns of the harvest, afford the most substantial ground of prosperity for the future. There are other advantages in operation at the plantations not less important, in the sound economical standards of outlay that have been established for agricultural contracts, for labour and manufacturing charges, these with the wholesome incitement and interest which the Superintending establishment feels and has in the working and well being of the concern afford good ground to believe will in due time become so improved and organized under a vigorous practical executive as to produce the most valuable fruits.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

(Sd.) H. BURKINYOUNG,
Managing Director, Assam Company.

To JOHN JENKINS, Esq.,
Chairman, Local Board of
Direction, Assam Company.
APPENDIX 5

REPORT
OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT

Henry Mornay, Esq., Secretary,
Assam Company, Calcutta.

Nazeerah, 16th February, 1854.

Dear Sir,

I have now the pleasure to submit, for the information of the Board of Directors and Proprietors, my Report upon the working of the Plantations, during the past season, their present condition, and the future prospects of the Company.

The result of the past season, as shewn in the annexed Tabular Statement, exhibits a net out-turn, estimated in the usual way, viz., 1 lb. of packed Tea from 4 ½ lbs. of green leaf, of 366,687 lbs., an average per poorah of 235, and a net expenditure of Rs.129,690, being at the rate of about 5 annas and 8 pies per lb. These results, when compared with those of the previous season, shew an increase in out-turn of 95,261 lbs. in the average per poorah of 33 lbs. in the expenditure of Rs.23,690, and a reduction of about 7 pies in the rateable cost of production.

The increase in the average yield, per poorah, is probably the least striking of these results, but this is accounted for by the large addition to the producing area at the minimum stage of yielding in the clearances of 1850-1851.

The increase in produce is, of course, much higher than could be progressively anticipated, and is mainly the result of a better development of the capabilities of the old gardens, which a better supply of Kacharie Coolies than had been obtained for several preceding years enabled us to accomplish many of the later clearances, being in detached patches, intervening between the old gardens, it is next to impossible to obtain a strictly accurate return of the green leaf actually gathered from the young gardens. But from experiments which I have made, I am inclined to believe that if an annual addition of 80 lbs. of Tea to the poorah be made on all gardens above two years of age and under six, it will afford a sufficiently close approximation to the increase, which may be expected to result annually from the extensions. Thus the total area of extensions from 1847-48 to 1850-51 inclusive, calculated at 80 lbs. to the poorah, equal to 35,040 lbs. would be the increase derived from this source on the past season, and in estimating that of the present, the clearance of 1847-48 should be merged in the old gardens, and omitted from the calculation, and those of 1851-1852 added. Whilst this affords a pretty sound basis, on which to estimate our probable annual increase, yet several causes may operate to render the result uncertain and variable, such as a failure in the sowings, and injury to the plant by imperfect cultivation.

Southern Division

In looking over the Tabular Statement No. 2 the Factory in the Southern Division, which most attracts attention, is Kacharie Pookrie, the working of which is certainly very satisfactory. The old gardens of this Factory are very fine, having fewer vacant spaces than those of either Mazengah or Hatty Pootty. It also possesses an advantage over Mazengah in having no China Plant, the inferior yielding of which, in respect to quantity, is now a well established fact. It will likewise be observed on referring to the
statement of land in cultivation, that it had a smaller proportion of land at the minimum stage of yielding, than any of the other Factories of the Southern Division, which contributes towards a higher average yield. On the other hand the proportion of non-producing land, the clearances of 1851-52 and 1852-53 being more than at either Mazengah, Hatty Pootty, or Cherideo, accounts for the higher cost of production. The same applies to Gabroo-Purbut, Deopawney, and Galakey, at all of which the cost of production shews higher than at any of the other Southern Factories.

At Deopawney also the average yield per poorah must be considered high, when it is taken into consideration that nearly half the producing area was at the lowest stage of production, and that this proportion consists of China plant. This Factory gives promise of becoming a very fine one.

At Gabroo-Purbut considerable improvement has taken place, but as the extensions at this factory with the exception of those of the past season, consist entirely of China plant, the annual advance, and, indeed, the ultimate permanent working, must shew less favourably than at most of the other factories of this Division. This is meant more with reference to the quantity of produce than the cost of production, which may be gradually reduced, I think, to less than 3 annas per lb.

**Rookang Division**

The producing area of Galakey being all old garden it might be expected to shew the highest average return per poorah, and that it does not do so is to be attributed to the circumstance of the ground not being so well covered with plant as the old gardens of Kacharie Pookrie.

The factories of this Division had suffered a good deal for several previous seasons from an insufficient supply of labour. The gardens could only be hoed once or twice a year, hence there was not only a considerable sacrifice of leaf in consequence of the trees being buried in jungle and imperfectly plucked, but the plants themselves a good deal weakened and otherwise injured. In the past season we were enabled to make a considerable addition to the force of Kacharie coolies (although the number is still far short of what could be advantageously employed) and in consequence of better culture and more regular plucking a material advance in produce has been made.

The factory shewing to most disadvantage in this division is Doomur Dulling, which is partly owing to the ground not being so well covered with plant, but also in a great measure to the circumstance of its being an outwork of Dubba, where its leaf is manufactured and where the labour of both factories, when insufficient for both, is occasionally concentrated, to the disadvantage of Doomur Dulling. It was also debited in the past season with an unfair proportion of the establishment.

"Booroo Gohain," having been only recently re-opened, is consequently non-producing, and its contents have been included in the clearances of the past season.

My reasons for resuming this barrie have been explained to the Board of Directors in my letter, No. 68, of the 3rd October last, viz., that the ground was well covered with plants; its convenient position with reference to water carriage, and that another person was endeavouring to obtain possession of it, who, for manifest reasons, it would be desirable to exclude from a position of such close proximity to our established factories.

The position of this Division is unfavourable with regard to local labour, and the land is in many places broken and unequal. Although susceptible of much further improvement, it must always occupy a comparatively low position in point of productiveness.

**Northern Division**

This Division, situated in a part of the country where the population is very thin, has to be worked almost entirely by immigrant labour, it having been found impracti-
APPENDICES

cable to introduce the contract hoeing system employed with so much advantage on
the Southern Factories. The gardens are in many places imperfectly covered, but have
within the last three years been very much improved in this respect, and as the process
of filling up with seedlings will be steadily continued, they may be expected in the course
of a few seasons more to attain a condition of average productiveness.

Eastern Division

This division comprises some fine indigenous tracts, but labours under peculiar
disadvantage from its remote position in a part of the country, where the population is
unusually scanty and provisions dear.

The factory of Hookun Kurie being situated on the Naga Hills, the coolies, in addition
to the other causes of dissatisfaction with the place, entertain a vague apprehension of
an outbreak on the part of their savage neighbours, although nothing has occurred of
late years to justify this fear, excepting occasional intestine conflicts between the tribes
in the immediate neighbourhood of the factory.

The working of this Division shews an increase in produce, but the general results
are, nevertheless very unsatisfactory; with a more abundant and steady supply of labour,
much improvement might be expected.

Towkok

This is a fine indigenous Barrie, but subject to the disadvantage common to all our
factories, (with the exception of Cherideo), situated to the north and east of the Dikhoo
river, in having to depend almost exclusively upon Kacharie and Bengallee labour in
the manufacturing season, and from the supply having been in consequence inadequate,
its natural capabilities may be considered equal to the average of the factories of the south.

Hatty Ghur

This is an insignificant little place, situated far in amongst the hills, bordering on, if
not within the Naga frontier, is inaccessible by water, and at all times difficult of approach
by land, it being only practicable on foot. It requires, from its isolated position a fuller
and higher paid establishment than its small extent can afford, has to be supplied with
provisions from Nazeerah, and from the impossibility of proper supervision, is liable to
have its teas damaged. It may be thought desirable to retain possession of the factory
for the sake of the little seed which it affords, but it is certainly of little value for any
other purpose.

Sontok Mookh

This is an establishment employed in cutting and preparing timber on the banks
of the Dikhoo for the use of Nazeerah, and consequently appears only in expenditure.

A partial failure in the sowings of the past season occurred in consequence of uninter-
rupted drought experienced from the month of November until early in April. All such
vacancies have, however, been filled up partly with seedlings, and the remainder with
seed and as we have had fine refreshing showers lately, these operations, together with
the sowings of the present season, now nearly completed, have the fairest chance of
success.

The contract hoeing of the Southern Factories has not been performed so efficiently
as could be desired. The failures have been more numerous than usual, and as all such
cases entailed so heavy an immediate pecuniary loss to the contractors, as to preclude
all suspicion of their having wilfully broken their contract in order to employ their
means for other purposes, the inevitable inference is that their resources in labour were
insufficient.

In the Box-making and Packing department we had to encounter unusual difficulties,
partly arising from an inadequate supply of sheet lead, but for the most part emanating from local causes which have been fully described in my letter to the Secretary, of the 8th January last, and from which the following is an extract:

"It had been customary to keep a stock of seasoned wood on hand for the purpose of box-making, but at the time I arrived at Nazeerah to relieve Mr. Mornay, there were not a dozen of logs, so that we were obliged to commence at once upon green wood, or occasion an inconvenient delay in the dispatch of the produce." Under ordinary circumstances, this evil might have been remedied, or partially remedied, by energetic measures during the past cold season. But the unfortunate visitation of Cholera, which continued with unremitting virulence for three months proved an obstacle of no ordinary nature, and for a time paralysed every effort. At this, as in most similar crises, panic proved more formidable than the disease, and between death and desertion, our Establishment at Nazeerah was, for a time, almost entirely disorganised. I made a tour through the out factories at this time, and during my absence, the work of Nazeerah was brought to a complete standstill. On my return I managed to re-assemble the people and resumed work, but the death of the head carpenter, an old and most valuable servant, was the signal for the dispersion of every carpenter in the shop. The establishment of carpenters had been held together by the personal character and influence of the head, and but a very small proportion of those who had served under him could be induced to return. The consequence of this intoward accident was that I was obliged to introduce a large number of common Coolies to perform the work of carpenters, and, as was to be expected, this work was done in a rough and imperfect manner. The evil was further aggravated by our being so short handed at Nazeerah, as regards assistance, by Mr. Milner having to attend to the duties of the office as well as the work of Nazeerah, and from my being under the necessity, in order to get the work done at all, of imposing a task upon the people which, for some time, met with a good deal of indirect opposition, but which is now being efficiently performed, these obstacles pressed more severely on account of the exigency occasioned by the large increase in the produce.

A stock of timber is now being collected, and with the aid of the saw mill, now erected and at work, the box making department is likely to be conducted more efficiently and cheaply.

The obstacles and drawbacks enumerated in the above extract, rendered it a task of peculiar difficulty to preserve the teas in a sound condition, and in the factories of the Northern and Eastern Divisions, as well as in Towkok and Hatty Ghur, a portion has been more or less damaged. It will, however, be found I think, that when the whole of the Teas have been sorted and packed, the damaged portion will not exceed the ordinary proportion.

From not being able to have a large collection of chests, and the necessity of dispatching the teas by every available opportunity, the breaks in the shipments have not been so large as would otherwise have been the case. Towards the close of the season, or rather towards the finishing of the packing, which always extends considerably into the succeeding season, the breaks must necessarily be smaller on account of the stock on hand, consisting of a great many remnants of different shades of quality. I am aware of the importance of having the breaks as large as possible, and our attention will be given to this matter in the present season.

Allusion has been already made to the inefficient state of our European Establishment at Nazeerah in the past season, occasioned by the retirement of the Accountant, the death of the Mechanical Assistant, and the temporary loss of Mr. Sedgwick's services, when the duties of both the office and Nazeerah station, had to be performed by one assistant, a charge of such magnitude as to preclude the possibility of its being effectively discharged. The assistants lately sent up, and the appointment of an Accountant, places our European establishment now in an efficient position.
The annexed statement, No. 1, affords every information relative to the area under cultivation, the proportion of old garden, and the respective ages of the different extensions. These extensions are all in a healthy and promising state, and I believe it may be safely affirmed of the old gardens, that they have not at any time since the Company commenced operations, been in a more thriving condition. Judging from past experience, there appears every reason to believe that with proper culture and attention, the old gardens may be continued at the point of full bearing for any number of years. A small number of plants are annually lost from the attacks of insects, the cuttings of their roots, and other similar accidents, but rarely, if ever, I believe, from positive and natural exhaustion. The periodical exhaustions observable in the operations of agriculture where the soil has borne the same or similar crops for many years successively without manure, do not appear to occur in the tea plant, a circumstance which I imagine is to be attributed more to the nature and habits of the plant itself than to any extraordinary fertility of soil. Injudicious and ignorant plucking may seriously injure the plant, and even cause its death by rendering it more liable to be attacked by white ants and worms.

But this is not liable to occur to any great extent, and as the vacancies in the old gardens, both those of original existence, and such as have been created by casualties of the nature described, as being steadily filled up with seedlings, the gardens may be expected to improve rather than deteriorate. The average capabilities of the old gardens (in which I include all formed gardens above six years old) provided a full and steady supply of labour can be obtained, will be found, in the course of three years more, to exceed 300 lbs. to the poorah.

My maximum estimate of crop in the present season is 430,000 lbs. If we have favourable weather in the early part of the season, and succeed in getting up a good batch of Kacharie Coolies, I think it probable that we shall reach this figure, but if unfortunate in these respects, the produce must sink in a corresponding degree. With this probable increase, I estimate the cost of production at 5½ annas per lb. or a gross expenditure of about 147,812 rupees; with less produce there will of course be less expenditure, although the rate per lb. may be slightly increased.

In considering our capabilities of extension, it appears to me that as regards land, they may be said to be unlimited; at all events, no anxiety need exist on this head, for many years to come. The cleared land in the Satsooeah forest, including the clearances of the present season not yet surveyed, may be set down at 1400 poorahs, and the further available land in this locality roughly estimated at 1600. When this has been exhausted, we have only to fall back upon the forest towards the hills in the neighbourhood of Cherideo, Galakey and Deopawney, all within ten or twelve miles of Nazeezah. The only point, therefore, which seems to require immediate consideration is labour, and in this single word the future prospects of the Company may be said to be wound up.

The difficulty experienced on this head is not likely to diminish, but rather to increase, as many private persons are now settling in the province and engaging in the cultivation of tea and the other more valuable products, who will, for many years at least, depend entirely upon the industrial resources of the province for their labour. There is also much more money being expended and more people employed by the Government in the execution of public works, than was the case in former years. The population of Assam is scanty, and scattered over a large area of country, a great proportion of which is unoccupied. Land, being abundant, rent cheap, and the position of an independent cultivator easily attained, there is comparatively little necessity for the people of Assam to engage as labourers, and, as such, they are as a body, very inferior to Bengallees.

The admirable system of contract work, introduced several years ago, by affording
Lucrative employment to many of the more respectable people, through whose influence the class below them again has been induced to hire their labour in a fitful, irregular way, has enabled us to work this element to the best advantage, still our wants can at best be but very inadequately supplied from this source. The large extensions made in the past season, created a corresponding increase in the demand for Assamese labour, but although I very readily obtained the requisite number of contractors, the numerous failures in contract, including both old and new contractors, proved that the coolies had not increased in a corresponding degree. Allowing for failures, the actual work performed was very little, if any, in excess of that of the previous season, confirming the impression already made upon my mind, by a variety of concurrent circumstances, that we had now practically availed ourselves of all the native labour that the contract system was capable of drawing from this section of the country, and that, in the cultivation of our future extensions, we must mainly depend on Kacharie and immigrant Bengallee labour.

The extent that can be cleared in the cold weather, when the people are comparatively idle, does not afford a fair criterion of our working capabilities. The true test must of course be the force which can be brought into the field during the manufacturing season—the time the natives are busily employed upon their rice cultivation.

The Kacharies, on whom we chiefly depend, form an isolated class, and belong peculiarly to one district (Durrung) about 12 days journey from Nazeerah. The Kacharie coolie is very much superior to the common Assamese as a labourer, has fewer prejudices of caste, eats animal food, drinks spirits, and, unless when perverted by Assamese example and influence, abstains from the use of opium. These habits, while they tend to preserve their physical superiority, also entail the necessity of increased industry for their provision. It is certain, and much to be regretted, that this fine race from their increasing intercourse with the Assamese, are gradually acquiring their vices and becoming less valuable as labourers. Those who have settled in life seldom emigrate from Durrung, our coolies being drawn chiefly from the unmarried portion of the population, of whom large numbers are annually absorbed in the Assamese community. This would prove a healthy element if preserved in its original vigour, but unfortunately this is not the case. The Kacharie is simply coveted on account of his superior industry and usefulness; and as the position allotted to him in the social scale is considerably below that of the Hindoo Assamese, he is proud to be admitted into their families, readily renounces those practices sanctioned by his own creed, but obnoxious to theirs, and promptly assimilates himself to their habits.

Although the Kacharies consider the district of Durrung as their home, they are otherwise migratory and gregarious in their habits, seldom remaining more than a year or two in one place, and generally seceding in large bodies; many of those brought up by the Company, who may have accepted their advance under some pressing urgency, retire as soon as it has been worked out, and not unfrequently with a balance due. A real or fancied injustice to one man may occasion the withdrawal of a hundred. The personal influence of a discontented Duffadar is sometimes sufficient to create a widespread feeling of apparent dissatisfaction, or, it may be, a partial strike, and the withdrawal of a large body of coolies at the season their services are most required. The superintendent has constantly to encounter and neutralise combinations of this kind, constantly being called upon to interpose as mediator between the assistants and the coolies, to soften down occasional instances of harshness and, frequently, of well merited severity, and to do so in such a manner as not to injure the general tone of the service. These difficulties cannot be met in the same spirit here as they might be in Bengal and other more populous parts of India, where, from the nature of things, they seldom arise; what would appear weak and temporising there, becomes a necessary element in our management here. The Kacharie, in retiring from our service, has not to contemplate...
probable idleness and poverty, but does so under the comfortable assurance that he has the choice of either accepting employment elsewhere, and probably on higher wages, or of returning to his country, and, if he wishes, re-entering our services with a fresh advance, knowing well that we shall be but too glad to get him back without instituting too rigid an enquiry as to the manner in which he left.

In this manner large bodies retire annually, and have to be replaced by fresh draughts from Durrung, and Kacharie labour is so much in requisition throughout the province that, for several years now, the number obtained by the Company has fallen far short of its requirements.

Whilst, as I have before remarked, the present facilities for squatting continue to exist, whilst the rent of an acre of cleared Paddy-land is only one rupee, any sensible increase to the labouring portion of the population need hardly be expected; almost every one looks forward to being able after a very brief period of service to establish himself as an independent Ryot, and regards the position of labourer as a mere transitional stage towards this goal.

Thus the money expended in the province by the Company, while it tends materially to increase the revenue of the country produces no reactionary benefit to the Company in the shape of increased labour.

I am convinced that a steady influx of labour from Bengal can alone enable the Company to advantageously extend its operations, and that until this can be accomplished, or appear in a fair way of being so, it would be more profitable in every way to discontinue making further additions to the area under cultivation. We have already attained to a greater degree of expansion than our present means are equal to, and the necessary consequence is, an imperfect development of results.

The area at present under cultivation, including the extensions of the present season, is capable, in five years more, of producing at least 750,000 lbs. of Tea, at a local cost of production (assuming that no extensions were made in the interval) not exceeding four annas per lb.

I am,

DEAR SIR,

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) GEORGE WILLIAMSON.

Supt. Assam Company.
### No. 1

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APPENDIX 6
Letter from H. Burkinyoung to Sir Wm. Baynes, Bart.

59 Onslow Square Brompton
March 12th 1859.

Dear Sir,

In your letter addressed to me under date the 14th ulto enclosing copy of a minute which you proposed for record on the Boards proceedings, the object chiefly indicated is, to use your own words, "to stand clear with the shareholders," but the Board however in carrying that proposition into effect, uninfluenced by and without pausing upon the considerations I urged upon your(sen and its attention, I think acted hastily in a matter that called for serious and careful deliberation.

If the Board considered an act of mine of so grave a nature in reference to the Company's interests as to render necessary on its proceedings a record of condemnation of me and of exculpation of itself, I conceive before proceeding to carry out such a step, the subject at issue should have been gravely deliberated in all its bearings, and then, if no better solution of the matter presented itself to the Board, the record of its minute might have become natural and proper. The subject is one that may be presented under various aspects and exhibit its operation in all respects as much in favour of the Company's interests as it may be possible to make it appear adverse to them; but as it now stands recorded, in its crude, unconsidered form, should it be thus presented to the Shareholders, or thro' whatever channel it may reach them, I think it is calculated to appeal more to their fears than to their reflection and likely to lead them to a premature decision and action adverse to their interests, and it is under this view therefore that I again beg to address you, in the hope, thereby to develop more generally the bearings of the question.

The matter as it at present stands is simply an unsupported charge on the part of the Board, attributing to me a certain act or policy which it alleges to be detrimental to the interests of the Company, met on my part by an unqualified denial, at this stage the most rational course would have been to enquire into the cause of the Board being thus divided, and to investigate the points at issue. The interest I hold in the Company, little short of one eighth of its stock, and the associations that otherwise bind me to it, would under most circumstances be received as full presumption of my bona fides, if however I am liable to the charge brought by the Board, the motives that influence me in a direction so adverse to my interests must be both powerful and peculiar, and if I am not justly liable to the Board's imputation, the grounds upon which it acts in bringing the charge in opposition to the evidences and influences that bind me to the interests of the Company should be clearly set forth. These are considerations that should be gone into under any circumstances, for on such a question the Board cannot remain divided without serious injury to the Company's interests, and in the event of its appeal to the Proprietors, the fullest exposition becomes indispensable.

The question or charge raised by the Board has sprung out of a previous question of much deeper importance to the Company's interests, a question I have frequently urged upon the Board's attention, but which it has not as yet recognized, viz: "The question of improving the practical organization and representation of the Company's interests in the Board." This question becomes month by month of greater urgency, when I first called the Board's attention to it, I was moved thereto more by prudent foresight than immediate apprehension, I was then under the hope and expectation that
our Superintendent Mr. Williamson would return to Assam and resume his post, and that if Mr. Roberts did not elect to return to his, that his connection with the Board here would take effect; neither of these expectations has unfortunately been realised and are still occurring in the Company’s Establishment in Assam, they occasion very serious apprehensions in my mind. No organization can encounter such dislocations without serious result, and this remark applies with manifold force to a remote unclaimed country like Assam, and at a time when our organization requires extension and strength to encounter the side of new enterprise that is setting in, the Boards policy in excluding from the Company’s administration the ablest and most experienced man connected with the Company, I can characterize by no other term than that of suicidal. No combination of interests can prudently disregard and part with its chief practical elements, however numerous an administrative body may be, it is always more or less dependent upon the support and guidance of one or more practical individuals, and the Assam Company is no exception to this rule.

When I retired from the Managing Directorship of the Company’s affairs in India in 1853 I left a system in operation dependant chiefly upon three practical members. I then addressed to the local Board a letter setting forth my views upon the position and prospects of the concern, and as the subject of that letter is pertinent to this occasion and may not remain in the recollection of the Board, and as it may serve to remove the Board’s impression of my want of interest in the Company, I append it hereto for perusal. The system then in operation and referred to in the annexed letter needs no better evidence of its soundness, than the results that have flowed from it, exhibiting as they do down to the present period a constant advance in the Dividends and value of the stock of the Company, the former of which has more than trebled and the latter more than doubled. Thus far the Company’s affairs have worked and resulted as I anticipated, but under their present aspect I have no confidence in the future, like a well constructed machine the concern will work for a time without apparent deterioration, but the changes that have already taken place in the Local Administration and establishment combined with the exclusive Policy of the Board cannot fail to operate most injuriously if not fatally upon it.

Under this state of things and subsequent to the 2nd August last when I addressed you on the subject of the failing practical strength of the Local Administration and the importance therefore of strengthening the Home Board, the fact came to my knowledge that certain Tea Plantations in Assam were offered for sale in the market here, through the Agency of Mr. Roberts and upon conferring with that gentleman, and finding that these concerns would become a new formation under his management, I realised at once the danger to the interests of the Assam Company and consequently to my own, if that formation took effect under new and separate interests, and the necessity therefore of acting in some way that would remove or neutralize the impending danger. The impression or wish that first presented itself to our minds to offer these concerns to the Assam Company was at once abandoned, under the belief in its inutility upon several grounds and more especially what would have been a primary stipulation in my negotiations, that of the admission into or incorporation with the Board of certain new members including Mr. Roberts to represent the new interests, without which we considered the union would be beneficial to neither party, and under the determination evinced by the Board to admit of no change and the time we had for decision being brief, we adopted the alternative of uniting our interests in the new formation and to connect with it such other interests as we could rely upon to act in a cooperative policy with the Assam Company; this has been fully accomplished and the Assam Company greatly benefited thereby compared with what its position might have been with a Company formed altogether under new and separate interests; under no circumstances
could the Assam Company’s position be made better or more secure except by a union with the new Company, a measure which even if desirable or necessary the Board itself presents the chief obstacle to.

The foregoing sets forth the views and motives which have actuated me in connecting myself with the new Tea Company and which were communicated to you in a brief form in my letter of February 16th and I still maintain that the formation of that association, as it is at present organized, was the best means available under the circumstances for protecting the interests of the Shareholders of the Assam Company: unfortunately but little attention was given to my letter or to the motives that actuated me and the result was the record of the Board’s minute.

The rule which the Board embodies in its minute “That the Office of Director of one Company is not compatible with that of Director of another Company formed for a similar object” is no doubt correct under circumstances such as were mentioned at the Board, in cases of Insurance Companies or other competing interests in a Commercial City, but I cannot see how such a rule can apply or be extended to the staple production of a country, such a rule would be a check rather than an encouragement to its development and contrary therefore to the opinion expressed by the Board; I consider there is nothing in the position of the Assam Company which brings it within the operation of the rule in question. If as assumed by the Board the new Company is to rival the Assam Company, then my position as Director in both would no doubt be incompatible and not tenable for a moment, but if as I aver, my connection with the new Company has for its primary object the prevention of rivalry, guaranteed as this is by the fact that the interest I hold in the new Company, it then becomes a question as to whether the Assam Company would not be benefited rather in the breach than the observance of the rule adopted by the Board.

I am too deeply interested in the well being of the Assam Company to take or urge any step calculated to affect its interests, and I shall not hesitate to adjust my position or retrace the course I have pursued should its interests require it. I entertain the hope however that the observations I now submit to the Board’s consideration may remove the impression it has adopted upon my connection with the new Company.

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

H. Burkinyoung.

To Sir William Baynes, Bart.

Chairman, Assam Company.
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Shewing all
THE TEA LOCALITIES
of the
ASSAM COMPANY
and other Companies and Planters
in the
Jorehat and Muttack Districts of
UPPER ASSAM
1864

Note: All the Spots indicated by numerals are the Factories and Lands of the Assam Co.
Those indicated by letters of the alphabet belong to other Companies and Private Planters:
See Appendix.