Date.	Name of Place.	A.	B.	C.	D.	Remarks.
		miles	miles	li.	li.	
April 21	Ch'ü-tung, near Yung-p'ing.. ..	58¼	..	320	..	Large village, half ruins.
„ 22	T'ieh-ch'ang	62¼	..	330	..	A few huts.
„ 22	Hsiao-hua-ch'iao ..	63¾	..	..	..	Hamlet.
„ 22	Hua-ch'iao	64¾	..	340	..	Long village.
„ 22	T'ien-ching-p'u ..	66¾	..	360	..	Two huts.
„ 22	Yung-kuo-ssŭ.. ..	67¼	..	370	..	Two huts.
„ 22	Sha-Mu-ho or Sha-yang	71½	80	390	340	Large village, fair.
„ 24	Yung-fêng-chuang	74	..	..	..	Small village.
„ 24	Me-kong River ..	75	..	..	..	Iron suspension-bridge, 60 yards long.
„ 24	P'ing-p'o..	76	..	420	..	Hamlet.
„ 24	Shui-chai	77¾	..	435	410	Village.
„ 25	Tali-shao	80¼	..	450	..	A few huts.
„ 25	T'ien-ching-p'u ..	81¾	..	465	..	One shed.
„ 25	Niu-chio-kuan ..	83	..	475	..	Two huts.
„ 25	Kuan-p'o	84	96	480	..	Small village.
„ 26	Pan-ch'iao	88½	..	495	..	Large village.
„ 26	Pei-kuan-t'ang ..	90¾	..	505	..	Ruined village.
„ 26	Yung-ch'ang	93	104	515	500	
„ 28	Wo-shih-wo	96½	..	533	..	Poor hamlet.
„ 28	Kao-tzu-p'u	98½	..	550	..	A few huts.
„ 28	Lêng-shui-ch'ing ..	101	..	568	..	Small hamlet.
„ 28	P'u-piao	106½	116	585	570	Large village.
„ 29	Kuan-yin-ssŭ.. ..	110	..	600	..	Ruined temple.
„ 29	Fang-ma-ch'ang ..	111½	..	610	..	Ruined hamlet.
„ 29	Ta-pan-ching.. ..	113½	..	618	..	Four or five huts.
„ 30	Salwen River.. ..	121	..	638	..	Iron suspension-bridge, 140 yards long.
„ 30	Ho-mu-shu	125	..	673	660	Poor hamlet.
May 1	Hsiang-po	127½	..	698	..	Very poor hamlet.
„ 1	Highest point of pass	129½				
„ 1	T'ai-ping-p'u	131½	..	723	..	Very poor hamlet.
„ 2	Tali-shu	134½	..	748	..	Four huts.
„ 2	Shuay-li River ..	136½	..	758	..	Iron suspension-bridge, 53 yards long.
„ 2	Kan-lan-chan.. ..	138	146	766	770	Poor village.
„ 3	Kan-lu-ssu	141½	..	783	..	One hut.
„ 3	Chin-t'sai-pu	144	..	798	..	Four huts.
„ 3	Li-chia-p'u	148¾	..	818	..	Large village.
„ 3	T'êng-yueh, Momein	150¾	162	833	840	
				166	168	miles.

IV. ON THE CHINESE TEA-TRADE WITH TIBET.*

THOUGH very widely cultivated in Ssŭ-ch'uan, tea does not form the subject of any considerable export. With certain exceptions, it merely supplies the local consumption, and with respect to the probability of its ever being exported to foreign countries, it is enough to say that it is generally insipid to European taste, and in many cases actually nauseous. In the hilly country which bounds Ssŭ-ch'uan on the east, a variety is grown which possesses a good reputation among the natives, but the quantity is small. The eastern provinces already furnish more tea than the

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foreign market demands, and there seems reason to doubt whether even that demand will be maintained in the face of the superior and acknowledged excellence of Indian teas.

There is, however, one point of great and increasing interest in this connexion, viz. the export of Sŭ-ch'uan tea into Tibetan countries. A good deal has been written, without much circumstantial foundation, on this subject, in support of a project for supplying Tibet with Assam teas. The matter resolves itself into the consideration of route, quality, quantity, and price—subjects on which I have collected some fairly precise information.

The area on which tea for the Tibetan market is grown, and of which the city of Yachou may be considered the centre, as it is also the head-quarters of the manufacture, includes six or eight districts, of which the chief are Hung-ya, Ming-shan, Ch'iung-chou, Lo-shan, and Yung-ching, covering roughly about 2500 square miles. The trees are grown on the hill-sides or in the hedgerows of the fields, and, though abundant, are not conspicuous; indeed it requires a search to discover them, round Yung-ching at any rate, among the thick brush which covers everything but the cultivated fields. They are scrubby and straggling plants, very different in appearance from the carefully tended bushes of Eastern China, and are allowed to attain a much greater height, reaching to nine or ten feet, perhaps, on the average. The coarser leaves are about 2½ inches long. I could not discover that any care is devoted to them; but they seem to require very little, as far as the mere health of the plant is concerned, and not the excellence of the leaves. The native belief, that they are liable to injury from the attacks of certain boring insects, is probably erroneous. Insects rarely attack any species of tree unless it is already diseased.

Mr. T. T. Cooper's experience of the Yung-ching tea-plants is much the same as my own. "Unlike that which produces the tea exported to Europe," he writes, "it is a tall tree, often 15 feet high, with a large and coarse leaf. Little care is bestowed on the cultivation. It is often planted along the borders of fields and homesteads, each farmer gathering his small crop of tea, and finding a ready sale for it in Yachou to merchants who pay the Government enormous sums for the monopoly." This account contrasts strongly with the same traveller's description of the tea plantations *below* Yachou, where, he says, the best brick-tea for Tibet is grown. "The whole country formed a series of large gardens, without a single fence to divide the different plantations, and kept in the most scrupulous order, the trees, which stood about four feet high, being neatly trimmed, and planted in rows four feet apart. The numerous homesteads which were visible were surrounded with belts of large tea trees, growing to a height of 12 to 15 feet." I passed through the same country, but was not so strongly impressed with the extent of the cultivation; but in any case, the Tibetan tea-trade draws a very small contribution from trim plantations, but is supplied from shrubs which are left pretty much to themselves, and for all the traveller can see might be wild plants.

They yield tea available for the market in the fourth year of growth, and for many subsequent years. The harvest is ready in the end of June, and there are three pickings; the best is the young upper leaves from trees of all ages, the second consists of the leaves of young plants, and the third includes everything else that can be spared, being mostly twigs and sticks, with a scant proportion of coarse foliage. The Chinese are epicures enough to retain all the first quality for themselves, and most of the second, asserting that the Tibetans—whom, by the way, they regard as savages—would not appreciate them. The tea of Tibetan consumption consists, therefore, almost entirely of the merest refuse. I saw great quantities of this being brought in from the country on the backs of coolies in bundles eight feet long by nearly a yard broad, and supposed it to be fuel; it looks like brushwood, and is in fact merely

branches broken off the trees and dried in the sun, without any pretence at picking. It sells in Yung-ching for 2000 cash a picul at the outside, and its quality may be judged from a comparison of this price with that of the common tea drunk by the poorer classes in the neighbourhood, which is about 20,000 cash a picul. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the tea of the Tibetan market is ten times worse than the worst tea in China.

Having purchased this tea brushwood, the manufacturers proceed to make it up for the ignorant Tibetan, as they themselves call him. The leaves and twigs, already sun-dried, are steamed in a cloth suspended over a boiler. The mould stands close by, four stout boards set up on end and secured with bitts, the interior having a section of about nine inches by 3½. Inside it is placed a neatly woven mat basket, somewhat smaller in section than the mould; the steamed and softened leaves with the finer twigs are dropped into the cavity by small quantities at a time, and a little rice-water being added to agglutinate the mass, it is consolidated, layer after layer, by forcible blows from a wooden rammer shod with a heavy iron shoe. The coarser sticks are dried and ground to powder, and interspersed *ad libitum* among the conglomerate of leaves and twigs. The basket being flexible, and a little smaller than the mould, keeps the cake from taking the angular shape which it would otherwise assume; the corners being rounded off, it is less liable to injury from the hard knocks it will have to encounter on the road to Tibet. The mould is taken to pieces, the cake, with its mat envelope, is brought back to the fire over which its composition was originally steamed, and when it is thoroughly dried, the ends of the envelope are closed up, and the long narrow package, called a *pao*, is ready for transport to Ta-chien-lu. This was the process of manufacture as I saw it conducted in Yung-ching. The cake thus formed is fairly dense when it issues from the mould; but the drying and the casualties of the road considerably loosen its consistency; and as the tea is weighed in its steamed condition, the theoretical weight is much reduced when it is dried. The quantity of wet tea in the Yung-ching packages is fourteen catties, which diminish to about eleven. The Yachou cakes are longer, and weigh, or purport to weigh, eighteen catties in the saturated state. On arrival at Ta-chien-lu the cakes are cut into portions which then receive the name of "bricks" (*chuan*) and are repacked. "Brick," however, is hardly an appropriate term. They are rather clods of not very closely matted foliage some nine or ten inches by seven, and three inches thick, containing a good deal more stick than leaf.

The best kind of tea, Mr. Cooper was informed, "is spread in the sun till slightly withered, and then rolled with the hand until moist with the exudation of the sap. In this state it is rolled into balls about the size of a large tea-cup, and laid up until it ferments. It is then ready for the wooden brick moulds." I heard nothing of this, but there is no reason for doubting the credibility of Mr. Cooper's informant. Such a preparation must, however, be rare and exceptional.

The packages are conveyed to Ta-chien-lu by tea-porters or on mule-back. A porter carries twice as much as a mule, but a mule travels a good deal more than twice as fast as a porter. The man's burden is arranged on a light wooden framework disposed along the whole of his back, and rising in a curve over his shoulders and high above his head, the structure being supported by a couple of slings, generally made of coir, through which his arms are passed. The great weights that can be carried in this manner are certainly astonishing. Von Richthofen writes, "There is probably no road in the world where such heavy loads are carried by man across high mountains. Six or seven pao is considered a small load; ten or eleven is the average; and, incredible as it may appear, I have seen frequently as much as thirteen carried by one man. I was assured that some men carry eighteen pao, or 324

catties." I have several times seen eighteen pao carried by a single porter, and on one occasion I overtook a rather slenderly built carrier freighted with twenty-two of the large Yachou packages. Although a pao weighs, in reality, considerably less than 18 catties, this man must have had, at the lowest computation, more than 400 English pounds on his back. I noticed that the greatest burdens were carried, not by the most muscular men, but by those of the straightest conformation; and that these porters, in spite of their excessive loads, suffer less from varicose swellings than ordinary chair-coolies. Laden thus, they take a rest after every few hundred yards' progress, and as it would be impossible for the carrier to raise his burden if it were deposited on the ground, he carries a kind of short crutch with which he supports it, without releasing himself from the slings. Travelling six or seven miles a day, and resting in the inns at night, these porters toil with their prodigious loads over two mountain passes, 7000 feet above their starting place, along a rudely paved road, where every step of the way must be picked, making the 120 miles from Yachou to Ta-chien-lu in 20 days or less, and receiving from 250 to 300 cash a day according to the number of packages they carry. The manner in which the loads are disposed is well depicted in an illustration to Mr. Cooper's work, but the packages are larger, and the burden much more top-heavy than he has represented them.

Inquiries into the quantity of the export are involved in much difficulty on account of the variation in the weights of the different packages. The best approximation *to the total production* is made by taking as a basis the number of permits (*yin*) issued annually in Yachou and Yung-ching. Three hundred cash is the duty paid for each permit; in Yachou a permit has to be taken out for every five packages; in Yung-ching for every six. The annual Yachou issue of these passes is about 80,000, and that of Yung-ching 60,000, giving 400,000 and 360,000 respectively as the total number of packages. The Yung-ching packages contain nominally between 14 and 15 catties of tea, and those of Yachou between 17 and 18 catties; but they have been gradually scamped until a brick of 60 nominal ounces now only weighs 44 ounces or less. Applying this correction, we obtain a total export of nine million catties, or twelve million English pounds. But this is merely a rough estimate, since the number of permits could only be ascertained within 15,000 or 20,000 of the truth, and they possibly do not represent the Tibetan trade alone; a good deal of the Yachou tea in all probability finds its way northwards to the districts round Mu-p'ing by other routes.

I obtained more precise figures in Ta-chien-lu. By a series of inquiries among the traders I learned that the annual duty-paying export lies between 500,000 and 600,000 packages of four bricks each; the mean of these gives 2,200,000 bricks.

The duty-paying unit in Ta-chien-lu is the "load," of six packages, nominally weighing 96 catties. I ascertained indirectly from the customs that duties were collected in 1877 upon 108,000 loads, otherwise 2,592,000 bricks, agreeing perfectly well with the traders' estimate. This result may be accepted with full confidence.

Precision must not be expected in the reduction of bricks to pounds. Leaving out of question the superior and exceptional teas, which form an infinitesimal fraction of the whole export, there remain only two qualities, or rather prices, although there are several kinds. A brick of either of these weighs, theoretically, 60 Chinese ounces; but actually the better quality only balances from 55 to 60 ounces, and the other from 42 to 45. The obstacle to exactness lies in the impossibility of knowing what proportion the export of large bricks bears to that of the smaller. I was assured that it is "as two to eight," but have no means of checking the

statement. Accepting it, however, for want of a better, this will give us the total Tibetan export from Ta-chien-lu to Batang almost exactly ten million English pounds, which, at the prices given below, are worth in Ta-chien-lu Rs. 1,814,400, or say 160,000*l.**

An addition of no great importance should perhaps be made for the tea which escapes the payment of duty. The smuggled total cannot be great, since there is but one route to Ta-chien-lu, closed in as it approaches the town by steep mountains covered with perpetual snow. But there is an item, too considerable to be altogether neglected, which enters Tibet as part of the baggage of officials, and which escapes all duties except those on the permit. Other goods, such as silk, also cross the frontier in this way; but it is mostly by means of tea that the Chinese resident officials feather their nests. Of these administrators and their gains, the Tibetans say, "They come to our country without trowsers, and go away with a thousand baggage-yaks."

At Ta-chien-lu the tea passes into Tibetan hands, and being wrapped, like all Tibetan goods, in skins, is conveyed on pack-saddles to Batang. The saddle is a much lighter contrivance than the cumbrous framework employed by the Chinese, and is probably equal in efficiency to any that has been invented. Two light boards, not more than 14 inches long, thickly padded with cloth and felt, are connected by two wooden bows. The girth is drawn close to the fore-legs, and a breasting which lies very low down on the animal's breast, is made fast, not to the saddle, but to the girth. A breeching, lying still lower than the breasting, is also connected with the girth; but in addition to this the saddle-boards are secured to a crupper consisting, in the cases I saw, of a straight stick a foot long, although the Tibetans employ for riding ordinary cruppers covered with soft leather.† From the bows, which stand high on the animal's back, loops of hide depend, and the packages are inserted into these, or unshipped, almost in an instant. The saddle and all its appurtenances, weighed by myself, balanced sixteen English pounds, which does not of course include the numerous layers of sheep-skin saddle-cloth. The boards are nearer together, and consequently lie much higher on the dorsal ridge than in the European arrangement. They will fit any animal, being equally adaptable by a judicious disposition of saddle-cloths to the prominent chine of a donkey, or the rotund hump of a yak. One advantage claimed for the system of suspending the packages in loops is that, if the burden strikes a projecting rock or other obstacle in a dangerous pass, it becomes detached, and falls down the precipice without overbalancing the animal. A horse, mule, or yak carries by this means a load not exceeding 160 lbs.; a *dzo*

* There must be some mistake or misprint here. According to Mr. Baber's figures, the number of better class bricks will be $\frac{2}{10}$ of 2,592,000, or 518,400. These weigh from 55 to 60 Chinese ounces each; say 57½, which will give the total weight of the better class tea 29,808,000 Chinese ounces or 1,863,000 catties, equal to 2,484,000 English pounds. The number of inferior class bricks will be $\frac{8}{10}$ of 2,592,000, or 2,073,600. These weigh from 42 to 45 Chinese ounces each; say 43½, which will give the total weight of the inferior class tea 89,164,800 Chinese ounces or 5,573,425 catties, equal to 7,431,233 English pounds. The total weight in English pounds will therefore be 2,484,000 + 7,431,233, equal to 9,915,233, or as Mr. Baber says, almost exactly 10 millions.

The value of the better class tea, however, will be 2,484,000 lbs. at 3·4 annas, 527,725 rupees. The value of the inferior class tea will be 7,431,233 at 2·7 annas 1,254,021 rupees, and the total value of the two classes will be 527,725 + 1,254,021, equal to 1,781,746 rupees. Taking the rupee at 1*s.* 8*d.*, this would amount to 148,479*l.* —[W. G.]

† The straight stick was the invariable form of crupper noticed by me in this country.—[W. G.]

is capable of supporting 240 lbs. The dzo is a hybrid between a cow and a yak, and is a much larger beast than his sire. The yak's forehead is round; that of the dzo is flat; his horns are larger and his tail longer and less hairy. He costs three times as much as a yak. The male dzo is the ploughing animal of Tibet. The female yields a greater quantity of milk than any other bovine, and the butter, which keeps good for a whole year, is the best for making tea—a fact which will palliate this digression.

The manufacturer is of course not necessarily, nor I believe often, the exporter. The comparison of expenditure and profit runs thus, taking four bricks of common tea as the unit:—

	Cash.
Eleven catties of leaves, &c.	200
Dues on permit	50
Dues at Lu-ting Bridge and Ta-chien-lu	36
Freight from Yung-ching to Ta-chien-lu	320
Preparation and packing (say)	100
	706
Sale at Ta-chien-lu	1240
	534

A brick of the common tea, which forms about four-fifths of the whole trade, weighs from 42 to 45 Chinese ounces, or say 60 English, and sells in Ta-chien-lu for Tls. 0·2, and in Batang for Tls. 0·32 or one rupee. The better quality weighs 76 English ounces, costing one rupee in Ta-chien-lu and Tls. 0·45 in Batang. In other words, the price in annas per English pound is—

	Ta-chien-lu (annas).	Batang (annas).
Better quality	$3\frac{4}{10}$	$4\frac{1}{10}$
Common ditto	$2\frac{1}{10}$	$4\frac{3}{10}$

I was told that Lhassa prices are about double those of Batang. From Ta-chien-lu to Batang there are eighteen stages, and from Batang to Lhassa forty-six. Any deviation from this main route increases the price enormously; at Yerkalo, for instance, which is only seven stages or so from Batang, but not on the high road, tea is as dear as in Lhassa.

Mr. Cooper was widely misled on these points. He evidently deduced his prices per pound from the cost of a pao, having understood by that term one of the ordinary packages of 18 theoretical catties. But the pao, by which permits are issued, and tea is sold and quoted, is five large packages. Mr. Cooper's results * are consequently five times too great. Prices were much the same in his time as at present.

It is probable that most of the tea which leaves Ta-chien-lu is paid for in rupees, as the export of Tibetan woollens cannot do much more than balance the supply of cotton cloth and silk. The rapid influx of these coins during the last fifteen years is remarkable; before that period they were rare, but have now become the currency of Tibet, and are counted, instead of being valued by weight. Great quantities are melted down by the Chinese in Ta-chien-lu, the Tibetans being unable to reduce them. Mr. Cooper alludes to the practice of melting them in Lhassa, but we know from Abbé Huc that the smiths of that city are Nipalese or other foreigners. On my asking a Tibetan why it was necessary to melt them down at all, he replied

* This refers to page 410 of Mr. Cooper's 'Pioneer of Commerce'; but what he there writes conflicts with his previous remarks on page 173.

that if they did not do so, they would have no use for such an immense quantity. It is clear that there must be a trade of no small proportions between Tibet and India. For exchange with Chinese silver in Ta-chien-lu, the rupees are weighed against the silver, and two rupees are added for every ten Chinese ounces. Russian roubles are beginning to put in an appearance, but only three of them were found in a payment of 1800 rupees.

A coin is called in Tibetan *tchran-ka*. Rupees are called *Pei-ling tchran-ka*, i. e. English coins; the derivation of *Pei-ling* is unknown. Another name is *Pei-ling ngo-mu*, i. e. English woman-face. Georgian and Victorian rupees are distinguished as *p'o-tu* and *mo-tu*, meaning male-head and female-head. Those which bear a crowned presentment of Her Majesty are named *Lama tob-du* or vagabond Lama, the crown having been mistaken for the head-gear of a religious mendicant. The same coin is known to the Chinese as *Lama-t'ou*, Lama's head, doubtless a corruption of the Tibetan.

Before the introduction of rupees, tea-bricks were used as currency, and even now in Batang a brick of ordinary tea is not merely worth a rupee, but in a certain sense *is* a rupee, being accepted, without minute regard to weight, just like the silver coin, as legal tender. Since the influx of rupees this tea-coinage has been very seriously debased, having now lost 25 per cent. of its original weight. The system of a double monetary standard is approaching its end, at any rate in Tibet. For in May last the Lamas of the Batang monastery having hoarded a great treasure of bricks, found it impossible to exchange them at par, and had to put up with a loss of 38 per cent.

To the Tibetan, tea is more than a luxury; it is an absolute necessary. Deprived of the costly, but indispensable, astringent, he suffers from headache, grows nervous, restless, out of condition, and altogether unhappy. In outlying districts, mothers are careful to keep the seductive beverage from their children for fear lest they should grow up unable, on occasion, to go without it. And yet, to European taste, the infusion, as prepared by Tibetans, is the remotest possible imitation of tea.

The Tibetan tea-pot is a wooden churn, much like a butter-churn, into which the boiling infusion is poured through a strainer; a little salt is added, and some twenty strokes applied with a dasher pierced with five holes. A lump of butter is then thrown in, and the compound is again churned with from 100 to 150 strokes, administered with much precision and regularity. The tea is then ready for drinking. It will be remarked that, with the substitution of salt for sugar, the Tibetan preparation is of much the same composition as the tea drunk in England; but the presence of the salt is not perceptible, and with the best intention in the world I could detect no flavour of tea. It is impossible accurately to describe the taste of the infusion; but to force a comparison, it is something like weak English tea with rich milk, but without any sugar or *tea*. And yet nobody would mistake it for milk and water, still less for butter and water; for the tea principle affects the flavour, while itself becoming modified into some un-tea-like astringent.

It is evident that astringency is the property desired, seeing that the many thousand Tibetans who cannot afford tea use oak bark in its stead.

The tea-cup of the Tibetan is a wooden bowl, not seldom an object of high price and elaborate workmanship, cased in precious metals and encrusted with jewels. In this he allows the tea to stand for a minute or two, and when the butter floats freely on the surface, he blows it off into another bowl. The national farinaceous food is *tsampa*, flour of grilled corn. The consumer takes up a portion of this between the tips of his fingers and thumb, and opening them with a jerk flicks it over the butter; then moulding it into consistency, he eats the immature pie-crust without further formality, washing it down with the tea. This is the characteristic nutriment

of Tibetans. Two English pounds of butter and ten ounces of tea are a liberal, but not lavish, allowance for twenty drinkers for one day.

As far as Batang is concerned, there is little prospect in all this of an outlet for Indian tea; but it is difficult to conceive how the idea of trading between Assam and that place could ever have been conceived. It possibly arose from an impression that Batang is a Chinese city, whereas it is a small Tibetan town of 200 houses, eighteen days distant from the true Chinese border by a track which, practically closed in winter, crosses four passes at various elevations between 14,000 and 17,000 feet, according to the careful and corrected observations of Captain Gill. Moreover, when the Chinese border is reached at Ta-chien-lu, the nearest city of any importance, namely, Yachou, is still seven or eight days distant, and has water communication with the sea. Setting aside, for a moment, the Tibetan roads, the only practicable way from Assam to Batang is across the Patkoi Hills to Burmah, thence into Yünnan by the Sawaddy track, and so northwards by Weisee, a distance of 750 miles,—a two-months' journey at least in such a country, whereby on arrival at Batang the freight alone, calculated at Tibetan rates, would be half as much again as the market price of Chinese tea.

The most direct road would of course be through Tibetan territory; but if Tibet be open, what purpose can be served by going to Batang? That town is a junction of high roads to Ssŭ-ch'uan, Yünnan, and Lhassa, and is consequently a point of great political importance to the Chinese Government. But its sole commercial significance worth the name, although there is a good deal of peddlery, is derived from the passage through it of Yerkalo salt and Yachou tea on their way westwards. Now Assam is admirably placed for taking this tea-trade in flank, and might even supply Western Tibet, without seriously affecting the Yachou export, since the whole quantity of the latter would only suffice for the consumption of a million Tibetans. The difficulty of crossing the Himalayas may be adduced as the most obvious impediment; but if any track whatever exists—as we know it does—it cannot be more formidable than the icy passes encountered by Abbé Huc on his journey from Lhassa to Ta-chien-lu by the Chinese tea-route.

The prices above quoted of about half a rupee per lb. in Lhassa do not, perhaps, at first sight appear to hold out a very encouraging promise of a direct tea-trade from Assam to Tibet; but, as already remarked, the price rises in a ratio altogether out of proportion to the distance of the market from the tea-route, and very quickly reaches a figure which puts the article beyond the purchasing power of the country people. This state of things arises not from the difficulties and dangers of the bye-roads so much as from the policy of the Lamas, who, being the traders and money-lenders of the country, and the only capitalists, have many motives for confining the traffic in a channel which they can most easily direct to their own advantage. They make greater and steadier profits by restricting the trade to one main line, along which they can monopolise it, than they could by opening new markets in districts at a distance from their lamaserais, where it would be liable to stray from their command. This they can the more easily effect, because the supply of tea is far inferior to the demand, and because it is not subject to much fluctuation. Mr. Cooper writes very strongly on these points, and frequently recurs to them—"The whole business in life of the Tibetans seems to be to procure a sufficiency of tea; and it is no cheap luxury; for the Lamas, keeping in their hands the retail, as the Chinese do the wholesale, trade, by this means reduce the people to absolute dependence on them, exacting in return for the precious article labour and produce. Grain, yaks, sheep, horses, and even children, are given to the rapacious priesthood in payment for tea." This statement may appear to be tainted with exaggeration, but it accords pretty exactly with the account I have received, among others, from an

apostate Lama. Under such circumstances, it will be admitted that the free circulation of tea-bricks is not likely to be encouraged. The practice of hoarding tea in the lamaserais is, by itself, sufficiently convincing. It may be taken as certain that the vast majority of Tibetans are unable to procure tea, or at any rate enough of it; that they are eager to purchase it; and that they would pay for it prices of which half a rupee may be regarded as the minimum; moreover, that the districts where it would sell most easily and advantageously are those which are furthest removed from the Chinese tea-route, or, in other words, those which are nearest to Assam. It is superfluous to remark that the merest sweepings of the Assam godowns would make better tea than the Tibetans have ever drunk.

In a few years' time, when Tibet has been opened, we shall begin to ask one another how it came about that the most powerful and progressive of Asiatic empires should have suffered the long frontier of its most flourishing provinces to be completely closed for so many years to the passage of any individual of the governing race, and that not by a formidable rival but by one feeble Tibetan State, for there are many Tibetan States besides Lhassa-dé. It is generally assumed that the obstacles to intercommunication are of a physical nature; but if so, there would be no trade, whereas evidences of a very extensive exchange abound, even so far east as Ta-chien-lu, in the use of rupees and of many articles of Indo-European origin. To mention some of the more trivial—but on account of their very triviality the more convincing—instances, the common dinner-plates of the Tibetans, when they use any, are of tin, stamped in the centre with an effigy of some European celebrity. In those which I examined I recognised the third Napoleon, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and Mr. Gladstone, all supposed by the natives to represent Buddhas of more or less sanctity. Round the rim of the plate, in all cases, were stamped the letters of the English alphabet, from A to Z.* The most desirable buttons, again, are four-anna pieces, and so strong is the demand, that three of these are worth a rupee. British army buttons are as common as blackberries.† Even corkscrews are offered for sale in Ta-chien-lu, although no one can explain their use. The presence of such miscellaneous and cheap articles testifies to the facility of trade, while the great quantity of rupees proves its extent. But although commercial intercourse crosses the whole breadth of Tibetan countries, diplomatic relations have not yet penetrated to the nearest of them, Lhassa-dé. Yet the distance from Calcutta to Lhassa, in a direct line, is less than from Paris to Berlin. Until such relations are established and maintained, there can be no hope whatever of a Tibetan market for Assam teas. Exploring missions, no matter how well organised or amply furnished, can effect nothing in the interest of trade, so long as the adverse influence of the Resident Chinese Legates and of the Lamas is unchecked. No matter how short the route, or convenient the road, the hostility of these two parties would be roused to the utmost against any project for a tea-trade. Even if the goods were admitted, which is in the last degree improbable, they would be burdened with such a weight of Tibetan dues and Chinese Likin, that the British frontier would be almost the limit of profitable sale. But if the opposition were kept within fair and reasonable bounds by the exchange of a convention and the introduction of diplomatic machinery to give it effective action, the Tibetans, with their fondness for tea and their dislike of Chinamen, would be the first to welcome the best wares to the best market by the shortest road.

In the mountainous region west of Kiating I discovered two kinds of tea of so unexpected a nature that I scarcely venture to mention them. In the monasteries

* These were noticed by me near Batang ('River of Golden Sand,' ii. p. 209).—[W. G.

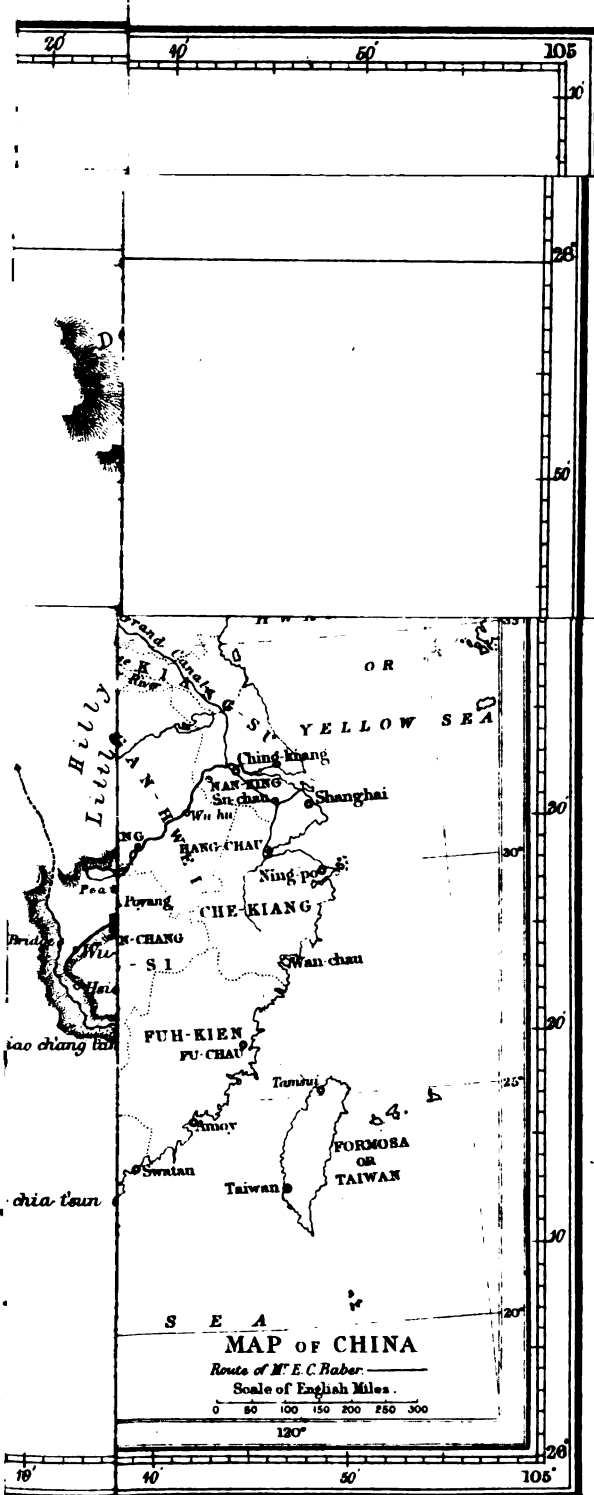
† See also 'River of Golden Sand,' ii. p. 132.—[W. G.]

on Mount O-mi, or as it is locally named, for brevity's sake, Mount O, I was regaled by the monks with an infusion of tea which is naturally sweet, tasting like coarse congou with a plentiful addition of brown sugar. It is only grown on the slopes of the mountain, and by the monks; two days' journey further west no one had even heard of its existence. I did not see the plant growing, and it is just possible that it is not tea at all; the prepared leaf, however, has all the appearance of tea, and no one on whom I have tried the experiment has taken it for anything else, or remarked upon its peculiarity, beyond inquiring why I put so much sugar in it. I am forwarding a specimen to Shanghai, without giving any hint of its singularity, for professional examination, in order that a tea-inspector's report may be appended to these notes.

The other variety, preposterous as the statement may appear, has a natural flavour of milk, or perhaps more exactly of butter. What is more interesting than this oddity is the fact that it is wild tea, growing in its native elevated habitat without any aid from human cultivation. An unimpeachable instance of a wild tea-plant has never yet been adduced in China. It has been supposed to occur in Formosa, but the specimens I found in the north of that island had evidently strayed from cultivation. The practice of drinking an infusion made from the wild plant has, I believe, never been met with anywhere. The wild tea in question is found in the uninhabited wilderness west of Kiating and south of Yachou, at heights of 6000 feet and upwards, and was described to me as a leafy shrub 15 feet high, with a stem some four inches thick. The wild mulberry is found in the same locality. Every part of the plant, except the root, is used for making the infusion. The wood is chopped up and put into a kettle of water with the dried leaves and twigs, and being boiled, yields a strongly coloured but weak tea, possessing a buttery flavour which gives it a certain resemblance to the Tibetan preparation. It cannot be obtained in Yachou. The only place where I found it in use is the Huang-mu-ch'ang plateau, a terrace perched among the stupendous gorges of the T'ung river. I only brought away a small quantity, which unluckily was drunk by mistake; but I hope next summer to make a general botanical expedition to the district, when it will be easy to procure a plentiful specimen.

E. Colborne Baber.

Chung-Ching,
25th January, 1879.


20'
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D
OR
YELLOW SEA
Ching-kiang
Shanghai
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Foochang
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- S I
Swan-chau
FUH-KIEN
FU-CHAU
Tamsui
Amoy
FORMOSA
OR
TAIWAN
Swatau
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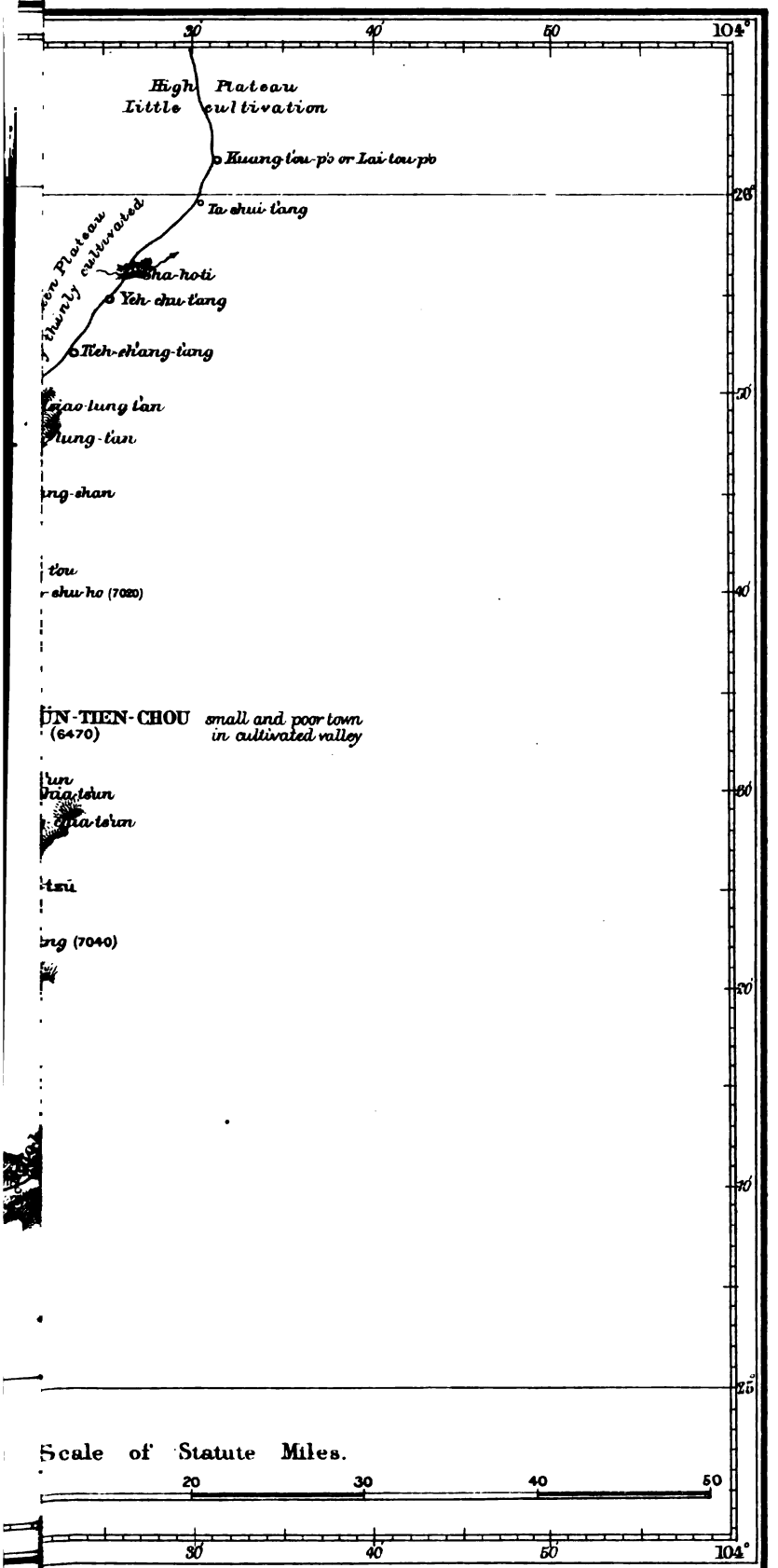
chia-tsun
S E A
MAP OF CHINA
Route of Mr E. C. Baber.
Scale of English Miles.
0 50 100 150 200 250 300
120°
19'
40'
50'
105'
Stanford's Geographical Estab!


20
40
50
104°
High Plateau
Little cultivation
Kuang-t'ou-p'o or Lai-tou-p'o
Ta-shui-t'ang
Sha-hoti
Yeh-shui-t'ang
T'eh-ch'iang-t'ang
UN-TIEN-CHOU small and poor town
(6470) in cultivated valley
(7040)
Scale of Statute Miles.
20
30
40
50
104°