

**TEA PLANTING IN
THE OUTER
HIMALAYAH**

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Tea planting in the outer Himalayah by Alexander Thorburn McGowan

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ALEXANDER THORBURN MCGOWAN

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W. A. P. 1866

"Tudet me vita."—Cic.

"Tea-dat mihl vitam."—Dr. Johnson's reading of Cicero.

——— "But Venus, goddess of the eternal smile,
Knowing that stormy brows but ill become
Fair patterns of her beauty, hath ordain'd
Celestial tea—a fountain that can cure
The ills of passion, and can free from frowns,
And sobs, and sighs, the disappointed fair.

To her, ye fair in adoration bow;
Whether at blushing morn, or dewy eve,
Her smoking cordials greet your fragrant beard
With Hyson, or Boha, or Congou crown'd
At midnight skies, ye mantle-makers! hail
The sacred offering."—Fynsouseon.

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TEA PLANTING IN THE OUTER HIMALAYAH.

ALTHOUGH India has been brought so near home by means of the overland route and the electric telegraph, and has been successively described from almost every point of view, yet there is one subject connected with this vast peninsula which has hitherto attracted but little notice. At the present moment, when the resources of India are being carefully opened up and explored, in order that a system of future credits may secure the prosperity and advancement of this vast empire, the following brief sketch of a tea plantation in the Himalayahs may not be deemed inopportune.

Though a committee of the House of Commons has investigated the possibility of colonizing India, and a large amount of information is to be found in blue-books and newspapers, there are few persons, nevertheless, that can form a just idea of the insurmountable difficulties to be encountered by any one who, alone and unconnected with the "service," would attempt to win a home or carve out a fortune in this country, which, up to a recent period, has been jealously guarded against all innovation and extraneous influences.

When, therefore, during the recent mutiny, we first heard of this colonization scheme, we were disposed to look with feelings of wonderment upon any man who would voluntarily leave an English home for only a vague prospect of fortune, but with the grim certainty before him of leading in this country a fevered, restless, and unnatural existence. Such persons seemed to belong to that class who are said to "embark for India with reluctance, to remain in it with disgust, and eventually to quit it with eagerness." Since that time, however, our ideas have somewhat changed; for although we should have been exceedingly offended had anybody questioned our ability to give an opinion on the subject at all, we must in truth acknowledge that we then had only seen the plains, and, with many more, wondered on what earthly grounds "gorgeous" had ever been applied to such an arid, hot, shifting waste.

After having wandered in the course of duty over a large tract of country, very pleasing to the eye when seen on the "Hall of all Nations" at Calcutta, and after having familiarized ourselves with Lucknow, the red walls of Delhi, the minarets of Lahore, and the valley of Peshawur, we eventually were lucky enough to be sent to the Fort of Kangra, where we enjoyed the bracing climate and grandeur of the mountains.

The tea-plant is cultivated in many portions of this district; a small Government tea plantation exists not more than eight miles from the fort, and twenty-four miles from it there is a very large one. This, myself and Lieut. W——, a brother officer, were most anxious to visit, and, through the kindness of Major S——, our

commanding officer, we received at various times for short periods during the last six months leave of absence for that purpose.

A short description of the various arrangements for one of these little trips to Holta may not prove tedious or uninteresting to persons not acquainted with these parts, and whose experiences of travelling have been confined to a small portmanteau with a few necessaries, a ticket at a railway station, and a comfortable seat in a first-class railway carriage, with the *Times* for a companion, in which newspaper on the morrow may appear some terrible denunciation should any untoward accident occur on the voyage.

A tent for ourselves and a smaller one for our servants, a camp-table, chairs, cooking utensils, plates, stores of food, &c., and various other odds and ends (for to be comfortable one entirely depends upon the forethought exercised on starting), were despatched on camels and mules under the charge of our khitmudgars,* bheesties,† and klassie,‡ the day before our projected departure. Two ponies with syces§ were also sent on, with instructions to proceed half way, and there to wait, in order to form a relay for us. Early the next morning our charpoys|| and bedding were despatched on coolies' heads under the care of our bearers or head servants, the latter mounted on mules; two sets of coolies sufficing in the present instance instead of the number of relays necessary for a long journey. Our heavy baggage having started the day before, halted for the night, so

* Cooks. † Carriers and drawers of water. ‡ Tent pitcher.
§ Horsekeepers. || A light bedstead made of string and bamboo.

that it did not reach Holta until a few hours before we ourselves arrived there.

About the middle of the day, after a hearty lunch, having threaded the steep winding path, often consisting of a series of stone steps, that leads from our lofty habitation in the citadel to the outer gate, where the ponies were in readiness, we mounted and rode off, gingerly at first, for the road was strewn with large round stones, that, impelled by monkeys and feeding goats, roll down from the hill-sides.

As the valley was reached, we mended our pace, and, in single file, galloped through the narrow winding paths, hedged in many places by the stubborn cactus or shaded by the plantain and tall bamboo. Now and then we passed through a village, and although we were evidently objects of curiosity, the inhabitants squatting in their doorways would only demonstrate their feelings by a prolonged draw at their hookahs. The women, mostly dressed in pegtop trousers, and wearing a large roll, usually of pink calico, that serves as head-dress, veil, and shawl, ran hastily away, often to the imminent danger of the pitchers of water on their heads, while others would sink into a heap on the ground in a manner most ungraceful to behold. Some, however, more bold, would pursue the even tenor of their way, taking particular care at the same time to cover their faces, but, with the curiosity that since the days of Bluebeard has been attributed to the softer sex, would leave their eyes unshrouded to watch the strange feringees. Now a brook had to be crossed; the hill ponies carefully picked their way over the smooth, worn stones, and