

**PITMAN'S COMMON  
COMMODITIES AND  
INDUSTRIES: TEA FROM  
GROWER TO CONSUMER**

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Pitman's Common Commodities and Industries: Tea from Grower to Consumer by A. Ibbetson

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**A. IBBETSON**

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TEA



TEA PLANT

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PITMAN'S COMMON COMMODITIES  
AND INDUSTRIES

# TEA

FROM GROWER TO CONSUMER

BY

A. IBBETSON

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# TEA

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## CHAPTER I

### DESCRIPTION OF THE TEA PLANT

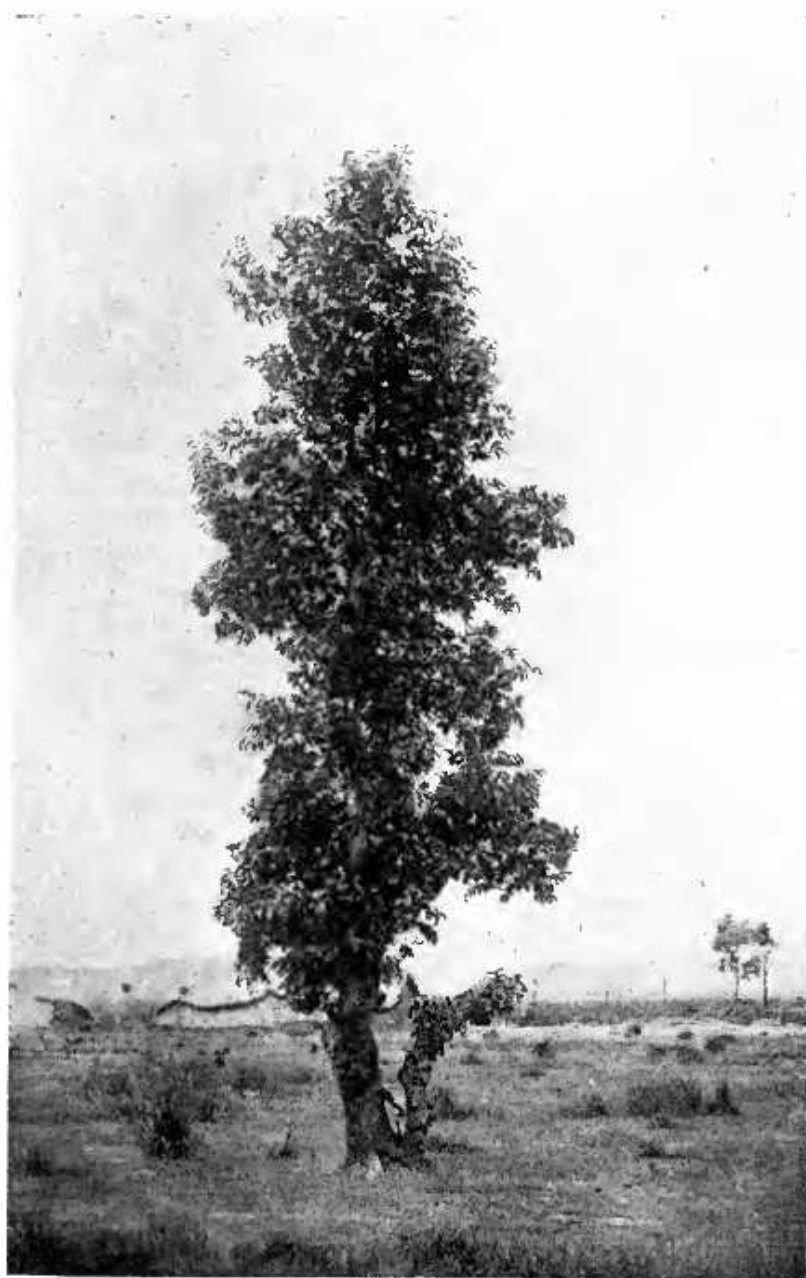
TEA, as everyone knows, is prepared from the young leaves of the tea plant, *Camellia Thea* (*Thea sinensis*), a shrub belonging to the natural order Theaceae, and extensively cultivated in China, India, and Ceylon, and, to a less extent, in certain other countries. Under the name of *Thea sinensis*, the Swedish botanist, Linnæus, originally described tea as a single species, but later it became known that two distinct plants were cultivated in China, which he named *T. viridis* and *T. Bohea*. These two species were long thought to be the origin of green and black teas respectively. No strictly wild plants have been found in China, but an indigenous tea-tree, *Thea assamica* (or, as it is now called, *Camellia Thea*) occurs in Assam, and is generally regarded by botanists as the parent species of all cultivated forms.

The tea plant is a bushy shrub which, when left to its natural habit of growth and not subjected to the vigorous prunings necessary for its successful cultivation, attains the height of a small tree. The leaves vary considerably in size and shape, according to the variety, but are leathery, alternate, and generally elliptical or lanceolate, with a toothed margin. Oil glands occur in the substance of the leaf and contain an essential oil to which the flavour of tea is largely due. The under surface of



the young leaves is thickly covered with fine hairs which entirely disappear with advancing age. The beautiful white or rose-coloured, slightly fragrant, flowers occur either singly or in clusters in the axils of the leaves; they are succeeded by more or less globular fruits consisting of capsules composed of three compartments, usually with only one seed in each compartment.

The question as to the original home of the tea plant is by no means settled, the point at issue being whether, after all, the true home of the plant is in the country naturally associated with it, viz., China, or in the neighbouring Indian province of Assam. The evidence in support of the latter contention is largely based upon the fact that the tea plant attains extraordinary luxuriance in Assam, greater, it is said, than that attained in any part of the Celestial Kingdom, and, arguing that in its natural home a plant reaches its greatest development, supporters of this view maintain that it is in Assam and not in China that we are to look for the home of tea. It by no means follows, however, that the reasoning of this argument is sound, for it has been repeatedly noticed that plants introduced into new countries where conditions seemed favourable for their growth have flourished so well that their luxuriance rivalled that of the plants growing in the land admitted to be their home. Support for the opposite view is sought in a Japanese legend which ascribes to China the honour of being the home of the tea plant; but, unfortunately, there is evidence for supposing that the Chinese never heard of this legend except from foreign sources, although the events related occurred in their own country. There are, however, certain references to the plant in the writings of a Celestial author who lived about 2,700 B.C., and a Chinese commentator of this ancient author, writing in the fourth century B.C.,



A WILD TEA TREE

calls attention to the mention of the plant, and adds that a beverage could be obtained from the leaves by adding hot water. It appears that the plant was used entirely as a medicine until 550 A.D., when it became a popular beverage.

De Candolle, however, in summing up the evidence on both sides, attaches considerable weight to the fact that apparently wild specimens of tea have been found by travellers in Upper Assam and in the province of Cochar, and adds that "the tea plant must be wild in the mountainous region which separates the plains of India from those of China"; he, however, regards the evidence as tending to prove that the *use* of the leaves was introduced into India from the latter country.

Much more certain information naturally exists as to the date of the introduction of the product into Europe. There is a story which states that a package of a commodity hitherto unknown was received by an old couple in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and that, instead of infusing the leaves and using the extract, they threw away the coloured liquid and ate the leaves after spreading them upon bread. Whatever may be said as to the probability of this story, it is definitely known that tea was introduced into Europe from China late in the sixteenth century, and that in 1657 a regular tea-house was opened in Exchange Alley, London. From this date tea began to be a regular beverage in England. It is mentioned by Pepys in his Diary; under the date 28th September, 1660, we read: "I did send for a cup of tea (a China drink), of which I had never drunk before," and, "Home, and there find my wife making of tea, a drink which Mr. Pelling the Pothicary tells her is good for her cold and defluxions." It was at about the time of its earliest introduction into England that tea first became known in Russia