

TEA CONSUMPTION IN INDIA.

Mr. P. J. Griffiths, C.I.E., M.L.A., Chairman of the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board, reviews the progress made in building up a future for the tea industry in India, in the jubilee number of *Capital of Calcutta*.

After recalling that as far back as 1893 — considerably before the possibilities of systematic propaganda had been realised in the world at large — tea producers in India taxed themselves to provide funds for propaganda for tea. Mr. Griffiths continues:—

In 1916, when serious attention first began to be paid to work in India, the Indian Tea Cess Committee, which has since been succeeded by the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board, concentrated upon the establishment of tea shops at railway station stalls, ghats, and other places where people habitually congregate. At this stage little or nothing was done to induce people to drink tea, for it was first necessary to ensure that tea should be available for those who might wish to drink it. By 1930 considerable progress had been made in this direction, and it can now be said that a cup of tea can be procured at any important railway station in India, and that in most important towns of India the supply of tea is equal to demand. In 1930, therefore, the Committee began to turn its attention to direct propaganda, and, in view of the fact that about 90 per cent. of the population of India lives in the villages, it was decided that the methods of propaganda employed must be those suitable for illiterate village folk.

The first problem is to persuade the villager to taste tea at all — and those who have experience of the extreme conservatism of the ordinary Indian villager in everything that affects his daily life will realise that it is no easy task; for this purpose demonstration tables have been set up in all the important towns and large villages in selected areas and at these demonstration tables a free cup of tea is given away to everybody who will drink it. It is an amusing sight to watch the reaction of the villager who for the first time is persuaded to taste tea at one of the stalls. His first reaction is frequently one of extreme suspicion, based apparently on the principle that tea cannot be a good thing, otherwise people would not want to give it away; in some cases, too, there is a suspicion that in

drinking an unknown beverage like tea the consumer may be unconsciously violating some rule of caste. At this stage considerable tact is required on the part of the demonstrator and it is always an advantage when the demonstrator himself belongs to the same caste or community as those amongst whom he is working.

To give away free cups of tea sounds simple enough, but, in fact, the process involves a great deal of supervision and constant attention to hygienic and other factors. In those parts of the country where people will drink from earthenware vessels, every recipient of a free cup of tea is given his own cup, which is thrown away after use, but this method cannot be applied everywhere, as there are areas where people will not drink from earthenware vessels. Then again the taste for sweetness varies greatly from one part of the country to another. Before propaganda can be carried out in any area, it is necessary to discover exactly how much milk and sugar will make tea palatable to the rural public. Provided sufficient attention is given to this factor, a man who has drunk a cup of tea at one of the demonstration stalls will, as a rule, come back sooner or later for a second cup, and, if the site has been well chosen in a place likely to be regularly visited by those concerned, it is usually only a question of time before the villager makes a regular habit of visiting the stall.

It is not sufficient, however, to give away free tea to those who come for it, for, apart from any considerations, such methods do not touch a considerable proportion of the womenfolk of the country. When a man has been given a cup of tea an attempt is therefore made to sell him a nice packet of tea which contains sufficient to make five cups of good tea. One of the demonstrators' tasks during his distribution of free tea is to explain the method of making tea, and a skilful demonstrator will always manage to collect a crowd round his stall before he makes the next brew. While he is doing this — and, indeed throughout the demonstration — it is up to the demonstrator to point out the cheapness and the valuable qualities of the beverage. This work of demonstration is now proceeding on a very large scale, and at the present moment some four million free cups of tea are distributed monthly and about one million pice packets per month are sold at the demonstration tables. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of the sale of these pice packets, for, purchased as they are in the towns, they are then taken to the village homes of the purchaser where, no doubt they are sampled in due course by the women of the household. This kind of work is supplemented by demonstrations at *melas* and by cinema shows, but the demonstration table remains and must remain the keystone of the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board amongst the villagers.

The approach to the middle classes and the well-to-do people presents a much more difficult problem, for their social status will not permit them to come to the demonstration tables. In Britain the corresponding class is approached by means of house-to-house canvassing, and in some areas it is proposed to make attempts along those lines in India; it is, however, difficult to get canvassers of the right kind in India who would be suitable for this kind of work, and there exists a strong feeling that going from house-to-house canvassing is lowering to the position and dignity of the canvasser. Then, too, the purdah system makes it, in many cases, impossible for a male canvasser to get into effective contact with the ladies of various households. In theory, this difficulty could be overcome by employment of lady canvassers, but in practice, it is difficult, if not impossible, to get such canvassers. Women who are uneducated would not be suitable for the work, and educated ladies, under present conditions of Indian social life, are, except in rare cases, not available for this kind of work. The approach of the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board to the respectable classes has therefore of necessity been largely confined to Press propaganda.

It is always difficult to isolate causes and it is impossible to say how much of the increased consumption of tea in recent years is due to the work of the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board, but the fact remains that simultaneously with the growth of that work there has been a phenomenal development in tea consumption. The science of statistics in India is in its infancy and the available figures must be regarded as very rough approximations, but such figures as are available show that consumption of tea in India has risen from 18 million pounds in the year 1902-3 (the year before the inauguration of the Tea Cess Committee) to about 90 million pounds per annum at the present time. Even this 90 million pounds, however, only represents a consumption of less than $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. per head throughout India, as compared with the figure of nearly 11 lb. per head in the United Kingdom. so that it is quite clear that there is ample scope for still further developing the work of the Board.

Considerable controversy has from time to time risen with regard to the work of the International Tea Market Expansion Board in U. S. A. and it is urged by some that the work should be discontinued and money thus set free for expenditure in India instead. The exponents of this view appear to overlook certain important considerations. Great as is the value of propaganda in India, it is important to bear in mind that the Indian demand is mainly for cheap teas, the sale price of which in some cases is even less than the cost of production. Although the development of this demand, which by expanding sales will, in course of time, lower the cost of

production per pound, is important, nevertheless it cannot take the place of the development of markets for high-priced teas.

Nor can we rely on the U. K. for an indefinite period to take all the high-priced tea that India can produce. In trade propaganda it is necessary to take a very long view and such a view suggests that according to all statistical evidence we are approaching a period of rapid decline in the population of the U. K. There seems little reason for doubt that in fifty years' time the population of Great Britain will be considerably less than it is now, and it is therefore essential to find some market to replace that which will be lost as a result of the decline in the population of Great Britain. Under such circumstances it would be sheer madness to ignore the possibilities of developing the American markets. The high standard of living in that country and its vast population would make it a very great potential market for tea if the tea-drinking habit could be developed, and the International Tea Market Expansion Board would be completely failing in its duty to the industry if it neglected to carry out propaganda in the U. S. A. Moreover, whatever may have been the case in the past, reports are now being received from every hand to the effect that tea propaganda in the U. S. A. is beginning to have its effect and the strongest possible support to that view is given by the fact that the tea trade in America has begun to spend money on propaganda along lines similar to those carried out by the Board. It is too early to prophesy, but it may be said with confidence that the present signs and reports are such as to provide the fullest possible justification for the continuance of propaganda in the U. S. A. by the International Tea Market Expansion Board.

It is not possible in this article to discuss the other aspects of the organisation of the tea industry, and the justification for having devoted so large a proportion of this article to consideration of that one aspect represented by the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board must be found in the fact that the work of the Board is the corner-stone upon which the industry as a whole must rest.