

TEA AS A PICKLE.

Curious Method of Preparation in Burmah and the Shan States.

From The London Times.

The latest issue of The Kew Bulletin contains two interesting reports on the cultivation and preparation of the so-called pickled or leppett tea of Burmah one from the Northern Shan States, the other from the Upper Chindwin.

Most of the pickled tea consumed by the Burmese is grown in Yaung Baing, in the Northern Shan States, the whole State being given up to the industry. The plant yielding this tea has now been identified as the ordinary Assam tea plant. Two crops are secured each year, only the young and tender leaves being taken. These, while still green, are thoroughly boiled in large narrow-necked pots made for the purpose, and are then poured into square pits dug in the ground about six feet deep, the sides and bottom being lined with walls of plantain leaves, which prevent contact with the earth.

The pit being filled with boiled tea and the juice from the pots, plantain leaves are placed on top and earth piled above these, stones and other heavy weights being placed on top. The pits are opened after some months, when the trading sea-

son begins, and the tea is sold to traders, who come with their caravans of bullocks to carry it to the Mandalay market in long baskets, so packed that fermentation is prevented.

The tea is sold in a dry state and is prepared by boiling in an earthen kettle, salt being added when it is drunk. In Lower Burmah, however, it is largely consumed in the solid form, the leaves being soaked in oil, a little garlic or dried fish being added, and in this form it is regarded as a great dainty. At all family festivals it plays an important part, and no ceremony is complete without it.

In the Upper Chindwin there is a trade in the seed as well as in the leaf. The leaves, when picked, are thrown into an iron cauldron full of boiling water, where they remain until they assume a yellow color, when they are rolled by hand on mats, and are then ready for the traders, who carry them away in bamboo crates. If the tea is to be kept, it is either buried in the ground or the crates are sunk in water. The seed, when intended for sale, is dried in the sun and carried away by traders in mat-lined boats to a convenient landing place, whence it is carried on coolies' backs to Manipul and Assam, where it has an excellent reputation for its germinating properties.

An experiment is now being made in sending the seed by Rangoon and Calcutta to Assam. Mr. Bruce, the author of the Upper Chindwin report, states that the gardens he saw in the region were wonderfully healthy, considering the little care taken of them. He thinks the tea-planting or European methods would be a great success if the labor difficulty could be successfully dealt with. Having labor, the planter need only search for red earth areas, which are numerous all over the Upper Chindwin. The plants become large enough to give a crop in three years, if the garden is kept free from jungle; seed is borne in eight years, and in fifteen years the trees are in full bearing, their normal existence being forty to fifty years.

The profits on the trade seem to be enormous; tea bought at the gardens at from 15 to 25 rupees for 360 pounds is sold in Mandalay at from 60 to 140 rupees. The trader makes over cent. per cent. profits on his outlay, and if he makes advances this is doubled.