

Since the bulk of the world's tea is produced in plantations, it will be of interest to detect the reasons for the persistence of plantation economy in the case of this commodity. In the first place, tea is in large demand among the white races, yet is the product of a tropical or sub-tropical shrub growing under conditions unsuited to white manual labour. Here is the essential basis for the old plantation industry in sugar, cotton, tobacco and indigo, and the modern industry in rubber. In the second place, rigid adherence to a daily timetable is essential—tea leaves must be plucked exactly when they are ready; the 'flush' must be dealt with immediately at the factory, withering must go on until almost exactly 42 per cent of the moisture is lost—after about eighteen hours. This all means adequate organization and supervision, or the quality of the resulting tea will suffer. There would be no market for the output of a factory which did not maintain an even standard. So much so is this the case that most factories consider it unwise to use supplies from other than their own plantations. Herein lies an important difference from other plantation industries—cotton can be bought according to quality from the small-holder; sugar cane can be brought to the sugar 'central' and does not deteriorate so rapidly. With tea the deterioration after plucking is so marked that 'lorry tea' (that is, brought in by the quickest method of transport) is regarded as superior.

Dr. Fay points out that, in the early European settlement of the New World, 'plantation' and 'colony' were virtually synonymous; the plantation was the economic instrument whereby colonies were established. Conditions of life were difficult for employee and manager alike. To be sent to the plantations was equivalent to disciplinary banishment for the turbulent younger sons. The negro States and the West Indies owe their population—and many of their present-day problems—to the system. It is curious that the present home of the plantation—the East—was, with its existing large population, at this earlier date recognized as a field for trade rather than colonization. Thus India and the East Indies had trading posts and forts to guard them, but not plantations. Since tea and rubber planting began there much later, its history has been happier. The tea-gardens of Assam attracted to that pleasant province labourers from overcrowded Bihar who, after their term of work was finished, settled down to work the land under conditions far superior to those in their home areas. Four fifths of the people of Assam are 'foreigners' by birth or origin—the tea-gardens have enabled this important migration to take place and have done much to relieve one of the pressing population

problems of India. To a less degree the rubber plantations of Malaya have had the same effect, with the difference that the Indian coolies have not been encouraged to settle. But rubber has given Malaya and the Dutch East Indies fine roads and railways and a vastly improved standard of living for the people.

The plantation system, under modern humane supervision, may thus confer great benefits on a world the agriculture of which is in a state of chaos. Not only may it provide diverse parts of the earth with commodities otherwise unobtainable—a good example is the highly organized banana industry—but it may also prove the way to development and settlement of tracts to which the individual settler without capital neither could nor would be attracted. Our economists and sociologists would be doing a great service by studying dispassionately the application of a modern plantation economy in Africa, Australia and other sparsely populated parts of the world.

L. DUDLEY STAMP.

The Hexlet*

HOWEVER ill-assorted in girth three spheres
may be
Each one can kiss the other two and simultaneously
A ring of six about them all kissing serially.

Though any necklet of graded beads
May fit in general the she-sex,
This Hexlet of mine of novel design
Caresses not one but three necks.
However it's worn it alters its grade
To suit its tri-spherical prison,
Plays kiss-in-the-ring and merry-go-round
Whilst hugging three necks with precision.
Like bubbles that blow and dwindle and go
It holds up to light-hearted derision
The terrible muddle mathematical fuddle
Makes of the pure circumflex
And its pet aversion is the mental inversion
That will have 'It's $1/x$ '.

All saints and sages throughout the ages
From one doxy never have swerved,
To hold fast unto what in change changes not
And ferret out what is conserved.
Now these beads without flaw obey this first law
For the aggregate sum of their bends.
As each in the tunnel slims through the funnel
Its *vis-à-vis* grossly distends.
*But the mean of the bends of each opposite pair
Is the sum of the three of the thoroughfare.*

FREDERICK SODDY.

Nov. 7, 1936.

* *vide* "The Kiss Precise" (NATURE, 137, 1021, June 20, 1936).