ON THE ARBITRARY DUTIES LEVIED ON FOREIGN TRADE AT CANTON.

Partly abstracted from a paper of the East India Company’s Factory.

“The impossibility of obtaining from the Government any fixed tariff of duties, has been for many years one of the prominent evils in the commercial system of Canton; and it being the policy of all parties, Government, Hong merchants, and Linguists, to keep foreigners in a
perfect state of ignorance of the mode and rate of duties levied on foreign trade, this may in a
great measure account for the circumstance,
that scarcely any two persons who have en-
deavoured to gain information on these points,
could arrive at the same result." An official
Custom House book for the province of Canton,
has been printed by Imperial authority in five
volumes, which, however, is but rarely procur-
able by foreigners, and only with considerable
difficulty and expense. This contains the tariff
which ought to regulate the payment of duties.
In addition to the prescribed rates, it directs a
further charge of 11½ per cent. on the amount
of duty; in lieu of which, however, the Canton
Custom-house levies 30 per cent., being an un-
authorised increase of nearly a fifth; while .15
decimals of a tael, per pecul, are charged for
weighing expenses in lieu of only .038 deci-
mals, the prescribed rate. But these are rela-
tively unimportant in comparison with the
heavy exaction of 3 per cent., which the Hong
merchants unauthorisedly levy on all goods, ex-
cepting woollens, long cloths, cotton yarn, and
iron, as a contribution to what is called the
Consco fund, originally instituted for the
purpose of liquidating the foreign debts of
bankrupt Hong merchants;* but never honestly

* See ante, page 96.
appropriated to that object. And the Cohong having lately passed a new regulation disclaiming their corporate liability for such debts, no legitimate plea remains for the continuance of this irregular imposition; which ought not to be longer submitted to. Thus diverted from its original purpose, the Consoo fund is now appropriated, by the Hong merchants, solely to bribery and to the payment of the irregular exactions of the Mandarins (locally termed squeezes). The annual amount thus wrung from foreign traders, by the mere fiat of the Hong merchants, and entirely subject to their irresponsible control, is immense. The following are said to be some of the purposes to which it is appropriated:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual tribute to the Emperor</td>
<td>£18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For repairing the Yellow River embankments</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses of an agent at Pekin</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth-day presents to the Emperor</td>
<td>43,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do. do. to the Hoppo or Commissioner of Customs</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presents to do.'s mother or wife</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do. to various officers</td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure for Tartarian ginseng, which the Emperor compels them to purchase</td>
<td>47,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£152,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is, however, yet another class of
charges to which foreign trade is liable, called see lc, business or trade regulations, which it is impossible to fix. "This consists entirely of an arrangement between the Hong merchant who acts as broker, and the native merchants who purchase the various articles; and varies according to the prices of the goods, and the expectations of those who profit by the charge. On some articles, particularly cotton and cotton twist, the amount is very considerable, comprising a great variety of charges, as allowance for loss of interest, different modes of payment, warehouse rent, expenses of weighing at Whampoa, &c.,—all these are expressed by distinct, and (to use a vulgar expression) slang terms, which are only intelligible to those Chinese who are intimately conversant with the particular trade to which they allude. In cotton, for instance, if sold at ten taels, only nine taels and seven decimals are paid, and the dollar is estimated at .707, instead of .718 decimals of a tael. What the object in this species of self-deception as to the nominal price is, it is difficult to say; but it really in some degree bears the appearance of being intended to mystify the transactions, so as to render them unintelligible to foreigners."

The bearing of the foregoing various charges
on the article of cotton is subjoined, by way of example:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorized by Chinese Tariff</th>
<th>Hong Merchants' Exactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotton, decjs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial duty, tael 0\textperiodcentered 1500</td>
<td>tael 0\textperiodcentered 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorized addition, 11\textfrac{2}{3} per cent... 0\textperiodcentered 0174</td>
<td>Hong Merchants' charge 30 per cent... 0\textperiodcentered 045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do. weighing charge 0\textperiodcentered 0380</td>
<td>Ditto, ditto... 0\textperiodcentered 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorized duty, tael 0\textperiodcentered 2054</td>
<td>Charged by the Hong Merchants, tael... 0\textperiodcentered 345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Add Consoofund, 3 p. ct... 0\textperiodcentered 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sze le, or trade charges... 0\textperiodcentered 915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total deduction, which a foreigner pays, from the price of his Cotton, per pecul... 1\textperiodcentered 500