

A CHAPTER ON COFFEE.

Perhaps the most important individual of the Cerealia tribe is the coffee plant. Coffee is the produce of an evergreen shrub, a native of Abyssinia and Arabia. The fruit is a berry about the size of a cherry, covered with a pulp sweet in taste and not very thick. Inside this pulp are two seeds, separated from each other by a parchment-like membrane. The seeds are the well known coffee. The coffee-seed has been frequently analyzed; chemists have found in it several oils and albuminous matters, and the distinguished Dr. B. S. P. Every person knows that coffee is rendered fit for culinary purposes by the process of roasting, but the precise agency of this roasting process is not understood.

It is supposed that it was only in the fifteenth century that coffee was transported from Abyssinia to Arabia Felix. But if Arabia be not the native land of coffee it is at least its most prosperous adopted home. Nowhere does the plant flourish better, nowhere is the resulting coffee so delicious in flavor, especially that raised from the berry grown in the environs of Mecca. The Orientals, it is well known, first introduced the use of coffee into Europe; but when they the Orientals, first became acquainted with the beverage of the East, an Arabian author of the fifteenth century, named Shehabeddin, states that the Mufti of Ahen, in the nineteenth century, was the first who used coffee as a beverage, but at this period the use of the infusion was known in Persia. According to vulgar tradition, the discovery of coffee is due to the mullah Chaddy, whose memory is held in reverence by all true Mussulmans. This pious man, afflicted with sorrow at the thought that he could not keep awake for the performance of his nocturnal devotions, besought Allah to indicate some means by which sleep might be chased away. Mohammed, touched with pity, as well he might, seeing that his own home was concerned, so brought matters about that a herb was found to acquaint mullah Chaddy of the curious fact that his (the herb's) goats could not go to sleep after they had partaken of coffee berries, but kept frisking about all night long. The mullah, taking the hint, at once prepared a good strong dose of coffee. He drank it, and was delighted beyond measure at the result. Next morning he held in his hand a delicious sensation crowded on his brain; and his midnight devotions were so fervent that he at once communicated the precious secret to some disciples, who, imitating his example, became regular sleepers, and in the seventh heaven of bliss, with increasing prayers.

According to another tale, the discovery was made by a man in a convent of Maronites, who, on receiving the report of a camel-driver to the effect that his beasts could not sleep after having browsed on the coffee plant, at once thought to try the berries, and, being coffee, was for his monks, who, like the mullah Chaddy, appear to have been for a long time, and had acquired the disagreeable habit—not quite dissipated—of drinking coffee. The practice, we are told, was quite successful.

But coffee, like many other good things, had its enemies, and among these, the very Mohammedan priests who were amongst the first to patronize it became its most voracious foes. The fact was this: So generally was coffee used by the Mohammedans, that people, instead of going to the mosque, spent their days in coffee-slaps; and, as there does not appear to have been any set and regular time for the closing of coffee-houses during the day—or rather no time—the priests had an audience of empty benches. Forthwith the mullahs anatomized the selling of coffee, and the use of it. Coffee, they said, was as bad as wine and spirituous liquors, if not worse. Its employment was interdicted throughout every part of the Turkish empire. Religious madrasas, however, being sufficient to check the growing evil, at length an appeal was made to physical force. "In the year of the Hegira, 943," A. D. 1538, an edict was issued in Cairo, which laid large numbers were assembled in the month of Ramadan, employed in drinking coffee, the captain of the guard surprised them, hunted them ignominiously from the shops, locked them up all night in the pasha's home, and the next morning administered to each individual by way of a salutary admonition, seventy stripes.

Percussion, as usual, accomplished its result the very opposite to that intended. Coffee speedily became universally popular. In the first half of the seventeenth century there were in Cairo no less than two thousand coffee-shops. At the present time coffee is amongst Eastern Mussulmans one of the first necessities of life, and is the chief source of new life to his associated peoples, he formally contracts with his friends that she is always to have plenty of coffee. If certain modern nations, however, are to be trusted, Turkish ladies have got into the habit of drinking brandy. According to Mohammed, they have no souls to lose; hence they may drink spirituous liquors with impunity.

Before the seventeenth century coffee was scarcely known in France, even by name. At length certain travelers returning from the East brought a little coffee with them, and it was in the habit of offering coffee, after the manner of his country, to those who attended his lectures. The ladies of the French Court soon heard of this, and, as they expressed their desire of tasting the seductive liquor; whereupon the Turk, being a polite man, as all Turks are, invited the ladies to his house, and gave them coffee to their hearts' content. Madame de Sevigne was opposed to this fashion; she did not approve of coffee; said it was only a short-lived taste; that it would pass away and be forgotten like fashion. Well, the lady was right, after all, though not after the fashion she intended; coffee has passed away and been forgotten, "like fashion." About the same time it was that coffee first came into favor in Vienna. The Turks, driven from before the walls of that city by Solimski, left their camp in the hands of the conqueror. In this camp there was abundant coffee, and a number of slaves whose office was to prepare it. Coffee had already been introduced amongst the Londoners in the following manner. An English merchant named Edward Colman, returning from Smyrna, brought with him a Greek servant, Pasquet by name, who opened a coffee-shop in Newman's Court, Cornhill, in 1612. Other coffee-shops speedily arose; but they were not patronized by the aristocracy, and the coffee-house of the day was a low named haunt, as Oxford, in 1659.

All the supplies of coffee imported for a long time into Europe were obtained from Arabia. It was brought by the way of Alexandria and the Levant; but the plants of Egypt and Syria imposed enormous taxes upon it. Europeans then began to obtain it by the channel of the Red Sea. Holland made a great discovery in this respect, next followed France and Italy. In 1666, the Dutchman, the direction of Van Horne, first president of the Dutch East-India

colony, having procured certain coffee plants, sent them to Batavia, where they flourished well. The French next introduced coffee into Martinique; and the English, following their example, planted the coffee shrub in many of their tropical colonies.

In the United States coffee is consumed to the amount of about sixteen million dollars annually, and is constantly increasing, not in strength, but in importation. *—Billon's Monthly.*

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