

COFFEE: ITS HISTORY, CLASSIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION

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Coffee: Its History, Classification and Description by Joseph M. Walsh

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JOSEPH M. WALSH

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AND DESCRIPTION**



COFFEE TREE AND BERRIES.

COFFEE

-ITS-

HISTORY, CLASSIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION

-BY-

JOSEPH M. WALSH,

AUTHOR OF

"TEA: ITS HISTORY AND MYSTERY."



THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.,

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CHICAGO,

TORONTO.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY HISTORY.

THE gigantic extent to which the production and consumption of Coffee has been carried of late years, the vast number of hands employed in its cultivation and preparation for market, including the great quantity of shipping necessary for its transportation, and the enormous amount of capital invested in its production and trade, naturally invest the commodity, not only from a commercial but also from a moral and social standpoint, with great importance, creating as it does an industry of almost fabulous proportions and capital, rendering it second to no other article of food or drink in the world. The early history of Coffee, however, like that of Tea, is involved in considerable obscurity, the almost total absence of any historical fact being only compensated for by an unusual profusion of legendary and conjectural statements, or by purely mythical stories. As far as can be ascertained, it was not known to the ancients, although one writer claims that it is mentioned in the Bible, making the bold assertion that the potion offered to King David on a certain occasion, at the hands of the fair Abigail, to calm the temper of the excited monarch, must have been Coffee, basing his argument on the untenable grounds that the beverage, whatever it may have been, was prepared from *something roasted*. Yet no mention of the plant or its product is to be found among the Egyptians in the time of the Pharaohs,

although their trade at their period, as in the present, lay up the valley of the Nile toward Berber, its reputed birthplace. It was unknown to the Greeks and Romans in any form, and though claimed to have been in use among the Arabs at a very remote time, no reference is made to it by Mohamet or his followers up to the seventh century. No account of its use is to be found during the first Moslem invasion of southern Europe by Abdulrahman in the ninth century, although large quantities of the commodity were captured in their camp before Vienna during their second invasion of eastern Europe in the seventeenth century, and it is not even alluded to by any of the writers who accompanied the Crusaders into Syria during the thirteenth century.

To the Ethiopians its use is said to have been known from time immemorial, and that the plant and its virtues were first discovered in that country is now generally admitted by all authorities on the subject. The first human beings who appear to have used the Coffee-berry in any form being the semi-savage tribes inhabiting higher Ethiopia, to which country the Coffee-plant is indigenous, and where it is to be found at the present time, growing abundantly both in a wild and cultivated state. Bruce, in his *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, published in 1678, informs us that "The Gallæ is a wandering nation of Africa, who, in their incursions into Abyssinia, are obliged to traverse immense deserts, and being desirous of falling on the towns and villages of that country without warning, carry nothing to eat with them but the berries of the Coffee tree *roasted* and *pulverized*, which they mix with grease to a certain consistency that will permit of its being rolled into masses about the size of billiard balls and then put in leathern bags until required for use. One of these balls they

claim will support them for a whole day, when on a marauding incursion or in active war, better than a loaf of bread or a meal of meat, because it cheers their spirits as well as feeds them."

From Ethiopia, the Coffee-plant is claimed to have been introduced into Abyssinia as early as A. D. 875, while, according to Lagrenie, Coffee has been known and used in Abyssinia, from the very earliest times, quoting the Abbé Raynal, a missionary to that country in the latter part of the sixteenth century, to that effect, stating that "he procured some of the berries from cultivated plants, and made a trial of them, finding them larger, rather longer and quite as fragrant as those obtained from Arabia." From Abyssinia it was evidently first introduced into Arabia, but at what period of the world's history, or under what circumstances is also lost in doubt. Tradition—never at a loss for some marvelous story—ascribes its first discovery in the latter country to a Dervish, who in the year 1275 was driven out of Moka, pursued and surrounded by his enemies in the adjacent mountains. In the extremity of hunger he is said to have gathered some Coffee-berries and eaten them, then, steeping some of the parched berries in some water to allay his thirst, he accidentally discovered their agreeable flavor and nutritious properties. While another Arabian legend attributes its first discovery as an alimentary infusion in that country to a Mollah named Chadeley, who on being informed by a goat-herd of the peculiar and exciting effect produced on his goats, whenever they happened to browse on the leaves and fruit of a certain kind of tree, resolved to test their virtues on his monks, with whom it is related he had considerable difficulty in keeping awake during their nocturnal devotions. Preparing an infusion from the berries of the plant indicated,

he served it to them, the experiment proving a complete success; the dervishes taking eagerly thereafter to the new and exciting beverage. While, according to an Arabian manuscript, now to be found in the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris, the use of Coffee was known in Arabia as early as the thirteenth century. This coffee-colored document states that "a certain Mufti of Aden, on his return from a journey to Persia, about the middle of the fifteenth century, brought back with him some *roasted* beans of Coffee." While in an old treatise upon Coffee, published in 1566 by an Arabian sheikh, it is stated that the first knowledge of Coffee and its use was brought from Abyssinia to Arabia about the beginning of the fifteenth century by a learned and pious mollah named Djmaleddin Abou Elfager. According to this document, the use of Coffee as a beverage was prevalent among the Abyssinians from the most remote times, and that in Arabia, when first introduced, it only supplanted a preparation made from the leaves of the *Celastrus* in that country. The introduction and use of the beverage by the Mufti gave reputation to the practice, his example soon rendering the new luxury popular among his countrymen, "first among lawyers and professional men, then with students and those who learned reading, the custom eventually spreading to artisans and others who worked in the night, and finally by travelers, who journeyed in the night to avoid the heat of the day." In a short time it was declared in Aden "that this liquor purified the blood, by a gentle agitation, dissipated the ill condition of the stomach and aroused the spirits." As a result of this high extolation it was quickly adopted by those who had no occasion to keep awake at night, and in a brief space of time, says M. Galland, "the whole inhabitants of Aden became inveterate coffee-drinkers." Its peculiar

property of dissipating drowsiness and preventing sleep was taken advantage of in connection with the prolonged religious services of the Mahometans, and its use as a devotional anti-soporific stirred up a fierce opposition on the part of the strictly orthodox and conservative section of the priesthood. Coffee being held by them to be an intoxicant beverage, and therefore prohibited by the Koran, and the dreadful penalties of an outraged sacred law were held over the heads of all who became addicted to its use in any form. But notwithstanding the threats of divine retribution, and though all manner of devices were adopted in order to check its growth, the coffee-drinking habit spread rapidly among the Arabian Mahometans, and the growth of coffee, as well as its use as a national beverage, became as inseparably associated with Arabia as tea has with China.

From Aden, the use of coffee extended to Mecca, Medina and other cities and towns of Arabia, the knowledge and taste for it rapidly spreading outwards from that country to Syria and Persia. Public coffee-houses being everywhere established, also in many of the other countries in western Asia, affording, according to one authority, "a lounge for the idle and a relaxation for the man of business, where the politician retailed the news of the state; the poet recited his verses, and the Mollahs delivered their sermons to the frequenters." But the mania for coffee becoming so great about this period, particularly in Syria, that an effort was made by authority of the government to check, if not to entirely suppress, the further growth of its consumption among the inhabitants, on the alleged ground of "its intoxicating properties," but in reality because of its use leading to social and festive gatherings, incompatible with the strictness and teaching of the Mahometan religion.