

## INTRODUCTION

The coffee of commerce is derived from the fruits of several species of the genus *Coffea*, all originating in tropical Africa. The most important species, *C. arabica*, had its origin so far as is known, in the hills of Southern Abyssinia and is thought to have been transported thence to Arabia, where its cultivation spread rapidly and there the first authentic records of its use as a beverage, appear about the middle of the 15th century. It is probable, however, that its properties especially as a stimulant, were known to the indigenous peoples of Africa before that time. On the other hand, the legends connecting coffee with the "Nepenthes" of Helen of Troy or the pottage for which Esau sold his birthright are difficult to vindicate and must remain legends. Certain it is that for several centuries, *C. arabica* was the only species known to the outside world.

The coffee bean was first brought to Europe around 1630, by the Venetians trading in the Levant and its use as a beverage attained quick popularity throughout Western Europe. It was not, however, cultivated outside the Middle East until in 1690 the Dutch took some plants to Ceylon and, a year or two later, to Java. In fact the first plant to be grown in Europe was a single specimen sent from Java to the Amsterdam Botanic Gardens in 1706. The offspring of this plant were subsequently distributed as gifts to the various Crowned Heads of Europe and it is interesting to read that as a result of war between France and the Low Countries, Louis XIV - the "Grand Monarch"-had no coffee plant until after the Peace of Utrecht in 1713.

Coffee cultivation was first brought to the New World in 1714, when the enterprising Dutch took plants to Surinam, and the crop quickly became so popular that only petty Franco/Dutch rivalry hindered its immediate spread throughout Central America and the West Indies. As it was, with the spectacular transport of a single plant from France to Martinique by de Clieu in 1723

coffee cultivation was soon firmly established. Brazil, that huge coffee garden, began cultivation in 1727 and Jamaica, the home of "Blue Mountain" in 1730.

All this time, the only coffee known to the world in general was the species *C. arabica*. It was not till the last decades of the 18th Century that we first begin to hear of the indigenous coffees of West Africa; *Coffea stenophylla* and *Coffea liberica*, natives of Sierra Leone and the Guinea Coast. The other commercially important coffees, sometimes known as the Robusta Group, are natives of Central Africa. *Coffea robusta* itself was first noticed, growing wild in the interior of the Congo Basin, by Laurent in 1895; while the allied species *Coffea canephora* is thought to have been the coffee described near Lake Victoria by the explorer Grant, in 1861. The only other important species, *Coffea excelsa* was discovered as late as 1905 near Lake Tchad, by the French botanist, Chevalier.

See Temp Trin<sup>v</sup>  
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Of the beginnings of coffee cultivation in Trinidad, little is known, and it is not until 1875 that we find any mention of it. It is then recorded that a "Mr. Prestoe attempted to draw attention to the desirability of cultivating coffee in Trinidad<sup>(1)</sup>. About this time, coffee plants of two species, *C. arabica* and *C. liberica* were propagated for sale to planters in the Botanic Gardens, Port of Spain. The most popular variety with planters in Trinidad and in the West Indies generally was a variety of *C. arabica*, known as "Creole".

There were obviously hopes of a prosperous coffee industry in the island at that time, as the report of an expert, one Mr. Pasteur<sup>(2)</sup>, in 1886 states that: "Trinidad is well fitted for growth of coffee, the shape and size of bean showing that soil and climate are favourable and that only labour, care and skill are required to give the coffee its proper value." That these hopes can hardly have been realised at the time is obvious from

a glance at the export figures.

The 1877 figure of 74,000 lbs. raw coffee exported, shows a definite increase over preceding years, but this increase was not maintained and thereafter the industry experienced a long steady decline due largely to the relative prosperity of cacao until in 1922 exports reached an ebb figure of 329 lbs.

Since then, apart from the general depression of the thirties, higher prices have resulted in an expansion of the industry. At the present day, Trinidad produces annually around 3 million lbs. of coffee, with an export of around 2 million lbs., and with prices now well above 50 cents/lb. the crop in Trinidad may, in spite of the increase in wage rates be said to be on a sounder footing financially than for many years.