

INTRODUCTION.

The genus coffee is entirely African in origin. There are in cultivation today several species and a very large number of varieties. These fall roughly into three main groups. They are: coffee arabica, coffee robusta and coffee liberica. C. arabica is the oldest known species and is as yet the most important coffee commercially. It is the best in cup quality. It usually thrives at a high altitude. C. robusta is usually grown at medium elevations, but is grown successfully from sea level up. It gives good yields but the cup quality is inferior to that of C. arabica. C. liberica thrives from sea level up to a fairly high altitude. It is a tall and hardy tree. The berries are large and of a low cup quality.

The Division of Commerce in the Dutch East Indies publish some of their findings upon the most suitable conditions for the growth of the different species. (10) A good deal of experimental work has been done on coffee by the Dutch. Their conclusions are that: C. liberica and C. excelsa prefer clay soils at low regions and that they are drought resistant. C. robusta does best on a loose soil at a height of 1,000 - 2,500 feet above sea level. C. arabica needs a high altitude.

C. arabica was first introduced into the West Indies by a French officer, M. de Clieu, who, in 1723, brought a single plant to Martinique from Amsterdam. (13)

Before the middle of the eighteenth century coffee had been widely distributed throughout the West Indies.

Of the crop in Trinidad it is reported that, in 1875-78, "Mr. Prestoe attempted to draw attention to the desirability of cultivating coffee in Trinidad." (4) At this period C. arabica and C. liberica were grown in the Botanical Gardens, Port of Spain, with great success and distributed to the planters.

An extract from the Trinidad Royal Gazette of the 29th May

to 28th August, 1878, says that: "no more favourable conditions could be desired for coffee planting than exists in the valleys of the northern portion of the island, east of the Mareval valley". (4) (11)

In 1877 the exports of coffee amounted to 74,189 lbs.

Coffee was seldom given any cultural care, being used entirely as a hedgerow around cacao fields and to fill in bare patches during the establishment of a cacao plantation. (16)

About 1920 the higher prices received for coffee caused a renewed interest in the crop and an increase in its cultivation in this colony. The coffee exports from Trinidad in 1922, from the 1st January to the 31st December amounted to 329 lbs. of cleaned coffee, valued at £17. 0. 0. By 1926 the exports had increased so that in that year 497,688 lbs. of coffee valued at over £20,000 were exported and in the year 1929, the amount of coffee exported was 818,593 lbs. valued roughly at £30,000.

- (a) Purpurascens: a red leaved type.
- (b) Aserilla: having yellow berries.
- (c) Bullata: having bullate leaves and a tendency towards a high percentage of unmet seed.

These varieties are undesirable as they are poor planters. Their effect upon the plantation is detrimental especially if it is desired to seed from the island for sowing as it is impossible to tell whether the seed has been fertilised with pollen from the superior types.

Types of commercial importance are:-

- (a) Necta: This type is usually considered to be a subspecies of C. arabica. The production of this coffee is very limited. The berries are small but the quality of the final product is excellent.
- (b) Padana: A Sumatran variety. The bean is rather large and the quality is said to be good.
- (c) Bourbon: The coffee is of good quality but the plant is said to be very exacting in its requirements.
- (d) Erecta: A sturdy variety with upright branches.
- (e) Columaria: Vigorous but a shy bearer.
- (f) Maragogipe: First found in 1870 on a plantation in Bahia, Brazil. It is a good bearer and the coffee is of fine quality.