

INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES

WHAT WE DRINK

BY

Harriet G. Brown



F. A. OWEN PUBLISHING COMPANY,
DANSVILLE, N. Y.



Coffee

What We Drink COFFEE.

In Kaffa, in East Africa, an evergreen plant grows wild, and very abundantly. The people there call it Kauchi; the Malays call it Kawah; and we know it as Coffee.

The Coffee plant is a handsome shrub, naturally about twenty or thirty feet high, but in cultivation rarely allowed to grow over eight feet. The leaves are oval, shining, and sharp pointed, resembling somewhat those of our laurel, but are not as thick.

The flowers are five-cleft, funnel-shaped, white and very fragrant, growing in small clusters at the axils of the leaves, the dark green of which emphasizes the whiteness of the blossoms. The anthers

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are quite conspicuous, as they project beyond the blossoms. The time of blossoming is short, being only from two to four days. In a single night the buds burst into bloom. A coffee plantation in blossom is a beautiful sight. The shrubs look as if a light snow had fallen on their glossy green leaves. The air is filled with the fragrance of the flowers. Travelers think that the coffee plantation in blossom time is far more beautiful than the orange grove at its best. This beauty is, however, short-lived, and may fade away before night, or even noon. It rarely lasts over three or four days.



Coffee Blossom

The fruit resembles a large cranberry or a cherry. Inside of the skin is a soft pulp, then a coating of a soft, sweet, glutinous substance; under this is a yellowish-white coating called parchment, tougher and thicker than the husk of wheat. This is easily removed by rubbing. Inside of this comes a thin film, called in Ceylon "silverskin." It resembles the skin of the white onion known as "the silverskin." Under this skin, their flat sides pressed closely together, are the two coffee berries or beans. The berry of the Mocha coffee has only one roundish seed; apparently the two seeds have grown together.

In Mexico the coffee blooms in March. After the flowers fade and fall the coffee berries or "cherries" appear. At first they are hard and green, but by October they are yellow, or deep crimson, according to the variety.

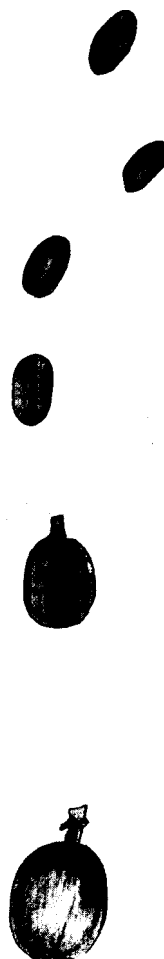
A sandy or gravelly soil is best adapted to the plant, but the soil is not so important as the drainage. A hilly district, where the roots can be kept dry and the leaves refreshed by showers, is the best for a coffee plantation. An eastern exposure is preferred; next to that a western one, for plants growing on either of these slopes are not exposed all day to the direct rays of the sun as they would be on a southern or northern slope.

The plants are raised from seed. Sometimes the seeds are planted in the place where they are to grow, but generally they are put into seed beds and transplanted later, only perfect plants of uniform size being saved. When the plants are twelve or sixteen inches high they are set out in rows, with plants of the banana or wild fig between the rows to furnish shade to protect the young plants from burning sun. In Brazil a tall pea called *quando* is much used. This is allowed to fall and decay, as the potash in the plant is an excellent fertilizer for the roots of the coffee plant.

That the berries may be easily gathered, the ends of the branches are kept pinched off when the plants are five or six feet high. The wild coffee trees growing in the forests are tall and straggling and bear very few berries. The cultivated plants produce but few berries the second year. In the third or fourth, good crops are expected, although the plants do not reach their full capacity of bearing until about six years old.

A coffee plantation in a good location and well cared for will bear good crops for more than forty years. The amount of coffee borne by one plant varies according to the variety and the locality of the plantation. Two pounds is a good average crop for one tree, but a single plant of Liberian coffee has been known to yield sixteen pounds at one gathering.

The berries do not all ripen at once, so they must be gathered by hand. A good picker gathers about three bushels a day. After the berries are picked the pulp must be removed. This used to be done by tramping on the berries. Now it is generally done by machines. The hand machines will pulp three



Coffee Beans