

PRACTICAL PAPERS.

A CUP OF COFFEE.

A cup of coffee seems a simple thing to have, and it certainly is not a costly luxury, yet it is a long journey from the coffee-tree to your cup, and many hands have helped to bring that handful of brown seeds, every one, of course, having been paid out of the few cents your grocer charged for it.

I wish I could take my readers into a coffee plantation, and let them see and, above all, smell the most charming of trees, (on the Squeer's plan of learning by object lessons.) It is equally delightful to both senses. The tree, a graceful pyramid of glossy, dark leaves, covered with a cloud of delicate white, jasmine-like blossoms, as dainty as a light fall of snow, with fruit also in every stage of growth, from the flower to the full red cherry-like clusters, and the whole air full of the most exquisite fragrance, more delicious than orange groves or the rose fields of Asia.

Within each one of these beautiful red globes, safely wrapped in a tough skin, lie side by side two of the grains which we call coffee. They are, in fact, the seeds of the future plant, and are packed with the choicest material the mother plant can extract from earth and air for the use of the baby germ, a mere point which lies between the two packages of food, and is broken and lost in the process of preparing the coffee for our use.

If the seeds are allowed to live the life that Mother Nature laid out for them the whole berry is put into the ground, and the tiny germ starting into life feeds upon the two packages prepared for it till it has grown enough to push its head out of the ground, open its two leaves to have a look at the world, and its thread-like roots, with the mouth at the end of each, are ready to take nourishment directly from the earth.

Like everything else, the coffee-tree begins life in a nursery, living first on food its mother prepared, and carefully protected from too hot a sun by a sort of roof built over it till old enough to help itself. When the plant is about a foot high and a year old it is considered sufficiently advanced to take a permanent place in the world, and the nurse—or the planter—gently removes it from the nursery and puts it in the regular plantation, where it stands several feet from from any of its fellows and has room to expand and grow to its full size of fifteen feet high.

But the seeds that are wanted to make your cup of coffee have a far better fate. As soon as the fruit puts on its richest red color, the beans, as they are called, are known to be fully ripe, and then appear on the scene the "pickers," native men, women, and children, dark-colored, of course, for wherever coffee grows the sun is hot and the natives are dark. Each grown-up picker is provided with a step-ladder and two shallow baskets, into which she or he picks the ripe fruit, carefully separating the small berries at the end of the branches for a particular use, which I will tell you farther on. The children pick up what falls to the ground or what they can reach from below.

When the basket is filled the workman takes it on his head and walks off to the plantation, where it is cured by drying on a floor of stone or mortar, crushing under wooden rollers to remove the pulp, soaking in water to soften the tough skin, and fanning, winnowing, sifting, and hand-picking, to make it the clean even-sized grains we are accustomed to see. The processes vary in different places, but this is the substance of what is done everywhere.

When it is dry, sorted, put up in bags, and started for the cars or sea shore on an ox-cart, or on the heads and shoulders of men following a leader and chanting a melancholy strain as they go, then begins the succession of hands which take a profit from it, and increase its cost at every step, from the cultivator to you. From the planter it goes into the hands of a man called in Brazil a commissario; from him, at a little higher price, to the exporter, who lives in one of the seaport towns. The importer, who lives in New York, we'll suppose, is the next buyer, at an advanced price, of course, enough to pay the owner of the vessel which brings it over the four thousand and eight hundred miles between us and Brazil. Arrived in New York, the cargo is taken out of the ship, carefully looked over, all damp parts removed, and the scattering grains which have worked out of the coarse bags into the hold of the ship, cleanly swept up and called "sweepings."

When the coffee is safely housed in New York one would suppose its wanderings nearly ended; but so far from that, it only begins a new career.

Coffee comes in what are called "marks;" that is, all of one grade bear the same mark. There may be ten bags, or there may be a thousand, but all in each "mark" are supposed to be alike. Long before the bags are laid up in the warehouse, samples of each mark, which come over in the same ship in round tin boxes, go to the office of the importer, and are ready for sale to the jobbers who buy whole cargoes, for the importer scorns to sell less than the whole at once.

By means of a man called a coffee broker, who adds his own percentage to the importer's profit, the cargo is sold to a jobber. New samples are now wanted, and a spruce young clerk, armed with paper bags, and a tool like an old-fashioned quill pen, only much longer, that is, a cylinder with a sharp point, goes to the warehouse or wharf where the coffee lies, and takes a sample of each mark by inserting the sharp end of the instrument between the coarse meshes of the bag and letting a few pounds run into a paper bag marked exactly like the mark on the coffee bag. He then withdraws the tool and draws the meshes together before proceeding to the next mark.

Not the least part of his business is to drive away a set of vagabonds called "coffee-pickers," who collect like flies around a sugar-bowl, hiding behind the piles and slyly cutting holes or digging their dirty fingers into the bags and filling pockets, aprons, hats, and dresses with the coffee. Many a race and a scuffle the tormented clerk has with these young thieves.

When he has procured samples of all, he takes them to the office of the jobber, where they are spread out in shallow, square, tin pans, examined, graded, prices put on, and are ready for sale in marks. Then the broker appears again, provides himself with small samples of each sort, or as many as he chooses, with the jobber's profit and his own percentage added, and sells to wholesale grocers all over the country.

All this, of course, with much "talkee, talkee," and entirely by sample, the bags still lying in the warehouse where the insurance companies make something out of them, and the warehouseman gets his proportion. When a mark is sold it is taken out of the house, carefully weighed by a weigher, a new cover sewed on over the old one, which is apt to leak, newly marked, (all this by a set of workmen called "baggers,") and sent to railroad or steamboat, according to its destination.

The wholesale grocer, adding his own profit, breaks up the marks and sells it by the bag to the retail grocer, who adds his profit, and sells it by the pound. If you buy it browned it takes another course from the importer and jobber. From them the coffee-roaster usually buys skinmings and sweepings and small marks of low grade coffee, browns the whole, puts fancy names on it, and sells at fancy prices. If it is to be ground he adds whatever adulteration his conscience will allow, puts it in fine papers, and sells it at a still higher price. I hope you do not buy it that way; for, let me tell you, you get very little real coffee and much chicory, beet-root, acorns, dandelions, rye, beans, nuts, stale bread, turnips, or other stuff, and that's not the worst: the chicory is adulterated with Venetian red, and the Venetian red is adulterated with brickdust.

Now, when a housekeeper orders coffee of her grocer, she is careful to order Mocha, Java, or some other particular coffee, and she can always get it without trouble, though the probability is that it grew in Brazilian fields; for more than half the coffee we use comes from Brazil, whether it be labelled Java, Laguayra, Mocha, or simple Rio.

There is one district in Brazil where the coffee is so fine that it is nearly all sold under other names. So, although they send many thousand bags to the United States every year, one can scarcely ever find a pound under its true name. This is Santos coffee. That is one of the tricks of the trade.

Brazil produces as good coffee as any, but as people have a fancy for Java and other names, only the very poorest is sold as Rio. The small round berries at the end of Brazilian trees are carefully separated and labelled "Mocha," and the larger, yellowish beans are dubbed "Java," and give satisfaction under those names. All which may be very well for the importer's pocket, but is an injustice to Brazil.

How much coffee do you suppose the world drinks in a year? A few years ago it was estimated that a thousand million pounds were used.

There are several legends of the discovery of coffee, which grows wild in Abyssinia and Kaffa in Eastern Africa—whence its name, by the way. All acknowledge that the Arabs were the first to use it. One story is that towards the middle of the fifteenth century, a poor Arab, travelling in Abyssinia, needing a fire to cook his rice, took some branches of a tree covered with dry berries for the purpose. After his meal he noticed that the half-roasted berries smelled good, and on eating some he discovered their refreshing and invigorating effect. From this to making an infusion of them was an easy step, and when he was sure of the value of his discovery he gathered a quantity of the fruit, and upon his arrival in Arabia told the facts to a high dignitary. This personage, who was not above receiving a new idea, was delighted with the effects of the coffee on himself, and thus it was introduced into that country, whence it came to us.

Another story is that a dervish named Hadji Omer, driven out of Mocha to starve, sustained life by means of coffee-berries, which he found growing wild. He flourished so well on it that his enemies regarded it as a miracle, and so made a saint of him. In return for this honor I suppose he made known his discovery.

When first sold in England, coffee brought twenty to twenty five dollars a pound. A curious and quaint old advertisement which appeared in London at this time, when people knew nothing about it, read thus, spelling and all:

"The vertue of the coffee-drink. The grain or berry called coffee groweth upon little trees onely in the deserts of Arabia. It is a simple, innocent thing, composed into a drink by being dried in an oven, and ground to powder, and boyled up with spring water, and about half a pint of it drank fasting an hour before, and not eating anything an hour after, and to be taken as hot as can be possibly endured, the which will never fetch the skin off the mouth, or raise any blisters by reason of the heat." (A "vertue" which modern coffee does not possess, by the way.)

The writer goes on to say that it is "good to help digestion, quicken the spirits, and make the heart lightsome; is good for sore eyes, headache, consumption, and coughs, cures dropsy, gout, and scurvy, running humors and spleen, and makes the skin clear and white." Which is wonderful "vertue" indeed.

However much we may enjoy the delicious drink, we are far behind the Oriental races. In one place a traveller tells us that ten cups are regularly taken after dinner, and each of the ten has its appropriate name. The first is "Cafe," the second, "Gloria;" the third, "Pousse cafe;" the fourth, "Goutte;" the fifth, "Re goutte;" the sixth, "Sur goutte;" the seventh, "Rincette;" the eighth, "Re Rincette;" the ninth, "Sur Rincette;" and the tenth, "Cory de l'etrier."

The cups, you must remember, are in the Eastern style, a little larger than a thimble, and the coffee served without milk or sugar. So it is not quite so formidable an operation as it would be to drink ten of our cups of coffee. — *Illustrated Christian Weekly.*

A FEW PRACTICAL HINTS.

Never let a tradesman call a second time for the amount due. If you keep him waiting, and calling again and again, you wrong him. You might as well rob him of his money as of his time, for time to him is money. Is it not practical dishonesty to do so?

Never try the temper of your friend by sending him a letter which it is a labour to decipher. If you cannot write rapidly and plainly, write less, and write distinctly. To waste the time of another through your carelessness—is it not positive unkindness?

It would seem as if some persons had forgotten the very shape of the letters. If it be so with you, you should renew your acquaintance with them, and continue to trace them carefully, until you have overcome your bad habit.

I have heard a friend say, observed Dr. Mather, that there is a gentleman mentioned in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts, to whom he was more indebted than to any other man in the world. This is he whom our translation calls the town clerk of Ephesus, whose counsel it was to do "nothing rashly." Upon any proposal of consequence, it was usual for him to say, "We will first advise with the town clerk of Ephesus."

Never engage in any thing on which you cannot look for the blessing of God. To act independently of Him is practical atheism. To do His will should be your constant aim.