

## INCREASED GROWING OF ETHIOPIAN COFFEE\*

**R**ECENT political events have directed world attention upon Ethiopia, the original home of coffee. From the viewpoint of this product, it is interesting to observe that, while coffee growing has spread to the four quarters of the globe, the wild coffee tree still grows in Ethiopia the same as it did centuries ago and its cherries are still being picked by the natives, many of whom make their sole livelihood from the sales of such staple. However, areas have of late years been planted with coffee and developments in quality have been brought about and new types have been added. While the total production is relatively not great, it has grown appreciably during the past decade and, due to its special merits, all offerings have found a ready world market. In view of the growing importance of Ethiopian coffees in the United States, your correspondent refers to the following report, prepared by U.S. Vice Consul William M. Cramp in Abyssinia.

### COFFEE IN ETHIOPIA

The cultivation of coffee is said to have been begun in southern Arabia, the seed having been brought by Arab traders from the Kaffa district in Ethiopia. Coffee became known as "Mocha," taken from the name of the port which in former times was the leading port in the lower Arabian peninsula. For a long time the Arabian product monopolized the market, but with the gradual development of coffee plantations in the Lesser and Greater Antilles, Java, Brazil and other South and Central American countries, less than one per centum of the present world's supply is grown in Arabia and its environs. Less than one-tenth of one per centum originates in Ethiopia.

It was not until the beginning of the present century that coffee was cultivated in Ethiopia. Arabs from the Yemen, having noted the advantageous lands, favorable climate, soil, rains and altitude of the Harar plateau, brought the seeds and established small plantations there. Thus the seed, originally from Kaffa, returned to Ethiopia and a quality of coffee was produced which is generally considered almost as good as the Yemen varieties, by this time well known in the trade as "Mocha." There has been and is a small but constant demand for "Mocha" in the Near East for the making of the strong "Turkish" beverage and in the United States for the softening and aromatic effect obtained from blending with the South American coffees. Thus the Harar coffee generally finds a ready market.

Ethiopian coffees, known in the trade as "Abyssinians" and "Hararis," have always found a market abroad due to their close resemblance to the Yemen coffees. Cultivation has developed extremely solely due to concession difficulties, high internal export duties, high freight costs to the seaboard, etc.

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Wild coffee, costing at source only the small wage for the collection of the beans, is with difficulty brought to the sea-coast or central market at prices comparable with those obtained for the cultivated product, although the coffee forests are vast and practically untouched. The failure of any considerable quantities of this coffee to reach the market is due to the feudal social organization in this country, involving heavy imposts by the lesser chieftains controlling the coffee lands, taxes collected by officials at each of the provincial customs stations, by the central Government's high export taxes, and by all and sundry who can collect anything in cash or kind from the coffee caravans. Also, the wild coffee forests are mostly found in dangerous wild animal country, and are far from the beaten trade routes.

### ETHIOPIAN COFFEES

Twenty-five years ago natives in Jimma and Sidamo used coffee trees for fire-wood. They were told by European travellers of the value of the coffee berry in the markets and have gradually ceased burning the trees and now gather the berries for sale. For many years it has been a custom amongst the natives to boil the wild coffee bean and use it as a beverage and for ceremonial purposes.

The seed beds are thirty centimeters apart and are covered with grass to protect them from the sun. They are transplanted in ditches 50 centimeters across and carefully watered. Planting usually takes place at the beginning of the rainy season in June.

The trees bear in from two and one-half to three years and continue bearing for approximately fifteen years. They are then cut near the ground and begin a second bearing in about two years, which continues until the tree dies. It is then used for fuel. Replanting takes place near the former tree, but never at the root remnants.

Gathering is made a festive occasion, in which the entire countryside takes part and which is very similar to the old-fashioned harvest in the United States.

### HARARI COFFEE

All coffee grown in the provinces of Harari and Tchercher is known in the trade as Mocha Harar Longberry. It is first quality coffee in Ethiopia, resembling Mocha of Arabia and the Central American and Colombian coffees. The berry, which is polished and bluish-green, is long and rather large, with an average of ten per cent. siftings. There is always a constant, if small, demand for this coffee in Egypt, Europe and the United States, as it is very mild and ideal for blending. Prior to 1925 the average annual crop was approximately 10,000,000 lbs., which has increased during the past few years to approximately 20,000,000 lbs.

### ARUSSI COFFEE

In 1912 in the province of Arussi, two Belgian companies obtained the first foreign concession for coffee cultivation and began operating on a small scale. In 1916, all development was stopped by the civil wars then raging, and the projects were abandoned. However, in 1918 following the success

of His Majesty Tafari Makonnen, the companies were indemnified for their losses, and work was resumed. They then merged into one company known as the Société des Plantations d'Abyssinie which is said to have a capitalization of 30,000,000 francs. Scientific and modern methods were introduced, roads built, and approximately 2,500 acres are now under cultivation. The coffee is of good quality similar to the Harari, but the bean is duller in color. It is known as Mocha of Arussi and is marketed in Europe, especially Antwerp and Le Havre. The average annual crop is about 1,000,000 lbs.

In spite of better grading, selecting, cleaning and packing, the company, which is at the present time the only foreign one operating in this country, has shown a deficit of over a million francs a year since 1929, when it is said a profit of fifty thousand francs was realized. As this annual loss cannot continue indefinitely, unless reductions are made in overhead, transportation costs and export duties and world prices increase, it is probable that the concession may be abandoned. The history of this company's concession has been that of all foreign attempts in scientific coffee cultivation in Ethiopia all of which have failed.

### ABYSSINIAN COFFEE

Abyssinian coffees were unknown up to 1922, excepting small amounts that were exported to the Sudan *via* Gambela. Following improved price levels, the coffee from the wild growing forests of Jimma, Sidamo, Lekempte, and other provinces in the central and western part of the country, was brought to Addis Ababa, where it found a ready market. During the past several years tonnage exports of Abyssinian coffees have surpassed those of Hararis and have averaged 22,000,000 lbs. annually.

Under the trade name of "Abyssinians" fall several varieties of coffee, which take their names from the provinces in which they grow, as described hereunder :

(a) *Jimma Coffee*.—Coffee grown in the provinces of Jimma constitute more than half of the total crop known as "Abyssinians," and is taken as a basis for price quotations of the other coffees. The bean is uniform, medium size, round, fat and greenish-yellow, with an approximate average of fifteen per cent. siftings. There is very little ground smell. This coffee is known in the trade as Mocha Abyssinian Jimma, and may be compared with Superior Santos No. 4. At present, average annual production is about 10,000,000 lbs.

(b) *Sidamo Coffee*.—There are three types of Sidamo coffee, known as Tigre, Wattader and Sayir. The first two resemble Jimma coffee in quality, the berry being small and short, flat, uniform and greenish-yellow in color, with an average of ten to fifteen per cent. siftings. Sidamo Sayir is a poorer quality, the berry being darker in color with twenty per cent. siftings. All three are known in foreign markets as Mocha Abyssinian Sidamos and the average annual production is 5,000,000 lbs.

(c) *Lekempte Coffee*.—The coffee from this province has the same characteristics as Hararis, and having no unique taste blends easily and mixes

conveniently with other coffees. The berry is long and regular, yellowish-green, with siftings of some ten to twelve per cent. It is a good quality coffee, practically all of which is mixed with Harari coffee for export. The annual average production is 1,000,000 lbs.

(d) *Derani or Gore Coffee*.—This coffee resembles the Jimma and Lekkempte coffees but has a larger and much darker berry, siftings are from ten to fifteen per cent. The annual crop is about 5,000,000 lbs. all of which grows wild and is exported *via* Gambela on the Nile.

(e) *Other Coffees*.—Small provinces within the major districts of Jimma and Sidamo give their names to coffees grown within their limits, *i.e.*, Goffa, Gumma, Guragi, Limo and Loumno. All of these coffees resemble Jimma, but have high sifting percentages (from fifteen to thirty per cent.) and have a strong earthy smell, which makes them undesirable for good blending.

## COFFEE MARKETING

1. *Addis Ababa*.—The central market for Abyssinian coffees is in Addis Ababa. A small percentage of the coffees is brought to this market by European dealers having their own branches in the provinces, but probably ninety per cent. of the year's crop is brought by mule caravans under the direction of native *Nagadis* (merchants).

Caravans are usually large for protective purposes, and take about a month to get from the interior to the capital. Arrivals of the new crop begin about the end of December and continue until the beginning of June. The native merchant brings his caravan to the government customs house, the duties are paid, and only then sells the coffee to a local Arab broker. The European exporters then buy from the broker according to their needs and/or contracts to be met, paying cash for immediate delivery. The Arab broker gets a small fee, approximately 1 cent per farasula (37 lbs.) In general, the Addis Ababa branch of the larger exporting firms acts merely as a buying agent for the Djibouti office, which is the actual exporter. Close touch is kept between the two offices by telegram and letter, due to the daily fluctuations of existence stocks, new arrivals, local prices and rates of exchange.

The following figures indicate approximately the annual coffee crop in pounds of "Abyssinians" passing through this market: Jimma, 10,000,000 (50%); Sidamo, 5,000,000 (25%); Lekkempte, 1,000,000 (5%); Goffa, 1,000,000 (5%); Gumma, 1,000,000 (5%); and all others, 2,000,000 (10%); making a total of 20,000,000.

2. *Arba*.—This is but a small railroad station on the direct line to Djibouti, but all coffee cultivated on the Arussi plantations is shipped at this point. Thus a small market has grown up with a custom-house at which export duties are paid.

3. *Dire-Daoua*.—All the coffee grown in the provinces of Harar, Tchercher and parts of Arussi are brought to the market in Dire-Daoua from whence they are shipped to Djibouti. Government warehouses exist at

Harar and at Dire-Daoua and all coffee must be brought directly to them, where a twenty per cent. tax in kind is collected by the Government before allowing the coffee to reach the hands of the exporter. The coffee is marketed by the Société Nationale d'Ethiopie, a Government controlled import and export firm.

4. *Gore*.—The coffee crop which is gathered in the provinces of Kaffa and western Godjam is brought to the market at Gore where it is sold and duties are paid and is shipped *via* Gambela down the Blue Nile to Khartoum. There are no other major markets in the country, and it is interesting to note that quotations on Ethiopian coffees to foreign buyers are never made within Ethiopia, but always at Djibouti in the French Somali Coast.

### TRANSPORTATION

As has been indicated, coffee is brought to the larger markets by mule caravan, where it is shipped *via* the Franco-Ethiopian Railway to Djibouti. The mule transportation cost is approximately one-third of the price of coffee obtained in Addis Ababa.

This includes the internal customs duties, but not the export tax. Railway freight costs are exceedingly high, amounting to approximately U. S. \$30 per ton. The cost of a ton of coffee in Addis Ababa is augmented by approximately forty per cent. when placed on board a vessel in Djibouti, which is the quoted price to the buyer.

### PACKING AND CLEANING

Excepting at the plant of the Arussi plantation, all coffee exported from Ethiopia, is packed and cleaned in Djibouti and prices are offered at the cost of hundred kilograms of cleaned coffee f.o.b. Djibouti.

Coffee cleaning is done by Somali women, who can clean two bags per day at a salary at approximately 10 cents American. The cleaning process is of the most primitive nature. Ethiopian women are unaccustomed to this work, and although cleaning has been attempted in Addis Ababa, it has nearly always failed. At the present time there is but one small cleaning plant in operation in Addis Ababa, the output of which is negligible.

Obviously, if the coffee could be cleaned here, freight costs would be less, due to the fifteen per cent. reduction in weight, expenses of unloading and reloading in Djibouti would be saved, and labour costs would be less as wages are lower in Addis Ababa than in Djibouti.

### EXPORT TAXES

It is estimated that approximately 40 per cent. of the price of coffee, not counting railroad freight charges, is taken up in export taxes. The first tax collected is that levied by the chieftain under whose jurisdiction the coffee lands lie. This may be collected in cash or kind, and varies in amount depending on the strength and influence of each individual chief. The coffee then starts for Addis Ababa by caravan and pays as it progresses interior customs taxes, which are called Keret taxes and are generally paid in kind in each province it passes through.

The collection of these Keret taxes causes considerable delay at each provincial customs station and makes a considerable drain on the original quantities picked and shipped.

It is interesting to note that, in general, the export taxes are equal to the cost of the coffee at source plus the cost of transport.

Between 1909 and 1923, practically all the coffee exported from Ethiopia was grown on the Harar plateau. The average crop amounted to approximately 4,000 tons annually and coffee exports averaged 45 per cent. of total exports. Between 1924 and 1933 average annual coffee exports increased to 13,500 tons, about equally divided between Harar and Abyssinian coffees. These exports constituted an average of 57·8 per cent. of total exports in quantity and probably considerably more in value. During the past year 17,000 tons of coffee were exported by the Franco-Ethiopian Railway, which were 63 per cent. of the total quantity of all exports and 65 per cent. of the total value.