

# Government Coffee Plantations in Java

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AMARANG, Java, Sept. 11.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—From the coffee island of Java I write these coffee notes for the greatest coffee lovers on earth. The Irish are famous as whisky drinkers, the English as tea drinkers, the Germans as beer drinkers, the French as wine drinkers, but the Yankees lead the world as coffee drinkers. We consume almost half of all the coffee grown upon earth. We annually use about 800,000,000 pounds, or on the average more than ten pounds a year for every man, woman and child amongst us. Our coffee bill in 1900 was more than \$52,000,000 and within ten years we have spent as much as \$75,000,000 for coffee alone. We take the best of the Java coffee. The exporters here tell me that the cream of the product of this island and Sumatra goes to the United States and that the most of it is at such high prices that it sells only to the rich. We take the bulk of the coffee of Brazil and of recent years are buying much from Central America. Our consumption is on the increase and there is no doubt but we shall be spending from \$50,000,000 to \$100,000,000 annually for coffee during the rest of our natural life.

## Coffee in Our Colonies.

The matter is being studied by the Agricultural department in Washington and within the next few years experimental coffee plantations will be established in the Hawaiian Islands, in Porto Rico, Samoa and the Philippines. At present the only coffee-producing country we have is Porto Rico. It grows some of the best coffee of the world—coffee which is better than the average product of Java, but which, owing to the lack of knowledge as to its excellency, is sold chiefly in France and Spain. Porto Rico produces 34,000,000 pounds of coffee a year and its product might be made ten times as great as it is now.

The Hawaiian Islands are just beginning to raise coffee. There are about 300,000 acres there which are now being developed and the plantations are paying enormously. During my stay in Honolulu I was told that coffee raising netted 40 per cent on the investment and that the island of Hawaii had already extensive estates and that more were being laid out.

In the southern part of the Philippines, on the island of Jolo, I found a German named Shuck who had a plantation of 35,000 trees. I went over the property with him and found every tree loaded. The trees are only three years old, but they were breaking down with fruit, and Mr. Shuck told me that he had already been offered 14 cents a pound for his crop. I have traveled through the biggest coffee districts of Brazil, Mexico and Porto Rico, but I have never seen such luxuriant trees as those on the island of Jolo. The plantation was cut out of the forest and its proprietor told me that it was raised with but little cultivation. Most of the Sulu archipelago is adapted to coffee raising. I saw



DRYING COFFEE ON A JAVA PLANTATION.

ties. During my stay in Java I have visited a number of the government plantations and have also gone over some of the private estates. The government lands are worked on shares with the natives, the Dutch getting the lion's share. When Marshal Daendels took charge of the government many of the native princes had coffee estates which they ran with forced labor. The Dutch East India company took its tribute in coffee from them and arranged with them to buy the balance of their crop at just about 1 cent a pound. Daendels urged the people of the highlands all over the island to plant coffee, and he remitted taxes on this account.

This policy was continued later on, and shortly after the English left Java every family of certain districts was required to keep 1,000 coffee trees in bearing on certain of the village lands and to give or sell two-fifths of the crop to the government. They had to clean and sort the coffee and to deliver it to the public warehouses. Here they were paid about 3 or 4 cents a pound for it, and this, notwithstanding the same coffee was selling for as much as from 15 to 20 cents a pound at the seaports nearby. At the same time the government gave percentages to the chiefs of the various vil-

were young, the bushes being shaded with banana plants and with trees. In others they were loaded with berries, which men, women and children were picking in baskets and carrying home.

There were villages scattered here and there through the coffee districts, collections of little houses of woven bamboo basket work, which looked more like play houses than anything else. Each village had a gate leading into it. The houses were fenced with bamboo poles, set crosswise. There was coffee drying in the sun in front of some of the houses and before others I saw girls pounding the hulls off the dried beans.

I asked as to how the government managed its estates and was told that the villages were required to plant the coffee under government supervision. The officials see that the land is properly cleared, the plants set out and the trees cultivated until they come into bearing. The people are paid for this work. After this the trees are divided up among the families of the village, each having as much as it can attend to. Each family is responsible for its own trees and their product. The different members of the family gather the berries, carry them home and dry them in the sun. When thoroughly dried they are put into wooden mortars and the hulls pounded off. The chaff of skins and hulls is then winnowed and the beans are carried to the warehouses and sold to the government at 15 florins a picul, or at \$6 for 133 pounds. This is too cheap for the natives to make anything. They are not interested in the business, and they will not cultivate the plants carefully. I am told if the price was doubled there would be a great deal more old government Java, and that of a better quality. At present the best Java coffee is raised on private estates.

## The Coffee Warehouses.

The government coffee warehouses are scattered throughout the coffee districts, and they are also to be found in the larger cities. I visited one in the town of Poespo, where I stopped on my way to the Bromo volcano. It was a building of woven bamboo walls and a roof of red tiles, with a cement floor. On the wide porch in front of it were scales for weighing the coffee, and within, piled up like so much oats on the floor, was a little mountain of green coffee beans. In the pile were two wooden scoop shovels for bagging the coffee, and two half-naked men were at work preparing it for shipment to market. Near the door, sitting cross-legged upon the floor before a table about a foot high, was a turbaned Javanese in spectacles. He was the native government official who bought the coffee and sent it to the seacoast. He told me that the government is now paying less than 5 cents a pound for its coffee, the same that we pay our retailers 40 cents in the United States; so you see the Dutch are not doing a losing business with the natives.

I was much interested in the coffee nurseries. These are of great extent. In places they cover the sides of the hills, great sheds roofed with bamboo filled with thousands of bamboo pots, each containing a coffee seed or plant. Some of the plants were just bursting forth from the ground; others were a few inches high, and some a foot high. The plants are set out in the same earth in which they grow in the nursery. They are put only a few feet apart and are shaded when young. At first they are kept free from weeds, but when the trees grow the shade from the coffee keeps down the weeds.

I wish I could take a pony-back ride with you up through these coffee estates. They are interspersed with forests, and there

are many monkeys, great long-tailed black fellows, which jump from branch to branch and from one tree to another. You see them squatting at the roots of the branches and creeping around the tree trunks grinning and chattering at you. Now you will see one clinging to a limb 200 feet above the ground, and now catch sight of one jumping fifteen feet from one tree to another.

## Luxuriant Vegetation.

The vegetation is everywhere luxuriant. There are palm trees and banana plants. There are all sorts of winding vines. The very plants seem to love one another, the trees twist themselves about their fellows and grow up together. Even the dead branches are covered with green; they are clothed with orchids and moss, the green and flowers of the air forming a winding sheet over the dead branches. There are orchids everywhere, and such orchids! Here one has wound itself around a branch like a necklace; there one squats like a monkey at the root of a limb and further over are great masses of green out of which come blossoms of many hues.

The soil of Java is exceedingly rich. The land is one of volcanoes, but its volcanoes spout forth mud instead of stones and

the most of the Java coffee sold in the United States was really Brazilian coffee and I do not doubt but that the statement was true.

Notwithstanding this, a great deal of pure Java goes to the United States, but it brings very high prices and it is sometimes used to flavor other coffee. The pure article cannot possibly be sold cheap, so when you are told you are getting a bargain in pure Java coffee don't take it.

## How Fine Coffee is Handled.

The finest Sumatra coffee comes from the descendants of Arabian plants. It is very carefully cultivated and after being picked is sorted by hand. In the warehouses here I have seen scores of Javanese girls squatting down with basket trays of coffee in front of them. They handle almost every grain, putting the small ones into one place and the larger ones into another, sorting them as carefully as though they were grains of gold. As the coffee comes in it is of a rich olive green color. It is left for some time on the floor of the warehouse, when it turns a light yellow. No coloring matter whatever is used, and the coffee is shipped as pure as it is on a plantation. The best varieties are sent to New York in sailing vessels which carry nothing else. The coffee steams and cures during the long three months' voyage, so much improving its flavor that sailing vessels are preferred to steamers. Coffee, like wine, improves with age, and up to a certain limit the older it is the better it is.

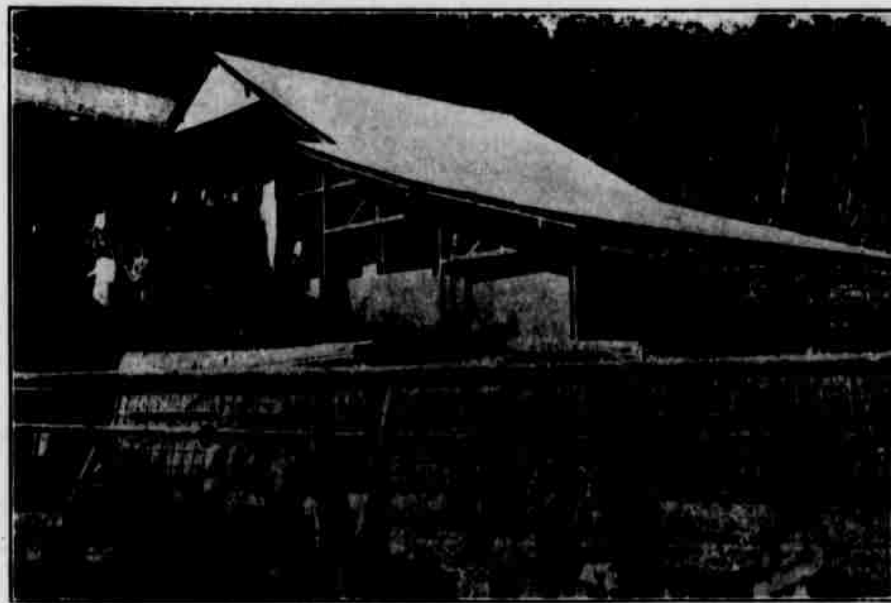
## Java's Private Coffee Estates.

Some of the private estates of Java are perhaps more scientifically managed than any other coffee lands of the world. At Sinagar a vast plantation near Buitenzorg everything connected with the curing of the coffee is done by machinery. The trees are most carefully cultivated and the greatest care taken to produce fine fruit. I saw there one machine which cleans 20,000 pounds of coffee in a day. It reduces the dried pulp to a powder, but does not injure the grain. After this the coffee is further cleaned in a simple fanning mill. One of these machines costs about \$320 in gold. I should think they would be of great value in Porto Rico.

The private estates are rather increasing in number. It used to be that most of the crop came from the government plantations, whereas it is now from the private estates.

## Liberian Versus Arabian Coffee.

The finest of the Java coffee, as we know it, is from plants of Arabian descent. It was this variety that was affected by the blight. The trees are small, slender and delicate, coming originally from the hills of Yemen in Arabia from about the same region as the Mocha coffee. In that country the Mocha coffee still grows, but there is so little of it that it is safe to say that a grain of it comes to the United States. Twenty-five years ago about ten thousand tons of Mocha coffee were exported, but it is said that the production is now not



SCENE ON A COFFEE PLANTATION.

luxuriant trees at Zamboanga, on Mindanao, and I doubt not coffee plantations would be successful throughout that island as well as on the islands farther north. Luzon was at one time noted as a coffee producer, but the trees were destroyed by the blight. Of recent years the scientists have been experimenting to counteract this disease, and the probability is that the Philippine islands will some day produce a large part of the 800,000,000 pounds used by our people.

## Old Government Java.

You may remember that one of the best brands of the coffee of the past was "old government Java." This came from the coffee plantations owned by Holland on this island. For many years the government was the chief coffee grower here. It had thousands of acres of coffee estates which it managed by forcing the natives to work upon them in lieu of taxes. These estates yielded a vast revenue. From 1831 to 1875 Java turned into the Dutch treasury about \$280,000,000, and the most of this came from coffee.

The government is raising a good deal of coffee today, but the business is gradually going into the hands of private par-

ties according to the quality of the coffee produced in their respective districts. They established rules of culture, organized nurseries to provide the best of plants for the natives, and in this way improved the Java coffee plant until it was one of the best of the world. The coffee used at that time came from plants imported from Arabia. Then a blight came which destroyed almost all the plantations of that variety and under which the coffee industry of Java was about ruined. Just before the blight Java shipped 300,000,000 pounds of Java coffee to Europe. Today her exports are something like 60,000,000 pounds. She is raising more of the Liberian coffee, of which I shall write later.

## On the Government Plantations.

Some of the best coffee estates I have seen are on the slopes of the Tenger mountains, in northeastern Java. I reached them by taking train at Soerbaya and then going on ponies about a day's ride through the hills. I rode for miles along the sides of the mountains through coffee plantations. There were millions of trees, the most of them not much bigger around than fishing poles, covered with varnished green leaves. In some places the plantations



JAVA GIRLS PICKING COFFEE.

this mud is of a chocolate brown, which, when dry, becomes a fine dust many feet thick. In the coffee districts it has a reddish tinge and is probably impregnated with iron. The best coffee regions are from 2,000 to 4,000 feet above the sea and some of the very best are in the Praenger or mountainous provinces of western Java.

## Best Java Coffee is from Sumatra.

In conversation with some of the chief American coffee exporters at Batavia I was told that the very best Java coffee of today comes from Sumatra. It is from the district of Padang and is of the Arabian variety. It brings a higher price in Batavia than the best Java sold in our ordinary stores brings at wholesale in New York, so that what is sold as pure Java for from 35 to 40 cents a pound in our stores is in all probability not Java at all. The best Java and the Sumatra Java cost the wholesalers in New York at least 30 cents a pound. The exporters here tell me that more Java coffee is consumed in the United States alone than is raised in all the Dutch East Indies and this notwithstanding a great deal of the product goes to Europe. I was told during my stay in Brazil that

half that, and that it is all consumed in Mohammedan households. During my stay in Brazil I saw thousands of bags of coffee which I was told would be sold as Mocha and I visited warehouses where there were sorting machines, in which the little round grains were picked out from the rest, to be put into bags and sold as Mocha.

The coffee most raised in Java today is the Liberian coffee. It is a coarse, large-grained variety. The beans are three times as large as as the real Mocha and they have a different flavor. The Liberian trees are stronger than any others. They have larger leaves and they grow thick and stout. They produce far more than other varieties and trees have been known to yield sixteen pounds. They will grow at a lower altitude and in Liberia are found wild not far from the seashore. This tree has been taken to Java because it will withstand the blight and other parasites, and also on account of its prolific bearing. The plantation on the island of Jolo has nothing but Liberian trees and I understand that there are large plantations of similar trees nearby in Borneo. I doubt whether this coffee would sell well in the United States, although there is a good demand for it in Europe.

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