

COFFEE LORE.

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It has struck me that a few notes on "Coffee-lore," supplementary to what my friend Mr. Baldensperger has already furnished on pages 121-122 of the *Quarterly Statement* for April, 1905, may possibly be acceptable. If in some points my notes do not agree with his, I would not wish it to be thought that I desire in any way to contradict what he has said, but simply to call notice to other popular statements on the same subject, and also to a couple of coffee-stories.

What my friend says about the libation to Sheikh esh-Shâdhilly, I can myself testify to. Some years ago I called the attention of the late Professor S. Ives Curtiss to this libation at the time he was here collecting materials for his work on *Semitic Religion To-day*.

The origin of coffee-drinking is connected with legendary tales. The shrub on which the coffee-berry grows is said to be indigenous in Abyssinia, and the story runs that the virtues of the plant were discovered by accident. Fleeing from persecution, towards the end of the third century, a party of monks from Egypt found refuge in the Abyssinian highlands, where they settled and supported themselves by agriculture and the care of flocks, which were entrusted in turn to the pastoral care of different brethren. One of these came to the Prior (names not ascertained) one night with the strange tale that the sheep and goats would not go to rest in their fold, but were frisking and lively to such a degree that he feared that they had been bewitched. This state of things continued, in spite of prayers and exorcisms, for several days, till at last the worthy Prior resolved to take charge of the animals himself. Leading them out to pasture, he carefully noticed the plants they browsed on, and thus discovered that their sleeplessness resulted from their feeding on the leaves of a certain shrub. Experimenting on himself by chewing the buds, &c., of this plant, he found that he was easily able to keep awake during the long night services which his form of religion prescribed; and thus the use of coffee was discovered. It was not at first used as a beverage, but eaten in form of a paste, something like chocolate. It was probably introduced into Arabia (not in the fifteenth century, but in pre-Islamic

times, probably not later than the time of the famous crusade undertaken by Elesbaan, or Caleb Negus, the Nagash of Arab authors) in order to punish the Himyaritic Jewish ruler, Yusuf Yarush, surnamed Dhu Nowas, who had been persecuting the Christians.¹ When the use of wine was prohibited, its place was taken by a decoction of coffee-berries. The name "coffee" is derived from the Arabic قهوة Kahweh (pronounced *Kahveh* by the Turks), and, in its primary sense, denoted wine or other intoxicating liquors.² "The city of Aden," says Crichton, "is the first on record that set the example of drinking it as a common refreshment, about the middle of the fifteenth century." (Possibly it is this to which Mr. Baldensperger refers.) "A drowsy mufti, called Jamaleddin, had discovered that it disposed him to keep awake, as well as to a more lively exercise of his spiritual duties." This is clearly a version of the story of the Abyssinian monks above given. Jamaleddin, according to Crichton, died A.D. 1470, "and such was the reputation which his experience had given to the virtues of coffee, that in a short time it was introduced by Fakreddin at Mecca and Medina." It seems, however, that it was not till the beginning of the sixteenth century that it was introduced to Cairo. The innovation, however, caused a bitter theological controversy amongst the Mohammedans. In 1511, it was publicly condemned at Mecca by a conclave of the *ulema*, who declared its use contrary to Islam and hurtful both to body and soul. This decision of the learned was echoed at Cairo. All the warehouses where the "seditious berry" (بنّ *bunn*) was stored, were purposely burnt down, the coffee-houses closed, and their keepers pelted with the sherds of their broken pots and cups. This was in 1524, but by an order of Selim I, the decrees of the learned were reversed, the disturbances in Egypt quieted, the drinking of coffee declared perfectly orthodox; and when two Persian doctors, who had declared it to be injurious to health, had been hanged by the Sultan's orders, the coffee-cup began its undisturbed reign. It now rules supreme in the East. If you want anyone, to whom it would be an insult to offer bakshish, to do you a favour, you find that "a cup of coffee" renders him gracious, and open to persuasion; and in the same way,

¹ Andrew Crichton, *History of Arabia*, vol. I, pp 123-125.

² *Op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 428, *sqq.*

if you want to get rid of an enemy, all you have to do is to give him "a cup of coffee." It depends, of course, on what you mix with it. This double usefulness of "a cup of coffee" is proverbial.

Who the mysterious Sheikh esh-Shâdhilly is, I cannot tell; all that I have been able to find out, during several years of enquiry, is that he is the patron of coffee-drinkers. Mr. Baldensperger is right in describing coffee-drinking as almost a religious act. Wherever a party of coffee-drinkers assemble, there the spirit of esh-Shâdhilly is present in order to keep them from harm. In proof of this the following story is told:—

A large number of people were assembled in a village guest-house. Coffee was being prepared for them. Beside the fire stood a very large stock-pot, out of which the person who made the coffee replenished a smaller pot in which he boiled the liquor after adding fresh coffee-meal, or *bunn*. He then filled a cup, after the libation to Sheikh esh-Shâdhilly, and handed it to the man nearest him, who out of politeness handed to the man next him, who in his turn gave it to the next, and so on, till it had passed all round the company untasted. The coffee-maker was much surprised when the cup was returned to him untouched. Somebody suggested that esh-Shâdhilly must have had some hand in the matter, and had purposely prevented those present from tasting the coffee. Hereupon the coffee-pots were emptied out, when, to the horror of all beholders, the dead body of a venomous serpent (some say of a toad) fell out of the stock-pot. How it got in nobody ever knew, but it was at any rate certain that Sheikh esh-Shâdhilly had protected his votaries.

What Mr. Baldensperger says about the third cup (p. 122) is illustrated by the following story:—During a famine in the early years of last century a Bedouin sheikh left his encampment somewhere in the Gaza district and went down to Egypt with some of his men and camels in order to buy corn. Night came on some time after he had crossed the frontier, and some time after midnight a light was seen twinkling at some distance through the darkness. The sheikh, who had never before visited that part of the country, rightly thought that the light came from some village; therefore he left his men and camels where they were and went to reconnoitre. He found that the light came from a certain house, the door of which was ajar. As he smelt roasting coffee-berries, he concluded that the place was a guest-house, and boldly entered. He was

however, mistaken. The only persons in the lighted chamber were an unveiled woman and a Memlûk, her husband. The woman screamed and veiled her face when she saw the intruder, but her husband, telling her not to be alarmed, asked the new-comer what he wanted. He said that he had thought the place was a guest-house, but as he had been mistaken he would go away again. The Memlûk, however, told him to stay, and gave him a cup of coffee. When he had drunk this his host offered him a second cup, which he accepted. A third cup he, however, declined, although pressed to take it. Finding his solicitations useless, the Memlûk drew his sword and threatened to kill the Bedouin unless he took the third cup. The man still refused, saying that he preferred being killed. "Why?" asked his grim host. "Because," answered the sheikh, quoting the saying which Mr. Baldensperger has given (p. 122), "the first (cup) is for the guest, the second for enjoyment, and the third for the sword. Though, indeed, I am a warrior, even as thou art, yet at present I am unarmed, seeing that I am here on business connected with peace and not with strife." "Well," answered the Memlûk, sheathing his weapon, "thy answer shows thee to be a true man. I took thee to be a skulking thief, but I see that I was mistaken. Remain under my roof as my guest." The sheikh accepted the invitation, and when he told his host the purpose of his visit to Egypt, the latter, who had a great deal of corn to sell, transacted business with him, and for several years in succession supplied him and his tribe with grain. In the year 1811, however, the massacre of the Memlûks, by the orders of Mohammad Ali, took place, and it so happened that the only person to escape was the one who figures in this story. He, it is said, managed to make his way to the tents of his Bedouin friend and was protected by him till the time came when he could return home without fear. Tourists visiting the citadel at Cairo are, indeed, shown the place where, according to legend, Emin Bey made his horse leap from the battlements; but many of the native Cairenes assert that he was not there at all, having received warning of the Pasha's plot through someone connected with the harem. What the truth is Allah knows!
