

From its original home in South and Central America, the cacao tree spread to many other tropical lands.

Today cacao is grown in Brazil, which ranks second in the world as a producer of cacao, Ecuador and Venezuela, and the West Indies, notably Jamaica and Trinidad. But cacao is not limited to the Americas. Over half the world's supply comes from Ghana and Nigeria. The development of the cacao industry in Ghana, originally the Gold Coast, was phenomenal. In 1878 there was not a single cacao tree in Ghana, but today there are over 180 million in the plantations there. All these countries lie between 20° North and 20° South of the Equator.

The cacao tree is small, only between 20 and 30 feet high, and it only thrives in the moist tropical lowlands where there is fertile soil. It requires a shade temperature of 80°F , rich, deep soil and plenty of moisture. It cannot stand up to high winds, sudden falls in temperature or drought. Shelter is provided either by leaving some of the trees standing ~~when~~ after the jungle has been cleared for the plantation or by planting other trees, such as kapok among the cacao. Thus the forested

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regions of Ghana, with their equable temperature and heavy rainfall are perfect for cacao growing.

The young trees are usually grown from seeds in nurseries and transplanted when they are a few months old to the new plantations, where they are set about 12 feet apart. But sometimes trees of improved varieties are bud-grafted onto the stumps of poorer ones.

Numerous clusters of flowers spring from 'cushions' on the trunk and the branches. As the petals unfold, they reveal pods which attain a length of 7 to 12 inches and a width of 3 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Inside there are five cells, in each of which there are from 5 to 12 seeds embedded in a pink acid pulp.

At harvest-time, groups of negroes walk from tree to tree, some cutting the ripe pods from the trunk and lower branches, others cutting the pods from the higher branches with goulets, long bamboo poles with a curved sharp ~~kn~~ knife bound to the end. They pass along the rows of trees leaving piles of pods to be collected by the girls. The pods are then taken to the farmer's compound where they are slit open with cutlasses and the beans, still

embedded in their pulp, are taken out with wooden spoons.

The beans are then piled on banana leaves and covered with more leaves and left to ferment. To ~~prevent~~ prevent mildewing they are turned over once every one or two days. Fermenting brings out the flavour and also aids the removal of the pulp. After they have fermented, the beans are laid out on tables in the compound to dry. They are ~~a~~ turned by all the members of the family so that they dry thoroughly in the hot ~~af~~ African sunshine. In some districts they are dried artificially, but sun-drying is generally acclaimed to be best. While drying and fermenting the beans are brought indoors from noon to three o'clock as it rains at that time.

Usually there are two harvests a year. In Ghana the biggest is from October to December with a smaller one in March or May. But in Trinidad the bigger harvest is early in the year.

After drying, the beans are put in sacks and the cocoa-broker takes his crop to a buyer who pays him a fair price for it. The sacks are then transported to the coast.

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In Trinidad the sacks are transported in mule-carts or lorries; in Brazil a canoe may be used; in Ecuador motor launches make use of the many rivers; in Ghana natives used to head-load the sacks to the railway, but, now, with about 6,400 miles of good roads, lorries transport the sacks. A cacao-farmer reckons to get 4wt. of prepared beans to every acre of good plantation.

The cacao is exported from Port of Spain in Trinidad, Salvador in Brazil, Guayaquil in Ecuador and from La Guayra and Puerto Cabello in Venezuela. In Ghana, at Accra and Sekondi, the bags of cocoa beans are shipped in the famous surf-boats to cargo steamers lying some distance off-shore, but in the deep-water port of Takoradi the bags are loaded straight into the holds of the ships.

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The discovery and development of the cacao tree, has led to the opening up of backward countries such as Ghana. This new country owes its growth and wealth to the cacao tree. Work on the cacao plantations has provided labour for the natives.

The revenue obtained by selling raw cocoa, can be used to educate the natives and teach them how to grow better cocoa on a sound economic basis. Recent figures show that the Oxford University Press

has sold 60% of its ^{books} to countries abroad and this is evidence of an increasing demand for books and teachers.

The money can also be used to further research into the causes and the prevention of diseases such as swollen shoot which may reduce the crop and also kill the trees. There are other insect pests. The trees are attacked by thrips, very small insects which rasp away the undersides of the leaves and pods; by longicorn beetles, known Cacao Borers, which tunnel the stems; and by the Cacao Bark house which attacks the young shoots and stems making them discoloured. There is also a cacao 'Mosquito', a mosquito-like bug, which feeds on the pods causing them to turn colour and shrivel.

The money can also be used to build better harbours, especially in the case of Ghana, like Takoradi. This would prevent such a loss of time, inevitable when the cacao has to be taken out to the ships in small boats.

Thus we can see that cacao has led to an exchange within the Commonwealth, that of ~~the~~ teachers, books and ^{engineers} ~~engineers~~ for raw cocoa beans and this tie will last as long as cocoa is cultivated.

REFERENCES USED:

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