

EZRA PRIZE

Name: Alviah Ayisi Date of birth: [REDACTED]
Address: Enchi Government School: Gold Coast, West Africa

"The Story of a cocoa bean."

Among the best known agricultural products of the world, cocoa stands foremost as a beverage and oil producing seed; and about half the world's supply comes from the Gold Coast. The people in Europe and America, and in other parts of the world, drink cocoa and chocolate made from the beans grown by the farmer of the Gold Coast. The following is a story told by a cocoa bean from a Gold Coast farm.

"I am an indigene of Brazil in South America, my forefathers were brought into this country from Fernando Po, a Spanish colony in the Bight of Biafra by one Tete Quashi. They were sent to the Akwapim district where they were planted on farms and they multiplied our species which spread from town to town.

Our cultivation spreads over a period of time. During the early days of December, the bush is cleared by felling the giant trees of the dense equatorial forest and burning the undergrowth. Meanwhile, a small patch of the land is carefully tilled and set aside as a nursery for us. To improve the fertility of the soil and to preserve some water in the soil for our use, the farmers leave some trees to stand. In about May, the seedlings are transplanted into the whole farm

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and arranged in such a way as to be able to stand against storms. As the trees develop, the farm is cleared and tilled periodically; and very soon after about five years flowers shoot out, unlike ordinary flowers, straight from the trunk and branches. These develop into pods as they get ripe which are first green and then yellow or brown. If properly attended, the trees are able to develop two crops annually. The first fruits soon become ripen and are harvested in August at the end of the heavy rains; the second harvest is in December, when our masters, the cocoa farmers become short-time "millionaires". The ripen pods are cut off the trunk with long cutting knives, so cleverly that the bark is left uninjured. After the pods are collected, they are put into heaps and while the farmers break open the pods their wives and children scoop us out of our "Coats of Mail". To a pod we are about thirty to forty in a family clustered together in the middle like the seeds of a water-melon. We are proud to say that we form the money-bringing beans of all the Gold Coast peoples; and when roasted and ground we are able to supply the world with cocoa, chocolate, ovaltine and many other delicacies for the richman's breakfast table.

Yes, after our release from the pods we are heaped up again and covered with either cocoyam or banana leaves to enable us to ferment. If we are left uncovered we shall decay because of the juicy pulp

that surrounds us during our birth.

After the fermentation is complete, we must be thoroughly dried. We are therefore spread on mats or tarpaulins on raised platforms and left at the mercy of the heat of the sun. We are turned over and over from time to time, for drying is very important; otherwise, we shall become mouldy and be spoilt, and may not be eligible for selection to go to over-seas to see all the beautiful sites that await us there. Yet despite this fact, I was very happy when I was turned under my friends to hide under them away from the blazing and scourging sun. The process of drying is somewhat an easy matter, because it is chiefly done in the dry seasons which occur round about Christmas and also in August when there is a fairly dry period between the big and the scanty rains.

When we are thoroughly dried, we are put in bags made from the jute grown in the far-off land of India and we are then ready for sale. European and American firms then buy us either directly from the farmers or through brokers. The bags are stored in warehouses in the big centres like Kumasi, Koforidua, and Nsawam. From these trading stations, the loaded bags are carried by lorries, and trains to the ports - Takoradi and Accra, from where they embark on ships then voyage to America or England. As the ships reach port, say at Liverpool, the bags are hauled and dropped into railway trucks which lie in wait alongside the quays.

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At Bourneville or Birmingham, where cocoa and chocolate are manufactured, the bags are taken right into the factories and unloaded. Now begins a long course of treatment which makes us run through all sorts of machines. It is a dreary sort of experience they say. The machines sort us according to sizes and by roasting, we are given a pleasant taste and smell; and at the same time we are loosened from our shells.

When we are crushed into little pieces, it is then not difficult to remove the remaining bits of our natal clothing which are winnowed by a current of air. About half of every cocoa bean comprises fat which is extracted and used for making various things. When broken and crushed in a grinding-mill, the result in the next process is an oily liquid which cools down into a solid block known as the "mass". The mass is ground into a powder which is sifted until it is fine. The course is ended by other engines which weigh the powder and put it into tins for sale. There are different systems used in making chocolates for eating. To the mass, additional cocoa butter and sugar are mixed. This is kneaded by a machine, and spun round until it is ready for flinging into small blocks of different shapes of chocolates. Different kinds of ingredients like nuts, soft fruits or sweets are added.

The factories which contain huge engines, make many kinds of things besides cocoa and chocolate. The materials that aid

in preparing these delicacies are obtained from many parts of the world; but the basis of it all, are the beans collected from the rustic farms of the humble Gold Coast farmer. The raw beans go to the European factories and the manufactured chocolate and cocoa are despatched abroad and some of it sent back to the Gold Coast. It is through these cocoa farms, more than anything else, that the Gold Coast maintains her link with all parts of the world.

From cocoa, cooking fat, lighting oil, ointment, hard and soft soap, candle fat, dipped and moulded candles, and many other necessary requisites of life, are prepared. I quite remember coming back to the Gold Coast in my prepared state of a chocolate bar and being bought by the children of my first master, the farmer who planted and nursed me on his farm at Nkawkaw. What a surprise it would have been to him if he knew this curious fact and had heard of the stories of my long and adventurous journeys over strange lands and seas.

But alas! I hear to my great surprise that the once prolific plantations of the Gold Coast farmer has been ravaged by a terrible disease called Swollen Shoot, and many farms have been devastated and laid waste by its scourge. I have however learnt again, with relief, that the Gold Coast Government has schemes afoot which, it is hoped, will help in eradicating this terrible menace which is threatening to terminate the propagation of my

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species."