Had Your Coffee Yet? Let’s Go Get A Small (Big) Cup

In Louisiana’s bayou country, west of New Orleans, they like their coffee hot, they like it black and they like it all day long. From the Attakapas prairie around Opelousas, down to Lafayette, and along U. S. 90 as far as, say, Raceland — the Sugar Bowl of America — coffee-drinking is a ritual, a tradition, it’s the very heart of social life. In this picturesque land, no custom tells more about the people than that surrounding the drinking of coffee.

Here live the Cajuns, descendants of the Acadians exiled by the British from Nova Scotia over 200 years ago. After their exodus from Canada, they settled along the bayous Vermilion, Teche, Lafouche. To these bayou-lands, the Acadians brought their insatiable appetite for day-long cups of coffee, brewed and served in traditional style.

Good coffee was described as being “Black as the devil, hot as hell, pure as an angel, sweet as love,” by Talleyrand, the French statesman who engineered the Louisiana Purchase for Napoleon. To this, South Louisianians have added, “— and in the right cup, too!”

Coffee cups come in many different sizes in the marshlands and little towns of coastal Louisiana, and there are just as many ways in which Pierre and Marie will “take” their coffee. (A real coffee drinker in the bayou country never “drinks” or “goes out” for coffee; he “takes” it). To the outsider, coffee time may seem somewhat involved and confusing. The good Cajun folk find their system not complicated at all — especially if you’re born into it.

Small Cup

The most frequently heard request in a restaurant is “a small cup, chere.” This calls for the demitasse cup, filled to the brim with steaming coffee, “I’ll take a small cup, too, but half, me,” also brings a demitasse, but only half-full. Or someone will ask for a “big cup,” which is standard size or what’s known as “the first cup in the morning.”

There’s a subtle distinction when a customer puts a dime on the counter and asks for “a little bit in a big cup.” He means just that, and woe to the waitress who pours a small portion in a SMALL cup. It must be a little bit in a BIG cup, just like he ordered, or none at all. It tastes better that way! Ask any Cajun and he’ll tell you, “Mais sure, that means one or two good swallow.”

Often during the day, the confirmed coffee drinker will sigh lightly and express a craving for “un petit gout,” his way of saying, “a little taste.” To be sure, he doesn’t drink much at a time, but he drinks cup after cup (Continued on Page 12)