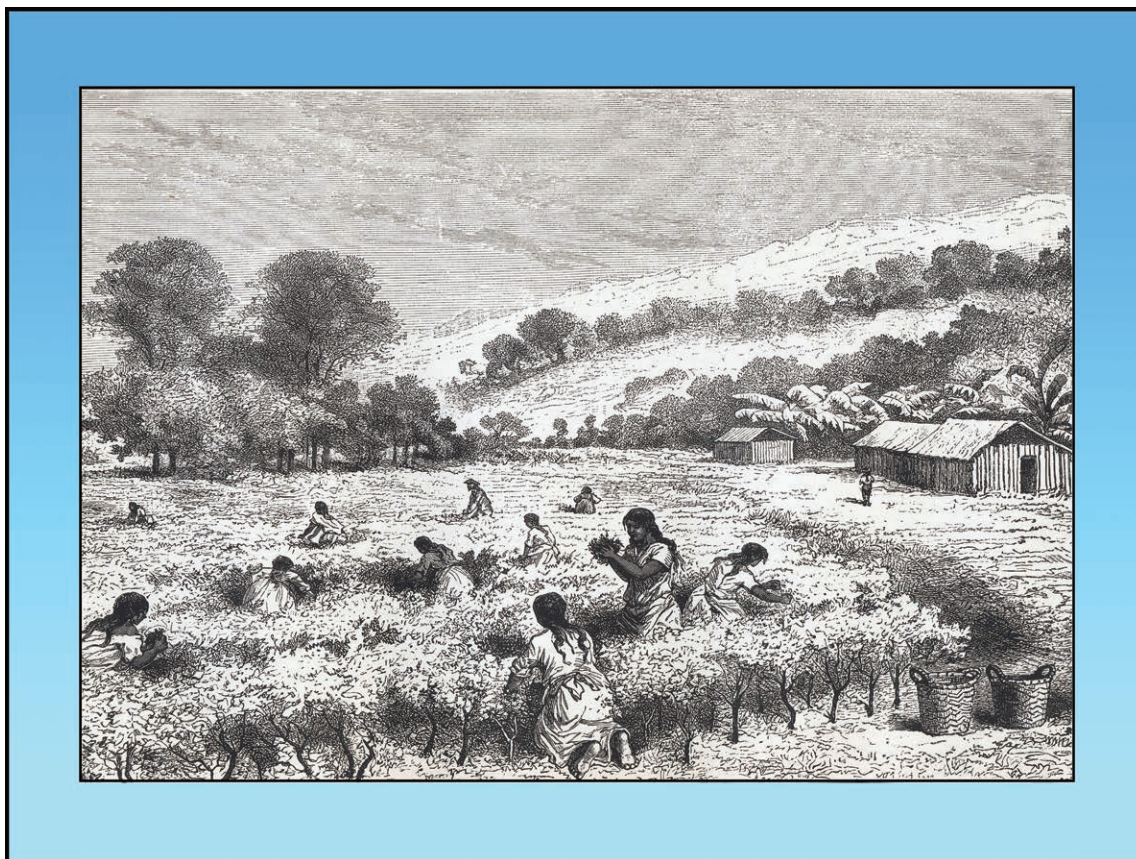


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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Brown Describes Bolivian Coca-Leaf Chewing: A Remedy Gathered *versus* Altitude and Attitude?



In 1876 author Robert Brown, Ph.D., began publishing his book series, *The Countries of the World: Being a Popular Description of the Various Continents, Islands, Rivers, Seas, and Peoples of the Globe*. In the third volume, he depicted the coca shrub, the pesticide-like cocaine of which wards off insects. However, the stimulant properties of the cocaine alkaloid led to what Brown captioned as “Gathering the Coca Plant (*Erythroxylon coca*) in Bolivia” (above). As landlocked descendants of the Incans, many indigenous Bolivians kept laboring on the steep Andes or on the highland plateau by carrying a “little leathern bag of the dried [coca] leaves, and a gourd of powdered [quick]lime.” According to Brown, the coca leaves were “chewed four times a day, mixed, either with the powdered lime, or with the ashes of *Cecropia*, or quinoa.” Cheekfuls of coca leaves provided trace amounts of cocaine, which were prized as an appetite-suppressing and energizing remedy against the altitudinal lows (fatigue) and perhaps the altitudinal heights. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

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