

California Avocado Association 1917 Annual Report 3: 69-75

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BY THOMAS H. SHEDDEN, MONROVIA

Ladies and Gentlemen of the California Avocado Association, and the Friends who honor us with their presence at our fifth semi-annual meeting:

Fraternal and sympathetic greetings to all who come from the sun-kissed (?) avocado orchards of—June, 14-18.

The convening of the Association in the unique and exquisitely beautiful Mission Inn, famous the world over for its comfortable quaintness, is an event out of the ordinary, so far, in our Association life.

When I contemplate the quietude of Mr. Miller's peaceful sanctuary, there will creep in a reminiscent thought of the varieties of discordant sounds which have usually attended our assemblies, culminating, at the last one, in the thrilling trill of the steam riveter serenade, just outside the windows. Thanks to Dr. Webber for leading us into this restful seclusion, where we shall be able to think and hear, and not have to wait until the proceedings are published in order to know what was said.

Since our annual meeting in May, at the election of officers, Dr. Webber who has so ably, satisfactorily and comfortably filled every nook and corner of the presidency, and whose enthusiasm for the avocado has endeared him to all, shook his head, and turned a thumb down when the subject of re-election was broached. He gave reasons therefore, in consequence of which the present incumbent was elected to succeed the scholarly Dr. Webber, "Whose shoe latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

The selection of such a raw recruit was a surprise to me, and the election was contrary to my protest. I am deeply appreciative of the confidence shown and the honor bestowed by the act, and by personal expressions. I thank you with all my heart while pledging my best efforts. "Guaranteed to work in single, or double harness," in forwarding the interests of our beloved avocado. I am a beginner in this unfolding life of the avocado in a strange land, but one who has at heart a hope to labor and live long enough to see this superb fruit become the attainable and acceptable food of rich and poor alike.

I am under instructions to deliver a presidential address, "To include some suggestions of policies to be pursued," was the wording, "in developing this fascinating industry."

The avocado is an interest worthy of our best thought and action. Its high characteristics call ladies and gentlemen to its culture. It has a charm for youth, and yet there is a seriousness about it which attracts mature men and women of all walks in life. There seems to be more old, than young, enthusiasts engaged in training the infant avocado for a useful future in California. This though recurs to me whenever I have looked over an avocado assemblage, and noted, in its makeup, the preponderance of white heads and bald heads.

What is the secret of its attraction for the senior class in life? Its delight and richness as

a food cannot fully explain it, for conservative age does not seek new and strange foods to feed its declining capacity. I submit these two believable reasons:

First: The avocado holds out to all its devotees, the pleasing hope of attaining that which is prized by all humanity, a green old age. Proofs of this are plentiful in countries of its habitat, where nonagenarians and centenarians, and over, abound without causing comment. Some years ago, a gentleman who had lived long in lands where this fruit for unnumbered centuries had been the daily food of all classes, said to me, "In looking at natives who are healthy, hearty and active after one hundred or more years of ahuacate eating, I have sometimes thought of the Scriptural description of Moses, when he died at the age of one hundred and twenty, 'His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated'."

The second reason is, that the avocado, as a food, fosters optimism and happy life among those who are really fond of it. I affirm this as the result of many years of observation among avocado eaters, in both hotels and homes. The pleasure in eating the fruit, and the effect of the food upon the system seem to create a cheerful state of mind. I have rarely ever met pessimistic persons who were fond of avocados. Have you? I ask you to study this phase of the fruit, and tell it to others. It will be good missionary work.

Avocadoans appear to be happily and agreeably disposed. As contributing evidence, I might cite that we have never had any fights, or squabbles in our Association meetings, or board sessions—so far.

The avocado man stands unique in this world of rising prices. With a slim crop of one of the richest foods known, he has made no change. Some uncharitably disposed persons say he never makes change; always keeps the change, when a purchaser tenders him a dollar.

Doubtless the thought uppermost in the minds of members today, is solicitude for the avocado, which, in this present year has been, to a certain extent, menaced by excessive frost in Florida and heat in California. But happily these menaces have passed and gone; let us hope for a long time. It did keep us on the anxious seat, though, in passing, in memory of which in this presence of friendly feeling I make this individual confession: Having prepared and planted Florimel Orchard, cared for each of the trees, watched their growth, returned their welcome smile each morning, praised them for the way they came through the winters, with flying colors, and having partaken of the fine product of their young lives, I became fond of them, and when I realized the torture which they had endured last June, I was full of compassion for them,—for those that had succumbed and those that survived and stood up smiling cheerfully, but pathetically, at me. Anxious thought went to all the avocado centers, and soon we found that it was the weaklings that were stricken.

Many of my trees were not right, eugenically, or euthenically, when I got them in an avocado orphan asylum in 1914. Months of recovery and reconstruction have passed, and now, as an individual member, and as the mouthpiece of the Association and its wise directors, I can encouragingly say to you, that there is nothing in the avocado situation now, that need cause a whimper over the results of that conflagration in the avocado orchards. Sometimes fires have been "blessings in disguise." Every great city

of the civilized world, from Rome to San Francisco, has been built upon the embers of its formative period. This was one such. It has taught us the absolute necessity of planting, not only strong varieties but healthy trees.

In passing through different orchards, "after the fire," I stopped, looked, listened, and everywhere, through the burned branches and rattling leaves, came the warning voice of nature—mingled with that of Mr. Spinks and Mr. Scott:

"Plant strong trees."

"Plant healthy trees."

"Plant pedigreed trees."

Nature has been helping in the process of elimination, and the "survival of the fittest," by thus destroying the weak ones in their youth.

The unbiased Committee on Varieties, and the Board of Directors, all men big enough to forget personal interests, deliberated long, and then heroically took up an axe that was as free from guile as was George Washington's hatchet, and chopped down a whole forest of avocado trees that have been confusing and impeding the progress of the industry. They left only eight trees, including two or three fillers, but they are all standing in regular orchard form.

From these few trees even though no finer varieties should ever be developed, will come fruit every day in the year, for all parts of this country and Canada. Perhaps even our Florida friends will want some of our fruit, as they have already been calling loudly for California trees and seeds.

The sound of this chopping down of trees has been heard as far away as Washington, from whence has come an approving cheer. In California it has been commended. This action of the committee and directors is not a dogmatic dictum to the chosen eight, "Thus far shall thou come, and no farther." They simply got us out of the woods and gave us a starting place, and when a materially better variety comes forward and proves itself in California, nothing will be able to keep it out of its proper high place in the Association's favor.

The nurseryman and the would-be planter have been, for several years, almost lost in the maze of growing number of varieties, but now the way has been made easy to plant an approved orchard. There are now, more than ever, intelligent reasons for planting avocados.

As a true lover of the noble fruit, and one who is simply an orchardist, I elevate my voice in saying to any one whom it may concern, "Buy the best." The future of the avocado demands that we plant trees that are right eugenically and euthenically. The avocado comes to us with clean life and habits. Keep it so. Treat it right and I believe that after the next "June drop" the tale told will not be so tragic.

These meetings of the Association and attendance of members are altogether important. We are pioneers blazing the way through the unmapped region of Avocado-land. Having neither sign-boards nor guidebooks, we are compelled to rely upon each other for exchange of ideas, experience and knowledge gained. This spirit of mutuality seems to have taken possession of the pioneers. We are scattered over long distances;

all are busy. It would be difficult for a single one of the two hundred or more units of the Association to go and exchange notes with each of the others; so we reverse this order of procedure, by bringing them all together, for a semi-annual "talk-fest."

The wise man of old said: "Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharp-eneth the countenance of his friend." So friends, when these kindred spirits meet and rub ideas together, the sparks of wisdom fly, and throw light upon our uncharted way. Many members have wished aloud that we might have more time at our conventions for this very purpose of getting acquainted. They have asked, also, that opportunities be given for making inquiries at the meetings upon matters pertaining to orchard work. These suggestions are of practical value, and upon the present occasion we have given our affairs a turn somewhat in that direction.

Closely allied to this mutual benefit in our meetings is that of creating and extending in this collective way, an enjoyable and eating acquaintance between the public and the avocado. Because of the scarcity of fruit I have hesitated to speak upon this practical phase of our duty, for most of us this year have been much like "Old Mother Hubbard, who went to the cupboard"—and found it bare, just when we were dutifully trying to follow the admonition of Dr. Hardin's little green stickers: "EAT AVOCADOS!"

But we will not always be bare of that which we are supposed to produce and we should aim to have at all our assemblages abundance of fruit for complimentary and educational use among visitors who desire to taste and learn to like. This might be done in one or more, or all of the following ways:

First: Fruit might be sold at a low or nominal price.

Second: Present a fruit to any visitor who shows appreciation.

Third: Give a part of a fruit to anyone desiring to taste.

Fourth: Have stacks of small avocado sandwiches for all who care to partake. This being such a good and unsuspected way to advertise, the Association might well afford to buy fruit at a nominal price to be so used.

I am an old believer in the life-giving and far-reaching influences of the dinner table in connection with associational and periodical meetings. The necessity of eating is, "One touch of nature that makes the whole world kin," and dining together brings the kinship still closer; fellowship, fraternity and equality play hide and seek among the plates and glasses; distances and differences are obliterated; misunderstandings and misapprehensions melt; widely separated ideas are fused and bring forth wisdom. Knowledge follows eating—proven by the case of Adam and Eve. We are to try one of these table sessions of the Association, and I truly hope it will be pleasing to all, and receive a hearty encore.

We had no thought of indulging in a banquet,—in fact advise against it in these times,—but as we all have to eat a dinner, we thought well to have a "Together Dinner" at a modest price, which modesty should prevail with us at least until, to the avocadoan, "the flowing tide comes in." The dinner is merely a pleasing accompaniment to an enjoyable meeting of avocado cranks, and the only item on the table which might suggest immodesty will be avocados, on which we should go the limit—from our own trees.

I urge the business wisdom of devoting more time and even money, to our exhibit. At least half our time should be given to the show, which in time should be competitive as well as educational, which latter it emphatically is. There is a demand for it. In fact the crowd is always loth to leave the fruit stands when the president starts to round 'em up to hear the platform eloquence of the thirty per cent oil avocado orators. If further proof is needed, I might mention, that upon the two occasions when the exhibit was in the assembly room or near it, the noise of those who lingered around the fruit stands was disturbing and continued, notwithstanding the protests from the chair and the audience in general.

Next in line with the collective idea of learning, I present a suggestion from the avocado's good friend, L. B. Scott, that we might have an occasional field day for the Association, or as many members as might care to attend and respond, so that suitable arrangements could be made for entertainment or for conveyance if necessary, beyond a certain point. The purpose would be to visit trees, orchards, and other avocado plantings in a certain locality, also to visit the members in that neighborhood. These excursions could be made at convenient times, and to different places, and would be a pleasant way for the members to extend their knowledge of avocadodom, and I believe that the ones called upon would be pleased enough to hand out an avocado sandwich and a glass of cold water at lunch time.

It has been shown that there are many persons growing avocados who are not members of the Association. We need their help by membership, but how are we to get them? Who is to go after them?

The Board of Directors, recognizing the importance of increasing the membership, has evolved a plan. In order to popularize it, it has been thought wise to bring it before the members assembled. Here it is:

Inaugurate a contest for getting new members.

Every live human being enjoys friendly rivalry, when there is a goal in sight. Offer three prizes for the three highest numbers of new members secured before the next annual meeting. It is always better to give more than one prize, for consolation's kindly sake.

Prizes to be offered by the directors without expense to the Association, in this way, namely: Let the Executive Committee interview members who are original owners of certain proven, or promising avocado varieties that are now generally considered desirable and that are known to be candidates for popularity and standardization, and ask them each to donate one or more young, budded trees,—the trees so donated to be the prizes. The committee to be satisfied as to the physical condition of the trees.

The names of the trees and their donors to be mailed to each member when announcement of campaign is first made, with request that the list be published in the local papers of their district.

Invite all members to enter the contest. Name a date for entries to close, and then mail names of the contestants to the members.

Members of the committee not to enter the contest, nor divulge any knowledge they have of the contest.

The total number of trees donated to be apportioned as prizes in the ratio of 6, 3 and 1, for the first, second and third winners, respectively.

The trees all to be numbered, and a list of same kept by the committee; duplicates of the numbers to be placed in a box for use at close of contest.

The conclusion of the contest and distribution of prizes to be a feature of next annual meeting.

After the finals of contest are announced, some lady in the audience will be asked to come forward and favor the occasion by drawing the numbers from the box—with averted eyes, of course.

I omitted saying in proper place, that any member may secure new members, and turn the names over to any contestant he favors.

The membership fee has been waived, so that new members will pay only the annual dues, \$5.00.

Here now, is a splendid opportunity to do a good turn all 'round. I'd rather have the first prize, here specified, than the conventional gold watch which is usually the prize offered in contests.

No canvass has been yet made for trees, but I'll give you this tip, in a stage whisper: some have already volunteered offers, and one man promptly said he would give ten trees, mentioning a variety that has become very popular. It can be seen that the winner of the first prize might receive enough prize trees to plant what would probably be the most blue blooded orchard in California.

Ah, my friends, that's the kind of orchard that can be planted now. That's the kind of orchard to plant henceforth in California. Plant and produce the best. Make a name and fame for the California avocado, and see that it goes, unsullied, into all the marts where California's wonder products are welcome.

Hail avocado!

When through all the states of our dear native land,

This fruit, with our orange, shall go hand in hand,

May lips that with pleasure its praises proclaim,

Be graced by the use of its soft sounding name.

Avocado's the name, Avocado's the name,

Avocado, Avocado, Avocado's its name.

THOS. H. SHEDDEN.

(NOTE: the above verse and chorus can be sung to the tune of the well known children's New Year song: "Happy New Year to All.")