

THIRTY YEARS' OBSERVATION OF TROPICAL FRUITS

ERNEST BRAUNTON

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Inasmuch as we have gathered at one of California's famous tourist hotels, I cannot help but hand along a little hotel joke I heard a day or two ago. It is said that in New York hotels, in every room, near the door where the departing guest may plainly read, there is a little sign as follows: "Have you *left* anything?" It is said that in the hotels in Southern California, it reads: "Have you *anything* left?"

In recounting or canvassing the experience of a third of a century among tropical fruits in Southern California, I do not recall anything particularly humorous or amusing. Yet they say, at the close of a banquet we should have all of jollity and none of gravity. However, a few weeks ago, while riding on a street car, I had with me a very beautiful cone of the Norfolk Island Pine, which I had picked up at Santa Barbara a few days before. The gentleman sitting next to me said, "Excuse me, sir, but is that an alligator pear?" Had I not valued the cone for its herbaria worth, I should have presented it to him with the assurance that it was in just as good condition to eat that day as at any future time.

In looking back over thirty-three years in which I have been engaged in horticulture in Southern California, the one striking point that presents itself with regard to the avocado is that we have not had an earlier and more just appreciation of the value of that particular fruit, for we have had them with us for, more than three-fourths of a century. Yet it has remained for the last few years to bring a true appreciation of their unrivalled value as a food.

Going back to the time when I first came here in 1887, I remember that then the tropical fruit trees of Southern California were in greater proportion to the residents than they are at the present time. Almost every garden among the old settlers had an avocado or two of the seedling Mexican type, and trees of cherimoya and sapote. I remember in those days going up and down San Pedro Street, where now all are business houses, and finding in the gardens there, avocados, cherimoyas and sapotes, all since chopped away because of lack of appreciation. There were points in Hollywood, in San Gabriel Valley and along the foothills where avocados were grown in considerable quantity. They were very poor fruits, large of seed and sparse of flesh, and for that reason very little attempt was made to select anything worthy of commercial growing, and the avocado, excellent in flavor though it was, was lost sight of. Yet twenty years ago they were sufficiently appreciated to find a market in Los Angeles for the few produced. In 1894 the plant firm I was with, Lyon and Cobbe, was asked by Lewis Bradbury to obtain as many seedling trees as we could find and I am wondering if the original Spinks tree was not among the lot I collected.

I well remember on the 18th of September, 1901, now more than nineteen years ago, standing on a street corner in Tustin, under the shade of a seedling avocado, talking with Mr. Samuel Tustin and the late Professor A. J. Cook, upon the merits of the fruits that hung above our heads. The tree contained from two to three hundred globular fruits, very black in color, and I should judge about three inches in diameter. Mr. Tustin informed me that he had a demand for more than the tree would produce, and was selling them wholesale at 25 cents each. Inasmuch as that was twenty years ago, I am surprised that with the stimulus of 25 cents for each fruit, nothing was done toward planting commercial orchards. A few weeks ago, I visited this tree and found it still standing and bearing fruit, though now surrounded with curbs and sidewalks. It was in the old days a most excellent fruit.

That was before Juan Murrieta and J. C. Harvey began distributing throughout Southern California, seeds of avocados which they had secured in Mexico. It was about eighteen years ago that Mr. Harvey began doing what little he could to distribute the seeds, which were the parents of some of our better varieties of today. I visited the Harvey and Murrieta places at the time these early fruits were started and remember the excellence of the fruit, and it seems very strange that its value has not been earlier recognized in view of the fact that even at that time a few of us realized the necessity of having a fruit that could qualify as a food in the way the avocado does, filling a field that is impossible to any other fruit yet discovered.

It has been a deep pleasure to me to have advocated for a number of years, by voice and pen, the planting of avocados in every door-yard. I was asked by many nurserymen why I did not advise planting orchards. I replied that I was not trying to commercialize the avocado, but merely to popularize, and added that "if everyone who reads my article or hears me speak on the subject will plant one in his back yard for family use, it will not be long before the gospel will spread and commercial orchards will follow." I believe that has proven true, to a large extent.

Now my friends, in closing, I wish to voice a plea for an amendment to the fruit standardization law of the State of California, to include the avocado. Mr. Murrieta called my attention a few days ago to this most necessary act and asked me to bring it to the attention of this assembly.

There are varieties, black or purple in color, which are not ripe when they attain full color, and others which are perfectly black that need to be picked before that stage. Last year Mr. Knight called our attention to one of his most excellent introductions that should be picked when the purple color has spread two-thirds over the fruit. I hope in the end, we may at least have a legal limitation as to when the fruit has reached the proper state for consumption or for market.

In mentioning Mr. Knight's varieties, I will close by saying that a few days ago I was presented with a Knight, grown by Mr. Knight himself, who has stated that he did not consider it one of his best. The fruit was in prime condition, and although I have tasted every named variety known to me, and countless others that I know not the name of, I am frank to say I have never tasted a better avocado. So in closing, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot do better than say, "Good Knight!"

PRESIDENT SALLMON FOLLOWING MR. BRAUNTON

It is very appropriate that while we are enjoying the hospitality of this beautiful city we should have one of its citizens on our program. Mr. Coolidge was the first secretary of this association, one of its charter members, and a member of the first board of directors. What he has to say is always of interest.

Mr. D. W. Coolidge, of Pasadena.