

"THE HOTEL AND THE AVOCADO"

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Mr. President and The Lady and Gentlemen friends of the Avocado:

I frankly say that I take earnest pleasure in addressing you upon a subject appropriate to the occasion, and yet, around which hangs a reminiscent aroma of the dining room; being, so far as known, the only hotel "has been" yet budded on to—or "butted into"—the avocado, the new and fascinating industry now developing in the two Eden lands of our country, Florida and California.

The topic is practical, for I believe that the popularity of the avocado as a splendid food, proven by the savants of the University of California to be of the highest value, will come directly via the hotel table and the Cafe too, of course.

The avocado has been an exclusive and elusive foreigner from the tropics; traveling at intervals to our shores in the cold storage seclusion of some big ocean liner; stopping at high priced hotels; dining only a la carte at swell cafes and clubs; attending ten dollar banquets, and appearing, upon occasions, in the homes of the upper ten; the lower millions, for which reason, are either uninformed, or cynical of the gustatory joy in store for them, just as soon as the avocado has been handed its final papers as a naturalized Yankee.

Though an alien in our land, the avocado is a nearby native North American. It was a precious food of the inhabitants when Columbus came. During a couple of centuries thereafter, many explorers wrote in high praise of it. The earliest known of such writings is the report of Oviedo to Charles V. of Spain. In a lengthy account of the tree, its fruit and uses, he quaintly says: "The Indians guard them well, but apply no work whatever to them, for the chief gardener is God." Guarded by the Indian and gardened by God! This beautiful thought of the avocado but adds to its charm. This was in 1526, since which time this aboriginal "staff of life" migrated eastward and westward, to the islands of the Atlantic and of the Pacific, to Spain, France and even to India; and yet, in the fifth century after Columbus, in our own land of good living, so close to its place of nativity, the noble avocado is only beginning to be known! While here in California, where nearly all the treasures of the tropics are being reproduced, an 18-ounce home-grown avocado retailed in the Los Angeles markets, in A. D. 1915, for \$1.50!—the price almost suggestive of them being yet in the curio class; and in Monrovia, where grows a sixty-five foot avocado tree, an old residenter recently told me. "he didn't know anything about either the alligator, or the avocado pears, but he'd bet they couldn't beat the Bartlett."

How came it about that ubiquitous and omnivorous Uncle Sam deprived himself, for so

long, of this delectable diet! Oh, why did Sir Walter Raleigh, when taking over to Queen Elizabeth those plebian potatoes, entirely overlook the patrician avocado!

There are some questions that growers have often asked me relative to "The Hotel and the Avocado." I have always carefully responded, within my scope, knowing how important a place the hotels and cafes now occupy, and will hold, in the expanding realm of the avocado, hence the more formal publicity here given these pointed questions of the practical growers.

FIRST: What is the proper size of avocado to grow for the hotel trade? In hotels and cafes of the highest class—as yet, alas! the sole places where the fruit is found—their service limits itself to, practically, two sizes: the 14 to 16 oz. and the 24 oz.; fruit of the first-mentioned weights, constituting, on some tables, one portion and on others, two. The 24 oz. is always cut, making two portions.

This has been crystallized into custom, not as might be supposed, by high cost, but through common sense; it being considered sufficient vegetable fat addition to the modern meal.

Now, let not the grower of smaller, or larger sizes be at all disappointed, for all the good fruit that can be raised will be used, in many ways, but probably not for individual service in the hotels that set the pace in these matters.

But it would seem, that though the extra large avocado, so mouthwatering to behold, will be apt to carry off the prizes at beauty shows, yet it may not win in the race for popularity and standardization. It will be wanted for occasions, and by the avocado eater of great fondness and capacity—God bless him! One of the latter remarked to me, as he sat before a 32 oz. dear darling: "The big alligator often reminds me of what the old Virginia preacher remarked about the turkey: 'It's a rather inconvenient bird; too large for one, and not enough for two.' "

SECOND: What form of fruit is most desirable for that trade? Most people in thinking of the avocado, picture in their minds a pear, not knowing that it takes on other forms. I was interested in tabulating the great variety of shapes specified by Mr. Popenoe, in his much used booklet on "Varieties of the Avocado," descriptive of the various shapes now in California. I found that he used forty-three different terms—all in the English language, too.

The grower desires to raise the round fruit because it packs and ships well. But the hotel-man perversely prefers the pear shaped. The term, to him, permits of some variation, but does not include the gourd shaped, or even the round. '

He wants it probably because he has become accustomed to it. But he will, eventually, accept the spherical fruit, and learn to handle it, because so many of the coming avocados will be round. It will be acceptable by reason of its safe carriage and short time from tree to table.

And yet, there is usually some philosophy in his likes. Here are several of his reasons:

1st: In a clean bodied, pear shaped fruit, free from fibre, the flesh is deeper and richer where it thickens toward the neck.

2nd: In eating the avocado on the half shell, any fruit having even a semblance of an

end on it can be held easier on the plate, while spooning.

3rd: The gourd like fruit is apt to be bruised in its soft neck in shipping.

4th: The thin skinned fruit, delicious to the taste, does make a mess of itself in public, and finger bowls are out of fashion.

THIRD: What colored fruit do they prefer?

The hotelman will usually select a fruit that is, or will be colored, other than green, when ready to serve, knowing that, to the uninitiated, green is suggestive of unripeness—like that little young wifie who went to the market to get her poor hubby some lobsters. She rejected the green ones, insisting on getting some that were fully ripe.

This is by no means a prejudice but merely a preference that will soon disappear when the splendid green fruits become more abundant and the guests more educated.

FOURTH: Do hotels, generally, call the fruit alligator pear, or avocado ?

Recently I was asked by the Hotel World, of Chicago, to contribute some information on the avocado. It needs publicity, and this opportunity was accepted. I thought it well to embody questions one and four in the article, suggesting that they might evoke discussion, and so help along the coming of the avocado. It is too soon to expect results, but I shall be glad to report them.

Few hotels have adopted the name avocado. I don't blame them if they do seem slow in the matter. The word suggests lawyer. I couldn't swallow it myself, until I came down south to Monrovia, and smoothed my throat with a 30 per cent oil avocado that is grown there. They are still called alligator pears, in the front of the house, and are nick-named 'gators, in the back of the house, and in the supply houses and markets. Interest in changing has not yet been awakened. There is encouragement, however, in the personal opinion of one of the masters in the humane art of preparing food, Victor Hirtzler, chef of the Hotel St. Francis, San Francisco, who enthusiastically tells me: "I love the California avocado, and I think Avocado is the proper name."

In further consideration of this question, I might quote from the aforementioned article:

"Avocado is the name; not alligator pear!

Both are misnomers and are misleading, but the former is euphonious, and is backed by authority and recommendation of the United States Department of Agriculture, the University of California, all recent writers, and the growers of Florida and California; having been selected from a list of forty-three different names under which it has been a foreigner to us. Henceforth, Brother Boniface, when thinking of a thing so altogether lovely as the avocado, banish the ugly alligator! Hotelmen, you caterers to creature comfort, who well know that the short cut to the guest's purse is down through Ailment Avenue, take an interest in spreading the kindly gospel of the avocado, that the present generation may yet enjoy much of this food delight before they go hence. You've taught 'em to eat the ripe olive; few persons will have to eat the magic three before comes the craving, and then the avocado habit takes a hold, like unto that of John Barleycorn!—Witness the poor victims standing up before the unblushing fruiterer and forking over a dollar for a lone one pound shell of palate tickle! Don't be discouraged should some beginner get balky and buck and kick at your table when you attempt to "put one over

on him." It was always a source of amusement, the facial and verbal expressions of the tenderfoot when he would first meet one of these alligators. He sometimes acted as though it was a crocodile. He'd "deny the allegation and defy the alligator", but, eventually, he seldom failed to get the habit, and often would take some back east for the home folks."

The avocado is happily constituted for universal consumption. It is food for both the mighty eater and the modest vegetarian. How many of "us poor humans" are under doctors' orders: "Don't eat sugar." "Don't eat salt." "Cut out meat." Just here the bland avocado comes forward, a real neutral in the war. It contains but a shadow of sugar and salt, and it takes the place of animal flesh.

All avocados are good, but how much better some are than others! I have, like that popular pickle man, fifty-seven varieties. The hotelman seeks the fruit that is free from fibre, and whose flavor appeals to him as tasting rich and nutty. These words described the perfect avocado. Some cynics think they are applicable to the present day avocado eater—rich and nutty.

As yet, with hotels, it remains, practically a salad fruit. It has been doctored by many prescriptions, but there remains only one best way to eat it: with a little salt, and, perhaps, lemon juice; the fewer frills the better—like that Irishman's celebrated recipe for whiskey punch: "You pour in the whiskey, and then the less water you pour in the better."

And now, fellow growers, benefactors of humanity, who are preparing this superb food for the health and pleasure of others—and profit to ourselves—don't be down-hearted when someone dolefully pictures prices "shooting the chutes." There will, doubtless, be an adjustment of prices, but take it rather as evidence that the production and consumption are keeping pace.

Be happy, conscious that you are bringing the avocado to stay, and it will soon find its welcome way to a hundred million mouths in the everywhere of "My Own United States!"