

HOW SHALL WE ELIMINATE THE MISNOMER, "ALLIGATOR PEAR"?

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Mr. President and The Lady and Gentlemen Friends of The Avocado:

The good Dr. Webber has again prescribed me to be administered to the infant avocado. I hope its growth may not be retarded thereby.

The interrogatory character of my topic indicates that the alligators are still crawling around among the avocados, although they do not seem to be so numerous, or conspicuous.

The formative period of anything is the proper time to prepare it for its ultimate purpose. Fundamental, afterthought alterations are always expensive and difficult—oftimes impossible. Right now is the best time to stamp indelibly upon this splendid food, which we are preparing for our fellow creatures, that newly coined name, clean and fresh from Uncle Sam's agricultural mint in Washington, "AVOCADO," obliterating thereby that animal-vegetable conglomeration, "alligator pears," so that in the next edition of Webster's, alligator pear will be followed by that quiescent word, "obsolete."

Some have feared that it may be too late in life to change the name of this fruit. Not so. It wasn't born alligator. It wasn't discovered alligator. Long ere the old half of the world knew that the other half existed, it lived, and bore the beautiful Aztec name, ahuate, which, alas, as a title, has seemed to be too mellifluously lingering and dulcet for our practical American tongue to maintain—a fact proven in our very midst—witness the blue pencil drawn through the original name of our association, The California Ahuate Association, a combination of sweet sounds, for the retention of which, Mr. Hart ably contended, as long as harmony would permit. The many modern cognomens (plural) of the fruit have been shifty enough not to have the fruit's feelings hurt, or flavor injured, by one more change, to mark, as it were, its new life in the warm bosom of Mother Earth in Florida and California.

Regarding the origin of the name alligator pear, which is merely one of forty-three aliases under which this fruit has played hide and seek for four centuries, I once read, that some cold climate sailors, while sauntering around in a tropical port, obtained a lot of the fruits from the natives. The Indian name, Ahuate, is as often spelled with the "gua," and the northern tongue is prone to pronounce the "g" hard. The word looked and sounded to the sailors like alligator, (try it yourself), and as the skin of the particular variety they had was thick and wartlike, it suggested an animal familiar to these seafarers, the alligator. As the fruit was shaped like a pear, they called it alligator pear.

The particular variety they got is said to have been a thick, rough, verrucose-coated, pear-shaped fruit,—I've heard Mr. Popenoe describe it. I think, from the description, they must have gotten his fruit from the Dickinson tree, just opposite the entrance to the

University of Southern California, when Balboa one dry season discovered the headwaters of the Los Angeles River.

The name alligator pear is illogical, because many hundreds of varieties have neither pear shape, nor alligator skin. If the name alligator pear must be used, let's put it over onto—the Hubbard squash.

The superb fruit gets in wrong with many who would otherwise be its friend, when, instead of its name suggesting its coming down from a celestial direction, from one of the truly great trees of the earth, as does the benign avocado, the other, hyphenated name, is suggestive of the crawling and sprawling on the ground, of one of the three ugliest, biggest mouthed animals of creation, the hippopotamus, rhinoceros and crocodile. Take this from one who ever carries the beloved avocado in his heart, (and elsewhere whenever he can get it) and has had training in first aid to those who have been in any way affected by the avocado, that he has found many hotel guests, men and women seemingly healthy, who were prejudiced against this superlatively fine food, simply because of the name, and the unpleasant thoughts it starts. Their expressions were varied and numerous; lack of space crowds them out of this edition.

Hyphenated names are not popular nowadays. The one in question is awkward, and in these days of short-cuts and saving lost motion, is unnecessarily long. In writing, it requires just double the space occupied by avocado. Those who are constantly handling the fruit use the nickname, " 'gators." This makes it misleading. One day a raw recruit down in the storeroom of the hotel, in the absence of the storekeeper, received a box marked as containing 'gators. The deliveryman had, also, told him they were 'gators. The employee was one of those "meant-wells" of the Happy Hooligan order, and he hurried upstairs, what he supposed was a box of shoes, to the room of a well-known San Francisco wholesale shoe dealer.

Sometimes the entire word alligator is used, which is fully as misleading. Witness a result: A recently come over Irishman, attendant in the kitchen, who was as fresh and green as the grass in his native land, in helping unload a great turtle and some giant San Francisco crabs, expressed amazement that such things should be eaten by human beings, but when the deliveryman handed out a box which he said was full of alligators, the astonished son of Erin almost dropped it in exclaiming: "Alligators! Will fer hivin's sake, what nixt'll they be ate'n in this hotil!"

It is not too late in the young American life of the fruit to change its haphazard name to something better. Mistakes in names are often corrected by the courts, and no dishonor attaches thereto. And surely, there is no more honorable or commendable act in the life of a good woman, no matter how late in years, when, in the happy presence of God, good angels and witnesses assembled, she stands up and joyfully changes her name.

In an unguarded moment, down at the meeting in San Diego, I got myself a job of hard work by making a move to attempt the extermination of the ugly alligator from our beautiful avocado world. Until the receipt, a couple of months ago, of the Association's year-book, I really didn't know that I was the lone committeeman to start the war, especially among the hotels, cafes, etc., and was awaiting the appearance of some companions in arms, for I'm not an old campaigner in this war. Until recently, the only destructive weapon I ever raised against the alligator pear was a spoon. While waiting

to hear of the appointment of some valiant alligator hunters, I have, upon numerous occasions, twisted the tail of the alligator, and with every twist have realized how big the tail is, and the wish has gone forth that some St. Patrick, or Siegfried might arise and rid the avocado world of the alligator. It will be hard, but not impossible work. It is simply one feature of the great problem of educating the public up to the eating point, which now confronts the expanding production of the avocado orchards.

The expenses of this general campaign of publicity will have to be borne by all those who are in any way interested in the production of the avocado. Few others will help, for the general public has an idea that the avocado grower will be able and ready, willing and waiting, to pay off Uncle Sam's war debt, as soon as the trouble is over.

The Association has no war chest, and so, the lone committeeman, not having been provided with any of the "sinews of war," has been able to carry on only a sort of guerrilla warfare, for the love of the sport. Hence this partial report of incomplete work.

While most of the hotel and cafe men still use the name alligator pear, so far I have found but one who positively refused to favor any move to change. He said he had always used alligator pear, considered it right, and would always call it that, regardless of what others did. I will not name him, but he it was, of whom Martin F. Tupper, the proverbial philosopher, wrote:

"Habit, with him, was all the test of truth;

It must be right, I've done it from my youth."

In general hotel men seem to be not unfavorably disposed to the movement, provided the public is satisfied.

This reason, alone, explains their chariness about changing. The true caterer aims always to give the public that which is pleasing thereto,— in other words, give what is wanted. For example, some years ago, a notorious bad man of the West went into Sam Dutton's hotel cafe in Denver. He was full of bad whiskey and some appetite, and ordered the waiter to bring him some rattlesnakes, fried, well done, with plenty of Tabasco, punctuating his order with profanity and an exhibition of his gun. When the quick-witted chef got the order he happily thought of some eels which he had in the ice-box, and which he promptly prepared and served, coiled up like a rattler pointing its head at the would-be diner. At the St. Francis Hotel, in San Francisco, guests can order nice fresh whale steaks, chops and cutlets for breakfast. If hearers doubt this statement, I refer you to Victor Hirtzler himself who is responsible therefore, and whom I am much pleased to see on the program today.

In Mr. Hirtzler's presence and participation in this convention of avoccranks, I see one of the best signs of the times in the avocado world, for he has as much practical and paid-for knowledge of the quality and consumption of the avocado as anyone in the United States. I have quoted him once before as to his expressed love for the California avocado and approval of its name, and will say of his discernment regarding the name, that when a diner at the St. Francis orders an alligator pear, he is served a pear-shaped fruit. If the order calls for an avocado, he gets a round one.

The alligator line of defense does seem to be wavering. I have had inquiries from different parts of the country as to the comparison of the two names, their relative value,

the proper pronunciation of avocado, etc. I was surprised at getting two of the latter queries from Florida. One earnest inquirer from that state submitted three different pronunciations, asking me to check the one which was correct. None of them were right. Several have asked: "Should the word a-v-o-c-a-d-o be pronounced 'avo-car-do'?" I have heard it distorted that way. One inquired: "Is the new name of the alligator pear pronounced, 'alavacardo'?"

No, dear seekers after the truth, the pronunciation is simplicity itself: a(ah)vo-ca(cah)do. It is a beautiful word,—not a whit more logical as a name than alligator, but far more pleasing, and sponsored by authorities vastly greater than those aforementioned jolly sailors on shore leave.

Just here, as I was about to begin on a peroration, an avocado man came, like one of Job's comforters, to tell me that he thought the alligator pears were entrenched and couldn't be dislodged. I admitted the truth of the first part of his statement, and congratulated him upon the up-to-date and warlike idea of the trenches, but expressed unbelief in the latter half of what he said.

The producer of a new, exclusive, or uncommon article surely, in reason, has a right to say what his product shall be called. The avocado growers of Florida and California are in accord upon the new name. It would seem an easy matter to have these earnest men and women of both states combine in an effort to familiarize the public with that gentle and euphonious word, avocado. A suggestion of this nature has the approval of President Webber, and a move in that direction will probably be made.

Printers' ink and personal attack will disentrench the alligators. They have been entrenched in the public mind, in dictionaries, encyclopedias and other forms of cold type, but with a fairly well financed campaign, in the words of Henry Ford, "We'll have the boys out of the trenches by Christmas." May be.