

## PILGRIMAGE TO THE ORIGINAL FUERTE TREE

C. V. Newman



Parent Fuerte Tree

**President Dutton:** Some time ago the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, as you know, went on a trip to Mexico City, and several members of this organization accompanied them. Of course, they were thinking about avocados. Now a recent survey of our plantings of the last five years indicates that a large majority of them have been Fuerte. So everything connected with the Fuerte is of interest to practically all of our growers. The next speaker had the opportunity to examine the original Fuerte tree in Atlixco, Mexico. Mr. Newman, President of Calavo Growers, looked the tree over and was very much interested in it. He is going to tell you something about this tree and his trip to Mexico. Mr. Newman requires no introduction—we all know Mr. Newman

**C. V. Newman:** I like to talk about Mexico—I had such a good time there.

I know you are all interested in the old Fuerte tree, and the history of Mexico, itself, is fascinating in its interest. Centuries ago, 7,000 or 8,000 years, there was a mound-building race that passed through the country and left mounds in Arizona and Colorado, and then went down into Mexico, near Mexico City, where they built great pyramids. There is something about the culture of these early people that has developed recently that is very significant. The base of the Mexican pyramids was made to conform to the curvature of the earth. Those gentlemen, knew something about astronomy and science or they could not have done this.

A little later a tribe came in—perhaps they were the Mayans. We don't know where they came from. They might have come from the East, they might have come from that old sunken continent of Grecian mythology, the Continent of Atlantis. Anyway, they came in as a full-fledged nation, and there is no evidence of their improvement after they arrived. We think possibly they came from the East, or might have come from this submerged continent of which the West Indies and Cuba are a reminder. Anyway, these people stayed a long time and built many fine cities. The center of their population was in Yucatan. There one will find remnants of cities which had paved streets, two-story

buildings, and country homes. The evidence is there today.

Then, following them, about the eighth or ninth century, came the Toltecs.

No one knows where they came from, except that it was from a northerly direction. They stayed about 500 years, learned to drink pulque—and vanished as a nation. They disappeared as quietly as they came along about the fourteenth century, at which time the Aztecs, a war-like people, came down also from the North.

These Aztec people were in power about 130 or 140 years before the Spaniards came in 1519. They had their capitol in Mexico City, a high plateau, 7,000 or 8,000 feet high, on which there was originally a lake. In the center of the lake was a big rock on which they built their castle Chapultepec. It is interesting to know that the Montezumas had this as their White House, and it is still used as the White House for the Presidents. There is no other city of equal historical interest in the North American continent. Around the Plaza, where some of the bloodiest battles of history had been fought, Cortez finally conquered the Aztecs. The old cathedral on this spot was on the site of the original temple of the Aztecs, "where they sacrificed human beings. They had built on the site of the old lake and have had to put a heavy piling under all large buildings. The height of the buildings is limited because of the underground condition. President Diaz started the construction of a wonderful theatre out of Venetian marble and also introduced Venetian architects to build this structure. The native architects objected because the Venetians supported the theatre on a mat instead of piles. As a result, this beautiful marble structure is sinking and the lower end is already below ground level over three feet.

I want to tell you something about the tribes—the forty different tribes in Mexico, making up a population of eighteen million, six million of which do not speak the Spanish language. The tribes start way up North in Sonora. In that country the desert tribes are lowly in civilization and culture. Going down still further, we come to the Mayo races, a kind of squatty sort of people, some of them are red-headed—maybe they are part Irish, I don't know. A little farther down you come to Tepic State, Nayarit, where there is a tall, splendid, dignified Indian. There are two tribes in this state that resemble the Chinese very strongly. There are remains of Chinese and Egyptian culture throughout the southern part of the Republic. In Yucatan—those tribes down there are so clean that they bathe twice daily and come out every morning with clean white suits on. The women are washing clothes all the time when they aren't grinding corn. And right in Yucatan, a traveler told me recently that he was looking at the carvings of figures along the inside of a building and all of a sudden he came to a carving of a Chinaman who had a pigtail. And in this museum in Mexico City, right beside the stone figure of an Egyptian, you will see a little statue which is undoubtedly Chinese. It is wonderfully interesting. Peoples from all parts of the world seemed to have migrated to Mexico. Then there is the Yaqui, the most warlike Indian on the American continent. There are 5,000 or 6,000 left. They have been gradually shifted onto reservations in the southern part of the Republic, and are dying off because they can't stand the tropics. Besides these, there are all the mixtures—Spanish, Portuguese, English, German, French.

We had this wonderful trip down to Mexico on the East Coast, and back through Central Mexico. In Hermosillo we came to real Mexico, and then came to Guaymas, which

means "yellow waters" in the Indian language, so-called on account of the fact that the water is oftentimes yellow with shrimps. We feasted on those shrimps at Culiacan. One member of our party, who thought he was the president of a Mexican land company, wanted to see his property. We got an automobile and cut across country, and later met the excursion train. We found the land all right—wonderful sugar cane and other tropical crops, and went down to the old hacienda of Senor Alyandro Redo, the only one of the haciendas that is untouched by the revolution in that vicinity. And, at this point, we found that Senor Redo owned somewhere between five hundred thousand and a million acres, and that he had quietly absorbed the ten thousand acres. While we were at this hacienda, the owner told us many wonderful things. It seemed as if we had gone back hundreds of years, to the time of feudalism. Here was a property of a million acres where one man had built the castles, the schools and churches, and everybody seemed contented. We noticed rows of guavas and avocados along the road. There were signs along the road, and these tell you something of the calibre of this man and the spirit of the country. The signs said, "Caminantes, las guavas son para ustedes, no rompan los arboles," meaning, "Travellers, the trees and fruit are for you. Don't break down the trees."

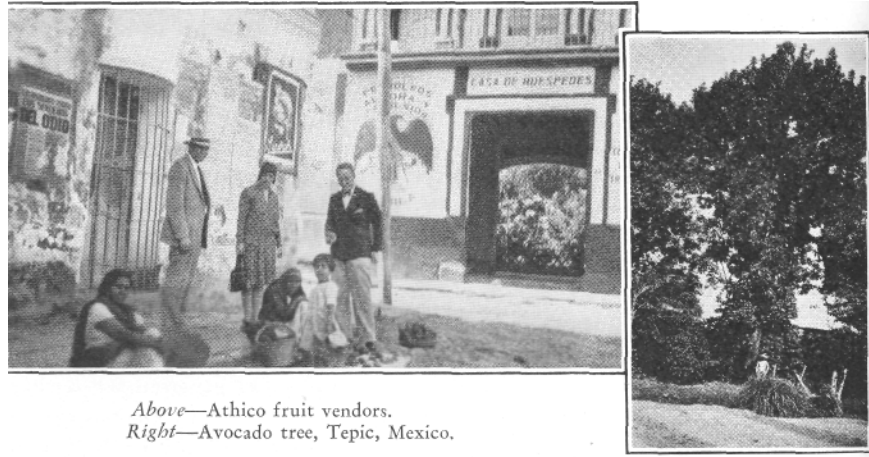
This was a remarkable sight, and it certainly appealed to us. That was the way it was all along the trip—we found these people very generous when they were treated as gentlemen should be treated. At Queretaro, the train ran alongside of two miles of Mexican seedling avocados growing wild. This is a portion of Mexico where no one has paid any particular attention to the finding of new Mexican varieties. I certainly want to go down and spend two months there; if Alyandro Redo would invite me, I would stay six months—it is a wonderful country.

When we got to Mexico City, letters of introduction obtained by Mr. Hodgkin from officials in the United States to officials in Mexico, gave us an opportunity to learn much about the economics and agriculture of the Republic.

Our first trip was to Atlixco in the Puebla Valley. We went down with Carl Schmidt, the man who introduced the original Fuerte bud, and we found the original tree. Whenever I think of the Puebla Valley, it seems like a dream—the cornfields, the wheat fields, the wild flowers, the homes and villages, and the mounds, each with its cathedral. The parent Fuerte was not in very good condition at this time. But it had quite a crop of fruit on it, which we learned was its second crop. That was of interest to us, because the Fuerte here often sets fruit during two and three more or less distinct blooms. (Someone asked if the parent tree had sunblotch.) No, we didn't see any of the sun-blotch, though some of the limbs were very bare. We took pictures of the tree and sent them back to the owners. We had a very pleasant time there.

Then we went with Mr. Schmidt to another hacienda that had been a very beautiful estate before the revolution eighteen years ago, at which place there were other famous trees. It was way up in the country, and the road was all washed out, so we had to leave our machine and walk up. This wonderful hacienda was simply a mass of ruins. Inside the old patio, where there used to be joy and prosperity, there was a sheep, a burrow and a goat, with weeds and rubbish all around. We went out into the once carefully designed and cared-for garden. There were little stone ditches where the water used to be carried to the individual plants. Now they were all full of weeds. The caretaker said,

"This used to be a wonderful place, but 'El perro de muchos amos es el primero se muere de hambre,' " or "The dog of many masters is the first to die of hunger." He explained that it used to be owned by one master, but now there were too many. Everybody owns it and nobody owns it. It was a pitiful sight—those fine trees in such a condition. We took pictures, and got buds from the trees, sent them to Washington, and they are now in the hands of Knowles Ryerson, being propagated. There was a Fuerte seedling that had some different characteristics from the parent. If anything comes of them, buds will be brought back from Washington, propagated, and distributed in the proper manner.



*Above—Athico fruit vendors.  
Right—Avocado tree, Tepic, Mexico.*

The next day we went down early to the market. On this market we saw many tropical fruits and plants not grown in California. There were Guavas— several different kinds. Sapotes, Cherimoyas, Bananas—long ones, short ones, red ones, and various colors. Avocados in all different kinds and shapes, some soft, some poor ones, selling from 5c, 10c to 15c apiece. I think it would probably cause a sensation to set down a box of our wonderful Calavos on that market. A good orchard of Fuertes planted in the Puebla would make someone comfortable. We found some of the most interesting things on the market— leaves of guavas used for sick babies, leaves of orange trees, sold to cure nervous people, or they sell you the bark of the oak tree to chew, if your teeth get loose. Another plant was used to make the water fresh. The merchants were friendly, and it didn't cost much to sample many kinds of strange fruits, roots and vegetables. We didn't find a single aguacate to compare with our good Calavos.

As you go along to one hacienda where a man has aguacates, and talk to him about his fruit, he will tell you that they are the best in the land. But, ask him about the aguacates of his neighbor across the street, and he will tell you that his neighbor's fruit are paguas, another kind of fruit. "Insipido"— another avocado, but of an inferior type. Go across to his neighbor, and talk to him, and he will tell you that he has the aguacate and his neighbor has the pagua. These fellows differentiate between good and bad just as we do here, only they call them "paguas" and "aguacates," and we call them "avocados" and "Calavos." So you see, we have some background for our contentions.

The next day, we went to Cuernavaca with Prof. Darby, who is partially in the employ of the United States and partially under Mexico. He is working on the Mexican fruit fly in connection with the fruit fly investigation in Florida. He showed us all through the

laboratory and showed us a fruit fly that had been living for nine months. The habits of this Mexican fruit fly is very similar to that of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly in Florida. This entomologist has done much work, on the life history of this insect, which has been of much help in Florida. Mr. Darby had to go down to Cuernavaca, State of Morelos, to gather fruits and insects for investigation in his laboratory, so we went along. Down there, he showed us big, fine mango trees, heavily laden with fruit, ninety per cent of which was ruined each year by the Mexican fruit maggot. We looked around and found sweet limes and guavas, but we didn't see any orange groves. We asked him, "Where are your orange trees?" "Well, the orange trees," he said, "have all been cut down." "Why did they cut them down," we asked. "Well, the fruit fly got so bad." That is interesting because of the fact that evidently for a good many years the fruit fly didn't attack oranges very seriously. But, after a while, they reached such a high percentage of infestation, that they simply cut the trees down. Of avocado trees, we saw just two, and we found that these were coming up from sprouts from the roots of trees that were evidently cut down for the same reason. "We want to keep that insect out of this country. It is easier to keep it out than to get rid of it when it once gets here.

We went back through the interior and saw many interesting things. But I am not going to tell you anything more about this trip. I simply say that I want you all to go down to Mexico and enjoy it yourselves. The best way to enjoy such a trip is to read and prepare yourselves before you go. Then go down with an open mind and treat those fellows like you would treat a fellow Rotarian, and you will get along fine and you will learn a lot.

Some pessimists say we are going to have a war with Mexico. No, we are going to have a highway down the coast, instead of a war. We are going to learn about Mexico, and Mexico is going to learn about us, and it will be to our mutual benefit, prosperity and happiness.

Calvin Coolidge, a wise man, did a great thing when he sent a schoolmate of his, Mr. Morrow, as Ambassador to Mexico. Mr. Morrow knows those people and knows how to treat them. After Lindy made his trip across the ocean, they invited him to fly down there. This air trip of Lindy's did more than any other single event to unite our two nations. It appealed to the nation's pride • and changed their attitude towards us, overnight. It was a wonderful move—Lindy coming down to see them, as he did. Then, the next thing was when Will Rogers made his good-will trip. "Will Rogers has a way of winning people. Shortly before he got there, the Mexican Government had just executed two fellows who got too ambitious and aspired to become President. So, as soon as Will Rogers met the President, he informed him, "I want you to understand I am not a candidate for the Presidency." The President countered with "We shoot them at sunrise." Will Rogers answered, "That's O.K., for I don't get up until ten o'clock in the morning." And then again, one morning when they were to have breakfast with the President—of course, everybody is supposed to be right on time when the President comes in—Will Rogers wasn't there. Where was he? He was outside talking to a group of soldiers and officers. Finally they dragged him in to breakfast and asked him what he was doing out there. He replied, "I have always understood it is better to stand in with the Army than with the President," and the President enjoyed the joke.

I hope you can all take a trip down to Mexico and enjoy it.