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CHAPTER XV.

THE MANGO, THE BEST OF ALL THE TROPICAL FRUITS.



SOME call the mango "the apple of the tropics." It is more; it is the apple, peach and pear combined. The novice in eating the old common seedling sorts meets with difficulties. Such an experience is sure to prejudice him against mangoes forever. These old-time sorts have the smell and taste of turpentine and a tough cottony fiber around their big seeds which completely fills the crevices between the teeth, making business for the dental profession. It is mushy, slippery and hard to hold. The juice stains the clothing. One smells and feels and looks as though he had been the victim of a yellow paint accident. After eating such a fruit for the sake of three or four tablespoonfuls of pulp, one must take a bath and then retire to some shady nook for the rest of the day to pick his teeth. But some of the improved sorts which sell locally at twenty-five cents each are quite otherwise. The skin peels off easily, the aroma is pleasant, there is no fiber, the seed is small, the fruit weighs twenty or more ounces and the creamy, delicious peach-like pulp melts in your mouth. I have never tasted a mangosteen, which, according to the books, holds the world's record for goodness, but of all the fruits I know, temperate and tropical, two or three varieties of mangoes lead in my estimation.

South Florida is making rapid strides in mango culture. Many varieties have been introduced from all parts of the tropics, both by the Government and enterprising growers. Many choice

THE EVERGLADES

seedlings are just coming into fruit and our budders are learning the trick.

I have always contended that a Florida seedling mango will become the commercial mango of the future. None of the choice imported sorts fill the bill perfectly. There is usually some defect, such as shy bearing, poor carrying qualities, or lack of resistance against pests. If the Government had imported a large quantity of seeds of all the best varieties of mangoes the world affords ten years ago, we would now have several new varieties of local origin which would exactly fill the bill for home needs and shipment North. It is possible that we have it anyway in the form of a seedling Mulgoba, bearing this year for the first time; it is too early to say. But this tree bears fruits of a large size, of very beautiful coloring; hard, rather thick skin; no fiber; small flat seed and delicious flavor. It remains to be seen whether it is a shy bearer or not. This is the fault of many of these high-grade mangoes. It is possible that this difficulty may be remedied by root-pruning, girdling, or by proper fertilizing.

I have a little book on the mango written by Woodrow of India, the man who sent Mulgoba plants to Florida in 1889, in which over eighty varieties of mangoes are listed and this is probably not more than half of the varieties now known, many of which are of recent origin and many of which are no good.

For instance, the Alphonse, Alphoos or Alfoss is highly prized. Higgins thus describes it: "This is one of the most noted of the India mangoes. Size, medium to large; color, greenish yellow on the unexposed side and running to yellow on the exposed side, which is overlaid with light red; peeling qualities excellent; texture excellent, may be readily eaten with a spoon; flavor unique, with a peculiar mingling of acidity and sweetness in the bright colored fruit." In looking over Woodrow's list, on the other hand, one runs up against all kinds of Alphonse. For instance:

Afonza of Goa; Alphonze, Kirkee, "the keeping qualities of this fruit are excellent and it is generally admitted the best of all

AND SOUTHERN FLORIDA

mangoes. *The name is applied in the markets to many distinct sorts of greatly varied merit.* (The italics are mine.) Kola-Alphonse; Kagdi-Alphonse, Bombay; Surawini Alphonse, Bombay. In fact, it seems that whenever they found a really good mango, they called it Alphonse.

The Mulgoaba, Cambodiana and a long yellowish kind from Burmah are my favorites. There is a little mango in Florida about the size of a peach, yellow in color, with a beautiful pink blush on one side. It has a thin skin, no fiber and delicious flavor. It is commonly called the "peach mango" and was raised from seed sent from Jamaica. For home use one would hardly wish for a more perfect fruit.

The Khatkia, according to Woodrow, is meant to be sucked, while others such as Fernandino II. of Goa is a cooking mango of special value. It should be stated to the credit of the mango that good apple pies can be made from the green fruit. The merits of the many kinds is a fruitful topic of discussion among mango cranks. Conclusions are not warranted as yet. It takes time to settle such questions. Some of the old timers with perverted taste settle it by saying that the common turpentine mango is good enough for anybody.

The mango belongs to a disreputable family, the Spondiaceæ or sumac family. It is probably the most respectable of all its relations. It is represented in Florida by a poison tree (*Metopium Metopium*) commonly called hog plum, poisonwood, bumwood and doctor gum. It includes the cashew nut (*Anacardium occidentale*), the jobo, pronounced hobo, and should be spelled the same way (*Spondias lutea*), the famous pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) so common in California, and the cassava (*Manihot Manihot*).

In spite of the highly poisonous nature of many plants of this family, the mango is very wholesome although I have heard of one or two cases of "mango rash" due presumably to the excessive eating of this fruit. Negroes in many parts of the tropics practically quit work during mango season, devoting themselves assiduously to making the best of a good thing while it lasts.

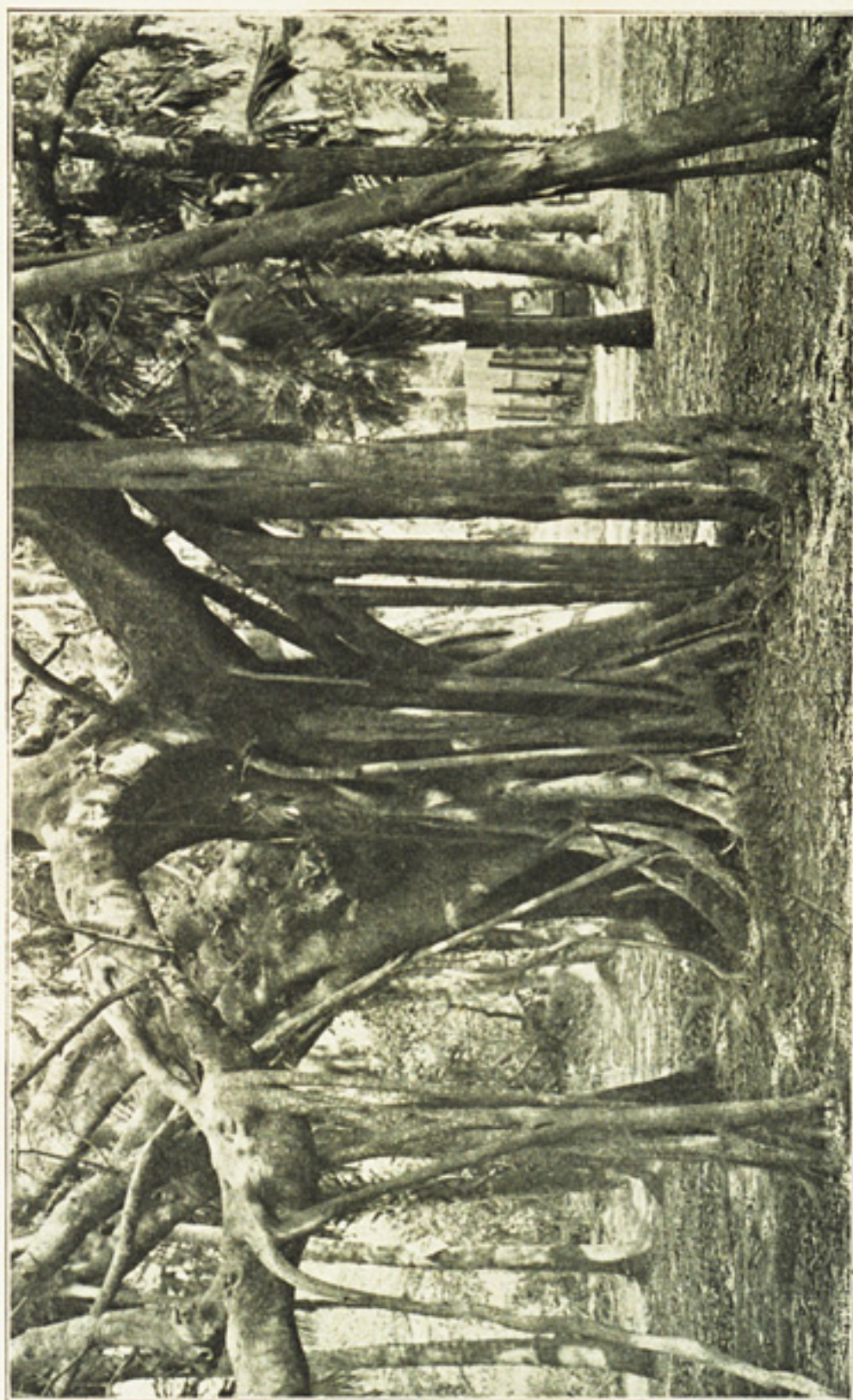
THE EVERGLADES

The mango is a beautiful, broad-spreading shade tree. Its rounded crown and dense foliage form a perfect shelter from the sun. It has a dark green leaf larger than, but similar in shape to that of the peach. It is never leafless. The young leaves are a beautiful pinkish red. The tree grows to be very large and groups of such trees around the homestead are striking features of many tropical landscapes.

The flowers are small but profuse and a dry winter season is favorable to a good crop. Some of the common mangoes bear heavily almost every year, the branches bending to the ground with the weight of fruit. In planting the seed it is best to remove the outer covering or case by carefully cutting the margin with a sharp knife. The seed may contain two or three embryos, so that it is often possible to secure two or even three trees from a single seed. It is a promising fruit for South Florida and, although it bears in the summer when peaches and other Northern fruits are in the market, it will sell on its merits; and besides there is the probability of keeping it in cold storage till winter, when the tourists come with plenty of money and good appetites for the fruits of the land. By this means, too, the railroads and commission men may be prevented from robbing the owner of the fruits of his toil. Ten years in the future Florida mangoes will be famous. Many local varieties will be developed and perfected and become as well and as favorably known as is the Florida standard grapefruit or pomelo. The same prediction applies to the avocado or alligator pear.

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A RUBBER TREE IN FLORIDA.