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A WORD ABOUT FIGS.

BY R. S. S., SUNNYSIDE, N. J.

How few there are in this latitude who have ever eaten Figs, ripe and fresh from the tree! Or if, perchance, they have tasted a single specimen raised by dint of great care in a pot or tub, can scarcely credit the fact that Figs may be grown, even in this Northern latitude, not as exotics under glass, but as an outdoor fruit; and gathered, not in single specimens, but in generous abundance and luscious sweetness. Yet the fact is nevertheless so, and, under favorable circumstances, two crops may be realized in a single season.

The flavor of this fruit is not generally esteemed by those to whom it is a new sensation. The taste must be cultivated, and then it becomes as fascinating as the Tomato or the Olive. Who does not remember the unmitigated disgust which the first taste of the Tomato or Olive excited? How hard it was to be persuaded that they were fit food for mortal man, or even to be tempted to make a second trial! Yet who can tell how the taste grew upon him? It is even so with the Fig. We have heard the tyro pronounce a fine luscious Fig *insipid*, or *too sweet*. We once thought so ourselves, but with years came wisdom—*experientia docet*—

and we now sigh over the breakfasts which, whilom, under the canopy of sunny Tuscany, we used to make off a well piled-up plate of fresh and luscious Figs, eschewing all meats or other solids. Reader, this is not poetry, but fact; and in the plenitude of our benevolence excited by such recollections, we desire for you a similar experience.

As to the culture of the Fig, there is nothing difficult. The chief requisite is to protect the tree against the severity of the winter; and this is done in precisely the same manner as the tenderer varieties of the Raspberry, viz., by covering with earth. We have seen a protection of straw resorted to, but have never known it successful in this latitude. The best method of protection is to dig about the tree in the fall, deferring the act as long as the ground remains unfrozen, and then undermining and throwing the tree, so that all the branches and canes lie upon the ground; and then to shovel upon them soil enough to thoroughly bury them beyond the reach of the frost, taking care to so leave the ground that all excess of water will readily drain off.

There is a decided advantage achieved in this process in the way of root-pruning, which prevents the plant developing too much into a tree shape, and thereby rendering it, as years increase, more difficult of being protected. The uncovering should be delayed as long in the spring as possible—at any rate, until the long cold storms of early May are passed, say until about the 12th of May. Then, if nothing untoward happens, you may look for a Summer and Autumn crop. The season this year has been decidedly favorable to the fall crop, and at this moment of writing we are luxuriating in abundance, with a promise of still more. Those that come too late to ripen should not be despised as worthless; for they may, by skillful hands, be converted into a delicate and delicious preserve. We have an ancient spinster aunt who, bless her dear old heart! put the idea into our head, and once, while on a visit to us, gathered the last of the Figs, and made us a jar of preserves which went far ahead of any East India preserves.

But enough about Figs for the present. Should our Editors care *a fig* about us, we may hereafter have another word to say about *culture*.

[Of course we prize you above many Figs, so send along the "culture," and a plate of figs with it, if you please, for we have not to learn to love so delicious a fruit. We have knowledge of two Fig "plantations," managed very much as you suggest, and the success is complete.—Ed.]

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THE FIG.—No. II.

BY R. S. S., SUNNYSIDE, N. J.

In point of historical interest, there is no fruit which claims higher regard than the Fig. It is of very great antiquity; a pomological noble, not a parvenue of recent birth and upstart pretensions. Its native habitat is Asia, where it is indigenous throughout the warm countries: perhaps its origin was in that garden which the curiosity of our first mother forfeited to her race. From Asia it was transplanted into Italy; and, as it is said, naturalized in France by the Greek colony which founded Marseilles, the ancient *Μασσαλία*, a celebrated colony of the Phocæans. This fruit seems to have been most highly prized by the Greeks, for we find that at Athens there was a law against the exportation of Figs. An informer against those who violated this law was termed *Συκοφάντης*, a detector of Figs; and hence our English word sycophant.

McIntosh thinks the Fig was introduced into England by the Romans almost coeval with the Christian era; but that it was lost until again introduced in 1525, when "Cardinal Pole brought from Italy those identical Fig-trees which still exist in the archbishopric gardens at Lambeth Palace; and (he adds) Dr. Pocock, the Oriental traveler, first brought the Fig to Oxford, and planted a tree in 1648 in Oxford College garden, of which tree the following anecdote is told: Dr. Kennicott, the celebrated Hebrew scholar and compiler of the Polyglot Bible, was passionately fond of this fruit, and seeing a very fine Fig on this tree that he wanted to preserve, wrote on a label, 'Dr. Kennicott's Fig,' which he tied to the fruit. An Oxonian wag, who had observed the transaction, watched the fruit daily, and when ripe gathered it, and exchanged the label for one thus worded: 'A Fig for Dr. Kennicott.'"

At the present day the culture of the Fig is general throughout the southern part of Europe, and in southern France and Algeria. Its introduction into this

country is of quite recent date—at about the commencement of the nineteenth century.

Thus much is said of the Fig, to show the claim it has upon our attention, simply on the score of historical interest. Now to speak of it pomologically.

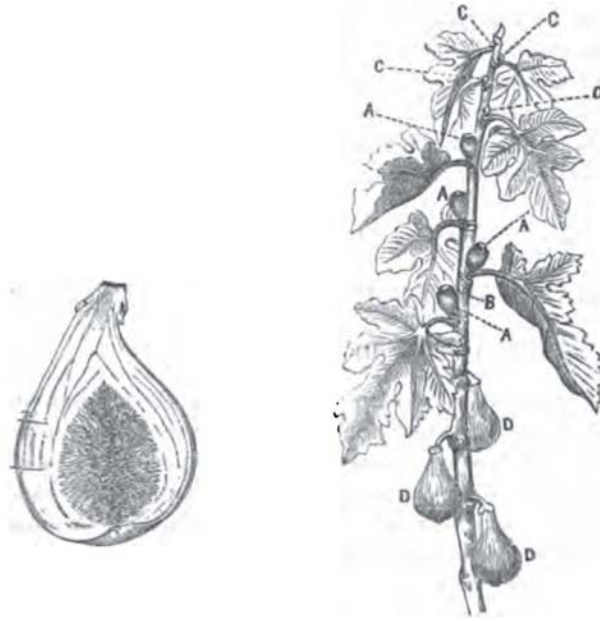
We know not how many varieties were known to the ancients. The probability is, that, from the high esteem in which the fruit was held, and the attention given to its culture, many more and finer varieties were known to them than to us. Be this as it may, there are yet a large number of varieties known at the present day. Among these Du Breuil enumerates “as only among the best which are cultivated in Provence,” twenty-two of the *White*, nineteen *Colored*, and seven of the *Black*.

The most favorite of the many varieties is that known as the “*Ischia*,” of which there are three kinds, the *White*, *Brown*, and *Black*.

*The Propagation* is a very easy matter. It is done by the Seed, Cuttings, Layers, Suckers, Roots, and Graftings. The best, most reliable, and earliest to insure fruit, is the process of *Layering*. The plant, if kept in a stool shape, which is for this latitude undoubtedly the best, will yield annually a number of layers. These, detached in the fall at the time of giving the parent plant its winter protection, and buried until spring, and then set out, are very sure, and come early into fruit.

*The Soil.* As to this, we would say, choose neither a wet nor a dry locality; rather what might be termed a moist soil. It is a French saying, that “the Fig likes to have its foot in the water and its head in the sun.” A light loam seems to be preferable, and especially a soil replete with calcareous elements. In *planting* and *training*, the rules followed in Fig-growing countries are not altogether applicable here, or at least in this latitude. In Europe, plantations are made. In England, walls are used; but with us the better plan is to grow the trees separately, and apart; not in rows, but scattered, and, if practicable, between other fruit trees. In this way disease, or an enemy attacking one plant, will not be communicated to the others. The most practicable form in which to grow the tree is in the shape of stools, taking great care not to allow them to become too thick or crowded. In this way it will be easier to give them their *winter protection*. Of all the fruit-trees, none require protection against winter frosts more than the Fig. If left unprotected in cold climates, it is sure to be killed down to the ground. Hence it becomes a very important question, how to afford this protection? It is a necessary evil connected with growing the Fig, and in any latitude where the tree can withstand the winter it is far better off without any protection. The uncovering the tree in the spring is attended very frequently by serious evils, in sudden checks, resulting in the loss of the first crop, and considerable growth of wood. Various devices have been resorted to for protection, but in this latitude the safest and easiest is to cover the tree with earth. This should be done late in the fall, before the ground freezes, and while it is yet fria-

ble and free from excess of moisture. The tree should be freed from all dead and unnecessary wood, the superfluous layers taken off, and the shoots gathered together and bound into a bundle with ropes of *straw*; (this is supposing the stool form;) then dig around the roots, and throw the tree over, so that the whole mass shall lay upon the ground; then pile on the earth and mound over to a sufficient depth to effectually exclude the frost; taking particular pains to finish the mounds so that they will not break open during the winter, and that the rains and snow may readily drain away from their bases. In removing this covering in the spring, corresponding care must be exercised not to wound the canes with the spade, and the time for uncovering should be delayed as directed in Part No. I., in the November number.



We have spoken of the Fig solely as an open air fruit, and therefore do not intend here to enter into the subject of forcing, or the acceleration of ripening by artificial means.

We have practiced, in the fall crop, the anointing of the eyes of the fruit with olive oil, which, despite all the sneers of the overwise, we have found to facilitate maturation in a very remarkable manner; the why and the wherefore we leave to more knowing ones to explain.

We are advocating the cause of a pet fruit, and if the attention of amateurs shall in any wise be drawn to the culture of the Fig by reason of any thing these

unpretending papers have put forth, their aim and object will then have been literally fulfilled.

*Explanation of the Drawings.*—They represent, one side, the section of a Fig, showing the flower within the fruit; on the other side, a branch of a Fig-tree, showing the summer fruit at D, the autumnal or second crop at A, B, and the rudimentary buds which appear in the summer, whose development is arrested by the winter, remain stationary until spring, and are then developed into the summer or first fruit. The portion of the branch bearing the summer fruit, D, shows how the leaves have disappeared to give full chance for the fruit to mature.

[Well, we were not wrong in estimating you above many Figs. Your historical allusions are very interesting; but there is one very interesting circumstance in its history to which you have not alluded: we refer to the fact, that at a very early period of the history of the world Fig-leaves were found very useful in making aprons.—In regard to winter protection, where the plants are grown in stools, the branches may be gathered into convenient bundles, bent down, and covered, without disturbing the roots, if this be preferred.—Ed.]

