

A CONSIGNMENT OF PRUNES

The Part That Humble Fruit Played in One Man's Romance.

(By John M. Oskison)

Tom Coffin watched, fascinated, but with a sense of irritation, the dean's black whiskers, cut to a formal Van Dyke, as the teacher talked. The dean spoke deliberately, accurately, and wasted a word now and then for the sake of polish. He could teach law as no other man in New York could—Tom was quite willing to agree with a lengthening roll of graduates who had gone out from the Morningside Heights school on that point. But—well, to put it bluntly, the dean had a chilling effect on Tom Coffin, "freshman law," a 1903 graduate of a California university where the professors, as he said, put "snap" and "ginger" and "personal magnetism" into their teaching to add zest to the process of getting an education. In a good many definitions, in football as well as in economic history, Tom's memory of academic shades was pleasanter than the New York reality.

Now, when he should have been paying the closest attention to "what constitutes an agreement," he was recalling a passage from his friend Abbott's good tale of a San Jose fiesta. It concerned his own well-beloved valley.

"The landscape lay beaten flat and gray under the retreating sunshine of Santa Clara, the hottest, kindest sun that smiles on California. File on file of green fruit trees, bending like weeping willows under their half-ripe loads, stretched back to the mountains."

That, in a nutshell, was the California Tom Coffin knew: acres and acres of prune orchards, with the vineyards mounting up the sides of the blue Coast Range on the west, and the big onion fields fixing their eastern limit somewhere between Santa Clara and Milpitas. Undoubtedly it was a more pleasing vision for a raw November day than a cool, formal dean afforded as he explained to the semi-circle of students that in every valid contract there must be a "meeting of the minds" of the principals. The hot, kind California sun that ripened the prunes was a blessed thing to remember. Here the wind from the Hudson was keen and bitter in late November. It froze people to a formal seriousness that was reflected in the young men who touched elbows with Tom Coffin in the classroom.

"Gentlemen," the dean was saying, with a rising, questioning inflection, "suppose that A. in California (Tom glanced up from his business of scrawling simple geometric designs on his notebook,) should write to B. in New York, proposing to sell a carload of oranges (why not prunes? Tom amended mentally,) at two dollars per crate, and B. mailed his acceptance of the terms on the day the offer was received, then, on the following day, received a telegram revoking the offer? Could B., in that case, enforce the contract in spite of the fact that A.'s offer had been revoked before B.'s acceptance had reached him?"

Tom let the question pass without grasping its significance. The carload of oranges, which in his mind had become prunes, set his imagination at work harder than before. Last summer it had come down to a definite choice, prunes or the law, and Tom had gone over the matter seriously with his father, whose prune orchards were producing the gold to pay for his legal training at Columbia. Law had won the day. It seemed to offer a more varied and promising future. But that was before Tom had "hit the freight East," as he expressed it, and "acquired perspective."

When the morning lectures were over, Tom went back to the apartment he shared with three other Western men, college mates in California. The janitor came up from the basement presently, bearing a small box.

"It came for you while you was all out," he explained. "Express charges all paid, sir." The janitor hesitated. The box was from his father. Tom laughed and gave the waiting man a coin.

"There's two-bits for your kindness, Storms."

"Two-bits, sir! Oh, that's what you gentlemen from California call a quarter! Thank you, sir."

Tom opened the box: A brief note lay on top of the packing:

"Here are a few of the choicest of this year's crop, Tom. I thought, perhaps you'd care to taste them. Your mother's letter didn't say anything about this kind of a Thanksgiving celebration, I noticed, but she'll agree that my idea was good when I tell her I sent these. Your Father."

"Prunes, or I'm a Comanche!" cried Tom. "And I've been thinking about the old orchards all the morning. Now we'll have to get busy on a hygienated Santa Clara-New York Thanksgiving feast. If only mother and Soy Sin were here to whip these prunes into a rich, creamy soufflé. I'd back that box against any Rhode Island turkey that old man Vose ever fattened for the white house! But I can't cook 'em, except in a stew. Notwithstanding, and in spite of the aforesaid objection, Dad was sure good and thoughtful to send 'em on!"

As if to make-it a "prune day" to the end, late brought Sydney Van Warne, in company with Morrow, one of the quartet occupying the apartment, to talk fruit growing in California. This gave young New York Tom a chance to hear his friends refer

to him as "Prunes" Coffin, and, since the matter had become one for serious consideration in the Van Warne family, Sydney sought the opportunity to get some first-hand knowledge.

"Why I wanted to come," young Van Warne explained, after Morrow had introduced him, "was because I've got a small brother of twenty-one with weak lungs. He's got to go somewhere and we've thought a fruit ranch would be the place for him. The fellows were good enough to tell me that you have mastered the alpha bet of prune growing and could give valuable advice to the ignorant."

"But you see I'm giving up prunes for law," Tom objected. "I'm hardly qualified to inspire enthusiasm in a stranger to the business. I can, however, show you a fine sample of the last crop from the Santa Clara valley." Tom showed his box of "samples."

"They look good to me," Sydney Van Warne laughed. "But I'll tell you what you do: you come over to our house this evening with Morrow and bring some of those to show my father, the kid brother, and the family. We'll find out all you know in that way. Now, I'm off."

The two went. Tom was glad of the opportunity of knowing Sydney Van Warne better and very much impressed with the idea of giving points on prune culture to the senior Van Warne, of Van Warne Struthers & Caulthrop, corporation lawyers of Cedar street.

As he was dressing, Tom reflected: "Now is my chance to show the Van Warne just what the superexcellent and succulent prune is really like when grown and packed by one who really knows. I'll just put about two pounds of these in a nifty Smyrna fig sort of a box. In cute layers, with shiny foil over 'em and justify myself as 'Prunes Coffin'."

"Why, sir, the prune isn't appreciated at all!" It was the elder Van Warne speaking. A chafing dish a row of plates containing delectable-looking "prune products," four interested young men, a gray-haired, spirited woman of fifty, and a girl of twenty in a fresh utility apron, flushed and bright-eyed, formed the exhibit that inspired the old lawyer's enthusiasm. Tom's two pounds of prunes had passed through the fiery ordeal of the alcohol flame and water-pan, as well as the greater share of the bigger box, which a hastily summoned messenger had brought from Tom Coffin's apartment. Every cook-book in the Van Warne kitchen library was piled at the lawyer's elbow.

"Mildred," resumed Mr. Van Warne, "don't you think that a prune compote might be tortured out of that chafing dish?"

"I think it might, father, if Mr. Morrow and Mr. Coffin want to stay all night, and the prunes and alcohol—and the cook—hold out!"

"My dear, it is late. I beg your pardon. Now let's summarize." Mr. Van Warne put the tips of his fingers together. "We have produced excellent prune soufflé. Prune meringue is first cousin to that. Prune pudding is here—as good as any pudding I ever tasted. Prune pie is feasible; we lacked the crust merely. Mildred, are you sure that this dish," he signaled out a deep glass receptacle—"contains prune jelly, lacking only the cooling and stiffening?"

"I'll stake my reputation as an expert on it," asserted the girl.

"Prune butter—in imitation of the good old apple butter of my youth—really, Mr. Coffin, the subject is just opening up! Think of the ignominious position the prune has occupied—stewed and stuffed and stuffed and stewed—since its introduction into America. There's a future for the 'Coffin and Van Warne Prune Products Company.' I assure you." Illuminated by the eloquence and fervid imagination of the old lawyer, the prune took on a new dignity. Even the thickest, languid Billy, the incipient "lunger" for whom the Van Warne family was planning, caught the fire of inspiration from his father's words.

"I'd go into the business like a streak," he cried. "If I had your faith and Coffin's knowledge. And I'm all for your Santa Clara valley, old man." He turned to Tom. "That hot, friendly sun, spotting the earth with gold between the black tree-shadows—Coffin, you're a California poet in disguise!"

"Young Billy took to the aesthetic side quick enough," Tom commented, as he and Morrow let themselves into their apartment.

"And Miss Mildred to the chafing dish experiments!" added Morrow. "Tom, you inspired her."

"Cut it out," advised Coffin. "I'm destined for a legal career."

"Why, sure!" laughed Morrow.

"Young Billy might go out and let the dad show him what prune growing really is," Tom ventured as he lighted a cigarette and kicked off his shoes.

"He'll be keen for it," asserted Morrow. "And that idea of the old man's—the 'Coffin and Van Warne Prune Products Company,' isn't a bad one."

"In my opinion it's excellent—make it a joint stock company, Tom, with the factory in the East, a selling agency in New York, the orchards in Santa Clara county, California, head advisory expert, Mildred Van Warne, and chief counsel—"

"Now, I'll look after that, Morrow. Go to bed. Enough of prunes today!"

Young Billy had to go somewhere for the winter, and Tom's idea, backed by his father's cordial invitation to spend some months on his orchard farm, prevailed. In his first letter home the boy wrote vividly of the valley and its beauties:

"Tell Tom Coffin that he doesn't do it justice by half. The sun wasn't so hot as I'd imagined it to be when I got here, but the early rains were

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on, and the best I can do in describing their gentleness is to quote a scrap I ran across in a local publication.

"The early rains have veiled the hills. The valleys hold a mystery. The happy coastward canon fills With gray mist from the sea."

There was more of the letter, and Mildred read it all to Tom; and through the winter other letters, some "full of prunes," as Tom observed weakly, and some merely the effervescence of a growing, strengthening young manhood intoxicated with the wine of a California winter. In June came one that brought a new idea.

"Why not send mother and Mildred out for a visit?" young Billy wrote to his father. "When Tom comes back for his summer vacation the three of them could make up a party."

"Of course, I'll be going back, too," Morrow reminded Tom when he was told of the plan, "and I can look after Mrs. Van Warne."

"I think you could do that, old man," was Tom's calm answer. "What I'd rather have you do, however, would be to explain to dad why in thunder I failed in four out of five examinations in law and the reasons why I'd better cut the dean's teaching in the future."

"The truth is," Morrow explained, "that the 'Prune Products Company' has clouded your brain, and so I shall maintain in the presence of your parents. Fate has settled you."

The four—Mrs. Van Warne, Mildred, Morrow, and Tom—made up a party that drove from the station at Santa Clara on a late June afternoon straight into the flood of sunlight that poured over the hills of the Coast Range.

"It's too late for the blossoms," Tom explained to Mildred, "but Billy will tell you about how they foamed out in the early spring."

"These are the 'Coffin and Van Warne Prune Products Company's orchards?" Mildred questioned as the carriage entered a long broad drive that led off the oil-sprinkled road.

Tom's answer was what an examining lawyer would call "incompetent irrelevant, and immaterial." He stole one of the girl's hands and, pressing it covertly, said delightedly:

"How much you resemble your brother Billy!" Then he added pertinaciously: "It's good to get back to the old Santa Clara valley!"

How to Cure Red Hands. Even doing housework, it is possible to keep your hands white and soft if you are willing to take a little pains about it. Whenever you can wear rubber gloves for dishwashing or when the hands are put into water. Get the gloves several sizes too large. For dusting and sweeping wear an old pair of kid gloves of your husband's or buy a cheap large pair. These are a great protection when working about the house.

Always after having the hands unprotected in water in which laundry or strong soap has been used wash them with toilet soap, and keep at the kitchen sink a bottle filled with a mixture of one-third glycerine to

two-thirds of rose water, with four drops of pure carbolic acid to one-half pint. Mix these and rub a few drops over and wipe. If you cannot use this every time do it as often as you can.

A nail brush, which is generally useful, may do harm by roughing skin that is dry. When women learn to use grease to clean their hands they will do much toward keeping them soft. When they are very dirty any grease like mutton tallow, or vaseline should be smeared on and rubbed in. This will not take a moment. Then wash in hot water and soap and the grease will come out, bringing the dirt with it without drying the skin.

At night wear cosmetic gloves. These are simple white kid gloves several sizes too large. The paste that is used with them is made of one-half ounce of powdered myrrh, two ounces of strained honey, one ounce of yellow wax and three ounces of water. Melt the wax in an earthen dish, set in a basin of hot water, and while it is liquid beat it in the myrrh. Remove from the heat and stir in the honey and rose water with sufficient glycerine to make the paste spread.

The easier way of using this is to spread the paste thickly over the hands and pull on the gloves. After spreading it on for three or four nights the gloves will be thickly coated inside, and no more need be added, but continue to wear the gloves.

The Man and Not the Dog Was Mad. Judge Richard W. Clifford is proverbial for his original humorous stories, and one of his latest is told of a complacent German who came rushing into the Circuit Court one morning before court was called and said:

"I want to get warrant for a man to kill a dog."

"Well, my man, you don't come to this court to get warrants in cases of that kind. If you want the dog killed you should go to a police court," said the judge.

The German started to leave, when the judge inquired in an interested manner:

"Did the dog bite you?"

"Yes, he bit me."

"Well, was the dog mad?"

"Was the dog mad? No, I was mad."

—Chicago Record-Herald.

There is much talk of "back to the land" nowadays. But, according to Professor Thompson of the Ohio Agricultural college, the tendency away from the farm is so manifest as to be the cause of great anxiety in many communities.

Quick Lunch Habit. Every time you swallow a quick lunch or go without your lunch or eat a cold sandwich while working or reading you are adding so many years to your life. It is the careless lunch habit which is spoiling the American girl's complexion.

WHAT TO EAT.

Stuffed Onions.

Boil medium-sized Spanish onions in slightly salted water for an hour, changing the water three times. Lift them out with a cloth and scoop out a part of the center. Fill the cavity with a dressing of two tablespoonfuls bread crumbs, one large teaspoonful grated cheese, one teaspoonful catsup, a little cream, salt and pepper. Mash a little of the onion centers with those wrap each onion in a piece of buttered tissue paper, twisting the end together securely. Bake in a buttered pan in a moderate oven nearly an hour more. Remove the paper, put in a buttered dish, sprinkle with a little salt and pepper and pour melted butter over the tops.

Baked Bread Pudding.

Put quarter-pound of bread crumbs into a bowl with quarter pound of flour, quarter pound of sugar, six ounces of currants and sultanas mixed and a pinch of salt. Then rub in six ounces of clarified drippings, and when thoroughly mixed stir in two eggs, beaten up with three-quarters of a cup of milk, and a small teaspoonful of baking powder to the flour before mixing. Pour the mixture into a well-buttered Yorkshire pudding pan, spread evenly and bake in a moderate oven. When done, turn it out, cut into squares, sprinkle plentifully with sugar and serve hot.

America's Salt Contribution.

Common salt was first made in this country in the Virginia colony some time previous to 1620. In 1633, when works were rebuilt, a considerable quantity of salt was exported to Massachusetts for use in the fisheries. America now contributes nearly one-quarter of the world's supply, consuming a large part itself.

Estimating the Sun's Heat.

By measuring the heat received from the sun on a certain portion of the earth's surface a scientist has announced that the temperature of that glowing ball is 11,250 degrees Fahrenheit, which is eight times as far removed from the freezing point as is a bright red furnace.

To Make Cloth Waterproof.

Cloth may be rendered waterproof by rubbing the under side with a lump of beeswax until the surface presents a uniform white or grayish appearance. This method, it is said, renders the cloth practically waterproof, although leaving it still porous to air.

Valuable Nitre Mines.

In the last twenty-five years Chile realized about \$300,000,000 from her nitrate mines. Senor Valdez Vergara calculates that in the next twenty years the outcome of the nitrate mines will exceed \$450,000,000 in value.

Longest Line.

The longest straight piece of railroad in the world is from Nyn-gan to Mourke, in New South Wales. This railway runs 136 miles in a level in a perfectly straight line.

\$50 Worth of Hardships.

The sailors of the steamship Cheltenham, which was seized by the Russian Vladivostok squadron July 2, in Japanese waters, were awarded \$50 each and the costs in a suit against the owners in London the other day. It took them three weeks by rail to go from Vladivostok to St. Petersburg. They nearly starved and suffered other hardships. The damages were granted because they had not been told on shipping that the vessel was to carry contraband.

Savage Women's Valuable Furs.

The women of savage tribes have not infrequently a wardrobe consisting of furs which would be worth from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Gruneman, the explorer relates, how one fair Greenlander wore a dress of seal skin with a hood of that costly fur the silver fox. The garment was lined with fur of the young seal otter, and there was a fringe of wolverine tails. About \$600 is probably the average worth of dress of Indian women of the Columbia and Fraser rivers.

Town of Streetcarville.

A suburb of Revere Beach, Mass., is known as Streetcarville. This name was taken from a large number of residences consisting of old horse cars, which a local transportation company sold off at \$10 apiece. The cars were arranged in regular street formation, and many of the occupants built piazzas in front and kitchens at the rear, making a fairly presentable appearance.

Bananas in England.

A few years ago bananas were seldom seen in English markets. Today they are almost as plentiful and as cheap as in the United States.

The Kaiser's Artistic Taste.

The refusal of the German National Gallery to purchase Prof. Kamp's "The Sisters," which was the picture of the season, still excites German connoisseurs. The cause of the refusal is the Kaiser and his often expressed belief that art should express only that which is cheerful and pleasant. According to the commonly accepted story, during the exhibition the picture was being piloted around by Prof. Kamp himself. When he reached the picture his majesty wanted to know who had painted those two miserable little girls. Kamp admitted he had done it. The Kaiser made no comment, but notice of the refusal of the gallery to buy the picture followed a few days later.

Tibetan Mark of Appreciation.

My first real Tibetan feast occurred in Darjiling, to which were also invited Dr. Yenyo Inouye (the Japanese "Borderland" philosopher) and Kang Yu Wei, the Chinese reformer and scholar. Our Tibetan host expressed his respect for us and appreciation of our remarks by rising to his feet and extending his tongue to its full length.—Eikai Kawasuchi, in the Century.