



Peaches.

BY MRS. C. S. NOURSE.

**P**EACHES are perhaps the most popular fruit in the world, and not certainly without reason, for though they are far from being the most valuable, the very circumstance which impairs their value to the cultivator and the merchant, their extreme fragility, enhances the appreciation in which they are held by the lovers of beauty

and of exquisite flavors. It is a tribute to their excellence that they are so highly esteemed, though they come in the midst of the abundant wealth of summer's completeness. They lay their downy cheeks against the purple bloom of the grape, and the brilliant gold of the pear, and compete with all the hosts of autumn's harvest, and yet bear off the palm.

The peach, though a naturalized American, is of very ancient family and oriental ancestry, as its scientific name *Amygdalus Persica* imports. Mr. Darwin thinks that it has not always been of as wealthy and distinguished a family, but that it sprang from, nay, that it may once itself have been, only a simple almond. The guess may not be without foundation, for we all know how closely the flowers of the almond resemble those of the peach in color, shape, and fragrance. At any rate, whether or not this is so, there is little doubt that it is indigenous to the East, and grows wild at present in Turkey and Persia. It was early transplanted to Europe, and was cherished with great care. In northern Europe they have never flourished in perfection, but in the southern parts of France they grow well, and some of the most beautiful

fruit is cultivated, but there is nothing of the abundance even there with which we are familiar in this country. The trees are treated almost as exotics, and the fruit never is sufficiently plentiful to be within reach of the poorer classes. In England the climate makes it necessary to be exceedingly careful in the selection of varieties, as many that in this country thrive with little or no attention, under her weeping skies produce fruit poor in flavor, and with little delicacy or tenderness of flesh.

But there are several kinds which attain, under scientific management, the highest perfection; of one of these the drawing at the head of this article is a specimen. The fruit is of a pale but rich tint of yellow, and the cheek scarlet lake, with rare markings of deep crimson. The English call it the Royal peach, as indicating the highest degree of excellence possible, but it is known to horticulturists by several other names, as the Bourdine, Teton de Venus, and the Late Admirable. It is described under all these titles, and by some authors their identity has been disputed, but is now generally admitted. It ripens about the end of September, and is considered the leading one among the late varieties. However botanists may divide the species, horticulturists separate the whole into two classes: freestones, or as they are called in Europe, melters, and clingstones. The former generally are earlier than the latter.

Besides the Royal, a splendidly colored and rich sort is the Chancellor; it has a decidedly vinous flavor. The name is English, but the same fruit is quite extensively cultivated in France. Two American varieties have been adopted by our English cousins, which have had exceptional success with them, for as a rule our sun-nursed fruits do not flourish without their native nutriment. These are



only brought to perfection by being trained against a south wall, where they can catch every gleam of sunshine.

It is indeed almost the universal custom to train the peach and its congeners, the nectarines, apricots, and plums, espalier, and by pruning and careful training to cause the branches to cover the wall closely, as does a grape-vine or a rose-tree.

In this country this is rarely done, and is seldom necessary, the danger to the peach being not from any want of heat or sunshine, but from the sudden changes of temperature which occur in our fickle climate during the winter. The treacherous warmth of mild days during the winter months raises the sap, causes the buds to swell slightly, and at night back comes Jack Frost and nips them sharply through their slightly opened vests, and the summer harvest is dead. It is not in the spring usually that the fruit is killed, unless the frost touches the expanded blossoms; the mischief is done by our heavy thaws and sudden cold. The peach, owing doubtless to the oriental blood in its veins, is a most excitable vegetable, and it is said will allow its sap to rise on much slighter provocation than its more prudent neighbors.

There would seem to be no means within human reach to prevent this, as the sanguine temperament of the tree leads it, like sanguine people, to be deaf to the lessons of experience, owing doubtless, as a late writer has it, to the total depravity of protoplasm. The famous American kinds are called in England by rather a singular conjunction of ideas, the George the Fourth, and the President. In America the culture of the peach has assumed wider dimensions than in any other country of the world, and has been more successful. In no other land is it brought within the reach of the poorest, and nowhere does it average such a standard of excellence.

It is a most profitable crop in fine seasons, and one that may generally be considered fairly remunerative. New Jersey and Delaware formerly raised more peaches than any other States in the Union, but of late years the yield has not been so great, and the fruit not so fine; but to make up for this, Michigan and California have raised immense crops. The climate of the former, would seem too severe, but the vicinity of large bodies of water tempers it, and the cold is more steady through the winter.

Of those kinds raised in the United States, the earliest is "Hale's Early." The name of the latest certainly marks it as American. It is called "Stump the World." Other leading kinds are the "Morris White, Ward's Peach, Crawford's Early and Late." The ease with which new kinds are obtained from seed has multiplied them indefinitely. A single writer in 1859 names one hundred and thirty.

No tree yields more prompt or richer returns to the grower. The seeds can be planted in rows, and worked much like corn, and when well cared for, instances have been known of the young stock yielding fruit in two years. It is common to bud them when about a foot and a half high. The work may be done very rapidly indeed, 2,000 buds being considered a fair day's work, but Yankee diligence and

"faculty" sometimes raises the number to 3,000. It is well that this is so, for the extent of these orchards, or rather farms, is immense. In Virginia some large orchards have been left without budding at all, and produced fine fruit. When the tree reaches its full growth, and the yield ought to be the greatest, it is attacked by various enemies. The "curl" is a disease affecting the leaves, which is believed to be produced by a minute insect, but it has not been proved. The yellows is the name of a kind of fungus, which when it matures scatters its fine dust-like spores upon the air, and they are carried from tree to tree in the orchard until all are infected. The only remedy is said to be to cut down, or burn the first trees in time, but I think if strict attention were paid to the laws of development of the fungus, other methods might avail. The peach borer is the most fatal perhaps of all the foes of the peach tree. It is an insect, really a moth, but resembling a wasp, which deposits its eggs under the bark near the foot of the tree. The larvæ feed upon the new wood, and destroy its health and vitality. If, when you take a stroll through your orchard, you see upon the lower part of the trees little collections of gum, you may take it as a warning that mischief is brewing. Take out your knife, and cutting off the gum, search beneath for the enemy; he is surely there, and there must be no quarter. The fruit begins to ripen in the latter part of summer, and the late kinds sometimes hang until the middle of October.

Large quantities of fruit are used for the table, and for this purpose they are sent to market in baskets, which hold only five eighths of a bushel, though usually called bushel baskets; the best assorted fruit is marked with a sprig of leaves. That which needs to be carried any distance must always be picked before it is fully ripe, and can never be quite perfect, lacking the last kisses of the sun.

It is computed that from three to four millions of baskets are annually sent to the northern market from the peach States.

Of late years canning has almost superseded preserving after the old fashion of our grandmothers. The headquarters of this enormous industry are in Baltimore, but large quantities are put up in other places, and so great is the competition that the cans are sold at very low prices. But with regard to this matter there is great need of stringent laws to make sure that the work is honestly done. It is true that inferior fruit may be used without much risk of injury, as it is necessarily cooked, but what shall be said of the wholesale poisoning which is effected by the use of cans which have been made of tin-ware adulterated with lead? The ware of which the cans are made should be inspected and tested by an appointed agent, as illness and death are frequently caused by the use of fruit put up in these cans. Even if no more serious result occurs, the fruit loses its flavor, and has a flat and slightly metallic taste. Persons should beware of purchasing any brands that are not well known and of established reputation. I wish I had room to give in detail the beautiful arrangements of one or two of these great houses, so that the nicety, and thorough meth-

ods of preparing and sealing might be appreciated, but my limited space forbids.

Home canning is largely practiced, and is found to be a quick and easy substitute for preserving, and more healthful. Perhaps the very best method is something between the two: when the fruit is thoroughly cooked with the kernels, add half its weight in sugar, and let it boil up once or twice to give consistence to the syrup. Glass jars are by far the best, though they should be kept in the dark, as light affects the taste and consistence of the fruit.

There are some abnormal varieties of the peach produced by cultivation, and some dwarf species which are natural; of the last, Australia has a dwarf kind which grows only two or three feet high. China has one which is almost flat, as though pressed between weights, and one, exceedingly sweet, which is long and crooked. According to some writers, among whom may be found De Candolle, the seed was brought to Persia from China.

The tree yields a substance which has been used as substitute for Peruvian bark in fevers, with good effect; and a resinous gum which is much like gum arabic, while from the leaves and pericardium of the seed prussic acid is extracted. In some species of *Amygdalaceæ* the whole plant is virulently poisonous. A few peach kernels, put into a vial of alcohol, make a pleasant flavoring extract, much less expensive, and quite as good, as the extract of bitter almonds which is sold in the stores.

In buying fruit trees, persons are often puzzled by finding the same fruit described under different names; from this cause great confusion arises. The only safe plan is to refer to reliable plates, which give exact representations. Close observation of the peculiarities of species will enable even the amateur fruit grower to distinguish with great accuracy. One of the best ways of ascertaining the variety is by the shape, color, and size of the stone. These all vary very much, some stones being nearly twice the size of others, and very differently marked.

There is also as great a difference in the tints of the flesh and texture of the skin as in color. They seem to touch every shade of yellow, and of red, from cream to deep chrome, and from a faint blush, to the richest crimson, the last degree in the latter scale being touched by the Sanguinole or Blood Peach. It is greatly to be desired that more rather than less attention should be given to peach culture, as it is one of the most wholesome articles of diet in either summer or winter, and there is no reason why it may not be preserved in the same manner as the West Indian fruits, *i.e.*, thoroughly preserved, then drained of all syrup, dried by artificial heat and packed in pulverized sugar. Those who have not tried this method will find it worth while to do so, and we hope that it may be done on a large enough scale to put it in competition with imported fruits of the same class, as it would certainly be cheaper and better than many conserves held in high esteem, and on which heavy duties are paid.

With the peach we take leave of all the delicate and perishable fruits. October brings us only the brown nuts and ruddy apples for the winter stores.