

See pages 50-53 for Brazil nut and pages 53-54 for the sapucaia (*Lecythis pisonis*)

POPULAR
ECONOMIC BOTANY;

OR

DESCRIPTION

OF THE

BOTANICAL AND COMMERCIAL CHARACTERS

OF THE

PRINCIPAL ARTICLES OF VEGETABLE ORIGIN, USED FOR
FOOD, CLOTHING, TANNING, DYEING, BUILDING,
MEDICINE, PERFUMERY, ETC.

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CHAPTER III.

NUTS.

THE vegetable products which are to be described under this chapter are many of them of considerable interest, both from their importance in a commercial point of view, and also from their botanical associations. The ease with which nuts of all kinds can be preserved and transported from place to place, and the agreeable flavour of such as are edible, render them valuable, either as food or as additions to our dessert fruits. Many of them are so familiar as to need scarcely any description, nevertheless the statistics of the commonest sorts are very little known to the public. Who would imagine, upon seeing the little halfpenny piles of those three-cornered nuts called Brazil nuts, lying upon the apple-stalls in the streets, that not less than 50,000

bushels of that nut are annually brought to this country, chiefly from the district of Para in the Brazils; and that they there furnish occupation to a large number of the male inhabitants, who are consequently styled Castanheiros, or Castanha (the Brazilian name) gatherers?

As we have mentioned the Brazil nut, we will give its history first.

THE BRAZIL, JUVIA, CASTANHA, or PARA NUT, is the fruit of a very fine tree, *Bertholetia excelsa*. (Nat. Ord. *Lecythidaceæ*, Lindley.) (Plate VI. fig. 27.)

It often reaches the height of 120 feet, attaining frequently a diameter of four feet at its base, and often rising a hundred feet before putting forth a branch. The Para forests contain this and an allied tree in great abundance, both yielding sweet nuts in profusion. The nuts are not borne singly, but are packed with most remarkable exactness, to the number of from twelve to twenty, in a hard ligneous capsule, which is nearly round, but inclined to the pear-shape; so hard and so heavy is this great pod, that when ripe, it is dangerous to pass under the trees, for even an Indian's head is not sufficiently hard to withstand the fatal blow of the Castanha Cabomba, as the Brazilians call them.

Many amusing tales are told of the monkeys, which are so fond of this fruit that they will patiently hammer the capsule for hours with a stone, in order to obtain the enclosed nuts. They watch the fall of the nuts from the trees with great eagerness; and should one of the capsules burst, it is the signal for an amusing scramble. Helter-skelter rush the quadrumanous sentinels of a hundred lofty branches, swinging themselves from bough to bough with their prehensile tails until they close upon the precious juvias, for which they fight with a determination which furnishes another point in their resemblance to the human race. The Indians are said to make use of the imitative propensities of the monkey in order to obtain the castanha crop: they pelt stones and other missiles at the monkeys, who, in return, gather the capsules of the *Bertholetia* and hurl them at their human opponents. By this means large quantities of these nuts are collected and transferred to the boats. The principal locality for the Para nuts is on the river Aripecurú, a branch of the Amazon; the time for collecting them is winter, when troops of Indian *castanheiros* ascend the river to obtain the harvest of nuts, upon which they depend for the year's subsistence. They frequently constitute the whole cargo of vessels of considerable burden, and the quantity

we receive from Brazil is, as before stated, not less than 50,000 bushels. The Para nut is one of the most wholesome of all the hard-shelled fruits, and contains a fine sweet oil, which is often expressed and used by watchmakers, and artists in oil-colours.

Closely allied to the Para nut, is

THE SAPUCAIA NUT. *Lecythis ollaria*, or Pot-plant.
(Nat. Ord. *Lecythidaceæ*.) (Plate VI. fig. 26.)

This curious nut is very superior to the last; its flavour is finer, and it is more digestible; but unfortunately these good qualities are as well known to the monkeys, which abound in the Brazilian forests, as to ourselves; the consequence is, that instead of pelting the castanheiros with them, they eat them, and we get but very few. The trees grow in the same localities as the *Bertholetias*, but the capsule is rather different: instead of being pyriform, or pear-shaped, it is urn-shaped,—hence its name of Pot-plant,—opening by a sort of lid, which falls off, leaving a large opening sufficient for the nuts to fall out. So eager are the monkeys to obtain the nuts, that they will thrust their hand into this opening, which they do with difficulty, and grasp the nuts; but the orifice which admitted the empty hand will not allow the egress of a full one, and the animal will torment

itself a long time rather than relinquish its hold. The Indians avail themselves of this cupidity to entrap the monkeys. They open the lids of several capsules, and then throw them under the trees: the greedy monkey will not be satisfied with one pod, but will thrust its hands into two, and will not relinquish its hold; the encumbrance renders its capture easy, and has led to a saying amongst the Brazilians equivalent to our "Old birds are not caught with chaff;" it is, "He is too old a monkey to be caught by a cabomba," the capsule being called by them a *cabomba*.

The Sapucaia nut is long, rather curiously but slightly curved in the S form, and the surface is deeply wrinkled longitudinally; the shell is softer than that of most nuts. It is to be regretted that this delicious fruit is not more generally known. The nuts come in small parcels, and are sold cheaply in consequence of the ignorance which prevails respecting their good qualities.

SURAHWA, SOUARI, or SUWARROW NUT. *Caryocar butyrospermum*. (Nat. Ord. *Rhizophoraceæ*.) (Plate VI. fig. 28.)

This large and singular-looking nut is the produce of a gigantic tree found in Demarara, whence we receive the fruit. The Surahwa nut is somewhat kidney-shaped, about half the size of an egg; it grows in bunches, and where the nuts



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26. Sapucaia Nut.

27. Brazil Nut.

28. Sarahwa Nut.

29. Cashew Nut.

30. Almond.

31. Ground Nut.