

The Parable of the Nuts by Weston Leibee

A certain nobleman owned nut plantations all over the world. He planned to host an enormous week-long Nut Exhibition at his estate with thousands of dignitaries and nobility attending. One of the primary purposes of the event was the display of his wide variety of nuts. So he called a meeting with his chief-harvesters and gave them the following instructions: "In light of the upcoming Exhibition, you are to organize my men and commence a great Nut Harvest. You must stockpile tons of nuts. I also want to ensure that every species and variety of nut that we have ever encountered or developed are available for my guests to sample. I can't tell you the exact date of the banquet, but get busy! It could be anytime in the next year."

Immediately the chief-harvesters organized crews of laborers to begin the Great Nut Harvest. Fortunately, the nobleman had thousands of acres in peanuts just several miles from his estate, so they concentrated the majority of the work there, realizing that it was by far the most efficient use of energy and resources and would yield the greatest harvest. The last thing they wanted to do was waste their lord's time or resources. After all, the banquet could be any time!

One or two of the chief-harvesters reminded the others of the nobleman's desire for variety as well as quantity of nuts, and so they dispatched small crews of workers to a few of their lord's distant plantations. Eight workers were sent to the macadamia plantation in Hawaii, five workers to the pine nut plantation in Thailand, and three workers to the Brazil nut plantation in South America.

All in all, things went on smoothly. The peanut harvest was quite phenomenal; the close proximity to the estate, excellent diet for the workers, and very efficient machinery had combined to produce a massive harvest. In fact, the peanut harvest was so substantial and the work force so large that they had turned their attention away from simple harvesting and had focused on perfecting methods of preserving and flavoring the peanuts. They developed recipes such as "Honey-Roasted Peanuts" and "Cajun Peanuts", which of course then required more machinery to produce and package in very beautiful wrappers and boxes. The peanut operation was definitely the highlight of the entire nut harvest operation, and the chief-harvesters could not help but be proud of it.

The walnut plantation several hundred miles north of the estate was also promising an excellent harvest. An occasional international delivery brought a few boxes of macadamias and pine nuts in from distant fields.

But there was a disturbing letter from the three workers that had been dispatched to South America. It was read at the chief-harvesters' weekly strategy meeting. In summary, the three workers were running against some major obstacles. The Brazil nut trees were proving very difficult to climb, there being no good machines in the vicinity to harvest them by any other method. On top of that, they couldn't figure out how to crack the nuts efficiently, and were

projecting at least 2 months and \$30,000 to develop a basic nutcracker capable of processing Brazil nuts. And they were asking for reinforcements as one of the three was desperately ill with a tropical fever. "This is ridiculous!" said one of the chief-harvesters, after hearing the letter. "We don't have the time or resources to invest in the Brazilian plantation any more than we already have. Let's call them back and put them on the peanut harvest." Most of the other chief-harvesters were in agreement, but one of them kept shaking his head, muttering something about the importance of variety in the Nut Harvest. He even brought up 4 remote plantations that he had come across in the records where, as of yet, no harvesters had been dispatched. But his exhausted, over-worked colleagues did not want to dwell long on that point. "We are doing the best we can," was their reply. The discussion shifted back to the main topic: increasing the flavor and shelf life of the peanuts.

Several more months of busy harvest passed. Then one day, at the weekly strategy meeting, the great Nobleman himself walked in unannounced. He looked expectant and obviously excited. "The great Day has come! Tomorrow morning the festivities commence! Let me see the harvest totals." The chief harvesters quickly gathered some papers together and handed him the most recent reports. The nobleman scanned the columns with expert eye.

"Hmm... '48 tons of peanuts, shelled, roasted and salted, numerous flavors, beautifully packaged.' Sounds like a lot of time invested in that one! '14 tons of walnuts, cracked and sorted.' Excellent! '8 bushels of macadamias.' Not much, but it'll do. '4 bushels of pine nuts.' I love pine nuts! 'Brazil nuts...' Umm, I can't seem to find any figure on the Brazils?"

He glanced up from the sheet toward the chief-harvesters, who were fidgeting in their chairs. "Well, sir," one of them began, "we tried on the Brazils but met with a lot of problems... we were very engaged with the peanuts and walnuts, sir."

The Nobleman's brow was creased and his mouth was set in a pensive line. "I am aware of your massive efforts with the peanuts and walnuts, but that does not take away from my disappointment at no Brazil nuts. None at all?"

But the Nobleman appeared to be looking for something in the harvest reports. He squinted hard through his spectacles and turned the papers he was holding from back to front, and then back again.

"What about my plantations in the Middle East? North Africa? Central Asia? I can't even seem to find them listed on these sheets?"

At this some of the chief-harvesters began to clear their throats and glance about nervously. Others seemed shocked that the Nobleman could be so worried about such a minor detail compared with the dizzying success of the peanut operation. But none of them were prepared for the shocking conclusion.

The Nobleman laid the sheets down on the conference table, folded his spectacles and buried his face in his hands. At long last he drew himself up. His expression was pained, and there were tears in his eyes as he said, "My dear, dear harvesters. Thank you for your efforts on the peanuts. But why, oh why, did you not obey my instructions? I clearly told you – as many nuts as possible and every species and variety. Can the exhibition be called a success if it exhibits not all of my nuts? In all your efforts you missed my will. You have failed me."