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Jordan Harbor Station Needs Improvement

Editor, The Canadian Horticulturist,—Allow me to commend the editorial which appears in your October issue relative to the Jordan Harbor (Ont.) Fruit Experiment Station. Both as a Canadian engaged in professional horticultural work in the United States and as a property holder in the Niagara district, I have watched, at first with hopeful interest, but latterly with keen disappointment, the failure of this institution to produce results of value to the fruit growers of the province or of scientific interest to those engaged in agricultural research and education. Your comment on the situation, therefore, meets my hearty approval, and I sincerely trust will bring about a movement for the proper support of the Station. As it has been my privilege to observe the work and organization of this institution from its inception, and to visit it from time to time ever since Mr. Rittenhouse made his first donation and proposals in regard to its establishment to the Department of Agriculture, it is possible that you or your readers might be interested in some of my observations in connection with its founding and work.

The Jordan Harbor Fruit Experiment Station was founded ostensibly for plant breeding, the chief object being to test and develop new varieties and to improve old varieties of fruits and vegetables for the Niagara district and the province of Ontario. Incidentally it was planned to collect data of scientific interest bearing on the problems of heredity as applied to plant life. I do not believe that the efforts of the Station should ever have been planned wholly with a view to limiting it to plant breeding experiments. Probably it was not really intended to exclude culture experiments of various sorts although the horticultural public was given the impression that its one chief object was plant improvement work.

Under such circumstances it was to be expected that the Department of Agriculture would make every effort to secure a well equipped and experienced specialist both in horticulture and in plant breeding to superintend the institution. In a long conversation some years ago with Professor C. C. James, who was then Deputy Minister of Agriculture, I was told that the Department was not limited in the salary it would pay the right man and that it proposed to get the best man in America. Professor James said that the Department was going after a man of the calibre of John Craig, late professor of horticulture in Cornell University, or Dr. Webber, then head of the division of plant breeding in the United States Department of Agriculture, to head the Jordan Harbor work; he added further that he hoped to obtain the services of a man superior in scientific training and at least the equal in possibilities of practical accomplishment to Luther Burbank! (The writer, who had had some training and experience in both horticulture and plant breeding, had had the temerity to apply for the position himself, but in view of the distinguished men under consideration he insisted at the close of the interview on the immediate withdrawal of his name from the list of applicants.) Such an attitude on the part of the Department of Agriculture was most commendable, and, at least at first, an

effort was made to secure such a man. Professor Craig himself, consulting with the writer in regard to the Station at Jordan Harbor, said that he had been approached and, when he could not undertake the work himself, was asked for and given advice in the selection of a director.

A CHANGE IN PLANS

In view of the high purpose and ideal which first actuated the Department of Agriculture in its search for a competent superintendent, it was a matter of great surprise that the first appointee, the lamented H. S. Peart, capable horticulturist perhaps, but absolutely untrained and inexperienced as a plant breeder, should have been its selection. The Station was more fortunate than the Department had a right to expect, for Mr. Peart was remarkably successful in carrying out preliminary work in the development of the Station, in laying out the grounds, superintending the planting and collecting material for future work. To those of us who knew Mr. Peart personally, and there were many, it was a pleasure to note the energy with which he set to work to make the farm a credit to the horticultural industry, and the manner in which he gained the confidence of the fruit growers of his district. Indeed, in spite of his complete lack of knowledge of the principles and methods of plant breeding, he might have produced the desired results, for he demonstrated his ability as a capable director in other directions from the very start. Without such training himself, without large financial support, and without experienced plant breeders as assistants, the plant breeding work could not be other than a disappointing failure even had Mr. Peart's untimely death not cut short his work at its beginning.

Your tribute to Mr. Hodgetts is well deserved. He has done splendid work for Ontario fruit growers, but the work of Jordan Harbor Station is of such importance as to make it impossible for a resident director to handle it. Such an arrangement as is now in vogue probably even the remotest possibility of the station accomplishing its purpose.

If any serious plant breeding is to be attempted, or any first-class experimental studies of the effects of fertilizers, different methods of cultivation, value of crops, systems of pruning, and so forth, are to be attempted, the Department of Agriculture must be prepared to expend money on a scale commensurate with horticultural interests of the province, bearing in mind the long time necessary for certain lines of work, and the difficulties confronting the experimenter, particularly in the case of orchard trees. It must appoint a horticulturist, a director who has received specialized scientific and practical training in both plant breeding and horticulture; it must give the director large powers of discretion in employing trained assistants and in planning a course of various experiments. The director should be advised by a proper committee as to the nature of the information which he is to seek in his experiments, learning the needs of the fruit growers of the province. He should be responsible to some one head, preferably the Minister of Agriculture or the President of the Horticultural College. Yours very truly,

B. S. PICKETT
Professor of Horticulture
University of Illinois

*Prof. Pickett held the position of Professor of Horticulture, New Hampshire College, from 1906 to 1912. Formerly he was Secretary of the Ontario Agricultural College, and recently he was offered the position of Professor of Horticulture in Macdonald College.—Editor.