

for canning. In this direction there appears to be an opening for an industry which would relieve this congested condition of the market from accumulations of cheap cuts, and which at the same time should prove a profitable investment.

BUTTER!

On several occasions last summer THE COMMERCIAL sounded a warning to the trade regarding butter. It was pointed out that the prices being paid by retailers to their customers for butter were higher than the market would stand, and that *somebody would have to lose*. It appears, however, that nothing but practical experience will suffice to thoroughly impress the wisdom of a certain course upon the minds of most people. So far as the butter question is concerned, this practical experience has now been gained by many dealers in this country, very much to their sorrow. It is now beyond a doubt that very heavy losses will be made by many Manitoba merchants in their butter trade of last season. Everybody holding any considerable quantity of butter in the country, bought at the usual prices paid to farmers last season, will certainly lose in the transaction. Coming in a close season like the present, this loss is especially regrettable. It had to come, however, and now that it has come, it is to be hoped the experience gained will not be lost.

The number of country dealers now holding large quantities of butter, cannot of course be accurately stated, but it is considerable. To these the loss will be severe. Round lots of butter have recently been disposed of in the neighborhood of 12 cents per pound, which cost country dealers from this figure all the way up to 20 cents per pound. The loss on a transaction of this nature will be apparent. Last fall a considerably better price could have been obtained, but many refused to sell, hoping for a better offer, notwithstanding the knowledge that butter begins to deteriorate in value the moment it is made. Last fall there was some demand from British Columbia for butter and a considerable quantity could have been disposed of in that quarter, though at best the British Columbia markets are limited. But holders here wanted too high prices, and consequently butter was shipped from Ontario, through Manitoba, to British Columbia. Later on quantities of Manitoba butter were shipped to the coast, but too late to meet with ready sale, as the markets were overstocked, and fresh butter was arriving from the States to the south. Now there is no market but to ship eastward, which means that very low prices must be accepted.

With the experience now gained, the butter question may be considered as practically settled. Next season merchants will no doubt begin to take butter only at lower prices than they have paid heretofore. The whole question can be summed up in a few words, namely: Buy butter cheap enough. Hereafter butter must be bought on a basis of prices which will allow of shipment east, if necessary, without loss.

There is another point which should be mentioned. A good deal of butter is taken in trade, and some dealers seem to think that if they make a profit on their goods, and sell the butter at about cost, they are doing very well. This is not a correct business principle to go upon.

Dealers should handle butter so as to leave a probable margin each way. They should buy so as to leave a clear margin on the butter, as well as the margin on the goods bartered for the butter. There is considerable trouble, expense and risk in handling butter, and some margin should be allowed for this. Where no margin is allowed for handling the butter, independent of the margin on goods, the profits upon the latter will be considerably reduced by the cost of handling the butter. A merchant might as well say that because he has made a profit on his last sale to John Smith, he will in future sell the said Mr. Smith at cost, as to consider that because he has made a profit on goods traded for butter, a direct profit on the sale of the butter is not to be looked for.

The price which may be safely paid for butter in Manitoba next season will of course depend upon the outlook in outside markets. At present quotations at Toronto and Montreal range from 10 to 14 cents per pound for ordinary medium to good dairy grades. In eastern markets butter is graded and sold more in accordance with quality than it is here. A great deal of our western butter would not grade over medium in eastern markets, and would therefore be worth in the neighborhood of 10 or 11 cents per pound in those markets. Some special lines of dairy butter, such as eastern townships, are quoted over 14 cents in eastern markets, but over 14 cents could not be expected for but a very limited quantity of our western butter. On the present basis of prices east, from 8 to 10 cents per pound is the very best that country dealers in Manitoba could afford to allow customers for the article. This would only leave from two to four cents per pound to cover the cost of buying and handling, freight, commission charges, besides which a small margin should be allowed for profit. The country dealer should allow a margin of about two cents per pound to cover cost of handling and provide a small profit. Then there are freight charges, cost of shipping and profits of the wholesale produce dealer, or commission charges. It is therefore evident that anything over ten cents per pound on the present basis of prices, would be more than the country dealer could safely pay to his customers for good dairy butter.

BURNING STRAW.

The shortage of feed this winter in some sections of the country, will call in question the advisability of burning straw. It is the custom throughout this country to burn the straw immediately after threshing. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of tons of straw are burnt in Manitoba, every fall, and last fall was no exception to the rule. Last fall, during the threshing season it was a common sight, in the rural districts to observe the sky illuminated at night from piles of burning straw, which had been set on fire after threshing, as a convenient way of getting rid of it. If the straw that was destroyed in this way last fall were distributed through the country, there would be no shortage of feed. Straw may not make as good fodder for stock as the natural prairie hay, but in seasons when hay is scarce, stock will not only eke out an existence upon it, but with proper care will come through the winter very nicely. In

some sections of the country, there is now a cry of scarcity of feed, while vast quantities of good straw feed were ruthlessly destroyed a short time ago. In this dry climate, straw properly stacked, could be kept in good condition for two years, and would answer very well for feed after having been kept over for a second winter. Instead of burning their straw immediately after threshing, it would show wisdom on the part of the farmers if they would carry their straw over until the following year, then if feed were plentiful they could burn it. In this way they would always have one crop of straw on hand, even in a year of general crop failure. If the farmers had followed this plan, there would not now be complaints of shortage of feed, and they would not be obliged to buy feed at high prices, in a year when their finances are low. To say the least, this custom of burning straw immediately after threshing, appears a very improvident one, and one which is certain in time to bring the usual reward of improvidence. It has already brought its reward to some, who are now feeling keenly the result of their improvidence in past years. The only excuse is that our country is young, and that many require severe lessons to teach them the necessity for providing for the future in seasons of plenty.

MEATS FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA.

The Calgary Tribune reports the shipment of several carloads of fat steers from that district to British Columbia coast markets. The cattle were gathered from several ranches in the district and were, according to the Tribune, in prime condition. This shows that the cattle must be standing the winter well, notwithstanding the unusual snow fall of this year. When fat cattle can be taken from the ranches at this time of year, they must be coming through the winter in good shape. Alberta no doubt will be able in a short time to supply all necessary requirements of the British Columbia markets in the meat line. Frequently we read in the coast papers items telling of the importation of butchers' stock from the states to the south, especially in the line of sheep and hogs. A great deal of mutton is imported to Victoria and other points in British Columbia from Washington and Oregon. Recently, owing to the floods in those states, which prevented the shipment of mutton, the supply of the article in Victoria was exhausted, and prices were advanced to twenty cents per pound. Alberta is well adapted to raising sheep, and in a short time these British Columbia markets should be supplied from our own ranches, and thus the necessity for importing would be obviated. With the development of the mining industry in the interior of British Columbia, there will be a largely increased demand for meats at good prices, and the benefit to be derived from this should largely accrue to the ranchers of Alberta, who should endeavor to be prepared to meet the demand.

In addition to holding their straw over for one or two years, there is another way in which farmers could provide against years of scarcity in fodder. This would be to put up a double supply of hay in years when the natural prairie hay crop is very abundant. There would be no cost in doing this, except the labor of securing the hay. In this dry climate hay properly saved and stacked would keep fresh for a couple of years, and in case of a light hay crop in the meantime, the farmer would be well supplied.