

The Grub and the Price

(Concluded from page 15.)

I am not saying he should not have a profit. I am merely pointing out that he gets in between the normal flow of supply and demand and queers the whole deal. He has fixed up a cute little toll-gate on the old highway at which the public must pay; and not on eggs alone.

Naturally I do not charge any trust or price arrangement between various cold storage concerns. That would be too shocking. It would be illegal; also immoral; also hard to prove. Besides, it isn't needed. All that is needed is the policy of buying perishable things as cheaply as possible when they are plentiful and must be sold, and selling them as dearly as possible when nobody else has them in any quantity. The result is the same. If anybody ever heard of competitive buying between cold storage men, or of a cut-rate competition in cold storage stuff he has heard more than I have. Yes, the cold storage men are fairly wise birds.

An economist might argue that this proves the truth of the law of supply and demand, because the price goes up when the supply is small. But the point is that it is merely the visible supply which is small. The whole condition is artificial, strategic, capable of withholding supply till the price suits.

That is manipulation, rigging the market. In the early days, before its possibilities were realized, cold storage was merely a plan to save perishable stuff. The honest simplicity of pioneers is proverbial; but their successors restore the general average of guile. The story of the egg is a mere single instance, showing that present prices cannot be explained satisfactorily by any cut-and-dried economic theory. Instances might be multiplied. The heart of man being deceitful and desperately wicked he will devise ways of beating any game.

Before laying the egg gently aside I desire to pay a humble tribute to a department of the public service which, in a campaign for thrift, alleged that there was money in eggs, and advised law-abiding citizens to keep hens. I desire to say in the politest manner in the world that this was absolutely punk advice. The same department is now advising the people who took the advice to hustle around and buy mill screenings, buckwheat, mustard seed, burrs or any old thing at all to feed the said hens, because real feed is scarce. More bad advice. Kill the hens.

In order to go broke all the average man has to do is to keep enough hens. I am not speaking of miracle workers, but of the common or garden variety of hen owner. He can't produce eggs with feed at present prices and break even. If he fools with cheap, inferior feeds, he won't get eggs. The

situation has him in a split stick. You may eat shavings or cute little mattresses yourself and call them breakfast foods, but you can't con the hen that way. Wheat is the laying basis of the Canadian hen. Cut off her wheat and she will cut down her eggs, and you merely lose what you ante for inferior feed. That is the system she plays. You can't talk wheatless days to a hen. I keep hens myself—almost enough to go broke on—and I know something about it. Time was when the eggs I sold paid for the feed, and the eggs I used in my house were velvet eggs, so to speak. But long before wheat hit this summer's price there was no velvet.

Feed wheat this summer cost three-and-a-half cents a pound f.o.b. Calgary. Not No. 1 wheat, mind you, but chicken feed, frozen, broken stuff unfit for anything else. Robbery? Certainly. The farmer got perhaps a cent or a fraction over a pound for it, and somebody else tacked on two cents. But there it was, and the hen owner who had to buy feed was up against it.

With feed wheat at such a figure you would naturally expect eggs to be high also. I mean high in price, for paradoxical as it may seem, we expect high eggs to be fresh and perhaps fresh eggs to be high. But in eastern B. C. at least, eggs were low in price. The producer got from twenty-five to thirty-odd cents a dozen, which did not begin to give him an even break on feed prices.

THE MAN WHO RINGS THE BELL

Nobody asked this man to get up on a platform in front of what looks like a magnified thermometer with a rail-splitting mawl, and his only aim in life evidently to hit a block hard enough to ring a bell at the top of the chute. In fact, when he first undertook to try it nobody took much interest in him. But the bell was several degrees higher than anybody else under the same circumstances had ever tried to ring it in the time he had at his disposal. As he seemed to be up against the improbable, if not the impossible, the crowd soon began to leave other attractions just to watch this man trying to ring the 50,000 bell.

Without taxing your imagination you have already surmised that the man who is doing this is nobody mentioned in any directory. He is, in fact, a composite man. The power of his elbow is not merely his own. He stands for the strength of a number of people all as interested as he is in ringing that bell.

When the Canadian Courier, something over a year ago, set itself the task of getting a circulation big enough to justify the part of the map it covered, nobody had any fixed ideas of just how it might be done. We believed that, once we had made up our minds to the task, a way could be found as we went along.

CANADA we understood to be a country of vastly variegated interests. It was impossible for any daily paper, however big, to represent these interests effectively. Every big daily depends for its clientele mainly upon one big city. Most weeklies have some sort of local attachment to the places in which they are published.

The Canadian Courier had, and has,

no such local attachment. It was necessary to produce it in one of the bigger Canadian cities because the kind of paper it is demands in production specialized labour that can't be got in a small town.

Some days ago the Premier of Canada sent a message of congratulation on the achievement of a national telegraphic news service for Canadian newspapers involving the use of 6,000 miles of Canadian leased wires. That was a step in the unification of the newspaper service of Canada.

The Canadian Courier is not exactly a newspaper, but for ten years it had been working the same principle of unity on the public-interest features of Canada. It was necessary to get the man in Halifax to get the point of view of the man on

Vancouver Island. The weekly illustrated paper was the only way this could be done.

This has been said before. It is recalled here merely to illustrate what it means for the Canadian Courier to be setting out to ring the 50,000 bell. How this can be done is already being outlined by the kind of service the Canadian Courier is already giving to its readers. In subsequent issues, every other week, if not oftener, we shall furnish a prospectus of who the people are, what they intend to produce, and what the general character of this 50,000-circulation national weekly will be in order to get the result we are aiming at in this period of 1917.

IN making up the list of Canadian contributors and contributions to a Canadian National Weekly, we are reminded that it is no longer necessary to harp on the word "national" in order to get people interested in a paper of that kind. Neither, when the word "national" is used does it need to imply that the contributions will be of the dull, diligent variety whose chief aim is to define what we are in the nation, what Canada is in the Empire, and all that sort of thing.

We believe that the truly Canadian thing is just as interesting as a similar thing done in any other country. We have our own problems, and our own ways of looking at them; our own pictures and illustrations; our own stories and story-writers; our own poems and poets. It is time we had. If this country is to hold her place among other peoples we shall need to tell ourselves every once in a while, as loudly as a woman writer does in this issue, that once a thing is known to be thoroughly Canadian in subject and treatment it's equivalent to saying that it's absolutely as good as the best going anywhere.

