

Better Ways of Handling Our Wool.

Editor "The Farmer's Advocate":

The Commissioners appointed to inquire into the sheep-raising industry in Canada have brought in a report in which they did not hesitate to state the naked truth, regardless of whether it would prove popular or otherwise.

The paragraph upon which I wish to make a few remarks reads as follows: "From shearing to marketing, no country in the world handles wool in a worse manner than Canada. We do not know of any country where it is handled in such an unsatisfactory way and delivered in such bad condition."

This is exactly what we have been telling our customers for years, only in modified language, as we imagine such a plain statement coming from a wool dealer or manufacturer would be resented by the wool-grower.

Our firm has been manufacturing Canadian wool since the year 1870. Our average daily consumption is now 3,800 pounds of wool, at least 95 per cent. being Canadian. I mention this in order that your readers may understand the situation and our relation to the subject under discussion. The Commissioners, in their report, stated from shearing to marketing the wool is badly handled. As a matter of fact, the great bulk of Canadian wool gathers dirt from the time the fleece begins to grow: burrs in the summer, chaff in the fall, and hay and pea straw during the winter months. Then, as if this were not sufficient to reduce the value of the wool to the lowest point, the shearers too often make it still worse when they clip the sheep on a barn floor or in a straw pen, or under the evergreen trees, where they proceed to roll up the wool with whatever foreign substance adheres to it, without ever a thought of the tedious work they are entailing upon the wool sorter, or the fact that the wool thus damaged must necessarily be unfit for goods for which it might otherwise be used.

In some cases the wool-growers and the shearers may not be aware that burrs and chaff and other dirt is detrimental to the value of wool, but one can scarcely imagine that there is any one living in Ontario who does not know better.

I overheard a conversation between a wool-grower and a merchant last week. The merchant remarked, upon opening the bundle, that there was chaff in the wool. The reply was that, last year, although his wool was clean, he did not receive a cent more for it than his neighbors whose wool was filled with dirt and burrs, so, continued the seller, "I decided I wasn't going to go to any trouble in keeping my sheep clean when my neighbors sold their wool and dirt for the same price." This is not an exceptional instance, by any means. The buyers in Ontario are mostly merchants or grain-buyers, the majority of whom are not familiar with wool, and who buy it as it comes, fine and coarse, clean and dirty, trusting that the good will balance the bad, and it is all bought at the same price. The manufacturer or wholesale wool dealer who buys the wool from the merchant is usually asked to make two bids. One to buy the wool flat (or in bulk), and also to quote prices on the different grades selected.

Owing to the keen competition between manufacturers and wholesale dealers, the wool sold at flat rate brings within one cent, or even one-half cent, per pound of the price of the wool which is bought selected, and the buyer often has cause to regret his bargain, as there may be more inferior wool in the pile than he expected. The manufacturer loses on the deal. The farmer who sold clean wool for less than it was worth is out on the transaction, and the farmer who sold his damaged wool for more than it was worth has the melancholy satisfaction of knowing that he sold inferior produce at the current market price, instead of having a first-class article, which would not have cost him one cent more to produce.

As long as the business of buying and selling wool is continued in this slovenly way, just so long will wool be grown and sold in its present unsatisfactory condition.

Wools from foreign countries are sorted into various grades, not only fine and coarse, but there are many degrees of grades or cross-breeds. A small sample by mail may be sent to represent a certain grade of wool, and a manufacturer depends upon receiving this in a uniform quality, which may be purchased at any time, and one year after another, with little or no variation from the sample.

The Canadian wool varies from the coarse Lincoln and Cotswold wool to the fine Shropshire and Southdown, with many mixtures of cross-breeding; but, notwithstanding this conglomeration of sorts, the fibre of the wool grown in Canada is second to none in the world for strength and lustre. In spite of this natural advantage, however, the Canadian wool-grower, by his careless methods in handling, has been the cause of this natural product having the unenviable distinction of being the worst wool in the world. The largest percentage of Canadian wool is tied

up with binder twine, heavy tags are frequently rolled up inside the fleeces, burdocks matted in the necks, while often the whole fleece is filled with them. There is but a comparatively small per cent. of it absolutely free from chaff, burrs, etc.

The wool-washing in many cases is very imperfectly done. Dipping would be a more suitable word to describe the so-called washing process. We prefer unwashed wool just for this reason, as over 80 per cent. of the fleece-washed wool has to be washed again before being manufactured, owing to the amount of grease and dust which it contains.

After washing the flock, instead of keeping them in a grassy plot until the wool has at least partially dried, they are allowed on the roadway, and, as they love to lie in the dry dust, this adheres to the damp wool, making them like dirty Tim of whom we read in the school books years ago—far worse than they were before. It is customary, also, to delay the shearing for too long a period after the washing. The result is that wool, even if carefully washed, is dirty again before it is shorn.

Tub wool is wool that has been clipped before washing, and is afterwards washed by hand in a tub, trough, creek or pond, as the case may be. Most of the wool shipped from Manitoulin Island is tub-washed, and very burry. The greatest objection manufacturers have to clean, tub-washed wool is that it is so mixed together that it cannot be sorted into the different grades into which the fleeces are divided by the wool-sorter.

BRITISH COLUMBIA AND WESTERN WOOL.

This wool is nearly all unwashed. It is extremely greasy, and shrinks from 50 to 60 per cent. in washing. Our experience with Western wool is that, like the Ontario wool, the fine and coarse is mixed indiscriminately together. Carloads from certain ranches have turned out satisfactory, while wool from others was in wretched condition. It is quite apparent that wool with the Western sheepman is regarded merely as a by-product.

We recently opened up two cars of British Columbia unwashed. There were fleeces in this which each contained from one-half to two pounds of tag locks which had never been detached from the fleece by the shearers. These were pickings which were not worth the freight; and, in the same bales, the most beautiful fine wool, equal to any Australian Merino, as well as coarse, hairy fleeces not worth more than half as much. The sorters opened each succeeding bale with expectant interest. They found lambs' tails, old sheep skins which had lain on the prairie, the remains of sheep long since perished. There was a motley array of sticks, tins, paper, wires and rags, including a man's cotton shirt, which, judging from the artistic patches, had been repaired by a batchelor with a darning needle. We do not attribute the condition of this wool to dishonesty or deliberate fraud on the part of the Western ranchers, but believe it is probably due to gross carelessness.

Not having seen the last part of the Commissioners' report, I do not know whether they suggested any remedy for improving the condition of the Canadian wool crops or not.

It seems to me that the wool-buyers and the

manufacturers must bear their share of responsibility, as the method of buying wool at a straight price for bad and good together has been a premium on carelessness, and has had a baneful influence in depreciating the quality and value of the wool grown in our fair Dominion.

The greatest burden of responsibility, however, must rest upon the wool-grower, who, in this enlightened age, can scarcely plead ignorance to justify his slovenly methods in producing this valuable commodity in its present unsatisfactory condition.

The principles of integrity and uprightness must be observed in every industry, if it is going to succeed. If it is a national industry, a comparatively small number of unprincipled partners will be the means of bringing disrepute upon the whole concern. For instance, for how many years Canadian apples did not command their rightful place in the markets of the world, owing to the fraud practiced by a very few careless or dishonest packers, who shipped cull fruit in the barrels, with good fruit on top. When good stiff penalties were meted out to the offenders and the fraud ceased, the demand increased, and the Canadian brand has since advanced to the position to which it was entitled.

If the Canadian wool is to command the important position which, according to our most optimistic hopes, we believe it can and will occupy in competition with wool from other countries, there must be a universal improvement in the methods now used by the Canadian farmer in caring for the growing wool.

One reason that the woollen manufacturers use imported wool is that a great deal of the Canadian wools are not fit for the purpose for which the manufacturer requires them. For instance, it would not be possible to sell underwear or knitted goods manufactured from dirty wool. How many of your readers would care to wear an undershirt choke-full of burdocks.

It is interesting to note that, at the sheep-breeders' convention, held in Toronto on February 9th, several of those members present advocated a duty of 10 cents per pound on foreign wools being imported into Canada. I feel sure that no amount of duty imposed on foreign wool would be instrumental in changing the present bad condition of the wool grown in Canada, nor raise the price one iota. In my opinion, it is a mistaken idea that a high tariff can be instrumental in changing wrong conditions to right, or that it will make an industry flourish when there is something radically wrong with the management. I never was very much in sympathy with the woollen manufacturer who claimed that a high tariff was the only remedy for all their wants and woes in their uphill fight against difficulties which the woollen manufacturers in Canada have been struggling with for many years.

As it has often been remarked, the majority of those who had the greatest difficulty in the struggle were the ones who were manufacturing shoddy with antiquated machinery. The factories which worked pure wool and made honest home-spun goods are still in existence.

I heartily approve of the suggestion made at the convention by one of the speakers to place a duty on shoddy. I would go one step farther and say a prohibitory duty not only on the

LATEST QUOTATIONS

HAY	\$16.50 per ton
STRAW	\$10.00 "
OATS	50¢ per bushel
BARLEY	\$9.50 per ton
PEAS	\$12.50 per bushel
BUCKWHEAT	70¢ "



A Market Day Chat.

Discussing the high cost of living.