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The Picking, Packing and Marketing of Fruit*

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ONE would think that after half a century had passed in practical experience along the line of picking, packing and marketing of fruit, that little remained to be said that would be of any great value to operators. Volumes have been written along educational lines, addresses by the thousands have been delivered bearing on the subject, millions of packages have been marketed and every conceivable method has been practised. There have been object lessons in every form. Experiment after experiment has been tried. Operators, some of whom have been in the business for upwards of thirty years, have had an opportunity of profiting from past experience. One would naturally think, therefore, that the subject "Picking, Packing and Marketing of Fruit" would be worn threadbare. But it would seem that there is much yet to be learned by the growers and handlers of fruit in order that their operations may prove successful. The question then we must ask ourselves is: "Wherein does the trouble lie?"—and if we are fortunate enough to trace it to its proper source, then apply the remedy.

Why is it that fruit handling has proven to be such a problem? Is it because there are insurmountable difficulties and conditions standing in the way of its successful carrying out, or is it because of the indifference and bad judgment of the operators? As I have no desire to be unfair in my criticism of those who are engaged in the trade, I am ready to admit that there are more conditions surrounding the fruit trade in all its branches than in all other trades along agricultural lines combined. While this is true, and while it calls for the closest possible care and attention, I am prepared to show that there is no trade in Canada in the handling of which can be shown the same indifference and bad judgment or a greater lack of good methods. I know that the difference between its being well and poorly handled is the difference between success and failure.

When is the proper time to pick? This is a debatable question. There is one

general rule, however, on which there can be no debate, and that is that every variety should be at least fairly well-matured and showing at least a fair share of color, character and finish, before being plucked from the tree. It is a well known fact that thousands of barrels of our apples are hurried off to the market at such a stage of immaturity that, if one were not guided by the name of the variety on the package, even an expert would be puzzled in some cases to name the variety.

WHEN TO PICK

It is the picking of our winter apples at the proper time in which there is so much involved. We had a striking object lesson last season. Thousands of barrels of our best fruit were damaged

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THE CANADIAN HORTICULTURIST is a credit to the publishers and deserves the support of every householder in the country. I sincerely hope that its circulation may be doubled each year until it may be found in the home of every respectable family in Canada.—Thos. Beall, Lindsay, Ont.

on the trees by frost. This frosted fruit went forward, some of it in a very bad condition. In my judgment this was partly, if not largely, the cause of the bad condition of the market. The frost came on the 20th of last October.

Now, the question is: Should our winter apples be picked before that date?" A learned judge, in giving judgment last season at Shannonville, in a case where frozen apples were in question, remarked that the Lord had sent the frost and we should not question what he had sent. Of course we all agree with him, but could we not agree with him and, at the same time, save our apples from frost?

HARVESTING WINTER APPLES

I am going to take strong ground here as to the proper time to pick our winter apples. The period for harvesting of our winter apples is, and has been, too long. I hold that this period should not extend over more than three weeks.

When the end of that three weeks should be, is a debatable question; but from past experience, it would seem that there is grave danger of damage from frost when fruit is left on trees later than the 20th of October.

The dealers will say with one voice that this is impossible. Of course it is under the present methods. When a single buyer will purchase 20,000, and often 30,000 barrels, a part of September, all of October, and often a part of November is consumed in picking winter apples off the trees. There is something radically wrong with this system. Each year there are thousands of barrels picked immaturity on the one hand, and on the other hand, there are thousands of barrels left to wind and frost to be gathered up and marketed in some way.

There is but one way to carry out what I contend—namely; that the picking period should not extend longer than three weeks—and that is that the growers must pick their own apples. I care not how they sell their fruit or whether they pack for sale or not. It is impossible to harvest our fruit properly and in season any other way; all other ways have been tried and found wanting.

PACKING

Packing the fruit is, perhaps, the most responsible part of the whole proposition. What constitutes a good packer? Ten years ago a good packer was a man that could take two-thirds of a barrel of poor apples and one-third good, and turn out a barrel of choice XXX Canadian apples. A good packer to-day is a man who, if he finds there are no No. 1 apples, in the orchard, will put them up as No. 2. (all that are fit for that grade), and do his work well and as rapid as possible.

It is in the packing after all that the whole trouble is centred. No matter how good the intention of those who direct the work and have their money invested, they are forced to employ all classes of men, in respect to some of whom, to say that they are careless and unscrupulous, would be using mild expressions. Those who employ the latter class are certainly "in the hands of the Philistines."

One of the common faults of packers is that, when they enter an orchard or

* Adapted from addresses delivered at Fruit Institute last winter.