

The Canadian Apple Situation

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quantities of apples bought at high prices were thrown back on the original buyer's hands. But even without this episode, the collapse was destined to come. The trade had not been conducted from the beginning in accordance with prudent business methods. The prices were too high, and the quality of the pack was inferior.

The local buyer as a rule is an intermediary between the grower and the real purchaser. He is perhaps paid by the barrel for his work, and yields to the tendency to increase his pack; or, if he is on salary, and "lumps" a few orchards, he wishes to pack as many barrels as possible in order to justify his estimate, and vindicate his good judgment. As long as apples are bought in this way, the proportion of inferior fruit in the pack will be altogether too great. There is no doubt that, the inferior quality of the apples put on the market last year was the principal cause of the season's unsatisfactory business.

INFLUENCE OF LOW GRADE FRUIT

Low grade fruit not only sells at a loss; it brings discredit upon fruit that is really good. Retailers, who would willingly handle good apples, lose interest in apples altogether if they find that the bulk of the offerings consist constantly of undersized, unsightly, ill-keeping, wormy and scabby apples. Markets, accordingly, become depressed even though the apples arrive in good condition, and the quantity on sale is not excessive. Some years a good grade of No. 2 apples may pay to export, if they are shipped direct from the orchard; and even from the fruit-houses. No. 2 Spies and Golden Russets may, if the market is strong, sell at profitable prices. But buyers, packers, farmers and dealers have all learned by costly experience that it would be better for the trade and for all trade and for all engaged in it if no apples below the first grade were exported at all. The barrel costs as much for poor apples as for good ones, the freight is the same, the sorting and packing cost a great deal more, and the wastage is much greater. Factories, evaporators and cider mills pay for such apples quite as much as they are worth, foreign markets have plenty of poor apples of their own; and we have room enough to supply an indefinite quantity of apples of

the very best grades. It is rare that a loss occurs on a shipment of good apples; it is equally rare that a profit is ever made on second-class apples. Better pay \$2 a barrel for No. 1 apples on the trees than set No. 2 apples for nothing, is the deliberate opinion of a veteran exporter.

How then to eliminate or at least reduce to a minimum the export of No. 2 apples, is the most important problem in the apple trade. Each buyer must solve the problem in his own way; but, theoretically, it should not be a difficult one. Poor apples will always be with us, but they cannot be packed and exported of their own accord.

DETRIMENTAL TO DEALERS

Other changes detrimental to the dealers and to the trade at large have also recently developed. Formerly, when apples were bought by the barrel, and the farmers picked the apples, boarded the packers and hauled the barrels, expenses were not nearly so great as they have since become. Less than twenty-five cents a barrel would cover them all. But now-a-days a dealer is fortunate if his expenses of buying, picking, packing and shipping do not exceed fifty cents per barrel. In addition, the cost of barrels has increased fifty per cent, while the material is poorer; and the dealer has endless trouble in procuring a sufficient and regular supply. The labor obtainable at apple-picking time is unreliable, floating and inefficient. And all these troubles are aggravated by the shortness of the season, delays in obtaining cars, and the necessity of having the apples taken care of before the frosts appear. With all the development of the trade, the extension of markets, the better, quicker and cheaper transportation, the more active and general demand for our apples, dealers cannot afford to pay any more for the fruit than they did twenty years ago.

It is obvious that if the trade is to prosper, the growers ought not to stand aloof and throw unnecessary work on the buyers. The expense of the packers, the picking of the apples and the teaming of the barrels can be undertaken by the farmers at far less cost than by the dealers, and all these expenses must in any event come out of the value of the fruit. Growers may combine into associations with excellent results. There is no doubt that this movement is beneficial to the trade. But associations can only cover a part of the field. Farmers have not sufficient opportunities for becoming successful traders. Apple-packing requires expert skill; the markets have to be studied; problems of transportation and finance are continually arising that tax all the long acquired and special knowledge of the trader. In exporting other kinds of produce, the farmer may be successful for a time, but the experience usually ends in disappointment. Similarly, in the case of apples, an intermediary trader is required between the grower and the distant salesman and no one can say with any conscience that this trader is making undue profits.

How to promote co-operation between the growers and the buyers with the object of minimizing expenses is, doubtless, the most difficult and complicated problem in the trade. The extreme cases are where the farmer sells his apples for a lump sum, relieving himself of further responsibility; and the farmer who packs and ships his own fruit. No general solution can be suggested but surely it ought to be possible in most individual instances to effect by mutual help a considerable saving



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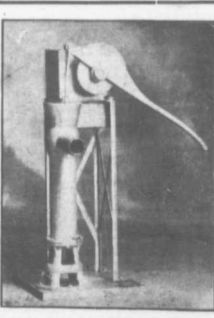
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