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SULPHURING OR BLEACHING DRIED FRUIT A MISTAKE, IF NOT A CRIME.

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The subject of this paper should command the careful attention of consumers of dried fruit, of conscientious fruit dealers, and of all health authorities. Fruit is now regarded more as a necessity than as a luxury, the want of it being a common cause of ill health.

As fresh fruit is not always obtainable, various methods for preserving it are in use, drying being one of the oldest and best for many fruits. Middle-aged people recollect when sun or air drying was the only method for market. Then some good housewife discovered that more rapid drying by artificial heat, with or without the addition of sugar, was a cleaner method, safer against fermentation and decay, retained the flavor better, and the fruit was also lighter colored, than when sun or air dried. The present evaporators are only an enlargement of the idea of such more rapid drying, while canning consists in the exclusion of the micro-organic germs of fermentation.

This is an age of progress, yet experience often shows that not all changes are improvements. It is about fifteen years since the sulphuring or bleaching of dried fruit began. At first only the uniform light color was sought, as in apples, pears, etc., but for some years past nearly all the large evaporating establishments have "sulphured" all kinds of fruits and some vegetables, and now much of the California sun-dried fruit for market is also treated in the same manner. The light color, especially of apples, early attracted unthinking consumers and commercial men, thus materially increasing the price of such fruit. That caused

the practice to spread even to those who disapproved of it. The expense and trouble were very slight. Fruit so treated is said to dry more readily, consequently all now prefer to do it.

While the apparent change is only in color, there is a loss of the natural fruit flavor, even by the most careful sulphuring. Unfortunately, some people do not notice the difference, but careful comparison shows it, as is admitted by the manufacturers of such fruit.

The practice began in California with apricots, as early as 1879. At the Twelfth State Fruit Growers' Convention, held in Fresno during four days in November, 1889, a paper on "Fruit Drying" was read by J. L. Mosher, of San Jose, and in his paper he remarked: "If fruit be picked before ripe and over-sulphured to produce whiteness, it is devoid of its true rich taste and flavor, and *only requires polishing to make buttons.*" (The italics are his.) In discussing the paper, one gentleman said: "I believe sulphuring the fruit is the greatest mistake in the world. I do it, but I believe it is wrong; the flavor of the fruit is gone after it is sulphured."

This change in quality was the first thing that called the attention of the writer's family to what was lacking in the "nice, uniformly colored" bleached fruits.

Later investigations have proved the presence of sulphate of zinc, "white vitrol," in all samples of fruit where zinc surfaced trays were used to hold the sulphured fruit while drying. Interested parties have charged the German prohibition of American evaporated apples to rival trade opposition, but there is no German fruit to compete with them. The real cause was the finding of zinc poison in considerable quantity. A good paternal government aims to protect its people.

WHY SULPHUR FRUIT AT ALL?

The advocates of sulphuring fruit say: (1) It dries quicker, (2) looks better, (3) keeps better, and (4) sells better. Besides, it makes ripe, unripe, and poor fruit all look alike; and if not so good for it, but few know it.

Sulphurous acid is formed by burning sulphur, and is readily absorbed by water. It abstracts oxygen from many vegetable substances, and thereby bleaches them. It also tends to prevent microscopic organizations that cause fermentation.