

the letters uninterruptedly; but, unfortunately, on my arrival here I found myself from insufficient sleep, and, perhaps, a little overwork, obliged to put myself in half harness, which meant the discontinuance of some of my duties for a time. Being now quite rested, and about to return home, I hope to be able to carry on the series to completion with little or no further interruption.

I am glad to say the prospect of a Dominion convention is exceedingly good; that the local associations have generally responded to the suggestion, and all have appointed delegates. The date which will best meet with the convenience of those with whom I am in correspondence appears to be the second week in April. After complete arrangements shall have been made, a circular will be issued from Ottawa, and due notice be given through the press.

Faithfully,

W. H. LYNCH.

Washington Territory, February, 1889.

### LETTER X.

If my farmer friends will take a lump of butter fresh from the churn, work it over well—a little too thoroughly—and, without adding any salt, serve it at table, when from two days to a week old, they will have a very fair impression of what sort of butter is eaten at most of the London tables. The average Canadian, or American, visitor to London will find the butter so “flat” and “tasteless” that he will make a practice, for a time at least, of sprinkling upon it a little salt. When he returns here he will tell what excellent butter he ate in London. If my readers were to visit Normandy, in France, where a large proportion of butter eaten by Londoners is made, they would find that the intrinsic quality of this butter is not better, on the average, apparently, than the butter ordinarily made on Canadian farms. Yet, when the butter made on this side of the water, which fresh from the churn would be pronounced excellent in London, when it has been worked, salted all it will bear, has stood the test of package, transportation and marketing, and has at last found its way to England, it would be utterly denied a place on a London table.

There is a teaching on the very surface of all this. For one market at least—and that one the market of the British metropolis—butter is the better liked the nearer it is to the churn, and the freer it is from salt.

It may be an open question whether Canada will find it possible or profitable, under the severe conditions of competition, to cater to the London taste. Yet a study of the butter question would have been incomplete without an enquiry into the methods of existing supply. Normandy was the district which naturally would be chosen for such enquiry.

The system in Normandy is peculiar. In the market towns there is one market day in each week. The market days of adjoining towns are two days apart. Market towns are near enough together to allow most of the farmers to reach two or three markets each week. Churning days and market days are the same. Everything is planned to do the churning in the early morning, and the butter is then brought to market not only fresh from the churn, but absolutely unsalted, and only somewhat imperfectly worked. It goes without saying that every means are taken to keep the butter cool.

There are a considerable number of merchants who attend each of the different markets. Thus it happens that the same set of producers meets the same set of buyers, two or three times a week, though only once a week at any one town. The system results in an extensive trade, lively markets, and stiff competition.

It is a novel experience, a visit to one of these Normandy market towns on market day. The early morning trains bring in the many buyers, and the one horse carts bring in the country people with their newly churned butter in baskets, tubs or pails usually well wrapped up in damp cloths. Traders by the score open up stalls in the open squares or the wide streets; each supplying his own special line. The peasant leaves with these traders a fair share of the gold which the buyer pays him for his butter.

Each butter merchant is provided with a number of large baskets and wrapping cloths, a weighing scale, also a table or desk, a cash box, and a book of tables for rapid calculation. It is astonishing to note the rapidity with which the buyer receives, weighs, prices, and pays for the butter, and throws it into the huge baskets, ranged side by side, to be filled with the different grades of quality.

The mystery of the apparent instantaneous estimate of value of butter, or pricing of it, is explained when one learns that each merchant has one or more buyers moving about the market among the peasants, examining and bargaining for the butter and scratching on the butter itself the price per pound agreed upon. The butter is therefore practically sold before it is brought to the merchant or his receiving clerk, who has only to weigh it and pay the price agreed upon. Some of the larger merchants are assisted by one or more clerks, to record the sales and pay for the butter, and all are kept busy for two or three hours until the butter is all sold and bought. It is a scene of business activity that inspires a feeling of admiration of the business qualities of those engaged. The receiver deftly turns the butter out on the scale, tosses the empty basket and cloth back to its peasant owner, weighs the lump, calls out the number of pounds—“*Vingt six à vingt quatre sous*” (24 lbs. at 12 pence)—and calls for the next. The clerk must needs be lively in his movements to glance at his reckoning tables, make an entry of the purchase, count out the amount, in gold, silver and coppers, and be ready for the next weighing—“*Cinquante à vingt trois sous*.”

I could not quite understand by what rule the butter was assorted in the different baskets. Generally, it seemed to be done according to price; but watching closely, I noted some exceptions not easily accounted for. It may either have been a mistake on the part of the receiver, or it may have been a difference in judgment between the buyer (who fixed the price) and the receiver who weighed and assorted the butter.

Again, neither the prices paid nor the assorting of the lots as received accorded with my ideas of quality. In my humble judgment the butter was graded on a different standard from our ideas of butter quality, and on a lower level than that upon which our finest qualities are judged. I observed a buyer toss one lot of butter which was possessed of a fine tinge of color into a basket containing butter of a dull, dead color. In explanation he told me that “color” did not count—they judged only by the “odeur” (odor.)

The fact that the butter was to be artificially colored was, doubtless, one reason why so little was made of color. Yet, the natural color or appearance of butter ought to be taken into account, as being, in itself, one indication of quality. The use of the term “gilt-edge” by Americans, applied to the very finest quality of butter, is a just appreciation of the importance of color, or tinge, or blush, as an indication of intrinsic quality.

I noticed, however, that consistency, or solidity, was taken into account practically in the estimate of value; for one buyer, with his hand, squeezed out a heavy proportion of water, and fixed a low price, giving the valid reason that he was “buying butter, not water.” The occasional tasting of butter by buyers proved that flavor also appeared in some degree to be considered, as, of course, it should be.