



Peach orchards of J. W. Smith and Sons at Winona, Ont.

FRUIT AS A BUSINESS

*A Profitable Occupation with the Charm of a Hobby
Business men who are Fruit Growing at Niagara*

By F. G. H. PATTISON

LAST month there appeared in this journal an article entitled "Fruit Growing by City Men," in which the writer stated that the influx of city men into fruit growing was revolutionizing the business in the way of scientific production, and that as a consequence the fruit farms are becoming larger. This is true only in a limited sense.

In the Niagara District, comprising that stretch of country lying along the shores of Lake Ontario, extending from Toronto to the Niagara River, the fruit farms so far from becoming larger, are being divided and sub-divided into smaller and smaller holdings all the time. Twenty-five years ago the average farm in that part of the country was about 100 acres. To-day 25 acres is considered a large farm, and there are numbers of farms of from 3 to 10 acres, out of which their owners are making a handsome living for themselves and their families.

Such a condition of things is ideal, both for the Province of Ontario and for the Dominion of Canada. Nothing can be better for any nation than a large community of prosperous small owners, practising intelligent intensive culture, so as to get the most out of the land, while at the same time raising families under conditions most likely to produce the best class of sturdy and independent citizens.

Business principles have already been extensively applied to fruit-growing in the Niagara Belt, by means of which both individuals and co-operative associations have attained a high degree of success. An evidence of this is that nearly 50 per cent. of the fruit grown in the district is sold direct to retailers on order, whereas in the United States the old stupid way of handling it through commission men is still adhered to almost entirely. One consequence of this is that the Niagara District growers get higher prices for their fruit as a rule than the U. S. growers do, while at the same time the private consumer pays no more.

Business men engaged in fruit growing are of two classes. The first, and most successful, consists of those brought up on fruit farms, who know the practical details of fruit growing from the ground up, and also combine with this business capacity and experience. From this class come most of the men "who have arrived" in the fruit business, and whose names are household words. Some of them are not only conducting a fruit business with success, but also allied businesses as well, such as the buying and selling of fruit, the growing and selling of nursery stock, the running of jam canning and basket factories.

The second class consists of those previously engaged in business in the cities, who have been attracted by the supposed easy profits on the one hand, and the pleasures of a country life on the other. Some individuals in this class, who have been content to gradually acquire the necessary practical experience, and have applied their previous business training to the management, have been quite successful. The great majority of city men, however, who take up fruit growing, are content to reap their dividends from the enjoyment and pleasure they get out of a country life, and from boasting to their city friends of the wonderful fruit and vegetables they grow. But their balance sheet will not bear examination from a business standpoint.

In the Niagara District the fruit business has become a very intricate one, demanding an immense knowledge of practical details regarding diseases,

works of cultivation, spraying, varieties, and so on, some of which can be learned from books, but most of which must be gradually acquired by practice and experience.

The writer referred to in the opening paragraph also says that the farmer will not learn to co-operate because "this requires business experience and ability." If he is referring to the man who raises grain as a main business and fruit as a side-line, he may be correct. If he is referring to the fruit-farmer as I know him, he is wrong.

Within the last year or two, however, city men from Toronto, Pittsburg, and Hamilton, have gone into fruit growing propositions in the District upon a considerable scale, and have formed several companies, the chief of which are The Niagara Fruit and Land Co., managed by T. B. Revett, of Toronto, who have about 1,400 acres of orchards near Niagara-on-the-Lake; The Bell Fruit Farms Co., managed by T. D. J. Bell, of Grimsby, who have about 600 acres near Grimsby; and The Jordan Harbour Peach Ranch Co., managed by Mr. Dobson, of Hamilton, who have 150 acres of peaches and cherries at Jordan Harbour, and who last year shipped peaches to England with some success.

All these ventures, however, are as yet in the "trying out" stage, and have been going too short a time to have proved successful or the reverse, nor are they, with the exception of the first-named, larger than several fruit farms successfully handled for years by practical growers; as for instance, the extensive fruit farms and businesses of E. D. Smith, of Winona; J. W. Smith and Sons, of Winona; W. H. Bunting, of St. Catharines; William Armstrong, and The Fisher Brothers, of Queenston; and many others.

There are a number of co-operative associations now established in the District, the chief of which are, The St. Catharines Cold Storage Co., The Ontario and Western Co-operative Fruit Co., and The Canada Fruit Co.; but there are also a number of others, all more or less successful. These companies are generally controlled by a board of practical growers, who employ a manager of good business training to handle the distribution of their fruit, and who pay him a good salary.

In the writer's opinion this way of handling fruit is the best, that is to say, a number of experienced growers, owning farms of a moderate size, uniting together, and packing and selling their fruit under the superintendence of a capable business manager.

Mere Suburbanism

SOME persons seem to think that the movement of city men out to the country offers a solution of country problems. It usually offers only a solution of a city problem—how a city man may find the most enjoyment for his leisure hours and his vacation. The farming of some city men is demoralizing to real country interests. Probably not much permanent good would come to rural society from the moving out of some of the types of city men or from the farming in which they ordinarily engage. One must not confuse suburbanism and gardening with country life.

It is also proposed to send to the country the

poor-to-do and the dissatisfied and the unemployed. This is very doubtful policy. In the first place, the presumption is that a person who does not do well or is dissatisfied in the town would not do well in the country. In the second place, the country does not need him. We may need more farm labour, as we need more of all kinds of labour, but in the long run this labour should be produced mostly in the country and kept there by a profitable and attractive rural life. The present back-to-the-farm cry is for the most part unscientific and unsound as a corrective of social ills. The open country needs more good farmers, whether they are country-bred or city-bred; but it cannot utilize or assimilate to any great extent the typical urban-minded man, and the farm is not a refuge.

It seems that what is really needed is a back-to-the-village movement. This should be more than a mere suburban development. The latter enlarges the boundaries of the city. It is perfectly feasible, however, to establish manufacturing and other concentrated enterprises in villages in many parts of the country. Persons connected with these enterprises could own small pieces of land, and by working these areas could add somewhat to their means of support, and also satisfy their desire for a nature connection. If the rural village, freed from urban influences, could then become a real integrating part of the open country surrounding it, all parties ought to be better served, and the social conditions of both cities and country ought to be improved.

Making Farmers in Town

AMONG the remedies for city congestion suggested by the New York Commission are public school courses in gardening in conjunction with lectures on farm life for city children and practical instruction in agriculture for pupils of rural schools.

The logical effect of such instruction would be to counteract the drift away from the farm and to make agricultural themes attractive to city dwellers. Whether or not they would result in repopulating abandoned farms, the recommendations are interesting as indicating the development of the new movement in which educators and captains of industry are combining to persuade an element of the population back to the land.

In this connection a recent bulletin of the United States Department of Agriculture discusses "farming as an occupation for the city bred men." The man reared in the city who wishes to become a farmer needs experience more than anything else. Without it his capital, if he has any, may melt away before he has become acclimated. He can get experience by serving an apprenticeship as a farm laborer, but that would mean a sudden breaking away from all his old habits. It would be hard schooling. Therefore he is advised to betake himself to the suburbs and begin there in a small way as a gardener. At first his principal aim should be to produce truck crops for home consumption. As experience is gained the industry may be enlarged and a market established. Pleasing tales are told of men who have begun with one or two cows or a few hens and have become opulent farmers. The slowly acquired knowledge or the details of farming and marketing enables the beginner to abandon city employment and become a full-fledged farmer.