

## Fruit and Co-operation.

### A Notable Lesson.

The fruit industry of this Dominion languishes, while that of the United States flourishes. Why? There is more enterprise there than here. The growing is not the difficulty. Every one can do that. It is the selling. Heaps of fruit-growing places in the States are far from markets. The growers of fruit have bridged the spaces by co-operation. Canada has done the same for the Atlantic Ocean. We publish below the lines on which the thing has been done in the States, in order to interest New Zealanders in the way they should go, with the fruit the Government experts can teach them to grow.

From Philadelphia "Saturday Evening Post,"  
a Paper established by Benjamin Franklin,  
and still a power.

In the valley of the Grand River, in Colorado, about midway between Denver and Salt Lake, there is now a fine deciduous fruit region some twenty-five miles long and from three to ten miles wide, with a planted area of about twenty thousand acres—a blossoming handbreadth on the slopes of the Rockies.

As late as the eighties Indians occupied the valley and there seemed no particular reason for begrudging them possession of it. "There was nothing here," says a fruit grower, "but a desolate waste of light-coloured, insignificant-looking soil that many a prospective settler passed up at fifteen to twenty dollars an acre." Water was there, however—Grand Junction, the metropolis of the valley, standing at the confluence of the Grand and Gunnison rivers.

In the eighties a few fruit trees were planted, and as those trees began to bear, men with an eye for such matters could see plainly enough that the bare valley, with its light-coloured soil, contained the making of a remarkable fruit district. Indeed, fifty dollars has been picked from a single tree there, a thousand dollars from one acre; and last year the valley shipped out more than two million dollars' worth of fruit.

The Grand Valley orchardist, however, had an unusual proposition to deal with. Directly east of him lay the formidable and sparsely populated barrier of the Rockies. To the west was a great stretch of scantily peopled and more or less barren plains. Moreover, the sorts of fruit that he could raise most successfully required no special conditions of climate.

Apples, for example, are decidedly the most important product of the valley, and, broadly speaking, they grow apples everywhere. The problem was how to induce an Eastern or Southern man to buy apples in Western Colorado, and pay the freight, when he could buy them next door. Obviously, as a rule, this could hardly be done by selling him apples cheaper than he could get them next door. Freight charges alone would often prevent that; but it might be done by selling him better apples. About the only way the Grand Valley grower could hope to succeed on a large scale, in short, was by making himself a sort of orchardist *de luce*.

### Success in Spite of Mistakes.

That he has succeeded on a large scale is partly due, of course, to soil and climate, but it is also due to the Grand Junction Fruit Growers' Association. At first, as usual, the marketing problem was simple, for when the output of the valley was small, points comparatively near by took the fruit readily at fair prices. As soon as the output exceeded the most obvious demands, trouble began. In 1891, a handful of growers met and organised the Grand Junction association for co-operative marketing.

"We organised with seven directors and an authorised capital of twenty thousand dollars," says A. B. Hoyt, one of the original incorporators. "At that time these seven directors represented the bulk of the fruit shipped out of the country. Each director took from five to ten shares of stock, paying down half the par value and agreeing to pay the other half at the end of the season. Some of them had to borrow the money to make the first payment. Fruit growing didn't look like a very good thing then. Practically everything was shipped by express, and the charges were high. We had no experience in picking and packing. Everybody used his own judgment; so there was no uniformity, and we had no inspection system. We were without commercial standing and could not buy supplies except on a guaranty from our local bank.

"On this matter of supplies, however, we were successful from the start, saving money by co-operative buying. In other respects we made a good many mistakes the first few years, but we held on and fought it out, believing we had the right idea and learning a good deal even from our mistakes."

For several years the success of the association was very small. The greatest of its mistakes is described by Mr. Hoyt as follows: "At first we elected a new manager every year—in other words, sort of passed the honour around. This gave us a green man for each year's business, and the result was rather disastrous. In 1897 we elected Mr. J. F. Moore and he has been manager ever since, growing up with the business. From that time our real success dates. Under Mr. Moore's able continuous management the association has expanded steadily and fruit-growing in the valley has expanded with it."

The association now handles about seventy-five per cent. of all the fruit grown in the valley and has over eight hundred members. Its capital stock is one hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Only fruit growers in the valley may subscribe to the stock, and no one man may hold over five hundred shares. Each member sorts and packs his fruit in the orchard according to instructions laid down by the association; then hauls it to the association's loading platform at the nearest shipping point. There an inspector opens several of the packages and examines the fruit, giving the grower a receipt that shows the number of boxes of each grade and variety. The grower's number, the grade and variety are also stamped on the box. The boxed fruit is then sorted on the loading platforms and each variety is loaded separately. This has been found a great advantage, made

possible by co-operation, because certain markets have preferences for certain fruits. Some varieties of pears, for example, will often bring a high price in New York, though in other markets the same pears will hardly bring enough to cover the freight charges. Still other points have a decided fancy for red apples. If several varieties of fruit were packed in the same car some of the fruit, owing to these market preferences, would often be sold at a loss.

### California Methods in Colorado.

It is only in the last five years that the association has gone after the trans-Missouri market in a big way. Indeed, several years of experimenting and education were necessary before growers learned how to pick and pack fruit for long-distance shipment. It was Manager Moore's idea that Grand Valley apples, peaches and pears should be sold in substantially the same way that oranges and lemons are sold by the California Fruit Growers' Exchange. To accomplish that result careful packing and grading and rigid inspection were necessary. One of the association's first moves was to discard barrels. For one thing it is very difficult to inspect a barrel of apples, while the contents of a box can be easily inspected by opening a side. Again, boxes give the grocer a small unit to handle, and experience has shown that a great many families will take a whole box of apples when they would not take a whole barrel. The association introduced boxed apples into the Eastern and Southern markets—meeting, of course, a vast deal of opposition from conservatives who wanted their apples in barrels simply because their fathers' apples had always been in barrels.

For handling trans-Missouri business the association opened an office in Omaha. The reputation of its fruit is now so well established that practically all apples are sold before they are put on the cars, by forward contracts specifying that so many cars of a given variety and grade are to be delivered at a stipulated price. In the case of peaches and pears the association or its agent at Omaha, endeavours to find a buyer at a satisfactory price before the car reaches the latter point. If a sale is not made the car is sent on to some Eastern auction market where conditions seem to be most favourable. In each of the large markets the association has its own representative to look after every car, disposing of it by private sale, or, if put up at auction, seeing that it receives proper treatment.

To improve the quality and pack of the fruit has been a foremost object of the association ever since it was formed. Early in the spring it sends out a circular letter to growers urging the necessity of pruning the orchards, and it employs an expert to instruct new members in the best methods of pruning. A little later the association sends out a letter advising orchardists to spray for certain insects, and telling them the best way to do it. An expert, employed by the association, will visit any member's orchard and give instruction in spraying. Again, after the fruit has formed, the association sends a circular instructing members to thin their fruit, so that the trees will develop nothing but large-sized specimens.