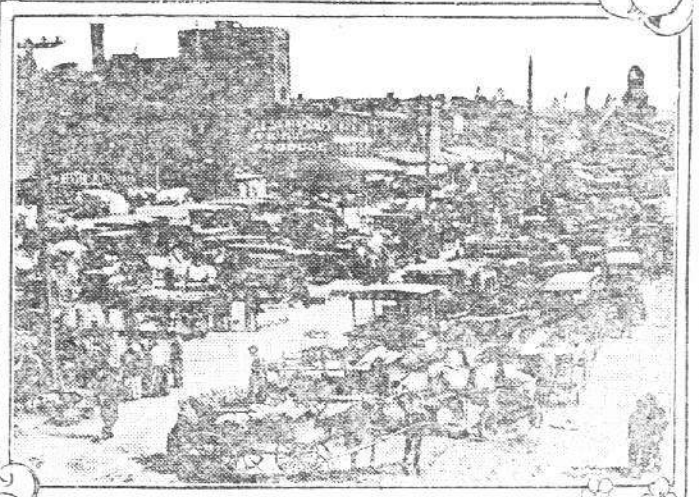
My Fight With the Middleman

SPRAYING



A CITY MARKET

GRADING AND PACKING

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SEVERAL years ago, in response to the urge then prevalent of "Back to the Farm," I traded my large city property for an 80-acre apple farm in the Ozark mountains. This farm had once been exceedingly valuable, but under a non-resident owner and a very shiftless tenant it had been allowed to degenerate till it was almost valueless. I took possession in July and the gross receipts for sales that fall from the entire farm were less than $80—less than a dollar an acre in income.

I had moved to the farm with my family and I devoted that winter to studying apple culture. I procured and read all the pamphlets issued by the national government and the state on this subject and corresponded with successful apple growers. By spring I felt myself competent to assume control. Under my direction we pruned and plowed the orchard and sprayed at what we thought the proper time. We had a large crop—or what seemed to me a large one—picking more than 4,000 bushels of apples. They were, however, of poor grade and affected with bitter rot and San Jose scale, while the curculio moth made heavy ravages. My net income was $700.

I realized now that it was necessary to appeal for help. I did so. Upon the suggestion of the state board of agriculture I secured the services of a young man just graduated from the college of agriculture, where he had spent four years in studying fruit raising, particularly apples. He came to the farm in January and I at once put him in complete charge.

He knew his business. I believed in him from the start. To watch him prune the trees was an inspiration. He took the utmost care not to infect one tree from another, using aseptic solutions with his tools. He cut the trees till I feared there would be little left. But most of all to be admired was his method of determining when and how to spray. From the various trees he cut cultures which he forced to grow in fruit jars, and watched them for the development of the various kinds of diseases. With this knowledge he set his time for spraying, and mixed his ingredients to fit the special cases.

The result was astounding; that very year we harvested more than 8,000 bushels of apples, and more than three-fourths of them were of first grade. My old farmer neighbors who had laughed at the "college feller" who ran my orchard, now came and admitted that he was right and asked him to give them suggestions with their own fruit.

But not yet had I succeeded; for I learned that it was not enough to know how to raise superior apples. I must also learn how to market them. We sold them through the usual channels of the jobbers in the large cities, and our income for the whole season was but slightly more than $1,600—just 20 cents a bushel on the average for first-class fruit.

The jobbers reported to us that our shipments came at a time of glutted markets, or were so badly damaged on the way that they had to be sacrificed. One carload of Jonathans which I had carefully selected and packed myself, knowing that not a poor apple went into the boxes, was turned into vinegar as being too small and too poor to be sold for eating; at any rate that was the report sent us and upheld by affidavits. For this carload we got $160.

During the winter I formed a new campaign. I moved to the city, leaving the farm in charge of my tried and true assistant. The week before the Jonathans were to ripen I visited every grocery store in the city, large and small, and offered to deliver to them such apples as I showed as samples, for $1.90 a bushel box, prepaid. As that grade of apple was then selling to the retailer by the jobber for $2.50 at the least, they were pleased by my offer, and within three days I had sold three carloads—1,800 boxes. I wired to the farm to ship them, and gave the express company the names and addresses of the consignees.

About ten o'clock in the morning of the second day the express company telephoned me to come down at once. I did so, and there found all my apples but 100 boxes, piled in the hot depot. Every shipment except one had been refused by the dealers. They had not even opened them for inspection, and in most cases had refused to let them be unloaded from the delivery wagons.

I started out to learn the cause of this extraordinary behavior. My first inquiries were unsuccessful, the dealers evading answer. But after a while I found an old German who was willing to talk, and he told me that the jobbers of the city had sent an agent to see them the day before and told them that if they took my apples as agreed, the jobbers would refuse them further "courtesies"—which meant they could buy no more fruit from the regular wholesale dealers. In self-protection, therefore, the retailers had to decline my shipments. The one who had dared to disobey this drastic order from the overlords was the largest retail firm in the city, which also conducted a wholesale department, and had taken the apples in that side of their business.

Still unconquered, but feeling mighty weakened, I went to the jobbers direct. The first man who learned my name turned on his heels from me and slammed the door of his office in my face. The next one told me with an oath that he couldn't do business with me. So it went along the row till at last by giving a fictitious name and even denying that I was myself, I found two jobbers who would take the apples, to be sold on the morrow on commission.

The next morning I attended the sale of my own apples on the sidewalk in front of the wholesale house. I saw the apples sold at prices ranging from $2.50 to $2.80, and I felt quite reconciled to my fiasco. But when I came in for settlement their books showed that no box had sold for more than $1.50, and their clerks all declared that to be the case. I was offered and had to accept that sum, less their commission of 25 per cent.

The other dealer reported that he had found no sale for my apples and had shipped them to an adjoining town 50 miles away, where they were sold at a price, which, after deducting two commissions and the additional freight, left me 55 cents a bushel.

Naturally this took all the fight out of me and the rest of our crop was marketed through the jobbers. The total sales for the 8,000 bushels were $4,500. But these apples cost the consumer more than $20,000.

I had a new scheme for the ensuing year. I advertised in the papers of several towns that we would deliver fancy No. 1 apples to the homes of the people, with the privilege of inspection before paying, express prepaid, for $2 a bushel. At that same time the usual retail market price was more than $4. We also sent circulars to the people whose names appeared in the telephone books. As a result of this campaign we sold less than 600 bushels, which did not pay for the cost of the advertising. Evidently the housewife is not anxious to save money, or else she has little faith.

Since then we are going on raising the best apples we know how to produce. We prune and plow and fertilize. We spray carefully. We pick by hand with the utmost solicitude. Our apples are large and free from bitter rot and other blemishes.

But we sell them through the jobbers, and we receive an average of $2 a bushel even now with the prevailing high prices, and these same apples cost the retail dealers twice that sum.

The difference goes into the rapacious and never-satiated maw of the men who do nothing to raise fruit or to sell it or to put any real value into it; but who live on the efforts of the other two real laborers. I think that they ought to spell their names with an initial R instead of J.

But they have on their side antiquity and religious prestige. For even way back in the time of the Garden of Eden there was there an apple tree. Eve tended this tree and watched its fruit. When it was ripe she presented it to Adam. Thus Eve was the producer and Adam the consumer. But that was not all. Even there was to be found the middleman; the Bible calls him by a more characteristic name.

Educated Clerks.

Two Terre Haute school teachers, both college graduates, spent a week recently clerking in a Chicago bakery. One day they sold several articles to two customers. The bill came to exactly 93 cents and both were elated, because of the size of the sale. They were further elated when they heard one of the women remark to the other one as they left the store: "They must have educated clerks here now. Did you notice that they counted up the bill in their heads instead of using a piece of paper as the old ones did?"

'Twasn't a Bird

Something had gone sadly wrong in the postoffice, and various employees hustled hither and thither and knitted their brows in attempts to ascertain what was what and why.

Mr. Springsteen, postmaster, lost just a trifle of his customary calm as he queried among messengers, carriers, clerks and others to learn how it might be that a poor little oriole was injured while in transit by parcel post from his office. And, furthermore, he must learn how it happened that the little oriole had not been duly insured as directed by the owner and consignor.

"Indeed," said Mrs. M. (said owner and consignor), "I surely told that man to insure the oriole, and now I ought to be paid."

"I certainly am sorry the poor thing got hurt," humbly replied the postmaster.

"You know what an oriole is, don't you, Mr. Springsteen?"

"Oh, yes, I know, it's a bird," came the proud reply.

"No it isn't either," said Mrs. M. "It is one of those baby carts that fold up."

Strangers Prepared For.

"Does this dog growl?" asked the lady of the dog dealer. "Oh, yes, ma'am," was the answer. "Well, I want a dog that doesn't growl." "Don't you want something that will growl when strangers come around?" "No. My husband will attend to that."

Many Cars in Japan.

The number of motorcars in the Hyogo prefecture of Japan in 1908 was four, in 1912 there were 14, in 1916 there were 39, and at the end of 1918 there were 282 cars registered. The city of Kobe, which is located in this prefecture, is said to have 182 automobiles.

Dangerous Suggestion.

"What a high-pitched voice your baby has in its cries."

"For heaven's sake, don't say that outside or we may get into trouble over its high bawls."

Tough.

"Things can never be the same."

"What has your husband done?"

"Used a can opener on my first pie?"