**Hooper’s Orchard, Marsfield**

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THE FRUITGROWER.

Fruit Growing in Cumberland.

NO. XXII.

BY UNICORN.

Messrs. Tom Hooper, Frank Hooper, and Edwin Hooper own between them 18 acres of first-class orchard land in Vimiera-road, Marsfield, the situation being so elevated as to command an excellent view of Epping, which is only a short distance away as the crow flies. The soil of the orchard is a sandy loam with clayey bottom, and the natural slope of the land is such as to render artificial drainage almost unnecessary, while the soil possesses in such a marked degree the quality of retaining moisture that the effects of prolonged drought are slight indeed as compared with the experiences in less favoured situations. As a matter of fact, though to some it might, seem strange, Hooper Brothers benefited by the droughts of last year, owing to the exceptionally high prices realised for their products. This result was, perhaps, as much due to careful and skilful cultivation and judicious handling of fruits when marketable as to the natural productiveness of the land they have been so fortunate as to select.

VARIETIES OF FRUIT.

The varieties of fruit grown by Hooper Brothers include apples, quinces, peaches, plums, nectarines, persimmons, loquats, grapes, oranges, lemons, mandarins (both Thorny and Emperor), pears (Williams' Bon Cretien. and the China pear).

The apples embrace the Trevitt's species, the Carrington (both red and striped), the Fanny, the Granny Smith, Allsop's Early, and the Roam Beauties. "The soil," said Mr. Tom Hooper, "seems to suit the Trevitt's apple particularly well, the fruit ripening with a good colour and commanding a price that pays handsomely, seeing that it bears so well. This season, owing to the scarcity of the fruit as a result of the drought, we got as much as 18s a case for this sort. The season was the driest we have ever known, but it was the best year for prices that we have experienced in the sixteen years that we have been working the land.

"As for the Carrington apple, there is nothing better growing on the place," continued Mr. Hooper, "from a profit-making point of view, and that, of course, is what we have to look to." The trees of the Fanny variety are too young yet to permit of an opinion being formed as to their paying qualities, but they promise well, the soil and the situation apparently suiting them admirably.

PROFITABLE PEACHES.

"The quince trees are of the 'Portugal' variety, and have done well, there being a good demand in the market for this class of fruit, which has usually brought 5s a gin-case — a good paying price, for, as will be readily understood, it does not take many quinces to fill a gin case. This fruit has one bad fault," said Mr. Hooper. "It is subject to sunscald, and we haven't been able to discover a remedy for that yet.

"The Braddock peach," said Mr. Hooper, "has done as well as any with us. It is a sure cropper, never missing a Season, and as it comes in generally when no other sorts are in the market, it commands a ready sale and a good price. Last year we got as much as 14s a half-case for our Braddocks, and they would pay any time at 2s 6d a half-case. The Briggs' May did very well at first — for the first season, or eight years in fact, but after that, for no reason that could be ascertained, the fruit became small, and consequently unprofitable." The Soudan variety has turned out well with Hooper Brothers, being a good cropper and growing to a large size, but it requires very careful handling and skilful packing, being easily bruised and quickly showing signs of rough treatment.

Next in order, from a profit-making point of view, Mr. Hooper places the Billington variety, a slipstone. It is a splendid cropper, he said, and had done very well on their orchard. It was not, however, as good a carrier as the Mountain Rose; which came in about the same time and was a bigger peach and of a better colour. The Elberta, a yellow flesh slipstone, has also paid well, being an excellent cropper and always in good demand for canning or preserving, for which purposes it is eminently suitable. The Shanghai seedling and the Shanghai slipstone have also done well. "We have made more money out of these," said Mr. Hooper, "than any of the other varieties, two tiers of the fruit filling a grape case. The splendid colour they attain makes them very attractive, so that there is always a ready sale for them."

The Newington (a clingstone) has not done well, never attaining a large size, though no fault could be found with the colour. The Bronger peach has done well so far as the clingstone variety has been concerned, but the slipstone, from some cause, which was not apparent, never attained the size it should have reached. Heand's clingstone has for some time proved a better paying peach than the Bronger, being larger, Rhodes' slipstone has proved a splendid cropper, but last year it got "the fly" in it. The Italian peach, both slip and clingstone, took the fly very badly, too, and both these and the Rhodes' are now doomed to be rooted out, it being the intention to have them replaced with apple trees.

Other late varieties of peach trees are also to be rooted out this year for the same reason.

NECTARINES.

Two varieties of nectarines are grown here — the Meek's and a larger sort — both of which have done exceedingly well, the latter especially.

Of plums, the Angelina, Lutherborough, and Evans' are grown to perfection. The last two mentioned varieties have paid handsomely. Heand's large loquat has been found to crop only every other year, for some reason which cannot be clearly defined. The fruit has brought very satisfactory prices as a rule, though.

AREA UNDER GRAPES.

About an acre of the area is devoted to grapes, the varieties grown being the Black Muscatel, the Black Hamburgh, and the Gros Coleman. These have paid the owners well. The vines have not done so well this year as last, but the crop has been better and the prices realised quite double what has been obtained in any previous season.

CITRUS TREES.

The citrus trees have all done well, but it has been noticed that the fruit of the Thorny mandarins is becoming smaller, though the reason for this is not apparent.

PESTS AND DISEASES.

"The fruit fly," said Mr. Tom Hooper, "is the worst trouble we have to contend with, and there does not seem to be any chance, not at present at least, of successfully combating this arch enemy of the fruitgrower. The Government, I think, ought to do more for us in this connection than they have so far attempted. They should experiment, as is being done elsewhere, with a view to discovering and cultivating a natural enemy of the fly, for I am convinced that if some remedy is not discovered, and that very soon, the fly is going to wipe us out altogether. If it gets into the early fruit as it does into the late varieties then we might as well dig out our trees at once and turn our attention to some other means of obtaining a livelihood. The Government, I repeat, are not doing all they might, considering the national aspect there is to the question. There is not a more wholesome food than fruit. I have no hesitation in saying that if there were more fruit and less meat consumed the country would be better off. There would be less doctors' bills to pay.

Mr. Hooper expressed himself as satisfied with the provisions of the Fruit Pests Act, but, said he, "there are no penalty clauses, and the Act is not being properly administered. The staff of inspectors is too small, with the result that their work is not, and cannot be, efficiently carried out. The orchards should be inspected at the very least once a week, but what do we find? An inspector informed me that it would take him at least two months to get round his beat, working at high pressure all the time! There should be a rigid inspection of back yard 'orchards,' as more trouble is to be apprehended from them than the professional growers.

"The remedy alleged to have been discovered by that gentleman from the northern rivers should have been thoroughly investigated by the Government, and if there is anything in it it would pay them to give a good price for the right to use it and let the fruitgrowers have the benefit."

CODLIN MOTH AND SCALE.

Hooper Brothers have successfully dealt with the codlin moth by bandaging the trees and spraying with Paris green, first when the trees are in flower, and then just when the young apple is "setting." They have had a little experience with the San Jose scale in the peach trees, the pest having been introduced originally from a nursery. It was kept in check and finally got rid of by spraying with a solution of wood-preserving oil and soap. The red scale in the orange and mandarin trees was got rid of by the same treatment. The Indian wax scale has been very troublesome during the past two years, but last year they managed to keep it well in check by using common washing soda as a remedy. The barrels of the trees in Hooper Brothers' orchard are noticeably clean and free from that moss growth so common in orchards and which injuriously affects the trees by preventing the sap from flowing freely, making' them "hide bound," as it were. This result has been attained by spraying in the winter with a solution of bluestone and lime, pr salt, sulphur, and lime.

MANURING.

Talking of manuring, Mr. Hooper said, "Stable manure is the best, I believe; but it is too expensive, owing to the long distances it has to be carted. We use bone dust.

MARKETING THE FRUIT.

"We do our own marketing," said Mr. Hooper, "putting the fruit in the cart and doing all the handling ourselves. It has been our practice, and we have found it the best plan, to allow the fruit to ripen before pulling it. It can be consumed the day we take it into the market, and for that reason we get the best price for it. Another practice we follow is to exercise extreme care in the grading of our fruit. We have four or five grades, and customers can always rely on getting the same quality of fruit at the bottom of the cases as at the top. The consequence is that our cases are seldom, if ever, opened by buyers who have generally ordered beforehand, and we have customers now who bought from us when we started 16 years ago. It pays to take the trouble of picking the fruit when ripe, and to grade and pack it honestly. There is everything in packing and grading. If you grade well you will get a better price for your small stuff than for the mixed."