

The Community

A Farmer's Message to Farmers

Editor:—I have been immensely interested in your sermons and other articles published in The Guide, and therefore accept your invitation to contribute some comments. I may add that I have travelled much and am keenly interested in philosophical and sociological questions, and that I have mixed with many grades of society in different countries. I admire and agree with many of your opinions, but I know from experience that you are up against a problem, the solution of which would test the moral courage of most men. In the creation of our social system, opportunity and environment has fostered so many different opinions, and religious beliefs and temperaments served to fix them into customs and conventionalities, and finally into laws: so that nothing short of a social upheaval will readjust conditions.

It has been said that whatever we wish to see introduced into the life of a nation must first be introduced thru its schools and universities. If this is true, then a new system of education must be introduced into our rural schools. We should have less of the competitive theory, and more of the idea of co-operating one with another. The teaching should be along lines of scientific knowledge and modern conditions, and many of the ideas of our grandfathers should be relegated to oblivion. As you say, new conditions have arisen, or rather new phases of an old order. Some say that the ignorance and indifference of the masses is to blame for conditions today. Pericles complained to the Athenians in the same strain, and an Italian poet—I forget his name—in 1600 odd composed a poem along the same lines with the same theme. They certainly had democratic institutions about the time of Pericles, but they have since gone, and were probably going when that orator made his complaint. Today the voice of the multitude is rarely heard, and they are seldom represented in our ruling assemblies.

Of whatever may be taught in our theological colleges I have no knowledge, but the ideas preached by many of our different ministers show a strange lack of knowledge of human affairs, and their sermons are often mere platitudes. What an incentive to advancement is contained in: "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end," etc.

As to social conditions in rural communities, you will find the highest type of community spirit in those communities whose members are on an economic equality, and enjoy somewhat even opportunities, and who have similar religious beliefs. All variations from this will create conditions in exact ratio to the differences existing. The keenness of the struggle for existence, the spirit of competition fostered and encouraged, and the unequal surroundings attached to farming are factors that breed the jealousy, hatred and distrust so often found in rural life. To assert that a really accurate knowledge of agricultural life and conditions is non-existent may seem strange, and if it were possible to have a commission fearlessly investigate along lines similar to that of the Industrial Relations Committee in the U.S., the report would reveal facts just as startling and the interests concerned would make similar efforts to suppress them. An investigation of the ownership and control of the press, and a true statement of its methods and functions might awaken the majority, but I doubt it. We are in the midst of a social embroglio, and in my philosophy, economic necessity is the dominant force pervading society today. The foundations of our social system are ancient and outworn, or its weight would not lie on its lowest strata, and, to follow your argument, to relieve the pressure all above must be removed. In other words the rich must get from the backs of the poor. Your conclusion that the solution of the problem of the hired man means the solution of the whole rural problem is very true; but then you must know that truth is not one of the pillars of our present social system. I would go further and say the trouble lies in the ownership of land.

It is fundamentally wrong and morally unjust for any person to have more land than he or his family can work, and, to come back to ancient usages, the ownership should be vested in the people in perpetuity. That departure was, in my opinion, the first great social crime, and was no doubt soon followed by the first mortgage, and the ultimate results are easily traced. But we are on dangerous ground, and a sore point amongst our farmers' organizations, for whilst the farmers are boasting co-operation from the narrow limits of a competitive intelligence, they are by circumstances intensely individualistic.

In conclusion, I may add that I am not the discontented revolutionary that my letter might imply, and I believe that all natural laws are divine laws, and that the efforts of you and I are but small contributions to the slow progress of social evolution, and that man is still only on the threshold of his career, and I have confidence that somewhere in the distant future, justice and equality to all will prevail, and the brotherhood of man will be more than a dim idea.

KITSCOTY.

P.S.—I write as a farmer and a landowner and hope the hired men will reply.

A Hired Man's View

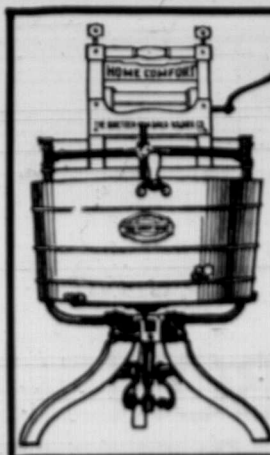
Editor:—Altho I am a farmer myself, I had three years' experience as a hired man. I left a good home and the church, in which I had been a Sunday school teacher for five years, and came West to farm work for my health, as city life did not suit me. I hired with a farmer for \$15 per month and \$25 in harvest. The first night the farmer's wife showed me my bed in one corner of the shack on the floor. The bed consisted of some sackings filled with wheat straw and two thin blankets to cover myself with, and the food I got was not enough to last until I reached the field again. I worked for that farmer from June 1 to November 1, and never had the chance to go to church once all the time. The farmer said he would pay me when he got the returns of his wheat. The end of December came, but no wages. Finally, I bought some seed wheat from him and called it square.

The second year I hired out for two months seeding at \$30 per month. At the end of two months I asked for my wages, and he said I must wait until October. Well, I knew the farmer had money, and I had another job twenty miles away, so I sued him for my wages and got them. The next place was a real good place. Good home, good food and plenty of it—a real gentleman to work for, and I went to church with him every Sunday. I worked for that farmer from July 1 to November 1, at \$30 per month. He promised to pay me on November 20. When I went for my wages the farm was vacant and the farmer gone, and I have not heard nor seen anything of him since.

My third year I hired with a farmer for eight months at \$35 per month. Seven months went past quietly, but the eighth month the farmer tried his utmost to make me quit. Chewing from morning to night; always something wrong. But I knew his scheme, so I paid no attention to him—just went about my work as usual. He tried to cheat me out of \$30. I had learned from another hired man what kind of man I had to deal with, so I bought a team of horses from him and paid him the balance.

I might also say all the three years I worked as hired man the farmers' wives never once washed any clothes for me. Finally I made up my mind I would be a hired man no more. My motto now is: "Equal rights to all." No farmers, before you hire a man, stop and think. Can you afford to pay a man? Can you afford to feed a man? If not, don't hire one and spoil the reputation of the farmers of the West. If you can afford it, treat the hired man as you would like to be treated yourself and you will find no difficulty in getting and keeping hired men.

JUSTICE.



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