

Abundant Crops and Low Prices.

The following letter from a Quebec farmer to the editor of *The Daily Witness* is deserving of more than a passing notice:

"I emphatically object to the oft repeated remark (and I might say in every publication) that the prospect of an abundant harvest is a blessing to the farmer, etc. I claim that abundant crops often go to the direct and exclusive benefit of the consumer, and not at all to the farmer, except in the way of building up and advancing the interests of the world. The only instance in which a farmer is benefited by a large crop is when other farmers have poor crops. Thus one country gains by the amount of loss suffered by the others. It is easy to understand that it costs more to harvest and market a large crop than a smaller one; and for heavy produce, and for local consumption, it is obvious that an abundant crop is a positive loss to the farmer, as he often handles double the amount of produce for the money he would receive for the produce of a poor year. But in every case the consumer is benefited. Thus, I claim, that the consumer is the one who, without alloy, has the cause for joy at the present appearance of the crops. Nor must it be supposed that large crops are obtained without a comparative loss to the fertility of the soil. Favorable atmospheric conditions do not provide all the requirements of plants, consequently large crops are obtained at a comparative loss to the farmer in this respect also.

I claim, further, that the appropriations which, from time to time, are made by the several administrations in aid of agriculture are sometimes in aid of the farmer, but always in the interest of the consumer. It is claimed that the farmers can now raise more produce, and of a higher standard, on account of the inventions and manufacture of agricultural implements and modern methods of culture. That is admitted; but the farmers of Canada are not in advance of other countries in this respect, and it consequently becomes a race between the producers of the several countries to produce the most at the least expense, obviously to the interest of the consumer.

Banish modern methods, destroy modern machinery, and the consequent prices of farm produce would create such a panic among consumers as never was known in the history of the world."

The line of reasoning in the above would seem to be that of the worst kind of a cynic. True, the consumer is very much benefited by an abundant harvest. But who is the consumer? Is not the farmer just as much a consumer as a person living in a city? In Canada the majority of the people are farmers, and therefore the greatest consuming class, as far as this country is concerned, is the farmer. From the "Quebec Farmer's" standpoint one would imagine that the farmer lived on wind, and did not consume any of the products of the farm. Though the bulk of the food the farmer requires is produced on the farm, there is none the less an actual outlay in producing it. If an abundant harvest enables the farmer to lower the cost of production, his cost of living will be reduced in like proportion. So, in this sense, even an abundant harvest is a benefit to the farmer as well as to the tradesman.

But an abundant harvest may benefit the farmer in other ways. The profit in farming, as well as in anything else, is not governed by the price of farm products but by the difference between the cost of production and the price sold. A farmer may get \$1.00 per bushel for his wheat, and because the harvest is poor it may cost him that much to produce it; while, on the other hand, he may get only 75 cents per bushel for his wheat and make a good profit, because the abundance of the crop has reduced the cost to 65 cents per bushel. If a right system of farming is carried on an abundant crop will increase the fertility of the land instead of diminishing it. It will enable the farmer to raise and keep more stock, which must enhance the value of the farm.

The writer's contention that the moneys appropriated for agriculture by the Governments are more in the interest of the consumer than the farmer is indeed a startling one. We wonder if this Quebec farmer has ever stopped to consider in what position the Canadian farmer would be today had the Governments—both Provincial and Dominion—not come to his assistance. The farmer to-day has to compete with nearly every producing country in the world. To do so successfully he must practise the most up-to-date methods of farming. But how is the average farmer to obtain knowledge of those modern methods? If left entirely to his own resources no advancement could be made. It is just here where the Government should come to his aid, and sup-

ply him with the means of acquiring this knowledge of better methods of agriculture. For a number of years our Governments, through the experimental farms, agricultural colleges, dairy associations, live stock associations, farmers' institutes, and by means of bulletins, reports, etc., have been rendering valuable assistance to the farmer, and it is beyond question that had it not been for this aid the average Canadian farmer would not be in as favorable a position as he is to-day. Therefore, though the consumer is benefited in an indirect way by Government appropriations for agriculture, it is the farmer who gets the most direct benefit.

With reference to the last paragraph we have not much to say. To "banish modern methods, destroy machinery," etc., would create a panic in agricultural circles sure enough. With modern appliances the farmer has to work hard enough as it is; but what would it be like if he had to go back to the scythe and sickle? Fancy a farmer with 25 acres of hay and the same area of wheat undertaking to gather them in with these out-of-date appliances! The farmer's calling would then be entirely one of "brawn" and not of brain, as it is to-day, and his lot would be a lowly one, without any ray of light shining along his pathway.

Specialties in Farming.

The Montreal Daily Witness, in a recent issue, after endeavoring to show that the farmer's lot is a hard one, and that, as compared with city life, a life on the farm is one of steady toil intermingled with very few of the real joys of life and less still of profit, gives the following advice to the farmer:

"The lesson of all this to the farmer would appear to be to trust as little as possible to those commodities which are universally and cheaply produced, and which are sure to be on the average over-produced, and to find some specialty in which, by devoting to it special attention and intelligence, he may attain excellence and command his own prices."

If it were possible for this advice to be followed in every case it would, perhaps, help to remedy some of the difficulties under which our farmers labor. But the impracticability of following it will be readily seen. What in one year might be a specialty for one farmer, or for a number of farmers, living in a particular district, would, in a few years, if it were a profitable line of farming, become one of the most important commodities of the whole country, and every farmer would be engaged in producing it. We have a good instance of this in the case of the cheese industry. Thirty years ago a few farmers in Oxford and Leeds counties began to make cheese on the co-operative plan. These farmers, at that time, may be said to have had a specialty. But they could not get a patent on the business and prevent other farmers from making cheese. Consequently, because it was a profitable business, the making of cheese on the factory system was taken up by farmers in nearly every section of the Dominion, and to-day, instead of being a specialty, it has become the leading industry of the country with a danger of the business being overdone. And so it would be with any other line. A farmer may adopt some special line of farming which he thinks will not be overdone, but, if he succeeds and makes a profit out of the business, others are sure to follow in his footsteps, and it will no longer be a special line so far as he is concerned.

There is a sense, however, in which every farmer may specialize, and that is to produce those commodities which require the greatest skill and intelligence in their production. In this way a farmer may hit upon a specialty which may be his own, in so far as his superior skill and intelligence may enable him to produce a quality of product which his brother farmer cannot reach. A good instance of this is the making of a superfine, gilt-edged quality of butter, such as the rich in our large towns and cities are able and willing to pay a high price for. Every farmer will and does make a certain amount of butter, but there are comparatively few who produce what we call the really gilt-edged article.

And so we say every farmer should specialize, not, however, with the aim of securing some special line which no other farmer is following, but with the aim of producing a quality superior to that which his brother farmers are producing. In this way the farmer may follow several special lines of farming, for in this country at least it is not the best plan to rely entirely upon one special line. There are several lines to-day in which superior quality may enable the farmer to command almost his own price. In the cattle trade there is room for specialization in the production of a quality of beef cattle that will meet the wishes of the British consumer. There is also room for specialization in the production of a hog that will exactly meet the needs of the export bacon trade, or in the production of prime fresh eggs weighing 15 lbs. to the 120 for the export trade. And so we might enumerate other lines in which superior skill and intelligence will make these lines a specialty by producing a superfine quality.

In the article referred to above it is pointed out that there is no end to the market for all kinds of "frillery," while of food only a certain amount can be consumed, no matter how good it is. But there is this difference between manufactured goods, such as clothing, boots, shoes, etc., and food products, which all come from the farm, that, while superior quality in both will command a higher price than a poorer quality, the cost of production in each case is different. While it costs less to produce a poor quality of manufactured articles than a good quality, it will cost the farmer just as much to produce a poor quality as a good quality of food products. In this way a manufacturer may become rich by making an inferior article, which sells at a low price, because there is a good profit in the business. But the farmer cannot do so. If he produces an inferior article he has to accept a lower price, while it will cost him just as much to produce this inferior article as a superior product, which would command a much higher price. Therefore in farming more than in anything else the amount of profit may be measured by the quality of the product, and we close with this advice to the farmer—aim at producing a superfine quality, whether it be in the horse, the cow, the sheep, the hog, the hen, or in products such as grain, butter, eggs, etc. Superior quality in every product of the farm is the kind of special farming we would recommend.

The United States Sheep Trade Active.

There appears to be a healthful tone to the sheep industry of the United States at the present time. Sales have been extensive and prices fair. A good evidence of progress is the registration in the flock books. Volume XII. of the Shropshire Registry, recently issued, is a good example of this. It contains more pedigrees than have ever before been published in one volume, and there are almost enough more entries on hand to fill the next volume. Such a condition of affairs must be gratifying to the breeder of pedigreed sheep. The revival in the sheep trade is felt more by the Western rangers. In the range country sheep breeders are now reaping the profit of better prices for wool, and a greater demand for sheep. The range clip this season is selling for from twelve to seventeen cents per pound, but there is very little selling under fourteen cents.

The demand for feeders is so strong and prices so high as to almost put a damper upon the feeding industry. In fact feeders declare that they cannot afford to pay present prices and make a profit out of feeding. This is a pretty general complaint in the States, where extensive feeding operations are carried on. It may be possible that if rangers do not make some reduction in the price of feeders many in that trade will be compelled to go out of business for the time being. This great activity in the sheep trade has not reached Canada, yet though things are more hopeful here than they were. The chief drawback to the sheep industry here is to find a steady market for the wool produced.