

The Farmer and the Interests

Review of a new and interesting book written by a farmer for farmers

Here is the picture: "I see the farmer toiling behind the harrow in the hot sun from early morning till late evening, begrimed with sweat and dust, while the crows sit in the neighboring trees and utter their appropriate caws at him. I don't wonder the crows caw at him."

This is a strong picture truly. It betrays deep feeling in the artist who painted it. If the wayfaring man, tho a farmer, will stop and look at anything he will surely stop and look at this and ask himself whether, peradventure, it is true or how far it is true.

This scene, the crows cawing their mockery at the farmer, is taken from and is the soul and spirit of a book entitled "The Farmer and the Interests—A Study in Parasitism," by Clarus Ager. The latter is a pen name and is the Latin equivalent for "A Fair Field." Who Clarus Ager is is not revealed, but from the book we glean that he is a Western Canadian and that he homesteaded in Manitoba twenty-seven years ago. The object of the work, as will already have been gathered, is to stir, to provoke, or shall one say to sting, the farmer into vigorous realization of his economic subjection. In the author's opinion it is not nobler in the farmer to bear the slings and arrows of outrageous exploitation. On the contrary he charges the farmer to take arms against a sea of special interests and by opposing curb them. On the cover of the book the author's aim, as interpreted by the publisher, is stated as follows:

"To beat the farmer into a clear conception of how he is, on every hand, paying someone to take from him the greater part of his produce, is the object of this brilliantly written book. Every farmer should read it thru three times: once, to realize what a fool he is; twice, how and why he is a fool; and three times, to make up his mind how he is going to assist himself and come into his own."

In one of his novels George Meredith makes one of his characters say: "The rich love the nation thru their possessions; otherwise they have no country. If they loved the country they would care for the people." Judged by this principle Clarus Ager's patriotism is of the true stamp. He loves the farmers and is on their side. The book is written from no spenetic prompting nor does it reveal the bilious mind. Perhaps here and there the nail is not hit squarely on the head, but nine times out of ten the hammer strikes true. If one will read to the end the sincerity of the book's inscription will not be doubted. This inscription reads: "Dedicated without their permission to the farmers of the Canadian prairies, whom I love with my whole heart and soul."

For Good Literature Lovers

The book is written in strong virile English and it has a quality which will recommend it to lovers of good literature. Bon mots abound. Here are a few of them:

"The Canadian banking system is the best in the world—for the banks."

"I don't see any prospects of the interests dismounting. The farmer has given them a leg up and he hasn't asked them to get off."

"The farmer has lost his wealth, but he has thus far retained his human qualities; he still values men more than property."

"It is infinitely easier to carry on a banking business among farmers than to carry on The Grain Growers' Grain Company."

"The interests induce corruption and pay the price. They raise politicians as the farmer raises pigs, at the hog trough."

"The farmer's cattle herd, his sheep flock, but he, God help him, is not as wise as the silly sheep."

"There is more truth than humor in the old joke that the decline of piracy at sea was contemporaneous with the rise of piracy by the railways."

"The farmer does not become money mad. The open country is an antidote for money madness. Contact with nature keeps him sane. I know not why it is so, but it is so."

"In a few years the farmer can make these prairies a perfect garden of prosperity, and not only will he raise himself, but he will carry a whole people with him."

"The decline and fall of the Roman Empire was the decline and fall of her farmers. As long as her farmers were strong, so long was Rome mistress of the world."

"One of the most astute Canadian politicians is credited with having said that the farmers are the easiest class in the community to legislate for; they never ask for anything, and they never get anything."

"Bank profits are so large that the bank cover up their profits by all sorts of bookkeeping entries in their

statements. Farmers' profits are so small that they cover them up with patches on their knees and the seats of their pants."

"The grinding of the common people in the mills of the preying interests is so gross a process that it grates upon even the most hardened human being, so the corporation is used as the instrument of their rapacity and it is a fitting instrument."

"Take five farmers of outstanding ability who proposed to start a commercial enterprise of any kind. It would be impossible to get their neighbors to invest in the enterprise. A glib-tongued promoter could get the same neighbors to invest in a gold-brick scheme."

"The prairie farmer does not pay directly a dollar a year for the support of his own political principles, but he pays indirectly a hundred dollars a year to compensate the interests for what they pay out for the support of their political activities."

The General Indictment

Clarus Ager's little work is in legal and logical form. It begins with a general indictment. Then the charges are specified and finally come some chapters on the remedy. The general indictment is tersely stated in the preface. We read: "The exploitation of the farmer by the interests has reached a stage where it is little less than thinly disguised legal robbery. The interests are every year growing relatively richer, the farmers relatively poorer. Agriculture on the fertile prairies

SPECULATIONS

When I sell my mining shares, a muley cow I'll buy and put her out to pasture while I hustle out to try to find a poor green boob who'll trade a rooster (Plymouth Rock) and thirteen hens or twenty-two, for all my fine oil stock. And then I want a Yorkshire sow with turned up nose and ears, who'll raise ten piglets every year and live eleven years. For her I'll give my Fort George lots if any one will trade. (Good prospects there, a wondrous land and fortunes to be made). My Hupmobile should bring enough to lay an old grey mare and leave the price of two ewe lambs with forty cents to spare. This ring and gleaming studs that came with ease in nineteen-ten. I guess they're worth one half of what the jeweler charged me then—I'll make a payment on a team, a wagon and a plow (some Massey-Harris agent, kind, will surely show me how). Maybe he'll take my fourteen blocks of North Vancouver pine and let me have a binder and a sack or two of twine. I'll need a little flock of goats, four Nannys and a Bill. They're fine to eat the willow brush or clear a scrubby hill. I'll sacrifice that acre that I bought in Saskatoon. It's only six miles out of town, 't will sell for thousands soon. Next move will be to find some chap who's keen to fight the turk. I'll rent his homestead on half shares and settle down to work. Then as the seasons roll along I'll weather snow and hail, a dry year and an early frost and start to stew the kale. The promises of agents (real estate and mining shares) will ache in ears, as profits (dividends) appear. For the surest way to make them, if you've only got the sand, is to chuck your speculations and get back to the land.

Formerly of Beulah, Man.

CLARA DOYLE,
Alberta.

of the West has already begun to decay and a decadent industry means a decadent people. Many signs go to suggest that Clarus Ager is correct. But there is also much evidence, happily, that the long lane is coming to a turning. Conditions of farm life, and of rural life generally, in the West are becoming so intolerable that Clarus Ager's advice to get together will have to be taken. Sheer economic necessity will probably determine this at an early date; unless the growth of militarism is going to give the interests a fresh lease of life.

First in the detailed indictment comes the exploitation practiced thru the banking system. "It works against the farmer selling as well as buying, particularly against the smaller farmer," says Clarus Ager. The so-called credit system, under which the farmer is forced to do most of his buying, is declared to be nothing but the vicious "tick" system. Describing the bankers' combine the author says: "Not only is the Bankers' Association incorporated, but the government actually works with it in effective combination to keep down the rate of interest on deposits. The banks effectively co-operate to fix the rate of interest on loans, so that competition between banks is so systematized that practically every bank is run alike down to the minutest detail."

In the chapter on "The Restricted Buying Market" some plain fundamental truths are told about the Canadian protective system. Clarus Ager says some healthy, wholesome and timely things about the shameless and unblushing exploitation of patriotic feeling by the Canadian manufacturers. Is there on this earth anything more hideous and ghastly than the manner in which the protected and privileged classes capitalize the generous promptings of men and women and turn them directly into coin of the realm? Witness the brazen, unblushing and deliberate "Made-in-Canada" falsehoods which have disgraced the billboards of Winnipeg and all the large cities of Canada.

Of the free-trade era, which is surely coming some day in Canada, Clarus Ager says: "It is true there

would be much adjustment, much change in the conduct of manufacturing business. Scientific management would have to be adopted. Some factories would go, those that in the long run could not carry on their business without artificial support. The closing of every such mendicant factory would be one more burden off the back of the farmer. The resultant prosperity would make work for every factory hand in Canada, and, if there were any who could do nothing but their daily factory grind, it would be a mere bagatelle to pension all such compared with what it costs to buy the greater part of what we require for daily use in a restricted market."

The third old man of the sea which crushes the farmer is the Canadian system of transportation. But all three, declares Clarus Ager, are mutually sustaining. He says: "The elevator system was used to build up big grain corporations, and no better illustration can be found of the way in which the banking system, the tariff and the railway work together to leech the farmer than the elevator system. The railway company and the bank stand back of the elevator companies which advance money to the farmer, and the tariff and the truck system compel the farmer to sell in a limited market which is largely influenced by the millionaire milling companies. The farmer is told that there is competition between Canadian banks, between Canadian manufacturers and between Canadian railways. This is an absolute lie, and everyone knows it is a lie, except, of course, the farmer. He swallows it for gospel truth."

The Remedy

In the remedial chapters the farmers will find sound and sincere advice, but it is given with the same brutal frankness that characterizes the whole book. For once, at any rate, the farmer is not flattered. He is called an ass, a dunderhead, a futile fault-finder and every other name in the dictionary. The remedy is economic co-operation and political coherence. The weapon is the ballot. But Clarus Ager implores the farmer not to try and emulate the political methods or copy the political morals of the interests which oppress him. In perhaps the finest passage of the whole book the author says: "The farmer must not only discard the political weapons of the interests, but he must approach politics from the opposite side to the interests. They expend much money on politics solely from the selfish point of view. Each of them puts in a dollar in order that he may take out five dollars. It irks them not that they take these dollars without earning them from someone else who has actually earned them."

"The common good is below their horizon. The farmer must rise to a higher plane than this. He must learn to spend for the common good. He must put a dollar into politics without expectation that he himself will be permitted to take five dollars, or any sum, from another who has earned it. He will stop the raiding of the farmers and will receive a due economic reward in the end thru the common uplift, but he will receive no individual or personal advantage that does not accrue to every other as well as to him."

Any reader who would like to read this delightfully true word picture of Western Canadian agricultural conditions can obtain a copy of the book for 75 cents post paid from the Book Department, Grain Growers' Guide, Winnipeg.

A PARABLE

It happened once that a man ran past Socrates armed with an axe. He was in pursuit of another who was running from him at full speed.

"Stop him! Stop him!" he cried.

Plato's master did not move.

"What?" cried the man with the axe—"couldn't thou not have barred his way? He is an assassin!"

"An assassin?—What meanest thou?"

"Play not the idiot! An assassin is a man who kills."

"A butcher, then?"

"Old fool! A man who kills another man."

"To be sure! A soldier."

"Dolt! A man who kills another man in time of peace."

"I see—the executioner."

"Thou ass! A man who kills another in his home."

"Exactly. A physician."

Upon which the man with the axe fled—and is running still.—La Torre.