

barons, as we call them, or the men who have cut down our great forests, marketing only the best, and wasting quite as much of the tree as they marketed, besides leaving the tops to be dreid by the sun and thus become a source of great fires that swept over miles and sometimes scores of miles of territory.

He forgets that in his own way the average farmer has wasted, and is wasting values quite as great, and often much greater, than the values that have been wasted by the men who have stripped away our forests.

We do not know much about mining coal, but a little investigation will show that in times past about one-third of it has been uselessly wasted in its mining. We censure the coal miners; but we do not censure ourselves for wasting, through bad rations and bad methods of feeding, one-third of the nutritive matter of our crops, the crops we grew with so much toil and expense.

When we come to examine ourselves and sit in judgment of ourselves as a nation, we will come to see that for thirty years we have been mining our soil and selling it to the cities and foreign nations at barely the labor cost, and sometimes at less than that cost. We came into this country, a country rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and cut and slashed in the forests, in the mines and in the soils, foolishly imagining that forests would grow about as fast as they were cut; that there was coal enough to last ages on ages; and, worse still, imagining that our lands themselves were of inexhaustible fertility; that is useless to look after the interests of posterity. In fact, we have often heard the remark, when we protested against this: "What has posterity done for me?" The argument was, first, "The land is inexhaustible," and, second, "If it is not exhaustible, that is not my look out. I must look out for myself; posterity can look out for itself."

Candidly, we believe the farmer has been the greatest waster of the bunch; and the energetic farmer a greater waster than the lazy one. He is the older brother of the lazy man. The greater the improvements in our machinery, the greater has been our ability to waste; for the man with a gang plow and binder can actually do more wasting in one year than his grandfather, with the old wooden moldboard plow, the cradle and the sickle, could do in half a lifetime.

Both the woodsman, the coal miner and the farmer have been selling the resources of the country at less than the cost of production; and this sacrifice of resources has gone on until in almost every direction we can see a coming scarcity. The great cities of the world and of our own country have had the benefit of these products furnished for the market at less than the cost of

production; and they, too, have believed that this was to go on for ever.

In the last five years or more we have been brought up with a sharp turn, brought up to the snubbing post, so to speak. The cities are inquiring: What is the matter? and chiding the farmer for not growing more grain. They will have to realize from this time on that the days of cheap coal, of cheap lumber, and especially cheap food, are past. There is little more new land to be possessed. The addition of virgin acres has done little more than balance the decline in fertility of the older acres. We are "up against it." We are at the end of our tether; and henceforth the city must figure on paying more for food supplies than they ever paid before, to the relief of farmers in the older states, who have been almost crushed by the competition we have been able to make by selling farm products at less than they cost us to produce them.

In other words, because of this wastefulness in the past, we are no longer able to furnish bread and meats at the old prices. Where the farmer has maintained the fertility of his soil and can grow more than average crops, and particularly where he can grow more than twice the average crop of any one thing, he is making money. And why should he not? The lumberman who had his forests yet uncut, or who was able to cut them so as to have a perpetual crop, instead of one crop which it took a century to grow, would be making money, too, and for the same reason.

Many farmers have been laughed at for the past twenty years because they took pains to maintain the fertility of their soils. These farmers are getting their reward. Farmers who have wasted their soil, however, who have allowed it to actually decline in fertility and to get out of physical condition for lack of a supply of vegetable matter, find themselves sorely handicapped in this work of restoring the fertility of a worn out farm. And why not? We can not go on indefinitely wasting the resources of the soil, of the mine and of the forest, without having to pay for it sooner or later.

It is a shame that there has been all this terrific waste in the past; but human nature being what it is, we could not expect anything very different. The point now is to economize, to stop this wasting, consider the farm as a factory that should be run economically, wisely, skilfully, with the end in view of growing annual crops of the greatest magnitude possible, and still maintaining the efficiency of the factory—in other words, the fertility of the soil.

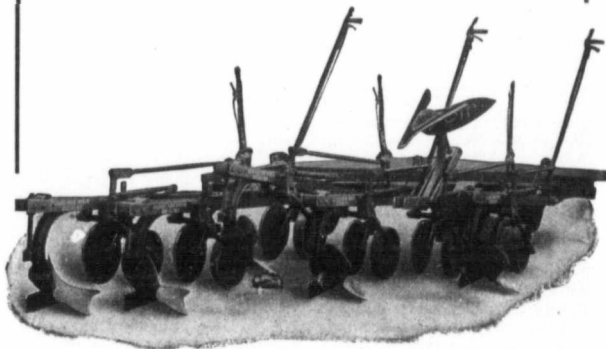
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