

The Mail Bag

AN OPEN FORUM

This page is maintained to allow free discussion of all questions vital to western farmers. Up to the limit of space letters will be published giving both sides of all such questions. It is not possible to publish all letters received, but an effort will be made to select those most fairly representing different views. Short letters will be given preference. All letters must be accompanied by name and address of writer, the not necessarily for publication. Unused letters will be returned if accompanied by postage.

SYSTEMATIC STUDY

Editor, Guide:—In the closing hours of the Saskatoon convention a resolution was adopted authorizing the board of directors to take preliminary steps and report on a plan for a systematic study of civic and economic questions by the association. The time was too short for much discussion and scant notice was given by the papers, but a number of delegates privately expressed enthusiastic interest in the project and assured me of their intention of taking up the work in their locals. The director of my district tells me he is planning on making a special point of this matter in his summer meetings, with the idea of putting the work on foot in a thorough way next winter.

As the proponent of the resolution, I wish to say that while the preliminary steps and the plan are both important, the former outweighs the latter as much as deeds excel words. I understand that a committee of directors have been appointed, commissioned with this double task. I hope they will not consider me officious in getting ahead of them in an opinion on the subject, and I think they will agree with me that it will in no way embarrass their work, but rather help it along, for any individual or local to take the initiative in starting the work. And if any should have a plan that seems to them preferable to the one I shall outline here, I hope they will not hesitate to follow it. The important thing is to get to work. A bad plan well supported will produce greater results than a good one without support.

For the moment I am not concerned nearly so much with the exact lines of study that shall be taken up as with the vehicle by which the study shall be conducted. In point of difficulty and labor involved the former sinks into insignificance as compared with the latter. An absolute essential, if this work is to succeed at all, is that there should be from the very start an interest sufficient to sustain the effort. Our engine must travel on its own power if it is to arrive. As a means of interest there is nothing stronger than the spirit of contest—of rivalry and emulation. Therefore, I propose that this work should start as a system of debating leagues. Each local wishing to take up the work should organize within itself a debating society. (Many have done this already.) Then as soon as a convenient number of debating locals have formed in any locality these are to be grouped into a league which shall hold at least one—preferably several—series of joint debates each year, leading to a pennant or some other suitable prize for the winning local.

The debate, as a method of study, has a great and peculiar value. It compels close and logical thinking and requires reason and proof for one's conclusions. It develops effective public speaking and put definiteness and purpose into one's discourse. Also, and of prime importance to our purpose here, the interest and benefit derived will extend far beyond the membership of the contesting locals.

While, as I believe, the debate should be the main feature of this work in its early stages and continue afterwards to be an important one, it remains true that there is only a limited class of subjects that lend themselves readily to this method of handling. Matters of some information may be materials for debate, but they themselves are not de-

batable. Exercises of a cultural nature also should have a place on these programs along with utilitarian matters. If this work is to be established on the broad basis which I hope, other methods must be taken up to supplement the debate.

A prime necessity from the beginning and at all times will be means of reference for information on the subjects studied. For this purpose ordinary libraries and even encyclopedias are inadequate. Every local should have a small fund available at all times for getting needed books and documents on short notice. Locals will often find themselves unable to tell where to go for the desired data. I have thought of an investigation bureau, a sort of clearing house for questions and answers, but probably that is impossible at the present time. Perhaps this want may be met at some later date.

After this, what? One thing that I have long thought of and that I consider perfectly feasible is lecture courses available for every part of the province. Why should we be denied the culture that comes from contact with the minds of great men? We can have it, and I think we will. Is it too much then to think of special courses of study, with outlines, text books and examinations and special investigators and instructors at our call? Faith and endeavor will bring them.

The reason why agriculture, ninety per cent. in numbers, exerts only a ten per cent. influence in legislation and commercial affairs is that it has less specialized knowledge than any other industry. If this continues the farmers can blame themselves. The only uplift worth considering springs from self-help.

This from a current writer: "The problem for us is to make a national unity in which the energies of the people and the resources of the country will be used for the general good. This can be brought about from above by an autocratic rule or from below by democratic organization of economics and society."

It is scarcely necessary to remark that here our choice is limited to the one agency—democratic organization. Under any autocratic rule conceivable in Canada the unrest of the people would prevent national unity, and the shortsighted selfishness of the rulers would prevent the country's resources being used for the general good. We must save ourselves or be lost.

I have here given in barest outline my plan as I have worked it out. I shall welcome any suggestion for its improvement, but much more shall I welcome any effort anywhere toward extending its operation. I am not deceived regarding the magnitude of the task nor the difficulty of instituting this project. If it were a small matter and easily accomplished, it would have been done before. But are the size and attendant difficulties reasons for further postponement? Let us rather consider the vital importance of the work and take adequate means to perform it. I hope the directors' committee, instead of an air castle, will be able to present the convention with a living, operating institution.

Respectfully,

GEO. W. ATKINSON.

Ceylon, Sask.

MANITOBA AND HAIL INSURANCE

Editor, Guide:—It is now nearly four years since I sent you a letter for publication upon the subject of hail insurance. When that letter was written it was with the object of trying to provoke discussion of that subject, hoping that discussion and suggestion might evolve some satisfactory solution of a very perplexing problem. The result was that the matter was up for discussion at the next Grain Growers' convention at Brandon, and received favorable

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The Tariff Burden

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The protective tariff has absolutely broken down and failed to produce the revenue required by the Dominion of Canada and it has also failed to build up large industries which are supposed to consume the products on the farms. Some change must be made. The tariff burden on the farmers of Western Canada is enormous, costing not less than \$200 a year in extra taxes upon the average family. These taxes are not seen because they are indirect, but they are nevertheless certain and are included in the price of pretty nearly everything the farmer has to purchase.

In order to show how the tariff works and the political machinery which keeps it in force, and the political corruption which it generates, we will send a copy of Edward Purcell's great book, "Sixty Years of Protection in Canada," absolutely free and postpaid to the first 200 farmers that apply for it. They are to keep it for five days, read it and examine it, and if in their opinion it is worth \$1.25 they are to send us that amount of money. If, however, they decide that the book is not worth \$1.25, they are to mail it back to us in as good condition as they receive it and there will be nothing to pay. In making this proposition we rely entirely upon the honesty of our readers.

"Sixty Years of Protection in Canada," by Edward Purcell, is acknowledged by all to be the most complete and enlightening history of the Canadian tariff ever written. Nowhere else can one find such a thorough going treatment of the political and economic facts of protection, the influences which dictate tariff changes, the free trade movement in Canada, the various attitudes taken by the Liberal and Conservative parties and the importance of the Grain Growers' movement. The economic pressure felt throughout all Canada is bound to keep the tariff in the forefront of our question. It is written in a fascinating style and is as pleasant to read as a popular novel. No one can claim to be acquainted with the history of Canada who is not familiar with the facts contained in Mr. Purcell's book.

The contents of the book are as follows:—The Grip of the Protected Industries on the Dominion; The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Fiscal Freedom for Canada; Reciprocity—The Movement for Free Trade and Annexation; Reciprocity—The Movement for the Elgin-Marcy Treaty—1846-54; Reciprocity—The Abrogation of the Treaty—1854-1866; Reciprocity—Overtures by Canada between—1866-1900; The Beginning of the Movement for a National Policy; The First National Policy Tariff—1878-1879; The National Policy as a Measure of Retaliation—1879-1879; The Fight in Parliament and the Constitution for the National Policy—1879-1879; The National Policy in Operation—1879-1896—The Era of the Red Fleece; The Liberals Adopt and Extend the National Policy—1896-1904; The Tariff Revision of 1906; Margins and Water-wagon Finance; Home and Export Prices for Farm Products; The Farmers' Organizations of Ontario and the Prairie Provinces; Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Borden in the Prairie Provinces; The Reciprocity Agreement with the United States.

Every farmer who is interested in public questions and the high cost of living should have a copy of "Sixty Years." The book contains 476 pages, is printed in large type and handsomely bound in red cloth covers, and fully indexed.

Book Dept.,

Grain Growers' Guide

WINNIPEG, MAN.

The Grain Growers' Guide, Book Dept.,
Winnipeg, Man.

Send me postpaid one copy of "Sixty Years of Protection in Canada." Within five days after I receive the book I will send you \$1.25 or return the book in good condition postpaid.

Name

P.O.

Province

Quite a number of letters that reach us for publication in the Mail Bag department ask that they be inserted immediately. This is usually impossible because the Mail Bag department is made up one week ahead of the date of publication, and correspondents should bear this in mind when writing.