

THE HUNGRY STATE AND THE FARMER

YOU might say it was this way: The world is trying to write a play with a happy ending for both the villain and the hero. You must admit that is difficult. The two chief characters in this play, of course, are John Farmer and Reginald Cityman. One is the hero and one is the villain. Which is which depends upon which part of the theatre you sit in. If your point of view is a field—there is no doubt about Reginald Cityman's villainy. He is lazy, greedy, extravagant and discontented. If your point of view is through an office or factory window—you have equal facility in deciding that John Farmer is the villain of the piece. John Farmer is backward and lazy, and keen on getting big prices at the expense of poor folk—and totally indifferent whether the world starves to death or not, so long as HE, John Farmer, gets a big price for his hogs (or whatever his crop may be.)

I must confess that there is something fascinating about this bloodthirsty representation of the farmer. It is rather pleasant to think of him as Louis Raemaekers would draw him (if Raemaekers were a city man) holding the world by the back of the neck and shaking him, while with his other hand he dangles a raw turnip under the world's nose and growls: "Yer money—or not a darn bit of turnip do you get!" To my way of thinking it is a pleasant picture, because it is so unlike the farmers I have known, and because, too, there is just enough of truth in such a picture to make one feel that the farmer is getting back a little of his goat, the "goat" which we city people have, perhaps unconsciously, been collecting for a good many years.

The position of the average government's Department of Agriculture in such a situation is no sinecure. I spent an afternoon recently with some of the agricultural officials of a certain provincial government, and I have reason for claiming that they have their troubles. Mind you, they don't admit it. They make no complaint. But between trying to appease Reginald Cityman's clamour for greater food production whereby Reginald and his little ones are to be saved from the awfulness of a concave stomach, and trying to do justice by the farmer—they have their troubles. That is what makes one think of the play-writing business. How shall our departments of agriculture devise a happy ending for both villain and hero?

"We are trying," said one of the officials of the Agricultural Department to which I have reference, "to show the farmer that in increasing his production he is not injuring his own interests, but, rather, protecting himself against possible market fluctuations. Many a shrewd farmer has the idea that since there is a world shortage of food he need have no fear about the high prices remaining. He says, therefore, that he will continue to produce about as usual and no more. He sees no great sense in increasing his output—and encouraging all others to increase their output—and thereby batter down the prices. We have had to get after this type of reasoning with counter-reasoning. We have tried to demonstrate that it would require a world-wide organization of the farming interests to seriously affect the prices for farm stuffs. Even if all the western farmers were wheat growers, and if they decided for one year that they would grow only half the amount of wheat which they usually put in—it is not certain that the price of wheat would go higher. There would still be India and the Argentine, and Australia to reckon with. Furthermore, there might be specially good weather that would make the yield from the smaller area of wheat—higher than the average yield from the normal area.

"THERE are too many factors in the production of foodstuffs to allow the farmer to affect the price of stuffs unless by a world-wide scheme—obviously impossible. It is in the interests of the farmer to grow as much as he can any time, and at all times."

An old retired farmer with farmer sons and his own farm "rented out" while the old gentleman lives in Toronto—because his grandchildren can get to school more easily here—had just returned from a sort of triumphal tour of the Province of Ontario

Someday the Business of Farming will be run like any other Great Business

By BRITTON B. COOKE

when I met him. For some reason, at the moment unknown, he seemed to breathe wrath against all dwellers in cities, and it was with difficulty that the screen of mutterings and mumbblings was cleared aside and the old man's thoughts lured, as it were, into the opening.

"I wish somebody would make farming the State's business," he said, presently. "I wish there was no such thing as the individual farmer—or the individual manufacturer, either, for that matter. The time is coming—least I think it is—when there will be state control of pretty nearly every form of necessary production. When that comes the food problem will be solved."

And this was his theory.

FOOD is scarce in England, because in England the balance between agricultural and city life has been destroyed. The great bulk of the population consumes food. The minority produces it. The result is that great quantities have to be imported from overseas. Here in Canada, though we have every reason to be agriculturists, we have followed the instinct of our kind. We have expanded our cities and left farming to the few. There has been a steady increase in the consuming population of the Dominion and a steady decrease in the number of farmers on the land. There is a growing demand and a dwindling supply.

"Now, then," he said, "we are trying to re-arrange the lop-sided condition of affairs. We are trying to get more people on the land and to make those that are there grow more stuff. Maybe that is all right for emergencies like the present emergency in food, but in the long run—statesmen are going to work out a principle of balance, balance between the urban and the rural activities of the country. They will make sure that the country can at least feed itself before it starts to export either manufactured goods or foodstuffs. We will then have an end of American stuff coming into this market."

A nation, in his estimation, was like a factory. There had to be a continual balance between the raw material stores of the factory and the orders that were being turned out of the shipping room. That balance the old gentleman failed to find in the case of the Canadian national "factory."

State control of farming would do more than anything else to make farming the scientific profession it ought to be. Many men who would disclaim socialistic tendencies, admit this. "First of all," said one official of a western province, "you must grant that farming is a business with a great deal of risk in it. No one can guarantee the wind and the rain and the sun. No one can guarantee the state of the world markets six months after a crop is sown. The individual farmer, it is true, has more information and better information than he ever had before as to the probable trend of markets. But even at that he is at the mercy of his own judgment. Great manufacturing enterprises do not depend upon the foresight of department foremen as to the nature and the quantity of the goods which that foreman's department is expected to run out. The policy is determined by a central executive whose business it is to study marketing conditions and to co-ordinate the efforts of the various departments under him so as to meet those conditions. Now, I don't care whether the Government takes over the general farm management of its territory or whether the farmers get together into a sort of joint stock company with a general manager and board of directors to determine the general lines

along which all members of his company shall work—either scheme would meet my point—but control, co-ordination and co-operation there SHOULD be. Farming will never hold the place it ought to hold in the eyes of the world until we recognize this fact. Manufacturing will always have greater respect and greater power over the public mind until farming ceases to be a haphazard affair carried on by countless individuals in countless different ways. When the change is made, the State, or the farmers' farming organization will decide on the policy to be pursued for the year. The losses will be pooled and the profits pooled. There will be no bankrupt farmers except those who refuse to work."

This is probably utopian, and yet there are signs not only of the need for this sort of thing, but of the tendency more and more toward government control. The story of the bacon hog is well known. The bacon hog is a hog with a good figure. The common hog has no figure. He runs to fat and the average farmer lets him run to fat because he argues that it is cheaper to do that than to watch the diet of his hog. Yet there ARE good farmers who recognize the importance of producing a lean-waisted hog (a "finished" hog is the proper term, I believe) and they carry their beliefs into practice. But with what result? The careless farmer comes into the same market with his fat hogs and gets the same rate on a greater number of pounds of pork simply because there are not enough of the conscientious growers to produce enough hogs to create a definite market for that type.

Take also the matter of cream and the production of butter. Hitherto we have been very careless in butter production in this country. For many years Canada did a large export trade with the United Kingdom. She lost this trade when the home demand rose on account of increased railway construction and other activities. The Danes then stepped into our shoes and had been selling their excellent wares in England in place of Canadian butter when the war broke out. With the cutting off of the Danish market, however, the demand for butter was such that the Canadian shippers were once more able to enter this market. They had a certain surplus of butter due to the fallen demand in Canada, and they added to this by increasing the output of the butter factories. Last year between ten and twelve million pounds of butter were shipped out of Montreal. This export was smaller than it might have been had the season been more fortunate. This year there will be still greater shipments. But—when the war is over and normal trading relationships are restored, Canadian butter is likely to be driven out of the United Kingdom market by the Danish butter unless it measures up to the standards set by the Danes.

OFFICIALS in the Ontario Department of Agriculture recognized this fact and—following the example of certain of our western provinces—are standardizing the butter production of Ontario. Hereafter Ontario butter will bear a government mark and will be bought and sold according to class. This will affect not only the actual butter-makers, but will re-act upon the farmers. For the quality of the butter depends very largely upon the quality of the cream which goes into its making. Hitherto there has been a premium on careless handling of cream. In most districts the clean and careful farmer only received the same price as the careless farmer. In future the cream will have to be graded in all butter factories. The slovenly farmer will find himself getting the due reward of his slovenliness—or will change his methods in order to get a higher price.

These are examples of the need for standardization in farming practice—and the usefulness of the Government, or of some farm-appointed authority in deciding upon the standards and enforcing them. Until farming is standardized in one way or another it seems quite likely that the greatest of all industries is likely to remain low in efficiency. Meantime the attempt to reconcile the demand of Reginald Cityman with the supplies from John Farmer are mere pieces of patchwork on a system which is bound to be reconstructed sooner or later.