

COULD JOINT STOCK FARMING SUCCEED?

Use of Capitalistic Methods is Feasible—Labor Conditions Must Attract High-Grade Employees

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THE gulf dividing the farmer from the manufacturer widens rather than dwindles. To the farmer, agriculture is the source of all wealth. Consequently, he believes himself to be the most important cog in the wheel of human activity and entitled, therefore, to special dispensations from governments and the gods. Apparently, he has overlooked the inseparable interdependence of all the human family. He almost seems to have assumed the attitude of a being apart from, and independent of all, who are not farmers,—an independence which really relieves him of that measure of national responsibilities shared by other sections of the community.

Perhaps, the above unfortunate attitude constitutes the reaction from the past. It is beyond denial that, in former years, the treatment accorded to the farmer by those who were not farmers was frequently disgraceful and even criminal. Nevertheless, the offenders were traders, elevator men and such like,—not manufacturers.

However, the problem is how to modify and if possible extinguish an unfortunate antipathy existing between the farmer and the manufacturer,—an antipathy illustrating as it were, the house divided against itself which, from a national standpoint, is so thoroughly undesirable.

Joint Stock Farming

Now, my solution is that manufacturers should become farmers. That they should form joint stock companies generously capitalized, which would take over and operate large areas of eastern farm lands, on the same strictly efficient business lines now characteristic of the successful industry. In other words, I contend that agriculture should be conducted as an industry in an exactly literal sense; that the directors of such companies should be able to bring to the venture all the guidance, force and experience which have won them success in their factories.

I further contend that factory hours—except during seeding, harvest and other busy times—should prevail as should factory wages. Further, that workers should have homes of their own and not a corner in the cottage of their employer. It is my confident belief that such joint stock companies could operate to a handsome profit.

Is it reasonable for the farmer to expect that labor should be philanthropic in his case? Why should labor work for him at less—far less—than a factory wage? Our factories are full of the best agricultural labor in the country,—labor, however, that is imbued with some slight ambition. In my respectful opinion, it is nonsense to assume that the farmer is the only one who finds cheap labor economical. Long ago, every other line of livelihood demonstrated beyond all peradventure that the very dearest labor was cheap labor. Last season, I saw factory hands with previous agricultural experience, working on the land at factory wages. They worked just as hard and as quickly as though they had been assembling automobiles at Ford's; they did three times the work of the ordinary farm hand;—and, their work was thoroughly good. Pray, what kind of labor can the farmer expect at the money he is willing to pay? The bigger wage offered in the factory draws the good man from the land,—which is perfectly natural. The unambitious culls and windfalls remain on the land, as a rule.

No, my scheme is not so absurd: Let me ask how many bank shareholders know anything of the operations of a bank, of the science of banking? How many railway shareholders know a thing about railway operation? How many industrial shareholders have any practical knowledge of the mechanical appliances and methods involved in the production of the article which produces their dividends? How many steamship line shareholders could take a sight or

steer a course? However, such ignorance is unimportant. Knowledge can be purchased. Business ability and experience the manufacturer already possesses; for, to successfully run a factory nowadays, a man must be very able.

Further, it is stated that the most successful farmers in the United States are business men who have gone upon the land and focused their trained business brains upon the production of crops and the raising of live stock, buying and paying generously for the practical knowledge and guidance that is necessary, just as they pay skilled craftsmen in factories. It is management that will count on the farm just as in the factory.

More Capital Required

Now, one great drawback in our agricultural life is the effort of so many to farm without adequate capital. Like every other business, capital is necessary to the farmer. Unfortunately, there are so many farmers, particularly in the older portions of this country, who are content to grow their own food and almost nothing more. Such men are of scant economic value. Their land is largely run out and unproductive. There are thousands of them in the maritime provinces,—and, thousands elsewhere. They are very poor and they have no real productive value.

In the old days, the craftsman worked at his bench with his apprentices turning out a small quantity of excellent hand-made goods. Later, however, steam power became a factor. Machinery cost money. Therefore, manufacturers in similar lines pooled their capital and formed partnerships. By and by, industry developed and largely capitalized joint stock companies became the order of the day; and, finally, we have great mergers embracing many large concerns in one huge whole.

So much for industry; but, with agriculture, no such evolution has been apparent. The farmer still labors with his apprentice in the same old way.

There is but one way, in my humble opinion, that agriculture can be raised to the proper place and plane, and that is by the formation of joint stock companies operated by business men on efficient factory principles. Such operation would mean the standardizing of products for export; it would involve the introduction of model agricultural methods which, under the law of emulation, would be productive of a general uplift. Further, it would mean good roads; a brightening of rural life and the adding thereto of these social amenities which are now so insistently demanded by intelligent workers. It would also mean the transformation to productivity of tens of thousands of acres of land more or less adjacent to centres of population and markets. And, lastly, it would demonstrate to the farmer that, after all, the business man could beat him at his own game, which he assuredly could. This accomplished, it is my sincere conviction that these two highly important sections of the community would then come together in a full and frank understanding of each other and of each other's problems, which consummation so devoutly to be wished, will, in my respectful opinion, never materialize otherwise.

CIVIC INSURANCE PROPOSED IN OTTAWA

The insurance on the civic buildings of the city of Ottawa expires on April 1st of this year. The council thinks that the present rate of two per cent. is too high for a three-year period, especially as the water system and the fire department have been improved since the present business was placed. A plan has been prepared for carrying the insurance by means of a civic fire insurance reserve fund. This fund would consist of \$80,000 of ten-year debentures which would be sold only to replace property destroyed by fire. A special rate would be levied each year during the currency of the debentures to pay the interest on them, and to provide for a sinking fund to retire them upon maturity. This plan has been incorporated in a bill which is being submitted to the provincial legislature at Toronto.