

SECOND PRIZE ESSAY.

How Can Farmers Best Protect Themselves Against Combines?

BY JAMES HAWKINS.

The owner of any domestic animal will generally treat his brute with consideration, not always on the score of humanity, but from self interest. From like motives, if from no other, the slave-holder provided wholesome food and necessary clothing. The slave was also permitted to have a breathing spell and a few moments to dance, sing and tune the old banjo. The Canadian farmer, though he boasts of freedom and a high state of civilization, finds himself the victim of a system, even more than slavery, for what care these vampires in human form, the ringsters, whether the poor farmer has wholesome food to eat or garments to shield him from the storm. If the farmer, or one of his family is sick, he must pay the extortionate charges of a combined medical faculty, who have had and still possess sufficient influence to have laws enacted, to enable them legally to extort the last dollar from the unfortunate. Is he bereaved of a loved one by the grim monster death, the undertaker charges him frequently three times the real value for his services, and his furnishings of the paraphernalia of the dead. Almost everything he must buy from a pin to a binder is under the control of rings and monopolies. If this were all, even this would be tolerable, but a much more grinding tyranny and injustice is forced upon him in the case of what he has to sell. From the small buyer in the country village or town to the great ringsters in the world's emporiums, all conspire to fleece him of his store, and sink him to poverty and ruin. Whenever any article not produced by the farmers becomes too low in price, so that it is not considered profitable handling, a combine is formed, and no matter what the method, the effect is the same. It matters not, however, what it cost the farmer to produce his commodities, he must accept the price set upon it by others. The lower the price the more he taxes muscle and brain to produce more to make up the deficit, and the more he produces the lower the price will become.

Who then is to blame for this state of things? I reply, principally the farmers themselves. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." All the way back, the centuries history teaches us whenever a nation or a people become the mere dupes and vassals of rascals, whose only aim is money and power, then that nation or people is doomed to destruction and oblivion. I assert that only for the wonderful capabilities and great natural resources of Ontario, her people would be in a more deplorable condition than Ireland. I have repeatedly heard this assertion made by intelligent and educated Irishmen, who were thoroughly conversant with the state and conditions of both countries. "The sheep which bleats looses a bite of grass," and the Canadian farmer thinks he has no time to look after the interest of his calling. He cannot afford even a couple of hours once a month at a club meeting gotten up for his special benefit. He cannot afford to read his own literature, and has no money to get it or time to read it. Is there one important question affecting him more than all others, then he is quite satisfied that a handful of professionals should do the thinking for him. He voted for them at the polling booth and thinks that completes his share of the responsibility.

If it were possible to allow without interference the whole body of agriculturists to be united on any one question they could be divided as if by magic by a simple wave of the political whip. When the farmers of Canada are so stupid in prejudice by political bias, is it any wonder that they have become the victims of scheming monopolists? The cure must be a radical one; the farmers must throw aside for ever the shackles of torism and gritism. They must do more thinking for themselves, even at the expense of less physical labor; they must form clubs and associations for the purpose of forwarding their own interest, and cast aside that silly idea that time spent at these meetings is lost. They must read their own literature and read less political trash, and above all in this reading age they must support, even to the last dollar, periodicals devoted to them and their interest alone. A widely circulated agricultural paper is undoubtedly the most powerful agency the farmers possess to free themselves of the impending thralldom which now threatens them. Farmers, you may protect yourselves against combines, corruption and misgovernment by a little effort. Will you make this effort? or will you allow the chains to be fastened around you tighter and tighter? Rid yourselves of old prejudices. What odds to you how your father voted? Would it be wise for you to imitate the follies of your father? Do your own thinking; attend to your farmers' clubs or institutions; help to form new ones; support agricultural periodicals, who have stood up for your interest against fearful odds. In so doing you will not only benefit yourselves but you will save your country.

The Farmer's Friends.

Concluding his remarks on injurious insects in the Husbandman, Mr. G. D. Halst says:—It may also be an advantage to point out some of the friends of the farmer, which, consequently, no farmer should destroy or allow to be destroyed. Among these are toads, which are, under all circumstances, the farmer's friend; moles and field mice, probably, do a vast deal more of good than harm; all birds, especially robins, wrens, thrushes, orioles, cuckoos, phoebes, blue birds, woodpeckers, swallows and cat birds. The destruction of all these and many others, except for scientific purposes, should be made, under very heavy penalties, illegal. The house sparrow, known better as the English sparrow, is to be rated an exception. This bird is now universally regarded as a nuisance, first, because of its grain and vegetable-destroying propensities; secondly, because it drives away insect-destroying birds.

Among insects, many wasps are friends, especially those with a more or less protruding horn or sting at the end of the abdomen. Lady bugs and lace-wing flies live entirely upon destructive insects, especially plant lice and scale insects, and should never be destroyed. Dragon flies, or devil's darning-needles, are also useful as well as harmless.

Unstacked lime dust used on asparagus when the leaves are moist with dew is a favorite remedy for the asparagus beetle.

If when preparing mixtures of soap and kerosene, the soap and kerosene is put together in a vessel and allowed to stand over night, a few minutes stirring with a stick will bring these mixtures into the right state next morning. By letting the coal oil stand on the soap its chemical powers are brought into play as well as by beating it about, though more slowly.

Good Farming Pays.

There is one dangerous kind of infidelity among farmers which not the religious, but the agricultural press can best deal with. This is, briefly, the want of faith that their business is or can be profitable. It prevails to-day more extensively than ever before, and is undoubtedly due to the sharper competition that the farming business has been subjected to. It was bad enough when the great West poured its cheaply grown products in competition with those of Eastern farmers. Now both alike are threatened with more ruinous competition from the cheap pauper labor of semi-barbarous India. The infection of this infidelity has extended to nearly all the agricultural press, and it is high time that efforts be made to counteract it.

We have always said, and now repeat, that good farming pays. But what is meant by good farming? Is agriculture the unprogressive science or business that alone remains the same, while everything around it changes? If it is, then most lamentable indeed is the prospect for American farmers. We know that in agricultural implements and labor-saving machinery connected with farming there has been astounding progress. But this itself is not improved farming. It only furnishes the means to make better farming possible. In fact, by enlarging the areas of land under cultivation, labor-saving farm implements are apt too make farming poorer rather than better. And the great difficulty with the farming business at present is that American inventions in harvesting machinery have gone all over the world. They are used in Australia, India and on the plains of Russia almost as freely as by the farmers of our own country.

It is not merely the good farming that pays. It must be something more than good, an improvement on the kind that made farmer's reasonably prosperous forty or fifty years ago. This requires personal thought and skill, such as have never before been demanded in the farmer's business. The old idea of farming, and for its time the correct idea, was that it was mainly hard work. The method of farming ran in ruts, and when a man got into one of these all he had to do was to pull ahead. He need not even plan. The man who got up earliest, worked hardest and longest, made the most money. He was by these facts the good farmer, and therefore successful.

Hard work never has been and never will be entirely eliminated from tilling the soil. Thorns and thistles and weeds it produces as it has always done, and it is still in the sweat of his brow that the soil tiller eats his bread. But we have relieved the farmer from more toil than would once have been thought possible, only it operates pretty impartially upon farmers of all classes. The better farming now needed must be the individual work and thought of the farmer himself. If he cannot plan, calculate and judge about the details of his business, he is in no better shape for success than his unskilled competitors, who perhaps work harder and for less wage than he. If a farmer wants to be successful he has to accomplish it through such improvements in farm stock of every kind, methods of manuring, underdraining and cultivation, as to largely increase the value of all our agricultural products. Possibly in some things it may be impossible for us to hold our own. These the skilful farmer will avoid.—[Am. Cultivator.