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## THE GRUB AND THE PRICE

**T**HERE are two distinct things about food to-day: First, there is not enough of it; second, what there is is unpleasantly high in price. Neither of these things is an original discovery; and neither is the form of statement.

The first proposition we must accept on the strength of the statements of men who presumably know what they are talking about; also because common sense tells us, or should tell us, that millions of men cannot be withdrawn from production without affecting the production of food. That is elementary. If we agree that there is not enough food we should get together in an earnest and united attempt to make what there is go as far as possible. That is elementary, too. But before looking at a few angles of the first proposition let us consider the second, not because that is the logical method, but because we are so constituted that we consider high prices, which we feel, more important than shortage, which we do not feel—yet.

The truth of the second needs no argument. High prices are within the personal knowledge of everybody. But we differ as to the reason for them. Some people of a fatalistic turn of mind class them with various unavoidable acts of God and the King's enemies, and let it go at that; others repeat some economic dogma learned by rote, and let it go at that; while still others are of the opinion that Barabbas, Claude Duval, the James Boys, et hoc genus omne, were mere dilettante amateurs as compared with some of our leading citizens. But every man thinks prices are too high—except the price of the particular thing he has to sell.

Take wheat. In a normal world wheat is about the best illustration you can find of a staple, mobile, not specially perishable world-wide product on which the law of supply and demand gets action. The price is supposed to be set by the world demand and supply. Heretofore Providence has usually arranged that when there was a poor wheat crop in one part of the world there should be at least an average crop in another. Famine became less and less possible with the increase of world wheat area as civilization extended. Now and then somebody tried to corner wheat, but as often as not wheat cornered him. The large fluctuations of price in the past have been in the main speculative.

**S**PECULATION has been recognized as part of the game. It has been permitted exactly as gambling and other things are permitted in a wide-open town, because public sentiment has not reached a point where they become a nuisance. But, sooner or later, if you let them have full swing, gambling and other things, and gamblers and other undesirable characters, do become a nuisance. They think they own the town. They affect the ordinary citizen in his everyday life. When that happens sentiment against them grows, and finally it reaches a point where the lid is clamped down and the town cleaned up.

Reforms of all kinds—constitutional, temperance, moral, and all the rest of them—are really due not to reformers and cranks, but to the fact that one way or another people make hogs of themselves. If old-time monarchs, ruling by divine right, had shown ordinary horse-sense there would have been no revo-

**T**HE man from Windermere packs a peak load of common sense into this article. He conveys it to you in language which puts a new aspect on what some people consider an old argument. Reforms of all kinds, he says, speaking of speculation, are really due not to reformers and cranks, but to the fact that one way or another people make hogs of themselves.

The second article on the Hen and the Egg, will appear next week.—Editor.

By A. M. CHISHOLM

lutions; if booze sellers and booze fighters had exercised ordinary modesty and moderation there would have been nothing for temperance sentiment to work on; if vice wouldn't insist on riding with its feet out of the window of the sea going hack nobody would bother about it. And so speculators and other hogs are at last arousing public sentiment against themselves.

Speculation is gambling. Speculation in wheat—in all necessities—is gambling with the resources of the nation. When the price goes up to enable the speculator to cover—which is to pay a bet—every family in the land has to pay more for its bread. Flour jumps or drops from week to week, almost from day to day, but it has always jumped a little more than it has dropped back. There is no longer any relation between the price of wheat and its growing cost. Nor is there more than a step-motherly relation between the prices of wheat and flour. And there is a growing conviction in the public mind that everybody who has anything to do with either is hogging.

Grant that wheat is scarce; but consider these fitful fluctuations in the price of it. Do they occur because there is from day to day less or more wheat in the world? or even because there is a greater or less demand for what there is? Certainly not. Do any words of a German politician, or any words of anybody at all, add to or diminish the wheat supply? Of course they don't. They merely influence the betting odds. And so we have allowed the price of a prime necessity of life, which we all must have, to depend upon betting. Now, honestly, isn't that a devil of a state of affairs? Are we sane or otherwise, that in times like these we have permitted such a condition? Why did we permit it? From mere force of habit, and because gambling had not got to the point of being an intolerable nuisance.

For a long time it was said to be impossible to fix prices. No particular reason why, except that it would be sacrilege to monkey with the sacred joss of supply and demand. But finally, it had to come, because otherwise descendants of the Gadarene herd would have put bread upon a par with humming-birds' tongues, and the public simply would not stand for it. The moral is, that if the price of wheat can be fixed, so can the price of anything else. It is mere custom-bound insanity to let people boost the price of any article whose growth, manufacture and export we can control, at their own sweet will.

The average citizen would like to know where he is at in prices. High, middle or low, he would like to see some stability about them. The only way to

secure stability is to stop speculation. The only way to stop speculation is to fix prices. The only fair fixed price is one which includes a fair profit and no more from the producer onward, and eliminates all unfair and excess profit. It is quite possible to ascertain that price in any product, and that is what should be done and done at once, all along the line, without the least regard for the walls of individuals and corporations who may lose speculative profits thereby. In fixing the price of wheat the Government expressly stated that the time had come to consider the public interest above the speculative interest of the individual, or the interest of the speculative individual. So it has. It is refreshing to find a statement of that kind.

Most people know that the Canadian wheat price is now fixed at \$2.40 for last year's wheat, and that export, save by the individual farmer, has been prohibited in order to make the first regulation effective. Otherwise, the speculator would have sent all the wheat out of the country to get a higher price, without any regard whatever for the food needs of his fellow-countrymen. That very fact is enough to kill any sympathy for him. My personal opinion is that the fixed wheat price is too high, but I make no claim to an understanding of all the fine points of the wheat game. But I do know that three years ago no wheat grower even dreamed of such a price; and I know, further, that the cost of growing wheat has not increased at all in proportion. Hence I have no sympathy with people who want to play a sure thing by having this or some other terrific price guaranteed as a minimum. The wheat grower would still make money if a dollar were lopped off that price. The average wheat grower grows besides wheat, meat and vegetables, and pays out little for actual subsistence in comparison with other classes of citizens, and is in much better case. There are other people besides the wheat grower who desire to live. However, the fixation of a wheat price, high or low, will stabilize, and that is a move in the right direction. But it should have been done long ago, and it should be done in all staple necessities.

**T**HE public puts the job up to the Food Controller. It is no job for a standpatter. It is a new job, and a big one. The idea is new, utterly opposed to the old idea—which used to be called the modern idea—that competition would regulate prices fairly. It used to—until competition became a race to raise prices. Prices are as high as they are, partly at least because everyone who produces or deals in anything is endeavouring to get the very last cent of maximum profit out of such production or dealing. That is the naked truth with the last frilly stripped off. To hear some people talk you would think that war profiteering was confined to the munition man and the manufacturer. Bosh! If war profiteering consists in selling at a tremendous increase over cost, then every grain grower in the land is war profiteering for all he is worth. So is everybody else. It is a case of everybody doing it. In every line men are afraid they have overlooked a bet, that they are selling too cheaply, that the traffic will bear more. The thing is in the air. We are doing exactly as the cats and rats did—eating each other by high prices.

The public expects two things of the Food Controller: First, to cut down extravagance in food;