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PIGS WILL BE PIGS

BY MARK KETTS

IN days almost forgotten, when there was no war, pigs were called mortgage-lifters, and with reason, for many a farmer has been relieved of the burden of debt by the then ignoble pig. Since the war, pigs have risen in economic and social scales. Losing none of their lifting propensities, they are now regarded as life-savers; and play big roles in the life of civilization—and in some life that is none too civilized. “Keep a pig and help win the war,” is the Hon. Food Controller’s slogan, a phrase which smacks of Sir Thomas White’s injunction to buy Victory Bonds. And, truth to tell, the two, Victory Bonds and pigs, are in the same class, the essentials to power of the Allied armies.

Mr. Hanna has inaugurated a campaign for pork production. He is emphasizing the importance of pork. Europe, it seems, has 32,600,000 fewer pigs than she had before the war. Possibly Mr. Hanna, who is responsible for the calculation, realizes how many 32,600,000 pigs are, but certainly the ordinary, unmathematical, unimaginative, plebian mind, cannot get the concept with a single gulp. Placed end to end—provided they would stand still long enough—32,600,000 pigs would make a row encircling the world. Properly deceased at the hands of the butcher, 32,600,000 pigs should make nearly five billion pounds of pork. And remember, this enormous poundage is only what Europe has eaten in excess of production since the war!

That is why so many medals are being pinned upon the porker. Like artisans and authors, their fame is of postmortem variety.

The explanation of this enormous consumption of pork is simple. Most soldiers are out-of-door men. They have long marches in all kinds of weather, and hard fatiguing labor. Like Canadian lumbermen, they must consume fats if they are to keep fit. The scientists tell us that 35 per cent. of the soldiers’ food should be fat; and like the Canadian lumberman, the soldier finds the most digestible, palatable fat in the pig.

When alive, the pig is a monotonous animal, sleeping, eating, and grunting the full course of his inglorious days away; but once dead, he becomes versatile. At least he can be put to versatile uses, which is much the same thing. The pig may be turned into ham, bacon, delectable roasts, lard and sausages. The pig’s feet and head tickle the palate and are nourishing; his skins make saddles; his bristles, brushes—the barons who make the pigs over into food products tell us that he is all-usable, except the squeal.

AND the pig keeps. That settles him with the exemption tribunal; for in overseas service, keeping qualities are essential. Cured by smoking, pickling, whether by post process or otherwise, the pig will keep longer dead than alive.

Briefly and unscientifically, that is why the army wants pigs, needs pigs, and cannot do without pigs.

Pressed by millions of military appetites, Germany, France, England, Italy, the Balkans, and all of the countries within the war zone, have had to slaughter their swine-herds faster than they could replenish them. Germany attended to the butchering in Serbia, where pigs were

once an integral part of the princes’ and peasants’ menage, and as a result of Teu-

tonic thoroughness, pigs there are to-day almost as scarce as alligators, and more valuable, fetching \$150 to \$200 each.

Even the neutral countries have been affected. The Danes, once purseproud in their bacon industry, turning up their Danish noses at the Canadian’s inferior stuffs, have been dethroned. They fed their pigs upon imported cereals, and alas for Denmark and Denmark’s pigs, these are no more!

It is an ill wind that blows no one good, runs the old adage; and Europe’s needs are Canada’s opportunities. The Allies’ needs ought to be Canada’s patriotic duties. The Honorable Food Controller Hanna points out that in this case the path to patriotism is paved with profits. Speed-up pork production, he says; provide the army with fat, and adds in a pertinent and audible aside: there is money in it.

THE stork is an open-handed, frequent visitor in pig-land, arriving on the maximum schedule five times in two years, and leaving often as many as ten or twelve little pigs, although seven is a fair average. Paper and pencil in hand, the interested reader can readily figure for himself that at this rate of production, a small herd devoted exclusively to breeding, may be rapidly turned into a big one. By a few compounding calculations, the would-be swine-herder can derive visions of wealth from the pig-industry, surpassing those of “Get-rich-quick Wallingford,” but—and if it were not for “buts” I would be very rich—the expense of providing for the cafeteria must be included. That’s the bar to production—the cost of food. For the high cost of living has reached the pig-sty.

Speed-up movements for hog-production are by no means new to Canada. For years they have been the favorite pastime of editors and government officials; and the farmer, carried away by eloquence, has in each campaign added an hour or two of labor to his expansive day, and converted his cereals into pork, only to often find the finished product selling for less than the labor and food were worth.

The Canadian pig-market has puzzled the wisest of outsiders. In the first month of the war, the prices of pork products steadily climbed the ladder, and farmers naturally concluded that live hogs would follow. But strangely enough, as bacons and hams went up, live hogs went down, and in a few months were separated by an enormous spread. Somebody got that spread, and as it was neither the producer nor the consumer, the farmer suspected—and openly accused—the packing-house barons of having stuffed it down their overalls’ pockets.

It was with a knowledge of these facts that I skeptically began to enquire into the Honorable Food Controller’s propaganda for pork production. Shall I invest my high priced grain in pigs? or shall I invest it at the village store for much-needed comforts? Such is the question I asked myself, and such is the question many a farmer is asking. City people may shout their blooming heads off about pork

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