

Honesty: Elevators vs. Farmers

Editor, Guide:—Some time ago, while on my way to St. Paul, I overheard two men in the seat opposite talking about the feeding value of grain. Thinking they were farmers and talking about something I was interested in, I moved over to their seat. But when I sat down they immediately stopped talking, so I excused myself for disturbing them, explaining that, as I was a farmer I was interested in their conversation. It turned out that one of them was a college student who had heard the professor explaining the feeding value of the different kinds of grain. I remained in conversation with them, and the discussion turned on the subject of government ownership of elevators. The other gentleman seemed strongly opposed to the principle and what I had to say in favor of it, so I said to him, "I am afraid you must be one of the elevator men." "No," he said, "I am not an elevator man. I am only a traveller looking after some of the elevators in the North West for an elevator company." "Oh," I said, "Then you are one of the men hired by the Combine to watch that the other men hired by the Combine to steal from the farmer do not also steal from the Combine." "Yes," he said, "if you choose to put it that way."

But he went on to say that he did not see how an employer could have confidence in any man whom he had hired to steal for him, as he would be very much afraid that the employee would steal from him as well. I agreed with him and said that it would be necessary to use the same precautions that the Elevator Combine was now using. He expressed a decided opinion to the effect that he did not believe the Combine hired their buyers to steal from the farmers. I told him that my experience with the Combine was limited to three buyers, but these buyers must all have been working for the same man at their orders were the same, namely, to weigh so and so, and take so much dockage, and if they did not obey orders they would lose their jobs. One of the buyers quit the business of his own accord, saying that a man could not run an elevator for a Combine and live a Christian life.

The traveller then asked me how the stealing was done. I explained to him that it was done in different ways, sometimes by weighing the farmer's load lighter, sometimes by excessive dockage, and sometimes by making mistakes (?) in figuring up the weight of the load. The method employed depends upon the man he has to deal with. If the farmer knows his business the buyer perhaps only employs one of these methods. But if the farmer is a greenhorn, he usually employs all three. I know of one case where the farmer took the precaution to weigh his load on the city scales before driving up to the elevator. The elevator man weighed his load light and the farmer informed him of the fact. Then he figured it up again and discovered his mistake (?). I went on to give him a number of instances of a similar nature. The traveller contended that my experience did not prove that all elevator men were dishonest. Then I gave him a personal experience.

I was farming in Iowa and took a number of loads of oats to the elevator. On the first load I had only forty-eight bushels. The oats they raise down there are not so heavy as they are here. The next load I was sure would weigh fifty bushels. But when I got to the elevator I only had forty-six bushels. I had tramped it in and was very much surprised and told the buyer so. He pretended to weigh it again but with the same result, and said that the oats must be lighter. The next load I did not tramp, for I thought if it weighed lighter when it is tramped there is no use doing it. This load turned out only forty-four bushels. Not satisfied with stealing from me on the weight, he next informed me that the oats were a lighter grade and that he would have to pay me less a bushel for them and told me I had been trying to cheat him. I protested that they were the same oats, out of the same bin, but he tried to make it appear as though I were a thief and he had caught me in the act. I did not have the advantage of a city scale, but had to take just what he would give me. I got so disgusted that I decided not to sell any more grain that year. Some time after I heard this same honest elevator man say that he had shipped out seven

carloads of grain more than he had bought. How did he get it? Through his honesty. I suppose.

Then the traveller proceeded to tell me of an experience he had, to show that a farmer is sometimes dishonest too. He said that one day he was in an elevator when a farmer came up with a load of grain. The buyer was busy, so he proceeded to empty the load. He found sand in it and on questioning the farmer, the farmer denied that there was sand in the load. He afterwards admitted that the end board had come out of his wagon box and in scraping up the wheat he might have got some sand in it. The elevator traveller gave this as a striking example of dishonesty. But I told him that in all probability the farmer considered that in any case he would be done out of several bushels and if the sand went unnoticed he would get even for once.

The traveller then told another story to prove that there were dishonest farmers. He said he was working for a commission firm that was handling eggs and they got their eggs from the country merchants. On repacking the eggs it was found that the two bottom tiers in some of the cases were empty. The merchant wondered why there was a shortage in his returns, and when the explanation was given him he said he had sent in the eggs just as he received them from the farmer. Then I asked the traveller if he had anything to show for this but the merchant's word. He replied that he hadn't, but that it was just like a farmer's trick. I told him about a merchant who had had a can of honey returned because it was only half full. The merchant sent a clerk down to the furnace with the honey and told him to melt it until it filled the can and then he would sell it for a full can. And it is as likely that the merchant with the eggs put the blame on the farmer to cover up his own dishonesty.

The discussion once more turned on the elevator question and my friend asked me why it was that if there was so much money in the elevator business, so many elevator companies are so anxious to sell out. "Simply because they know that their days are numbered. First they have aroused the distrust of the farmers, second, they know that the elevators are going to be taken over by the farmers sooner or later, and they will handle their own grain." The traveller said he thought it would be hard for the working man to get a living if the farmers ever should get together and run the grain trade, and explained that once they had the grain trade in their own hands they would command any price they liked, and if it wasn't paid they could hold the grain till it would have to be paid. I told him that the farmers' only aim was to do away with the middlemen, and thus by lessening the cost of handling the farmer would get more for his produce without raising the cost to the consumer. My friend agreed with this, but, as of regretting that he had given way to his better feelings, added that farmers as a class were distrustful. I told him that we had greater reason for being distrustful than any other class of people on earth, and drew his attention to a remark in the speech of the secretary of the Manufacturers Association at their banquet in Winnipeg. This man said something to the effect that if the 2,500 members of the Manufacturers' Association chose to do so, they could, by united action, bring the whole country to the verge of starvation. Yet these "poor creatures" go up to the government and plead that they cannot live as manufacturers if they be not privileged with bonuses on the manufactured article. Then when we come to buy the article we are asked five prices for it and told if we do not care to pay that much we can leave it.

On the next station being called out, my friend grabbed his coat and grip and hurried out, saying as he left, "Well, I may meet you again some day and we will continue the discussion."

Now, brother farmers, you can see from this that the Combines and all our abusers know full well that if we all got together and used our full force as one man we could get anything we wanted done and for fear we will do that our oppressors are doing everything in their power to create distrust among the farmers and keep them from uniting as long as possible.

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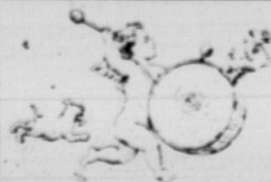
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TO JOIN LAKES.

Efforts to get the governments at Ottawa and Washington to act together for the improvement of Rainy River are being made by thirty-one northern counties of Minnesota. The plan is to make the river more open for navigation so as to furnish means of water transportation between the great lakes and the Lake of the Woods, helping to open territory now accessible only by the Canadian Pacific and the Minnesota and International. Of these roads the Canadian lines are but branches—and the Minnesota and the International serves

but two Minnesota counties.

The plan, as it will be outlined to the two governments involves a canal with three locks connecting Rainy and Pigeon Rivers, thus furnishing a waterway between Hudson Bay and Chicago and New York, via the great lakes, and Hudson Bay to New Orleans, via the great lakes and Chicago canal and the Mississippi river. The movement for these improvements was started at a recent meeting at Crookston, Minn., but was not announced, pending the notification of the authorities at Washington on account of the international character of the project.