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HARD TIMES ON THE FARM.

Why They Are and How They Can Be Helped.

The Department of Agriculture furnished the following authoritative statement upon the subject of "Agricultural Depression and its Cures."

There is almost universal complaint among farmers of all nations of the prevalence of low prices. The agricultural depression of Great Britain has probably been more severe than that of any other nation. A potent cause in this case is the competition from all parts of the world, unrelieved by any taxation of imports. France and Germany are somewhat disturbed by similar complaints of unremunerative rural industry. Italy has also had occasion to make official investigation of the causes of agricultural depression. Other countries are vocal with similar cries of dissatisfaction with the proceeds of agricultural labor. So the trouble appears to be general in monarchies and republics, whether the monetary circulation is good or silver or paper, and under the influence of various and diverse economic systems. Not all countries are in the same depths of distress. In ours farmers and farm laborers are doubtless better fed and clothed, able to maintain a higher style of living and enjoy more of the benefits of civilization and culture than those of any other country. It may be said with absolute truth that in thirty years the scale of living has advanced immensely in this country, not equally in all sections, but manifestly everywhere. There is a tendency to extravagance in town life that has been imitated in rural circles, and the natural ambition for progress and precedence, when generally aroused, will express itself in dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions and a determination to overpower all obstacles to advancement. This is a hopeful sign. It is an indication of conscious dignity. It is a prophecy of progress.

WHY THE LOW PRICES.

While, therefore, our own country feels the effect of agricultural depression less than almost any other in the world, the reduction in prices of most staples, and in domestic animals and their products forces a disagreeable comparison with agricultural values at their highest, compels reduced expenditure to keep the outgo subordinate to income, increases the number of unfortunates who cannot make "both ends meet," and reduces the profits of the enterprising and skillful, who are still able to strike a balance in their favor. Retrenchment is not an agreeable alternative, and is therefore delayed until its compulsion is imperative and perhaps destructive. "Hard times" are universally regarded as "hard" in comparison with more prosperous eras of the past. It matters not what the prices of implements, utensils, and fabrics, of goods desired by the farmer, have been reduced proportionally; his interest account, if it has one, is unreduced, and his mortgage is a greater burden to lift. He sighs for the good old days of high prices, though they may have been war or famine prices, necessarily temporary, and though they may have been the source of extravagant views, unnecessary expenditure, and the foundation of his present indebtedness. He naturally resents and deplores low valuation of farm products.

What are the causes of low prices?

They may be various, but the prime cause is the operation of the inexorable law of supply and demand. Abundance leads inevitably to low prices; scarcity to high prices. With either there are fluctuations a see-saw of prices which increases cost and reduces profit. Medium and uniform values are, therefore, best for the farmer.

THE INCREASE OF PRODUCTION.

There has been an increase of production in this country even more rapid than the increment of population. America has long been synonym of plethora. Her people probably consume more than those of any other nation and have a larger surplus for foreign needs. Immigration has been heavy and unrestricted; railroad building has been stimulated until an empire of new and productive lands has been opened, and these lands have been given alike to settlers of native or foreign birth. Speculation first and profitable utilization afterwards have been the motive for settlement and development, which has astonished the world and caused over production and low prices. The following statement shows the increase in thirty years in certain products of the farm, as reported by the census:

Products.	1860.	1890.
Corn, bushels	592,071,104	2,112,891,000
Wheat, bushels	100,485,944	611,780,000
Oats, bushels	156,848,049	809,250,000
Potatoes, bushels	65,797,000	181,000,000
Cotton, bales	2,847,000	9,901,000
Hay, tons	15,958,000	65,000,000

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If we extend the comparison to the present date we find that the corn crop exceeds 2,000,000,000 bushels, wheat approximates 500,000,000, oats exceed 700,000,000, and hay and potatoes have increased in similar proportion. While the product may be three or four times as large the population is less than three times as much, though the proportion of workers engaged in agriculture is larger than ever.

HARD TO REMOVE A BURDEN.

During the forty years from 1850 to the present time the cotton product increased from a little over 2,000,000 bales to more than 9,000,000 bales. Cattle have also increased very rapidly, even from between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000 to about 15,000,000, other cattle from scarcely 12,000,000 to more than 35,000,000. While sheep have doubled in number, the wool production has quadrupled. While the milk cows are almost three times as many, their average rate of yield of milk has probably doubled. The improvement of other cattle through breeding and feeding has reduced the time required for maturity and increased the weight of carcass to such an extent that the amount of beef produced annually in proportion to number of animals kept is immensely increased. Relative numbers in comparison with the past in all all kinds of domestic animals have far less significance than improvement in weight and quality in thriftiness and early maturity. It is difficult to force a market abroad for a surplus of any product. Every nation is seeking to produce its own food, and, as far as possible, its raw materials for extension in all forms of industrial production. The instinct of self preservation compels the adoption of such a policy. This furnishes the motive for the corn laws of France and Germany and other continental countries, and the laws of European nations prohibiting the introduction of our pork products. We cannot sell our crops abroad, as a rule, except to fill the gaps in supply that are made by bad seasons, or other results of the inevitable or inexorable.

A SENATORIAL PLAN.

When Senator Sumner once proposed to levy an export tax of 20c per pound on tobacco and compel a tribute from foreigners, he was soon convinced by practical tobacco men that its only effect would be to destroy our importation, and he at once abandoned the idea. The amount grown in Europe and the quantity imported are both regulated by governmental control there, and never by the government or growers here, and under the influence of this regulation the proportion of our crop exported is declining, being reduced slightly below one-half, and nothing that our government or growers can do will change this fact.

In cotton this country enjoys an acknowledged superiority, and will doubtless continue to hold it. It supplies to the cotton factories of the world more than half their material. It can increase this supply, with the inevitable effect of reducing the price. The sale does not depend on our purchases abroad. Its aggregate would not be reduced a pound if we should refuse to spend a single dollar for foreign products. The mills must have the fiber, and nowhere else can it be had of so good quality and value. We can manufacture more of it here and thus increase foreign competition for it, but the product can not be enlarged beyond the current wants of the world's trade without reducing the price of fiber and fabrics. Thus the law of supply and demand limits the extension of the cotton fields.

LOWEST FOR A CENTURY.

In wheat, overproduction has destroyed the growers' profit. Wheat growing has become a philanthropic mission for supplying cheap bread to Great Britain and encouraging her manufacturers to keep wages on a low plane. The Northwestern missionaries are still diligently sowing their seed and floating their bread across the waters, and mourning that the profits do not return to them after many days of weary transportation. The area of the crop of 1889 included about 10,000,000 acres more than the home consumption of the year will require, and the price in Liverpool has of late been the lowest for a century. We can not force foreigners to pay our taxes. There has been a mass of ineffable nonsense regarding "the markets of the world" for wheat. Less than a fourth of the people of the world eat wheat. Half of the people of Europe scarcely know its taste, while few of the nations of Asia and Africa have any knowledge of it. The statistician has thus presented the limitations of our distribution of the wheat surplus:

South America is now no market for flour, as more wheat is grown there than is required for domestic consumption, and an annually enlarging outlet for wheat is now sought in the distribution of the surplus. Australasia makes more than a home supply. India has a surplus of 10 to 15 per cent. Eastern Europe always has wheat to sell, leaving only Western Europe to supplement its nearly full garners with the contributions of all other countries, those of Europe included. Of the average four bushels consumed by each inhabitant of Europe only a half bushel comes from other continents, and this is practically the measure of the market for the wheat surplus of the world, a market which neither reciprocity nor the persuasion of any international comity can enlarge. Nothing but war, famine or pestilence, nothing but an act of God or a change of crop distribution utterly at variance with long-settled policy and practical sense, can swell to sudden importance the demand for wheat and flour that will relieve prevailing stagnation and advance prices.

TOO MUCH MEAT.

The production of meat has also advanced faster than population. In 1880 the cattle of all kinds were returned as 33,000,000 head, and the numbers as now estimated on farms and ranches are 52,500,000, or 33 per cent more. Excluding cows, the increase of other cattle, which includes the beeves, is equivalent to about 40 per cent. These beeves are brought to maturity more rapidly than formerly, and more meat is made in proportion to numbers, so that the beef supply is greater than in 1880 in proportion to population. The ratio of supply has been very greatly increased since 1850. Our export of beef has grown up in the past thirteen years, and the export of cattle has not only increased, but its character has changed from the shipment of Texas or Florida longhorns to Cuba to the export of fat beeves to Europe, one of which commands the price of five of the original style of Gulf coast cattle. This difference represents not precisely the meat making capacity of the cattle of 1850 and 1890 respectively, but it suggests the wide disparity between the ratio of meat to number of cattle at the two dates. The following table of highest prices of beeves in Chicago shows that the present values are lower than in any year since the export of beef was inaugurated, with the sole exception of 1879. Prices increased till 1883, when they were highest, and fell heavily in 1884, advancing slightly in 1887 except as to the extra grade, and recovering further in 1888, only to continue a decline during the past two years:

Year.	Beef Cattle.	Extra.	Choice.	Good.	Medium.
1876		$5.75	$5.10		$4.50
1877		5.70	4.90		4.10
1878		6.00	4.70	3.90	3.95
1879		5.90	4.25	4.00	3.90
1880		6.25	4.75		4.70
1881		6.75	5.80		4.75
1882		6.85	6.35	5.15	
1883		6.50	6.10	5.50	5.00
1884		7.25	6.30	6.25	5.00
1885		6.85	6.00	4.70	4.50
1886		5.70	5.00	4.75	4.15
1887		5.15	5.00	4.90	4.70
1888		5.00	5.15	4.90	4.70
1889		5.10	4.75	4.50	4.00
1890		5.20	4.75	4.40	3.90

DIVERSIFICATION ONE REMEDY.

Thus the staple products of agriculture by increase of farms, by railroad building and land settlement and the increase of agricultural implements are grown to excess, while other products with which our farmers are not familiar are neglected and left to foreign labor to produce, while our own rural labor is only partially employed, or else in crowding production of these old staples, and still further lowering prices and intensifying dissatisfaction with the results of agricultural effort. It is futile to attempt to defy the law of supply and demand. So long as farmers insist on growing only the bread, grains, cotton, tobacco and cattle, and to neglect other products which are needed, which we import at a cost of more than $200,000,000 annually, just so long will the lamentation over low prices continue. Diversification is essential to agricultural salvation. There are writers and speakers who are doing incalculable injury by their influence in repression of any tendency to a wider range of rural production, encouraging indolence and illiteracy, paralyzing enterprise, intensifying rural inertia and encouraging dependence on foreign production, and the draining of the resources of the country to foreign lands. They appear to deprecate any effort toward independence or the cultivation of self-reliance, the stimulation of invention, the acquisition of manual skill, or the development of rural taste. Their advice points in the direction of aimless poverty and practical serfdom.

FOLLY OF AGRICULTURAL IMPORTS.

The agricultural exports of the United States during the past year amounted to about $750,000,000 at the seaports, or about $400,000,000 on the farms. The agricultural imports amounted to over $418,000,000 at ports of shipment, and fully $600,000,000 with freights and commissions added, without further allowance for undervaluation. Thus it takes most of our agricultural exports to pay for our agricultural imports. These are largely food and fibers. The heavier items for 1888-89 were as follows:

Sugar and molasses	$80,279,868
Animals and their products, except wool	46,179,566
Fibers, including only textile	39,142,964
Fruits and nuts	16,836,187
Barley and other cereals	8,570,522
Tea, coffee, cocoa	10,866,236
Wines	6,966,722
Total	$228,841,865

Most of this importation should be produced here, and many minor products not named, in fact there is little on the list, except tea and coffee, that should be imported. There are many plants yielding fruits, dyes, medicines and other products useful in the arts, or for food, that could be profitably grown, after suitable experiment, for the supply of a demand already existing, or to be created, and utilizing rural labor and increasing the wealth of the country.

THE RAPACIOUS MIDDLEMAN.

There is a further cause of low prices, which farmers should understand, very difficult to remedy, demanding serious consideration and wise action. It is found in the combination of carriers and middlemen to absorb a large share of the proceeds of the sale of farm products. Beeves are sold by growers for seven-tenths to three-fourths of the prices of a few years ago, and the meat is sold to consumers in the retail market at little, if any, reduction from the highest prices of the last twenty years. For instance, prime roasts have been sold in Washington during that period for 24c per pound, and sirloin steaks for the same. There has been little variation as a general rule, in the price of the less valuable cuts. The same complaint comes from consumers in other cities. Another aspect of the case bears upon the inexperienced buyer. The meat that is bought at $3.50 to $4 per 100 pounds live weight, is sold to the consumer at practically the same prices as that which cost $4.50 to $5. Rarely is there a difference made in the selling price of cuts from beeves of different quality. If such difference is ever observed it is more frequently made in regard to meat which a good judge of beef would hesitate to buy at all. Unfortunately there are thousands of poor people who do not know the difference between good and poor quality, and they are the most easily imposed upon. The increasing swarm of dealers in regular markets and provision stores shows that numbers of people are living off the difference between wholesale and retail beef.

COMMISSION WHICH IS ROBBERY.

All kinds of meats, vegetables and fruits furnish, similarly, subsistence to armies of middlemen. Milk is brought from farms for the supply of New York for less than 3c per quart and sold to consumers for 8c. The hucksters of city markets often get as much for handling a product in a single day as the grower obtained for producing it during a season's growth. The contrast between the price of fruit on a farm and in the city market is a suggestion of greed and extortion. In many markets the prices of variable products are fixed for the day at early dawn, not with reference to their cost, but in view of the comparative quantity, to squeeze from the buyer the last cent that his patience will endure without declining a purchase. The poor are robbed still further, when a commodity costs 25 cents a peck, by a charge of 17c for half a peck, which is a clear penalty of 20 per cent for buying in small quantities. Thus, by every imaginable trick of trade the cost of buying is increased, while the producer gets less and less for his products. The army of dealers in futures who bet upon the price of grain in the coming months, and bend their energies to shape prices to suit their deals, do other injury than merely to prey upon each other; they disturb the natural flow of trade, and check exportation by a temporary rise in values, which leans inevitably to lower prices later and greater fluctuations, which are the meat and life of this class and the bane of the farmers' market for wheat. The actual buyer of grain, if a speculator and not merely a commission merchant and forwarder, may scheme to depress prices while buying, and to boom them in selling, to the great injury of the grower. The honest and legitimate business of receiving and forwarding grain, or that of the buyer who is a conscientious merchant and not a professional manipulator of prices, helps rather than hurts the farmer; but the others, who play games of chance disguised as business, are the enemies of the grower and consumer and of every man who earns a livelihood by the sweat of the brow. This class is so large, in the various marts of trade, that its aggregate gains absorb an essential part of the national industry.

DOWN WITH THE COMBINES.

The middlemen, working in trade guilds, societies, exchanges and boards of trade, combine to control the transfer of lands, farms, city lots, railroad shares and bonds, stocks and securities of all kinds, and all real and personal property, and to swell commissions and fees of such transfers. Cities are filled with non-producers, not merely teachers and physicians and other useful professionals, who are in a sense producers and in every view useful and necessary members of the body politic, but people who, under the guise of go-betweens in the distribution between producers and consumers, combine to fix the prices they pay for the goods of the former and set up daily the rate demanded for the latter. Free competition should reduce this share of the middlemen to a minimum but for the inducement and opportunity to combine, formally and informally, to control prices of products and cost of vending. Thus the share demanded often amounts to a confiscation of the grower's profit, and the number of salesmen is so increased that they complain that they can't make a living. The trouble is, there are too many of these producers who absorb the products of the farmer in the distribution to the consumer. Perhaps the only remedy may be a combination of the farmers to retail their own fruits and vegetables in cities, sell their own meats and manufacture their own flour. Something must be done to reduce the number and nullify the greed of a long line of leeches that are fattening on the industry of the country, who neither toil on the farms or spin in the factories, and yet they are absorbing the wealth of the country by combination without conscience and service without equity, while the producers are relegated to the rear and left to enjoy their pittance as they may.

WHAT WE MIGHT RAISE.

There may be minor causes of depression which have not been considered, but they are important and unimportant in comparison with those outlined. The main difficulty is that there is overproduction of a few staples and quite too limited a list of rural products. There is too much hog and hominy, and a narrow range of delicacies that are so eagerly sought by the buyer and so profitable to the producer. There is too much rural labor unemployed and too much mechanical and manufacturing labor idle, in both classes for lack of sufficient variety and because $600,000,000 to $700,000,000 are spent in foreign countries for products that could better be made here. It is no loss, it is foolish, to say that we can not sell our surplus unless we buy our food and clothing abroad. We did sell last year to a single country to the amount of $300,000,000 more than we bought of that country, and similar disproportion exists elsewhere. As we become more independent, more self-sustaining, producing all substantials of life, wealth will more abound and be more equally distributed under the industrial than under the commercial idea, and while in ports will still be heavy they will be mainly for luxuries and superfluities of the rich, and will not reduce the resources or limit the comforts of the people. In a primative country the first business of farmer is to produce food, to cater to the wants of the stomach. If they go no further, as population advances and its wants increase with the processes of culture and civilization, and to neglect to supply the "raw material" for the uses of the industrial arts, their country will forever remain primitive and poor. This country can not claim exemption from the inexorable rule. Cotton, by the invention of the gin and the existence of a suitable soil in the south, became the salvation of its agriculture, and then threatened its existence by its refusal to tolerate other raw materials or other arts. The cotton crop is valuable, and will represent a larger value, yet it would not suffice to board the people of the south at first class hotels for a week. A score of other products should further enrich her agriculture to relieve existing depression. All the worsted woods and all the carpet woods that can be woven in the country can readily be produced in the south. Only the invention of an effective decorticator is required to make ramie a great industry, supplementing rather than rivaling cotton, and jute and many native and foreign fibers should swell the list of raw materials, silk, sugar, etc. And there should be no further need of going to Italy and Japan for raw silk than there is to India for raw cotton. Further, there should be as little need of going to Cuba for sugar. Nine-tenths at least of all the raw materials required for textile, metallic, mechanical, chemical, oleaginous or other manufacture can be produced, primarily, by our farmers directing their labor to profitable channels and swelling the value of their products, stocking the prairies of the food staples and insuring prosperity and comfort to all. No other panacea will cure hard times. A profitable outlet by diversification and extension by constantly augmenting rural labor can alone make rural labor profitable. If the policy of going abroad for all there except cotton shall be put into permanent practice, and for all sugar and fruits, barley and oil seeds, to be paid for in corn and wheat and cotton, which are already crowded into foreign markets to the last pound and bushel, there will be no necessity for a "single tax" to make the farmer's land valueless; and no need of account books, or pocket books, and little demand for books of any kinds. And yet there is gross ignorance abroad of the extent of the limitations of our agriculture and the means of recuperation. Many of our farmers are delaying the emancipation of rural industry, and seeking to import cordage to bind upon their backs still closer their present burdens. Instead of enlarging the range of profitable production they are seeking to restrict it. The wheat-growers insist upon going to the antipodes for binder twine, while hundreds of acres of flax fiber are wasted in adjoining fields, and when they could produce hemp enough within six months to bind the wheat of the world. The cotton growers want to go to India for jute which will grow in their cotton fields as readily as weeds. If we will not produce the twine to bind our sheaves, or the jute or hemp or flax to cover our bales, we shall have no right to complain of 50c per bushel for the one or 5c per pound for the other. During the last ten years more than 2,000,000 workers in agriculture, armed with improved implements, have been added to the 7,000,000 that were making corn and wheat and cotton, and shall they still insist on the same limited range of effort, walk in the same furrows their fathers turned and seek to live and die in the same overdone and profitless route. Agricultural depression will become chronic and intensified to a degree unknown at present. Shall farmers hug the chain of their dependence, limit the range of their industry, refuse to strike out into new paths and sink into comparative illiteracy and poverty? There are millions of them too intelligent and enterprising and ambitious to co-operate in any such scheme of self-degradation.

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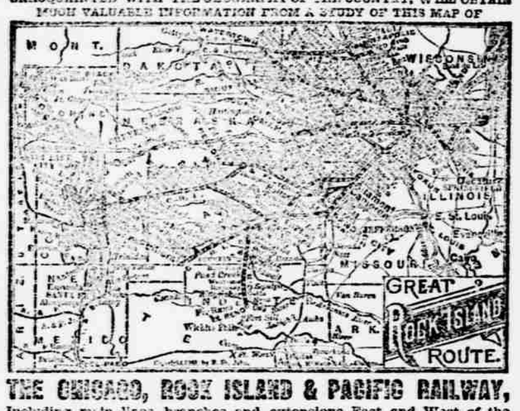

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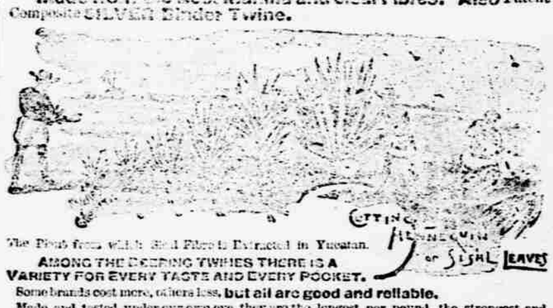

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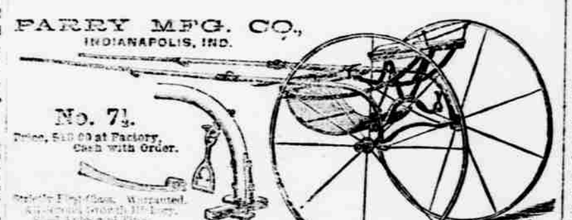

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Whereas, J. G. Eddy and Sarah J. Eddy, by their certain deed of trust, dated March 14th, 1888, and recorded in the office of the recorder of deeds of Holt county, Missouri, on March 15th, 1888, in book 56, page 199, conveyed to Henry