

The Law and the Farmer.

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The history of the human race abounds in stories of oppression, caused by the existing state of society, towards the tillers of the soil. There is a feeling deep down in the hearts and minds of the masses, that for centuries, through the powers of government, the wealth producing classes have been misused. For years past, this feeling has pervaded the nation, and a constantly increasing murmur, especially from farmers, is arising against the upper classes, against other trades and professions, but most bitterly against the lawmakers and laws of the land as discriminating in favor of the wealthy and against the wealth producer. Many believe as a result of unjust laws, licensed fraud, and public corruption, that the agricultural industry is so depressed that those who follow it can barely maintain a struggling existence and are rapidly approaching utter ruin.

If this is true, if agriculture is depressed as maintained by speakers and press throughout the land, and the farmer is burdened until want and misery have become his companions, or if he cannot live in comfort, then there is cause for the gravest concern. If this government has enacted laws which tend to cripple the grand industry

to which it owes its greatest prosperity, and to cause hardship to those, who, as a class, have ever been its truest defenders in war, its staunchest workmen in peace, it becomes the imperative duty of every patriotic lover of justice and country to give time and energy to the changing of those laws until all are fixed upon the broad foundation of right. But first let us carefully, candidly and honestly search the laws and see if the farmer is wronged by them or if he is given the honorable place therein which his importance deserves.

We find two kinds of law in the nation, The Common law controls the simpler acts of society. Built up by the stern justice of Anglo-Saxon people, having for its foundation that sense of right possessed by the common man, such law as this cannot be wrong. True the complaint may arise in this, as in all other law, and upon this complaint rests the foundation of Anarchy, that the law is unjustly enforced by those in authority. To this we can only say that the enforcement of any law is determined by public sentiment. Few judges, unless sustained by a proud consciousness of right, ever have the courage to go contrary to public opinion. With the people then rests the blame.

The Statutes contain three great systems of

law whose effect for good or ill upon the farmer, makes them of special importance to him. These are the laws governing Tariff, Transportation and Money.

In a discussion of these laws we must not argue that because men whose business is connected with these systems get very rich that they are therefore detrimental to the welfare of others. It is in the nature of the case that comparatively few men must have the management of gigantic enterprises, involving immense capital. For this reason the aggregate individual profit will often be very large when the per cent of profit is really very small.

A discussion of the Tariff would be useless. Each farmer must decide for himself whether or not Protection enhances the price of articles he consumes or whether it gives increased value to his products.

His position in the discussion may be noted. Both sides agree in giving his interests a prominent place in the controversy, both claim to represent his best interests and are striving for what they conceive to be his highest good.

The laws regulating transportation have assumed a place of great interest and importance only in the last few years. While it was necessary to the development of the country that railroads should be built to furnish transporta-

tion for the produce, yet the autocratic relation which they bear to producers and consumers gives to them dangerous power; and unless checked by their own sense of fairness, or by government regulation, they can drain the life blood from both. Indeed many farmers honestly believe the railway system of the United States is one great combination of fraud and extortion backed by corrupt political influences. That now, though the railroads were largely built by government loans and bounties, the farmers are left at the mercy of the railroads which are robbing them by charging exorbitant rates, while the government does nothing to prevent it.

This view is wrong. When the government gave a farm to every man who desired it, to make the present as valuable as possible, great inducements were given to capitalists to risk their money in railroad building that the farmers might easily get their produce to market.

A way of getting his produce to market obtained for the farmer, it would certainly show a very foolish and improvident government that would allow him to be despoiled by the very system that was created for his upbuilding. But we find that he has been provided for, nearly every state has required railroads to take the utmost precautions against injur-

ing life or property, have regulated the operations of the railroads, limited the rates they may charge, and established commissions to see that these provisions are carried out. The General Government has also regulated their operations and established the Interstate Commerce Commission whose only object is to preserve fair and equitable rates and just railway management. So far and so stringently has this regulation been carried that many railroads do not now pay operating expenses, most pay but a fair profit, while few are extra paying property. The railroads have generally conducted their business with fairness to all concerned. It is stated on good authority that a laborer in New England, can, in one day, earn enough to transport his bread and meat supply for a year from the prairies of the West to his own hearthstone. Surely the railroads are committing no grievous wrong, while they may be subject to very unjust treatment by this popular clamor against them.

Our examination shows, that, through the government, the railways were built for the benefit of the farmer, that their operations are regulated for his well being, and the Interstate Commerce Commission, and State Commissions have been created to guard his rights and advance his interests.

In common with all other citizens, the farmer has a vital interest in the monetary system of this country. When we consider that his business transactions include hundreds of millions of dollars each year, besides the millions he has stored up by patient toil, it is plain that the question of a change in the measure of value, or of paper inflation, is one of great importance to him. It must be borne in mind that the question of finances is the most intricate and contradictory which statesmen have to meet. It is true that our currency system is imperfect and has often been unjust because of public necessity, popular demand or ignorance of the true science of money. The legislation since 1860 has been such as to put us on a higher and better financial standing than we ever had before and the tendency is now toward improvement. There is however a demand for a lower measure of value which would be injurious to creditors. While the farmers are too often debtors, still, aside from the fact that it is morally wrong, they have too great interests at stake to favor such a change. The demand for an inflated paper currency is also opposed to the farmers advancement. Pelatiah Webster a century ago said of paper money: "We have suffered more from this cause than from every other cause or calamity. It has killed more men, perverted and corrupted the choicest in-

terests of our country more, and done more injustices than even the arms and artifices of our enemy."

The lawmakers of the country with the interests of the farmers at heart have avoided those measures which history has proven to be fraught with danger if not with disaster and given us a financial system which shall, as nearly as possible, operate with justice to all. Their object is to keep the good we have, guard against dangerous or doubtful experiments, but be ever ready to improve our currency as the opportunity comes.

Our conclusion from an examination of these laws is, that though far from perfect, still they reveal no startling wrong that would work ruin to the farmer. We do find that the Government has ever stood ready to aid him. Never has he been intentionally wronged. Seldom have his interests been put second. Washington while President urged government patronage of agriculture and his advice and example have been followed throughout our history. Law after law has been passed for the farmer's benefit. He has been given a form and means have been provided for his keeping it. Other industries have been encouraged to give him a home market for his produce. Trusts, monopolies, and other vicious combinations are being

destroyed and, better yet, a higher education and training is being given him. The farmers position in the law has always been one of honor and distinction. His wants and necessities have ever received careful attention from the lawmakers and been of foremost importance to the country at large.

Though the farmer has suffered from great competition caused by the forced growth of agriculture in a new country, often from his own bad business management, from shoopers, chouths and grasshoppers, yet in spite of this, he is, as he ever has been a free, independent, and progressive American citizen; not poor, not rich, but in his own family happy and contented, yet ever striving upward. Surrounded by peace and plenty with inborn love of home and country, of right and truth and justice, he stands as the grandest production of the New World.

C. A. Kimball.

Class of '93.