

FARM LABOUR

Many farmers, East, Centre, and West, place the lack of suitable or competent labour as the greatest difficulty in increasing farm production. City people, with their interest in humanity and desire to see the basic industry enlarged, point to the large surplus of labourers in the cities and towns and say that surely some method can be devised to place these people on the land where they could be producing food, at least for themselves. Two things should first of all be clearly understood. First immediate increased production of any considerable extent must come through organization for that purpose that is, through the farmers now on the land—any attempt at forcing production this year through schemes of government assisted or supervised construction, utilizing large numbers of the unemployed, would be carried to failure, at least to very doubtful results. Second, inexperienced, and wholly untrained men are as unprofitable on the farms as in the factories. Farming is a manufacturing process, and why expect results in food production that would not be looked for in urban industries? The attempt at increasing food production must be based on economical grounds. Cash wages for farm help until recent years were low, and it is taking time to bring the farmers to realize that they must compete with the city industries in buying labour. It is easier to move labour from the country to the city than from the city to the country. The social aspects have to be reckoned on as well as the cash paid. Even when there is a surplus of labour in the cities the farmers will find it difficult to draw it to the farms, until stern necessity and abject want drive men to a consideration of their serious situation. First of all, then, the farmers should realize that they must offer wages and home conditions that will be attractive. With present prices of farm products and the prospect of a continuance of strong demand for the same the farmers should be urged to consider the advisability of their being a little more generous in their offers. The whole thing resolves itself into a question of whether it will pay. Food products are the result of labour. If they can secure more effective labour they can produce more. This question then of what they can afford to pay is purely a business proposition. Then, as to the housing. Farmers who have separate houses, cheap but comfortable, with the perquisites of garden, milk, etc., as a rule claim that they have no trouble in securing and retaining good help. The providing of homes for the help on the farm will solve, to a very large extent, the labour problem in districts where mixed farming is carried on. Then the farmers say "the help is no good," "the man I got was more bother than worth." Perhaps so he was, a misfit. He was as much out of place on the farm as he would be in a machine shop. There are two difficulties here—one is the shortage of men skilled in farm work and the other is the lack of machinery or organization in the locating of men. The lack of experienced farm hands is hard to remedy. You cannot order these by mail or turn them out as factory goods. The very thing that causes this demand for more food is using up the old world's supply of farm help, and until the war is over the immigration from abroad will be limited. Many of our home supply have enlisted and gone to the front. What then are we to do? We shall have to depend mainly on workers now in Canada. The country wants men and the cities have large numbers of unemployed. It is largely, then, a question of getting the men to the work. City and country are equally interested. The farmers who make the most reasonable offers and who provide home accommodation will certainly get the preference. Why should not the city and the country co-operate?

Appoint a well selected committee composed of both city and country men to take this matter up. Tabulate carefully the farmers, their offers and their housing conditions. Tabulate carefully the unemployed and those willing to go to the country. Know the man and know the place and make an honest attempt to get the right man into the right place. Too often the man of the country is not represented in such an adjustment, the labourer is just sent to him, dumped off at his gate. The wisdom of having on such a Committee representatives of the farmers themselves,—men who know country conditions and the farmers who hire the men—is overlooked. Men are volunteering to organize to raise money and food to send abroad. Why not volunteer to organize to help produce more food? Perhaps if two or three women interested and experienced in Women's Institute work were placed on such a committee something would be done. They have proven themselves leaders in forward movements. We have said that the supply of experienced help is limited, and therefore there is an urgent appeal to the farmers not to be too exacting. Take hold of this question, discuss it, let the city and country co-operate, and above all do not stop with destructive criticism—what we want now, as never before, is constructive work. The country papers can well open up their columns to the farmers to discuss this question, but warn the correspondents that it is constructive not destructive work that helps. It is easy to grumble. Cheer up, we have a big work to do. The most striking characteristic of Tommy Atkins in the wet and nasty trenches, next to his bravery, is his good humour and his brotherliness. The farmers of Canada and the city men must pull together, and the out-of-work men must not be overlooked any more than the brave Belgians.

Before we reproduce a few of the many clippings let us have a slight insight on the spirit of the men who are fighting for us. They have the heavy end of it, ours is light—all the

more reason for our all pulling together—they are fighting for us, let us work for them.

"It used to be class against class, but the partition walls are being broken down," says the "Church Family Newspaper." Mr. Will Crooks, the Labor M.P. for Woolwich, in a delightfully humorous recruiting speech the other night, exactly hit off the situation to the great delight of his audience.

"Everyone is in this war," said Mr. Crooks,— "the man in the field, the factory, on the railway, in the mine, and the Johnny from Rotten Row. They are all there. Algy—who said to me, 'Anybody can tell you have not been properly twained; you drop your h's; and to whom I retorted, 'Well, that's nothing; you drop your r's—is now in the trenches fighting, giving of his best, side by side with many a pal of ours.

"To a Bethnal-green man alongside him Algy said, 'You know, Tom, I have been to the East end myself. Oh, yes. I went there and bought a bull-pup. I gave three pounds for it, and when I got home I found it was not worth three shillings.' 'Oh, give us a fag.'

"Algy handed him a cigarette. 'Give us a match.' Algy handed him the match. 'Algy, I was the bloke that done you for that three quid.'

There's brotherly love if you like—cheering each other up in the hour of adversity."

The best possible form of investment for unemployed labour is the tillage of the soil which will repay the tiller with a crop sufficient to return the entire investment within a year. And Canada has any quantity of unworked and upon which that labour can be invested. There is only one class of labour as honorable and as indispensable as that of the fighting man in times of war, and that is the labour of the man who provides the food supply. A proper recognition of this fact, and of the supreme dignity and importance of agricultural labour, should help materially in the difficult process of transferring displaced city workers to the fields and pastures.

Canadian farmers and their wives, more particularly their wives, have been doing a great work for the relief of the starving people of Europe. One township in Western Ontario has contributed a carload of flour. Many other townships have contributed carloads of various kinds. The Women's Institutes of the land have probably done more than any other single organization to bring relief to the little kingdom of Belgium. For all of this good work, our rural people deserve the thanks of the world.

But while performing a necessity and Christian service for our brethren across the seas, let us not forget that charity begins at home. Owing

to the seasonal employment common in rural districts, many who work for us in summer are reduced to actual want in winter. Many cases have come to our attention where farm labourers and their families were living on only two scanty meals a day, and that when all kinds of farm produce was going to waste in farmers' cellars in the neighborhood. The needy ones had themselves partly to blame. They were too independent to apply to their own prosperous neighbours and one-time employers for help. This very independence, however, is a good sign. Such people are worth helping. It may be done tactfully, however, and in a way that will not injure their sensibilities. They can be found in almost any rural section.

And let us not forget that the only true solution is a reorganization of farm management methods that will ensure work for all the help the year round.

There is every indication that a very large number of men will soon be out of employment in cities through the dislocation of industry and the temporary abandonment of large public undertakings on account of the war. At this time it becomes the duty of all classes to help not only the families of those who have gone to the front, but also those who have lost the means of livelihood by reason of the war.

Many of the unemployed have, no doubt, experience in farm work and many of the inexperienced would be willing to learn. Here is an opportunity then for the farmers of this Province to benefit themselves not only themselves but also those out of work. The world's supply of food products will certainly be greatly lessened this coming year, since the nations at war will not be able to produce as much as usual. At this time, therefore, for the farmers to increase the supply of foodstuffs would not only be an act of the highest patriotism but also a profitable proposition.

In order, however, to undertake the necessary increase in acreage of cultivated crops it would be necessary to make additional preparations of many kinds on the farms during the winter, spring and summer months, and this can be done only by the employment of extra help, if such can be procured on reasonable terms.

The war has already increased and will continue to increase the demand for all farm products. It has already brought about increased prices for some products and is practically sure to have the effect of making and maintaining the high prices for all farm products that make up the world's supply of food. Farmers know these facts and each in his own way is planning the work for this fall and the coming winter and next autumn so as to take advantage of them and thereby serve the Empire and themselves at one and the same time.

It is desirable and necessary that much of this unemployed labor should be helping to produce on the farms instead of helping to consume in the cities. It is true that for the next three months farm work is slack but even at that much may be done. These are times of sacrifice. Many farmers who are in comfortable circumstances will make their contributions to the Empire's needs next summer by producing at some profit to themselves as much as their fields

are in a condition to produce. The Departments of Agriculture point out that our farmers can also contribute

to the national well-being at this time by keeping in their employment during the next three months even at some slight sacrifice to themselves one or two men more than they actually need. The wages need only be nominal—board and a few dollars a month—something to tide these men over until spring and save them from a winter of want and idleness in the cities.

"Let every farmer who is in easy circumstances and has already reaped financial advantage from the war, consider this matter, look around his own district and give employment to at least one man more than he would otherwise keep."

Charity can never take the place of work. Its proper place is only with those who can no longer work. The best antidote for the merely unemployed, now standing around in their thousands, is work—work of some kind, even if the wages are below what have heretofore been considered current rates. Idleness is the root of all evil; there is generally speaking only one end to it, and that is the deterioration in health, character, and the drifting into mischief and crime.

The best thing for the city corporations to do is to provide as much work for the unemployed as they can; it is a primary duty they owe to the people of the city. To give employment to one man with a family of little children is to feed the whole family. Thus to employ a thousand men is to relieve 3,000 or 4,000 human beings, and to have something to show for the expenditure. And this is where the farmers may come in and take up their share of the heavy burden imposed on the Empire by this struggle for very existence and on behalf of the rights and liberties of humanity. They have a patriotic duty to perform as well as their brethren in the city. The bond that binds the farmers and the dwellers in the cities together is an intimate one. If the farmer produces the food products, it is largely the city people that pay him the good prices he is getting for them.

To provide work throughout the year, even during the winter, on farms where help has not been found necessary in previous years is within the power of a very large percentage of Ontario farmers; and to give employment to men out of work at this particular time, is a duty which every farmer who is in a position to do should feel it incumbent upon him to perform. On most farms there are improvements to be made and operations to be carried on through the winter, in anticipation of the next year which promises to be the greatest year of production ever known in Canada. If the farmer could come to terms with a good man now for all the year round, it would pay him well to do so. He will want help in the spring and throughout the summer and fall. Labor is going to be cheap and it would be possible now to get a man to work on the farm for 12 months for the wages farmers have been paying for years back for only six months. It is not charity these thousands are asking for; it is work; and it is the patriotic duty, under this great stress that has come upon the Empire, for every farmer who can find work to give to provide it and to pay for it, so that the burden may be more evenly distributed and more equally borne.

If the farmers of Ontario are wise

they will begin at once to secure help for the farming operations next summer.

~~As a result of the help can be secured at present in limited quantities but next spring will undoubtedly see higher wages for farm help than we have ever experienced in the past. The Ontario Colonization Department is prepared to render assistance to farmers desiring help. The District Representatives are also instructed to give this matter their serious attention.~~