

# Watauga Democrat.

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**A FARMER'S VIEW OF IT.**

[Sol. Putnam, in Belford's Magazine for July, 1888.]

I am a farmer, the son of a farmer, and the father of farmers. I have been all my days scratching a poor man's back in an effort to make a living off my farm. I am sixty years of age. My form is bent, my hands are hard, and my eyes dim. I own a hundred and sixty acres of as rich, well watered and wooded land as there is in Ohio. I say I have worked hard to make a living I have done something more—I have raised and, in a way, educated three sons and one daughter. I suppose I could have made the living, a poor sort of living, for myself and family out of the farm, but this attempt to school my boys has left me very poor. Fortunately, I kept out of debt, so that what I have I have, and if I were younger and had less rheumatism, I could yet get a miserable living by farming. I could not do this and keep up the place. It has got to go.

Now, while this is my history as a farmer, that of my neighbor Morton is quite different. He sold out to the Hormish Dutch, went to our county-seat, and put his money in a National bank. He is now living in what, to me, appears a palace; and it certainly is compared to my poor house. Morton drives an elegant carriage, and is accounted a wealthy man. Nor is my condition that of Tom Shiply, also a neighbor, who sold to the Dutch. He went to Middleburg, and bought a store. He is not so rich as Morton, but he has done well. I know three others, in our county, who got out of farming into some other business, and all to their own advantage. There never was. I can understand how it looked as if we were getting rich, when land, bought at \$1.25 an acre from the government, bounced up to ten, then thirty, and then went on bouncing up till it reached a hundred. But this increased value did not come from what we raised on the lands, but

from immigration; that made the lands valuable. For thirty years this value has been receding. I remember when this land of mine was held cheap at a hundred dollars. Now I cannot sell it at all.

When our Congressman, the Hon. Lycurgus Leatherlungs, was among us, canvassing for a return to Congress, he was fond of saying that the agricultural interest was the great solid interest of the land. He would then tell us that a high protective tariff was the source of all the profit, the farmer made out of his products. Most of my neighbors took that in, and tried to live on it. I didn't. I have a son, a lawyer at Cleveland, who has helped me, from time to time, when I got into a worse pinch than usual, and he has also sent me some books, that I manage to read at intervals,—mostly Sundays and at night,—and have got from them a deal of useful information.

In one I read, for example, that history taught us that an agricultural people was easily conquered. In another I saw it stated that slavery and serfdom were only possible among the tillers of the soil. This came, the author said, from the lack of combination, or even association, among the oppressed. Scattered widely apart, in rural districts, there could be little association, or of that interchange of intelligence and sympathy, which are the foundations of effective resistance.

I learned all this from the books sent me by my son. I learned more, and that was that in Europe the lowest form of pauper labor, so much talked about, was that of the farm-laborer. Why, the Negro slaves were better off before the war than these creatures. They are housed like cattle, worked like mules, and fed like dogs. In the wheat-growing regions of the Baltic, for example, the farm-hand gets eighteen dollars and a sheepskin coat at the end of the year. If we go to India, we find the agriculturalist works for six cents a day, lives on rice, and wears nothing but a cotton shirt. In Egypt the farm-laborers are slaves, held down to their wretched existence by English, French and German bond-holders.

Now, it struck me one day that we farmers had been saved from this condition only by the government lands, that kept us from being crowded down. Then came the thought, that when these lands are all taken up, as will soon be the case, what will be our condition? I have observed how, within the last twenty-five years, agricultural values have shrunk thirty per cent, and this while every other sort of property has been on the rise. During the war, and shortly after, I sold my wheat at a dollar and a half bushel. I sold my last crop at sixty cents. Next harvest it will be fifty. My wool, pork, corn, and all tumbled, not quite so badly

but very nearly. At this rate how long will it be before I am working for eighteen dollars a year and that sheepskin coat?

The most significant part of it is that, while the agricultural interest goes down, the country is prosperous, and all other interests go up in value. Here is my county, for example, fairly shingled over with mortgages. In all the heavy investments of the entire county there is not a hundred dollars profit. Mr. Carnegie clears a million on a less investment every year. He and others like him, not farmers, have the country's prosperity in their breeches' pockets. When one talks of the great American boom, he means Carnegie, Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, and boomers of that sort. They hold all our prosperity.

This condition of things put me to looking round, to see if I could find the cause of the condition. I made a discovery one day. I found that this protective tariff that the Hon. Leatherlungs was a whooping up was the vampire that was sucking the life-blood out of us. Under pretence of laying a tax to support the government, these cunning devils had laid a tax to support themselves. I was curious to know how much of this levy for private pockets I was paying. To this end I got the tariff, and went to studying. It is no easy matter, but it can be done by any farmer.

Now, to begin with, my house, a frame one, may be valued at eight hundred dollars. This, if I were building, would be the price; but when I had deducted the protective tax on lumber, glass, shingles, hardware, and paint, I found the real cost of my house was only five hundred dollars. Here is a dead loss to me of three hundred dollars.

I had paid three hundred dollars to the Carnegie set to keep up their palaces and tally-hos at home and in Scotland.

My stable, also a frame one, cost me four hundred dollars. Calculating as before, I found the same proportion held good, and I am skinned to keep up the protectionists to the tune of one hundred and fifty dollars—another loss to me of that amount.

I have a pair of old work-horses. The harness on these cost me forty dollars; the unnecessary tax is fourteen dollars—surely a loss.

My three ploughs cost me thirty dollars. The tax is, in steel, iron, and lumber, the neat little sum of, as near as I can calculate, twelve dollars.

Four years since I bought a binder. I paid, in instalments, \$225. An agent, who had quarreled with his manufacturing company, told me that the binder cost fifty dollars. Twenty-five dollars went to advertising, and when the agent sold one he was allowed twenty-five dollars. Of the remaining hundred and twenty-five dollars,

seventy-five went in as profit to the company, and fifty to the protectionists.

This is the beginning. There is nothing a farmer purchases that does not pay toll to these protectionists. I take my two horses to the blacksmith's to be shod, for example. The blacksmith charges me, for all around shoeing, one dollar and twenty cents. Of this, forty cents is retained for protection. To have a new roof on a shed leaves two dollars in the hands of Mr. Carnegie and such, to keep up palaces in Scotland and at home. Mr. Blaine says protection is a Republican principle, and must be sustained. He was rolling along over English pikes, behind four blooded horses, and sitting by Mr. Carnegie. Probably, if I were fixed that way, I would see beauties in the system. But, you see, I am on the side that sees only the swindle.

When my daughter died I took home her three children. After that, when my daughter-in-law died, I adopted her two. So I have a family. I could not afford it, but there was nothing else to do. Now, the cost of clothing, shoeing, and furnishing hats for these little folks, so that they may not only be comfortable, but decent enough to attend the common schools, makes up no small item. I calculate that the five cost me, in money expended at the stores in Middleburg, some two hundred and seventy-five go on the backs of my poor children, and twenty-five into the pockets of the protectionists.

All the purchases made by us farmers are at the village, where a year's credit is given. When our crops come in we deliver our grain at the railroad depot, and getting checks for same, go round and settle—that is, so far as the money from our products enables us to do so. Every year the sum that remains unpaid grows larger. We have then to hustle round, sell wool, sell hogs, sell anything to make up this difference. The worst of all are the township, county, and State taxes. These have to be paid, and two-third, yes, three-fourths of the mortgages on farms originate in these.

Now, if I could have the two hundred and odd dollars extorted from my poor little farm of one hundred and sixty acres, could about make both ends meet. And what an infernal outrage it is that I, and other farmers like myself, should have this extortion fastened on us, for which we get absolutely nothing in return!

We are told of a home market. We have heard of that home market for twenty-five years, but have never seen it. Small wonder! for of all the people taken, they tell us, from agricultural pursuits, there is not one eats more or less than he did be-

fore. And as for lessening the number of producers, the emigration from Europe puts in three men for every man taken out. It is an odd sort of protection that protects labor against the labor in Europe, but not from the thousands on thousands pouring in upon our shores every year.

The home market don't work. It costs me, as it does any other farmer in this locality, one dollar to plant, grow, cut and thrash and get into the granary one bushel of wheat. The home market, as the thing is called, gave me last harvest sixty cents a bushel. This coming harvest I expect fifty cents—for this is the rate of decline; and all my other products suffer the same loss. This sort of thing never occurred with the foreign markets.

This, however, is all fudge. There is no more home market now than there was fifty years ago; and there can't be. After the people at home have consumed our products to their utmost capacity, there remains a heavy surplus that has to find its market abroad or rot on our hands. This market abroad fixes the price at home, so that no law of Congress can lessen or add one cent. When they talk about taking laborers from farming and putting them at other pursuits, they don't help us, for these same consumers were consumers before. As for lessening the number of producers, as I have said, these people get pauper labor from Europe for less than they would have to pay native farmers; and get them they do. These miners and manufacturers, after squeezing all they can out of us by law, proceed to squeeze labor; and they do that by drawing on the pauper labor of Europe I am but a short distance, as the crow flies, from the Hocking Valley coal-mines. I saw the native Americans driven out by Welsh and Irish. These in turn were crowded out by Poles, Bohemians and Italians. These in turn, as they object to being starved to death, are being threatened by Negroes; and we would have Chinese did not the law forbid. So far as I can find out, the poorest-paid laborer in the United States is the protected laborer. Mining work never was skilled labor, and, owing to the improvements in machinery, manufacturing has ceased to be of that sort. Even a girl or a child can stand by and regulate the machine.

I said the protected labor was the poorest paid. I must qualify that. There is very little difference between that and farm labor. At the rate we have been sinking in the last twenty-five years, in the next twenty-five we shall see farm labor little better than the old serfdom of Russia. We are coming to the eighteen dollars a year and the sheepskin coat. And as the right honorable official protectionists address us now, continued on 4th page.

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June 7, 1888, 1y.