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# WHAT I KNOW OF FARMING.

BY HORACE GREELEY.

## XLII.

### CO-OPERATION IN FARMING.

The word of hope and cheer for labor in our days is Co-operation—that is, the combination by many of their means and efforts to achieve results beneficial to them all. It differs radically from communism, which proposes that each should receive from the aggregate product of human labor enough to satisfy his wants or at least his needs, whether he shall have contributed to that aggregate much, or little, or nothing at all. Co-operation insists that each shall receive from the joint product in proportion to his contributions thereto, whether in capital, skill, or labor. If one associate has ten children, and the other none, communism would apportion to each according to the size of his family alone; while co-operation would give to each what he had earned, regardless of the number dependent upon him. Thus the two systems are radical antagonists, and only the grossly ignorant or wilfully blind will confound them.

A young farmer, whose total estate is less than $500, not counting a priceless wife and child, resolves to migrate from one of the old States to Kansas, Minnesota, or one of the Territories; he has heard that he will there find public land whereon he may make a home of a quarter-section, paying therefor $20 or less for the cost of the survey and of the necessary papers.—So he may; but, on reaching the land of promise, where with or without his family, he finds a very large belt of still vacant land beyond the settlements already transformed into private property, and either not for sale at all or held on speculation, quite out of his reach. The public land which he may take under the Homestead law lies a full day's journey beyond the border settlements, which he must look for mills, stores, schools, and even highways. If he persists in squatting, with intent to earn his quarter-section by settlement and cultivation, he must take a long day's journey across unbridged streams and sloughs, over unmade roads, to find boards, or brick or meal, or glass, or groceries; while he must postpone the education of his children to an indefinite future day.—Gradually, the region will be settled, and the conveniences of civilization will find their way to his door, but not till after he will have suffered thro' several years of want for them; often compelled to make a journey to get a plow or yoke mended, and a grist of grain ground, or to minister to some other trivial but inexorable want. He who thus acquires his quarter-section must fairly earn it, and may be thankful if his children do not grow up rude, coarse, and illiterate.

But suppose one thousand just such young farmers as he is, with no more means and no greater efficiency than his, were to set forth together, resolved to find a suitable location whereon they might all settle on adjoining quarter-sections, thus appropriating the soil of five or six embryo townships; who can fail to see that three-fourths of the obstacles and discouragements which confront the solitary pioneer would vanish at the outset?—Roads, bridges, mills, nay, even schools and churches—would be theirs almost immediately, while mechanics, merchants, doctors, &c., would fairly overrun their settlement and soolit their patronage at every road crossing.—Within a year after the location of their several claims, they would have achieved more progress and more comfort than in five years under the system of straggling and isolated settlement, which has hitherto prevailed.—The change I here indicate appeals to the common sense and daily experience of our whole people. It is not necessary, however desirable, that the pioneers should be giants in wisdom, in integrity, or in piety, to secure its benefits. A knave or a fool may be deemed an undesirable neighbor: but a dozen of such in the township would not preclude, and could hardly diminish, the disadvantages naturally resulting from settlement by co-operation.

Nor are these confined to pioneers transcending the boundaries of civilization. I wish I could induce a thousand of our colored men now precariously subsisting by servile labor in the cities to strike out boldly for homes of their own, and for liberty to direct their own labor, whether they should settle on the frontier, in the manner just outlined, or should buy a tract of cheap land on Long Island, in New Jersey, Maryland, or some State further South. I cannot doubt that the majority of them would work their way up to independence, and this very much sooner, and after undergoing far less privation, than almost every pioneer who has plunged alone into primitive forest or struck out upon the broad prairie and there made himself a farm.

The insatiable demand for fencing is one of the pioneer's many trials.—Though he has cleared off but three acres of forest during his first Fall and Winter, he must surround those acres with a stout fence, or all he grows will be devoured by hungry cattle—his own, if no others. Whether he adds two or ten acres to his clearing during the next year, they must in turn be surrounded by a fence; and nothing short of a very stout one will answer; so he goes on clearing and fencing, usually burning up a part of his fence whenever he burns over his new clearing; then building a new one around this, which will have to be sacrificed in its turn. I believe that many pioneers have devoted as much time to fencing their fields as to tilling them throughout their first six or eight years.

It is different with those who settle on broad prairies, but not essentially better. Each pioneer must fence his patch of tillage with material which costs him more, and is procured with greater difficulty, than though he were cutting a hole in the forest. Often when he thinks he has fenced sufficiently, the hungry, breachy cattle, who roam the open prairies around him, judge his handiwork less favorably; and he wakes some August morning, when feed is poorest outside and most luxuriant within his inclosure, to find that twenty or thirty cattle have broken his defenses and half destroyed his growing crop.

If, instead of this wasteful lack of system, a thousand or even a hundred farmers would combine to fence several square miles into one grand inclosure for cultivation, erecting their several habitations within or without its limits, as to each should be convenient—apportioning it for cultivation, or owning it in severalty, as they should see fit—an immense economy would be secured, just when, because of their poverty, saving is most important.—Their stock might range the open praire unwatched: and they might all sleep at night in serene confidence that their corn and cabbages were not in danger of ruthless destruction. Among the settlers in our great primitive forests, the system of co-operative farming would have to be modified in details, while it would be in essence the same.

And once adopted with regard to fencing, other adaptations as obvious and beneficent would from day to day suggest themselves. Each pioneer would learn how to advance his own prosperity by combining his efforts with those of his neighbors. He would perceive that the common wants of a hundred may be supplied by a combined effort at less than half the cost of satisfying them when each is provided for alone. He would grow year by year into a clearer and firmer conviction that short-sighted selfishness is the germ of half the evils that afflict the human race, and that the true and sure way to a bountcous satisfaction of the wants of each is a generous and thoughtful consideration for the needs of all.

And here let me pay my earnest and thankful tribute to Mr. E. V. de Boissiere, a philanthropic Frenchman, who has purchased 3,300 acres of mainly rolling prairie-land in Kansas, near Princeton, Franklin county, and is carefully, cautiously laying thereon the foundations of a great co-operative farm, where in addition to the usual crops, it is expected that Silk and other exotics will in due time be extensively grown and transformed into fabrics, and that various manufacturers will vie with Agriculture in affording attractive and profitable employment to a considerable population. I have not been accustomed to look with favor on our new States and unpeopled Territories as an arena for such experiments, since so many of their early settlers are intent on getting rich by land speculation—at all events, through the exercise of some others' muscles than their own, while the opportunities for and incitements to migration and re location are so multiform and powerful. Doubtless, M. de Boissiere will be often tried by stampedes of his volunteer associates, who, after the novelty of co operative effort has worn off, will find life on his domain too tame and humdrum for their excitable and high-strung natures. I trust, however, that he will persevere through every discouragement, and triumph over every obstacle; that the right men for associates will gradually gather about him; and that his enterprise and devotion will at length be crowned by a signal and inspiring success, and thousands will be awakened by it to a larger and nobler conception of the mission of Industry, and the possibilities of achievement which stud the path of simple, honest, faithful work.