

THE OBSERVER

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Editor and Owner.

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THE FIR STREET CROSSING

At the council meeting last evening objection was made to the high board fence at Fir street, claiming it endangered the lives of people who cross the railroad track at that point.

There has been danger at Fir street before the fence was erected and it seems to us that instead of trying to do away with the fence it would be the proper thing to insist that gates and a watchman be installed at this principal crossing. It must be remembered that necessity forces travel on this thoroughfare owing to the fact that so many of the streets are closed. No objection is being raised to the closed streets, not by any means, for La Grande, in its appreciation of the railroad shops and the splendid plant erected here was willing to do anything in reason to assist.

But now comes the subject of human life above which there can nothing be placed. Things might go on indefinitely without an accident on Fir street, and again it might occur any time. The railroad we believe,

when attention is called to this necessity will only be too glad to install gates and a watchman at this crossing for it will probably relieve them of damage suits in the future and may be the means of saving several lives.

There is no use waiting until a killing takes place on this crossing to adjust the matter. Do it now and prevent any chance of accident.

BACK TO THE FARM.

You see a good deal these days written and printed on the subject of getting young men back to the farm. So far, however, the discussion does not seem to have brought much practical result. The urban population still continues to increase rather than the rural population. The disproportion increases instead of decreases, is the belief of Tom McNeal. That this condition isn't healthy is generally admitted, but that doesn't alter the fact. It does show, however, that we haven't found out the remedy.

Why do the boys want to leave the farms and go to the towns and cities? Maybe we might get the answer if we could interview the hundreds of young men who are leaving the farms every year to try city life. Most of the men who are writing articles on the subject themselves used to live on farms and now live in cities or towns. Why did they leave the country? If they were attracted to the cities they can't seriously criticize other young men for doing the very thing they did themselves.

Every year thousands of farmers who have accumulated a competence on the farm leave the country and move to town. Why do they do that?

Now we may fill 10,000 columns of space with words urging young men to stay on the farms, but unless they can be convinced that they can make more money and have more enjoyment in the country than they can have in the town or in the city they will continue to leave the farms.

It seems to me that the close observer and student of history can find a number of reasons for this movement from the farm to the towns and cities and at the same time he can find considerable encouragement in the present and future outlook, even though it must be said that the back to the farm movement hasn't amounted to a great deal as yet.

Going back to the rude beginnings of organized civilization, the evidence seems to show that the farmer, that is the man who really tilled the soil, wasn't considered as worth much consideration. He was nominally perhaps a freeman, but in reality he was a serf, subject to the orders of his overlord.

The only people who had any standing in society in those times were the people who didn't work. They hunted and fought and ate and drank like gluttons as they were, but work was something they never dreamed of doing. Work was the business of slaves. The plain farmer who tilled the soil with such rude tools as they had in those days was despised and abused. Naturally men were farmers, not because they were forced to do it in order to earn a miserable living.

As civilization advanced the condition of the farmer gradually got better, but the senseless prejudice continued. One does not have to be very

old to remember when the average city bred man regarded the farmer with a sort of contempt. The cartoonist pictured him as a Reube, a man with a wealth of wind-swept whiskers and wearing garments that did not fit him anywhere. He was also pictured as the ready victim of every faker, gold brick man, card sharp and bunco stealer.

His wife fared no better at the hands of these merry picture makers. She was pictured as wearing clothes as outlandish as the garments of her husband. You can find some of that style of illustration even yet.

Now human nature is much alike both in the city and the country. The human animal dreads ridicule more than almost any other weapon. Many a man has been driven from a position that was right just by the force of ridicule. In public discussions the man who manages to get the laugh on his opponent generally has him bested, not because he has the best of the argument, but because the other man can't stand it to be made fun of.

The farmer's son saw that the countryman was the butt of ridicule, and naturally he wanted to get away from a business that seemed to subject him to the scoffs and jeers of his fellow-men. He believed that if he could get to the city he would have a chance to be considered as good as anybody. So he left the farm.

And the farmers themselves seemed to encourage that idea. What man is there of three score who does not remember that if there was a boy in the farmer's family who was thought to be extra bright he was sent away to school in order to make a preacher or lawyer or doctor out of him? If he was just a common work horse on a boy he was to be kept on the farm. It was not considered that education was either necessary or even desirable for him.

In fact, most of the farmers were disposed to scoff at anything in the way of book farming. Their idea of a good farmer was one who would get up early, work hard and late and save every cent he could make.

Farming was a question of strength, endurance and industry. Not one farmer in a hundred kept any books or had any knowledge why any particular crop was the most profitable that could be grown on his land, or whether the crop grown on a particular field made him money or lost it. He did not know when he had raised an ani-

mal and sold it, whether it paid for its feed and the labor of taking care of it or not. In short, farming as carried on by most farmers not many years ago and by many of them even yet, was and is the most haphazard business in the world.

Now the boys who have gone from the farms to the cities have demonstrated that they have brains and force of character. They have become the leaders in all lines of industry. Their ambition has had the opportunity to be gratified. Now if those same boys could have been shown that there was as good a chance for the exercise of brains on the farm as in the town, my notion is that a great many of them would have stayed there.

But the situation it seems to me is not altogether discouraging. It is gradually dawning on the minds of men that farming is not only the foundation of all our national wealth, but that it is the most exacting of the learned professions. It takes more brains and intelligence and study to be a first class farmer and stock raiser than to be an ordinary business or professional man in the city or town.

As soon as this fact gets thoroughly soaked into the heads of people generally the farming profession will take the rank that it ought to take at the head of the professions to be followed by the sons of men.

When the young men of the country can be convinced that the business of farming and stock raising offers as good opportunities as any line of business, they are likely to get into the city or town, and furthermore that men and women in the country are regarded as ranking socially with the men and women of the cities and towns, then you will see a back-to-the-farm movement, or rather a stay-on-the-farm sentiment, that will amount to something, but until then the movement of population will be toward and not away from the cities and towns.

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