

The Commoner.

Wool Growers Complaining.

It is a painful surprise to learn that the wool growers are complaining. They have supported the republican party with so much enthusiasm, and have been cared for so tenderly that the news of their dissatisfaction is in the nature of a shock. The Drover's Journal says:

The Wool situation is by no means satisfactory to the Sheepmen of the West. Much of last year's clip is still stored in the warehouses, and there is little prospect of selling it at the prices which obtained early last year. Manufacturers are going into the shoddy business because they say that the demand from the laboring classes is for something cheap, and they cannot afford to pay the present market price of wool and sell the cloth cheap enough to make a garment that would come within the reach of the ordinary workman. The advance in the price of woolen goods has shut off much of this demand, and tailors are finding their business shrinking perceptibly. At the Salt Lake meeting the wool men introduced a resolution demanding that some legislative measures be taken to prevent or, at least, limit the manufacture of shoddy goods. How far their influence can go in this direction, however, is problematical.

What! Laboring men forced to buy shoddy because they cannot afford to buy woolen goods? Shades of the dinner pail! Why, this is almost treason! And what is the remedy? Legislation which will prevent the manufacture of shoddy goods and compel the laboring men to buy woolen goods whether they can afford to or not.

How long will it be before the voters will see that a protective tariff first raises prices and then lessens consumption and demand?

The consumer is denied an article which he needs, and when he ceases to be a consumer the demand for labor raw material is reduced.

But about the same time that the above editorial appeared in the Drover's Journal, the American Wool and Cotton Reporter registered a similar complaint. The editorial is somewhat lengthy, but it is so interesting and instructive that it is reproduced in full:

No industry in the United States has probably turned out so poorly in the last decade as the wool industry. Neither the wool grower, nor the wool merchant, nor the wool manufacturer will deny this. All three will admit, in fact, that during the most of the time something has been the matter with wool. Opinions differ very widely as to what that something is. Into the details of that question it is not our purpose to enter at this time. Whether the trouble is due to too much tariff or to too little tariff is a matter which we may leave for future discussion. There can, however, be no doubt that the situation has been greatly aggravated by a fact which primarily has no relation to the tariff nor to the general business situation. We refer to the speculative spirit which has governed everybody connected with wool in any way during the last decade. The speculative fever was fed by the tariff agitations and the general business conditions of recent years, but it had its origin elsewhere.

Why has wool been the most speculative of all our commodities in the last ten years? The answer is simple enough. Business in most other lines has long since been placed on a scientific basis; and though opportunities for speculation still exist, they have nevertheless been reduced to a minimum. In many industries the commodities dealt in are classified according to standard grades; exchanges have been established to facilitate sales; bureaus have been organized to collect the most complete data obtainable regarding stocks in sight and regarding other matters of interest to buyers and sellers alike; the fact has been generally recognized that unless buyer and seller mutually benefit trade cannot be permanently profitable.

This is quite the reverse of the policy which has

been generally pursued in connection with wool. In this particular industry every one has conducted his operations in greater or less ignorance of what every one else was doing. In cotton and iron and wheat and other commodities a scientific system of grading has been devised; but the people interested in the sale of wool will tell you that this is impossible in their business, which statement simply shows how lethargic the wool trade are in arousing themselves to the requirements of modern business. No serious attempt has ever been made in this country to introduce the exchange as a means of facilitating the sale of wool and of compacting the industry. Furthermore, the wool trade have discountenanced every serious attempt to compel accurate statistics regarding supplies and regarding the condition of the industry generally. This fact can be illustrated no more clearly than by the manner in which the Boston wool dealers were accustomed to report their weekly sales to the various newspapers. Long familiarity with the wool industry enabled the "Wool and Cotton Reporter" to accept their statements for what they were worth, and not to be led to erroneous conclusions by them; but the credit for accurate wool reports in the past belongs chiefly to us rather than to the trade.

In short, while almost every other line of business has been reduced to something like a scientific basis, the wool industry has been conducted under the most primitive conditions. To state the case differently, all the various lines of wool business in the United States have been conducted up to the present moment more in accord with the conditions of a frontier civilization, than in accord with the systematized methods of trade evolved by the nineteenth century. The people in this industry are continually working in the dark, and never more so than when they fancy themselves most in the light. They sedulously attempt to thwart every effort to reduce the wool situation to a statistical basis, and then go ahead and base their operations on statistics compiled in London that are absolutely meaningless. The surprising thing is, that every one handling wool seems to labor under the impression that the general ignorance regarding the real facts in the case is somehow going to work to his advantage, and to everybody else's disadvantage.

Thus, for instance, the trade in the East like to have small sales and low prices reported in the seaboard markets just prior to the clip time in order that they may make the growers in the West believe that wool is less valuable than is actually the case; on the other hand, they are equally sedulous in quoting high prices and reporting big sales just as soon as the clip has been contracted for, for the purpose of preparing the manufacturers to pay high prices for the raw material in the fall and winter. In short, the idea of mutuality of benefit between buyer and seller is to a very great extent lost sight of, and business is conducted apparently on the assumption that there can be no trade unless one of the parties is a loser.

All this of course tends to reduce the industry to a gambling basis. Certainly there is no line of business—stock market trading hardly excepted—in which there has been so much gambling in recent years as in wool. In saying this we are merely saying what everybody knows. The gambling has not by any means been confined to the seaboard wool merchants, but has extended to the growers in the West and the manufacturers in the East. The result is, that everybody in any way identified with wool is today in a state of profound dissatisfaction. But will the industry ever reach a permanently satisfactory basis so long as the present hap-hazard policy is pursued? There may be years of exceptional prosperity in the future, as there have been during the past decade, but every one with a sound business mind must know that, year in and year out, the losses are bound to greatly offset any such spasmodic profits as were witnessed, say, in 1897 and 1899? There was once a dog who, on crossing a bridge, with a bone in his mouth, saw in the water another dog with a larger bone than his own; in trying to grasp the shadow he lost the bone already in his possession—a fate not unlike that with which wool interests have met repeatedly in the last ten years.

There seems to be no doubt that there is

"profound dissatisfaction" but there is a difference of opinion as to the cause. The suffering is so acute that the Reporter leaves the question, whether the tariff is too high or too low, for future consideration and plunges into a discussion of the situation as it is. The Reporter fears that the wool growers have, in the language of the story, lost the bone in trying to grasp the shadow. The Reporter might investigate the tendency of the manufacturers to combine and employ one purchaser. When all the woolen factories are consolidated into one concern the wool growers may have even more cause for complaint than they have now.

Still Other Foes to Fight.

Senator Hoar grows righteously indignant at corruption in politics. In a recent speech he said:

The whipping post, the branding on the forehead, the cropping of the ears, the scourging at the cart's tail, are light punishment for the rich man who would debauch a state, whether it be an old state with an honorable history, or a young and pure state in the beginning of its history.

It is gratifying to see the Massachusetts senator alive to the fact that money is being used to debauch politics. Some two years ago he discovered that the republican party was attacking the Declaration of Independence, and he began aiming vigorous blows at the administration. He now sees, what many have seen before, viz., that public morality is being undermined by the illegitimate use of money. The remedies proposed by him are none too harsh, but what about the lobbyists who hang about the senate and push subsidy bills, suppress anti-trust measures, defeat legislation aimed at extortionate railroad rates and prevent the election of senators by a direct vote of the people? It is to be hoped that the senator's continuous but gradual awakening will finally lead him to turn his wrath against the corporation agents who hold high carnival at Washington during Congressional sessions.

The Penalty.

By J. A. Edgerton in The Ram's Horn.

We are mad—grown mad in the race for gold.
 We are drunk with the wine of gain;
 The truths our fathers proclaimed of old
 We spurn with a high disdain.
 But while the conqueror's race we run,
 Our rulers should not forget
 That the God who reigned over Babylon
 Is the God who is reigning yet.

Would we tread in the paths of tyranny,
 Nor reckon the tyrant's cost?
 Who taketh another's liberty,
 His freedom hath also lost.
 Would we win as the strong have ever won,
 Make ready to pay the debt.
 For the God who reigned over Babylon
 Is the God who is reigning yet.

The ruins of dynasties passed away
 In eloquent silence lie;
 And the despot's fate is the same today
 That it was in the days gone by.
 Against all wrong and injustice done
 A rigid account is set,
 For the God who reigned over Babylon
 Is the God who is reigning yet.

The laws of right are eternal laws,
 The judgments of truth are true;
 My greed—blind masters, I bid you pause
 And look on the work you do.
 You blind with sheekles your fellow man,
 Your hands with his blood are wet,
 And the God who reigned over Babylon
 Is the God who is reigning yet.