

THE WORLD FACING STARVATION?

"Starvation is staring the world in the face!" We have heard that doleful cry often during the last decade; especially since a certain railroad builder—and, incidentally, land sales promoter—began insisting that human hunger was growing faster than food production. Taking up his cry, the statisticians and fictionists have been harrying and frightening us with what they declared is absolute proof of the truth of the railroad builder's cry. Yet there are those of us who refuse to grow pale of cheek or tremulous of speech when we listen to the direful predictions of ultimate world starvation. Somehow or other the most of us manage to get our three square meals a day, usually by working, although some there be who get theirs in divers and sundry ways not recognized in law as being good form.

We are told that our area of corn production is already stretched to the limit; and we are shown by figures that our wheat production is decreasing owing to the overworking of our wheat lands. By deft manipulation of the multiplier under the multiplicand we are shown that at the decreasing rate of production and the increasing rate of population we are all too soon to begin skipping meals with constantly increasing regularity. A great many people have been worried to death by troubles that never happened; and a lot of people are working up cases of starvation while surrounded by foodstuffs of every description, and with multiplying facilities or increasing the production thereof. It is true that there are thousands upon thousands—aye, millions upon millions—of people who are in dire want. Many of them, however, want that which they do not need but think they need; other millions are really in need because they lack the "get-up-and-get" spirit in proper degree; still other thousands are starving because of some radical failure in our complex machinery of distribution.

Less than twenty years ago Nebraska farmers were burning corn for fuel because it was so cheap it was unprofitable to haul it to market. At the same time miners in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, with millions of tons of coal waiting for their picks and shovels, were starving because they could not mine that coal and send it to those Nebraska farmers in exchange for the foodstuff those farmers were burning. Even as long ago as that an occasional pessimist would arise and assert that the world was approaching the starvation stage. But the blunt fact is that the world is further away than ever from that point. One need but look past academic figures to where the real facts are to obtain proof of the truth of that assertion.

A great many people overlook the trite old truth that while "figures will not lie, liars will figure," and these, gazing first upon the tables showing decreasing wheat yields per acre, and then at the tables showing rapidly increasing population, immediately feel hunger pinching them.

Of course it is true that we usually consume every year what was produced in that year, and that if the 1911 crops were to utterly fail we would all become awfully hungry before the 1912 crops were harvested. It is also true that if one-half the people were to die during 1911 the under-

takers could not supply enough coffins to decently inter the dead. This old world has been wagging along for several thousands of years, and to date we have always managed to raise enough foodstuffs every year to feed the vast majority until another crop came along. True that many people have died of famine, but was it because there was not enough food in the world, or was it because we have signally failed, as yet, to solve the problem of distributing our food supplies? The fault has been our own if our brothers and sisters anywhere starved to death, not the fault of the soil, the air, the water or the Creator.

While a lot of pessimistic statisticians are growing blue about the gills because they have figured out that the day of ultimate starvation is at hand, proving it to their own satisfaction by tables showing decreasing production per acre, a lot of optimistic scientific sharps, usually working for scant wage but with unbounded enthusiasm, are finding ways to correct that. When Uncle Sam had land to give away to all comers, and gave it, the land was held so cheaply that people abused it, overlooking the fact that soil, like a cistern, must at some time or other have something put into it else the time would come when it would have nothing to give out. After raising successive crops of corn or wheat upon land, until the land balked and refused to yield profitably, the farmer moved on, or sold out to some other farmer whose land was in even poorer condition.

Right here the "book farmer," the scientific fellow in the college laboratory, came to the front with his theory about crop rotation, legumes, bugs and other things, all evolved from his inner consciousness, so to speak, and after the "practical farmers" had laughed at him for a spell his theories were taken up little by little. As a result, land that was pronounced "worked out" and worthless a generation ago, is now producing bigger crops than it did in its palmiest days of yore.

We have so long labored under the delusion that it took not less than 160 acres of fertile land to afford a living that we find it difficult to believe that a 40, or even a 20-acre farm, well tilled and intensively cultivated is more profitable than the quarter-section merely "farmed." Yet it is the truth, as may be seen by a visit to Pawnee county, Nebraska, where lives the most successful farmer in the United States. He is actually getting rich from the production of a 20-acre farm. Land, too, that he bought cheaply because the man he bought it from thought it practically worthless, being hilly and clayey. That successful farmer not only uses plow and harrow and disc and hoe, but he uses brains—and, after all, the best farm tool and the best fertilizer is brains.

When Nebraska was admitted to statehood in 1867 her population consisted of about 100,000 people, nine-tenths of whom lived fifty or sixty miles of the Missouri river. For fifteen years people believed that ful pictures of impending starvation, sixteen million acres of fertile Nebraska soil are ready for alfalfa seed—soil never yet touched by the plow.

Starvation staring the world in the face? Just about as true as the old-time Millerite predictions of the second coming. The prob-

lem of production is really solved. If inability to produce is all that is frightening the pessimists, let them chirp up. The problem confronting us now is how to get what we can produce to those who need it, and get it to them in time.

The starvation-scared statisticians dearly love to deal in doleful figures; perhaps some figures the other way 'round may tend to ease their minds. Nebraska has 72,000 square miles of land within her borders, four-fifths of which, approximately 58,000 square miles, is unusually responsive to intelligent cultivation. That is 37,120,000 acres, or thereabouts. Now, if that Pawnee county farmer, who has a wife and three children, can make a good living and lay up a thousand dollars or so a year on 20 acres—what's the answer? Nebraska has a population of about 1,270,000, half of whom live in towns. The same figures that the hunger-scared statisticians use to frighten the unthinking, prove that Nebraska can take care of about 5,500,000 more people on her fertile lands, and about as many more in her cities and towns. And taking care of 11,000,000 people threatened with starvation is taking up quite a considerable bit of slack at least for one state that was deemed little if any better than a desert less than a generation ago.

There are too many of these attic investigators, and too few investigators who get out and pace off the ground. Why, if every corn raiser in the United States went right on trying to raise corn like their grandfathers raised it, we wouldn't have enough corn in any one year to make a griddlecake per capita. Fortunately for all of us in our agricultural school laboratories are men who would have difficulty in explaining to a Wall street broker the difference between a gangplow and a cream separator, but who are discovering new things about corn and corn growing every day, and then telling bright-faced students all about them. Then those students hike joyfully back to the farms and make 'steen ears of corn where only a nubbin grew before. Same way with wheat, and oats, and potatoes—everything produced from the soil. Danger of the world starving? Yes, when there is no longer air to breathe or water to slake thirst.

Scarcity of hogs and cattle and other meat products? Certainly, but the resourceful west is full of swine and kine potentialities. A score of years ago it took a half-section of land to raise a long-horned steer that was scarcely worth the raising after all. It's different now. Although the almost unbounded cattle range is a thing of the past, there are more beef cattle in Nebraska today than in the days of the free range. Not long-horns, either; the white-face, the short-horn, the Polled Angus, the Aberdeens—the best beef animals in the world, any one of which is worth more than three of the long-horns that once roamed the free and unfenced range. And on the half-section that once had all it could do to prepare one of those Texans for market, a carload of grade steers is now prepared—yet men sit around with faces as long as pumphanes, telling us that the day of starvation is almost upon us! If there is hunger anywhere in this world—and of course there is—it is not because we are unable to produce the foodstuffs to satisfy that hunger. It is because there is, somewhere, a bad kink