

French Farmers Thriftiest in the World



EVERY CHAIR AND TABLE OUTSIDE PAYS A TAX.



HOW FRENCH DEPARTMENT STORES SELL GOODS ON THE STREET.

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IN THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE,
 Nov. 5.—(Special Correspondence
 of The Bee.)—I want to tell you
 something about the farmers of
 France. I have been traveling for

weeks through the different parts of this country, and I am now on a train speeding up the Rhone valley from Lyons to Switzerland. The land is covered with luxuriant crops. There are no fences, and nature's great patchwork stretches out on every side as far as my eyes can reach. Just now we are passing some wheat in which blood red poppies are big around as a teacup look out of the green. On the opposite side of the train is a hayfield where women and girls are working side by side with the men, and farther on is a great expanse of white beets in which are women bent half double pulling the weeds. The women here work as hard as the men. They do all sorts of field labor, and you see them scattered over every landscape. They are more thrifty than the men, and they are among the great savers of the French people.

The work among the farmers goes on throughout the week and often on Sunday as well. The fields are full of Sunday workers. While the church bells are tolling mechanics are plying their trades and the ordinary stores and workshops are open.

I have described England as owned by the few. France is owned by the many. There are 5,500,000 landowners among the 38,500,000 people which make up the French republic or almost a landholder to every family. The average holding is less than six acres, and thousands own little tracts upon which they live, working a part of the year for someone else.

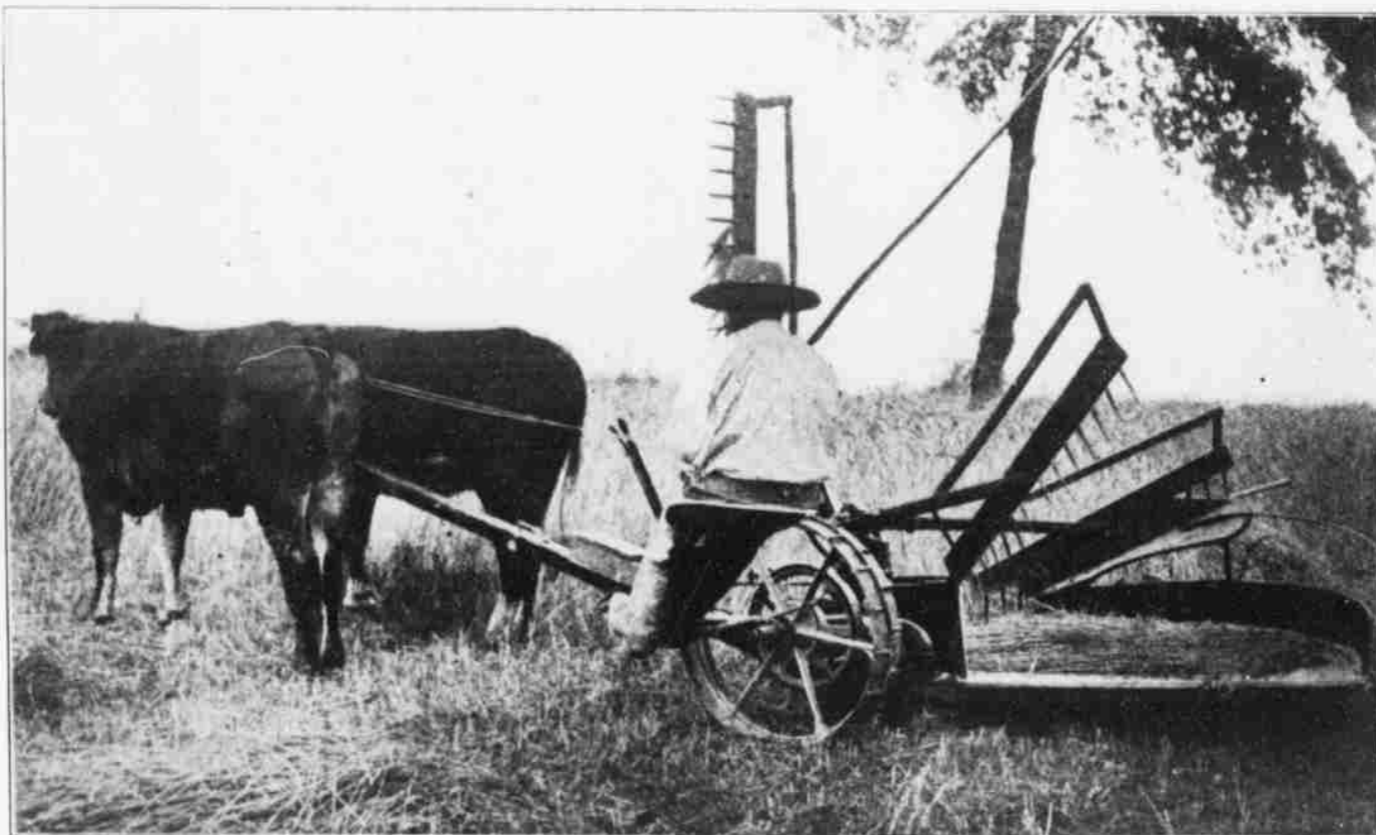
The French love their land, and it is this common ownership that keeps them at home. They are not an emigrating nation, like the Germans and Italians or the English. More strangers come into France every year than Frenchmen leave, and notwithstanding this the people are about the richest on the face of the globe. They were able to pay the enormous Franco-Prussian war debt without feeling it, and they have now hundreds of millions of dollars stored away in their woolen stockings under the rafters. They are prosperous, although they have the largest debt of any nation. They pay in interest alone \$250,000,000 a year, or almost \$7 per head, to say nothing of the taxes required for the necessary expenses of the government.

The French are excellent farmers. With them a penny saved is twopence earned, and they see that nothing goes to waste. They live as cheaply as any people of Europe. The average farmer starts out to work on black bread and vegetable soup, or he may have only bread and cheese and a glass of wine. At noon he will have a vegetable soup and perhaps fried potatoes and in the evening the same. He has wine at every meal, for it is one of the cheapest of drinks. Nearly everyone keeps a goat, but few drink the milk, for goat's milk will make cheese.

The farming is intensive. The wheat regions produce almost twice as much on the average as the wheat fields of the United States. Every bit of land is used, and nothing goes to waste. On the larger farms American machinery is employed. Our plows are bought and also our mowers and threshers. President Loubet uses an American reaper on his big French estate.

The French understand how to make money out of trees. They appreciate the value of forests, and have some of the largest and best of the world. There are vast wood lands belonging to the government and private holdings in which the trees are as well cared for as in our city parks. Only the ripe trees are cut and every piece of fallen wood is saved.

The roads and streams and little canals of France are lined with poplars. I can see long lines of them cutting the landscape in every direction as I look out of my car window. Some of the trees are 100 feet high. They are bare of branches, with only a tassel left on the top. Others are full limbed and others are just sprouting new growth on all sides. These poplars are grown for their branches and are finally



AN AMERICAN REAPER IN USE IN FRANCE.

cut down for wood or for furniture. The branches grow rapidly. They are cut off year after year, put into bundles and sold to the bakers to make the hot fires necessary for the crisp crust on the French bread. There is such a demand for them that raising them is one of the chief industries of France. The poplars are planted in places which are good for nothing else, and after five years each will annually produce at least 20 cents. Later on the trees are cut down and sold. Willows are grown in the same way, their sprouts being used for baskets.

The French make money out of chestnuts. They grow varieties which are from two to three times as large as the American chestnut, and sell them to the fruit stands and the grocers. The chestnuts are used to dress turkeys, geese, chickens and game and they are also used for dessert. The confectioners make candy of them, and the best candied chestnuts bring 45 cents per pound, or, if coated with chocolate, 52 cents a pound. There are large establishments in France which do nothing else, one at Lyons handling 25,000,000 pounds of chestnuts a year.

The French chestnut trees are not cultivated. They are usually planted on poor earth and in time are cut for their wood. Some chestnuts are grafted, and there is no doubt but that the French and Spanish chestnut can be grafted on our native American sprouts. In fact, I have done this on my farm in Virginia and have there produced nuts as large as the largest buckeye. There are men in Pennsylvania and New Jersey who are making such chestnut grafting commercially profitable, and the same might be done in other parts of the United States.

In South France, Spain and Italy chestnuts are ground into a meal and used for bread, and they command good prices in such localities. In the United States they are chiefly sold by fruit vendors and by the confectioners, and they bring, I am told, \$7 or \$8 per bushel. Here in France they sell by the kilogram, for 2 or 3 cents a pound.

I have already written of the market gardens of France. I learn more about them every day, and am more and more surprised at their excellence. The French have 1,000,000 acres devoted to gardens and fruits, and in riding over the country you pass fields of hotbeds and see glass frames propped over plants outside the beds. In many places glass bells are used to cover the individual plants, and there are some sections which raise potatoes under glass for export to London.

The French have studied the soil and the sun and they coax both to work. They

feed the crops rather than the land and in places get three crops a year through intensive cultivation. Near Cherbourg cabbage is raised early in February. After it is taken off a crop of potatoes is planted and a third crop comes on in the autumn. This is on land that has been used for generations.

And still we Americans talk of old Mother Earth being worn out. Nothing of the kind! The old lady has all the possibilities of perpetual youth, but, coquette that she is, she must be fed with the dainties she loves and petted to make her yield her best crops. This is especially so as to the vineyards which have been used for generations. The French vines are cut down every year and every vine has its individual stake, and I might say its individual treatment.

One of the odd features of fruit growing here is the training of the trees against stone walls for early crops. The stones act as radiators and proportionately increase the amount of heat and the fruit ripens earlier.

I have seen garden after garden outside big French cities walled in this way. It is estimated that there are 400 miles of such walls in the suburbs of Paris and that they annually yield 12,000,000 peaches. The peaches are sold by the piece and bring a franc and upwards. Indeed, I have seen peaches sell for 75 cents and \$1 apiece, but they were probably raised under glass.

Suburban Paris has pear orchards which produce as much as \$300 per acre, and there is one noted for its early pears which yields more than \$2,000 a year. It contains five acres. The French export trees in great quantities and good fruit land is very valuable, the best selling for \$500 or even more per acre. This is of course in favorable localities.

I had a long chat during my stay in Lyons with Consul Covert about farm clubs and agricultural organizations. Mr. Covert has spent a great deal of time with the farmers and has attended many of their meetings. He says they are far in advance of us in such matters.

Every French country community, for instance, has its clubs where the farmers meet and discuss how to market the crops. They combine together and buy their fertilizers at wholesale and appeal to the railroads for low freight rates. Not only the farmers but the railroad officials, the bankers and the merchants come to the clubs. The railroad men are asked to advise the farmers as to what they should do as to transportation and markets and the bankers and merchants are also counseled with about money matters. In America the

farmer wants nothing to do with the city man. He seems to be jealous and afraid of him. The French farmer is willing to say there may be some brains outside his own class, and he is glad to take advantage of them.

There are more than 8,000,000 farmers in France who belong to agricultural syndicates, and there are altogether over 2,000 such syndicates. These syndicates are for general furthering of the farming and commercial interests of the members, and they are further organized into ten unions which work together for the interests of their class. They have a head office at Paris, and this deals with the railroads as to freight rates and also pushes agricultural interests before the French Parliament.

The farm syndicates support measures for a protective tariff on farm products and do all they can to bring the farmers into connection with the markets, the bankers and the public. They have made it so that much farm goods are now sent over the country by mail. Butter and cheese are thus shipped, and wine is marketed by post in two-bottle lots. Most of these syndicates have their own libraries, and it is largely due to them that the national government has established a bank with a fund of about \$8,000,000, which has been loaned out to farmers at 3 per cent interest. They have also decreased the taxes on farm lands and provided that certain lands shall be exempt from taxation.

These syndicates buy things in quantities for their members, and it might pay our exporters of farm implements and fertilizers to treat directly with them.

Speaking of taxes, the tax exemptions of the farmers have caused a decrease in the revenue of \$5,000,000, and this came from the very smallest of the taxpayers. Nevertheless, there are some taxes almost infinitesimal. There are more than 8,000,000 persons in this country who each pay a land tax ranging from 10 to 20 cents, more than 3,000,000 pay from \$1 to \$3, and there are more than 2,000,000 landholders who each pay from \$4 to \$6 per annum. If a farmer pays a rent of less than \$50 he is untaxed. If he pays \$50 he is taxed only on \$130, but if he pays more than \$150 he is taxed 9 per cent on the whole sum.

Almost all taxes here are based on incomes or rents. Business property is taxed 8 per cent of the amount for which it rents, and if it is idle it is not taxed at all. If a store or house burns down the tax on the land stops from that moment, and if a factory stops work its tax stops. Every loom in the silk mill pays a tax while it is working, but if it is broken or becomes

idle the tax officials are notified and the tax is not collectable.

In Lyons all buildings are free from taxation for two years after their erection, no matter whether they are rented or not. This is to stimulate building and to enable the owner to get back something of the first cost.

The policy of the government is to make every man pay taxes in proportion to the benefit he receives, and this policy extends to the smallest of such benefits. For this reason every chair and table which is placed on the pavement outside a store or restaurant must pay its tax. Sometimes cafes and restaurants thus monopolize the whole street, but the people do not grumble, for they know the owner is paying for the privilege.

Every plant set out on the street pays a tax, as well as every counter for the sale of goods. Many of the large department stores of Paris and other cities use the streets during bright days to show goods and sell them. The wares are spread out upon tables and the clerks stand there and hawk them out to passersby. When the goods are so displayed the merchants are taxed, but when taken in they are not charged.

There are such counters about the Bon Marche and Au Printemps, two of the largest stores of Paris, and also about a great department store near the Hotel de Ville. Some stores have movable counters, on wheels, as large and as long as the counters inside, which are pulled out during the shopping hours and pushed in at night, thus increasing the working space about 50 per cent. The Bazaar of the Hotel de Ville has three sides facing the streets and its pavements are filled with goods. I looked over the counters and found many American articles. There were cheap watches, carpenter tools from New England, American ink and American canned fruits. As I waited the bell rang for closing the store and the clerks shoved the counters from the street inside, and within five minutes the great building was surrounded by blank walls of steel, which had dropped from above, covering the windows. The next day was rainy, and when I came past the store at noon the business was all inside, and I was told that no tax was collected except for such times as the street was so used.

It takes an army of officers to collect such taxes, and hence France has a large officeholding class. There are families of professional officeholders who feed at the public crib from generation to generation, being backed by political influence.

In France even government bonds are taxed, but nearly every issue has a lottery attachment. City and municipal bonds bear low rates of interest, but there are always a number of prizes connected with them and the lottery element is as great an attraction as the investment itself. The Paris exposition bonds were issued in this way, as were also those of the exposition of 1889. Lotteries are instituted for all sorts of purposes and are generally patronized. They are operated fairly, and the prizes sometimes go to the rich and sometimes to the poor. A coachman at Lyons lately drew 100,000 francs, or \$20,000, and the Rothschild brothers more recently got \$20,000 from tickets in a lottery organized for the support of indigent artists. The Rothschilds refused to take the money and gave it over into the hands of Coquelin, the French actor, who had charge of the fund.

The United States would never permit its government bonds to be issued with a lottery attachment. It is contrary to our ideas of the right. But there are many things outside this which the French can teach us as to handling our finances. They know how to keep their own debts among their own people, and when they annually pay out \$7 per head in interest they have the satisfaction of knowing that it all goes back into France. Their bonds are of such a nature that every French family, however poor, owns some of them. This might be done in America if our bonds were in small denominations, and it would undoubtedly tend to bind our people more closely together and to make them better citizens and more enthusiastic patriots.

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