

Winnetka Weekly Talk

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by

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"My Country 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty."

FRIDAY, MAY 18, 1917

TOWN IMPROVEMENT

One Improvement society a few years ago asked every member to bring in what suggestions occurred to him for local betterments. Nearly 100 were offered. These ranged from window boxes with plants in the business districts, to regulations preventing congestion in tenements. Most of the ideas were good, though many were impossible under present conditions of laws and public sentiment.

Several meetings were spent discussing these propositions. The members were so exhausted by the wide field of work that needed doing that their ambition all evaporated in talk, and practically nothing was done. The society soon after expired.

Probably the most practical end in view in the average American town is the removal of disorder from home places. Some wonderful successes have been achieved through the competitive garden movement. Many bare and ugly little cottages have been transformed into bowers of beauty by a little spirit of competition.

One of the worst features of most towns is disorderly back yards along railroads and trolley lines. Many places clean up their main streets until they fairly shine, and are lovely boulevards of trees and shrubbery. There where the railroad comes in, there is an ugly succession of chicken coops, outhouses, ash heaps, and general litter. All that could be changed by an active Improvement society. By offering prizes for the best looking back yards along the railroad line, visitors to the place would get an entirely different conception of the town.

Some of the most beautiful places have a reputation for ugliness just because the yards along the railroad are so disorderly. It takes comparatively little work to make the transformation. House owners can be induced to go into the scheme by the improvement in value of their real estate.

BURNING UP FOOD.

Every few days one reads in some newspaper that a car of potatoes on some remote side track has been burned, or that a grain warehouse has been destroyed by fire. All accidental, of course.

It will strike lots of people that car loads of potatoes are too valuable property to be left lying alone on remote sidings. There are people among us who have an interest in having these potatoes destroyed.

Also a grain elevator is a part of our military preparation. There should be guards around all these reserves of foods under present conditions.

In some places officers are guarding buildings, the destruction of which would not be of the least military advantage to our enemies. Meanwhile the food stocks on which our national safety depend are left unwatched. The railroads that are transporting these commodities should be held responsible for the protection of this vital property in transit.

PASSENGER SERVICE.

It is announced at Washington that railroad passenger train service will be generally curtailed during the war, so as to ship a surplus of locomotives and cars to our allies in Europe. Also it is desired to release locomotives for use in drawing freight trains as far as possible.

Salesmen and others whose business requires a constant succession of railroad journeys will feel the change a good deal. They will wind up their business in one town and find they have several hours of fruitless waiting before the next train comes along. But inconveniences of this kind must and will be cheerfully borne for the sake of promoting national efficiency. If we are to make a good showing in this war, we must adjust ourselves to changes in our plans in a thousand ways.

Pleasure travelers are fussy about their trains. Many such are run at a loss, and the cost is paid by the great mass of the public in freight rates.

The public would hardly be satisfied with a cutting down of passenger trains for the purpose of saving money for the stockholders. But if some of the locomotives and train crews could be shifted over to the freight business so as to stop the congestion that has added to cost of living, the public would often be the gainer.

In thickly settled sections where there are many trains many persons never bother to look at a time table. They just go to the station thinking that a train will come along, and then are angry if they have to wait. Here is where the railroads make a mistake when they cut out their advertising of train schedules in the newspapers. If they constantly inform the public through the newspapers when their trains run people can look up the schedule without running to the station for a timetable. Thickly settled districts where train service is abundant could often get along with less trains if these were thoroughly advertised, and a well advertised train service in any locality may make a scanty service tolerable.

TAXATION.

The government rightly plans to raise a large share of the war cost by taxation. Everyone naturally will want some one else hit. But there are certain general principles that everyone should assent to. These are that wealth should pay in proportion to its ability and that special taxes should be laid upon play rather than on work and business, upon luxuries rather than necessities.

One proposal is to tax advertising. That places a direct tax on the selling of goods. The business men no doubt expect to take their share of the burden, but it would be equally fair to tax every employer for the number of salesmen employed. Either proposition would hamper business, tend to restrict trade, and would impair the economic soundness of the country.

Another proposed tax placed contrary to the principles enumerated above, would be to raise letter postage to three cents. This would hit business concerns heavily, and would be an impost on work rather than luxury. So far as heard from, however, no one has objected to a tax on picture post cards.

The more legitimate subjects for taxation are luxuries like liquor, tobacco, soft drinks, candy, chewing gum, and a wide range of notions and frivolities which people can easily do without. The amusements of the people are a legitimate field for assessment, including theaters, baseball games, movies, all entertainments for private profit, country clubs, billiard rooms and bowling alleys, and all kinds of sporting events.

It is not a hardship to the people to have to cut down their expenses a little in these respects. It of course means higher prices on all such diversions and luxuries. But if the people will but restrict themselves a little, their expenses will be none the greater. War is serious business, and we must all expect our daily habits to be affected. Large incomes must of course pay a heavy tax, and the people of wealth expect it.

It is bad enough to have to pay all these price advances, and still worse to have our intelligence insulted by all these reasons that they give for it.

SCHOOL GARDENS.

The school garden movement was not promoted so much for what few potatoes and beans the youngsters could raise on their little plots. It was more to train the children in industrious habits, and to interest them in processes of nature. But, vegetables are regarded with wholesome respect now. The National Educational Association plans to push school gardens harder this summer, as a resource in food production.

Teachers are to secure permission to use vacant lots and back yards. If the schools everywhere would promote this movement, an increase could be made in the food supply. Speculators who are contriving to beat the last dollar out of the poor man, would reflect on all these little stocks stored away in a million cellars.

The school gardens will be planted with boisterous enthusiasm. It always gives a youngster a thrill to do something like his father. He will feel like a grown man while he is digging his furrows and dropping in his seed. There will come a day when the weeds have grown very tall. The teacher is rusticated at rural retreats. A boy's will is the wind's will, and vacation days are full of pressing engagements. The swimming hole has to be visited several times a day, and there are no end of birds nests to be inspected and back yard ball games to be played. Then there is the inappropriate fact that the garden was not laid out in the shade. If this vital consideration had not been overlooked, it would have been much more practical for Tommy to weed his plot.

Still the children's gardens have really raised a substantial amount of produce. Children are happier if they have some regular task. But their gardens will amount to a great deal more if some competent person is given the job of regularly supervising them. Father can well afford to pay something for real vegetables.

A shortage is reported on all materials and elements contributing to agricultural production, except talk. The astute youths who dodge registration for conscription are no doubt attracted by the idea of free board and conscription for the pail farms.

Clean up day was carefully observed by many people by moving the ash barrel to a location where only the near neighbors can see it.

It is surprising what an authority on gardening a person can become after reading a couple of columns of farm hints in the newspapers.

So far Congress has not voted to grant pensions to those who are drafted but fail to pass on account of physical defects.

Although a man may be able to stand the glare of the sun all day on an automobile trip, it does not prove that his eyes will not suffer if he goes to church and gets the light from those stained glass windows.

A public desire is manifested to hang the food speculators, but more suffering could probably be inflicted on them by forcing them into bankruptcy.

Some of the dealers are skinning the eyes out of the potatoes also the eye teeth out of the customers.

The people who think it is going to be a short war and not much preparation is necessary, are the same ones who never mend a leaky roof until it rains.

The fact that people can get all exhausted on a fishing trip and yet have a good time, does not prove that they can stand a little perspiration in the garden.

These long flowing whiskers that the farmer is pictured with don't look nearly so funny when he looks out at you from the seat of his new six-cylinder automobile.

The food speculators feel that the establishment of minimum prices is necessary for the protection of the community, while maximum prices are a gross abuse of governmental power.

Another lot of those people that have been biting granite, according to the cheerful German phrase, are the German spies that have been trying to bite it into the negro's head that he would better revolt.

Another of those fellows who should be taken out in the back yard and introduced to the spade, is the college student who is planning to spend his summer at a resort hotel playing ball to amuse the guests.

Farm implements reported short. They can't be repaired in summer because everyone is too busy, nor in winter because they aren't needed then.

The need of more freight trains which the Council of National Defense has at last arranged to provide for, has long been pointed out by Wandering Willie and Dusty Rhodes.

It might be a good idea for some of these anti-submarine device inventors to sink one or two submarines first and talk to the reporters afterward.

After thoroughly reading the baseball news, many citizens will then turn to the front pages to read minor items like revolutions in Russia and killing of men by the hundreds of thousands in France.

It is still possible if you pay a higher price than girls can earn anywhere else, to get domestic servants that don't know enough to be stenographers and aren't strong enough to walk to their daily work.

If some people's ideas of censorship prevail, it will be every one's duty to keep mum and not commit the dastardly crime of showing how our military power can be strengthened.

If baseball has to be stopped on account of the war, our National indictment against Germany will be terrible indeed.

The only chance of a revolution in Germany is in case the government should grant popular rights, in which case the people would certainly revolt against any such proposition.

Those young fellows who are leaving the farm to go to the cities won't be able to earn so much money, but they are cheered by the expectation that they can keep their cuffs clean.

The German spies worming their way through all Russia are trying to prove that it is discourteous for our government, to send a commission to Petrograd.

The men who are unable to enlist are always awfully disappointed that they can't go.

It will be much safer for some of the boys to enlist and go into the trenches than to take their chances with sporting life at home.

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