

Trifling with the Food Problem

NEW YORK CITY is the greatest consumer of food in the United States. Conservatively estimated its annual food bill is about \$800,000,000. Yet it is absolutely dependent upon outside sources for its supplies. When a railroad strike threatened last summer, a panic was created because, in spite of its isolation, the city had exercised so little foresight that if it were cut off from the world it could not feed itself adequately for more than a week, and three weeks would reduce it to famine. Though the food problem of New York is specially acute, its significance is national.

But the food supply has never been cut off from the city, and in consequence the people have come to regard it ordinarily as a normal provision of nature. So whenever a crisis develops, the city is as helpless as a child that comes to the breakfast table before the cook is up and grows petulant because it is not promptly served.

The current boycott against eggs is a case in point. When egg dealers forced the price up beyond what the city found it pleasant to pay, people thought of nothing better to do than to scold the speculators and threaten to stop eating eggs. Of course this childish performance moved the speculators to mirth. They simply unloaded upon the market eggs that had already been held in storage to the limit of safety. When eggs dropped a few cents the consumers, not knowing that they were merely buying an inferior quality heralded the event as a great triumph for their boycott.

The culminating example of popular helplessness in dealing with the food problem is the complacency with which the people of New York City are accepting Governor Whitman's announcement of a new commission which is to go into the entire subject and report to the legislature. No fault can be found with the men whom the Governor has appointed—they are public-spirited and of proved business ability; but there is serious ground for objection to the appointment of any such commission at this time because all the essential facts in the problem were collected and published by the New York State Food Investigating Commission in 1912, by the Mayor's Market Commission in 1913, and since then by various private organizations. In view of this circumstance, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the appointment of the Commission is a political manoeuvre inspired by the speculators and middlemen themselves to checkmate the plans of Mr. John J. Dillon, State Commissioner of Foods and Markets, whose practical contributions to the solution of the marketing problem have made his department the foremost organization of its kind in the country.

In December New York seems completely to have forgotten the lessons taught by the strike of the dairy farmers in October. This strike might have been avoided if the people had paid intelligent attention to the constructive program for their protection against a possible milk famine, the program which Commissioner Dillon presented to the legislature more than a year ago. For years the dairy farmers of the state had protested that the price they received from the great middlemen was below the cost of production. Their charges were sustained by a state investigation as far back as 1909. They had appealed for legislation that would protect not only themselves but the consuming public from the combination of milk dealers who were charging at retail two or three times as much as they were paying the farmers. Last year Commissioner Dillon prepared a bill which provided for the establishment of a receiving and distributing station in the city of New York. This station would have enabled him to pay the farmers a fair price for their milk and to supply the consumer at a reasonable rate, thus creating an effective instrument for the regulation of the milk business and insuring the community a continuous supply. The bill contemplated an outlay of not more than \$300,000, an amount it would have saved to the farmers and consumers in the course of a year. But the consuming public showed not the slightest interest, the legislators professed disbelief in the capacity of the farmers to organize, and the whole matter was sidetracked and hushed by the appointment of a commission which after months of investigation discovered not a single new fact of importance. In the meantime the dairy farmers did organize and with the coöperation of Commissioner Dillon forced terms upon the large milk dealers. This gave the farmers a better price for milk; but the people of New York City, thanks to their incapacity for sustained attention, are no better off than they were before.

And now they seem about to repeat this same folly with respect to the city's entire food supply. Again the people of New York are making a great outcry against high prices and the ruthlessness of the food speculators, but it is noteworthy that the demand for practical reform in this larger field is also coming from the farmers. Of the \$800,000,000 spent annually in New York City only five per cent goes to the farmers of New York State. The determining factors in the prevailing system of food distribution are the railroads, which control not only transportation, but the docking facilities of the city as well. The railroads have always been particularly interested in the long haul, and as a result the farmers of California and Texas are able to send their produce into the New York mar-

ket more regularly and in less time than the farmers of central New York. Because of this discrimination, the general agricultural output of New York State has been steadily diminishing in the interstate competition. Commissioner Dillon, in his attempt to secure a larger place in the New York City markets for the farmers of the state, has been continually baffled by the hostility of the railroads and their allies, the commission men.

For example, last year he tried to coöperate with the orchard men by organizing auctions for the public sale of apples. The center of the city's apple market is the Barclay Street pier, which the New York Central Railroad controls and where it permits the speculative dealers to make their sales and deliveries to customers. In the name of the State Department of Foods and Markets and in the interest of state apple growers, Mr. Dillon persistently applied for the privilege of selling apples at public auction from this pier, and the privilege was denied with equal persistence. The result was that untold barrels of apples rotted on the ground in New York State while the New York City consumers paid fancy prices for a portion of the New York crop and for apples shipped in from the South and the Pacific Coast. The same condition prevails with respect to eggs, butter, poultry and other supplies.

There is no longer any mystery about the principal cause of excessive food prices in New York City. The farmers grow more than they are able to sell; but the railroads and the food speculators by their control of the terminal and distributing facilities restrict and juggle the supply so that the consumers have annually to pay from \$150,000,000 to \$200,000,00 more for their commodities than would be necessary if the state or the city owned an adequate terminal and storage plant from which food might be sold directly to the ultimate consumer or retailer. The establishment of such a plant is Mr. Dillon's simple and entirely feasible proposal. It has been approved by State Senator Wick, and it is essentially identical with the one recently proposed by Mr. George W. Perkins. Both of these men the Governor has appointed to the new commission. The problem is intricate, as the Governor says; but, as he also says, it is "not something that has cropped up in fifteen minutes or risen over-night." It has been exhaustively investigated time and again and, as in the case of the milk problem, there are no facts of importance which this new commission can possibly uncover.

When Governor Whitman first announced his intention of appointing this commission, he insisted that he had no desire to supersede Mr. Dillon, but

that he was unable to support Mr. Dillon's plan because the state could not afford to spend three or four million dollars for the wholesale terminal market which the plan calls for. This explanation was made immediately after the people of the state had voted a bond issue of ten million dollars to extend their state parks—a project of great importance to the public but not nearly so important as facilities for the economical distribution of food.

At the very moment when an unusually competent public servant is ready to take effective action for the relief of both producers and consumers, he is virtually superseded by a commission which, if it follows precedent, will be chiefly noteworthy for its effectiveness in allaying public unrest and check-mating a program of action. And while this manoeuver is in process, the people of New York City are diverting themselves with a futile boycott against eggs and an equally futile spluttering against the speculators and middlemen—against everybody but themselves. They are trifling with a vital problem of public economy.

If Commissioner Dillon were in a nation of belligerent Europe, he would be given autocratic power over the food supply. Public officials concerned with the food supply in our own country are watching the fate of the New York department not only because they recognize as models the law which Mr. Dillon drafted and the organization which he is perfecting, but also because they see in his present struggle a critical test of the willingness of the people to support an efficient servant. If the people of New York City remain complacent while Mr. Dillon's work is sidetracked and suppressed, they will give another signal demonstration of popular incapacity for constructive reform; and they will sacrifice a unique opportunity for carrying through an experiment of national importance.

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The Failure of Rumania

WHEN last August Rumania entered the war, practically all the military writers, including Colonel Feyler and Colonel Repington, supposed that the Rumanians would strike south across the Danube in an endeavor to cut the Berlin-Constantinople railway at Sofia or at Nish. There was every reason for anticipating this plan of campaign; in Transylvania there was no near objective of any strategical value, while of course the Constantinople railway was, and is, vital to the success and coördination of the Central Powers. Moreover before the declaration of war Sarraill had begun those intermittent activities which have ever since held the bulk of the Bulgarian forces in Macedonia. At that time, therefore, the disposition of the Teutonic armies in the Balkans, which was well known to the Rumanians, was as follows: On the Transylvanian frontier, between Dorna Watra and Orsova, there were only frontier guards. On the Danube from Orsova to Rustchuk, there were only frontier guards. At Rustchuk, and along the line of the Rustchuk-Varna railway, there was, and had been for several months, a considerable force of Bulgarians, Germans and Turks, kept there in view of the very contingency which did actually develop. In Macedonia the main Bulgarian forces, strengthened by some picked German units, opposed Sarraill. All this was known in Rumania, including the size of the Bulgarian army at Rustchuk, which was estimated at about 50,000 mobile infantry. It was also known that for reinforcement Bulgaria counted on the Turks, who had already despatched a considerable force to Galicia.

Now what most critics expected to happen was this. Russia was to extend her military frontier from Dorna Watra southward, along the Moldavian frontier, as far, say, as Predeal, which was actually done, at least in part. Russia was likewise to descend upon Bulgaria, through the Dobrudja, using the Cernavoda-Constanza railway as a base. This Russia did not do. Her forces in the Dobrudja, at least in the first four months of the campaign, were light.

Meanwhile Rumania was to cross the Danube. This was then quite possible. Rumania could have brought to bear upon Bulgaria a large numerical superiority, and could have feinted at a dozen places, just as the Austro-Germans did when they invaded Serbia in 1914 and 1915. At the same time Sarraill was to exert pressure both by attacks and by a lengthening of his line westward to Lake Presba, as he did, and not unsuccessfully.

According to this plan of campaign there was only left the western Carpathians for Rumania to defend. This naturally strong frontier, it was supposed, could be held by a proper fortification of the Torzburg, Rothenturm and Vulkan passes. The eventual result of this strategy, of course, was to be the elimination of Bulgaria from the war.

Instead, the Rumanians struck north, counting on two things—the element of surprise, and the known lack of Austrian reserves. Political factors no doubt existed also, but for the present these lie in the field of conjecture. As a matter of fact, the Rumanian attack did actually surprise the Austrian frontier guards, and there were no Austrian reserves available.

Exactly what were the strategical objectives of the Rumanians will perhaps never be known; for what they did not apparently take into account were the military resources of Germany. The armies with which they presently found themselves engaged were almost wholly German, and against those armies they stood no chance whatever. Their initial defeats at the hands of Mackensen in the Dobrudja they justly regarded as indecisive, since neither they nor the Russians had chosen to make a great offensive effort in that theatre of the war. But the ease with which the Bulgarian Rustchuk army took 20,000 prisoners at Tutrakan must have been disturbing to them, as it was to the outside world. The course of the campaign in the Dobrudja argued great tactical weakness in the Rumanian military machine, and prophesied difficulties in Transylvania as well.

From the first moment of contact with Falkenhayn's Germans these difficulties became obvious. For Falkenhayn, in view of the immense tactical superiority of his command, was able to execute movements of converging columns and of encirclement which are highly reckless when employed against a good opponent. In fact the principal obstruction to his advance was not the Rumanians, but the lack of rearward communications. He surrounded and destroyed a Rumanian force in the Vulkan Pass, feinted at Predeal, broke the Rumanian resistance at Tirgujiul, and descended to the Danube almost unopposed, where he established connection with Mackensen's Bulgarians. In two months, with inferior forces, and upon a difficult terrain, he completely defeated the Rumanian armies, and invaded their land from the Carpathians to the Danube.

Yet those who counseled originally a defensive