

Calbion H. Fougere

Mayville, N. Y.

Dear Sir: I have read all the letters to a Mugwump, the letters of Siva, and the bystander's notes, and admire the force and vigor of your style, and somehow I have more faith in your sincerity than in most newspaper writers, you don't seem to be hunting for office. It seems to me that a man who writes for the public must sometimes wish to know what impression he makes on the minds of the people. I hope it would not seem presumptuous in me to claim ~~to claim~~ to be one of "the people", and to be in touch with the movements that are taking place among the farmers. My relations have cleared more than 1000 acres of land since they came to this state from Virginia and North Carolina about 70 years ago. Not one of them has held or sought for office, to my knowledge. They have been sober, steady going men and women, and members of the Quaker church. I was brought up in the republican party but voted the prohibition ticket at the last election. I was a charter member of the first farmer's alliance lodge organized in this neighborhood, and served as secretary. I own a small farm of 60 acres and work it myself. I tell this merely to let you know what I am.

You have shown yourself an able advocate of the force bill but don't you think there is danger in it? Could not some future President who chanced to be popular with the people, aided by a clique of political strikers, deprive the people of all real power? But this is not the main reason why the people here regard the measure with so little interest. I speak sincerely when I say that the question with us seems to be, not whether the negro shall receive his full rights, but whether we, ourselves, shall retain any real power in the affairs of government. A people

that is ground down into abject poverty will soon become ignorant and a people both poor and ignorant will not long remain a free people. The semblance of power might be left, as in the old French parliament, but no more. A man is not free when his employer or landlord requires him to vote a certain way or lose his place. And it seems as if $\frac{3}{4}$ of the farmers would be in that condition in 25 years more if the same conditions prevail as in the last 25.

Already some of my neighbors are so "hard up" that when I ask them to subscribe for a paper they say they can't afford it, and I know they are right for their places are advertised for delinquent taxes. It took one entire page of the county paper to advertise the land that was for sale in this county, this winter, for back taxes. Two 40 acre farms, joining mine, have been taken by the mortgages, the owners becoming renters, another of 120 acres will soon go. I enlisted in the regular army in 1879, at the age of 21, and I saved more in that five years, at \$13⁰⁰ pr. month than I have in the last five at farming, and I have \$1600. invested in the land. Would it seem strange if we were indifferent to the wrongs of others when we feel the land slipping out of our hands, when almost all the value it possesses was given it by ours and our parents' labor. When a man is fighting for existence he is selfish. We could stand it ourselves but the thought of our children becoming mere dependent laborers and renters, without hope of betterment, where their parents had been owners, is maddening. According to Edgar L. Wakeman the rich have completely mastered the small farmers in the British islands, and now it seems they are grasping for our land. What good would a law do the negro unless he could improve his condition, acquire property, and

3

educate himself. He could not rise where the native American fails. It is my opinion that you and all ^{the rest of us} who desire reform will have to build a new party. Look at the conduct of Senator Plumb as reported in the Inter Ocean when the silver bill was up. He was personally in favor of it, had been one of its most eloquent advocates, the people of his state wanted it, but he was first and foremost a republican, and so he voted against it. And look at the contemptible hypocrisy practiced by republicans toward the temperance element in the party all along. I am not a very radical prohibitionist but I detest such straddling. There is a widespread feeling of distrust of our present legislators. There is fear that if the present congress pass an election law they would frame it with a view to party success and not as a matter of right. On the other hand the democrats now side with the farmers from mere partisan motives. They are just as anxious to keep the colored laborers of the south poor and ignorant and cheap as northern republicans are to keep white labor down. The fact is laborers must all stand or fall together and neither party is to be trusted. I know several men who have declared since last election that they will never vote with either old party again. You have looked to this congress for needed legislation until you realize that hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Reformers must learn that it will not do to put new wine into old bottles. This gradual impoverishment of the laboring classes is so imperceptible, extending as it does over two or three generations, that there is danger of its going on unchecked until nothing short of violence will change it. You can not accuse me of being an alarmist for I have only to refer you to an article of your own in the Inter Ocean last summer. I read that in our lodge and hoped we would have more, but the negro

monopolized your attention. Are we not of as much consequence as the negro? Don't forget that if the masses become too poor to buy books and papers and too ignorant to care for them, the condition and independence of authors will change and disappear. Every writer will have to become a barnacle or hanger on of some rich man with more money than brains. It has not been so very long ago when, according to Macaulay, an author expected more from a flattering dedication than from the sale of his book. Even now, as I have already shown, the circulation of newspapers is not near as great as it would be if money were plenty. You need us and we need you. You may think some of our schemes are wrong, in fact I don't approve of the warehouse scheme myself, but I believe the people are becoming aroused and feel that something must be done. Many feel that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose. We are not so easily scared at the cry of bankruptcy as those who have large incomes. As long as the rain and sunshine fall upon the earth and the seasons return we can live, and that is about all we can do now. Legislation might help, but can't hurt us. We are so low we have no fear of falling.

I never before addressed a letter to a writer or a newspaper and may never do so again, but if you wish to refer^{to} it or quote any part of it in some future article in the I. Q. you are at liberty to couple my name with it, for whether the sentiments are popular or unpopular I am convinced they are right and many others are beginning to feel the same way.

Yours respectfully,

Jesse Thomas,
Phlox, Ind.

Feb. 18-1891.