

Wooden Wages

THE TWO FARMERS were talking about the wood-cutting chores of the afternoon; so the economist-boarder asked: "Why did you cut wood?"

Accustomed to such silly questions, farmer Harold indulgently replied that the general purpose was to keep warm. The economist made a mental note about why men labor, then inquired whether they had thought of buying wood.

"If we could have gotten jobs in town—"

"What would you have received?"

"Wages."

"And what did you get from your wood-cutting?"

"Why, wages, of course." And a pause, "Yes, we got our wages in wood, wooden wages." The mental note was "wages in kind."

"But I heard you say that you were to get five loads, while Bob would get only four. Why do you get more wages than he?"

"Well, don't I supply the tractor and buzz-saw. I ought to get something for the use of them, oughtn't I?"

The economist explained that these things were capital.

"Just the same," said farmer Harold, "as if I'd borrowed the money at the bank to buy the buzz-saw and tractor. Which, by the bye, I did once."

"And what would you call the extra load you got because—"

"That's right. It's interest. Wooden interest."

"Now, suppose you and Bob both owned this capital, equally. Would you have gotten any interest?"

"Of course not."

"Well, yesterday I saw farmer Jones and his son cutting wood by hand, with a cross-cut saw. They weren't cutting as much wood as you were with your machinery."

"You're right. So the extra wood we got was a kind of interest on the buzz-saw and the tractor, wasn't it?"

The unfortunate part of this dialogue was the intent of the economist to put it into a text-book which the farmers couldn't understand.