

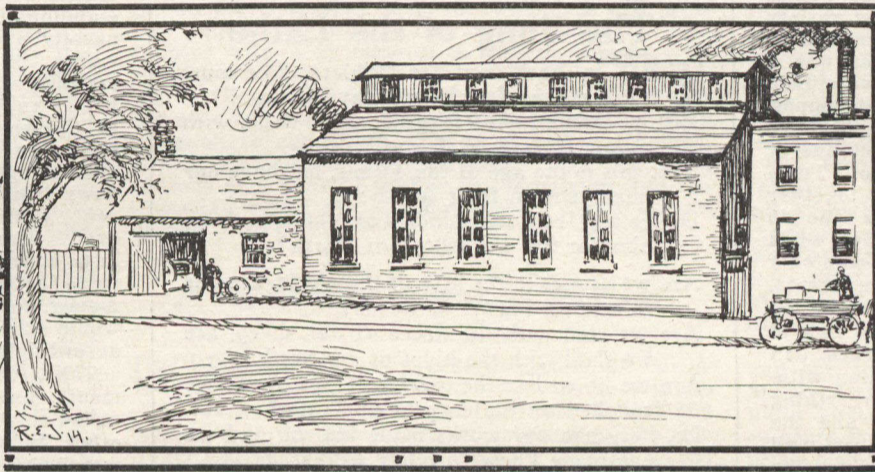


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Public Opinion and the Manufacturer



Views of a Manufacturer, who Gets his Ideas from the Farm

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THIS is an ex parte statement, biased, one-sided, and partisan, quite. Though my motive in writing is not partisan, I freely admit that the material is necessarily so. One can only speak for oneself and from one's own viewpoint; there is only one brain and one tongue by which a man may find expression for his thoughts. As a manufacturer I write from the manufacturer's point of vantage—or point of disadvantage, believing what I write to be true and just. Some farmers, reading this article, may repudiate my arguments and condemn my sentiments. It is to be expected. Yet I entertain some hope that between the free thinker and the protectionist, there may, at least, be some whose attitude of mind is sufficiently aloof from controversies to enable them to realize a truth in

where he set up our first furnaces, and where we still turn out the smaller castings, became his "farm" in place of the acres he had been obliged to quit in Wellington. It is part of my "farm" to-day. Each year I invest my capital in my business just as my father used to invest oat-seed in a ten-acre field. Each year I take off the increase—my crop—if there is any. Like him, I have a sort of natural instinct for "farming" in the foundry business. Like him, I should be all at sea in the management of a piece of good clay loam. Sometimes we get a bad crop, sometimes a "bumper." It depends largely upon the economic weather which Providence may see fit to send or to withhold. It depends, too, now that my father has retired, upon the attention I give the business and my skill, or lack of skill in handling the problems which arise from day to day. My grandfather, who was a good farmer, occasionally lost a colt; sometimes I lose money on a contract when I have miscalculated my costs. My grandfather, who was an astute judge of weather, sometimes left his hay just one day too long, and had the rain spoil it in a night. I sometimes give a customer too long a line of credit, and thus sustain a loss. In short, we are still a family of farmers, though my uncles deal in seed and soil, and I in other things.

my observations, which the average Canadian might do well to consider.

My business is the making of certain kinds of iron castings used by other manufacturers. I belong to the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, and I have always contended, however obscurely, on the side of protection. I mention these points so that there may be no possible misunderstanding of my position. I was one of the many who voted against the proposed reciprocity agreement. I am almost always to be found, I fear, opposing the Western farmer and his ever-increasing demands upon Canadian legislators. Constitutionally I am a conservative of conservatives. Frankly, I distrust radical proposals on first sight. I am suspicious of changes. In matters of government and public policy I dwell upon the value of caution. While I place great emphasis upon the corrective power of public opinion, I distrust popular opinion. For example, to my mind the Initiative, Referendum and Recall is actively dangerous—from which you will see I can never hope to attain merit in the eyes of the Grain Growers' Guide, and must be content with a place in the category of reactionaries.

YET by descent and relationship I am a farmer. In a figurative sense I am still a farmer. For generations my forbears have lived on the land, the last excursion into the realm of ancestry having discovered nothing but an honest yeoman of my name farming a few acres in Kent. My great-grandfather and his father, and his father's father—farmed. My grandfather had a hundred acres in Wellington, and even my father was a farmer until the neighbours laughed him out of it. He was forced to the city for a living, where it was thought we must certainly starve, so hopeless had my father proved as a farmer. Yet we prospered in the town, for my father, by some freak in heredity, turned out to have a natural bent for working in iron. He began as a blacksmith and thrived from the first, until when he was fifty he laid the foundations of the industry which is now mine. The low building

THIS is a protest; a protest against the agriculturist on the one hand and the city dweller on the other hand. It is a protest against the lack of representative public opinion in Canada, a protest against the unevenness of the pressure which is brought to bear upon our legislators, and the resultant lack of balance in the direction of public policy and in the enactment of legislation. So far the results may not have done any great harm, but the situation is potentially dangerous. There is in Canada scarcely a vestige of real public opinion; its place is usurped by "popular" opinion, or more often by sectional and class opinion. We think in classes and in communities, heterogeneously. Parliament and the various legislatures are prompted accordingly into making concessions to the class or community which appears to control the most votes, patching and mending laws and bribing constituencies with their favourite cake. This is the substance of the protest. The responsibility falls, I claim, upon the farmer, for his over-activity, and upon the city dweller, for his indifference, though of the two, the city dweller is the greater sinner.

The power behind almost all great social and economic movements in the last two hundred years has been the agriculturist. It was the country places that lent such terrific momentum to the French Revolution. Farmers made early trouble between Germany and Russia over the ratification of trade treaties. Farmers fired the first shots in the War of the American Independence, and the great-great-grandsons of those very men, in the Western States,