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The Social Problems of British Columbia

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IV.—The Land Problem.

The land question in this Province is peculiar in such respects as the following: The districts suitable for agriculture are quite limited, only about one-twenty-fifth of our total area can be considered farming land. The fertile sections are separated from each other by impassable mountain ranges. The agricultural element can never be the influential factor in the life of British Columbia that it is in the other provinces. The different communities will be hemmed in, and the people thrown back upon one another in social life in a way impossible on the wide stretches of the prairie. Each settlement will develop its own peculiar type and become a law unto itself, while the public opinion of the Province as a whole will have less effect on the individual community than in districts where the settlements lie close together, and a free interchange of opinion is possible.

In the valleys and coast districts where the land is low and rich, the holdings must necessarily be smaller than on the prairie. In the fruit areas the land is usually sold in ten-acre blocks. Experience will undoubtedly prove that these are too small for successful fruit farming, but still the holdings will never be as large as those in the Middle West. This means greater density of population, more intensive farming and better opportunities for social life.

The land is extremely difficult to clear. In many places the trees are or have been of enormous size, and the removal of stumps and rubbish even where the land has been logged off is a serious undertaking. In other districts extensive and expensive irrigation work must be put in before anything can be produced. The land must be more fertile than elsewhere to make its cultivation profitable when so much has to be invested in preparing it for the plough, and guidance and assistance from the authorities are necessary if people are in any numbers to go "back to the land" for a livelihood.