

River of Ponds.

The Tragedy of a Small Settlement.

(By J. D. HENRY.)

ARTICLE V.
SPIRITY COVE. (Near Hawke's Bay.)—I always think that the country between Bellburns and Spirit Cove at the entrance to Hawke's Bay has a bleak winter face. During the summer the outlook is (or was) almost so very different. I recall that in the brief months of the fishery and the seven months of open sea the entire landscape changes in many ways. Over the edge of bold rocks waterfalls splash down into the sea, and in some of the straight shore coves there were, before these never-to-be-forgotten years of bad trade and widespread penury, some happy and prosperous little fishing settlements. Today, in mid-winter, there are mere memories and we know there is scarcely a glimmer of happiness and prosperity in the homes of hundreds of fishermen. Along the shore line there are a few forests of fir and spruce but the predominating features of the landscape are the great stretches of wind-swept and snow-free country. All that can be said of these barrens is that they will one day make level country for a coastal railway. The chief summer fishing settlement after leaving Bellburns is Hattien, boasting the only Government rest camp between Daniel's Harbour and Port Saunders, a distance of thirty miles, and once this is left the traveller must reach River of Ponds or take to the camp and spend the night in the woods.

HARD REALITIES.

It was at River of Ponds, a large crescent-shaped bay with a boulder-strewn beach and a river which is a popular summer resort for wealthy anglers, that I discovered a summer tragedy connected with the fishery. Everywhere along the coast, excepting at one or two of the large settlements, the traveller finds homes which are externally innocent of the luxury of paint and where the full flour barrel is no longer a feature of the winter stores. Families which at the time of the last election had sufficient for their common needs all the year round are to-day in penury. To them, at election time, the blatant political promises of "liberty and freedom" may have meant something; to-day these disillusioned toilers are up against the hard realities of a situation in which they plainly see that the false rhetoric of election days has not been translated into action. At River of Ponds times are very hard; the families there carry a full share of the common misfortune of the coast. They have a greater trouble than their fellows, and it is this which constitutes the tragedy to which I have referred. In this last summer of their promises "liberty and freedom" four of the five small motor engines at the settlement were seized for debt and taken away by the police. I do not stop to state the legal facts of the case. The law may be right. These men, deprived of their means of livelihood on the sea, may have been too long and too heavily indebted—the consequence and curse of long credit and truck dealings—but still this fact stands out clearly, that they have been driven from the sea and crushed by an iniquitous system of credit trading fostered by the misgovernment of the country. These men, with their wives and children standing by, were silent witnesses of the law's removal of their engine and to-day, on the ice-covered beach at River of Ponds there are lying four useless empty boats to warn them that the fishery can earn them nothing during this coming summer. That is the tragedy of River of Ponds: four engines out of five taken for debt in a year when only a very few fishermen on the coast could possibly earn sufficient to pay their debts and keep their families! These unfortunate men must now take to the woods, and thankful they are that they can take to the hills for fur or the Hawke's Bay woods for work, for the fishery of their fathers can no longer mean anything to them. The moral of this pitiable story is, that the law of Newfoundland, where the fishery means practically everything in the form of a livelihood for the people, should render a fisherman's motor boat engine immune against seizure for debt.

NEGLECT BY REPRESENTATION.
The people of this settlement want a bridge across the fast running river. Their treatment has been so bad in the past that they ought to succeed with their application. In these important matters of bridges and roads it is known that there is no equality in the treatment of electoral divisions. Others get almost anything and everything they ask for; here we get practically nothing. For St. George's, Mr. Hall, Government engineer, has just prepared a detailed report on the numerous and expensive bridge schemes it is proposed to put through. Here in this part of St. Barbe we are almost without bridges and the few we have are weak and wobbly trestles which cost the country only a little poorly-paid labour. Bridges are a great need of the coast, and River of Ponds is an applicant for one at once because it has the last unbridged river on the main road along which so many men are travelling to and from Hawke's Bay. Not far, only six miles, from River of Ponds is Spirit Cove, from which settlement the traveller can see the feeble beacon light on Keppel Island and the great, car-revolving Canadian light on the long low-lying Point Riche. These lights are off Hawke's Bay, my destination this trip.

HAWKE'S BAY THE KEystone.

On my way along the coast I have formed many new impressions of the fishermen. They are no longer under any illusions concerning the future of the coast; they believe it will progress and give them steady employment in years to come; but they do see, and see most clearly, that if for any reason the bottom falls out of the Hawke's Bay industry there will be absolutely no employment for them anywhere else this winter. In other words, they have been left by a disappearing fishery on fearfully thin ice and are almost without work. Others do not think so. Some of our public men appreciate the value of the press, and, by a free use of the papers of this and other countries, very successfully secure publicity for their official visions of an earthly paradise. One of these descriptions of domestic peace and affluence has just been published by the Department of Agriculture. I have read it with amusement in one of the ruined homes of this coast, and with all the materials for a flat contradiction to my hand. Here it is:—

"We can point to communities where industrious fishermen have cellars well stocked with potatoes, turnips, carrots, beets and cabbage, and who during the fishing season provide themselves with a good supply of different kinds of fish for the winter; and in most localities rabbits may be got for catching. The same industrious fishermen are seldom without a pig to kill at Christmas. With such a well stocked larder provided, winter has no terror for the worker, and Newfoundland offers such inducements to every worker."

Why not go the limit in east coast deception and tell an envious world that this is a land flowing with milk and honey? Optimistic publicity of this kind has recently become a large part of the political game, but honest men in public life must despise and condemn it as a misrepresentation of the actual conditions on the neglected and stricken north-west coast. It is not only premature, but deceitful. If this is the real feeling in St. John's it accounts for the failure of the departments to do anything for the alleviation of the misery of those who live in the distant outports and small settlements. There are not half-a-dozen pigs north of Bonne Bay; rabbits are everywhere uncommonly scarce, in some places "skinned out for the foxes," and the well-stocked cellars and larders exist only in a few diminishing cases, and are at most, merely painful memories of those pre-war years when food prices were low, and men could get a living wage out of the sea.

POLITICAL PROPHETS PLATITUDES.
Not only are we officially told that everything is right in the "well-stocked" homes of the people, but we have political prophets testing our gullibility with the plausible assurance that the flowing tide is with in-

dustrial reconstruction and progress. In this settlement I find in a widely-read Canadian weekly the following statement concerning "an improvement in trade conditions enjoyed by Newfoundland":—

"Business is getting back to a sound basis. Deflation and reconstruction have been an exceedingly difficult and painful process, but the thoroughness with which they have been done means firmer and more rapid progress now that the tide has turned."

It is not difficult to guess the source of this remarkable display of optimism. If "the tide" even remotely relates to north-west fishery prosperity I feel compelled to say that everything I have seen on this and many previous journeys stamps the statement as a flagrant misreading of the hard facts of bitter poverty in many homes and the widespread feeling of dependency concerning the future of this particular industry. Along the coast I have just travelled there are hundreds of clever hard-working fishermen, ranking amongst the best types of Newfoundland's handymen, and to me it is remarkable that men of this class should be hard up, but hard up they undoubtedly are and, that too, through no fault of their own. Very few indeed have well-stocked larders, and where these are found, they are the result of the fishery, but are there because the men have drawn on the earnings of better days, or have been successful with their work in the woods or on the hills. Mostly, however, the fishermen on this stretch of coast are bankrupt in cash and gear, and their store credit is fast reaching vanishing point. There are no indications of a turn of the tide, and I do not know one fisherman who will read absolute truth in the amazing proclamation: "that the tide has turned." The waters of fishery prosperity are still dead low and they will probably remain low on the coast for another twelve months, because very few fishermen will follow the old calling if they can get work in the woods.

Newfoundland's Opportunity.

The time is come when Newfoundland should make a special effort to introduce new methods in the cure of a certain percentage of our codfish to suit those markets that do not want salt cod as we send to European countries. There is a market in the United States for fresh codfish put up in cold storage and shredded form such as is used by the Gloucester firms. There is a good market for salt bulk fish. There are also the by-products of the cod, such as sound, tongues, and cod-roses, which are mostly now thrown away.

Not only have we codfish, but salmon, herring, halibut, turbot, caplin and plaice, lobster and smelts, and a score of other qualities of edible fish which Newfoundlanders now do not use except for manure. The Canadian fishermen put no less than 34 species of fish on the market, and this is what makes their fisheries so valuable, three times more valuable than ours. We have confined our energies exclusively to salt hard dried codfish. The time is come now when all the other edible fish in our stores should be exported.

The total value of Canada's fisheries is about \$45,000,000, and codfish in all its forms of cure makes up only about half of this total, which goes to show that if Newfoundland were to develop all its other fisheries beside the cod with the same enterprise and energy as Canada, our fisheries would be twice as valuable annually as they are to-day. The herring fishery alone could be made as valuable as the codfishery at present. We are only working on the fringe of the salmon industry, a business which, in the fresh and smoked state, could be made worth half a million dollars.

This is the age of canned foods, and even this process is being improved on now by the use of glass receptacles for preserving fish food as well as fruit. Lobsters put up in glass receptacles will be used extensively in the Canadian market the coming season. It fetches a better price than that which is put up in tins. Newfoundland should wake up and get into the procession so as to get commercial value out of every fish that swims in our waters.

There is a fish called tuna which is plentiful in the West Coast waters and when killed, cut up and prepared for market, is a choice article of fish food. The halibut and turbot are plentiful enough to be worthy of special attention and development, and find a profitable market in Canada and the United States. Crabs, mussels and scallops are all worth developing and find a good market in the United States.

There is another industry that is

capable of infinite expansion and that is the seal industry, but nobody now bothers about it, except a few people in St. Mary's Bay.

Our inland fresh water lakes could be stocked with the fresh fish that are so plentiful and valuable in Ontario and other Canadian provinces. The whitening is a fine edible fish and the principal food fish of the towns in the interior of Canada. They are, of course, eaten fresh. It would be a good idea to have Grand Lake and Deer Lake stocked with these fish by bringing the ova here from Canada as in the case of the rainbow trout, which has now become quite plentiful in the lakes and rivers where the ova were placed a few years ago. In the future, when the interior becomes inhabited around Deer Lake and Grand Lake, the fact that these waters are stocked with white fish will afford a great and inexhaustible supply of

fresh fish food to the people. Faith, enterprise and capital are all that is wanted to make these subsidiary fisheries as valuable as the codfish marketed in the old style and by the old methods.—Trade Review.

"Lavender and Old Lace" at The Nickel.

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