

## The Slav in our Midst

Written for the Western Home Monthly By J. Richardson.

**M**UCH has been said and written condemnatory of the Slavish stocks which have come to our country.

A lack of sympathy and of a real comprehension of the influences which have been a compelling force in their lives is seldom shown.

We frequently hear of the polyglot, non assimilable element of Saskatchewan, but hear little of any effort put forth to make these people at home in our midst.

Too often their ignorance is taken advantage of by machine agents, business men and others.

They have taken homesteads in sections of the country, which entails a struggle for existence for years.

These homesteads are often swampy or scrubby or alkaline in character, and, owing to the absence of public roads almost inaccessible.

These homesteads demand great toil and often privations before a decent living can be wrested from them.

Yet in spite of these difficulties they are, in many sections, giving evidence that they are an asset to the state.

Frequently they are used as pawns in the political game by the governments in power. Promises to create certain conditions to their advantage, or promises to refrain from enforcing certain enactments are made them in return for which they cast their vote for the government candidate.

The economic problem is ever with them, living often remote from the accessories of their calling, and as every dollar acquired has required strenuous labor it is reasonable to suppose they will be inclined to part with them reluctantly.

These people have a wonderful tenacity of holding on in spite of adverse conditions.

The necessity of purchasing farm implements presses heavily upon them, the men leave their wives and children, and the struggle for existence demands that the most shall be accomplished by those left at home. The children are kept from schools (a) owing to the pressure of economic combinations; (b) the absence of schools or their inaccessibility owing to want of roads. Particularly is this the case in Saskatchewan and sections of Manitoba.

With such conditions is it any wonder that progression is comparatively slow? A few acres under crop and three or four cows do not offer much to support a family, and should the land lie in an area liable to frost, they realize the lowest prices possible, since the elevator people do not pay the actual value and frequently the money received does not pay for the cost of production.

These people have been paid 19 cents a bushel for frozen wheat, and last year 19 to 21 cents a bushel was the price paid for oats. Truly, under such conditions is it not a crime to condemn them for their present status?

These Slavs have hauled a load of dry poles into town, a distance of 10 miles, and then have been offered the munificent sum of 50 cents, and, at times, having waited all day for a prospective buyer, for 5 cents. Think of it, a twenty mile trip and the load of wood and the pay for such labor figured out at 25 cents.

You will often meet sleek, well fed, paunchy individuals in these towns maintained by the labors of the Slav element in the district, who will turn up their noses in disgust when brought into contact with them, but who are prepared to take advantage of the ignorance or compelling necessity of these people.

These men, boasting of their Anglo-Saxon descent, and with ready tongue the Slav as non-progressive. How can it be otherwise with them? Progression depends upon economic conditions, and when economic conditions are adverse it is an impossibility for any one to make progression.

These people, who brand the Slav as "The sheepskin voter," and who are loud in their professions of fealty to the

British Constitution, fail to interpret aright some phases which mete out justice to all, irrespective of race, language or condition.

The problem relating to the incorporation of these people has a twofold phase. The first of these is the economic phase, the second is the racial or linguistic phase, and with this may be included their ancient customs which are at variance with Canadian ideals.

The assumption in law is no excuse for the doing of a wrong acts often harshly and unfairly upon these people.

Frequently, in making a bargain, or entering into a contract, their inability to comprehend the terms, places them at the mercy of the other party to the contract, and presumably the Albertan Legislature had this and kindred matters in mind during the recent session, when a law was passed making principals responsible for the acts of their agents.

This inability to understand English places them at a great disadvantage in all their business relations.

English speaking people often find it difficult to escape the machinations of the glib-tongued, wily agents of the commercial firms doing business through an agent, who is paid on a commission basis.

Is it not then much more difficult for the Slav farmer to avoid the danger line with these men who are concerned solely with getting a sale, and that, whether the party making the purchase understands the condition or not. His signature to the legal instrument is binding. Whether it produces an injury to the purchaser does not at all matter. In all and similar cases wrong has been done to these foreign people for years.

Many persons consider it no wrong to take an advantage of these people whenever and wherever an opportunity presents itself.

Again, party exigencies are damning agencies which invariably result to these people's disadvantage.

Twenty years ago objections were urged against allowing any one nationality to settle in large bodies. The settling of large areas with people of any one race is a disadvantage to the people themselves, and many become a definite menace to the progression of that and contiguous sections.

And to-day we have difficult problems to solve, because of the vast bodies of people of foreign origin perpetuating the language and customs of their forbears, and because we have many more of the foreign-born than we can absorb.

Further, wherever we go, English speaking persons will not long remain in any section of the country where these people predominate.

The reasons for such withdrawal are obvious. At present there is no common plane whereon they can meet. The medium of communication is wanting, and in the administration of the Municipal Act in Saskatchewan there are no provisions preventing the Slav or any foreign body from carrying on the business of that municipality in their own tongue, providing they are in a majority on the board.

In certain sections of the country English speaking persons were prevented from settling upon lands, which for political reasons were set apart for the foreign element. The result has been that, owing to the disproportionate number of settlers of foreign origin in a locality, such few English speaking persons as might make a home therein were soon compelled to withdraw therefrom. And the leaven which might have leavened these districts was altogether wanting.

The only remedy which will be of permanent advantage is a sane educational code, providing an efficient training in the English language for the children born of these people, and an effective, compulsory attendance law.

Financial aid, over and above, the mere pittance now granted, must be provided by the state.

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