

# The Troubles of the Land Speculator

By G. R. MARNOCH.

In our Preparedness (May) issue an article appeared under the title of "Immigration—Canada," by J. E. Martin. Below is the other side of this great question by Mr. G. R. Marnoch, President of the Lethbridge Board of Trade.

No sensible person will quarrel with that part of the lengthy disquisition on land settlement in Canada recently broadcasted by Mr. J. E. Martin of Minneapolis through the Dominion, which deals with the bad principle of limiting the amount of personally-owned farm machinery and livestock that a new arrival may bring into Canada. Due safeguards against the misuse of such a privilege could easily be made. The regulations as they stand are a survival from the days when the only farmers who were coming into Canada were quarter-section farmers with their little store of implements; but with conditions such as now obtain in the Lethbridge district, where hardly any of the new settlers are buying less than a half section, and many of them a whole section and more, they should be encouraged to bring their full equipment with them, so as to let them get quickly settled to the business of the fullest production possible. There are, however, signs that this matter may soon be adjusted fully to the satisfaction of both newcomers and old residents, by the adoption of a policy of letting in livestock and all agricultural implements either free or at much lower rates of duty than have hitherto prevailed. It is certain that very soon after peace is declared our friends in the East will rediscover the truth that had dawned on them in 1913, that their business was in poor shape if things were not well with the western farmer.

But all the rest of Mr. Martin's remarks are a case of special pleading for the men who bought western lands just as so much merchandise, to be turned over at a profit. That they helped to advertise such lands and did their best to find buyers was, of course, part of their business. Nobody in the west could wish that they should not be successful in selling their lands to farmers who will put them to good use. Our side of the story is that we are the people who have to live with these farmers as fellow citizens; we are the people who have to do business with them all our lives; whereas Mr. Martin and his friends have but one transaction with them; they take their profit, and then it is a case of "Home he's gone and ta'en his wages." It is natural therefore that we wish to see the incoming farmer get his land at such a price that he may make a profit on his labor; and we are not averse, either, to seeing him get a share of the increment in land values which he helps to create by his efforts.

Answers to Mr. Martin's criticisms will perhaps be more readily understood if these are applied to a definite case. Everybody in this district is gravely concerned in regard to the withholding from development to an enormous tract of some five hundred square miles within a short distance of the city of Lethbridge. Briefly, the history of this area is this. These lands formed part of a land grant given by the government of the old Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company fifteen or twenty years ago, in consideration for their developing the now highly-successful Lethbridge irrigation plan. The company was often embarrassed for lack of capital to carry on its pioneer enterprise of railway and irrigation development; so about eight or nine years ago, these lands were sold to whoever would buy them, at low prices around five or six dollars an acre. A considerable part of the area is still held by the original buyers; but in other cases the lands have changed hands among speculative buyers at increased prices. The present writer used to inquire in 1911 and subsequent years why it was that these splendid and fertile lands were not developed. The reason at first given was the lack of a railway. The C. P. R. built right through the heart of the District in 1911 and 1912, and so that reason was removed. But still no development took place. And, to cut the story short, these lands remain still as virgin prairie, with the exception of a farm here and there; just enough in fact to show the splendid possibilities for grain and live stock raising.

The C. P. R. naturally hoped that their enterprise in building this road would be rewarded by the development of heavy traffic; and in face of their discouragement in that regard as year after year went by, it required all the combined efforts of the people in Lethbridge and the farmers who were settled farther out in the direction of the

line to get the railway company to extend into that home-steaded territory beyond. Their enterprise in building beyond that uncultivated area has been rewarded by very heavy grain traffic from Foremost on to Manyberries, a distance of some forty miles. But the uncultivated stretch of fifty miles still remains between Stirling and Foremost.

Now Mr. Martin is very voluminous in his writings about the iniquities of the old wild lands tax, and the unearned increment tax and so on. What about those few farmers who are already in the district described and who are demonstrating the farming value of these lands? They cannot build the roads they want; they cannot get the schools they need for their children; and in short, they have put up with pioneer conditions until the land-merchandisers make up their minds to sell. Does a wild land tax of about six or seven dollars on each 160 acres seem too much for the privilege of holding these lands out of cultivation?

None of the original holders from the A. R. & I. Co., can complain about what they paid for their land. It was not the people of Alberta or of Canada who sold any of these lands at higher prices. Why then complain of such taxes as are levied now to help in general development?

We cannot be expected to waste any public sympathy on people who are retarding the development of our country. If they bought their lands at low prices, let them take a reasonable profit and be done. If they paid too high prices, surely the best thing they can do for themselves is to cut their loss.

There is hardly likely at any time to be a better opportunity for selling than now. Crops of wheat of forty and fifty bushels in 1915, and thirty and forty in 1916; favorable weather conditions for another big crop in 1917; high prices likely until the world scarcity is caught up, even if the war should end to-morrow; farmers on high priced land in the States eager to come to Canada with their families if land at reasonable prices is available—surely land-merchants who are weary of paying taxes will avail themselves of the opportunity to quit.

The board of trade of Lethbridge will willingly do what they can to help make sales if holders show a disposition to sell. Land prices are firm and slightly higher than they were at the last considerable auction sale of school lands in this district when some 250 quarter-sections were sold at an average of \$14.00 per acre.

But, we have to live with and do business with these incoming farmers; and we want to see them buy lands on which they can grow grain and live-stock that will show them profits through the years that are to come.

With regards to the complaints regarding legislation adverse to the security of mortgage loans on land, the best assurance that can be given that there is nothing more to fear in this direction is that the farmers' organizations now fully realize that any legislation that impairs a first mortgage security reacts against every farmer who wants to borrow money. The conference carried on by the joint committee of commerce and agriculture has cleared the air and our legislators realize now that our farmers want to be honest and fair in their dealings, and that legislative acts which may enable dishonest men to evade their obligations are not appreciated. If any further assurance is required, it is provided in the fact that all western provincial governments are now in the land mortgage business themselves, and that their transactions will be subject to the same laws that apply to other lenders.

## SOCIAL PROBLEMS CHANGING.

Sixteen prisons have been closed in England since the beginning of the war, but on the other hand, there has been a large increase in juvenile delinquency. Social problems are steadily changing, and the solutions of yesterday are no longer applicable. Probably the future will see, among other changes, the uniformed policeman on the street corner turned into a trained social worker, having the legal authority to redress human wrongs. Thus instead of rushing people off to the lock-up he could be devoting his energy to the protection and guidance of the public, especially the young and inexperienced, saving them from themselves in many cases, and spreading sunshine and kind deeds all along his path.