

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, SEPTEMBER 14th, 1891.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CENSUS.

The publication of the census returns has caused general disappointment. Our population has not increased as we had expected. Though the western divisions have made rapid advancement, the average of the whole country is disappointing. The maritime provinces have been at a standstill, and the large provinces of Ontario and Quebec have made slow progress. We have received a large number of immigrants during the decade since the last census was taken. The official figures place the number of immigrants at 866,000 in the past ten years, while besides this there should have been a natural increase of about 14 per cent in the population. The census returns, however, show only about half a million of an increase in the total population of the country. Thus we have lost more people than we have received from immigration. Our total increase for the decade has been only 11.66 per cent., which is only about the same rate of increase as that shown by the recent census of England and Wales, the increase there being 11.63 per cent. Our population should have increased much more rapidly than that of England, which has long been crowded, while we have millions of acres of new land awaiting settlement. We have also been carrying on vast public works, we have opened new regions for settlement and have spent considerable in attracting immigrants to our shores, but from all this there appears to have been but a moderate return.

The result of the census should start people to think. We have had a national policy in force, which was to give ample employment to our people at home, while various expensive efforts have been made to attract people from abroad. Has this policy proved a failure? Our customs and excise collections, (that is taxation), have increased at a surprising rate, in comparison with the increase in population. This means that our annual expenditure has increased out of proportion to population, while our national debt has been largely augmented, along with other evidences of inflation.

Another undesirable feature is, that the increase in the population of cities has been out of proportion to the increase in the rural population. A strong tendency has been shown to desert the farm for the cities. This has also been a marked feature of the late census returns in Great Britain and the United States. So long as this tendency continues, Canada will naturally be at a disadvantage with the United States, in point of increase in population. Canada is more thoroughly an agricultural country than the republic, and so long as the tendency is to leave the farm, the large industrial centres and the great commercial cities of the United States will be sure to attract Canadians who desire to change their rural life for city life.

This tendency to leave the farm seems to point out what our future policy should be.

Canada, we say, is first of all an agricultural country. Our agricultural interests are vastly in excess of all others. Our aim should therefore be to encourage the farmer in every legitimate way. If we can make the farmer prosperous and contented, we are certain to have a prosperous and happy people generally. Our cities may not grow as fast, but they will be on a more solid and healthful basis. Our national policy during the past ten years has not been shaped to encourage agriculture. It has been quite the reverse. The proportionate reduction of the rural population, in comparison with the urban population, is the natural consequence of a vicious and unnatural trade policy.

We do not say that our trade policy has been the great cause of the desire to desert the farm, but its tendency is in that direction. Under a different trade policy the same disposition is manifest in Great Britain, where the system of land tenure has probably operated to this end. Unfortunately, however, there are other causes which induce young people, and even those of middle age to leave the farm. "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Herein we think is the chief cause of the tendency to desert the farm. The life of the agriculturist should be the most independent and happy of any calling. Nevertheless, there is a great allurements to city life. To the young people of the country there is a fascinating glitter about the city, which is absent in their quiet rural homes. They see only the exterior of this life. The ease and comfort which they fancy belongs to the city, they compare with their "drudgery" on the farm. The spread of education is no doubt largely responsible for this tendency of the times. The young people of the farm now receive a fair education, and they forthwith decide that rural life is too slow for them. They will never be able to make their mark upon the farm, and hence we have our stores and offices filled with young men from the country, the majority of whom no doubt hope to be at the head of an establishment a few years hence. Even the learned professions are filled up with young men from the farm, and the result is that financial, mercantile and professional branches are crowded to excess.

As a "little knowledge" is the cause of the desertion of the farm, so we look to the spread of education to correct the evil, for evil it evidently is. The agricultural population will become generally well educated. They will follow their calling with greater intelligence than they now do. The great advantages of an agricultural life will become recognized. The independence and freedom which attaches to agriculture will be appreciated more fully. Instead of being spoken of as an unprogressive "hay seed," the farmer will be looked upon as a man of superior intelligence and one who occupies an enviable position. The latter is really the natural position of the farmer, and his calling if followed out to its natural course, should make him independent and contented, while his life affords opportunity of developing the highest order of intelligence and general advancement in all that constitutes free and noble manhood, free from the sickening flunkeyism and despicable red tapeism and formality of "the best society."

The tendency to desert the farm will undoubtedly correct itself in time, but while it continues, Canada will be bound to suffer in point of increase in population, as compared with the United States. In the meantime, however, we should endeavor by wise enactment, to encourage agriculture, and make the lot of the farmer as pleasant as possible. The freedom of trade, the prevention of unjust monopolies, the reduction of taxation. The discouragement of landed monopolies, and the immediate discontinuance of the granting of tracts of land to railway or other corporations, are among the features which would encourage agriculture and improve the position of the farmer. The adoption of a national policy to this end, together with such other features as could be legitimately enacted in the interest of agriculture, would undoubtedly help to check the tendency to leave the farm, while at the same time there would be nothing inimical in such a policy to our general commercial prosperity.

HANDLING WHEAT.

The remarks made in THE COMMERCIAL two weeks ago, regarding grain dealers and damaged wheat, have, as was expected, created considerable adverse comment in some quarters. We did not, of course, expect to be able to convince everybody who entertained the belief, of the absurdity of the idea that a damaged crop of wheat would be an advantage to grain shippers. Many persons are not open to conviction, no matter how false and ridiculous their opinions may be. When a belief gains almost general currency, it is a difficult matter to change that belief, no matter how false it may be. The farmers will no doubt still labor under the false impression, that the grain shippers will cheat them right and left in cases where they have damaged wheat. We think, however, that business men will readily comprehend the great error which lies in the somewhat general belief, that grain men can derive a better profit from damaged than from choice grain. No doubt there are dishonest grain buyers, as well as there are dishonest men in other branches of business, and in some instances, perhaps, advantage may be taken of a farmer who has slightly damaged grain. This, however, has nothing to do with the general business principle, which is the same in handling wheat as in any other commodity, namely: that it is more satisfactory to both the buyer and the seller to handle a good than a poor quality of a commodity.

As stated in a previous issue, damaged wheat will be saleable in a short crop year, but in a year of abundance it would be a very slow sale. This year is one of crop failure or partial failure over a large portion of Europe. In the rye countries of Europe there has been a heavy general shortage in the crop, and to make this shortage up, other cheap grains will be in demand. So far as this year is concerned, it is therefore safe to count upon a market in the rye-eating countries of Europe, for wheat which would hardly be saleable in other years, and which could not be handled for domestic trade at all.