

Rural Planning and Development

A Short Sketch of the Topics Discussed by Thomas Adams in his book on this subject—By J. W. Macmillan

There is an old saying about not being able to see the woods for the trees. Perhaps there are farmers like that, who cannot see the larger problems of country life because of their absorption in their own acres. I can conceive that no man knows less of a forest than the man who dwells in a hollow tree. A farmer may be wise in respect of tillage and stock, competent with machinery and shrewd in business, yet completely ignorant as to the questions of population, highway planning and maintenance, education, rural credit, co-operation, and many others, all of which vitally affect his own existence and that of all his brother-farmers.

There has been issued from the press a volume which deals with these matters from the Canadian standpoint. It is called "Rural Planning and Development," and is written by Thomas Adams, the gentleman who came from the local government board of Great Britain some ten years ago to give the commission of conservation the benefit of his thorough and expert knowledge. It is a portly volume of nearly 300 pages, copiously illustrated, well-bound, and best of all, to be distributed free. So long as the edition lasts a copy will be sent by the Commission of Conservation to anyone who applies for it. Every intelligent farmer should have one.

It is impossible of course to concentrate the information contained in a large book within the limits of a couple of columns of a weekly newspaper. All that I can do is to sketch the topics which are discussed, leaving to my readers the pleasant task of a more detailed perusal when they shall have gotten the book for themselves.

The introductory chapter calls attention to the timeliness of a consideration of the way in which the Canadian people are administering their vast heritage of land. After the war there is likely to be an increase in the number of settlers on the land. There are still large sections of public land which have not been settled. There are besides, questions, such as those of transportation and co-operation, which will be sharpened by the new conditions. Better ways of placing families on the land may be found, and readjustments of the conditions under which agriculture is now being carried on may wisely be sought.

The Fruits of Past Mismanagement

The second chapter presents a picture of some of the evident fruits of past mismanagement. Let me say, once for all, that it is not a book, written in a complaining spirit. There is not a bitter line in it. Full recognition is given to the fact of the big problem which the governments had to face, without precedent to guide them, and with the necessity of haste pressing them hard. It would be surprising if all had gone perfectly. Our duty, as the Canadians of today is not to repine nor seek to assess blame, but to take up the burden of responsibility as we find it, and see if we can find the way out.

Adopting this rational mode of approach, we will not hide from ourselves such facts as that the cities of Canada have been growing at the expense of the country districts; that there are many deserted homesteads, each of which represents a social tragedy; that there are not enough women on the farms, nor are those on the farms as happy as they should be; that the speculator has been filching the earnings of the producers, and still holds on the prairie provinces fifteen millions of idle acres within twenty miles of the railways; that there are sections in the older provinces where the untoward environment has reacted on the rural population, causing degeneracy both physical and moral; and, most important of all, that the root of the difficulty lies in the fact that farming is not as profitable a business as it should be.

After this summary of the ills to be

found on the land the question is raised as to what effect systems of surveying and planning land have upon the fortunes of those residing upon it. All dwellers on the prairies will read with vivid interest the description of the proposed alternative methods of laying out a township. Everybody knows the inconveniences which arise from dividing the whole prairie section on rectangular lines, taking no account of rivers, or sloughs, or ridges, or mountains. Everybody knows the disadvantage of having no trunk roads running diagonally across the surveyed boundaries. Everybody knows the loneliness of farm life as it is. It is interesting to learn of the wisdom with which Australia has gripped this problem; as also to study the eight alternative ways of laying out a township which have been suggested, and guess as to how much life on a prairie farm would gain or lose from one or other of them being substituted for that now in use. The question of community settlements is also taken up, with illustrations from the customs of other lands.

The Big Question of Transportation

Next comes the transportation problem, both by railway and highway. Even after the stirring of thought during the past generation upon the matter of good roads it will surprise most Canadians, I imagine, to discover just how many angles there are to the road question. Besides the cost of haulage, which varies with the surface of the road, there are such matters as the width of the road, and the relation of the width to taxation, the influence of roads on education, and even the significance of the direction of the road and its "curve of sunlight." An illuminating estimate of the comparative cost of hauling one ton one mile on a level road according to the nature of the road is included. It seems that the cost varies from 2.7 cents over asphalt, to 18 cents over hard earth, and 29 cents over muddy and rutted earth, to 64 cents over dry sand. One Canadian engineer has calculated that an adequate road system in Canada would create a profit of \$50,000,000 annually.

The fifth chapter deals with an assortment of rural problems which arise in connection with land development. They are so numerous that I can do little more than mention them. Foremost comes land speculation, which is of some service in a new country through drawing out and stimulating energy and enterprise. It is when the pioneer stage is over and the building of the social life of the community takes on new forms that speculation produces deplorable results. From speculation comes absentee ownership, inflation of the prices of land, the encouragement of the spirit of gambling, and many other evils. The method of taxation upon land is an important and keenly debated issue. Rural sanitation, with the sickness and death rates in rural regions, is often overlooked. It is startling to learn that during the first two and a half years of the war more Canadians died at home of tuberculosis and typhoid, both quite preventable diseases, than died in the expeditionary force sent to the war. In this chapter are also discussions of how to keep the young people on the farms, how to prevent fire loss, and the vexed matter of employment.

Rural Organization Essential

Rural organization comes in the next chapter. It is one of the most important chapters in the book. Social life must be maintained, if the country is not to be depopulated. Mankind refuses to live where his association with his fellows is unprofitable and unhappy. Thus we need a social organization of rural life and rural industries which will yield us the best possible results in the volume of production, in the efficiency of distribution, and in the character and stability of our citizenship.

There must be more co-operation, more social intercourse, more scientific training, more available capital, and,

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