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Causes of Depopulation—Some Remedies Suggested

CANADA is facing a serious crisis, particularly Eastern Canada. Agriculture, the great basic industry, is declining. Rural communities are losing in population, and consequently in social, educational, and spiritual advantages.

We know these things but do not appear to realize that no more serious condition could face any nation than decay at its very heart—among the tillers of the soil. It has been well said that no nation can rise above the level of its rural citizens. If that be true, the promotion of the greatest happiness, contentment, and prosperity among the families on the farms is a country's first and most important duty. Have we in Canada failed to realize this truth? Or have we been blind to conditions as they really are?

The rural situation in Canada, as pointed out by Mr. John MacDougall in his book, "Rural Life in Canada," is a distressing one. The situation, as seen by Mr. MacDougall, was reviewed in Farm and Dairy last week. Our folks will remember that Mr. MacDougall estimates the loss of population from rural Ontario in the 10 years—1901 to 1911—at 373,367 people.

He finds on studying the census that not only is population declining, but that the country church, country social life, and country education are all suffering because of the drift of population citywards. Rural depopulation presents, therefore, as great a problem as the congestion of people in our towns and cities, with the slum evil that congestion brings about. Indeed, rural depopulation is the greater problem of the two, for to solve this problem is also to solve the problem of the slum. The one is the result of the other.

THE PROBLEM IS ECONOMIC

The problem is largely an economic one. First among the economic causes of depopulation Mr. MacDougall cites the decline of village activities and the centralization of industries. The farmer's boots and shoes were once made by the village cobbler. They are now the product of the great factories located in the cities. The village wheelwright and blacksmith, once an important factor in rural economy, has also been largely displaced. The tanner has left the village for the city.

A quarter of a century ago the village store-keeper was a prosperous man. He was not uncommonly the wealthiest man in the community. His place of business served in a way as a social centre. His family and he himself were helpers and leaders in every social enterprise, including the church. Cheap and rapid transit then made the big departmental store and its mail order system possible. With it came the decline of

A Review of the Economic and Social Causes of Rural Unrest as seen by Rev. Jno. MacDougall, Grenville, Co., Ont. Mr. MacDougall and an Editor of Farm and Dairy give their views as to the solution of a Serious Rural Problem

the country merchant as a force of the community.

But it is not the declining village population that explains the enormous loss of population of rural Canada. Depopulation is chiefly due to the removal from the country community of farmers' households. What is the explanation of their removal?

Mr. MacDougall first makes mention in "Rural Life in Canada" of the introduction of improved machinery as a cause of rural depopulation. He says: "The census Bureau of the United States in a report dealing with the census of 1890, published a comparative table

population and more lavish consumption accompanying increased wealth. "The setting free from farm labor of a certain number follows the introduction of machinery as a matter of course," says Mr. MacDougall. "But why," he asks, "has there not also come fuller satisfaction with farm

conditions? Why have we not, while the city grows, at least a staple farm population with greatly enlarged production per capita, with increasing rural wealth together with decreasing prices of farm produce and with greatly enhanced leisure for better living on the farm?

"The world's markets," he says, "are not glutted with farm goods. The reverse is the case. Amidst all the increase in the cost of living that due to enhanced prices of commodities from the farm, stands easily first."

The farming of soil unfit to be cultivated is the cause of rural depopulation noted by Mr. MacDougall. The invariable rule is found to be that rural depopulation is greater from these localities with the less fertile soils. Many of these soils are splendidly adapted to forestry, and Mr. MacDougall regards it as a duty of the nation to see that such soils are reforested and that further denudation of such soils be prevented.

Another cause of rural depopulation is that young men find themselves with farms whose fertility has been exhausted by unscientific methods such as constant cropping without fertilization, and these farms overrun with weeds; they leave them. A still further cause of dissatisfaction with farming is the great proportion of inferior stock; dairy cows, for instance, that do no more than pay their board without leaving a sufficient margin of profit to enable the farmer to live well.

Getting away from the economic causes of rural depopulation due directly to the farmer himself, Mr. MacDougall next discusses the speculative holding of lands. This cause he considers is not a handicap to farmers in Eastern Canada, but speculative buying of farm lands is a menace of the near future. Mr. MacDougall admits that farm lands are too high in price.

"There is certainly no legitimate justification," he writes, "to be found for it (the speculative value of land) in the relation between investment and return in farming as an industry at present. The inflation in price would seem to be due to anticipation of a prospective prosperity and a change in the character of ownership. The farmer is able to borrow increased amounts against increased value and the mortgages are increasing; and many farmers sell at the first slight rise to capitalist investors, who reap the profit of further rise in value, while tenants replace agricultural owners. This phase of the pro-

The Lure of the Wood

'Tis Sweet to be here in the wild-wood alone
Where solitudes blessings abound
And the Sun's Golden Light
Seems to greet with delight
The leaves that come flitting aground

Methinks when the earth in her infancy lay
No Pure: Place could be found
In such sweet scented air
With beauties so rare
And Peace encircled around

Adieu to the rush, the noise and the din
To all that's untrue and unfair
And give me the quiet, the peaceful and good
Oh give me the awe that is found in the wood
And a heart that delighteth in Prayer

—E. Robeson, Athens, Ont.

covering the nine principal farm products in 1850, and showing that whereas 570,000,000 days' labor—that of 1,900,000 persons for 300 days—were required to produce them, the same amount of the same staples in 1890 were accounted for by 400,000 persons or 120,000,000 days' labor, slightly over one-fifth requisite 40 years ago. The ratio of change during the ensuing 20 years has doubtless been accelerated rather than slackened. We would probably be not far wrong in supposing that the efficiency of labor, in the major operations at any rate, is not far from seven times what it was three generations ago."

With this increasing use of machinery has come with almost equal pace an increasing demand for farm produce, due to increasing city