

A SUCCESSFUL P. E. I. FARMER.

SKETCH OF JAMES O'BRIEN, GLENAHIRY.

"Certainly, you have the man." This emphatic confirmation, from one of his compeers, was spoken in reply to a query as to whether James O'Brien, of Glenahiry, were not Prince Edward Island's most successful farmer. It is no easy task to sit down, off-handedly, and write a sketch for a reliable publication of the most successful farmer in even this small Province. Like the condition precedent to making first-class hare soup—catch your hare—it is necessary, in this sketch-making, to get your man. Only the other day an agricultural author across straits asked us for the cut of the Islander who had done most for agriculture here, so that it might be included in a new work. We confess that the commission gave us any amount of concern. No doubt, a farmer's portrait was needed. After a deal of rumination, well as we know the Province and the people, we were obliged to hie ourself off to the Capital and consult with the officials there. But this did not help matters appreciably. From one end of the Island to the other, we could not pick out a farmer who had done anything special in his calling, one who could, with some show of fairness, be placed above his fellows in scientific merit. In the end, we were forced to say that we were unable to find the man, and consequently no farmer's figure will adorn the pages of the work in question.

Now, if we had to settle such a matter at this moment, we would not hesitate in placing the name at the head of this article before the inquirer, not that he has done anything wonderful for agriculture in the abstract, but because his great success as a farmer, with no advantages which anyone—even the poorest in the country—cannot boast, enabled him to build up a beautiful home for himself, provided with all the modern improvements; to secure in his farm operations all the machinery and conveniences known to science; to bring up a numerous family of intelligent, industrious and virtuous children—the country's best asset—and generously treat and establish them; and to set an example of thrift and integrity to the community, the value of which cannot be computed in dollars.

James O'Brien is the son of the late Dennis O'Brien, who came to this country from County Kilkenny, Ireland, and Margaret Doolan, his wife. He was born at New Haven, Lot 31, and removed to the western portion of this Province with his father in 1862. One of the numerous family of boys, James was obliged to go out early to work with strangers to earn a living for himself and help his struggling parents. He ultimately, at the age of 25 years, secured the fee simple from the Government of a hundred acres of woodland on the Dock Road, about five miles from Alberton, then called Cascumpec—a piece of land anyone could have had for the taking in these pioneer days. Here he decided to build him a home. Between this new holding and the town were situated the Dock farmers, the best-off and most-skilled agriculturists of these times, men who have all since passed away, leaving their fully-equipped homesteads to descendants who, alas, in many cases, knew little how to appreciate them, and who since have had either to relinquish them to others or make some arrangement with their creditors whereby the present occupants may retain them during their natural lives. O'Brien worked for their fathers as they now work for him.

As every wise settler should determine early, James O'Brien resolved to seek out a partner who would share the loneliness of backwoods life with him and aid him in making a home and rearing up a family of helpers. He was not determined in his choice by any sickly sentimentality, either painted cheeks, flippancy of speech or looseness of manner, but chose, in Hanora Christopher, one comely enough as the rural standard went, and trained up to do her part of all the woman's work of a farm, and give a helping hand occasionally at that which is more properly ascribed to men—the field operations, demanding the handling of horses and the putting in or taking up of crops. They plighted their troth to each other on a bright morning in August, and Father Dugald McDonald blessed their generous vows with the Church's blessing and bade them

to prosper in their life's work. The potency of that blessing the sequel amply authenticates.

Without any of the world's goods but an axe and a bag of flour, O'Brien had taken possession of his holding, and erected a log hut for himself at the start, near the rude road which ran by its southern boundary, and began to cut down the forest—not to destroy it, however, as many had done in their shameful improvidence, but to turn it to account for firewood or lumber, to be sold for necessities before the land it stood on bore them in crops, or to be turned into scantling, boards and shingles with which to erect the

it in the end. His paper to-day would be welcomed at any of our banks for a sum of money which certainly constitutes a fortune in this land of moderate monetary aspiration. And all this prosperity out of husbandry, whilst the well-to-do settlement, on the fringe of which he, with no little trepidation, pitched his tent in the sixties, has dwindled and decayed. Others, it is true, have taken up the lands beyond him and about him, and have, according to the common estimate, succeeded; he alone can be said to have done wonders.

And what was the secret of this Titan's success? He has been blessed with health, unmistakably; he has had an ideal helpmate; he has been industrious ever, and frugal when frugality was becoming; he has indulged himself in none of the enervating luxuries, but even this will not answer the question of his extraordinary success. To what, then, can it be ascribed? Intelligent management. He strove to understand the work in hand, to comprehend its dignity, and to be something more than a mere clod-hopper of a farmer; to get into intimate touch with the earth he cultivated, and to take from it only what it could afford to lose without impoverishment. In a word, he farmed sanely, and disposed of what he raised, with keen business discernment and a judgment nearly infallible. Hence his success.

At a time when the credit system was, unfortunately, all but universal in the country, and although he was poor enough and struggling against a period of commercial depression, he took good care to keep well out of the meshes of debt. "To what do you ascribe your business success?" we once asked him; and quick and determinedly came the reply, "I never bought what I could not pay for." If only this had been the guiding star of many others, what a different appearance would not the country manifest to-day. The great folly of buying everything they see whilst their credit is good, soon brings down to ruin the best of people. The best of people, did we say? For, after all, there is something mentally as well as morally astray with the man who contracts debts freely for anything but the mere necessities of life. O'Brien's rule would have made all his neighbors equally prosperous with himself, were it lived up to by them.

Another straw in the direction of success is seen in his methods of field treatment. He resolved early to maintain the natural fertility of the soil and bring it to a condition of tilth on which he might depend, in any sort of season, for crops. All about him the virgin soil was exploited—burnt up by ignorant manipulators in the clearing, and run out in what remained by incessant cropping to oats, one of the great mediums of commercial interchange in these days. He cleared his land carefully, conserving the organic matter it contained, and adding to it persistently barnyard manure or the common deposit of our rivers, rich in decaying matter and the stimulus which comes from the mineral in the shells of oysters and mussels, amply safeguarded against outwearing. We have seen him diligently applying stable manure and mussel-mud to virgin soil which all his neighbors would have hastened to seed to cereals at once, and have kept employed growing such crops until the heart was either taken completely out of it or its growing power greatly impaired. This, then, was the secret of agronomic success with him.

James O'Brien was always a lover of a good horse, and his stables count dozens of them at all times. But they are not there for the satisfaction of any sporting sentiment; they have to earn their keep, and are the better for it, too. He is a careful breeder, and has pocketed many big bunches of bank notes for speedy roaders. His cattle are also a large and fairly representative herd, although, if there is any weak spot in his system to which we might refer, it is here. True, he has been, and is, perhaps, yet, the biggest patron of the cheese factory we have; true, his dairy turns out much gilt-edged butter; true, he has always fine, fat steers to sell, and knows how to sell them; but there is a mixing up in the herd we don't like, a shiftiness in his ideals of cattle-breeding, which surely predicates weakness. As a result, instead of one good, pure, well-



Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien.

buildings designed to serve the steading in the coming years.

That was just thirty-nine years ago, and it seems incredible that, in this little Province, which offers so few opportunities for making money quickly, he has advanced from that rude condition of wood-settler long ago, to the proud position of ownership in that thoroughly-improved hundredth—one of the best in the whole country—and also of many more of the hundredths which his neighbors owned then, and which he bought on the market when they had failed to improve or maintain them. He has purchased farms for three sons, built magnificent houses and outbuildings for them, and started them in life in the way of comforts, at the same equipped stage as he finds himself, after life's effort, and still he has three or four times as much land himself as when he cut down his first tree. Besides, he has settled two married daughters handsomely, and paid a generous dot for two more, who, like Mary, have chosen the better part, in religious sisterhoods. He has settled a fortune, then, as was his duty, on his family, and is all the richer for



A Typical P. E. Island Country Scene.

Farm of Thos. Furniss, Vernon River Bridge.