

The Year 1913

In reviewing the events of the year, one might be expected to begin by referring to matters of world wide interest. Human nature is such, however, that it unduly magnifies the importance of the personal and the local. The hill in every neighborhood is greater than the distant mountain. The appointment of a village councillor is a more notable event than the choice of a leader for the nation.

To people of Western Canada there has been nothing of greater interest than the harvesting of the grain. Nor has the interest been confined to the West, for people in all parts of the Dominion, and in all parts of the Empire, as well as citizens of the United States, have been as observant of our conditions as if they were on the ground. Our prosperity is now a matter of concern to all the nations, since we are coming to be known as the grain growers for the world. It is no small venture, this of planting millions of acres, of waiting in hope and patience during the long summer months, now yearning for rain, now wishing for wind; at one time fearful of hail and at another time fearful of frost. Even when at last the harvest has been gathered, there are the long anxious days until the threshing is completed and the grain safely transported to its destination. This year there is much reason for thankfulness. No great calamity has befallen us at any stage. So bountiful has the harvest been that the leading financial journal of the Motherland frankly avows it to be the outstanding marvel of the year. It was indeed a great harvest notwithstanding the fact that the price received was lower than it should have been, and though much of the money received never went into general circulation, but helped to pay the banks and implement dealers what was due on old accounts. The general effect has been to create in the West a feeling of security and optimism, and in the Empire a spirit of confidence that the prairie provinces are well able to supply the world with bread.

It would be strange, if along with the song of rejoicing there was not also to be heard a little of the deep undertone of complaint that is growing louder and louder in all the towns and cities of the continent. Indeed, as people usually have more to say about their hardships than their blessings, it is not wonderful that there should be more time spent in complaining of the increased cost of living than in rejoicing over the fact that of all lands we have reason to be most thankful. There is indeed good reason for feeling uneasy over the increase in the cost of living. It would not be so grievous if the increase in earning power were growing in the same proportion. But such is not the case in any part of the continent. It costs from one-third to one-half more to live than it did five years ago; the wage increase has not, on the average, increased much more than ten per cent. Among the controllable causes operating to advance the price of commodities are the existing high tariff and freight rates, the formation of mergers and combines, the imperfect system of distribution according to which so many middlemen intervene between consumer and producer. It is no doubt true that people are more luxurious than formerly. They are not content, even, to buy oatmeal in bulk, but must pay twice the price for it when wrapped in dainty packages. It is time that a thorough investigation was made of all the facts in this matter. Why should a settler near

Gimli cut a cord of wood and haul it to the boat for a dollar, and a citizen of Winnipeg pay four dollars and a half for the same wood when delivered at his home? Why should tons of fruit be thrown into the Okanagan lakes, when peaches were bringing a dollar and a quarter a crate in Manitoba? Why should the price of chicken be from twenty-three to twenty-eight cents in North Winnipeg, and only fifteen cents in villages a few miles away? Why should flour manufactured at our doors cost more to us than to people in Great Britain? It does seem that the problem of the coming year is to get at the facts with regard to cost of production and consumption, so that a remedy may be found for the conditions under which we suffer. The suffering is so wide spread that a thorough investigation is all the more necessary.

In matters political, the year 1913 has been comparatively quiet for all Canadians. They have been so interested in the problems of the Motherland that they have for the time being almost forgotten their own. Nor is it any wonder that interest should be centred in Ulster and Dublin. The most terrible calamity that can befall any nation is civil war, and civil war in Great Britain just now would be a double calamity. It is when the lions quarrel among themselves that the jackals thrive. There are many hungry jackals waiting now. Canadians have a firm conviction that differences in this matter will be amicably adjusted, even if all parties have to yield something either for the time or for all time. It is not for us to regret struggles of this nature. The road to progress is beset with many obstacles. Without struggle there is no development. Britain will come out of this struggle a stronger and a greater nation, for she will take one step more in that long march she has been making towards religious and political freedom.

Quite as interesting to Canadians, though the interest is of a different kind, is the tempest in Mexico. It is not Mexico that interests us, not Huerta nor his political opponents. It is President Wilson, who is attempting to bring order out of disorder, government out of misgovernment. That he will succeed in his own time and his own way may be taken for granted. He has as yet failed in no great task, and he will not fail in this. Taking it all in all, the event of 1913 has been the entry of President Wilson into world politics. It is not professional politicians who always do the most or act most wisely in the actual administration of affairs.

The New Year

It is impossible for anyone to say what will be, it is quite possible for him to give his opinion as to what ought to be. If the people of Western Canada had their way, here are some of the changes they would make.

They would see more settlers on the land, and perhaps fewer in the towns. They would see more English-speaking people, and a smaller proportion of the foreign-born. They would see every child of school age able to read, speak and write the language of the country.

Conditions in the rural districts would be improved. There would be better schools, better homes, better roads, better means of transportation.

Conditions in the towns would alter. There would be lower prices for the neces-

sities of life. There would be more attention paid to community welfare. Vice and crime would be less common. Intemperance and with it the saloon would pass away. There would be no poverty, because there would be some approach to equality in the distribution of wealth.

Financial embarrassment would be less common, for banks would lend to the poor man according to his means as readily as to the rich. The farmer would get a loan on the security of his grain and stock.

Trade conditions would be bettered. There would be an open market to the south and a reduction of the preferential tariff.

There would be no further uncalled for gifts of public funds to over-bonussed railways. There would be a reduction in freight rates and express charges.

There would be public ownership of railways and telegraphs. Our national resources would be preserved.

Lastly and chiefly private and political corruption would end, and good old British honesty prevail in all the institutions of society.

Every one of these reforms we can have if we wish it with a hungry heart and plan it with a determined mind. If for one whole year the people of Western Canada think not of their personal affairs but of their duty to the community, their problems will be solved. The only obstacles to the prosperity and development of Western Canada are selfishness and partisanship.

Back to the Land

One of the most serious problems in Western life is that of retaining people on the farms. In one of the provinces in some sections forty per cent of the land owners have moved to the towns and the farms are worked by tenants. This not only makes for poorer farming, but lowers the social standing of the communities and destroys public spirit.

Among the reasons that people leave the farm are these: A desire to escape from manual labor, a desire for social companionship, a feeling that in the cities there is opportunity for advancement and freedom from routine. It is felt that there are better educational facilities, more entertainment, less monotony. Of course the man on the farm often pictures the city life in colors too rosy. There is a darker side that is never known to those who live in the open fields. Yet there is much truth in the complaint that life on the farm is lonesome and at times hard.

Fortunately it is not impossible to remedy conditions. With a few pictures, some well chosen books, a good gramophone, a few visiting neighbors, the Western farmer may say with Goldsmith "Every morning awake us to a repetition of toil, but the evening repaid it with hilarity." True joy springs from within, and does not depend upon external conditions. There is no joy equal to that in the country home, when a right relationship exists among the members of the family, and when the ambition to make money does not dwarf every generous instinct. "Back to the Land"—not only because the land is the source of wealth, but also because in spite of inconveniences, the rural home is in place when life unfolds most fully and naturally. It is where a man has a chance to breathe pure air, look at the stars, and speak with God.