

Tariff and Rural Depopulation

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Perhaps no country in the world offers at the present time such opportunities for wide and varied agricultural development as does Canada. Situated in the colder portion of the north temperate zone, her climate is adapted in the highest degree to the production of the finest quality of the more important agricultural products. As a producer of the cereal grains no country is superior, and few equal; Manitoba wheat and Ontario barley set the standard of excellence, at least for America. Few climates are better suited to the production of high-class livestock; and Canadians have already made a name for themselves in this line. In fruit, too, while the rigors of the winters forbid the production of the more southern kinds, the most stable and useful fruit in the world reaches its highest and finest development, and the apples of Canada are known almost the world over. Our bright northern sunshine and long summer days insure quality in all lines of farm produce, while a fairly sufficient and well-distributed rainfall gives to the farmer a generous harvest for his labor. In addition to the best of climates, Canada is blessed with an almost limitless area of fertile soil, and penetrating almost into the heart of these areas, bringing to the farmer the great boon of cheap transportation of his products to the markets of the world, are the great natural waterways of the St. Lawrence with its great lakes, and Hudson bay with its still unutilized possibilities. By nature, Canada has been destined to be a great agricultural nation. But beyond these great natural advantages we still have the wonderful blessing of free land. The landlord system, which crushes the agriculture of England, is unknown. In the settled portions of the country the farmer almost invariably owns the land he tills, while there are still many millions of acres of the most fertile soil to be had for the asking in the newer sections of Canada. Canada presents advantages of soil, climate and free land which are found nowhere else. Under these circumstances we should naturally expect a great expansion of agriculture, and a great increase of rural population. Instead of this we find agriculture languishing, and farm population dwindling in all the older provinces, while in the great West the growth of towns and cities is proportionately greater than that of the rural districts. These facts call for some explanation. In themselves they are a striking indication that something is wrong.

There are several ways by which it is customary to explain these conditions. One, and a very widely accepted one, is that the movement away from the soil and to the cities which is so apparent in Canada, is a part of a world-wide modern movement, due in part to the modern liking for city life, and in part to the introduction of labor-saving machinery on the farms. This, to my mind, is a very superficial and inadequate explanation, and fails entirely to account for the facts.

City Versus Country

In the first place, I cannot bring myself to believe that, to the normal human being, city life is more attractive than that of the country. It is true that some conveniences and pleasures are found in the city that are not, and cannot be found in the country. But country life has also some advantages. The married farm laborer, with his separate house, his garden, his cow, and his fowls; with wholesome freedom for his children, and a recognized place in the rural neighborhood, is surely better off, other things being equal, than the factory hand, whose home must necessarily be in the poorer sections of the city, whose children must find their playground on the streets, and who has no neighbors, and no recognized place in the great community of which he forms a part. The unmarried farm laborer, living with his employer, treated in

most cases as one of the family, is undoubtedly better situated than his counterpart in the city, domiciled in the cheap boarding house. Around all our large cities are suburbs composed of the humble homes of workingmen, stretching as far into the country as the daily necessity of the laborer to get to his work will allow. It seems to me that this "shack town" movement utterly disproves the assertion that the working man will not live in the country.

More futile still, in such a country as ours, is the attempt to explain the rural exodus by the introduction of labor-saving machinery on the farm. A year or two ago the writer, at a gathering of agriculturists, had occasion to draw attention to this rural exodus as it is manifested in the Province of Ontario. The next day a city daily, commenting on the discussion said, "It is useless to complain of the decrease of farm population. The men who used to cradle and bind the grain are in the factories making self-binders." This remark by a leading daily serves to illustrate the shortsighted view which many people take of these questions. The man who wrote that comment simply did not know what he was talking about. The introduction of labor-saving machinery may, and doubtless does, explain much of the rural exodus in Europe, where agriculture is already fully developed, and where the man displaced by the machine is no longer wanted. But this is not the case in older Canada. Here, the new age of labor-saving machinery finds our farms in a transition stage, from the old days of grain growing and grain-selling to the new agriculture of dairying and meat growing, of ever-increasing areas of orchard and hoed crop, calling, not for less men, but for more. The change from the old wasteful practices to the new is slow, much slower than it should be, and the difficulty of procuring sufficient help is the chief reason. To claim, under the circumstances, that the introduction of labor-saving machinery can account in any way for the rural exodus, is an absurdity. The constant demand, at higher and higher wages, for farm help is a thorough refutation of this theory.

Is the Farmer Asleep?

Another theory by which the rural exodus is accounted for assumes that the farmers of this country are too stupid and ignorant to adopt and practice improved systems of agriculture. According to this theory all we have to do is to get the farmer to double his output, to grow two blades of grass where one grew before, when presto! the whole question is solved. Cheaper food for the cities; higher wages for farm help to solve the farm labor problem; more attractive country homes to keep the boy and girl on the farm; all these things are possible if only the farmer will wake up. And he is constantly being told to wake up—by millionaire pork packers, bank presidents and manufacturers. These well-meaning advisors sometimes grow quite petulant because he does not wake up and do the thing which appears so simple and easy, which would solve all these questions, and incidentally take the farmer's mind away from the study of economic problems, where, all agree, he is quite out of his sphere.

But, seriously, are not the farmers of this country awake, and are they not advancing as fast as they can along lines of improvement? Have they not taken gladly, and profited by, the excellent educational work of our departments of agriculture, and our agricultural colleges? Look back at the old days of grain growing and summer-fallowing and hay-selling, thirty years ago, when the bacon hog and the dairy cow were almost unknown, when corn for silage and alfalfa were quite unknown, when agricultural education was scarcely thought of, because the farmer, and everyone else for that matter, thought there was nothing to learn about farm-

ing. Compare those days with the present, and say, if you can, that the farmer is not awake, and willing to advance. Let us give all due credit to our departments and colleges, but let us do the farmers of this country simple justice, by acknowledging that they are willing to learn. Agricultural advancement is of necessity slow. It takes a year to gain a single experience. Perhaps the farmers of this country may be forgiven if they prefer slow and safe advancement rather than to rush in, on borrowed money, and with high-priced hired help, and try some system of intensive farming to which they are urged by men who never farmed. For it is not able that this sort of criticism and this advice is never given by our most progressive farmers, but by those who for the most part, never had any acquaintance with the problem of making a living on the farm. I think it is true that in this country most farmers know how to farm far better than they are farming, but cannot put their knowledge into practice through lack of sufficient labor and capital. We cannot in any satisfactory way explain the rural exodus by assuming that it is the outcome of the ignorance and carelessness of the farmers themselves.

Only One Explanation

There is to my mind but one explanation for rural conditions as they are, and that is lack of comparative prosperity among the farmers as compared with other classes in the community. We say the young people leave the farm because of a lack of conveniences and comforts in the farm homes, because these homes are not attractive, or because there is little leisure for pleasure in country life. This may be true, but these things are not impossible in the country, and the farmer is not constitutionally averse to them. He does not have them simply because he cannot afford them. We say that the farmer must employ his hired help the year round if he is to keep a sufficient supply. Most farmers would like to, but it is necessary to economize. We say the farmer should farm more intensively, and so increase the output of his soil. But it requires a good deal of extra capital and labor to do this, and these are not at his disposal. But the farmers of Canada, farming under best of conditions as regards soil, climate, cheap land and comparative easy access to the world's markets, should, we would naturally expect, be prosperous enough to enjoy every convenience and comfort in their surroundings, and to solve the problems of the farm labor supply and the improvement of their methods of farming. That they are not, and from no lack of intelligence and industry on their own part, indicates the working of some cause or causes external to the farm itself. One of these causes, and to my mind, the most powerful, is found in the protective tariff.

There is no doubt as to the cost of all the farmer buys being increased to him by the protective tariff, and in most cases by the full amount of the tariff. There can be no doubt about this fact. A few months ago the writer had occasion to investigate for himself the prices of several lines of goods of both domestic and foreign manufacture, and almost uniformly the prices of the domestic goods were just equal to the price of the foreign goods with freight and duty added. In some cases the prices of Canadian goods were greater than the foreign goods with freight and duty added. This is explained by the following extract from a letter from a leading Canadian wholesaler and importer: "Contingency on the part of Canadian manufacturers to the Canadian wholesaler, the fact that the men know each other, all these things put the Canadian manufacturer in a position to actually charge a higher price for his goods than the British goods cost even with duty added." This referred to textile goods, but the same is true in other lines. In implements there is little reason to

doubt, not that implements may be bought in free trade countries cheaper than in Canada, that is certain, but that Canadian manufacturers sell these goods to competitors of the Canadian farmer in outside countries at less cost than they are sold in Canada. Quoting from J. J. Harrell's recent excellent book on the question, we find the following statements: "The cash price of a Canadian made harvester in Alberta is \$155, in Ontario it is \$132. But the same binder can be bought in Great Britain for \$121, cash. . . . It would pay the farmer in Alberta to buy his Canadian made machinery in Liverpool, and ship it back into Canada, if it could be imported free of duty." If this statement is not true, it admits of easy disproof by the Canadian implement makers, but the fact that no such disproof has been attempted, though the book containing the statement has been published for several months, is a very strong reason in itself for believing that the statement made by Mr. Harrell is absolutely true. The same fact is true of cement, hardware, groceries, leather goods, even flour, in fact of everything the Canadian farmer consumes except those things which he produces on his farm. Assuming that the average price of dutiable goods is raised to the extent of 25 per cent., and the average enhancement is rather more than that—and that the average farmer buys \$600 of these goods per year, we see that the direct cost of purchase is raised to the extent of \$150 per year. Some may doubt that the farmer spends as much as \$600, but from figures collected by the writer from several average Ontario farms, from his own experience, and from the opinions of many representative farmers, it would appear that this is rather below than above the average. In the West, the average expenditure is much greater, due to greater cost of transportation. Thus we see that the cost of running an average farm is increased directly as the result of the protective tariff by about \$150 per year.

Indirect Effect of Tariff

But this is not the whole cost. There is also an indirect cost, due to the fact that the purchasing power of money is reduced in proportion to the enhancement of prices. Thus the services of everyone the farmer employs, directly or indirectly, must be more highly paid. The lawyer, the doctor, the teacher, the preacher, the employees of the transportation companies which carry the farmer's goods, the farm laborer—all these, and many others, must receive more for their services, because their cost of living is increased by the tariff. The whole cost must, in the end, be borne by those industries which take our natural products of forest, mine, fishery and farm and sell them in the world's markets. Of this cost, the farm bears the brunt. Just what this indirect cost is, is difficult to determine, but to put it at \$50 per year for the average farm is at least within the mark. If this is true, the direct and indirect cost of the tariff to the average farm is at least \$200 per year—the interest of a \$4,000 mortgage at 5 per cent. Could this amount be spent, as it would be, if available, in improving farms and farm houses, in better stock, more implements and more labor, there is little doubt but the condition of the average farm would be greatly improved, and its production very greatly increased.

But, it will be urged, the tariff is of value in raising the price of what the farmer must sell, in protecting his home market. This, however, is not the case, except in one or two instances. In the case of some of the more southern varieties of fruits, as peaches and grapes, of tobacco and of early vegetables, the tariff does operate to raise prices to the producer. These products, however, are exceptional. The areas in which they may be produced are very limited, not capable of producing enough to supply

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