

THE FACTORY SYSTEM

By P. A. NOLAN

REEVE OF CORNWALL TOWNSHIP

THERE were over 1,000,000 cows in British North America in 1861. The home market was supplied with butter, and, to a large extent, with cheese, although the imports of the latter article were considerably in excess of the exports until after the cheese factories began to operate. The dairy outlook in the early sixties was not encouraging. Progress was impossible under the conditions which then existed. Cows were kept in most cases as a sort of side line, the butter and cheese being made by the women of the household, who, after supplying the needs of the family, "traded" the surplus for groceries and other requirements at a valuation often below the actual cost of production. The production was limited to the amount of labor which the farmer's wife and daughters could spare from other arduous duties.

The introduction of the factory system saved the situation and gave a new impetus to milk production. The factory product was more suitable for the English market than the home-made article, and the great export cheese trade which then began was made possible.

The system of making cheese in factories originated in Herkimer County, New York State, about 1851, and for some years that district set the standards and fashions for the rest of America in connection with the industry.

The factory system was exactly suited to the labor and other conditions in Ontario and Quebec, and as a consequence it was extended very rapidly directly it became known and understood. The results were so important that the rise of the dairying industry in Canada has been associated in the public mind with the beginning of the factory system. That view, of course, is hardly correct, but it must be admitted that the day that saw the first cheese factory started marked a distinct epoch in the progress of the industry in this country.

The first factory started in this section of the province was at Grey's Creek in 1867, about three miles East of Cornwall, by Mr. De Bellefeuille MacDonald, although "dairy" cheese was made on quite a large scale at Fraserfield, the estate of Colonel Fraser, near Williamstown, as early as 1848.

From these beginnings, the number of cheese factories multiplied so rapidly that there was estimated to be over two hundred factories in Ontario in 1867; since then the number has increased to about nine hundred in Ontario. Many of the buildings erected during the first three or four years are still in use, and in style and appearance compare favorably with the many new and elaborate ones since erected.