

The Social Problems of British Columbia

[By Professor Geo. C. Pidgeon, D. D.]

I.—*Introduction.*

The unique character of the problems of this Province strikes every student of our affairs. They are exceptional in their type and exceptional in their difficulty. The physical peculiarities of the country make its conditions of life different from the other provinces. Our farming districts are comparatively limited and separated by impassable mountain ranges. This means that each community will live its own life apart from the rest of the Province. Each will be a law unto itself in a measure impossible elsewhere; the influence of the public opinion of one community on the life of another will be unusually small; each will develop a type peculiarly its own. This means also that the farming element will have less power in the Province as a whole than anywhere else in Canada.

The Province is young; its real growth dates back only a few years. When in 1871 the British Government handed over the administration of our vast resources to the people of the Province, there were only 36,247 persons here to accept the responsibility. For years the growth was dishearteningly slow, and it is only within the last ten years that the inrush of population has taken place. The rapid growth of the Middle West is largely responsible for this. Our ports are the outlet to the Pacific for the whole Dominion. The products of Central Canada must reach the Coast. Transportation had to be provided. This led to unprecedented activity in railway construction. Our own transcontinentals pushed their lines through. American roads competed for a share of the trade. Branch lines were run in all directions. This brought great numbers of men into the Province for the work of construction, and business followed in their train. It led also to the abnormal growth of our cities. Our urban population bears a far higher ratio to the whole than is to be found in any other province. Actual production in agriculture and manufacture is at a minimum and therefore much of our growth has proven unstable. Further, this railway construction has opened up vast tracts of country, with potential wealth above the dreams of the greatest romancers of the past. It is no wonder that our people have been dazzled by the possibilities, and that there has been an influx of immigrants from every part of the world.

The country's production must be done on a large scale. There is very little room for the small proprietor. In the Middle West farming is the main industry. Individuals take up their homesteads or buy their farms, and develop their possibilities by their own labor. Every