

Sidelights on the Foreign Farmer

By D. B. Bogle



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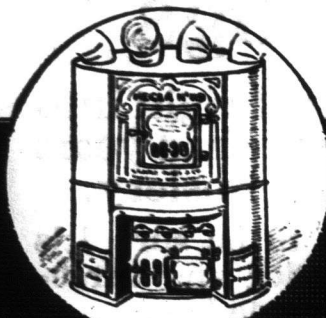
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SOME three years ago I bought a farm, influenced by I know not what sense of dissatisfaction with the selfish individualistic struggle of the city even during the war, and agreeing with the late Colonel Roosevelt's dictum, "If you can't fight, farm." I bought in an intermediate district between an old (for Manitoba) farming settlement and a territory to the north, the scene of the earliest of Clifford Sifton's experiments in the settlement of Ukrainians on unoccupied land.

The neighborhood in which I pitched my tent had all or virtually all been taken up in homesteads, mostly by pioneers from Ontario, before the land to the north was settled by Ukrainians. I presume it was earlier, I do not pretend to accuracy. I am not trying to write history but to give impressions accurate as to the reflex from my mind not necessarily so as to the actual facts. At the time I purchased this neighborhood showed evident signs of retrogression. Everywhere were abandoned farms, ruined cabins, bits of stubble gone back, the whole country being eaten up by wild oats, cow thistle, mortgage, interest and taxes, and the odd people still there giving the impression that they only stayed where they were because they could think of nowhere else to go. The country was strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of a receding tide of settlement lying to the north of a fairly prosperous Canadian settlement which was however not expanding, and to the south of a foreign district of which the coming forward of a second generation is only now determining the value in the development

bedezined. It all depends on the point of view. I forgot to ask my friend however whether his wife agreed with him.

In the beginning the foreigner excited the ridicule and contempt of the rural population of Canada. It is impossible to despise him now. For that reason it is easier perhaps to hate him. There is certainly a wide gap of ill-feeling between Canadians and the foreign farmer. How deep it is I cannot say. The children when they attend the same school live in a state of open and continued warfare, the daily progress of which is recited at home to amused but by no means unsympathetic ears. To hear many farmers talk one would expect a series of pogroms to begin immediately. Nothing is commoner than to hear it said that every blank foreigner should be kicked out of the country. That any such action would break the banks, bankrupt the railways, cut the grain crop in two and diminish the live stock by two-thirds does not occur to such extremists. There is one feature fairly hopeful. It is an abstract foreigner against whom the ill-feeling exists. It disappears against the individual upon actual contact. I was talking one day with a farmer whose language about foreigners was absolutely sulphurous and I said to him: "I don't understand. You get on all right with So-and-So," mentioning a Ukrainian neighbor. "Oh! He's different," was all the answer, but the diatribe ceased. I am no great believer in racial hatred which is compatible with mutual assistance freely rendered at wood cutting bees and well-digging. On the plain of wage-earning competition I can understand the



Muttons for the future.

of Canadian resources and the settlement of our vast areas of untilled land. I was at a unique post of observation, I was between the two communities and a stranger to both. I had no prejudices to overcome in the case of either. I have been so much about that I have no local or conventional standard for human being but take them all pretty much as I find them be the Seythian, Ethiopian, bond or free. I have in particular a mild contempt for the human failing which finds occasion for ridicule in foreign mannerisms or customs. The simple consideration is overlooked by most of us that for every single thing in them which excites our ridicule there must of necessity be a counterpart in ourselves which excites their ridicule.

A Ukrainian friend of mine who speaks good English but a little stilted and difficult of reproduction from his limited vocabulary once said to me: "In the city I see many women on the street dressed in clothes that cost much money, all kinds of money. I would not have my wife on the street so dressed."

"Why," said I, "because of the extravagance, the waste of money?"

"No," he answered, "not the money. I would have my wife all the money, but— they are so ugly."

So there you are you see. Michael, whom you saw at the corner of Portage and Main waiting for his car with the grime of toil still about him and whom you imagined to be gazing in wonder and admiration at the throng of beauty and fashion passing by, was really thinking what fearful caricatures of the human form the fashions made and that not for worlds would he behold his Marenka thus

feeling but not in the rivalry of production.

As to the reciprocal feeling stirred among the Ukrainians I cannot speak. Centuries of oppression have bred in them a power of repression which is completely baffling to an outsider. The nearest I ever got to an interior glimpse was one day a friend of mine said to me: "You write?" "That's my trade," said I, "but I am not working at it just now. At present I am engaged in educating pigs." That went past him. "I would you write for my people. It is not just," he continued and went on to relate a villainous injustice of which I was as sadly aware as he. It was quite a specific thing and had nothing to do with the state of popular feeling however. Of that in its time and place, which is neither here nor now.

As I have said, the inner consciousness of the Ukrainian farmer is a sealed book but at the present moment he is undoubtedly uneasy. One of them asked me once: "Do you never feel a longing for your own country?" His language was scanty but there was no mistaking the pathetic yearning of his tone. If this feeling ever reached the point of stimulating a general exodus the consequences would be startling. Such a thing is not impossible. Anyone who has read the history of that astonishing migration from the Don river to the centre of China which took place only two centuries ago could never be surprised at anything bodies of people who are uncomfortable in their environment might do.

At the base of the Ukrainian character is an ingrained timidity and fear of the constituted authorities. The government

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