

Rural and Economic Questions Discussed

Ex-Students of the O.A.C. Give Addresses on the Country Problem

THE proceedings of the Friday sessions of the Rural Community Conference, held in Victoria College, Toronto, with students of Toronto University and the O.A.C. in attendance, were briefly reported at the time in Farm and Dairy. Further report here delayed until this issue. On the second day of the conference the morning session was given over to addresses by ex-students of the Ontario Agricultural College, followed by general discussion. Mr. Justus Miller, editor of "The Canadian Countryman," opened up with a discussion of the function of the State in building up the rural community. Rural communities in the past, he maintained, had been built down rather than up, and the virility of the whole human race thereby endangered. In the development which must now come, Mr. Miller emphasized the fact that arbitrary government regulation was useless unless backed by public sentiment. The necessary moral sentiment must first be developed ahead of regulation or the promulgation of correct economic theories, and to develop this sentiment is the great work of the rural worker, particularly the rural minister. Mr. Miller then gave a sketch of his ideal rural community, as the most expeditious manner of elucidating his idea of the part the government should play in its development. Some of the characteristics of which are the following:

No land speculation for agriculture shall be idle. Use of land would be conditional on its being put to use. In case of tenants long leases and

payment for improvements would be the rule.

Immigration would be strictly regulated to preserve the democratic ideals and living standards of the Canadian people. The English language must prevail. Life and property, of course, will be suitably safeguarded.

The farmer must be ensured a fair share of his production! Just how the government would make this possible the speaker did not make clear. The people will be organized in civic improvement leagues. Transportation and communication will be well provided for. Government surveys will be made of the physical, economic and social resources of the community. There will be consolidated schools and social centres. No rural community is complete without its strong church, which should be the centre of all progressive work. And back of all these desirable characteristics, the speaker stated, must be the ability to spare money and time.

The District Representative and His Work. In dealing with the work of the Department of Agriculture in rural communities, J. W. Stark, B.S.A., District Representative for Peel, traced the development of agricultural education in Ontario from the founding of the one central college at Guelph to District Representatives in each county. He dealt entertainingly with the work of the representative, classifying his activities as follows:

Among the young people the representative conducts short courses for

men in stock and seed judging; short courses for girls in food values and cooking; acre profit competitions, pig feeding competitions, and school fairs among the children. Junior Improvement Societies are organized among the young people. Perhaps in no way could Mr. Stark have made the value of his work more apparent than in telling of two societies that he was instrumental in organizing at Streetsville. For the present winter weekly meetings had been planned. Literary and social union meetings will be held, and then, the third week, the two societies will separate and "talk shop"—the boys agriculture, and the girls house-keeping or allied subjects.

With the "grow-up" people the representative conducts demonstrations, organizes clubs, conducts drainage surveys, test milk, supplies information, and makes himself generally useful to his constituency.

Land Values and Rural Progress.

The last speaker of the morning session was F. E. Ellis, a Halton County farmer and ex-editor of Farm and Dairy. Mr. Ellis took a somewhat pessimistic view of the economic situation of the Ontario farmer. For 40 years, he maintained, the greater find had been sapping the country districts of the very best of its young manhood, until it was a question if the general average intelligence of the rural population is as high to-day as it was several decades ago. This is a situation demanding a remedy, else the sturdy Anglo-Saxon population may be displaced by peoples of other nationalities, whose standards of living are lower. The remedy Mr. Ellis did not find in better farming, co-operation or education. All of these things are good and desirable and worth striving for, but they are not

capable of overcoming the ill results of ignoring fundamental economic laws. Denmark has met these three, but the economic position of the Danish farmer is not such as to attract any Canadian. The speaker showed how all improvements in agriculture are immediately reflected in the price of land. In Denmark it is land prices that keep the peasant farmers in a state of poverty, and in Canada also advances in land values follow the change, which otherwise would increase the labor income of the farmer. Land, labor and capital, said he, are the three factors in wealth production, and increased land prices hinder production quite as much as increased wages or increased cost of implements. One evil result of increasing land values, with their speculative feature, is a strong drift towards tenant farming, which is already in evidence in rural Ontario, the proportion of tenants varying from 10.7 per cent. in the five counties where land values are lowest, to 24 per cent. in the five counties with the greatest average price of land. The increasing land values of cities, increasing the cost of doing business as they do, are also a severe tax on the rural dweller. Another disability under which the farmer labors is a system of indirect, land prices through the tariff, puts \$20 in the pockets of the protected manufacturers for every dollar it puts in the coffers of the country. The remedy Mr. Ellis found in the substitution of all indirect taxes and taxes on improvements for one tax on unimproved land values. Such taxation would do away with speculation; and it would solve the tenant problem and make production easier and more profitable. Also it would force the vacant land into use.

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