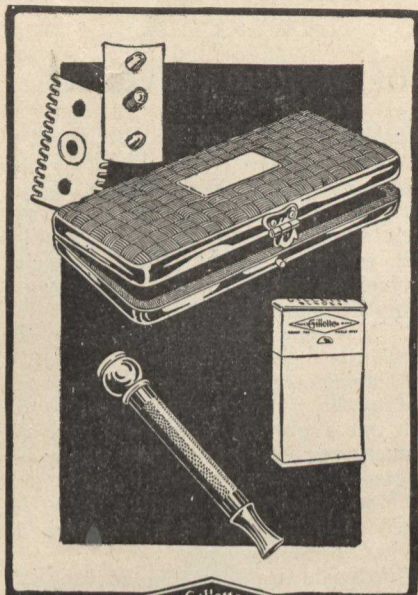


**A Rural Problem**

EVEN in the most careless and light-hearted observer the conditions of this country, social, economic, or political, must arouse many grave misgivings. There are clefs in the national fabric which suggest something more than the pressure of some passing trial, which indicate some serious flaw in the foundations. Industrial conditions are threatening beyond previous experience. Times there have been when misery was more acute, but none when it has been more widespread or hopeless. Trade shows a growing languor and reduced power of recuperation. We are every year becoming more dependent on foreign nations for the first necessities of life. And with all this may be noticed a deterioration in the physique and character of the people, especially perhaps in the latter. The worst of it is that these developments, which are symptoms of the disease, directly tend to greatly increase the malady.

Frightened by hysterical policies begotten of distress, Capital, which might relieve it, is leaving the country in ever-growing volume; flying, as an American paper well puts it, from economic persecution, as French Huguenots and Russian Jews have fled from persecution political and religious. Thus we have entered on a vicious circle of unemployment formulating demands which diminish employment, and so tending to reproduce itself. Poverty creating instability, instability breeding poverty—so runs the hopeless round. The observer who saw these things and nothing else might be pardoned the most utter pessimism. But his hopelessness will disappear if he note one great fact—that the phenomena above described have coincided in their growth with an enormous change in the distribution of our population. We say that it will disappear, because the distribution of population can be largely controlled by human agency. Against laws of evolution we may be powerless, but against movements which are not evolutionary but artificial, counteracting effort may prevail.

To the migration of the rural population to the town is obviously traceable the overcrowding of our cities and the repletion of the labour market. Less obviously, but perhaps quite as truly, may we refer to it the physical and moral change described above. The neurosis, the decreased vigour, the irritability, the restless rushing after new gods—these are precisely the characteristics of a people of town dwellers. We should moreover look for such changes when men leave a highly skilled industry, such as agriculture, for casual and spasmodic employment under vitiated conditions. The divorce of the countryfolk from the land creates therefore a very serious danger to the State, the more to be deplored because it is not inevitable. It is a singular thing, but, properly regarded, a hopeful, that while labour is a drug in the cities it is at a premium in the country. Not all of the millions of acres of tith that have been converted into pasture have been laid down because of foreign competition. Scarcity of labour has played its part in the process. It is an irony that men should turn their backs upon the fields which call for their labour, and turn their faces to the towns which would shut their gates against them if they could. An irony indeed! But in its very absurdity the remedy may be found. There must be some cause for a movement so opposed to reason and prudence. If the cause can be found, the movement may be checked, perhaps even reversed.—*The Outlook.*



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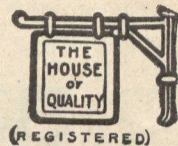
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