

RURAL DEPOPULATION IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO.

BY S. A. CUDMORE,

Lecturer in Political Economy, University of Toronto.

(Read 27th April, 1912.)

Among European peoples and societies of European extraction the decline of rural population—relative in some cases, absolute in others—has been one of the most remarkable phenomena of the last half-century. It has taken place in such densely populated regions as Great Britain, France, Germany and Belgium, and also in such comparatively thinly settled countries as the United States, Canada and Australia. It is on the whole most noticeable in what we should consider the most progressive countries, and least evident in such economically backward societies as those of Russia and the Balkan States. This great displacement of population has naturally excited the keenest interest, and in many cases the greatest alarm. It has, during the past decade, been widely discussed in Europe, the United States and Canada, and in the discussion the advantage of numbers, if not of argument, has been with those who hold that the movement is an evil, pregnant with danger for the future of the entire white race, and particularly of the English-speaking nations.

The results of the Canadian census of 1911 show that in the past decade the rural population of the Dominion has increased 17.16 per cent. while urban population has increased 62.25 per cent. or more than three times as fast. Four of our nine provinces—Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island—show an actual decrease of rural population; nowhere in the Dominion has rural population increased at the same rate as urban.

Our subject, however, confines us to our own Province of Ontario. Here we find that in spite of the activity of a progressive Department of Agriculture and considerable immigration of agricultural labourers, the rural population of the Province has declined during the decade by 52,811, while the urban population has increased by 392,511. A decline of 52,811 may not at first seem a very serious matter in a large and populous province, but one must remember that this has occurred in spite of a considerable extension of settlement in New Ontario, and further that this decline has been going on in some parts of the Province for about fifty years.

