RURAL DEPOPULATION IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO.

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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.

MOVEMENT OF POPULATION IN TYPICAL MUNICIPALITIES.

The best way of measuring the movement of rural population is to take the distinctively rural municipalities, the townships, with their populations at respective enumerations. It is, of course, essential that our typical townships shall not have been changed by the creation of new urban municipalities during the period under consideration. This is the course which I propose to follow, and as a County of Peel "old boy" I shall take my first examples of this decline from the county with which I am best acquainted.

The township of Chinguacousy, just outside the county town, Brampton, has a generally excellent soil, is well watered, and close to the Toronto market. It is well adapted to grain-growing and stock-raising, and is a good example of the ordinary Ontario agricultural township. This township had in 1861 a population of 6,897, which has since that time been steadily declining. The figures for the five succeeding decennial censuses, taken in order, are 6,129, 5,476, 4,794, 4,177, 3,913. For every 100 people in the township in 1861, there were only 56 in 1911—a loss of 44 per cent. In the same period of fifty years, the population of the small adjoining township of Toronto Gore declined from 1830 to 1032—a loss of 43 per cent.

Fruit-growing and market-gardening townships have of late had a different story to tell. If we go back again to Peel County, we find that the population of the lakeside township of Toronto, lying just south of Chinguacousy, was in 1861, 6,592, and in 1901 only 5,208—a loss of 21 per cent. During the past decade, however, the growth of fruit farms and market gardens has occasioned a substantial increase in the population, which in 1911 stood at 6,208—only 384 less than the maximum. The continued growth of the Toronto market for its products and the growing practice of "commuting" will probably make the 1921 population the greatest that has been.

The same phenomenon which we have already noticed in the case of Chinguacousy and Toronto townships is also perceptible in other pairs of adjoining townships so situated that one is naturally a fruit-growing, the other a grain-growing and stock-raising district. When we consider the lakeside township of Saltfleet and the inland township of Binbrook, in the County of Wentworth, we notice that Saltfleet's population has increased from 2,740 to 4,458 between 1861 and 1911, while that of Binbrook has decreased from 2,100 to 1,254. In other words, Binbrook in 1861 had three-quarters of Saltfleet's population; in 1911, two-sevenths. Once more, considering North and South Grimsby, the former a lakeside, fruit-growing township, the latter agricultural, we find that in the last twenty years the population of the former has increased from 1,095 to 1,758, while that of the latter—the inland township—has declined from 1,610 to 1,389. Everywhere then, we notice that the influence of the increase of fruit-growing and market-gardening has been to increase the rural population, while the inland townships have shared the common depopulation of the ordinary Ontario agricultural community.

So far our illustrations have been drawn from a comparatively small area. In order to show that the decline is not merely a local phenomenon, we shall take cases from different parts of the Province.

The township of Oro in Simcoe reached its maximum population, 4,566, in 1881; in 1911 its population was only 3,485, a decline of 26 per cent. in thirty years.

The population of the township of Bosanquet in Lambton declined from 4,425 in 1871 to 2,491 in 1911, or forty-three per cent. in forty years.

East Nissouri in Oxford declined from 3,668 in 1871 to 2,623 in 1911—a loss of twenty-eight per cent. in forty years.

Otonabee in Peterborough declined from 4,261 in 1861 to 3,287 in 1911—a decrease of twenty-two per cent. in fifty years.

Osnabruck in Stormont declined from a maximum of 5,796 in 1881 to 4,170 in 1911—twenty-eight per cent. in thirty years.

Numerous other examples can be given, but the foregoing are sufficient to establish our general conclusion—that the population of the ordinary agricultural Ontario township to-day has declined from 20 to 45 per cent. from its maximum. This decline is, however, partially offset by the very considerable increase of late years in the population of fruit-growing and market-gardening districts. This latter increase is itself largely due to the rise of our cities, which provide a market for their products.

PRESENT DENSITY OF RURAL POPULATION.

It will now be worth our while to consider the present density of rural population in order to see what is the complement of human labour per square mile in the ordinary Ontario township. What is the average number of people living and labouring on and maintained by the products of the average square mile in an ordinary agricultural district? My general conclusion on this point is that the Ontario agricultural township averages about thirty persons to the square mile. This figure necessarily includes the population of small unincorporated villages—probably from one-fourth to one-third of the whole—so that only about twenty to twenty-three persons actually reside in the average square mile of agricultural land in a grain-growing and stock-raising township.

This conclusion was reached by taking various agricultural communities and dividing the aggregate population of the rural municipalities of a county by the area. Thus I found that the average density of population in Prince Edward County was 31.54 to the square mile; in East Huron, 28.4; in Wellington, 28.5; in Dufferin 24.45; in Simcoe (excluding the non-agricultural and partly settled township of Matchedash), 31.26; in Norfolk, 31.9; in North York, 35.9. For purposes of comparison I calculated the density of rural population in Prince Edward Island, the only province which is all settled, and found it to be 36 persons to the square mile. It should be noted that all the communities under discussion are overwhelmingly English-speaking.

In French-speaking districts the density is quite noticeably greater than in English-speaking. For example, the density of rural population in Prescott is 40.87 and in Russell 41.6 to the square mile. Also in the Province of Quebec the density in Bagot is 41.6 per square mile, and in Chambly and Vercheres, 43.6. From these and other examples I conclude that the average density in an ordinary French-speaking agricultural community is in the neighbourhood of 40 to the square mile. The significance of this greater density we shall see later.

So far I have dealt only with facts. I shall now attempt to give an explanation of the causes of this great decline in rural population and to show why these causes have not operated with the same intensity in French-speaking as in English-speaking districts.

CAUSES OF THE DECLINE.

Various causes of this decline—the alleged contempt in which the farmer's profession is sometimes held, the tendency to city life inculcated in our schools, the glittering financial lures held out by the city, the electric lights and shop-windows and the gregarious instinct of mankind have no doubt had more or less effect upon our young people in the choice of a vocation. These have been discussed almost *ad nauseam* in our press, while the main cause is left in comparative obscurity. That cause is not social but economic.

The decline of rural population in our province, as in other provinces and other countries, is mainly due, I believe, to the introduction of labour-saving, agricultural machinery and to the increasing operation of the great economic principle enunciated by Adam Smith—the division of labour, which has transferred to the cities and towns various branches of production which half a century ago were carried on almost exclusively on the farms. Further, the decline of rural population has been to the economic advantage of the people of the North American continent as a whole.

I shall best make clear my point by going back to my first example, that of the township of Chinguacousy, Why has its population declined from roughly 7,000 persons to less than 4,000 in the half-century, when, at a low rate of natural increase and making no allowance for immigration, that population should now be 11,000? Where are the missing 7,000 people? The answer is easy enough: either in the country districts of Western Canada and the United States, or in Canadian and American cities.

In the settlement of the North American continent, the young men of each community have as they grew up become the founders, the pioneers of still other communities further West, even as far as San Francisco, Vancouver, and Prince Rupert. The great North American continent, with its unrivalled transportation system; inhabited by men of one race who spoke one language and lived under similar institutions, has become what I should call a single labour market of area unparalleled in the history of the world. Labour has been more mobile here than elsewhere, and it is one of the first principles of political economy that, other things being equal, the greatest production takes place where labour is most mobile—moves most freely to those localities where it is most needed and is best rewarded. The West needs these labourers worse than does Chinguacousy; it rewards them better. Their per capita production of wealth is greater in the West than in their home township. They could not have produced so much nor earned so much in Chinguacousy as they produce and earn in the West. Therefore they go West.

This mobility of labour on the North American continent is mainly due to the predominance of a single language. The English-speaking labourer finds himself at home wherever he goes, and is consequently ready to go anywhere. This, however, is not the case with the French-Canadians. The barriers of language and religion, the distaste for migration into an alien community and the ignorance of the economic conditions and opportunities of that community—make them cling to their native place. This fact at least partially explains the greater density of the French-speaking rural population. It also explains why the growing French population floods the Eastern Townships and the Ottawa River counties of Ontario in preference to going West.

The great mobility of labour and the "call of the West"—which is really the call of the economic opportunities there—will account for Chinguacousy's loss of her natural increase of the past fifty years, which we have estimated at 4,000 persons. But they are hardly sufficient to account for the loss of nearly half the population resident in the township in 1861. To explain this absolute decrease of population we must compare the methods of production in use at the two periods.

DECLINE OF AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT DUE TO MACHINERY.

The agricultural methods of to-day are very widely different from those of 1861, especially in the matter of the use of labour-saving machinery, which has revolutionized agriculture. How great the change has been may be shown from statistics of the United States Department of Labour, published some years ago. Here we find that the nine principal crops of the United States required 120,000,000 days of human labour in 1895, with the methods then in use, while they would have required 570,000,000 days of human labour with the methods of 1850. In other words, 400,000 agricultural labourers, working 300 days a year, could do in 1895 work which it would have taken 1,900,000 labourers working 300 days a year, to perform in 1850. It is entirely probable, to say the least, that the 4,000 people in Chinguacousy to-day can cultivate the soil of that township quite as efficiently and thoroughly as the 7,000 could in 1861. Under the new conditions thirty persons to the square mile are able to perform the work which once required fifty, and still demands forty in the French-speaking districts, where agricultural methods are backward and unprogressive.

Labour has thus been displaced in agriculture, just as in the manufacturing industries, by the introduction of labour-saving machinery. The displaced farm-labourers of the past generation have very wisely migrated to "fresh fields and pastures new" instead of remaining at home and attempting to secure employment by the hopeless method of underbidding the machine. They and their descendants are now, as a result, using labour-saving agricultural implements on their own Western farms, and their position in life is vastly higher than it could otherwise have been. The labour-saving machine, which would have crushed them by its competition had they remained at home, has helped them to raise themselves altogether out of the class of manual labourers, and the total agricultural product of the country is vastly greater than if they had remained in the East.

TRANSFER OF OTHER EMPLOYMENTS TO THE CITIES.

Not all the labourers who have left the farms of Southern Ontario have migrated to the West. Thousands have gone to the stores and factories of Canadian and American cities. But what of that? In 1861 these people who worked on the farm were yet by no means exclusively agricultural in their occupation. The farm household of 1861 produced all its own food, nearly all its own clothing, was quite capable of building its own house, and often did so. Thus the three primary needs of mankind—food, clothes, shelter—were satisfied within the household, and the average household had few others. Some of the members of the household specialised, for instance, in spinning and the production of clothes. When the factory system of weaving and garment-making superseded the old domestic system, what wonder that such persons left the farm and betook themselves to the cities and towns, where alone the power was available to run the machinery of the new factories? Who would expect them to remain at home and compete with the machines—a method of procedure which would have been both uneconomic for the country and hopeless for themselves? And if still others who were better at house-building than at grain-growing left the farm and devoted themselves to the occupation for which they were best suited, is there not an economic gain here also? Here again we have Adam Smith's principle of the division of labour: "Let every man do only that which he can do best, and the total product of the community will be the greatest possible." The whole displacement of Ontario's rural population during the past half-century is due to this law of the division of labour which has taken people who are not fitted for farm work away from it, or to the invention of labour-saving machinery which has freed agricultural labourers for the opening up of the West. Both of these causes are productive of economic gain, and help to produce a greater quantity of wealth in the country.

Has this not been the case? Is not the average farmer to-day ever so much better off than he was fifty years ago, and is not the production of a given number of people engaged in agricultural pursuits much greater than it has ever been in the past? The average annual product on the Ontario farm of to-day, according to the Department of Agriculture, is worth about $2000. Even in the last decade there has been a striking increase in rural wealth, as far as we can see from the assessment rolls. The Ontario Bureau of Industries shows that in 1900, 1,094,241 persons resident in the townships of the Province were assessed for $453,917,203, or a trifle under $415 per head, while in 1909, 1,049,240 persons were assessed for $607,173,285, or over $578 per head.

The case then seems quite clear that the decline of our rural population is due to causes predominantly economic, and that on the whole it has been productive of great economic benefits to society. Critics and sentimental *laudatores temporis acti* who believe that it implies a weakening of the fibre of the younger generation are absolutely in the wrong. Both the westward movement and the movement from the country to the cities are simply due to the desire for the economic betterment of the individual, which generally coincides with the best interests of society. Since this desire is the strongest motive of mankind, it is as vain for the critics to combat it with the ordinary superficial "back to the farm" address as to drive back the Atlantic with a mop.