

REHABILITATING THE COUN- TRYSIDE IN EASTERN CANADA

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“THE source of a nation’s vitality is its rural population, and the basis of its economic prosperity is its agriculture.” As one drives along the highways of Eastern Canada, prosperity and progress dot the landscape; but, in the panoramic view, struggle and stagnation prevail. The rural complexion is not reassuring. It calls for consideration. A fine farm may be the result of much toil, more often careful management, sometimes fortuitous circumstances. A tired looking farm may be occupied by a tired farmer, innately tired, without ambition, without ideals. The prevailing type of farm is the one where the operator has tried and failed to solve the puzzle of modern farming. It is this latter class to which attention should be directed.

Modern farming is not a simple task. Natural hazards, business complexities, and even modern machinery, indispensable as it is, have propounded a new set of problems to each and every farm. There is also the human equation. There are more people attempting to farm than are engaged in any other occupation of a private-enterprise type involving personal capital and management. It is comparatively easy to undertake to farm on one basis or other; but failure is just as certain because of poor management, lack of capital or any other reason as it is in commercial business. The only difference is that in farming it is not so swift; the turnover takes longer, the farmer can retrench and continue to exist. Selection, therefore, is not very rigid.

It would be much better for farming if low grade farmers could be made to disappear, and if submarginal farms were left unoccupied. Many of these are suited for only one thing, reforestation. Others are fit for the next most extensive practice, grazing. Still others may justify cultivation when good land becomes less plentiful, and when they can be improved more economically, and with more prospect of profitable use than appears to-day. Farmers who are on the lower levels because of personal incapacity, incompetency or insufficiency—and they are not uncommon—should not be encouraged to believe that they are entitled to a decent living. They are a burden on the good farmers because they are

low-standard competitors; their inferior product is not only a drag on the market, but also degrades the good product with which it is sold. Unfortunately, marketing machinery is not yet sufficiently developed to insure proper discrimination. Herein lies one of the great marketing possibilities, to which both the town man and the farmer can contribute, and through the development of which both may benefit. For some of the things that handicap farming, farmers are not directly responsible, but they continue to exist because of the farmer's inability to eliminate them.

For many years the economic opportunity in cheap, fertile land attracted people. Conditions in the town were not very different from those in the country, and there was an intimate relationship between the two. Land was a good investment. There was a local self-sufficiency, in which all things were more or less common to all men. The saw-mill, the grist-mill and the woollen-mill, the wheel-wright, the blacksmith and the shoemaker were among the town's indispensables; the farm products maintained the people, and trade was largely a matter of local exchange. People's wants were few, and their pleasures were simple. Industry then began to centralize in the cities, the towns and villages began to lose their old establishments, the output per man on the farm increased, fewer people were needed there, land became more valuable and money more available for other interests than farming; so the young men of the rural districts began to move, first to cheaper lands farther west, and finally to the cities and larger towns where opportunities were abundant and where comforts and pleasures were multiplying.

In this period of rapid industrial development, industry and commerce became greatly specialized and highly organized. Farming underwent considerable specialization, but fell far behind in organization, with the inevitable result that in its relations with business it is now at a great disadvantage. And so, while the cities have grown and prospered, and have been able to develop and command the best in the services and the satisfactions of life, the rural communities have been obliged to struggle to maintain their institutions, and have been severely handicapped in trying to raise the standards of living comparable with those in the cities. But necessity is a hard master, and example is a good method of instruction. The farmers are learning, and among them are to be found some quite promising pupils in the school of modern trade and public welfare. This development should be welcomed and encouraged by urban interests. It is imperative if the farm is to have its rightful place in the economic structure of

this country. Thus a mere settlement of new lands will not suffice; rural institutions must be strengthened, if necessary at urban expense. Dr. Kenyon L. Butterfield, a well known authority on rural problems, made the statement at a recent International Conference on Rural Life, that "the total social wealth must be used for the total social health." With the present commercial inter-relationship, the economic pendulum itself will establish, and is establishing, greater equality between urban and rural people; but recent experience seems to show that modern facilities can greatly accelerate the development of this desirable condition.

There are those, of course, who urge that the farmer must solve his own problems, and, while this is largely true, it should be recognized that he is entitled to the same services which other people enjoy, and that in his various relations the co-operation of others will benefit everyone while helping the farmer to help himself. The business man of Canada has a very vital interest in the welfare of Canadian agriculture. Even the most casual is aware that the wheat crop is a harvest for the business man as well as for the farmer. But the harvest is not limited to wheat. Wheat represents, at the most, thirty per cent of the agricultural production value of the country. Forty per cent of Canada's manufacturing arises out of agriculture as a whole, and the purchasing power of the farm people determines commercial prosperity. The farmer, too, must realize what business activity means to agriculture. This interdependence will become even more pronounced, and let us hope more appreciated, as the country develops. It is clearly apparent in Eastern Canada now that special possibilities in farm practice are largely the result of growing markets in our cities and towns. An Eastern farmer, therefore, has an immediate interest in Eastern business particularly. The business man is just as much concerned with Eastern agriculture, but he is too likely to limit his interest to increasing the wheat crop, and to this end immigration seems to be the one thing he is ready to shout for. Notable exceptions point the way which, in the interests of both business and agriculture, others might well follow.

We have a few organizations and institutions in which business men and farmers jointly participate, and through which matters of mutual interest receive collective consideration and treatment. We have business organizations which not only recognize that in the final analysis the welfare of such businesses depends upon the well-being of the farmers who supply the raw material for them and purchase their products, but also through their operations serve as instruments for sound agricultural development. And

we have business leaders who use their influence, their offices, their ability, and not infrequently their money, to promote the interests of farming communities. There is much that the business man can do, if he is sufficiently enlightened; and there is much that he should do for his own sake, for the sake of the farmer to whom he is indebted, and for the sake of the country.

If we take a further look at our rural community, we shall see that many of the farms appear to be insufficiently manned. Labour of any kind is scarce, and satisfactory labour is extremely difficult to obtain. There are farms apparently abandoned, the farm houses uninhabited, but as a rule these farms are being operated on some basis or other, and usually as extensions of other farms. Under many conditions, this larger unit represents the effort of the farmer to increase his volume of business. His premises are quite sound, but he sometimes fails because the undertaking is beyond his capacity; he is unable to finance it properly, he does not man it sufficiently, or he attempts to work it on the smaller unit organization. Had he followed the alternative plan of intensifying his practice, he might have been more successful. There are plenty of farms for sale, and there are more to rent. Some of these are in the submarginal class, and should not be considered as separate units for farming purposes. Others are owned by people who are getting old, or are otherwise physically unfit to continue farming, and there are no young people on these farms to carry on. In some cases the young people have left, or are about to leave. In others, the farm has long since had no family. Incidentally, bachelors are very common in farm communities. This is very regrettable, because the farm is a poor place for a bachelor, and a bachelor is a doubtful asset in a farm community. Social workers might interest themselves in this problem.

Despite the absence of young people on individual farms, and the migration from the country to the city, as well as from the East to the West, there are still a lot of young people in the farm communities. Contrary to public opinion, the rural community continues to produce some surplus population. Many of the young men are interested in farming, quite sufficient numbers of them to reinforce the whole structure. The solution in this respect is much more hopeful than it seemed a few years ago, partly because there is now slightly more equality in opportunity as between the town and country, partly because of rural improvements, and partly because of experience. Even some of the town boys are commencing to understand that a farm can have many advantages and attractions difficult to obtain in the city. Many a farm boy

who went to the city some ten years ago has not found it a bed of roses. Probably we shall find him with his family in a small cottage or apartment for which he is paying a substantial part of his salary, and living from month to month. The chances are that he has not yet been able to make a start in accumulating an estate for himself. If he went to the city with some professional or business career as his objective, giving himself the necessary preparation for it, and finally receiving financial and other support to undertake it, he may be in a very satisfactory position. Corresponding categories may be found in the country districts, though not exactly comparable, because rarely does the boy in the country receive advantages equivalent to those accorded the more favoured son who goes to town. Given equal consideration, it is doubtful if the country boy would be anxious to change. City explorations by farm boys have not been entirely detrimental to the cause of the farm. Doubtless the country will continue to supply boys to the town, but this need not be alarming, if enough remain to operate the farms. Enough will remain, and others will join them, provided they have the opportunity to farm, and provided they are equal to the task, and therefore able to see and to realize its possibilities. These are two important difficulties to overcome.

Under present conditions, farming is not within the reach of young men in the country, because they are unable to start on a decent basis, as they once could. The question of capital is an immediate stumbling block. The average farmer who has two or three boys may be able to finance one; the other two will take other lines of less financial resistance. There has been no financial provision that would enable the young man with limited capital to establish himself on a farm. Recently the Dominion Government passed an Act for the purpose of establishing in Canada a system of Long Term Mortgage Credit for farmers. Each province in which loans are made is required to participate in the plan. It has been accepted by a number of the provinces, but has not yet come into operation. Time and results will show the adequacy or inadequacy, as the case may be, of this provision. It means at least acknowledgment of a condition that has for some time called for notice. The farm population, according to some authorities, changes in every twenty-five years; in other words, the farms change hands in that time. Financing facilities that will permit this natural transfer of property to younger people is essential if the farm community is to be kept up to strength. If this recent provision fails to enable young men with good credentials to start farming, it will fail to supply the most important credit requirements, and

therefore should be remodelled without delay. Merely granting loans to farmers who are already established, and perhaps in difficulties, will not suffice. The farmer should be able to obtain as suitable credit and as much in proportion to his needs as other men get for their business; but credit alone will not cure his ills, as many are given to think; in many cases it may make them more acute. Demand for credit is sure to come from those who must be classed as low-level farmers. The vital thing is that money be invested for the *advancement* of farming. The purpose for which it is lent should receive as much consideration as the security.

The key to the situation is the farm boy of to-day, the farmer of to-morrow. There are two possible farming futures before him: a fascinating enterprise and a life of progress and satisfaction, full of opportunity for leadership and service to others, or, a routine business, a life without vision or inspiration, limited to a daily grind, narrow and shallow. Natural endowment may overcome many obstacles, and experience is a great teacher, but too great reliance on these is what has placed farmers where we find them. Other people have made greater use of other instruments, and the greatest of these is education. Education for its intrinsic value or as a technical asset is not yet fully appreciated by farmers. Unfortunately, too, the farm boy is often at a disadvantage in gaining primary education. Our rural schools are the poorest in the land. A recent remark by a girl who had been teaching successfully in a city school, that "rural teachers should be the most highly paid", is not without significance. Economic difficulties are at once apparent; but the suggestion may point to a national necessity. Without good rural schools no countryside will live.

But modern farming demands something more than country schooling. The progress of the past thirty years is largely due to the services of higher education and scientific investigation. There is not a farmer in the country who has not been served in some measure by both. He will continue to benefit by them; but in order to make the fullest use of them in dealing with the complex problems which he has to face, he must be better equipped himself. Agricultural service by well trained men has developed the capacity of the farmer, but it has also been limited by it. It cannot rise any higher than the farmer's power of assimilation. Progress is made through the few who possess superior capabilities; and as the numbers of such men increase, more will be accomplished. The country must have of its best, therefore, and this is by no means beyond the bounds of practicability. The capable boy, who is willing to add to his experience an education and special training

at an agricultural college, should become a special asset to his community. Farms are being operated under the direction of able young men who have had such advantages, and are furnishing extremely useful demonstrations, but a policy is needed that will enable more of them to operate farms for themselves. Every Government in Canada has in its employ a number of such men. The value of their services to agriculture is established. Their numbers, necessarily limited in such service, could be multiplied indefinitely through the medium of practical farming and without cost:—capital on terms and in amount that will enable them to farm as farming should be done is the fundamental requirement. If every district had a group of such men to reinforce the rank and file who may take up farming, and to supplement the efforts of those who are now leading the community, new opportunities would appear, and an improved morale would begin to develop. Desirable young men from other countries will be attracted and retained by rural communities in Canada where they are needed, when the success of Canadian young men is apparent, and when that success is based on a high standard of farming and a high standard of living.

Preparation will reveal to the young men the special opportunities that are to be found in every community, and which the great majority fail to discover.

Capital will enable them to use this equipment for themselves and for others who are in need of help. Business men can make it easier for those who strive to improve rural conditions. And, finally, when the men who can master farming and look after its business and other relations constitute a much larger proportion of the farmers than they do now, the rehabilitation of the countryside will be assured.