

It has always been a pleasure to me to be invited to a meeting of the Women's Institute. In other parts of Canada I have found the Women's Institute the salt of the earth; and, the other day, I heard of good work it had done, on behalf of a school and some teachers, in Nova Scotia.

The plain fact is that, as a student of history, and as an observing Canadian citizen, I look upon the agricultural community as a reservoir of political sanity and morals, and that I regard the Institute as the most useful organization of the agricultural community. I have witnessed the upgrowth of other organizations in the Canadian agricultural community, but at a certain stage these have been led by the nose into booby-traps. The Women's Institute has shown more intelligence. I hope it will continue to be intelligent. It will need all the intelligence it can muster in the days to come.

Forces are released which threaten today the very foundations of our society. There is no widespread conspiracy, of course, to bring about such a result. Society

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is rarely threatened by an external enemy. It is like a garden or orchard, it requires more than planting, and more than a fence to keep out spoilers of the fruit. It requires everlasting attention if it is to be kept in repair. And the attention must be intelligent, scientific to the last degree. Now, as gardeners and horticulturists know, scientific and intelligent attention means much more than the skill to be learned in an agricultural school. It means a study of world markets, it means an almost uncanny prescience in many directions. Somis it with those who are concerned with the welfare of the agricultural community.

In a book published a few years ago: "The History of Darlington Township" (in Ontario), by the late Professor Squair, of Toronto University, some of the economic changes in agricultural life, caused by the introduction of farm machinery, were clearly traced. But, even in the pages of that shrewd observer, the more important social changes connected with it, were altogether missed. The most striking of these

which is apparent to every one, on a moment's reflection, is the shrinking of the population of the country-side, of the fishing villages and of the lumber camps. Now that great change is the parent of many other great and very serious changes. It has, as every one knows, resulted in a great redistribution of political power. This, in turn, has brought about a radical change in the economic policies of the country, or those who have controlled the country. It has also made the country and the little country town a less attractive place to live in. As machinery has made larger and larger farms not merely a possibility but an economic necessity, the farmer's family has had a lonelier and lonelier existence. We are told today that the telephone, the automobile and the radio have overcome this, but for a rather long generation these things arrived too late. Again, for many years now, I have been accustomed to think of these great changes in terms of rural schools. It is a commonplace among Canadian educationalists that the rural schools, ever so precious an element, have become the mere husks of themselves, and that all the efforts made to consolidate them have not yet overtaken the mischief.

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Now, I have no intention to waste either your time or my own in a trite dirge for the good old times. It is the future that we are all concerned with. What practical steps can be taken here and now, in this age of machinery, in this age of change, which heedlessly neglects and wantonly destroys things which no one in his senses can be content to lose?

Would it, I wonder, be a safe and sane beginning, to turn our attention to the millions of acres, in the older parts of Canada, which now produce nothing - neither crops, nor wool, nor milk, nor timber? This may sound like madness in these so-called days of over-production, when raw commodities seem valueless. But, in the first place, no student of economics can be brought to believe, in spite of all the unsold and rotting commodities, that a real over-production exists. Cities and nations are starving, unclad, unemployed. I have heard, and I have even read, in little smart-Aleck articles, that nowadays men would rather starve in the cities than work on the land. Now I want,

as seriously as I can, to denounce that as a hellish doctrine. I don't believe that millions of my fellow men are willingly unemployed. To believe that means to give up one's belief in common sense, and faith in humanity. And it is monstrous that in this crisis of society one should bandy light words.

But, of course, it is no test of a man's honesty to send him out to a swamp, or a wilderness of rocks, with some seed potatoes and a hoe. If farmers' cooperative societies have failed, with all their accumulated experience, one cannot expect the individual greenhorn to save himself. Besides we must surely know, today, that it is not the salvation of the individual that is at stake. Society and civilization are at stake. If ever political sense, and a capacity for thinking corporately, were needed, it is now.

Further, we may have to modify our belief - I almost said our superstitious faith - in machinery. We may have to give up our idolatrous admiration of mere size, of doing things on a big scale. Few of us, perhaps would go the length some thinkers have gone,

and denounce machinery altogether. Yet, I think, none of us can deny that machinery has failed, and failed very signally, to bring the millenium that it was promised it would bring. Perhaps about machinery, as about other things, we shall have to fall back on the common sense of Sir Robert Giffen, who used to ask a hundred years ago, when he heard that a thing was good, "How good?", and, when he heard that a thing was bad, "How bad?".

And, now to come back to our empire of waste lands in the older parts of Canada. You know them! There is hardly a Canadian who has not seen them through train windows, or from an automobile. But those who have travelled the country afoot, and who travelled in Europe afoot, know what a colossal waste we tolerate. Within fifty miles of some of our large Canadian cities there is enough absolutely unproductive land to feed a Belgian province. But, in these Canadian cities, there is still much unemployed capital, and there are tens of thousands of unemployed men. Granted that world trade has broken down. There was a time when we Canadians never thought of

world trade! There are many Nova Scotian communities which are ten times happier today than communities to the West, because they are ten times more self sufficing. It may be a far cry from 160 acres and an automobile to "two acres and a cow". But perhaps somewhere between lies the road to salvation.

Now, do not mistake me. When I talk of vacant wasted Canadian lands, and say that a small part of them could feed a Belgian province, I am not thinking of those stupid and mischievous schemes to transplant millions of Europeans into Canada. I mentioned the unemployed already in Canadian cities. And I am thinking even more of that "surplus rural population" as it is so often called, that year after year becomes urban, or moves to the remote West. There are some who will tell you that the whole matter is very simple. They flourish the economic principle of "diminishing returns", and say that while there is fertile vacant land in the West the poorer lands in the East must remain uncultivated until such time as Western lands grow scarcer, when it becomes profitable to work the poor Eastern lands again they will be worked, and meantime no one need worry about them. Now there are two points to remember about all this -

(1) that very few things in our Canadian development can be said to have gone according to economic laws. It is not the natural fertility of the Western lands that has hurt our Eastern agriculture so much. It is the vast and artificial expenditure of money we have made in attempting to open up the West overnight. To say nothing of railways, water routes, roads, and Western real estate booms, if only that money which has been spent on advertising the Canadian West in Europe and the United States, had been spent in improving Eastern rural communities, what an entirely different country side should we have around us today! After defying economics as we have been for decades, it is impossible for us to say: "Things have happened thus and thus because of an economic principle, (2) We must consider the matter socially and humanly, and as I believe the Women's Institute considers it. If rural life is not merely a blessing to those who lead it, but salutary to the moral welfare of the whole nation, we must study how to increase it, we must resist with all our powers and all our intelligence any diminution of it.

A great beginning could be made at this very moment in afforestation. How must we have talked about afforestation in the last few decades, and how little have we done.

Suppose the authorities of a village or a township laid their heads together on this matter. They have known one another for generations; they know every "rise" of ground, and every valley in the neighbourhood. They know the cheapness of scrub forest land and pasture on the upper hillsides and stony heights. Suppose they buy a tract of this for the community, and fence it. That could be done on a thirty-year bond issue at a negligible charge on the tax-rate, and for the bond issue the land itself would be ample security. The forestry department of the province, and the forestry faculties of many Canadian universities, would be overjoyed to give them advice at this juncture, and later, when they felt advice was needed. But there is enough woodlore and woodcraft in almost every Nova Scotian community to render scientific advice unnecessary at any early stage. Over much of the fenced tract no planting would be

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necessary. It would be found that almost everywhere spruce, and in many places ash, birch, beech and maple, are year after year sowing themselves. In some fortunate spots there is even white pine reappearing! Very often only thinning, and a little foresight in terracing a steep slope, would be necessary. On bare spots a barrow or two of earth from lower down is all that would be needed to encourage natural sowing. For years the chief occupation of the village owners would be precautionary. Keep the sheep out; but down the choking alders; let no timber be cut, whatever the temptation; above all, let no one strike a match, within or without the enclosure, in such a way as to risk a fire. Co-operative village labour (not corvee rotating labour) a few days in the year, and occasional talks to the children in the local school, by the minister, the doctor, or the reeve, will be all that will be necessary.

In ten years' time this mixture of precaution and salutary neglect will have transformed the village or township wood-plot. It will begin to look like an investment. The pride of its public owners will be great. The thinnings, and the clearing of

underbrush, will have begun to supply fuel to the nearest neighbours, who will be glad to remove the debris. If the tract has been well chosen in the first place, and is sufficiently large, it may already appear that a regular forester is necessary. But by this time the increase in the stand of timber will justify a slight increase in the public expenditure, and the community will almost certainly contain a woodsman, part of whose time can be secured cheaply. (The public ownership of the enterprise will obviate the jobbery that goes with such appointments when made by a government.) Now will be the time for expert advice. Whether Norway pine or White should be planted; what sheltered slopes should be given over to hardwood; whether some of the large trees should be cut and sold; how many feet radius should be allowed for spruce trees, and how many for hemlock; and so on. Imagine the tract at the end of twenty-five years! The thirty-year bond issue will now appear a trifle, for the profits of the undertaking will have caught up to it. Employment will have been given in the village; the cost of fuel will have been kept down; and the community will have a possession of ever

increasing value and general utility. If two or three adjoining townships embarked on such a venture, there would, in a generation or so, be a different story to tell about the scarcity of lumber. Those who have seen even twenty-five year old plantations, which began with nothing, will know what I mean. But in thousands of parts of Nova Scotia the beginning would be made with a good sprinkling of trees from twenty to a hundred years old. It is, in fact, this very feature of the situation which emboldens me to be urgent, and to call public attention to it. I say, and I know, that it would be easy to compass this far-reaching reform now. But a generation from now it will be a very different matter.

But the political and social effects of such a movement I think I see in advance. A society cannot live by its forests alone, nor is public ownership of forest land the political salvation of a people. But to have in the midst of a community a living and growing object lesson in public thrift and cooperation, and of a political responsibility equally shared by every man, woman and child, would have a

very steady effect on our life and our notions of citizenship. In North America, in many quarters, "citizenship" is equivalent to "an opportunity to make a living". Certainly citizenship should mean, among other things, a living, and a decent living; but that is not the whole matter, and indeed it is only one of the material features of citizenship. In other places in North America citizenship is coming to mean the privilege of calling on a government, far away in Washington or Ottawa, to "set something going." Local self-government, which is the very base and foundation of English responsible and representative government, is somehow being forgotten. A citizen appeals to his parliamentary representative, or gets up an agitation in the press, but he rarely thinks of talking matters over with his neighbours. This, by the way, is the very root of our educational difficulties in many parts of Canada. And, in general the problems of government, and the problems of life, are for the most part local problems.

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