

# THE RIFT THAT CLEAVES CANADA IN TWO

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CITY Life *versus* Country Life—an old, old theme. It is a theme most useful to playwrights and novelists. Always they have been able to strike from it sparks of sentiment or of wit. We still laugh at Squire Western's wrangles with his sister.

But in Canada the cleavage between town and country is no laughing matter. Canada is a young country, and in fact an agricultural country—in fact, but not in spirit. That is the reason why farming here is not the respected honoured vocation which one might expect it to be. No; Canadian leaders and thinkers, all those most mentally alert and well-educated, look upon farming as the Cinderella of the professions; they are entirely urban-minded. This is not a good thing for the nation; it is a bad thing.

The rift is becoming wider and deeper. The closing of it is a problem which bristles with difficulties; yet it ought to be closed.

Canada has no peasant population; that is her great lack. Perhaps this lack explains the mental attitude of the people of the cities, especially the women. They look down upon all farmers, not differentiating between the man who owns his farm and the agricultural labourer. Most country dwellers are, in urban eyes, awkward, narrow, inarticulate, even bovine. There is some justification for this attitude.

Occasionally a city-bred man, even perhaps from a private school, when choosing his walk in life, will consider farming. He believes that he would like it. He has the theory that the better a man's education, the better farmer he will make; and he is convinced that a much larger number of educated men ought to become farmers. However, he sees, with his mind's eye, the raised eyebrows of his friends, at the announcement of any such intention; he shrinks from the ridicule of the women of his acquaintance. So he drops the idea, and enters instead some profession already overcrowded. Later in life he may regret his decision and will perhaps gratify his inclinations (if he has prospered) by buying a country estate and living on it, taking up agriculture as a hobby.

But he is not the average man of the city. The average man I have in mind is the clerical worker on a small salary.

He is present, in scores of thousands, in every large city. Unless he is gifted with unusual ability, or meets with unusual luck, his income is not likely to increase much; and, after a few years of marriage and fatherhood, he realizes that money does not go far in a city; it goes a very, very little way. He asks himself, "Would I not be as well off, making my living at farming—as well off in a material sense, and far happier?" Very likely he is convinced, as nearly everyone in a city is convinced, that anyone can farm. He says to himself, "I will consult X." X is a gentleman-farmer of his acquaintance. Gentlemen-farmers are a disappearing breed, but a few still remain. (Yes, I do mean "gentleman" in the exact dictionary sense of that much-abused word.) X confesses that he has been through a good deal, is still going through a good deal; notwithstanding some solid compensations, he is a disillusioned man.

If the average man is not yet daunted, he confides the plan to his wife. She is an average woman, sensible and affectionate, but no heroine; she therefore scouts the idea.

Once there was a wife who was heroic as well as sensible and affectionate; she did not scout the idea. There was enough money to buy a farm and on a farm the two settled down, with their family of boys and girls. They were going to live by farming, they said, while maintaining their inherited way of life and abandoning none of their ideals. Many years of hard work and poverty followed, as a matter of course. The children received the best education that rural Canada affords; they grew up in an environment that was ideal, physically, the parents striving to limit contacts from which might be "caught" undesirable rusticities of speech and manner. This was difficult. Even more difficult it was to keep their resolve as to their way of life; but they did preserve their interest in the fine arts, even achieving something—the one in music, the other in the literary world. By the time the children had reached maturity, the worst of the poverty was over.

"And so," you say, "it all ended well, then, did it?"

No; it did not. These two people, the kind of citizen which Canada can ill afford to lose, both died before their time, years and years before their time—victims of, or martyrs to, the social and economic structure of Canada. The physical strain had been too great. Other tragedies come to mind, differing in kind but not in degree. Such experiments, in Canada, have never ended happily—experiments of gently-bred people attempting to make

a living by farming, while shaping for their children a destiny similar to what would otherwise have been theirs, and keeping in contact with what is being thought and said and done in places where men and women rub shoulders with one another.

Thus the average woman has solid grounds for declining to follow her husband to the farm. She may be as ardent a lover of the countryside as he. She may prefer to look out upon fields and woods rather than upon paved streets and buildings in rows, prefer to see stars at night rather than mere city lights. Dullness and occasional loneliness may, in her eyes, be no worse than the close proximity of neighbours. She knows that for every pleasure lost—the bridge party, the frequent visit to the theatre or concert-hall, the beautiful church service—there would be in country life a compensating joy. But she is always more keenly alive than is her husband to the social aspect of things. The effect, socially, upon her children is present to her mind. She asks, will the teaching in a rural school be as good as that in a city school, or (if the children are pupils of a private school) will they be able to come in and out of the city conveniently, or at all? Secondly, who will be their playmates? Thirdly, what will be their history when they will have grown up? Her husband may laugh and call her "Clever Alice", but what she has in mind is the subject of love and marriage. If her sons are to become farmers, she asks in all seriousness, will they have enough, when the question of marriage arises, to offer to the kind of girl they will be likely to wish to marry? Will there be anyone for her daughters to marry? Most married women still have the belief that marriage for a woman is the happiest lot, and wish to bring up their daughters in an environment which will make them good judges of men and will also provide opportunities for them to marry men who will be congenial to them.

She falls into a reverie, this average city wife, and the burden of her reverie is "If only".

"There are Sally and her husband," she thinks, "and Janet and her husband." These women are former schoolfellows living in the next block, and both are people of slender means; both husbands have been heard to talk enthusiastically and wistfully of farming.

"If only," she says to herself, "I could persuade Sally and her husband and a few others like them—If we all made the move simultaneously and all settled in the one rural neighbourhood, could we not be in ourselves an effective though small social

co-operative group? Why, every problem would disappear almost as soon as it arose! Even the really baffling question—what clothes these amateur farmers would wear daily when at work and when at leisure—might be solved by some system of sharing the hired man or hired men, handing them round, as it were—”

At this point she confesses to a little vagueness; and then the daydream fades, and she sees the bleak fact: never, never in a lifetime could she persuade Sally or Janet—much less eight or ten others—to make such a revolutionary change in their lives. Although she herself is a zealous young woman, her main zeal is for the welfare of her children. If along with it there burns in her breast a crusading zeal, it can never blaze into action, because she has very little leisure time. As far as she is concerned, she acknowledges sorrowfully the present tendency in Canadian life must continue—the tendency towards a more and more artificial life. All she can do about it is to give countenance and encouragement to any brave people who contemplate such a plunge (should they ever cross her path), and herself ignore the existence of the rift and frown upon the prevalent attitude in cities towards farming and farmers, especially stamping out in her own children any manifestations of a “superior” spirit. She may live to see the desired development; it may come by the time her grandchildren are grown up.

It is, then, in the most unlikely places that we must look for the prospect of a change—the corridors and playgrounds of the private schools, and the high schools of the “best” neighbourhoods of a city. The “teen-age” boys and girls must be led gently and unobtrusively to alter their view. If the day ever dawns when a girl who is the product of a private school can gather her friends round her and say, “I am going to marry John Smith; he is a farmer”, and see no eyebrows raised, hear no titters; when a young man who is a graduate of a private school or a “classy” high school can announce to his friends that he is going to be a farmer, and perceive in them no reactions embarrassing to himself; then there will be a prospect of more happiness for that large body of Canadians now chained to the cities and thereby forced to lead a circumscribed life—those Canadians of limited means, but good education, cultivated tastes and high ideals.

Within the last year a prominent Canadian journalist has both written and spoken on the subject, “Of Low Professions.”

The gist of his remarks was, I think, that a people can be judged by the kind of man it honours, and that Canadians do not always pay the most honour to those to whom it is most justly due. In Canada there is a class of men which receives rather more than its share of applause and respect—the men who have chosen the calling of the manipulation of money. This activity undoubtedly calls for a high degree of ability and skill; and these men are, for the most part, upright, honest, and able. No doubt they merit all the deference, all the distinctions they receive; but can anyone, can they themselves describe their calling as a “high profession”? There are some among us who would like to see Canadians, more often and in greater numbers, rush to honour the man who has to his credit some achievement in one of the arts or sciences; and farming is a science.