

that while in a general way the American farmer was never more prosperous or better off than he is to-day, agriculture is not commercially as profitable as it is entitled to be, considering the labour and energy that the farmer expends and the risks he assumes, and that the social conditions in the open country are far short of their possibilities. The leading specific reasons for this condition are stated to be lack of good training for country life in the schools; the disadvantage or handicap of the farmer as against the established business systems and interests, preventing him from securing adequate returns for his products; lack of good highway facilities; the widespread continuing depletion of soils, with the injurious effect on rural life; a general need of new and active leadership. It is true that the standard of life in the country in New Zealand has improved greatly during the last fifteen years, especially in the older-settled districts, but there is still an urgent necessity for raising it higher. Proposals in this direction we submit later in this report.

(5.) During the last few years the migration from the country has been increased by the number of retired country dwellers who have come to live in the towns.

(6.) During the last twenty years there has been noticeable a tendency [for certain small rural industries, such as milling and smith-work, to shift into the towns. This has resulted from the greatly increased facilities for transport and the economies that accompany the concentration of manufactures at the local centres of population.

(7.) Another cause is the difficulty of obtaining land in suitable areas and localities on advantageous conditions.

Its effects in
New Zealand.

4. (1.) In estimating the effects that this population movement has had in New Zealand, your Commissioners would express the opinion that the movement of the rural population to the cities has tended to increase the rents of houses and land to the urban population.

(2.) It has also increased the difficulty of obtaining skilled farm labour in the country. Several witnesses stated that they had been compelled by the scarcity of farm labour to abandon wheat-growing, and they intended to try grazing or dairying instead, while others claimed that even the development of dairying was being checked by this cause.

(3.) Prices in New Zealand of our exported products are fixed mainly by the London markets, but the lessening of the amount of wheat grown all over the world must tend to raise the price of wheat in the London markets.

(4.) The effect of the relative increase in the city population has not been so marked in New Zealand as in other countries, and the cities appear to have been able to absorb the workers up to the present; but it is to be feared that unless steps are taken to check this movement the same ill effects may be expected as have been experienced in other parts of the world.

(5.) In many parts of the world the effects of the rural exodus are arousing serious fears. King Edward, at the opening of the English Parliament shortly before his death, called attention to the necessity for legislation by which a larger number of the population might be attracted to and retained on the land. The Right Hon. Sir Horace Plunkett, at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, stated that a growing apprehension of the effect of the rural exodus and urban concentration upon national well-being has produced an urgent desire to save the country from the town, by making agricultural industry more remunerative and by brightening life upon the farm. "It does not appear," he said, "to have been considered how far the ethical and physical health of the modern city has been due to the constant influx of fresh blood from the country. At present, the town makes an irresistible appeal to the spirit of enterprise and to the growing craze for excitement; but sooner or later, if the balance of trade in this human traffic be not adjusted, the raw material out of which society is made will be seriously deteriorated, and the national degeneracy will be properly charged against those who failed to foresee the evil and treat the cause. Physical degeneracy, and the harassing prospect of employment in the towns, a prospect that soon every nation will have a huge derelict population, not merely unemployed but unemployable, have forced the problem of rural life over the threshold, aye, into the very forefront of practical politics."