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**Keep the Farmers Off the Farms**

by Arthur Lower  
in Saturday Night

Reports appeared in the papers not long ago describing the sale of farm top-soil to make suburban lawns. Apparently certain farmers are simply selling the earth beneath their feet, their capital equipment, to realize a quick cash profit. No one need be surprised, for our Canadian farmers have rarely taken any other attitude than that the earth — that particular portion of it which they "own" — is a mine from which they dig their living.

Parts of Europe, notably certain areas in France, we are told, have been farmed since long before the dawn of history. Some of them have possibly been under crop for three or four thousand years. And today they are as good as ever they were. The same must be true of other parts of the earth, notably China, where millions of people have lived for thousands of years by putting back as much into the soil as they have taken out of it. With such countries our own farms are an unhappy contrast. In most of it, human occupation is a matter of less than a century. And yet in a short three generations what a scene of devastation we have managed to effect. One can go from ocean to ocean in this country and everywhere encounter areas that might correctly be described as desert.

Here in this neighbourhood where I write, we have a hard, lean country where everywhere the earth's bones stick up through the surface in the shape of long limestone ridges and plateaus. In between the ridges lie more or less fertile pockets of soil. The countryside was settled by Loyalist immigrants over a century and a half ago. They had to win a living, somehow or other, from what lay around them, as have their descendants since. No wonder, of course, that they drove the harried earth to destruction.

How? By the usual method. Cutting down the wood for fuel, exposing the bare rock underneath it, turning the cattle into what was left and letting them graze the underbrush. The result is that now just five or six generations after the pioneering generation (as compared with the hundred generations or so of European peasantry), they are square miles of nothing but bleak, flat limestone fields, covered with sagebrush. Much of the country is so bad that men have given up. Today city people have made many a derelict farm into a "country place." In his way farms may have become playthings, but at least the cattle are being kept out of the woods and the trees are recovering.

What is the secret of the old world peasant that enables him to go on providing food, and food surpluses, generation after generation while our farmers at varying speeds, reduce this continent to a desert? Is it not simply that he expects to stay where he is, following the same mode of life as his father and which his sons will follow after him? He is a peasant, yes, quite simply, and the word means "a countryman", one whose whole existence is bound up with the land from which he lives. He does not expect to "make his pile" and "get out"; he stays put and cares for

**MRS. SKUCE SPEAKS AT TEACHER BANQUET**

The annual banquet of the Esqueping Unit, Women Teachers' Federation, was held in Acton. Fifty members enjoyed a turkey dinner in St. Alban's parish hall, catered to by the Ladies Guild of the Anglican Church. Those attending were from Acton, Georgetown and the rural public schools. Mrs. James F. Evans, Georgetown, the president, was in charge of the program and introduced the guest speaker, Mrs. L. L. Skuce. She took as her topic, "There's Nothing New Under the Sun. She was presented with a gift. Mr. Skuce, public school inspector, was also a guest.

what he's got. Canadians do not like the word "peasant" for it seems to them to connote something lowly, a narrow life of toil and poverty. We fool ourselves about it. Many a European "peasant" is a sturdy independent man; many of our "farmers", especially those on marginal soils, are, in the invidious sense of the term, peasants. In this country, in the banner province, Ontario, there are large districts of peasants, and pretty poor samples of peasants at that.

But even our lowest-down peasants I suppose, have some kind of dream of escaping from their lot and going off to become city millionaires. And that is the poisonous weed in our garden.

An example of this comes from a spot in Ontario where an industrial development has ripped the farmers off a couple of thousand acres of farm land. One man who was bought out said that the farm had been in his family since the original grant from the crown and that he was living in the same house in which several generations of his people had been born. "It will come hard to quit the old place," he was reported as saying. "However, you can't stand in the way of progress." And so he pocketed his money and I suppose moved into town.

"Progress," that's the word; this mad scampering about the country on wheels, this brittle mechanical civilization of ours — that's what the popular mind identifies with "progress." For some people, it will be a great day when the entire surface of the earth has become on smooth concrete plain on which cars can charge about in every direction unhindered. The very noise and speed of modern life to many people constitutes "progress."

I heard years ago of a Polish immigrant in western Canada who refused with scorn the offer someone made him for his homestead. "It's my home," was his simple and dignified response.

Perhaps the future lies that way; the simpler people who have been crowding in here as immigrants will displace us old wasters and sinners. They will take care of mother earth and when they come to possess the countryside, with the restless Anglo-Saxon cooped up in his dark Satanic mills, they will not be far from possessing the country too, for from the countryside comes the annual surplus crop of human beings who mainly keep the cities going.

It may be just as well; we English-speaking people are a brash, arrogant and wasteful lot. Maybe the world will be happier, less miserably desolated, with fewer of us.

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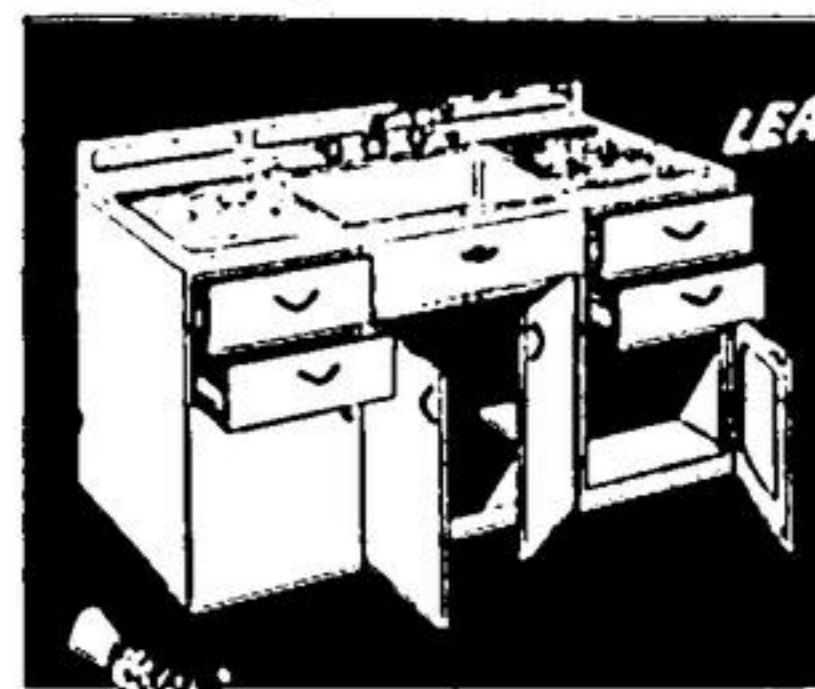
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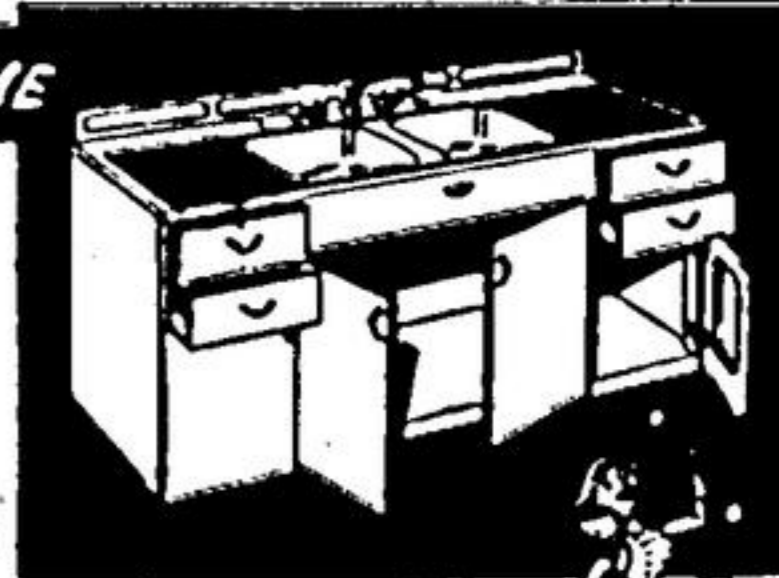
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