

**THE CHALLENGE OF
AGRICULTURE; THE
STORY OF THE UNITED
FARMERS OF ONTARIO**

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The challenge of agriculture; the story of the United farmers of Ontario by Melville H. Staples

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MELVILLE H. STAPLES

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THE STORY OF THE UNITED
FARMERS OF ONTARIO

EDITED BY
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UNIV. OF
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FOREWORD

For almost three centuries after the discovery of America that part of Canada lying west of the Ottawa River was very little inhabited by white men. Adventurers, traders, colonists, and officials who came to seek a fortune, or a home, or both in the New World, clung to the banks of the Lower St. Lawrence or to the Eastern seaboard.

But gradually the resources of the great unsettled region became known, and colonists pushed on into the forest. With infinite labour and unfaltering courage they began to hew out for themselves little plots of land. This movement received a wonderful stimulus about the year 1784, when the United Empire Loyalists began flocking into Canada.

With the coming of the Loyalists, the rapid development of Ontario may be said to have begun. Whatever we may think of the Loyalists' action, we must admire their courage and their tenacity of purpose. "The sufferings of these Loyalists during the long march to Canada were terrible. With their wives and children, and such household goods as could be

carried away, they followed the long trail, homeless, friendless, hungry and weary. Frequently they had to beg their bread or accept food from the Indians."

Nor were their troubles over when they reached Canada, for while "every man received free of charge a grant of two hundred acres, with a like estate reserved for each child the Loyalists during early years lived very hard lives, and frequently went to bed at night without knowing where they would find the next day's food. But they bore stout hearts and strong hands, and they persevered, hoping on, and working always."

While the loyalists were the earliest settlers to come to Ontario in large numbers, they were by no means the only pioneers. It is perhaps not unfair to say that by far the greater part of the heavy toil-some work of opening up the country was done by those who came still later, and without government assistance pushed farther back into the bush. Thrown entirely upon their own resources, almost destitute of means, they braved the loneliness of the "back-woods" and the peril of wild beasts, to make a home where freedom might dwell. Such were the men and women who cleared the land and made it ours; theirs was the hard lot, ours the reward.

As we go up and down the land today we pass by many cemeteries where lie the remains of these gallant pioneers. More often than not their graves are overgrown with thorns and thistles, the headstones awry, perfect symbols of neglect. Are we not forgetting them and their labors, and accepting our heritage too lightly?

And worse still are we not forgetting the high ideals for which they stood, and the hope that led them, through privation and want, to turn the wilderness into homes where their children might live together amid peace and plenty? Who can look about on the social and industrial fabric of our Province today and say with truth that their dream has been realized?

Still their children struggle on, some tilling the soil, some otherwise employed. From time to time well marked movements have broken out amongst them, in which the old heroic spirit has arisen in power. One of the most recent of these has developed in the ranks of agriculture. In that movement some men, only a few, see a terrible danger; the majority see a great hope. Whether that hope will be realized, years alone can tell; but let no one mistake a certain indecision of step for lack of resolution. The pioneer spirit is abroad again; the farmer has to find his way.