

PRAIRIE PATRIARCH: A HISTORY OF ALMON JAMES COTTON 1858-1942

by

Wendy Jean Owen

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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WENDY JEAN OWEN

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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ABSTRACT

Between 1870 and 1914 Canada's prairies were settled by thousands of farmers, many from overcrowded Ontario. While the Ontario farmer has been the protagonist in much Canadian fiction, often being portrayed as a tyrannical patriarch, he has seldom been examined as an individual in historical writing. Agricultural history rooted in political economy and economic history presents the farmer as an anonymous figure contributing to collective statistics about costs, yields, and averages under cultivation. Like the fiction, the historical literature sees the farmer as victim, subject to a myriad of larger environmental and economic forces over which he has little control.

In the career of Almon James Cotton (1858-1942), we have the opportunity to follow the agricultural strategy of an effective and articulate prairie farmer.¹ Cotton is one of the few farmers in early Manitoba for whom extensive financial records and personal papers are available. In his early years in the West, at Treherne, Manitoba, between 1888 and 1902, Cotton established himself by exploiting leased land, combining good fortune, above-average farming practices, and constant expansion of his acreage under cultivation to become known as Manitoba's Wheat King. Detailed analysis of Cotton's surviving account books makes it possible to follow the gradual process by which Cotton achieved his success, providing a case study illuminating the long-standing debate over the costs of establishing a prairie farm. At the turn of the century, with four sons to establish on farms of their own, Cotton shifted from tenancy to land ownership, purchasing 3,000 acres in the newly-opened Swan River Valley.

In the Swan River Valley, Cotton turned patriarch and squire, per-

haps enabling him to avoid the alienation which beset many farmers. He had not only to improve his land but to take the lead in the building of roads, bridges, schools, churches, and even towns. He became briefly involved in provincial politics, running in 1903 for the Manitoba Legislature on a combined Temperance-Liberal ticket. But Cotton found politics unsatisfying, and lavished far more attention on correspondence with over 2,000 potential newcomers to the region, serving as an unpaid agent of the Department of Immigration. He became a spokesman for the successful prairie farmer, sharing in criticism of the eastern establishment and boosting the region in a variety of ways.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1870 and 1914, Canada's prairie provinces were settled by thousands of farmers. They came from all corners of the world, but one of the major sources was the overpopulated farming districts of central Canada, particularly Ontario. The Ontario farmer on the prairies has been the protagonist in a good deal of Canadian fiction, especially in the early days of realism, but he has seldom been examined as an individual in historical writing. We have had a good many studies of the prairie farmer as a group, but few of the historical equivalents of the characters in the novels of Robert Stead and Frederick Philip Grove. In part this neglect results from an absence of source material; few pioneer farmers had the time or the inclination necessary to make possible a biographical approach. In part the neglect follows from the larger-than-life fictional characters, for it has often seemed that real farmers led much less interesting lives than those created by the novelists. One farmer whose records have survived, and whose career did have some dimension to it was Almon James Cotton, known in his time as Manitoba's "Wheat King." Cotton was not only a highly successful farmer who regarded himself as a self-made man, but like his fictional counterparts he built a dynasty in the Swan River Valley region of Manitoba. His life tells us much

about the development of prairie agriculture and settlement in the formative years of the West.

Two distinct sources shape our prevailing images of the farmer in the early years of western expansion. One source, rooted in a long tradition of political economy and economic history, presents the farmer as an anonymous figure contributing to collective statistics about costs, yields, and acreages under cultivation. Often portrayed as a victim, the farmer is subjected to a myriad of larger environmental and economic forces over which he has little control.¹ To a considerable extent, this image was one advanced and perpetuated by the farmers themselves through their various movements of protest. This study of A. J. Cotton, by concentrating on the life of one farmer, enables us to see him not in the abstract, but as a concrete personality, one who makes decisions as well as being acted upon by the outside world.

Born in Ontario, Cotton had farmed there without marked success before removing to Treherne, Manitoba, in 1888. Between 1888 and 1900, Cotton laid the foundations of his reputation as an effective farmer. While much has been written in recent years about the minimal amounts of capital necessary to establish a prairie farm, little is known about the subsequent behaviour of farmers who did achieve success. A. J. Cotton had a deliberate strategy, based upon tenancy of virgin prairie land. Close analysis of his account books for the period 1888-1900 enable us to follow his steady progress

and ultimate emergence as one of Manitoba's leading farmers, a product of good fortune, above-average farming practices, and constant expansion of his acreage under cultivation. By 1898 Cotton was ready to move into a new phase of his career, as large landholder, leading citizen, and founder of a family dynasty in the Swan River Valley.

The move to Swan River takes us to the other source of the image of the farmer, one rooted in the imaginative literature of the prairie West. This source is more ambivalent about the forces to which the farmer is subject, sometimes seeing him triumphing over them and often being submerged by them. The literary image, however, does offer the farmer some sort of humanity in terms of his relationship with his family. The result is not always positive. As one critic has put it, the farmer in much western fiction is

. . . the "prairie patriarch" filled with the righteousness of his own purpose, but in fact a land-hungry, work-intoxicated tyrant. The farm women are subjugated, culturally and emotionally starved, and filled with a smouldering rebellion.²

Characters like Caleb Gare in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Gander Stake in Robert Stead's Grain, and Abe Spalding in F. P. Grove's Fruits of the Earth, provide a powerful evocation of the prairie farmer.³

While the two images of anonymous farmer and literary

protagonist are not often juxtaposed, since political economists and critics of fiction inhabit different world, they are not so much conflicting as complementary. Unable to control either nature or the impersonal economic forces of the external world, the fictional farmer sublimates his sense of alienation in an attempt to dominate the one aspect of his life over which he can exercise power: his family. Prairie writers have developed a variety of versions of this central theme.⁴ On one level, A. J. Cotton represents a real life-embodiment of both images. He was subjected to the impersonal forces, and he did consciously set out to make himself the patriarch of a dynasty. But care must be exercised not to turn Cotton into little more than a mechanically representative figure.

While Cotton did struggle with forces beyond his control, occasionally perceiving them as such, he also managed to turn some of those forces to his advantage. And while Cotton exhibits traits drawn from Caleb Gare, Gander Stake, and Abe Spalding, he was neither introspective nor alienated. He turned to building a dynasty not because of his dissatisfaction with achievements on the land, but because their success made possible a new life with different goals. Cotton was never swept up in "the turbulent tide of Mammonism" - the phrase is Robert Stead's in The Homesteaders - nor did he suffer the "depersonalizing effect of mechanization, the alienating effect of industrialization."⁵ He never became captured by the machine age, allowing his farm to be domin-

ated by labour-saving machinery. If he exploited various members of his family as a labour force, he was also generous and loyal to them, a true paternalist rather than a tyrant. Houses and machines are often employed by the novelists as symbols and metaphors for alienation. Unlike Abe Spalding's edifice, A. J. Cotton's housing was modest and unpretentious, even in his dynastic period. Moreover, Cotton had a positive attitude toward the land, and even after he no longer worked it actively, he revelled in the pleasures of the farmer's kitchen garden.⁶ Cotton was no saint, and he is no more - or less - typical than any of the fictional characters. But his career, especially in Swan River, offers a somewhat less negative version of the prairie patriarch.

The difference between A. J. Cotton and the fictional patriarchs may lie in the way in which Cotton developed his life. He did not attempt dynastic pretensions until he had become successful. And he turned for his pretensions to one of the last manageable frontiers in the Canadian West. In his mid-forties, Cotton turned his back on a southern Manitoba where he might well have found himself subjected to the alienating conditions outlined by both the economic historians and the novelists. Instead, he moved to new territory and new involvements. Perhaps he escaped from the "modern trend" of running "the farm like a factory" by removing to Swan River.⁷ Perhaps such an action was merely avoiding the inevitable. But for Cotton it worked. In

Swan River he became involved in politics, in the petty details of improving the amenities of his district, and in "boosting" both the West in general and Swan River in particular.

One of the most interesting aspects of Cotton's activities in Swan River was his considerable correspondence with prospective newcomers to the Canadian West. As an unpaid agent for the Commission of Immigration, in the early years of the century Cotton wrote to nearly 2,000 intending settlers, answering their queries and offering them advice. In most cases Cotton talked in generalities and cliches, but he did serve as a real-life illustration of a farmer who had been successful, and none of his letters indicated any sense of alienation from his environment. Cotton was an enthusiastic believer in the West, and he communicated his commitment to his correspondents. Enthusiasm and commitment, as well as a definite quality of adaptation and personal growth, make Cotton a sympathetic figure. Together with his undoubted success as a working farmer, these qualities make A. J. Cotton's life and career worth examining in some detail. The pages which follow attempt to understand Cotton and place him in the context of his times.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

1. See, for example, C. A. Dawson and Eva B. Younge, Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process (Toronto, 1940); Robert England, The Colonization of Western Canada: A Study of Contemporary Land Settlement, 1896-1934 (Toronto, 1936); A. S. Morton and Chester Martin, History of Prairie Settlement and "Dominion Lands" Policy (Toronto, 1938); J. L. Tyman, By Section, Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement (Brandon, 1972); Trevor J. O. Dick, "Mechanization and North American Prairie Farm Costs, 1896-1930," Journal of Economic History, 42 (1982), 199-206; Frank Lewis, "Farm Settlement on the Canadian Prairies, 1898-1911," Journal of Economic History, 41 (1981), 517-536; K. H. Norrie, "The Rate of Settlement on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1911," Journal of Economic History, 35 (1975), 410-427.
2. Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton, 1977), p. 90.
3. Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese (1925); Robert Stead, Grain (1926); F. P. Grove, Fruits of the Earth (1933).
4. Harrison, Unnamed Country, 100-130.
5. Ibid., p. 118.
6. A. J. Cotton, "The Farmer's Vegetable Garden," The Nor'West Farmer, 21 December 1904.
7. Grove, Fruits, p. 41.

CHAPTER I: IN THE BEGINNING

Almon James Cotton was born near Port Granby, Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, in 1858. Cotton's grandfather John Cotton had emigrated to Upper Canada with his wife and family in 1838 from Bude in Cornwall, England.¹ John Cotton and his brother William, who had begun farming in the Port Hope area in 1836, were among the flood of English settlers who had entered Upper Canada in the 1830s. John Cotton settled on fifty acres in Clarke Township in Durham County. Almon James was the illegitimate child of John Cotton's daughter Emma, and like many such offspring in the nineteenth century, he was raised by his grandparents. Although brought up on a farm, A. J. (as he became known) went to work for the railroad upon leaving school, probably because there seemed little future on his family's holdings, a typical situation for all but eldest sons in the older parts of Ontario and undoubtedly exacerbated by the manner of his birth.² The agricultural lands of the province were desperately overpopulated by the 1870s and 1880s, and younger members of farm families were forced to migrate elsewhere or leave farming in order to become established. Most of John Cotton's offspring seem to have remained in the immediate area, but four of William Cotton's five children ultimately moved to the United States and the remaining one settled in industrial Hamilton. A. J. achieved sufficient success to

justify marriage, and on 22 June 1880 he married Louise Ford, the daughter of John Gay Ford, a farmer of Little Britain, Ontario.³ In 1881 old John Cotton died, and the young couple took over his fifty-acre farm, renting it from A. J.'s uncle Henry Cotton for \$25 per annum.⁴ Fifty acres was hardly enough land upon which to prosper, but it was a start in life.

The records begun by A. J. Cotton on 23 February 1881, when he "commenced business for himself," show that in his first year of farming he paid out nearly \$100 more than he took in.⁵ However, despite the shortfall in the accounts of 1881, Cotton seems to have scraped by. On his farm barley was the main crop, but like most farms in Ontario at this time, Cotton's was really a mixed holding. In later years he raised horses, both for his own use and for sale. In February 1884, with the help of cash he had earned loading barley onto Lake Ontario schooners, A. J. was able to extend his acreage by purchase of the nearby Henderson farm, then owned by John Staples, a local schoolmaster. Cotton paid \$6,400 for the Henderson property, comprising the centre 100 acres of lot 5 in Broken Front, Township of Clarke, and containing a dwelling house and two barns.⁶ He rented the dwelling on his new property for \$2 per month, which suggests it was not a very substantial building. To help with his expanded land holdings, A. J. took on a hired man - Samuel Henderson, later his brother-in-law. Cotton was to pay Henderson \$160 per annum plus board, washing, and mending.⁷

The expansion of the farm through the Henderson purchase appears to have been a mistake, and Cotton's subsequent reluctance to buy land may have been conditioned by this early experience. In any event, by the autumn of 1887 the Cotton enterprise was in trouble, and the family decided to leave Ontario, "having farmed down there," Cotton later recalled, "until we could farm no longer at a profit."⁸ Whatever the reason for Cotton's difficulties, it is unlikely to have been an absence of hard work. The surviving account books for the early years bear out Cotton's contention that he worked hard for little profit in Ontario. Both A. J. and Henderson worked on the Lake Ontario schooners, and on the railroad when there were blockages to be cleared on the line. They cut and sold cord wood, as well as tending the farm and stock. Although Cotton would later blame American policy for his failure, particularly the McKinley tariff, that legislation did not pass the American Congress until 1890.⁹ The problem was more likely the size of the farm, the lack of good land upon it, and the size of the mortgage. Like many farmers in the area, Cotton made ends meet by supplementing his farm income with non-farm labour, often the sign of an inadequate holding either in size or in fertility.

Selling the Henderson farm proved more difficult than Cotton had anticipated. The farm did not sell at auction when first put on the block in October 1887, and when it fi-

nally sold in December of that year, it realized only \$5,000, \$1,400 less than Cotton had originally paid for it. The original fifty-acre Cotton holding reverted back to Henry Cotton after A. J. removed to Manitoba. After Henry's death in 1910, A. J. came under some pressure, particularly from his sister Lina, to buy the property. But he refused, on the grounds that none of the family were left nearby to supervise the farm, and even if rented out it would cost more in upkeep than it could bring in revenue.¹⁰ Cotton was never sentimental about Ontario. If Cotton lost money on his land, his disposal at auction of farm animals, implements, and equipment, was more successful. Prices ranged from 25¢ for a seed box to \$45 for a Massey binder to \$145 for a bay horse.¹¹ Cotton did not dispose of all his livestock and implements, however, and in March 1888 he packed a railcar with goods and set off for Manitoba. The car, which travelled from Newtonville, Ontario, to Treherne, Manitoba, via the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railways, also contained the Cotton household furniture. The total value of the goods that Cotton shipped he estimated at \$800, but this valuation was probably not on a replacement cost basis.¹²

The land to which Cotton migrated in 1888 belonged to Major (later Colonel) William McLean, a Port Hope businessman. McLean had visited Manitoba in the summer of 1887, when memories of the bust of 1882 were receding and eastern optimism for Manitoba was rekindling, helped by a good crop

year. McLean purchased land about a mile outside Treherne, about 100 kilometers southwest of Winnipeg on territory newly opened by the railway. The land was the east half of section 3, township 8, range 10, west of the first meridian. Obviously a speculator, McLean needed someone to bring the land under cultivation. He was prepared to give a five-year lease with an annual rental of one dollar payable at the end of the year, providing he acquired all other improvements - broken land, fences, and buildings - at the conclusion of the lease. While such an offer might not at first glance appear attractive, Cotton accepted it. No doubt the experience with the Henderson property made him more willing to lease, as did news of the quality of the land, the cost of which was beyond his available resources. Before he came to terms, Cotton wrote to a neighbouring farmer in Treherne to enquire about the potential of the land, but when he was assured it was good grain-growing land he signed the lease with alacrity. Although there is no mention of statute labour and taxes in Cotton's description of the lease preserved in his account book, it is clear from subsequent books that Cotton was responsible also for the statute labour and local taxes from the outset.¹³ In 1888 Cotton spent three days with his horses helping to clear what became Treherne's main street, and on 23 November 1888 he paid \$14.76 as taxes in full for the year. The taxes were to rise yearly as Cotton broke new land and added improvements, and by 1901 the taxes were \$70

per annum.¹⁴ Despite these charges, Cotton had none of his capital tied up in land, no mortgage costs, and few financial responsibilities for it. Providing he did not over-improve the property, he was getting first cultivation of it for a relative pittance.

In his first year Cotton and his hired hand Albert Taylor between them broke sixty acres of prairie. Cotton had hired Taylor before he left Ontario: "Hired Albert Taylor for two terms of eights in each term at 17.00 per month beginning today (March 17, 1888) for the first term. April 1st 1889 for the following 8 months."¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Taylor was not hired for the entire year but only for the farming months. Presumably he returned to Ontario for the winter. Cotton planted no wheat in his first year; of the sixty acres broken, twenty-three were planted with barley, two and one-half with oats, and one acre with potatoes. The last crops were obviously intended for food and fodder. Cotton planted the barley against the advice of his new neighbours. Barley was not generally profitable in his new surroundings. But A. J. was familiar with the crop and had never planted wheat. And he was very lucky, not for the last time in his Manitoba activities. Rain came at exactly the right time, and he was able to harvest a yield of sixteen bushels per acre, for a total of 356 bushels. He was even more fortunate that 1888 was a year of high prices and he was able to get top dollar for his crop.¹⁶ The Cottons also sold thirty-five pounds of butter and seven

and one-half dozen eggs in their first year in Manitoba. Sale of such surplus did not imply any serious efforts at mixed farming, although Cotton supplemented his income for years through such marketing, but it did mean that the subsistence area of the farm was more than doing its job. As in Ontario, Cotton helped to balance his books by working for other farmers in the area. He earned \$12 for four days' work with his horses and another \$24.50 for fifteen days of manual labour.¹⁷

There was no farm house on Major McLean's land, and for the first year the Cotton family, their hired man - and later Mrs. Cotton's brother William Ford - lived in an abandoned house on a neighbouring farm. Fancy housing was obviously not one of Cotton's immediate priorities in Manitoba; how Mrs. Cotton felt is not recorded. The primitive conditions may have reflected a continuing shortage of building materials in Manitoba at this time. When the Cottons took over the abandoned house it had no floor, but they put one in with the material from the packing boxes in which their goods had been shipped. They floored "a piece overhead large enough for the man to sleep on" and "hung some carpets and curtains for walls."¹⁸ On March 21, 1889, Cotton began to lay the foundation for a new house on Major McLean's land, suggesting that he was reasonably satisfied both with the land and the move to Manitoba. Lumber for the house came to \$124.57 and its total cost was calculated by Cotton at \$217.04. Costs for improvements on the land - outbuildings

and fencing - as well as the need for more implements and more hired help as more land was broken, created more outlays in 1889. Cotton had borrowed money from members of his family in Ontario before he came west and soon began to incur other debts.¹⁹ Like most farmers, Cotton's early years saw him continually in debt. Unlike most farmers, however, Cotton gradually managed to reduce his debts. By 1891 his finances were beginning to improve, and he was not only able to pay off all the debts incurred in that year but also to make inroads into the earlier ones. In 1891 he was able to pay his threshing bill for 1890 and most of the 1891 bill, as well as sending a total of \$250 to his aunt Nora Williams and her husband John back in Port Hope. One of the principal reasons for this turn-around was that Cotton had sold his 1890 wheat crop for \$2516, and was able to look forward to another prosperous year in 1892. By the end of 1892 his net worth had increased significantly, despite extra expenses caused by the hiring of two hands in addition to his brother-in-law, William Förd.²⁰

Despite the early success with barley, wheat was the crop upon which A. J. Cotton's success was built. Wheat had been the foundation of the prosperity of Upper Canada, and it would be the basis of Manitoba's agricultural progress in the last years of the nineteenth century as well.²¹ One of the major concerns of Ontario farmers, of course, was whether wheat could consistently mature in the shorter growing season of Manitoba, especially outside the Red River Valley. Cotton welcomed the arrival of Red Fife, a wheat

strain which matured in 115-125 days, as opposed to the 125-145 days of earlier varieties. Red Fife was a great advantage to prairie farmers of the 1880s. In order to encourage its use the Canadian Pacific produced seed at their experimental farm and even supplied it free of charge to settlers. The development and spread of such hardy strains made the northern expansion of the agricultural frontier of America possible.²²

By the end of 1892 Cotton had broken 270 acres of Major McLean's half section. In that year he had sown 153 acres with wheat, twenty-three with oats, and ten with barley. Twenty-five acres were newly broken and the remainder were probably in summer fallow. Whether the practice of summer fallowing had spread as a direct consequence of the events of 1885, when land had been left croplless because of farmer involvement with the Riel Rebellion, is not clear. But land left fallow produced a crop after the drought of 1886 while land that had been cropped in 1885 did not. The observations of farmers like Angus McKay and W. Motherwell, who had been farming in the Indian Head region since 1882, probably spread by word-of-mouth.²³ Whatever its origins, summer fallowing - that is, ploughing the land in June or July and then keeping weeds and wild grain out by successive harrowings until the following year's planting - was becoming widespread in the West as a means of producing better crops. The Manitoba Department of Agriculture was a firm advocate of summer fallow and was constantly en-

joining farmers to adopt it, both as a means of conserving water and as a way of controlling weeds.²⁴

Weeds had become a major problem in Ontario, and some of the varieties had been imported to the newly-opened western lands in the seed grain that most Ontario farmers brought with them to their new homes.²⁵ The most noxious weeds were wild mustard, wild oats, and thistles.²⁶ In 1884 the Manitoba legislature had passed stringent laws regarding the destruction of weeds. While it was the responsibility of the municipality to appoint overseers to see that the legislation was put into effect, the Department of Agriculture had the responsibility of overseeing the operation and appointed its own noxious weed inspectors to see that the municipalities were doing their duty.²⁷

The main brunt of the battle against weeds had to be born by the individual farmers. The Department of Agriculture was constantly exhorting farmers not to overextend their cultivation, but instead to cultivate no more land than they could work thoroughly.²⁸ Weeds not only choked the growth of the crop but in the grain reduced its grade at the elevator. The worst sources of contamination were non-resident lands which had been cropped in the past but were then left vacant.²⁹ At Treherne Cotton may have felt some of the effects of uncropped land when he first arrived, but the growth in settlement and the reassumption of farms - providing they were taken up by conscientious farmers - soon

reduced the problem to manageable proportions. In the absence of weed killers, summer fallow was regarded as one excellent weapon. The best protection against weeds, however, was the careful farmer. According to Cotton, a yield of fifteen bushels to the acre was often more exhausting to the land than a larger crop, because "where you see a 15 bushel crop you generally see a full crop of weeds which is produced by improper cultivation which is not profitable to the producer and impoverishes his land for future profitable crops."³⁰

In 1893 Cotton decided to expand his area of cultivation by renting an adjoining half section belonging to Isaac Mawhinney. The arrangement was that Cotton was to break 155 acres of North Half-section 2.8.10W, as well as having the option to break more. Mawhinney himself was to fence 180 acres, while Cotton agreed to fence any land that he broke beyond 180 acres, as well as paying the taxes, doing the statutory road labour, and giving a dollar rent per annum.³¹ At the end of five years, the land was to be "in as good a state of cultivation regarding roots, grubbing etc" as the land Cotton rented from Major McLean.³² Landowners obviously found the prospect of putting land into active cultivation attractive, regarding such "improved" land as more valuable than unimproved. Such standards were reflected in the prices paid for land. As Cotton consistently demonstrated, to some extent older assumptions carried over from the east were not totally relevant in the new environment. In most

of Ontario, improving land meant clearing it of bush and forest, a slow and laborious process which could be done at the rate of a few acres a year. Although breaking prairie land was not a simple matter, it was seldom as complicated or as expensive as in the east. Cotton was always pleased to take advantage of the premium placed on improved land by his compatriots, and built his success on improving land rented from others at minimal cost.

A. J. broke seventy-five acres of his new land the first year, summer fallowing twenty-seven acres of the total. While he did not do all the breaking himself, he and his hands were also involved in planting ever-increasing amounts of acreage, something they could not have done while clearing Ontario woodland. In 1893 Cotton sowed a total of 200 acres of wheat, forty of oats, and forty-three of barley. His yields were not more than average, although his increase in acreage sown resulted in more grain to sell. So long as expansion did not put him too far in debt, he could expect to prosper. Nevertheless, despite cash returns from the subsistence areas of the farm in 1893, Cotton calculated a small loss in net worth on the year. The reason for the loss was partly increased wages paid to William Ford and Ezra Haskill, who now earned \$220 per year apiece. Haskill had lived in Mariposa near the Fords and had moved to Treherne with his family in April 1893. But the greatest share of Cotton's increased costs were the product of expansion, coming from the construction of a granary and two stables, as

well as the purchase of additional farm equipment. Despite the use of rented land, expansion of acreage required new expenditures of money.³³ At the same time, Cotton's decade of expansion in the 1890s predated most of the mechanization which later plagued the prairie farmer, and he did not have to weigh large capital expenditures for equipment into his calculations.

In 1893 Cotton's original and highly favourable five-year lease with Major McLean ran out. From 1894 he was to pay \$450 per year to rent the east half of section 3, township 8, range 10 west. It must have been tempting to relinquish the lease and concentrate on the Mawhinney land, but despite the enormous increase in rent, Cotton dug in and continued to pay it. He increased his acreage under cultivation to accommodate his increased land costs. By 1895 he sowed the largest acreage of wheat to this point in his farming career - a total of 314 acres - and his yields were the highest ever. Averaging over forty bushels per acre, he was able to ship 12,585 bushels of number 1 wheat in nineteen railcars to Fort William. It was this wheat shipment, both in terms of quantity and quality, which first earned A. J. Cotton the sobriquet of "Manitoba's Wheat King."³⁴

Cotton and his family took advantage of success and excursion rail rates to return east for a visit to Ontario. A. J., his wife, and their two youngest children Frances and Almon left on 17 December 1895.³⁵ In Ontario, Cotton repaid the money he had borrowed years earlier for the move

to Manitoba. It must have been a satisfying moment to be free of these old debts, however small, and the gesture of clearing them demonstrated the extent of A. J.'s success in the new province. He undoubtedly strutted a bit, like most prodigal sons, but he had indeed done well.

The visit to Ontario lasted until 2 March 1896. In addition to clearing the debts, there were presents to buy for various members of the family, such as a silver cake stand for Mrs. Cotton's sister Sophronia Henderson. There were also items to be bought for the Cottons themselves: clothes, silver cutlery, twelve yards of carpeting. Cotton celebrated his return from Ontario by further extending his holdings, renting yet another quarter section. This land was owned by Dr. T. G. Phillips of Toronto and his wife Elizabeth. Although an absentee landowner at this time, Phillips does seem to have had some connection with Treherne and later resided there.³⁶ Cotton may well have been "improving" the land prior to Phillips' arrival in the province. The lease on this new quarter section, the southwest quarter of section 2, township 8, range 10, west, was again for five years. Under the terms of the lease Cotton was to pay a yearly rent of one dollar, break sixty acres, fence the property with two wires, execute the statute labour, and pay half of the taxes. 1896 was a bad crop year, however. Cotton's yields were down precipitously, and at the end of the year his estimated net worth reflected the crop: it

was down \$58.50.³⁷

Despite the setback of 1896, A. J. Cotton pressed on. By 1897 he was farming the whole of section 2:8:10, still without having committed any capital to his land assembly operations.³⁸ He had a total of 960 acres to cultivate in 1897. One of his side-interests, the breeding of horses, began to pay off in this year. By breeding his own draft animals and selling the surplus, Cotton transformed one of the major expenses of expanding cultivation into black ink on his ledger. He had purchased stock from Major McLean and had it shipped west, as well as buying locally.³⁹ His breeding efforts paid off in July of 1897 when three of the four colts he had entered in the Holland Fair took first prizes, and one of them - a one-year old mare named Laura - won a special prize as well. 1897 was a good year in many other ways, and at the end of it Cotton had \$4,361 in the bank, the first time he had a substantial balance in an account he had initially opened in 1896.

Reflecting his increased prosperity, for the first time Cotton began in 1897 to loan money to others. The lack of local banking facilities in rural areas was always a problem, particularly for cash to tide farmers over the continual cash flow problems inherent in their operations. When Cotton was beginning in Manitoba he had borrowed money from his family and the more prosperous members of his community, and he always regarded credit as critical in starting up a farm. As Cotton prospered it became his turn to lend money to others. Between 1898 and 1900 Cotton had almost \$4,000

out on mortgage at eight percent.⁴⁰ Such loans were probably not what we would today regard as mortgage lending, but were simply money secured by mortgage. He obliged not only neighbours but institutions in the community, lending to the Treherne Elevator Company and the Matchett Methodist Church. Interest rates varied from seven percent to the church to ten percent for some private borrowers.⁴¹ While Cotton obviously benefitted financially from his money-lending, he was only doing informally what others did when they organized small local banks like the one begun by Bailey, Lockhart and Brown at Gladstone.⁴² That bank had started with a capital fund of \$10,000, and like Cotton's lending was designed principally to serve local men and local needs. Moneylending had always been a major means of acquiring local influence, as well as additional income, in small rural communities.

But A. J. Cotton was not to become a major figure in Treherne. In November of 1897, Cotton's brother-in-law William Ford made a trip to the Dauphin Country to look for land for himself and his father.⁴³ John Gay Ford was seventy-two and ready to retire from his farm in Ontario. Talk of the possibilities of agriculture in the Dauphin area had been circulating since 1883, when a party of men from the Gladstone district had gone to investigate the new country. Some of the men had been so favourably impressed by what they had seen that they returned there the following year to settle. The district was settled piecemeal over the next

few years, but the absence of railway facilities was a deterrent to substantial growth and a discouragement to existing settlers, who were faced with having to haul their grain by wagon seventy to ninety miles to get it to market.⁴⁴ Such distances made grain growing virtually uneconomic.⁴⁵ Furthermore, although yields were often high, the quality of the land was quite variable.

The arrival of Mackenzie and Mann's Lake Manitoba Railway and Canal Company line from Gladstone with links to Portage la Prairie and Winnipeg - which occurred in January of 1897 - opened up the country anew, and many fresh settlers arrived. These newcomers had been encouraged in part by the efforts of T. A. Burrows, the Dauphin area representative in the Manitoba legislature, who had "sounded forth its praises with such persistency."⁴⁶ In the autumn of 1897, after all the harvesting and threshing had been finished, many who had been working on farms in southern Manitoba headed for Dauphin. Among them were William Ford and two brothers - Hubert and Warner Loat - who had come from Ontario to spend the spring and summer working on a farm in Manitoba.⁴⁷ The winter defeated the Loats, however, as it did Will Ford. The snow in the area was soon over a foot deep, and selecting land under such circumstances was virtually impossible. At Dauphin the prospective settlers heard talk of the opening of a new district - the Swan River Valley - in the following year. The Dauphin region already had many settlers and the best land was gone, while the new area would be an

opportunity to start afresh on the ground floor. If the rumours about the quality of the land and the relative mildness of the climate proved accurate, the Swan River Valley was not to be ignored. The Loat brothers "decided to camp on the Drifting River all winter and start to the Swan in the spring."⁴⁸ William Ford returned to Treherne and some home comforts, but he and A. J. Cotton obviously spent many winter hours discussing the pros and cons of the new district.

As one of the leading wheat farmers in Manitoba, A. J. Cotton at first glance seemed an unlikely pioneer to open a new northern district of Manitoba. Young men like the Loats or unestablished men like Will Ford, who would find land prices an important consideration, were the obvious settlers of the Swan River Valley. But both his personal situation and conditions in Treherne were changing. Cotton was casting around, looking for land, and he was willing to consider heading north.

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CHAPTER II: FROM TREHERNE TO SWAN RIVER

The years in Treherne had been prosperous ones for A. J. Cotton. Not only had he paid off his debts and greatly increased his net worth, but his success as a farmer was widely publicised and he was held up as an example to the community. Nevertheless, Cotton began casting around for an opportunity to move from the Treherne area. His reasons for considering such a move were only vaguely related to the strictly economic calculations about which modern economic historians have written at length.¹ Cotton's sons were maturing and he felt the need to provide for his children, which was difficult to accomplish on leased land, however economically viable that land might otherwise be. Cotton's paternal, indeed patriarchal, instincts were asserting themselves, and he began to cast around looking for large amounts of new land at reasonable cost. His letters at this time are filled with references to the way land prices were rising in southern Manitoba, and when he finally vacated Colonel McLean's land at Treherne in 1901 he recommended that the rent be raised there to \$640 per annum. In one epistle Cotton noted "a farmer living 3 miles from Treherne who has a section of good land, with a house on it worth \$1,600, a \$600 barn, and \$4,000 in chattels and he is offering the whole lot for \$14,000 with \$10,000 down."² Such figures put the land itself at over \$10 per acre in

the Treherne area, with annual rentals of between \$1 and \$2 per acre. Cotton's comments about prices were made from the vantage point of a man who had no intention of investing \$10,000 in an improved farm of medium size. He wanted large quantities of fertile land at reasonable cost, upon which a dynasty could be established. The Swan River Valley would prove ideally suited to his purposes.

The arrival of the railway in Dauphin had precipitated an influx of settlers which in turn put pressure on the Dominion government to open more land in west-central Manitoba for settlement. As early as 1897, The Nor'West Farmer, in its issue on "The Dauphin District," was pushing for settler access to the Swan River Valley, partly because of the favourable reports that emanated from miners and trappers who had visited the district.³ T. A. Burrows, who was not only Dauphin's M.L.A. but Clifford Sifton's brother-in-law, was asked to visit the Swan River Valley on behalf of the Dominion government to advise upon its suitability for settlement. Burrows recommended that the land be opened promptly, and to facilitate that action suggested that a wagon road be cut into the valley. By March 1898 it was known that the federal minister had concurred in this recommendation.⁴ The valley would be joined to Dauphin by the Winnipeg and Great Northern (another Mackenzie and Mann company which later became part of the Canadian Northern), and from Dauphin a rail link already existed to Winnipeg and the Lakehead. The chartering of the railway company meant that

there would be land available to purchase as well as to homestead. There was a great deal of excitement when the news of the Swan River land was made public, fanned by articles in the Dauphin Herald and by an extravagant write-up in the Manitoba Free Press.⁵ In Ontario's older farming districts, the Swan River Valley and the Yukon territory were often mentioned as golden opportunities in the same breath.⁶

Not surprisingly, the early summer of 1898 saw the beginning of a land rush into the Swan River Valley, with Dauphin as the nearest railhead benefitting enormously from the trade brought about by the intending settlers and land speculators. Even those who did not come by train had to visit Dauphin if they wished to purchase railway land, for the Land Commissioner for the railroad (T. A. Burrows) had established his office there. The land office of the Dominion government was set up in a tent at the eastern end of the valley, near the present site of the town of Minitonas.⁷ It was from this "tent-town" that Hugh Harley, the first government agent, supervised the surveying of the valley into the projected eighteen townships, of which ten were provisionally subdivided. The Loat brothers, who had wintered in the valley in hopes of early access to homestead land, suffered a setback when they discovered that the half section they had picked out to homestead was after the survey not included in the homestead land, "so that was no good on account of the new laws."⁸ The odd sections comprised land

reserved for the railway company and schools. The Loats later decided on the south half of 24-35-28, but their experience illustrates that being first on the spot did not necessarily profit a potential homesteader as much as did inside information.

A. J. Cotton was no impecunious homesteader. As soon as the spring work was finished on the thousand acres he was currently farming in Treherne, Cotton prepared a covered wagon and provisions, and on 15 June 1898 "set out for a drive of over 700 miles into a new country where if it suited me, I would pick out new land."⁹ Cotton was among the first of many experienced farmers who would rush into the valley with - as W. L. Morton later put it - "their stock and equipment, picking their lands and occupying them with the practised skill of the Boer voortrekkers."¹⁰ Few of the incomers, however, were proposing to accumulate land on the scale that Cotton anticipated. On his trip A. J. was accompanied by two of his Treherne neighbours, Jack Staples and Alfred Flack, who also "took up land."¹¹ When Cotton had decided sometime in the winter of 1897 that he should start looking for land suitable for setting up his sons in farming, he had investigated land in various parts of the province, none proving both suitable and reasonably priced. Some land with bad water and a scarcity of wood was more expensive than land in Treherne. While Cotton could have afforded \$10 to \$12 per acre, it would have eaten into his capital and gone against his principles. Land in the Swan River Valley was

likely to prove far less expensive. Railway land, which was considered "good soil" and had an abundance of wood and water, was available for between \$3 and \$4.50 per acre. Cotton took no official statements about the quality of the soil as gospel, managing instead to make contact with an "old timer who knew good land when he saw it," and who had prospected the valley on horseback in the fall of 1897. Cotton was prepared to take his word as to the quality of the soil and the best places to locate.¹²

Significantly, Cotton did not concern himself with homestead land. In the first place, homesteading did not provide enough acreage for Cotton's purposes. His decision to pioneer may not have been made for economic reasons, but once taken his pragmatism took over. The railway's land, Cotton was told, was better quality. Moreover, railway land would be closer to the rail line. It would obviously be impossible to continue to farm successfully on the scale Cotton had done in Treherne if there were no way of getting the wheat out easily and cheaply. The knowledge that the railway would be at Swan River and news of a line projected to run southwest down the valley combined to make the region appealing. Although the latter had not yet been determined, Cotton was experienced enough to recognize the likely coincidence of the right of way and the railway's own land holdings.

Cotton and his companions left Treherne on 15 June and arrived at Dauphin on 5 p.m. on Saturday evening, 19 June. The next day was a Sunday and so the little party remained at

Dauphin; Cotton was a strict observer of the Sabbath.

Nevertheless, sometime during his Dauphin visit he managed to chat with T. A. Burrows. On the Monday morning Cotton's wagon left for the Swan River Valley. After another discussion about land with Hugh Harley at the government tent at Tent-town on 23 June, Cotton arrived two days later at the land Will Ford had claimed as a homestead on Thunder Hill at the west end of the valley. As the next day was a Sunday, Cotton again observed the Sabbath, but on the Monday he began his quest for land. He had brought with him a bag of soil from Treherne so that he could compare its quality with that of the new district.¹³ Since he had consulted with both T. A. Burrows at Dauphin and Hugh Harley at Tent-town, he had a fair idea of the land available and the way in which it was being surveyed. Cotton found the land he sought about ten miles east of Thunder Hill and thirty miles up the valley on the banks of the Swan River. "Feasting my eyes," he later wrote, "I picked out 2,400 acres of the finest land in the valley."¹⁴ The land he had selected had not yet been fully surveyed and was therefore not officially for sale. It had been established, however, that "those who first filed applications to purchase would have the first chance of doing so."¹⁵ Cotton wasted no time.

Cotton had taken only one day to find the land that he wanted, and even while he was doing so others were entering the valley for similar purposes. In order to file for the land he would have to get to the railway company's

offices at Dauphin. Cotton worried that he would not arrive ahead of the competition as he "was handicapped by a heavy team, the others driving light rigs." Abandoning all thought of a foot race, Cotton went instead to Russell via Fort Pelly and telegraphed his application to Dauphin.¹⁶ On the way into the valley it had taken Cotton five days to drive from Dauphin to Thunder Hill, but leaving Will Ford's place on the morning of Tuesday 28 June, Cotton had reached Russell - over 160 kilometers - by Thursday noon.¹⁷ His strategy was successful and his efforts rewarded. Cotton's claim was filed well ahead of others. Cotton had initially chosen 2,400 acres of railway company land. He filed only for two sections (13 and 19) in Township 35, Range 28, "the two sections of land I chose myself and walked over the Ground personally and chose them for Grain Growing Purposes."¹⁸ It would be some time before the application could be processed. In the meantime, there was still work to be done at Treherne.

Cotton had once again in 1898 renewed the lease on Isaac Mawhinney's land for a further three years, extending from 1 January 1899 to autumn 1901.¹⁹ He was committed to Treherne for at least this period. In addition to the on-going work of the farm there were various members of the kinship group to be settled. Like many farmers, Cotton preferred to "keep it all in the family" whenever possible, thus insuring dependable labour and fulfilling a dynastic sense, which in his case may have been enhanced by his own origins. In January 1898, T. H. Sleeman, Cotton's half-

brother, had come to Treherne from Ontario. He was to work for Cotton for \$150 per annum, although he was to be allowed to leave any time he wanted. In May 1898, Sam Henderson, his wife Sophronia (Mrs. Cotton's sister) and their daughter Muriel had arrived in Treherne as well. Henderson had worked for Cotton at Port Hope but since then the family had been living at Peterborough. Now they had come west, and Henderson was again to work for his brother-in-law, this time at \$200 per annum. In 1898 Cotton paid out over \$1,000 in wages, mostly to various members of his family, which must have provided some sense of satisfaction to him.

After the 1898 harvest was completed, twenty-five farmers left the Treherne district with their families and effects to take up land in the Swan River Valley. Among them was William Ford, who had summered in Treherne working for Cotton. Ford was going up to the valley to ensure that everything was prepared for the movement of stock and effects from the family farm at Mariposa, Ontario, to Thunder Hill early in the new year. Moving effects from Dauphin to the Swan River Valley would be much easier while the roads were still frozen. Although the railway was due to reach the valley in 1899, Ford preferred to be in place and settled before the onrush of incomers which the railway would encourage. Homestead land if unoccupied could be taken over by squatters, and actual residence was always the best protection.²⁰

In February 1899 Cotton decided to buy still more land

in the Swan River Valley. He wrote to T. A. Burrows that he intended to farm in the valley on a large scale, but that his operations could only be successful if they were in close proximity to the railway. Cotton continued that he had heard that the final route of the line down the valley had not yet been settled. He recommended that consideration be given to bringing the line in as close proximity as possible to the western end of the valley. In Cotton's view these were the best lands, and he pointed out that they were already fairly thickly settled. Cotton himself wished to file for a number of sections in addition to the two whole sections he had already acquired, bringing his total filings to three and one-half sections.²¹ Cotton travelled to Dauphin in May of 1899 to close the deal. He did not include one preferred quarter section and extended his land in another, ending up with all of sections 13, 19, and 21 in Township 35, Range 28W, paying \$4.50 per acre for the first two sections and \$3.50 per acre for the third. In addition he paid \$3.00 to \$3.50 per acre for additional scattered quarter sections. On this trip he put down a total of \$1,425.90 as first payment on the total acreage.²²

Despite his Swan River purchases, Cotton continued to increase his holdings in the Treherne district, leasing an additional eighty acres for three years from Mrs. Roger Robson. The terms of this lease were that Cotton was "to summer fallow what is now under cultivation and do statute labour and break up what is now unbroken and have all Grain

that I grow on what I break and two thirds off summer fallow." Mrs. Robson was to receive one-third of the grain from the already broken land, delivered at the elevator in Treherne, as well as money for one-half of the quarter section's taxes.²³ Once again Cotton had expanded his cultivable acreage at a very reasonable cost.

Cotton travelled again in July of 1899, this time accompanying Mr. and Mrs. John G. Ford to their new home in the Swan River Valley. Also along on this journey were Mrs. Henderson and her daughter Muriel. John Ford's health had been failing for some time and Mrs. Henderson went along to help settle her parents and care for her father. However, John Ford did not long survive the journey' he died in September of 1899.²⁴ Cotton began to cut his 1899 grain crop on 17 August, and with five binders working at once it must have been an impressive sight. Massey-Harris certainly thought so, as on 18 August they sent a photographer to capture on film all their machines at work. The harvest was not without incident, including a spectacular although fortunately not critical accident, when the five binder teams bolted simultaneously.²⁵ The photographer apparently missed this opportunity.

Storage of grain at Treherne was by 1899 a serious problem. Although the town by this time had three elevators, including the Farmer's Elevator with a capacity of 75,000 bushels, as well as a flour mill, the elevators were full and refusing to take any more wheat. The problem was caused

by a shortage of railway cars. As a director of the Farmer's Elevator, Cotton wrote to the traffic manager of the Canadian Pacific Railroad complaining that "Grain is locked up here and cannot get moved." Farmers were desperate because grain buyers had been told not to buy any more wheat.²⁶ If the wheat were not moved soon it would not reach the Lakehead before freezeup and someone would have to pay for storage all winter. For the farmer with bills to pay, the situation was desperate, for if he could not sell his wheat he could not settle his debts. Furthermore, he would be forced to hold wheat all winter, and not all farmers had their own facilities for so doing. As an established large producer Cotton was to some extent protected from the vicissitudes of the local market. He had so much grain that it was economically feasible for him to ship his own production and deal directly with grain brokers either at Fort William or at Winnipeg. But for the small producer or the farmer who was just starting such an independent operation was not possible, and the availability of a competitive local market was essential.

By the end of the nineteenth century the storage and shipping of grain had become a serious western problem. Elevators provided the most efficient means of handling grain, but not all districts had them. The traditional means of storing grain was in flat warehouses along the railway line, whence bags were transferred or loose grain shovelled into a railcar. In an attempt to encourage the

construction of elevators the C.P.R. had announced in 1897 that it would no longer pick up grain from flat warehouses or loading platforms. Furthermore, the C.P.R. offered a site on the railway at nominal rent to anyone who would build a standard elevator of 25,000 bushels capacity, powered by a steam or gasoline engine. Along with this offer went the assurance that box car service would be provided for the elevator, since by using only elevators the turnover of cars would be increased. The C.P.R. did in fact have an insufficient stock of railcars to carry grain, even with the increased efficiency of the elevators, but the company was reluctant to invest more money in rolling stock that was used for only a short period each year.²⁷

The C.P.R. attempt to force the construction of elevators was met with much anger by the farming community, as the flat warehouses provided the only competition to the line elevator companies. Few districts had farmer-owned elevators as did Treherne, and most farmers would be left at the mercy of the line companies if competition were removed. According to R. L. Richardson, the M.P. for Lisgar, the action of the C.P.R. also inspired the line companies to form a syndicate. Companies like the Northern Elevator Company, the Manitoba Elevator Company, the Ogilvie Milling Company, and the Lake of the Woods Milling Company, no longer had to face independent competition from the flat warehouses. Nor would farmers - except in the few districts which had farmer-owned elevators -

be able to ship their own wheat to the Lakehead and sell it themselves. The elevator companies had banded together and, according to one critic, "decided to corral a larger share of the profit than was their legitimate due." Instead of each company deciding its own price as in the past, representatives of each company would "meet in a little room in Winnipeg each morning" and set the price of wheat. This price was then telegraphed to every elevator, and one uniform price prevailed across Manitoba and the North West.²⁸ Although the private member's bill introduced into the House of Commons by James M. Douglas in February 1898 to allow continued use of flat warehouses was not passed, the C.P.R. did agree to provide railcars to individual farmers wishing to load their own grain from loading platforms. Douglas introduced a second bill the following year, maintaining that flat warehouses were necessary to continued competition in the grain trade.²⁹ This bill also contained provisions for the appointment of a chief inspector to oversee the entire grain trade in Manitoba and the North West Territories. Although the bulk of the bill was adopted by the government and passed, the provisions relating to flat warehouses were again rejected. The legislation thus did little to abate the growing dissatisfaction among western farmers, and in the autumn of 1899 the government announced a royal commission to investigate the shipment and transportation of grain.

The Royal Commission of the Shipment and Transportation of Grain was embodied on 7 October 1899 on the recommendation of Clifford Sifton, Dominion Minister of the Interior.³⁰ The

defeat of the warehousing provisions in the Douglas bill had brought down a great deal of criticism on Sifton's head. The Tribune (Winnipeg) had implied in an editorial of 3 June 1899 that Sifton had bowed to private pressure from the elevator companies to prevent the use of flat warehouses. With a federal election looming, something had to be done to allay the farmers' criticisms. The Commission was to be headed by E. J. Senkler, a judge from St. Catharines, Ontario, and had three western farmers - W. F. Sirrett, William Lothian, and C. C. Castle - as members. The secretary was Charles Napier Bell. Senkler died during the course of the Commission's work and was succeeded by A. E. Richards, a Winnipeg judge. Between October and December of 1899 the Commission held hearings in twenty-one western communities, including Treherne, Manitoba. One of the 227 people to give evidence before the Commission was A. J. Cotton.³¹

No record in either the Commission's report or the Cotton Papers survives to indicate the precise testimony which Cotton gave. However, a manuscript piece on elevators in the Cotton Papers, dated March 1903, undoubtedly reflects his position. Cotton's view was that the system of elevators, while it provided the fastest and most modern way of transporting, cleaning and weighing wheat, was not being used to the farmer's best advantage. The farmer was in many cases exploited by the line companies. Cotton insisted that it was frequently impossible for the farmer to get cars for his grain, and for most small producers it was uneconomic to

ship grain independently. The farmer had payments to meet, and given his need for ready money he had no alternative but to accept whatever price the elevator companies offered him. Furthermore, Cotton insisted, the farmer

. . . must put up with the insinuation that his grain is low grade, unclean, and not up to standard. He is docked a large percentage for such "careless" farming, is generally offered from two to ten cents per bushel below the market value, and must accept one or two grades below its actual standing.

Cotton also complained that the farmer was charged excessive cleaning and dockage rates.³² There is absolutely nothing distinctive about such an analysis. What is significant is that Cotton - a highly successful farmer to some extent able to transcend the worst abuses of the system - shared the same grievances as his colleagues.

Cotton's solution to the inequities of the grain system was the establishment by farmers of an elevator system of their own. The advantages of such a system were obvious to him. In addition to getting farmers "up off their knees" - the phrase was Cotton's - such co-operation would ensure that farmers received full market value, just weights, equitable dockage and fair grading according to government standards. Furthermore, when farmer elevators existed they served as ". . . regulator and other elevators at the same point must pay the same price, or a higher market value, for whatever

grain they buy, and they must give the same treatment as the farmer's elevator offers."³³ Again, the notion of co-operation was hardly original with A. J. Cotton. But his advocacy of such action at a fairly early stage in the development of farmer action in western Canada was undoubtedly at least locally influential, as well as indicative of the extent to which all farmers - regardless of their success and political philosophy - could share a common front. Cotton's own attitude was on the whole individualistic. He believed in the virtues of right conduct and hard work. No radical or farmer activist, he was seldom involved in farmer organizations. But on the subject of grain handling, Cotton was unequivocal. Farmers were being exploited and needed to organize for their mutual benefit. Treherne had enjoyed its own Farmer's Elevator since 1891, and Cotton had been among the original stockholders and directors. When the elevator had burned down, Cotton had - in addition to his shares - provided on mortgage some of the money for its rebuilding. The new facility, with a capacity of 75,000 bushels, could take in as many as 8,000 bushels of wheat per day. After his move to the Swan River Valley, Cotton continued to be an advocate of co-operative grain handling, attempting to organize a farmer's elevator at Kenville without success.³⁴

The 1900 crop year provided some respite for the grain handlers and the railway. The spring and summer of 1900 were extremely dry - "not an inch of rain has fallen since last fall. . . . Manitoba never had such a scorcher," Cotton

complained - and most of his neighbours lost their crops or ploughed them under.³⁵ Cotton was hardly immune from the difficulties of 1900, but the reports of his harvesting in the local newspaper suggest that he had done better than most. Cotton's wheat cutting was evidently a "harvesting scene worth going to see, with five binders travelling in procession around the fields."³⁶ Cotton had sown his largest wheat acreage ever in 1900, a total of 730 acres, but his average yield of eight and one-half bushels per acre was only slightly above the provincial average and his total was only 6,205 bushels. He joined most western farmers in complaining about the poor quality of his crop, selling most of his wheat "at 51, 50, 55, 57 - slow way making money this year." But he kept the best back for seed, "over 1400 bush very good wheat."³⁷ While he had not done too badly on his crop, money was tight, and Cotton, who had \$10,000 out on loan, could not collect because it had been "such a poor year."³⁸

By the summer of 1900 Cotton had hired hands preparing some of his land in the Swan River Valley, and there were numerous reports that he would plant over a thousand acres of wheat the following year between his operations at Treherne and Swan River.³⁹ In the end, 1901 saw only 764 acres planted with wheat, mainly at Treherne. Although Cotton had expanded his wheat acreage only marginally - up thirty-four acres - there had been a general explosion of planting in western Canada as farmers attempted to recover from the bad

year of 1900. Combined with heavy yields, the farmers produced a record wheat crop of 62,820,000 bushels. The situation of 1899 was again repeated. Elevators filled up and there was a shortage of railcars' as the buyers realized these facts, prices began to fall. The problems of the West continued unabated, although for A. J. Cotton there was a new future to anticipate in the Swan River Valley.

Up until 1901 Cotton's activities had been concentrated almost exclusively in contributing to the expanding wheat economy of the prairie west. While he was in the scope of his operations no typical or ordinary farmer, his basic strategy had been relatively simple and cumulatively successful, despite the 1900 drought and the 1901 glut. Like most of his fellow farmers, he had simply grown as much wheat as possible. Cotton had driven himself and the men and beasts who worked for him very hard. He had kept capital expenses to the bare minimum, constantly expanding his acreage on leased (and virgin) land and concentrating on keeping his machinery costs as low as possible. His large stable of horses represented more an investment of time than capital. There was in his account books little evidence of the purchase of expensive equipment; he preferred renting to owning machinery as well as land. His labour force came largely from his extended family, and his expansion of acreage can be better associated with the arrival of relations from Ontario than with new equipment. To some extent Cotton managed to insulate himself from the vicissitudes of bad

years by the sheer scope and audacity of his operations, but by the turn of the century Cotton had shifted his interests to the opening of the Swan River Valley. He was never as successful a wheat grower in his new surroundings as he had been in Treherne, but this did not really matter. Some prairie farmers grew wheat. A. J. Cotton had visions of establishing a dynasty. Before turning to the Swan River operations, however, we will in the next chapter examine in detail Cotton's agricultural operations in Treherne.

NOTES: CHAPTER II

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CHAPTER III: EVERY KICK DID ME GOOD

The foundation of A. J. Cotton's success, both as a prairie patriarch and as a booster of western Canada, was laid in the farming operation at Treherne in the years between 1888 and 1900. Part of the attraction of the West, of course, was in its perpetuation of the New World dream of beginning - in economic terms - with nothing, and achieving great prosperity. Men came west to seek their fortunes, and in urban and rural surroundings some succeeded. James Ashdown parlayed a small tinsmith's workshop behind a Red River hotel into a large wholesale trading empire, and the local histories of the prairie region are full of stories of men who made themselves wealthy from literally nothing. In his own writings, Cotton certainly perpetuated the notion of the self-made farmer, citing his own case as an example. At the same time, the records are full of the evidence of failure: abandoned farms, disastrous attempts at homesteading, and a high incidence of transiency. By the turn of the century, immigration literature and the popular journals had begun to discuss in some detail the question of the cost of establishing oneself on the land.

In a variety of ways, intending immigrants did seem more aware of the problem of costs, often hidden, after 1900. Even if the land were free, and frequently it was not, establishment upon it required some capital. In many

of his letters to prospective newcomers Cotton responded to what were obviously pointed questions about cost. When he was still attempting to persuade Mrs. Cotton's sister Sarah Hislop and her husband John to move west, he provided a breakdown of expected costs and profits over a four year period, as we shall see later. There has recently been a considerable debate in the scholarly literature over the minimal amount of capital necessary to establish a prairie farm.¹ In addressing the problem of farm-making costs, however, the authors in this debate do not deal with the subsequent progress and viability of the farms except in the most vague and general terms, focussing instead on minimum requirements at the outset. While it is possible to assume that those farmers who came with the bare minimum took longer to achieve financial independence (and ran more risk of going bust in the process) than more substantial settlers, there is little attempt in the literature to provide any framework for the process of farm establishment over time. Examining costs in a vacuum frozen in time does little to help clarify the mechanics of successful prairie farming. While A. J. Cotton was hardly the typical farmer with minimal resources, he did leave a fairly detailed financial account of his early days in Treherne, from which it is possible to gain some understanding of the process of "turning the financial corner." The following analysis will concentrate on the years from 1888 to 1900, which were the critical ones for A. J. Cotton.

In many ways, establishment costs to a farmer were inseparable from subsequent cash flow and continual access to capital. One of the most difficult problems for any settler was finding the cash necessary for farm expansion. The homesteader could not mortgage his land until he had received the patent. Farm equipment could often be bought by giving a "note," assuming one's credit was "good," but credit often entrapped the farmer into an endless round of refinancing at increased cost. Paying off debt could be done only from the sale of a cash crop, whether grain or farm surplus such as eggs or butter. While expansion of land under cultivation was one of any new farmer's major targets, at some point the cost of expansion had to be exceeded by the rewards of expansion. In the early years, when margins tended to be tight and cash flow a perennial problem, any untoward occurrence such as the loss of livestock, the need to replace damaged equipment, or poor yields, could place the beginning farmer in a perilous position. A key part of the "cost of establishment" question, therefore, is how the farmer dealt with these first critical years. Obviously some long-term calculated strategy was necessary.

In 1903 A. J. Cotton offered his sister-in-law and her husband, Mr and Mrs. John Hislop, the opportunity to farm one of his half sections in the Swan River Valley on terms similar to those he had himself received from Major McLean in Treherne. Cotton provided the Hislops with a breakdown of what he considered their progress should be over the four years of

the contract.² The Hislops were expected to erect a house and stable on the property, although Cotton was prepared to provide the lumber. In addition, the whole 320 acres was to be fenced and taxes on the property paid. In return, Hislop would receive what Cotton had gotten from McLean: the opportunity to take first crops off virgin land while neither paying to own land nor to rent it. Cotton's calculations were based on considerable experience, including his own. They offer an interesting opportunity to view the kind of strategy which Cotton had himself followed at Treherne, on which they clearly were based.

According to Cotton, the major expenses for the first year were in the provision of equipment and animals. Cotton suggested bringing the livestock and most of the implements from Ontario as they were cheaper there, but he emphasized that the seeder and the plows should be obtained in the west, where those available were suited to prairie conditions. The freight charges for the railcar (\$117) were exactly the same in 1903 as Cotton had paid in 1888, and the cost of implements, stock and freight charges amounted to \$933. Additional expenses in the first year included \$60 for shingles, windows, and nails for the house and stable; \$21 for fence wire; \$35 for taxes; and \$105 provisions for family and livestock, for a total of \$1,154. This estimate was considerably higher than the minimal figures debated in the literature on the cost of farm establishment, and Cotton obviously did not set his scenario at the minimum. The only income he envisioned to

TABLE I

COSTS OF FARM-MAKING

Cotton's Goods 1888	est. value	Hislop Needs 1903	Est. val.
1 Bay horse	\$145.	3 horses @ \$100.	\$300.
1 Black horse	120.	2 cows @ \$40.	80.
1 Bay mare	81.	1 Binder	120.
1 cow	40.	1 Mower	50.
1 cow	41.	1 seeder	75.
Harness	25.	1 wagon	65.
Horse hoe	5.	1 sulkyrake	25.
Harrows iron	12.	1 set harrows 5 sects	18.
Combined seeder	50.	1 breaking plow	20.
1 wagon	55.	1 stubble plow	18.
Bobsleighs	5.	1 1/2 set double team harness	45.
Mower	85.		
Sulkyrake	35.		
Hayrack	4.	Freight on car	117.
Forks, hoes, shovels	6.		<u>933.</u>
Tools	10.		
Household furniture	100.		
Freight on car	117.		
	<u>919.</u>		

set against the necessary costs would be \$100 earned by Hislop helping his neighbours at harvest and threshing time. The first year (1903) would be taken up with building shelter for the family and animals, and in breaking land. Cotton estimated that sixty acres could be broken the first year, close to his own figure of 1888. But in retrospect, he did not recommend trying to crop the first year of settlement.

Cotton envisaged the Hislops entering their second year with a debt of \$1054 and interest at seven percent, or \$1,127.78 on the debit side. Expenses for 1904 would amount to an additional \$378. Broken down, this figure would include \$47.50 for seed to plant fifty acres of wheat and fifteen acres of oats. Feed oats and provisions for the family would add \$80 to the expense and the taxes would add another \$35. Shingles and nails for the granary would come to \$38. In addition to sundry expenses of \$25, there would be the cost of harvesting the grain crop, which Cotton estimated at \$155 (\$30 for binder twine, \$45 for threshing wheat, \$30 for threshing oats, and \$50 for hired help). The total expenses for the second year, added to the previous year's debt, would produce a liability of \$1,505.78, offset by sale of 880 bushels of wheat at fifty cents per bushel. For purposes of his exercise, Cotton estimated average yields at twenty bushels per acre and average prices for wheat at fifty cents per bushel over the whole of the four-year period. At the end of their second year of farming, therefore, the Hislops would be \$1065.78 in debt, a small increase over the previous year. Again, this general

calculation paralleled Cotton's own experience.

A further sixty acres would have been broken in the second year, Cotton estimated, so that Hislop would begin 1905 (year three) with 125 acres of broken land and enough seed carried over from the previous year to raise the 1905 crop. With interest on the debt, the Hislops began 1905 in the hole by \$1,140.38. But year three was critical. Cotton anticipated that 110 acres would be seeded in wheat and fifteen acres in oats, yielding 2,200 bushels of wheat and 750 of oats. Expenses for harvesting this crop would amount to \$129 for threshing, \$56.25 for binder cord and \$75 for hired help, or a total of \$260.25. In addition to these costs, expansion of cultivation would require another horse at \$200, an additional half-set of harness at \$15, and another stubble plow at \$18. Cotton increased the amount for family provisions to \$75, probably to take into account the food needed for hired help. With taxes up to \$40 and \$25 for sundries, total expenses in year three came to \$633.25. In all, expenses for this year plus previous liabilities amounted to \$1,773.63. To set against these debits, Cotton envisioned selling 1,930 of the 2,200 bushels threshed, which would realize \$965 and reduce the Hislop indebtedness at the end of 1905 to \$808.63.

For the fourth and final year of the contract, the Hislops would have 205 acres ready for crop, an increase of eighty acres over the previous year. 180 acres would be sown with wheat and twenty-five with oats. Seed for this acreage would be carried over from the previous year. Such expanded acreage

would require the help of a hired man for seven months of the year, as well as additional hands for harvesting and threshing. The projected wage bill would be \$275, but part of this expense could be offset by hiring out to break fifty acres of land for others, bringing in \$150. The major task for this year besides growing the grain would be the completion of the fencing of the half section at an additional cost of \$84. The expanded acreage would also call for the purchase of another wagon to carry the wheat to the elevator, at a cost of \$70. Threshing expenses for 3,600 bushels of wheat and 1,200 bushels of oats came to \$273.50. With sundries of \$50 and taxes of \$40, total outgoings would be \$771.90. To this figure was added the \$808.63 indebtedness (plus interest of \$56.60) from the previous year, totalling \$1,637.13. But with receipts estimated at \$2,325 from the sale of the grain, the Hislops would end year four with \$688.81 cash in hand, plus all their chattels, 750 bushels of oats, and 270 bushels of wheat.

As we shall see, this calculation of progress is marginally faster than that managed by Cotton himself. It took him five years to have cash in hand. However, Cotton had expenses which the Hislops would not, including hired help and horses. As was the case with all such projections, Cotton assumed fixed prices and yields, making no allowance for any of the disasters which might beset the western farmer. But in theory, Cotton did not anticipate any beginning farmer turning a profit in less than four years, and then only providing he had access to over a thousand dollars in unsecured credit at an

uncompounded seven percent, and had minimal land expenses. What Cotton expected the Hislops to do at the end of their four years of tenancy is not clear, since most of his land was ultimately destined for his sons. Apparently he thought that the farming experience and their assets after four years would provide them with a good start on their own land. Not surprisingly, the Hislops did not take Cotton up on his offer. When laid out in such graphic terms, starting up in Manitoba did not sound terribly attractive. But Cotton here did something which little contemporary literature or subsequent scholarship has done. He thought in terms of a lengthy process of gradual expansion and reduction of debt based upon the market. He did not pretend that farming could begin without debt, but he offered a scheme for reducing it in an orderly and relatively swift fashion. He also assumed that the beginner should not own land until he had cash in hand.

As the Hislop scheme suggests, when A. J. Cotton had come to Manitoba in 1888 he was not destitute. His resources consisted of most of the farm implements and livestock necessary to work the land he had rented from Major McLean, worth perhaps \$800 to \$1,000, and access to small amounts of family capital in Ontario. Prior to his departure from the east, Cotton had borrowed \$225 from his aunt, Mrs. Nora Williams.³ Most of this money was used to transport Cotton and his family west, but the remaining \$59.99 helped Cotton supplement his existing equipment. His first purchase was a second-hand John Deere breaking plow for \$4. Although it needed repair,

its final cost of \$6.75 was considerably less than the \$20 or more a new one would have cost.⁴ Because Cotton brought his horses and a hired man, he was able to break and sow more land than the average settler might have done in the first year. On 4 May 1888, Cotton sowed his first crop in Manitoba: two and one-half acres of oats. On 23 May he began to sow twenty-three acres of barley, and he also planted an acre of potatoes. In all, during the first year Cotton planted twenty six and one-half acres and broke a total of sixty acres. The cost of seed for planting was \$10.82 for the oats and potatoes; presumably Cotton brought the barley seed with him from Ontario, saving part of the 1,328 bushels of barley he had harvested in 1887.⁵ During the first spring and summer the family literally camped out in the abandoned shell of a neighbouring farm while Cotton devoted his major effort to his new land. A number of points are worth emphasizing in this beginning by Cotton. In the first place, he did begin with some resources, not the least of which was a dependable hired man. In the second place, Cotton arrived at Treherne in the spring and turned immediately to breaking and planting. Finally, unlike many settlers who spent most of their first year organizing living accommodations, the Cotton family "roughed it" so that farming could begin.

At the conclusion of the first year, Cotton's accounts showed a profit of \$1.96. This figure, however, did not reflect the true picture. Cotton's 1888 costs included \$165.10 for the move to Treherne, plus \$216.86 in ongoing expenses.

TABLE II

A. J. Cotton: Acreages under Crop

Year	Total	Wheat	Oats	Barley
1888	25.5	---	2.5	23
1889	62	62	---	--
1890	130	120	10	--
1891	170	140	20	10
1892	186	153	23	10
1893	235	200	25	10
1894	330	280	35	15
1895	380	314	52	14
1896	412	320	80	12
1897	544	475	59	10
1898	760	515	132	13
1899	690	650	40	--
1900	810	730	80	--
*1901	809	764	24	21
1902	269	175	83	11
1903	361	300	51	10
1904	362	261	87	14
1905	323	224	90	13
1906	370	325	51	14
1907	392	274	84	34
1908	492	200	207	85
1909	282	137	145	--
1910	401.5	238	112	51.5
1911	328	263	44	121
1912	603	514	29	60
1913	733	392	114	227
1914	747	309	160	288
1915	791	650	120	21
1916	832	547	191	114
1917	774	431	203	140
1918	493	302	123	68
1919	514	260	177	77
1920	496	284	160	52

*Part in Swan River Valley, part in Treherne

Combining the money borrowed from his aunt, the money raised by working for others (\$36.50) and from sale of produce (194 bushels of barley at forty cents a bushel, or \$78.90, plus twelve bushels of potatoes, twenty-five pounds of butter, and seven and one-half dozen eggs for \$7.41), he had \$337.81. Although it is not clear from his accounting, Cotton must have used notes to finance part of his expenses, probably the stubble plow and the threshing bill. However, at the end of his first year, Cotton had his livestock (including some animals obtained in Manitoba) as well as 160 bushels of barley, twenty-five of oats, fifty-eight of potatoes - plus sixty acres of broken land.⁶ Since the province did not publish agricultural statistics in 1888, it is not possible to put Cotton's yields in a larger context. However, at Pipestone, James Lothian's oat yield was forty-eight bushels per acre as compared with Cotton's ten.⁷ Cotton's yields would appear relatively low, perhaps reflecting his lack of experience with the new environment. Nonetheless, Cotton - unlike many incoming settlers - did break land and harvest a crop in his first year.

In 1889 Cotton sowed his first wheat, on 25 March of that year. By the time of sowing two more acres of land had been cleared, and the entire sixty-two acres was planted with wheat.⁸ According to the Manitoba Crop Bulletin for this year, seeding of spring wheat was earlier than any other year in the history of the province to date, and in thirty-two years of subsequent record-keeping Cotton only began

seeding this early in one other year.⁹ After his wheat sowing was completed on 11 April 1889, Cotton began the next day to break land for a barley crop. By 24 May he had broken and seeded thirty acres of barley.¹⁰ Having been sown relatively late, Cotton's barley crop escaped the late May frosts that decimated the crop already above the ground, but it fell victim to the summer drought and was a complete failure.¹¹ Early seeding of wheat was followed by a fairly early harvest, with Cotton beginning cutting of wheat on 8 August.¹² This harvest was generally disappointing across the province, with the yield the lowest on record. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that much of the rain-starved grain was too short to cut and bind in sheaves. Although the provincial yield was light, the grain threshed was considered of good quality, "being pronounced bright and hard," and both high quality and scarceness drove up the price. The average wheat yield per acre across the province was 12.4 bushels, while the return for the district in which Cotton's land was located was better at 19.5 bushels per acre. Cotton topped both figures with an average of 23 bushels per acre.¹³

In all, Cotton harvested 1,256 bushels of wheat in 1889. Of this total, 840 bushels were taken directly from the threshing machine to the Farmer's Elevator at Treherne, and the remaining 416 bushels were stored in the back kitchen.¹⁴ A month later he sold the elevator wheat to R. S. Alexander for \$536.80, which with wastage represented a price of 65¢ per bushel, 7¢ more than James Lothian received for his wheat at

Virden.¹⁵ Cotton's yields were also considerably better than Lothian's, the latter averaging 15.5 bushels per acre on land that had been cropped the previous year and (surprisingly in a year of drought) only nine bushels per acre on fallow land.¹⁶ Cotton's earning of \$14.95 per acre was thus substantially greater than Lothian's, marking the beginning of a long run of such superior returns, which when combined with a constantly increasing acreage sown would form the basis of Cotton's prosperity.

1889 had been a busy and expensive year for Cotton. One of his first actions had been the purchase of another horse, to complete two teams. The horse was bought from Major McLean in Ontario and cost \$180, Cotton giving McLean a note for the amount due on 1 December 1889. Only if Cotton were unable to redeem the note at that time would interest be charged at the rate of seven percent.¹⁷ Such access to interest-free capital was enormously advantageous to Cotton, and enabled him to forge ahead rapidly. With two teams and two men (in addition to hired man Albert Taylor, Mrs. Cotton's brother Will Ford was now at Treherne), Cotton was able to break another seventy-five acres in 1889, as well as planting nearly 100. Two teams and the move into wheat brought additional expenses. Cotton had to buy another breaking plow, this time a Moline at \$27. He had also to obtain a second stubble plow, although this one cost the same as last year's at \$20. The major expense in equipment, however, was a \$200 Massey-Harris binder, although he spent \$49.20 on 615 pounds of wire to

complete the fencing of the land and \$13 for a permit to cut wood for posts, logs, and firewood.¹⁸ Cotton was not only concerned with a crop and breaking land, for on 21 March he had laid the foundation for a house on McLean property. Lumber and shingles for the house cost \$118.41, although Cotton also paid \$3.10 interest on the outstanding bill up to 16 October, when he used part of the proceeds from the sale of his wheat to retire the debt.¹⁹ Unlike many farmers, Cotton appreciated the burden which interest charges placed on his operations; and he never allowed interest-bearing debt to remain a moment longer than necessary.

Cotton's rate of land breaking slowed in 1890, with only thirty-six new acres broken, bringing the total of broken land on the farm to 171 acres.²⁰ In this slowdown Cotton appears to have been in line with many others in the province, as a definite falling off in the level of new breaking was noted in 1890.²¹ Spring had been late in 1890, which may account for the reduction. Weather certainly delayed seeding. Beginning his seeding on 7 April, Cotton was a full week in advance of the general date for the province. This year he sowed 120 acres of wheat and ten acres of oats.²² Rainfall was generally good in the spring and early summer, although there was still a shortage of moisture due to the drought of the previous year. Probably all would have been well but for a disastrous hailstorm over a large portion of the southern part of the province on 2 August. In some areas the crops were completely destroyed; in total, 31,851 acres of wheat, 8,403 of oats, and 1,108 acres of barley were wiped out.²³

Cotton does not seem to have been affected by this storm, although he was undoubtedly struck with the rain which fell generally from August through October. Although a week ahead in sowing, Cotton was almost a week behind the general date for cutting, beginning on 20 August.²⁴ His average yield for wheat of 21.3 bushels per acre was marginally below the 21.5 bushels for his district and barely above the 20.1 bushels per acre which was the province-wide average. His oats yield was 32 bushels per acre, compared with 25.3 for the district and 41.3 for the province.²⁵ While these yields were probably disappointing to him, the doubling of his acreage took away some of the sting. Cotton managed a respectable crop in a personal year of consolidation. Making no major equipment or livestock purchases and no substantial improvements to his buildings, Cotton noted at the end of the year that his incomings were \$832.95 and his outgoings only \$444.84. Since part of the outgoings included retirement of \$167.79 of debt, it was clear that 1890 was a critical year for A. J. Cotton.

Cotton accounts for 1891 show that this year was an easier one financially for the entire family. There was more money spent on incidentals, and a large Christmas order was despatched from T. Eaton in Toronto.²⁶ Cotton increased his wheat acreage by another twenty acres, bringing the total to 130 acres, but in so doing he was below the twenty-two percent increase general across the province.²⁷ The weather had been particularly favourable for putting in the wheat crop, and with the aid of his new press drill Cotton had finished planting by 12 May.²⁸ He also sowed twenty acres of oats and ten

of barley. The July weather was good for the crop and a large one was anticipated, but in fact the crop year was rather mixed.²⁹ Although the crop was unusually heavy, a frost had affected at least forty percent of the yield, and a late, slow harvest due to a shortage of farm labour probably influenced the grading if not the quantity harvested. Cotton appears to have escaped the worst of the problems, typical of his fortune in the early 1890s. His wheat averaged 28 bushels per acre, above the district level of 26.5 and the provincial figure of 25.3 bushels per acre. Cotton's barley was a bumper crop, averaging 51 bushels per acre, as compared to the district's 36.5 bushels and the province's 35.6 bushels per acre. His oats produced his best average yield ever at 55 bushels per acre, again ahead of both the district at 48.7 bushels and the province at 48.3 bushels.³⁰ Cotton's yields were persistently above both the district and provincial figures in this decade, and while account books cannot reveal the secret of his success, they do demonstrate that he was a highly skilled farmer. To what extent expansion onto virgin land assisted the total yields cannot be calculated.

At year's end, Cotton had only 360 bushels remaining of his 3,920 threshed bushels of wheat, indicating that his marketing was not delayed as was that of many other farmers in the province.³¹ In addition to his cereal crops, Cotton continued to sell other produce from the farm. Sales of hay, potatoes, eggs, butter, as well as a steer for \$19, all added to his income in 1891. Cotton added to his livestock this

year, buying two more horses, the "span of colts" costing \$280. The animals represented the major purchase of the year, although in general Cotton's expanded acreage cost more to farm. He had to buy oats and barley for seed, and his harvesting costs were up, both for threshing and for binder twine. At the end of the year Cotton calculated his assets and liabilities. The list of assets, which included the grain on hand, livestock and farm implements, as well as his \$25 share in the Treherne Farmer's Elevator, amounted to \$2,280.25. The liabilities, including a note due on 11 October 1892 for the insurance of the farm house and its contents (together valued at \$500) and \$151 still outstanding to his aunt, amounted to \$355. Cotton considered his net worth at the end of the year to be \$1825.25, perhaps double that with which he had arrived in Manitoba four years earlier. Nevertheless, his income was \$2,696.08 and his outlay \$2,716.84.³² Despite the increase in assets, Cotton had still not reached Mr. Micawber's golden mean. As we have already seen, Cotton would later project a substantial annual profit for year four of the Hislop operation, although he had not achieved such a state himself.

1892 was a good year for Manitoba wheat and for A. J. Cotton. Manitoba wheat won the gold medal at the International Millers Exhibition in London, England, a recognition that could not have come at a more opportune time.³³ The large harvest of the previous year had shown that the Manitoba wheat crop had outstripped the demand in North America, and the province would have to look more seriously for markets

in Britain and Europe.³⁴ In 1892 Cotton planted 153 acres of wheat, as well as ten acres of barley and twenty-three of oats.³⁵ The total of 186 acres planted meant that he was continuing to bring new land under cultivation. During the early summer, farmers had looked forward to a bumper harvest, but this expectation was not realized in all areas. Dry weather caused the wheat to ripen too quickly, there were the usual local storms and frosts, and in some sections wheat did not fill to the top.³⁶ According to the analysts, another reason for the light yield was overexpansion; some farmers were breaking more land than they could adequately cultivate.³⁷ Cotton, however, had not allowed his land to get out of control, and he was lucky with the weather as well. His wheat yield in 1892 was 29 bushels to the acre, nearly double that of either his district (16.33 bushels) or the province (16.50 bushels). Oats and barley yields were equally good for Cotton, barley more than doubling the district average and nearly doubling that of the province. Oats averaged 61.5 bushels, compared with 35.7 for the district and 35 for the province. Altogether Cotton had 4,437 bushels of wheat, 1,414 of oats, and 570 of barley.³⁸ Christmas in the Cotton household in 1892 reflected the prosperity derived from these results. In addition to a fifteen-pound turkey, there were candies and raisins, nuts, oranges, lemons and pears.³⁹ While last year's holiday had been a good one, this one was better. When Cotton sat down to his annual year end's reckoning, for the first time he could record that he had \$228.36 cash on hand. Cotton's assets

this year came to \$2,668 and the liabilities were \$348.61, down slightly from the last year. Some debt had been retired and some added. Cotton now owed his aunt \$160.06, the increase reflecting the six percent interest being charged on the remaining principal. Cotton's net worth had increased by \$722.50 over the previous year, now standing at \$2,547.75. It had taken Cotton five years in Manitoba to "turn the corner," and he had begun with some advantages and progressed without any major setbacks. Despite Cotton's later calculations, it would appear that five years represented the minimum span of time during which a beginning farmer in Manitoba could become a profit-maker.

As Cotton's worth increased, so did the value of the land that he was renting from Major McLean. At a dollar a year for the first five years, Cotton had gotten a bargain. There is no way of arriving at a typical rental in this period, although we do know that rentals fluctuated greatly, ranging from a few cents per acre to as much as five dollars per acre.⁴⁰ The lower range obviously reflected unimproved land in untested or marginal territory. As Cotton improved the farm and as he demonstrated that it was prime wheat growing land, its value would obviously increase. In 1890 with 135 acres broken, a "fair" rent for the farm might have been five cents per acre for unimproved land and two dollars per acre for improved land. The total of \$280 would have been a rental that Cotton could ill afford. Using the same figures, the rent in 1892 should have been \$350. Cotton was in effect farming on land he was getting far below its market value. Although he

was paying for the improvements, he was also benefitting from them. The increase in land prices reflected the growth of settlement within the district. One side effect of this growth was that it provided extra income for Cotton, from breaking land for his new neighbours. In 1891 he or his men had ploughed 110 acres for a remuneration of \$200, in 1892 he ploughed 195 acres for \$400, and in 1893 he ploughed 280 acres for \$550.⁴¹ In part, such an income reflects one of the differences between a district where most land was purchased and one where most had been homesteaded. James Lothian in Pipestone had noted: "Went over and gave a days ploughing to Rob't Gray on sec 12, eleven plows turned out. I broke about eight acres in good style."⁴² Cotton's practice was not mercenary as compared with Lothian's neighbourliness; it reflected a more commercial standard in Treherne than in Pipestone.

While Major McLean might be receiving less than the market value in rent, he was nonetheless benefitting from the arrangement he had made with Cotton. The value of the land that Cotton was cultivating for him was constantly increasing. The average cash price paid for land in Cotton's district in 1889 was \$11.13 per acre for improved land and \$6.30 for unimproved land.⁴³ At these rates, McLean's half section had been worth approximately \$2,000 in 1888, increasing to \$2,663 in 1889, and rising to \$3,882 by the end of 1891.⁴⁴ The farmhouse and outbuildings might have brought the value up a bit if the property were actually up for sale, but as in most districts buildings had little impact on farm prices.

The McLean/Cotton arrangement was mutually beneficial in different ways. Cotton had no capital tied up in land and was able to invest in more rapid cultivation instead. Ideally, in progressive rental arrangements such as Cotton and McLean had, the period of low rental at the outset offered the farmer the opportunity to become established and prosperous before higher figures kicked in. The scheme worked for Cotton, but his experience suggests that a five-year period of low rental was essential.

In 1893, for the first time Cotton had to pay more than token rent for his farm. The rental to be charged was \$450 per annum. But Cotton by now had the measure both of his land and of farming in the west. Significantly, he extended his area of cultivated ground to 235 acres this year, with 200 of the acres in wheat, an increase of almost one-third over the previous year. This increase was by far the largest Cotton had attempted, and doubtless was related to his new expenses. Barley acreage remained constant at ten acres although oats went up to twenty-five acres.⁴⁵ Across the province there was a substantial growth in area seeded, and there were fears that not enough men would be available to work on the farms. 5,000 men were employed on farms throughout the province and it was estimated that another 2,000 would be required to take off the harvest.⁴⁶ In 1893 the demand for harvesters was not so heavy as anticipated, although there remained an undercurrent of criticism that strangers "plucked the big wages" for two months' work on the harvest. Although

the yield was lighter than generally expected, the grade was excellent, due partly to favourable weather for threshing and marketing. The result was "a finer example of grain than has gone from the province for years."⁴⁷

The average yield for wheat across the province was 15.56 bushels per acre. Cotton averaged 22 bushels per acre, also above that within his district at 20 bushels per acre. Cotton's oats yield, at 40 bushels per acre, was also above the 31.12 bushels per acre for the district and 25.28 bushels per acre for the province. His barley yield at 43 bushels per acre was also significantly above the provincial average (22.11 bushels per acre) and the district average (26.8 bushels per acre).⁴⁸ Once again, Cotton had outproduced both the province and his own district, and in 1893 he threshed 4,378 bushels of wheat, selling 3,777½ bushels graded No. 1 hard for 45¼¢ per bushel.⁴⁹ The system under which Cotton's wheat was graded had been put in place in 1885-86. In 1885 the Federal Parliament had amended an earlier 1873 statute relating to the grading of wheat, reflecting the growing importance of the western grain trade. The legislation shifted from winter to spring wheat and gave particular importance to the Manitoba-grown Red Fife. The major categories established by the legislation were the No. 1 and No. 2 Manitoba Hard wheat grades and the Nos. 1-3 Northern grades. The hard wheat grades had to be at least 85% Red Fife grown in Manitoba or the North West territories. To grade No. 1 hard the wheat had to weigh sixty-two pounds to the bushel, while No. 2 hard weighed fifty-

eight pounds to the bushel. The Northern categories graded wheat which was between 50 and 85% Red Fife, while the weight requirements were the same as for Hard. No. 3 Northern was a category of wheat weighing at least fifty-six pounds to the bushel, barely fit for warehousing.⁵⁰

1893 had been another year of expansion for Cotton. He had bought four more horses for \$390 and earned \$550 plowing for other farmers. He also bought more equipment, including harrows, another binder, and a Superior Press Drill. Expanding operations required another granary, the lumber for which cost \$99.12. Cotton's sale of non-grain products also increased this year: dressed hogs, eggs, butter, lard, and three head of cattle brought in an additional \$289.65. While his main income was, as always, from the sale of his wheat crop, his side income was considerable. For the first time, he did not sell all his wheat at Treherne, but shipped part of it himself to Fort William. Normally 1,000 bushels of wheat of the same grade was required to fill a rail car. Cotton appears to have shared a car with another farmer, since he recorded the cost of \$60 for freighting half a car to Fort William, and an additional \$12.15 insurance on the cargo. When he came to his year-end assessment, Cotton recorded his assets at \$3,360, with \$42.95 cash on hand. Liabilities had increased also, to \$898, undoubtedly due to the demands of the expanded acreage. As a result, Cotton's net worth at the end of 1893 was \$2,510.05, a reduction of \$37.25 over the previous year. However, it must be remembered that for the first time he had paid a market rent for the McLean land, and that a non-agri-

cultural item like the Singer Sewing Machine for his wife represented the difference between a gain and loss in net worth.⁵¹ During 1893 Cotton had also arranged to rent an additional half-section for the next five years from Isaac Mawhinney, on terms similar to those obtained from McLean in 1888. The rent on this new land was to be one dollar per annum, but Cotton did not have to erect any buildings, but only to fence at least 180 acres with wire provided by the owner. Cotton guaranteed to break 155 acres but could if desired break more.⁵² Cotton was once again taking advantage of virgin land at minimal cost. When he broke land for others Cotton charged about two dollars per acre. At this rate, breaking Mawhinney's 155 acres would cost \$310; spread out over five years this figure translated into an annual rental of \$62.

According to provincial reports 1894 was generally a bad year for farmers. "Never have reports as a whole been so emphatic as to 'hard times,'" commented one source.⁵³ The provincial average was down to seventeen bushels per acre of wheat, and wheat prices were at an all-time low. None of this gloom and doom seems to have had any appreciable effect upon A. J. Cotton, who set out to cultivate an extra half-section in 1894. Beginning on 26 April, Cotton sowed 280 acres of wheat, a forty percent increase over the previous year. The acreage of oats and barley were also increased to thirty-five and fifteen acres respectively. In total, therefore, Cotton had 320 acres under crop, a considerable amount given the

TABLE III

A. J. Cotton: Wheat Yields and Comparative figures

Year	Acreage	Total bu.	Bu./acre	Dist.bu/ac	Prov bu./acre
1888	-----				
1889	62	1371	23	19.5	12.4
1890	120	2566	21.3	21.5	20.1
1891	140	3920	28	26.5	25.3
1892	153	4437	29	16.33	16.5
1893	200	4378	22	20	15.5
1894	280	8400	30	20.5	17
1895	314	12745	40	29	27
1896	320	4536	14.25	11.9	14.33
1897	475	12350	26	14.7	14.14
1898	515	16026	31	19	17.01
1899	650	18632	29	19	17.13
1900	730	6025	8.5	7.6	8.9
1901	764	17954	23.5	NA	25.1
1902	175	4550	26	26	26
1903	300	7200	24	21.4	16.4
1904	261	3915	15	18.2	16.52
1905	224	4480	20	27.5	21
1906	325	8237	25.5	26.5	19.49
1907	274	4110	15	14.71	14.42
1908	200	2000	10	16.5	17.28
1909	137	2187	16	20	17.33
1910	238	6873	29	20.1	13.47
1911	263	3523	21	22.5	18.29
1912	514	5579	18	18.1	20.7
1913	392	10540	27	NA	20
1914	309	5387	16.5	NA	15.5
1915	650	23338	36	NA	26.4
1916	547	9325	18	11.1	10.16
1917	431	9820	23	19.5	14.9
1918	302	4492	24	19.7	16.5
1919	260	4250	17	16.1	14.3
1920	284	6200	22	15.52	13.96

TABLE IV

A. J. Cotton: Oats and Barley Yields and Comparative Data

Year	Oats			Barley		
	Cotton	District	Province	Cotton	District	Province
1888	10	NA	NA	16	NA	NA
1889	--			--		
1890	32	25.3	41.3	--		
1891	55	48.7	44.5	51	36.5	35.6
1892	61.5	35.7	35	57	26.75	29
1893	40	31.12	25.28	43	26.8	22.11
1894	61	NA	28.8	38	NA	25.87
1895	76	49.87	46.73	57	37.81	36.69
1896	36.5	24	28.25	43	NA	24.8
1897	42	23.5	22.7	18	NA	20.77
1898	59	NA	33.6	45	NA	27.06
1899	93	42.1	38.8	--		
1900	35	20.4	20.5	--		
1901	28	NA	40.3	34	NA	34.2
1902	61	49	47.5	45	35.4	35.9
1903	60	62	38.62	40	32	26.66
1904	65	36	38.8	40	30	30.54
1905	66.5	27.5	42.6	35	35.2	34.2
1906	61	50	43.85	33	35.5	36.96
1907	37	39.1	34.8	31	28	25.7
1908	36	38	36.8	17	26.5	27.54
1909	45	41	37.1	--		
1910	52	43.4	28.7	35	30.5	20.7
1911	30	49.8	45.3	22	26.8	31.5
1912	50	41.2	46	40	33.4	35.1
1913	58	NA	42	36	NA	28.6
1914	40	NA	47.7	18	NA	20
1915	82	NA	47.7	47	NA	34
1916	40	38	28.4	25	24.4	20.9
1917	61	28.4	28.4	31	23.7	20.4
1918	43	32.1	32.1	32	25.5	25.5
1919	35	35	31.6	28	20.1	20.1
1920	45	33.8	31.08	39	21.83	21.08

non-mechanized state of his equipment; most of the work was still being done by draft animals. Whatever factors adversely affected the province obviously missed Cotton. His wheat yield was 30 bushels per acre, above the provincial and district averages by a wide margin. His oats yield was more than double the provincial average, and his barley well above the province figure.⁵⁴ Cotton could not escape the low prices of 1894, but the large volume of his crop resulting from good yields on increased acreage cushioned him from the worst effects. He threshed 8,400 bushels of wheat, all No. 1 hard. The major part of this crop - 7,479 3/4 bushels - was sold in one lot at forty cents per bushel, bringing in \$2,991.90. Cotton did not repeat the experiment of shipping his own wheat to the Lakehead, presumably because of the depressed market.

Cotton had invested in two new wagons and two new horses in 1894, as well as paying off \$100 still owing on the horse purchased the previous year. At year's end, Cotton's liabilities had fallen to \$232.25. He had retired \$681.28 worth of debt, and his assets had increased to \$4097 while his net worth now totalled \$3,864.75 (up over \$1300), not a bad record in what was generally considered a poor year.⁵⁵ One of his expenditures in 1894 was a small sum at a Brandon nursery. From H. Patmore, Cotton bought raspberries, strawberries, black currants, red currants, gooseberries, and one plum tree.⁵⁶ A firm believer in the value of a garden to the farmer, Cotton obviously felt in a position to improve its variety. As he would later write, "One of the most profitable and useful

pieces of ground the farmer has in his possession is the vegetable garden plot."⁵⁷ Of particular value to the beginning farmer, it could provide at little cost a great deal of fresh food which would reduce dependence and the size of the account at the local store. In the same article, Cotton enumerated the best varieties of vegetables to grow in Manitoba. But the garden was not simply an economic adjunct to the farm. Cotton did not forget flowers, advising his readers, "Just get say two 5¢ packets of pansies and say two packets of mixed poppies . . . and the sight of these flowers before summer is over will more than repay you."⁵⁸ As he became successful, Cotton did not confine himself to 5¢ packets of pansies and poppies, subsequently ordering a whole range of flowers including asters, begonias, carnations, fuschias and double hollyhocks.⁵⁹

In January of 1895 Louise Cotton received a belated Christmas gift from her husband: a fur coat.⁶⁰ Cotton was obviously feeling confident about his prospects. Seeding was under way early in 1895, with Cotton beginning the sowing of wheat on 8 April. He finished sowing with fourteen acres of barley on 11 May. Between these two dates Cotton seeded 380 acres, with 314 in wheat, fifty-two acres in oats, and fourteen acres in barley.⁶¹ Throughout the early summer, prospects for the crop looked bright, and for once were realized. Manitoba reaped a bumper grain crop, beginning with barley, when harvesting began at the beginning of August. Cotton began cutting his wheat crop on 16 August, in line with much of

the province.⁶² The size of the crop put a severe strain on the labour force, with farmers worried that they would lose money if not enough manpower was available. Five thousand harvesters were brought in from Ontario on two excursions, one on 13 August and the second a week later.⁶³ They were not quite enough, and the harvest was protracted until the snow fell. While many farmers were not finished threshing until late fall, Cotton was finished much earlier. The seventy-eight acres of wheat grown on the Mawhinney land averaged 44 bushels per acre when threshing there ended on 16 September.⁶⁴ This harvest offers one of the few opportunities to compare yields on virgin land with those on land previously cropped, since Cotton recorded the Mawhinney results separately. He got considerably lower yields on the McLean land - 38 bushels per acre - and overall managed 40 bushels per acre. Nevertheless, the difference suggests the advantage of continual expansion on new land. In any event, once again Cotton's averages were far above those of the province and his district. The provincial average in 1895 was 27 bushels per acre and the district averaged 29 bushels per acre. Cotton's oats yield was even more spectacular, 76 bushels per acre compared with 49.87 for the district and 46.73 for the province. At 57 bushels per acre, Cotton's barley also outstripped both the province (36.69 bushels per acre) and the district (37.81 bushels per acre).⁶⁵ While the Mawhinney land had some impact on the wheat figures, the fact remained that Cotton consistently outproduced his peers.

In 1895 Cotton threshed an incredible total of 12,745 bushels of wheat. Finished early, he wasted no time, and by 27 September had 12,585 bushels on their way to Fort William. In all, nineteen rail cars left Treherne carrying Cotton's wheat, thirteen filled with No. 1 hard and six with No. 1 northern. The wheat had been inspected and graded by "Gibbs, the Government Inspector."⁶⁶ Consigning his wheat to J. H. McLennan in Fort William, Cotton received an advance of thirty cents on the bushel. McLennan would carry the wheat until spring when Cotton, paying eight percent interest on the money advanced, would order him to sell. With his \$2,600 cash advance, Cotton was able to pay off various outstanding bills. Besides his wheat, Cotton sold \$4053.77 worth of produce in 1895. From this point, it becomes virtually impossible from his records to relate annual revenue to annual production, since Cotton was now holding wheat back for the best price. His outgoings in 1895 totalled \$3044.34, and at the close of the year Cotton estimated his net worth at \$6,237.15, an increase of \$2,372.40 over the previous year. Cotton paid off \$673.73 worth of notes in 1895 and his remaining debts - those contracted in Ontario before his move west - he would retire in person during a trip to Ontario over the winter. While he had been subjected to the cost of bringing the Mawhinney land under cultivation - which included more horses, another binder, another wagon - 1895 was obviously a very profitable year for A. J. Cotton.

Cotton undoubtedly enjoyed his visit to Ontario and the

liquidation of his old debts. After his return to Manitoba on 2 March 1896, one of his first actions was to add to the land he had available for cultivation. On 20 March he arranged to rent another quarter-section: S.W.¼ 2.8.10W..⁶⁷ The spring of 1896 was very wet and seeding was delayed. Cotton did not begin to sow his wheat until 7 May and only finished on 30 May. In all, 320 acres were sown with wheat. Cotton sowed eighty acres of oats beginning on 2 June and twelve acres of barley. 1896 was not a very good crop year for anyone. The provincial average yield for wheat was only 14.33 bushels per acre. At 14.25 bushels per acre, Cotton's average was for once below the provincial one, although above that of his district (11.9 bushels per acre). Despite the low yield the quality was evidently high.⁶⁸ As usual, the low yield drove up the price per bushel. On 5 September Cotton finally sold his 1895 crop, which had been sitting at Fort William. He received 61½¢ per bushel for No. 1 hard, and 50¢ per bushel for No. 1 northern. 1896 was undoubtedly a disappointing year for Cotton. His major outlay was on wages, for although the harvest had been light he engaged in much autumn plowing to bring more land into a state fit for cultivation. At year's end his incomings at \$9,791.53 were only marginally above his outgoings at \$9,771.40. But he had not yet sold his 1896 wheat crop.⁶⁹

On 1 January 1897 Cotton made his sowing plans for the upcoming crop year. He would sow 475 acres of wheat, fifty-nine acres of oats and ten acres of barley, for a total of

of 544 acres. This year Cotton was farming the East half of 3.8.10 and all of 2.8.10, having leased another quarter section from Dr. Phillips. Cotton's increase in acreage paralleled a general rise throughout the province beyond that caused by new settlement.⁷⁰ The spring weather was very favourable, and the seeding went very smoothly. Cotton began sowing his wheat on 19 April and was finished by 11 May, whereupon he began sowing first oats and then barley. Predictions of a great harvest were frustrated by the depredations of the Wheat Stem Saw Fly across the province. The fly bored at the base of the stem of the wheat plant, causing it to turn white and then produce empty heads.⁷¹ Fields that appeared full of good wheat proved virtually useless when threshed. The provincial wheat average for 1897 was a disappointing 14.14 bushels per acre, the yield in Cotton's district only slightly higher at 14.7 bushels. Perhaps because much of the land he was cultivating was new land, Cotton seems to have escaped the worst of the problems. His wheat yields were 26 bushels per acre, producing 12,350 bushels of wheat. Cotton's oats yielded well above provincial and district averages, but his barley yields at 18 bushels per acre were below the provincial figure. He was therefore unable to take advantage of the enhanced prices for coarse grain which resulted from the poor crop.⁷²

Whatever the result of his coarse grain harvest, Cotton had again scored highly with his wheat, the basis of his continued prosperity. In July 1897 Cotton had sold off his 1896

wheat crop, receiving \$1,849.43 in total. The prices for No. 1 hard and No. 1 northern had been 54¢ and 53¢ per bushel respectively. However, when he marketed his 1897 crop locally he received from 80¢ to 82¢ per bushel for the No. 1 hard.⁷³ The early harvest of this year had meant that it was possible to sell the crop before the ports at the Lakehead closed to ice. Cotton celebrated the sale - which brought him a total of \$8,893.36 - by purchasing some silver cutlery and making a substantial contribution to the church.⁷⁴ Christmas also reflected Cotton's increasing financial security. His major expenses in 1897 had been labour (his wage bill jumped to \$897.60) and threshing (increased to \$503.65). In this year Cotton loaned out his first money, \$200 to W. D. Staples for one year at seven percent interest.⁷⁵ At year end Cotton's assets had reached \$11,650.80, including \$4,361.80 in the bank. Set against this figure were liabilities of only \$300. Cotton's net worth was \$11,350.80.

Sowing 660 acres in 1898, A. J. Cotton again increased his acreage under cultivation. The major crop was, of course, wheat, at 515 acres, but there was also 132 acres of oats and thirteen acres of barley. September and October of 1898 turned out to be the wettest in twenty years, and the provincial wheat crop was badly affected. Some of the wheat was lost as a direct consequence of the wet weather, especially extra handling of the stooks in an attempt to dry them. Many of the wet and damp sheaves were thrown away, and late threshing forced some farmers to feed part of their crop directly

to their livestock. A. J. Cotton continued serenely on his way, however, not delayed by the weather. He began cutting his wheat on 16 August and was finished by the end of the month. His threshing was far enough advanced by late September that he was able to send six rail cars of wheat to Fort William. On 12 October he loaded and forwarded another six cars.⁷⁶ All this wheat graded either No. 1 hard or No. 1 northern. Cotton's wheat yield was 31 bushels per acre, compared with 19 bushels per acre for his district and 17.1 bushels per acre across the province. Cotton's oats yielded 59 bushels per acre, once again well ahead of his colleagues. In all, the 132 acres that Cotton had sown with oats produced 7,788 bushels. He sold \$1,000 worth of these oats at 40¢ per bushel straight off the machine, and held the remainder. He was still storing over 3,000 bushels of that bumper crop in February 1900.

Cotton harvested 12,350 bushels of wheat in 1898, and most of the crop was sent at his own expense to Fort William, the freight charges on the twelve cars costing \$1,433.83. His early completion date enabled him to get his grain away to Fort William before the elevators filled and the rail system broke down entirely.⁷⁷ His bank manager attempted to persuade him to sell his wheat in December and invest in spring futures, but Cotton decided against such a plan, partly because of the advice he received from the Winnipeg Commercial.⁷⁸ Harvesting such a large grain yield (over 20,000 bushels) required a great deal of labour, and for the first time Cotton's wage

bill exceeded \$1000. But if his expenses had increased, so did his profits. At the end of the year there was grain to the value of \$9,792 at Fort William. Cotton estimated his total wealth at the close of 1898 at \$20,567.45, a figure which included \$2,601.65 out on loan. Despite a rather large increase in liabilities, largely expenses relating to the marketing of his own grain, Cotton's net worth at the end of 1898 was \$17,719.35, an increase of \$6,368.55 over the previous year.

Superior yields and high prices were something that every farmer fervently desired, and Cotton continued to be very fortunate. There is no evidence to suggest that Cotton's management decisions in Treherne - especially the steady increase of his acreage under cultivation - were motivated by anything other than the perpetual optimism of farmers of the time. Cotton did have an observable strategy of utilizing the fresh soil of others, and his general management of his accounts was prudent and cautious. But on the whole he kept planting more on the assumption that the climate and the price of grain would both hold, and in the 1890s that assumption worked. A series of good years was the basis of the Cotton success story. He was in the right place at the right time with the right strategy - and he was persistently more fortunate with weather than other farmers in Manitoba.⁷⁹

The original agreement with Isaac Mawhinney for N $\frac{1}{2}$ 2.8.10W had run out at the end of 1898. In January of 1899

a new agreement came into effect which was to run until the end of the 1901 season. Mawhinney did not want, or at any rate did not receive, a cash rental, but was instead paid in shares. Cotton was to have all the hay grown on the land and perform the statute labour, while Mawhinney was to have "one third of the crop on land now under cultivation delivered free of expense [at the elevator] except oats which he has to take from the machine."⁸⁰ However, any crop grown on newly-broken land would belong to Cotton. In 1899 the share of the grain for the rent of Mawhinney's land amounted to 2,216½ bushels of wheat. At 55½¢ per bushel, this rental worked out at \$1,221, a very good amount for a half-section. Cotton was discovering that renting land was no longer as inexpensive as it had once been in Treherne.

In 1899 Cotton planted 650 acres in wheat, his largest amount to date. He began sowing late in April, but the crop benefitted from the moisture still left in the soil by the heavy fall rains. He planted only 40 acres of oats and no barley in 1899. Once again most of the problems which beset the 1899 crop - August drought, hessian fly - were escaped by Cotton, although his yields were down from 1898. His poorest field averaged 19 bushels to the acre and his best fields (on new land) averaged 37 bushels per acre. The overall average was 29 bushels per acre, compared with 19 for the district and 17 bushels per acre for the province. Cotton's oats yielded an amazing 93 bushels per acre, more than double the district average and nearly trebling the provincial one.

In all, he ended up with 18,632 bushels of wheat and 3,741 bushels of oats. Cotton finished cutting his wheat on 1 September 1899, and five days later sold his 1898 crop "a-float at Fort William." He sold 10,254½ bushels of No. 1 hard at 70¢ per bushel and 4,233½ bushels of No. 1 northern at 65¼¢ per bushel. He had in fact held on to the grain slightly too long, for if he had sold earlier in the year he could have received 78¢ per bushel for the hard, and saved on storage and interest. Marketing proved as much or more of a gamble than cultivation. Cotton realized \$9,940.73 on this sale, but after deducting freight charges from Treherne to Fort William (\$1,546.97), storage at Fort William (\$870.38) and interest on freight, he deposited only \$7,488.06 in his Winnipeg bank account.⁸¹ The charges for transport and storage, therefore, consumed nearly twenty-five percent of Cotton's proceeds, just under 17¢ per bushel. Later in September of 1899 Cotton sold 10,000 bushels of his 1899 crop at Treherne at 55½¢ per bushel. Although this price was significantly lower than what he received at Fort William, his net return was slightly greater.⁸² Not even a major producer like A. J. Cotton could beat the marketing system.

During 1899 Cotton also arranged a further extension of his acreage at Treherne, leasing eighty acres, E½ of NE¼ 33.7.10W, for three years. Under the agreement Cotton was to summer fallow land already under cultivation and break the remainder. In return he was to have all the grain off the newly-broken land and two-thirds off the summer fallow. He was obligated for the statute labour, the taxes, and de-

livery of the grain off the summer fallow to the elevator at Treherne free of expense.⁸³ Six days after signing this lease, Cotton and his men had begun to break the newly-acquired land. That same month Cotton sent seventeen head of cattle to his brother-in-law Will Ford at Swan River. Ford was to keep the cattle on shares, ". . . him to feed and care for them and have one half of the increase and when I want them to return the same number and same age and one half the increase."⁸⁴

Freeze-up came late in 1899. It was "the best Fall I have ever seen for plowing," recorded Cotton, "no frosty mornings to hinder." By 7 November he had finished his autumn plowing, preparing in all 730 acres for the following year's wheat crop. Of that acreage, 620 had been stubble and 110 was new land and summer fallow.⁸⁵ The year had been a good one for Cotton. In all he had sold \$16,260.68 worth of wheat during the year, and his total incomings amounted to \$19,717.32. There were, of course, major outgoings during the year, including the down payment of \$1,425.90 on the land in Swan River. Cotton reckoned he had spent \$1,669.05 on rent, and \$1,018.60 on wages. The expansion of acreage again required more equipment, this time two new binders, three wagons, and more harrows and horses. One new expenditure this year was \$152 for hail insurance. In all Cotton calculated his outgoings at \$15,757.65.⁸⁶ In estimating his assets Cotton arrived at the figure of \$19,103.68, which included at total of \$6,306.56 out on loan. He had liabil-

of only \$12.50. Cotton added a calculation in his 1899 accounts, estimating that it cost 28¢ to raise a bushel of wheat in 1899, or \$8.03 per acre. He further calculated that over the past eleven years he had made 22¢ profit on every bushel of wheat he had threshed. It is impossible to find comparable figures, but Cotton's "profit" per bushel undoubtedly represented the maximum gain any farmer could expect.

Cotton must have felt optimistic at the beginning of the 1900 crop year. He had 730 acres plowed, ready to be harrowed and seeded with wheat. In the past few years he seemed to have avoided the worst problems of weather and insects that had affected many another farmer in the province. He began wheat seeding on 9 April and finished on 1 May. For the second consecutive year no barley was sown, but another eighty acres was put into oats. In all Cotton had 810 acres under crop.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, he was unable in 1900 to escape the ravages of drought, wind, and locusts that literally decimated the provincial crop. The average yield per acre across the province was 8.9 bushels per acre, and for the first time since he began farming in Manitoba Cotton's figures were below the provincial average, although slightly better than the average in his district.⁸⁸ Perhaps he was slightly cheered by the news that the crops in Swan River had fared better. But despite his extended area of cultivation, Cotton's wheat crop yielded only 6,205 bushels, about one-third of the previous year. But although he must

have been disappointed, Cotton's financial position remained sound, and his plans for the move to Swan River were not set back in the slightest. For many a struggling farmer, the disaster of 1900 could have been a mortal blow. For A. J. Cotton it was merely a temporary nuisance.

What can we learn from this detailed analysis of Cotton's farming progress from 1888 to 1900? In the first place, it must be emphasized that he was a good farmer. The land at Treherne was among the best in the province, but Cotton consistently outperformed his neighbours. Continual expansion onto new land undoubtedly aided his yields, and may also have kept down some of the collateral problems of weeds and pests. In the second place, while his annual planning seemed based on little more than constant expansion, Cotton did have an overall strategy and a good business sense. He had become established without investing in land, and he operated on a pay-as-you-go basis as much as possible. In the third place, Cotton built his success in a period in which constant expansion of acreage under cultivation worked, and in which the problems of mechanization had not yet emerged. He was able to expand without incurring the major costs of mechanized agriculture. In the fourth place, Cotton was very fortunate, particularly in escaping most of the disasters which ravaged parts of the provincial wheat crop in the 1890s. Finally, Cotton was not able to resolve the problems of marketing. Despite his success he was no better off than other farmers once his threshing was finished.

As Cotton wrote to the Hislops in 1903 regarding successful establishment as a prairie farmer, "to accomplish this . . . means industry and good management, and doing the proper thing at the proper time. You cannot be promised ease or luxury. There will be a certain amount of hardship to endure, obstacles to contend with and privations to overcome. Your first four years would be your greatest worry, after that you would be into shape to go ahead. Of course the more capital you can put into it, the easier you can get through."⁸⁹ By 1903 Cotton was again facing some of the problems of establishment again in the Swan River Valley. In his years at Treherne he had proved himself as a farmer, and he now had sufficient resources to undertake the role of landholder.

NOTES: CHAPTER III

1. Robert E. Ankli and Robert M. Litt, "The Growth of Prairie Agriculture: Economic Considerations," in Donald H. Akenson, ed., Canadian Papers in Rural History, I (1978), 33-66; Lyle Dick, "Estimates of Farm-Making Costs in Saskatchewan, 1882-1914," Prairie Forum, VI (1981), 183-201; Irene M. Spry, "The Cost of Making a Farm on the Prairies," Prairie Forum, VII (1982), 95-99. Ankli and Litt suggest \$1,000 as a minimum for 1900, and while Dick accepts \$1,000 as average, he suggests that \$300 was an absolute minimum. Spry disagreed with some of Dick's expenses, arguing that they were not properly part of "farm-making," but accepted his conclusion that it was possible to succeed with little initial capital.
2. A. J. Cotton to John and Sadie Hislop, 28 January 1903, CPPAM. See Table I.
3. Cotton Account Books, 16 March 1888, CPPAM.
4. Cotton Account Books, 10 April 1888; James Lothian inventory, 1882, PAM MG8 B2; A. J. Cotton to H. F. Call, 18 March 1900, CPPAM.
5. Cotton Account Books, 1887, 1888, CPPAM. See Table II.
6. Cotton Account Books, 1888, 1889, CPPAM.
7. James Lothian Papers, 1888, PAM MG8 B2.
8. Cotton Account Books, 25 March 1889, CPPAM.
9. Manitoba, Department of Agriculture and Immigration, Crop Bulletin, number 22 (1889), p. 3. Hereafter this

source will be cited as Crop Bulletin, with relevant number.

10. Cotton Account Books, 11 April, 12 April, 24 May 1889.
11. Crop Bulletin 23, p. 7; Cotton Account Books, 1889.
12. Cotton Account Books, 8 August 1889.
13. Crop Bulletin 24, p. 8; Cotton Account Books, 1889.
14. Cotton Account Books, 11 September 1889.
15. Cotton Account Books, 16 October 1889; James Lothian Papers, PAM MG 8 B2.
16. James Lothian Papers, 16-21 September 1889, PAM.
17. Cotton Account Books, January 1889.
18. Cotton Account Books, 1889.
19. Ibid.
20. Cotton Account Books, 30 December 1890.
21. Crop Bulletin 26, p. 11.
22. Cotton Account Books, 7 April 1890; Crop Bulletin 25, p. 5.
23. Crop Bulletin 26, p. 14.
24. Cotton Account Books, 20 August 1890; Crop Bulletin 27, p. 5.
25. Cotton Account Books, 1890; Crop Bulletin 27, p. 6.
26. Cotton Account Books, 9 May, 15 May, 22 December 1891.
27. Cotton Account Books, 1891; Crop Bulletin 28, p. 4.
28. Cotton Account Books, 12 May 1891.
29. Crop Bulletin 30, p. 6 and Crop Bulletin 31, p. 5.
30. Cotton Account Books, 1891; Crop Bulletin 31, p. 5.

31. Cotton Account Books, 1891; Crop Bulletin 31, p. 8.
32. Cotton Account Books, 1891.
33. Crop Bulletin 33, p. 15.
34. Crop Bulletin 32, p. 3.
35. Cotton Account Books, 1892.
36. Crop Bulletin 37, p. 4.
37. Crop Bulletin 31, p. 11, and Crop Bulletin 36, p. 12.
38. Cotton Account Books, 1892.
39. Cotton Account Books, 24 December 1892.
40. Crop Bulletin 25, p. 8; Crop Bulletin 28, p. 5.
41. Cotton Account Books, 1891, 1892, 1893.
42. James Lothian Papers, 25 June 1883, PAM.
43. Crop Bulletin 23, p. 19.
44. Crop Bulletin 29, p. 11.
45. Cotton Account Books, 1893.
46. Crop Bulletin 38, p. 7.
47. Manitoba, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1891; Crop Bulletin 42, p. 6.
48. Cotton Account Books, 1893; Crop Bulletin 42, 6-8.
49. Cotton Account Books, 1893.
50. Vernon C. Fowke, Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern (Toronto, 1946), p. 242; Crop Bulletin 37, 12-13.
51. Cotton Account Books, 1893.
52. Cotton Account Books, 9 June 1893.
53. Crop Bulletin 45, p. 11.
54. Cotton Account Books, 1894; Crop Bulletin 45, p. 4.

For a summary of yields, see Tables III and IV.

55. Cotton Account Books, 1894.
56. Cotton Account Books, 14 May 1894.
57. A. J. Cotton, "The Farmer's Vegetable Garden," The Nor'West Farmer, 21 December 1904.
58. A. J. Cotton to A. J. Cole, 15 February 1905, CPPAM.
59. A. J. Cotton to Darch & Hunter, 18 March 1905, CPPAM.
60. Cotton Account Books, 7 January 1895.
61. Cotton Account Books, 11 May 1895.
62. Cotton Account Books, 1895; Crop Bulletin 47, p. 4.
63. Crop Bulletin 47, p. 11.
64. Cotton Account Books, 16 September 1895.
65. Cotton Account Books, 1895; Crop Bulletin 48, 4-5.
66. Cotton Account Books, 27 September 1895.
67. Cotton Account Books, 20 March, 7 April, 1896.
68. Crop Bulletin 51, p. 7.
69. Cotton Account Books, 1896.
70. Crop Bulletin 52, p. 6.
71. Crop Bulletin 53, p. 18.
72. Crop Bulletin 54, p. 10.
73. Cotton Account Books, 21 July, 31 December 1897.
74. Ibid., 27 September, 15 October 1897.
75. Ibid., December 1897.
76. Crop Bulletin 57, 7-9; Cotton Account Books, 13 April, 3 May, 26 September, 12 October 1898. See also A. J. Cotton to Bank Manager, Canadian Bank of Commerce, 14 November 1898, CPPAM.

CHAPTER IV: THE SWAN RIVER DYNASTY

As soon as threshing was completed at Treherne in October 1901, the Cotton family embarked for its new home in the Swan River Valley. The move was no homesteader operation involving a few possessions on the back of a wagon. Although the original move from Ontario to Treherne had been carefully orchestrated, it had involved only a few possessions by comparison with 1901. On this occasion the Cottons took their comforts with them. The loading and packing of their rail cars took two days, although most of the farm implements had already been transported. On the morning of their departure they were seen off at the railway station by a large crowd of well-wishers.¹ The journey was delayed for a whole day near Westbourne by a train derailment. Cotton feared some of his cars would be involved, but the alarm proved a false one.² Despite the delay, the Cottons had left Treherne on Thursday morning and arrived at Swan River at midnight on the following Saturday. Staying overnight in the town, they drove proudly to their new farm on the following morning, the drive conducted with suitable pomp and ceremony.

Settling in was no easy matter. The Cottons were able to carry only their personal possessions to their new home. Heavy goods had to be left in a storage shed near the station in Swan River because the roads were quite impassible

until the snow came and sleighs could be used to haul the goods; winter did have its advantages, and Cotton chose to move late in the year for good reason. Nevertheless, A. J. and his family moved in 1901 to a comfortable farmhouse, a far cry from their original arrival in Manitoba in 1888, when they had existed in Treherne under conditions similar to those experienced by Swan River pioneers. Discussing the home that the Loat family came to in 1901, H. A. Loat was to recall many years later the makeshift log cabin "built of logs, chinked with peat moss, with one room, one door, one small window and ground for the floor. Poor mother it must have been a shock to her. Leaving a comfortable house of brick back in Ontario, to have to step in and take over the likes of that."³ While Louise Cotton may have experienced something of the same shock in 1888, she was spared it in 1901.

Cotton had planned and ordered both house and outbuildings in January of 1901. The house was to be eighteen feet by twenty-six feet by fourteen feet, with wooden floors, window and door frames, and shingled with number 1 B.C. materials. Like most farmers, Cotton projected outbuildings larger than his house: the granary was thirty-six feet by fifty feet by fourteen feet; the horse stable was thirty feet by sixty feet by fourteen feet; and the cow barn was twenty-four feet by fifty feet by fourteen feet. Of the 60,000 number 1 B.C. cedar shingles ordered, less than

6,000 were employed for the house. Similarly, of over 55,000 board feet of lumber employed in construction, only 5,080 board feet were utilized in farmhouse construction. Cotton's new home was no baronial castle, no overmighty edifice such as Abe Spalding's. It was a modest farmhouse, well-built but unostentatious. Neither family nor livestock would suffer in Swan River, but there was no visible display of wealth either.⁴

The advance preparation and expenditure marked the Cottons from the typical homesteader. He had begun the process of removing to the Swan River Valley in June of 1898, when he had first visited the district. The planning had not always gone smoothly. The first setback came but two months after that initial visit, when Cotton wrote to Hugh Harley enquiring as to the truth of rumours that there had been a heavy frost in the valley in July.⁵ There is no record of Harley's reply, but it must have reassured Cotton. Nevertheless, as the Loat diary shows, there had been a heavy frost during the night of July 18-19, which had affected the potatoes.⁶ Cotton went ahead with his plans to buy the land, but in truth the climate in the Swan River Valley was rather less predictable than that at Treherne, with a shorter growing season and more risk of frost. The difference showed in Cotton's harvests, but he never regretted his decision, another indication that it was not taken solely on economic grounds.

Summer frost was not the only problem in the valley.

In January of 1899 Cotton's brother-in-law Will Ford and about thirty-two other homesteaders in township 35 (including a number of men who had left Treherne the previous autumn) received notices from the Dominion government that range 29 had been reserved for Doukhobor immigrants. The notices from the Department of the Interior informed the settlers that they would be able to take up homesteads elsewhere, but not in their original locations. The homesteaders were outraged, for many had suffered difficulties and hardships - not to mention expense - in getting themselves settled in the district, and they did not want to move again. Furthermore, after the rush of settlers the previous year they would be unable to find comparable homestead lands in the area. There had been no mention of land for Doukhobors in the spring of 1898 when the first wave of pioneers had filed their applications; only later had the Canadian government decided on the policy. Although Cotton was not directly affected at this point - the land he sought was in range 28 - he was concerned for his relatives and friends from Treherne, and their loss would make his choice in some ways less attractive.

The Doukhobor business marked the appearance of a new A. J. Cotton. Never previously active in dealing with government, Cotton sent off a number of angry letters complaining about the actions of the Dominion government. He wrote to Clifford Sifton, to Robert Watson (Minister of Public Works) and to his Member of Parliament, J. G. Ruther-

ford. On the provincial level he communicated with Thomas Greenway and the provincial immigration agent, W. F. McCreary. His message in all the letters was the same. Writing as "a British subject and a lover of British justice," Cotton argued that "a British subject should never be turned out to make room for a Doukhobour."⁷ While Cotton's views undoubtedly expressed those of the affected settlers, he felt that he must act as a spokesman because of his position as a major landholder in the western part of the valley. Cotton pointed out that when the homesteads had been taken up there had been no suggestion of such government action. Buildings had been erected, goods and stock moved fifty-five miles from the railhead, and now the government was giving the people the privilege of moving out. As Cotton exclaimed, "some privilege I must say!"⁸

Attempts by the Dominion authorities to argue that the land in the Swan River Valley had been available for years without takers did not impress the protesters. They mounted a concerted campaign of letters to politicians of both parties, and to the press.⁹ The government apparently gave in to the pressure, which at times contained hints of violence if the plan of resettling the Russian sectarians went ahead in range 29. "Some of these settlers," warned Cotton ominously, "served three years with the volunteers and are ready to take up arms again, this time in defence of their rights."¹⁰ Perhaps the spectre of a homesteader uprising was worrisome. On the other hand, with a federal election in prospect it

may have been the threat of alienating potential Liberal voters which had more impact. According to Cotton, "if this is permitted by you, there will be such a howl of indignation rose up from Manitoba that your Government will never see power again."¹¹ Moreover, the majority of those who were "Grit to the backbone in Manitoba" had relatives back in Ontario who might also decide to "turn their back on the Government."¹² Cotton displayed little finesse in his correspondence, but clearly felt that a bit of sabre-rattling was in order.

For whatever reason, the Doukhobor settlement was moved one range further west, where there were fewer occupants to protest. Once the colony had become established, Cotton accepted it without question, writing "I am of the firm opinion that these Doukhobours will make good settlers." The anti-foreign tone of his letters in 1899 disappeared.¹³ One of the reasons Cotton found them acceptable may lie in the fact that the Doukhobors showed themselves to be extremely hard workers both on and off their own lands, and Cotton always respected and admired hard work. There was an element of self interest as well. As he observed, "because the Doukhobours are located west of us a branch line is bound to be built to their colony. The branch will either run through my land or in close proximity to it."¹⁴ Furthermore, the Doukhobors quickly became an important element in the economy of the valley. One of the region's major problems was the perennial shortage of farm workers, particularly

after the first few years when the homesteaders became better established.¹⁵ Under the homesteading regulations the settler had to reside for six months of every year on his claim. The beginning homesteader could establish his required residence, seed his newly-broken land, take off his small crop, and still work for most of the season for a more established farmer.¹⁶ If he had a family to look after his land while he worked for hire, so much the better. The high level of wages in the Swan River Valley, as in Manitoba as a whole, reflected the shortage of labour and was an added incentive to outside work.¹⁷ As the homesteader cultivated more of his own land he was less likely to work for hire, although he might still exchange labour with a neighbour to their mutual advantage.

The economy of the Doukhobor colony was organized so that many of the men could work outside it, bringing in cash needed for the expansion and development of its agriculture.¹⁸ After the arrival of Peter Verigin, the Doukhobor leader who had been detained in Russia, working outside the colony became more formalized, with men having set quotas of money which they must go out and earn. The cash was used to purchase machinery, which Verigin saw as important in developing the colony to its fullest potential. Ironically, the sectarian leader was far more attracted to industrialized agriculture than was A. J. Cotton. What interested Cotton was the potential labour force. He hired his first Doukhobor in 1901, although others like the Loats had been using Russian

labour since 1899.¹⁹ Cotton was always satisfied with their work and full of praise for their energy and application. By 1903 he was describing Verigin as a fine fellow.²⁰ In 1905 he wrote to Verigin offering to obtain a wool carding machine for the colony from a friend in Little Britain, Ontario. He characteristically added that he thought there should be "English schools for your children" because they would need to "do General Business on the English methods."²¹ He closed the letter with an invitation to Verigin to visit whenever he came down to Swan River.

As Cotton's behaviour regarding the Doukhobors suggested, he seemed to perceive a different role for himself now that he had become a major landowner. Cotton saw himself as having worked up some sort of "agricultural ladder," and had now reached the pinnacle.²² Part of success involved social responsibility, evident in his concern over the Doukhobors but also over the question of the railway and a host of other issues of local improvement. With railways as with Doukhobors, Cotton saw his own interests and those of the community as closely linked.²³ Nevertheless, Cotton's chief concern in Swan River was to prepare the way for his four sons - Nelson, Herschel, Almon, and Allan - and later Mrs. Cotton's nephew Frank Ford Cook, who was brought up by the Cottons.

A. J.'s original selection of sections 13 and 19 was an interesting one, since the two sections were quite far apart. Whether he chose them solely for the quality of the land or because his concept of the ultimate family holdings

required a broad range of lands rather than geographical unity is not clear. Although Cotton bought further land to consolidate his holdings in the area of section 19, he did not choose to add to the property in section 13. Perhaps significantly, part of section 13 became half of the townsite of Kenville, the first stop on the railway spur that went southwesterly down the Swan River Valley. Cotton may have received some assurances about the railway from land agent T. A. Burrows when the two men travelled together from Winnipeg to Dauphin in May 1899. It is possible that had the railroad not been scheduled down the valley at an early date, Cotton might himself have speculated in Swan River land, as did so many of the valley's early settlers, using the profits to establish himself elsewhere.²⁴ Certainly Alfred Flack, who accompanied Cotton on the initial reconnaissance to the Swan River Valley, bought land on speculation, later selling it to one of the Loat brothers in 1901.²⁵ Will Ford also speculated in some railway land that he bought in June 1899, selling it at a profit in January 1900.²⁶ But Cotton was not interested in land speculation. From the outset he made quite clear that "I intend to farm . . . on a large scale if railway services will permit."²⁷ He did not necessarily plan to do all the farming himself, however. His sons and tenant farmers would cultivate those sections that A. J. did not himself intend to work.

During the summer of 1899, several years before the actual removal to Swan River, Cotton discussed the possibil-

ities of renting out his new land with a good many people.²⁸ However, these discussions do not seem to have come to fruition, and in October of 1899 he began to advertise in Ontario for tenants. His plan was to hold a section and one-half under his own control and to lease out the remainder in lots of 160 and 320 acres on terms similar to those he had enjoyed when first he had started in Treherne. The difference between the Treherne situation and those of his prospective tenants, of course, was that in the latter case the landlord would be right on the spot overseeing developments. According to his newspaper advertisements he was offering "leases of five years to break and bring half under cultivation, put up what buildings required, fence it with two wires and pay taxes."²⁹ The land was described as being "good easily cultivated, with hay and running water and within a short distance of building material and firewood."³⁰ Although this advertisement did elicit some response from Ontario, no land was leased at this time. It does indicate that from the outset, Cotton had in mind to become a major landlord. Whether Cotton failed to lease his land because prospective tenants were unavailable or whether those interested did not find Cotton's terms acceptable is not clear. Certainly many doubted that the terms Cotton had experienced in Treherne were to his advantage.³¹ Cotton's success demonstrated that the critics were wrong. But there was always a built-in hostility to tenancy everywhere in North America, and the Swan River Valley was not Treherne. A survey done in the

valley in 1914 by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches indicated that no more than five percent of farmers in the valley were tenants, quite unlike the southern part of the province where the practice of tenant farming had expanded rapidly.³² Most men did not come to an isolated territory to lease land from others, even if such a practice made good sense economically.

Cotton continued his efforts to lease his land, shifting from strangers to kinsmen. In one case, the interest in kinsmen was quite literally true. His mother's sister Harriet had married a Mr. Kinsman and moved to Illinois; one of her sons - Charlie - seemed interested in moving to Canada. After a long and complex correspondence Charlie decided to take up part of Cotton's section 21. The terms were to be on lease of four years at a rental of one dollar per year plus improvements. There were no buildings on the land but Cotton agreed to provide the rough lumber for them.³³ Kinsman moved to the valley with "fine horses and a splendid outfit," but he did not like the location of Cotton's land and found another farm closer to the town of Swan River.³⁴ Within a year he moved on again, this time to Worthington, Minnesota.³⁵

Cotton also tried to persuade another kinsman from Ontario to move west. Mrs. Cotton's sister Sarah had married John Hislop and the couple farmed near Whitby, Ontario. Mrs. Ford already had three of her children settled near her, but according to Cotton wanted the Hislops to move west as well. Cotton offered some of his land on lease, at the same terms

as to Charlie Kinsman, but after a fairly protracted correspondence, including the detailed budget discussed in chapter III, and a visit to the Swan River Valley, the Hislops decided to remain where they were.³⁶ However, another of Mrs. Cotton's sisters did move west after the death of her husband. Annie Cook was Mrs. Hislop's twin. A. J. travelled to Philadelphia in January of 1905 to accompany her and her two-year old son to Swan River.³⁷ Mrs. Cook eventually went to Winnipeg where she worked as a dressmaker. Her son Frank Ford Cook was brought up by the Cottons, and eventually received part of the Cotton land.

After breaking some of the land in section 21 himself during the summer of 1903, Cotton again at the end of the year publicly advertised for tenants. This time he chose two journals with wider circulations than the Port-Hope Gazette. Advertisements were placed in the Christian Guardian and The Nor'West Farmer. To the Christian Guardian he confided that he would "like to get a Methodist family up from Ontario for this farm."³⁸ The terms were the usual ones, although he now offered to break 150-200 acres of the land in the coming year and to furnish the seed, thus producing not simply a tenant farmer but one farming for shares.³⁹ Cotton received more replies to this advertisement, about equally divided between the northwest and Ontario.⁴⁰ One of the most important questions, as his comment to the Guardian suggested, concerned religion. After a lengthy correspondence with a number of enquirers, the

farm (comprising section 21:35:28W) was leased for one year from 1 April 1904 to George F. Wright from Wolseley, Ontario. Cotton had been forced to revise his original intention of replicating the opportunity he had enjoyed in Treherne. Not only had he to break land on the section in advance of leasing, but he had also to build a fairly comfortable house on it, as well as a stable and granary. Tenants such as himself were no longer easy to find. Most were willing to trade the opportunity of cheap land for greater comfort.⁴¹

Ultimately, Cotton leased much of his land on the "share system," the most common form of tenancy in North America. The owner of the land supplied the seed, and paid for half the twine and half of the threshing in return for half of the crop. One advantage of this share cropping system, so prevalent in the American South after the Civil War, was that it reduced the amount of capital required to begin farming, since men starting farming on their own account or moving to a new area needed virtually no cash to get under way. Unlike Cotton's Treherne arrangements with Major McLean, which did imply some capital input by the tenant, share farming was designed for the very poor. In the United States share farming created a system of perpetual thralldom, particularly when blacks were involved as tenants, but it did not necessarily produce the same effect in the prairie west. The western tenant was not receiving small amounts of worn-out cotton and tobacco plantations,

but enjoying an opportunity of taking the first crops from virgin land without capital investment. Cotton himself was a prime example of the positive possibilities inherent in tenancy, although it must be added that he farmed on a share basis only on supplementary acreage in Treherne.

George Wright was obviously satisfied with his first year's results, because on 1 November 1904 he and Cotton negotiated another and longer-term lease. This one was to run for five years and four months, until 1 April 1910. Under this lease Cotton was to receive one-third of the crop delivered at the local warehouse or elevator in return for the use of the land and the supplying of seed.⁴² Cotton undoubtedly preferred to provide the seed, because he was always extremely concerned lest weeds and micro-parasites like rust be introduced onto his land through bad practices of the tenant farmer. Wright turned out to be an excellent tenant and moved in 1910 only because like Cotton he had a number of sons to settle, and required his own land. Once again, Wright's example underscores both the importance of sons to a farmer at this time and the influence of those sons on his behaviour. According to American historian Alan Bogue, the farm boy by the age of ten was considered capable of offering considerable help to his father, and by the time he was fifteen he was usually doing a man's work. Family labour was usually cheap labour because few farmers paid their sons wages, at least before they turned 21.⁴³ As was the case in Ontario, western sons tolerated such exploitation by their

fathers because they hoped that they would eventually receive a fully-improved farm of their own as a reward for loyal and faithful service. Fathers could exercise considerable control over their children, especially the males, in this way. But the control only worked if the farmer had sufficient land to accommodate all the eligible sons.

The farm that Cotton advertised in January of 1910 was a much more attractive proposition than it had been before Wright's tenancy. The land was proven grain land, four hundred acres were under cultivation, and the farm buildings were well developed and maintained. The advertisement which appeared in The Farmers Advocate, The Nor'West Farmer, the Christian Guardian, the Montreal Weekly Witness, and the Toronto Globe, elicited a full seventy replies. Once again Cotton favoured Ontario applicants and sought to rent to one William Gardiner of Coldwater, Ontario. Unfortunately the postal service delayed Cotton's offer and Gardiner's affirmative response. Worried about spring planting, Cotton rented the farm to a family named Martin from McGregor, Manitoba. The Martins arrived on 24 March, 1910, but were not such successful tenants as the Wrights. They were also unfortunate. Most of the crop was hailed out on 30 June 1911 and the wheat which came up thereafter was frozen.⁴⁴ By 1912 and 1913 Cotton was constantly complaining about money owed by Martin, as well as about buildings and fences in disrepair.⁴⁵ Martin's tenancy appears to have terminated in 1913, and Cotton's second son Herschel took over the section, per-

haps a bit sooner than intended; although he was already thirty years old, he was still unmarried.

Herschel was the second of A. J.'s sons to assume possession of part of his father's land. The typical pattern was for each son to leave home and take up his patrimony after marriage. Nelson, the eldest boy, had taken over section 13 in April of 1906, at about the same time that he married the local schoolteacher, Vita Mackay. Cotton built and furnished a house for them on section 13, no doubt as a wedding present. Like the tenants, Nelson farmed on shares. For the first year he was to give his father a half-share of the crop, but a second lease a few months later altered that figure to one-third, in return for which A. J. provided the seed.⁴⁶ Although the details of Herschel's lease have not survived, Cotton pursued policies similar to that with Nelson when his younger sons, Alman and Allan, subsequently took over their own farms on Cotton land in 1922; both boys had married in 1921. According to the later leases, Cotton provided the land, a fully furnished house, and the seed, in return for one-half the crop the first year and one-third of the crop thereafter.⁴⁷ In 1922 Alman was twenty-nine and Allan was twenty-three. All Cotton's sons continued to farm under this share system until they inherited their property under their father's will, and all remained on the land until their own deaths or retirements. Family tradition is that at least one and possibly more of Cotton's sons would have preferred some alternate

occupation to that of farmer, but were never able to break away from their father's patriarchy.⁴⁸ In any event, over half of A. J.'s Swan River land still remains in the hands of the Cotton family, farmed by grandsons who in turn have sons of their own ready to take over. A. J. Cotton did truly create an agrarian dynasty in the Swan River Valley.

Until his sons were ready to assume their places in Cotton's grand scheme - only Herschel acquiring his own farm before marriage - A. J. continued to try to persuade kinsmen and friends to move to his land. One candidate was Ezra Haskill, who with his family had moved from Little Britain, Ontario, to Treherne to work for Cotton. After establishing himself in Treherne, Haskill had eventually sublet some land from A. J. In 1904 Cotton tried to persuade Haskill to take up a lease on Cotton land in the Swan River Valley.⁴⁹ Haskill refused, however, and subsequently purchased land at Treherne.⁵⁰ Obtaining reliable tenants was no easy matter.

Although Cotton planned to employ tenants to cultivate much of his Swan River acreage - at least initially - there was still to be a large home farm. Cotton had sent an outfit to the valley after the spring work was completed in Treherne in 1900 to begin breaking his land. The party comprised "two three horse teams with two breakers," and was headed by Samuel Henderson and A. J.'s eldest son, Nelson.⁵¹ Cotton had arranged in advance with his brother-in-law William Ford, already resident in the valley, that there should

be about 3,000 board feet of lumber awaiting the party, so that they could throw up "two shacks 14 x 24 each one for shack and the other for stable."⁵² Cotton also sent his implements, horses, and feed, by rail to Swan River. He had also to ship wagons to transport what he had sent from the railhead to his land. These operations were by no means simple, and were a far cry from his early days of pioneering in Manitoba.⁵³

Cotton had considered the possibility of hiring professionals to do some of the breaking. Supposedly they were able to break land at a much faster rate than the ordinary farmer, since they were so much more skilled and experienced.⁵⁴ But professional breaking required a substantial cash expenditure, something Cotton always begrudged if it could be avoided. For an absentee landholder like Cotton it probably worked better for his own men to do the work, especially since he felt the land at Swan River was easier to break than that at Treherne. In any case, when the breaking party returned to Treherne for the harvest of 1900, they had broken a total of 250 acres.⁵⁵ Cotton would be able to plant his first crop in the valley the following year. Advance planning had some considerable advantages.

In 1901 Cotton planted 764 acres of wheat in two crops, one at Treherne and one at Swan River. This planting was his largest wheat acreage to date; his operation was still expanding. While 1901 saw a bumper harvest generally in the west, the crop at Swan River was badly hailed out and

averaged only twelve and one-half bushels to the acre. Nevertheless, Cotton did thresh 3,500 bushels of wheat and 2,000 bushels of oats between the two locations.⁵⁶ Sam Henderson had been in charge of the work at Swan River in 1901, and although he was hardly responsible for the weather Cotton was not altogether pleased with Henderson's handling of the job. A. J. grumbled that the expenses at Swan River had been too heavy, that the harvest was much too slow, and "by the way the crop is being handled it will not pay expenses."⁵⁷ Cotton was discovering the hazards of absentee ownership. Even the most devoted and responsible manager did not always share his employer's views. If Cotton had considered hedging his bets by farming in both Swan River and Treherne, this experience helped decide him on a single location where he could personally supervise the work. Cotton summered at Treherne in 1901 as it was the location of his major crop - 670 of 764 acres - and there were many tasks which had to be overseen. But he undoubtedly would have preferred being at Swan River on his own land.

A great believer in summer fallowing, Cotton preferred to let land lie every third year because by so doing it was "kept in perfect condition, free from weeds, moisture retained in a favourable condition for producing the most perfect crop possible." He insisted the operation in the long run paid dividends, for clean land storing moisture enabled farmers to reap increased harvests "and we will receive more satisfactory dividends from our farming opera-

tions."⁵⁸ Modern scholarship has agreed with him.⁵⁹ Cotton did feel that he had been prevented from following this practice properly because of the demands of those landlords from whom he leased, although he never went the next step by putting himself in his own tenants' shoes. He always maintained he had "not the privilege to work the land as I would like but expected to raise as much wheat as possible without summer fallowing."⁶⁰ Such protests were more than a bit disingenuous, since it was in Cotton's interests as much as the landlords' to push the soil as hard as possible. On some of his rented land seven consecutive wheat crops had been planted without a break, a procedure which was possible largely because of the virgin nature of the soil. Cotton was really rationalizing his decision to become a landowner himself.

If Cotton believed in summer fallowing - although he did not always practice it - he was also a great supporter of the Experimental Farm System, often writing to S. A. Bedford of the Brandon Farm with advice or suggestions.⁶¹ Because of the one-sided nature of the surviving Cotton correspondence, we know only what Cotton wrote to Bedford, and not the information he may have received in return. Nevertheless, the correspondence indicates a farmer who gave serious thought to his craft. On the question of harrowing, for example, Cotton favoured going over the land three times, although he observed that many of his neighbours harrowed only once and justified the practice by saying that overworking injured

the soil. Obviously a single harrowing was cheaper - at least in the short run - because of the time and labour saved, but the cost of labour could be well spent, if the result were greater yields.⁶² In this correspondence as elsewhere, Cotton had a tendency to categorical preaching. He must have received something more from Bedford besides an outlet for his own ideas, because after he moved to the Swan River Valley he was a great supporter of the establishment of an experimental station in his district, insisting that conditions in the Swan River Valley were quite different from those at Brandon or Indian Head and that all known results simply did not apply to northern Manitoba. In the meantime, Cotton did his own experimenting. He tried winter wheat, with mixed results over the first few years. Although convinced it would prove successful, he added, "success would be here quicker if we had an experimental farm backed by the Government and experienced men."⁶³ Despite a barrage of letters to T. A. Burrows and other political leaders, Cotton never made much progress on his experimental station. He became convinced the placing of experimental farms was not done on the grounds of need or results but in terms of political patronage.⁶⁴ In this assessment he has been supported by recent scholarship.⁶⁵

Certainly one aspect of his farming in which Cotton attempted to take advantage of the Brandon Farm was in his choice of wheat variety. After his move to Swan River, he continued to use Red Fife for the first three seasons, al-

though some of his neighbours had switched to White Fife. Cotton had already tried and discarded White Fife in the Treherne district, not finding sufficient advantage in it over Red Fife. However, in 1906 Cotton decided to try Preston wheat, writing to S. A. Bedford to see if the agent could supply him with up to twenty-five bushels to sow on an experimental basis.⁶⁶ Preston was a variety of wheat developed in the 1890s by the Saunders family. A cross between Red Fife and Lagoda, another early maturing wheat which William Saunders had imported from Russia, Preston was considered to have real potential for use on the northern prairies.⁶⁷ Cotton does not seem to have received any Preston seed from Bedford, although A. J. began using the new variety in 1905. In that year he sowed both Preston and Red Fife because he did not have enough of the former for all his needs. He found that in fields sown with both, the Preston gave consistently better yields, twenty-five bushels against sixteen of Red Fife to the acre.⁶⁸ It would appear that Cotton was not simply keeping up-to-date, but also responding to the different growing conditions of the Swan River Valley.

Certainly Cotton's interest in winter wheat was a result of his move to Swan River, where the northern climate of the valley made the advantages of the technique obvious. In December of 1904 Cotton began to make enquires about importing a carload of seed, not only for his own use but for sale to other farmers. Winter wheat, which was planted

in the autumn rather than in the spring, had been grown successfully in the valley for several years, but only on a small scale using Ontario varieties not well suited to the new district.⁶⁹ Winter wheat was extensively grown in Ontario, where it gave higher yields than spring wheat but was extremely susceptible to weather conditions.⁷⁰ A new variety was needed in the Swan River Valley, and as was typical, required the initiative of one substantial farmer. If the crop were successful the neighbours quickly became interested. Cotton appears to have been inspired to investigate the possibilities of Turkey Red by the success achieved by one of his neighbours, J. Becker. Turkey Red was an American variety which had been encouraged by the American Department of Agriculture for use in Iowa and Illinois, and Becker was probably an American who had brought his seed with him.⁷¹ Despite Cotton's best efforts he was unable to obtain a sufficient supply of the variety in Canada. Nor was an alternative, Oregon White, more readily available. Eventually he had to import an entire carload from Kansas. The growth of winter wheat was - in Cotton's view - more likely to be successful in the Swan River Valley than in southern Manitoba, because the valley was sheltered and the snow remained on the ground until spring.⁷²

Cotton had hoped that the wheat would arrive before March 1905 and the subsequent spring thaw, so that "farmers can get it out on sleighs," still the best method of transport in his part of the valley.⁷³ But the seed did not

arrive until July. Cotton imported the wheat at his own expense and sold it at costs to his neighbours, as well as to farmers at "Winnipegosis, Treherne, Holland, Russel, [sic] Melfort, Prairie Creek and River and among the Douks."⁷⁴

His own first plantings were not very successful. During the first winter there was so little snow that there was little protection for the seed and it did not flourish.

The second season saw sufficient snowfall "but the incessant freezing and thawing up to such a late date in spring killed a large area of it."⁷⁵ However, what survived did provide twenty-six bushels per acre of fine wheat. Cotton also ascribed some of his early failures to having sown the seed too early. He had initially sown in mid-August, but discovered through trial and error that the best date was in early September, even as late as 25 September.⁷⁶

One of the major reasons Cotton was willing to experiment with new wheat strains and planting sequences was his failure in the Swan River Valley to produce the quantities of No. 1 hard wheat which he had enjoyed in Treherne. His quest was to some extent futile, because the soil in the valley simply was not suited to the production of no. 1 hard or northern.⁷⁷ When the winter wheat market was established in Winnipeg, the sample that the grades were based upon came from the High River and Pincher Creek districts, and even Cotton agreed that his own winter wheat was not so good. He continued to sow Preston as his spring variety because it matured earlier than Red Fife, although he re-

mained convinced for some years that the failure to produce no. 1 wheat was due to the seed: "it does not make as good a grade as the Red Fife because I think we have not got the pure seed." However, Preston proved its worth in 1908, "one of the worst harvests" Cotton had ever seen in the west.⁷⁸ That year those who had sown Red Fife harvested nothing at all.

As the foregoing has suggested, the early years at Swan River were more of a struggle than Cotton had initially envisaged. Despite Cotton's confidence when he chose his land, it rarely gave him the outstanding results he had achieved at Treherne. Furthermore, Cotton bore more of the costs of bringing his acreage into cultivation than he had planned. Except for George Wright, he was unable to find tenants prepared to develop the land as he had done for Colonel McLean. Even in Wright's case Cotton had to provide the house. Instead of having a relatively compact home farm with a large proportion of acreage out on shares, Cotton was forced to underwrite almost all the costs of bringing five farms into operation. To make matters worse, this substantial effort was executed in years when his wheat yields were persistently disappointing. Between 1902 and 1909 Cotton's yields only once exceeded those of his district and the province - in 1903 - and in the years 1904, 1905, 1908, and 1909 they were well below district and provincial figures. In 1903 Cotton estimated his total assets to be \$45,438.06, against which he set

liabilities of \$5,836. The assets were largely in land, farm implements, and animals. The liabilities consisted mainly of money owed on the Swan River land to the Canadian Northern Railway, a total of \$4,800.⁷⁹ In 1907 Cotton calculated his assets at \$59,530 (again mainly in land) and his liabilities at \$11,000, which included a mortgage to provide cash for land development.⁸⁰

Not until 1910 would Cotton's wheat yields again exceed district and provincial figures by significant amounts. In this year Cotton's wheat averaged twenty-nine bushels per acre compared with just over twenty for the district and thirteen and one-half for the province.⁸¹

He reckoned that with such a good crop he would clear about \$10,000 above expenses for the year, although prices were lower than they had been for the past four harvests.⁸²

On 21 September 1910 Cotton made a reckoning of his assets and liabilities. The former amounted to \$85,259, including \$65,000 for his land, \$3,000 worth of farm implements, \$2,600 for sixteen horses, and \$700 for twenty-eight cattle. He estimated his 10,000 bushels of wheat were worth \$8,000. He also held a mortgage of \$1,674 on the homestead of his brother-in-law William Ford. Cotton's major liabilities were his mortgage from the National Trust for \$10,000 on his land, \$500 to the Canadian Bank of Commerce, \$450 for painting farm buildings, and \$600 on his threshing bill. In all Cotton's liabilities amounted to \$13,040, which left him with a net worth of \$72,219. Despite the good results in 1910, 1911 and 1912 also proved disappointing.

In one sense, the difficulties Cotton experienced worked to his advantage, for they led him to continual experimentation with new methods and procedures. Like other farmers, Cotton's profits were affected by other factors besides yield, and in Swan River he was forced to tackle some of these problems. Smutty wheat, for example, was a difficulty which had plagued farmers in the 1890s and emerged again in 1905.⁸³ There were two kinds of smut - "stinking" smut and "loose" smut - both caused by a tiny plant which showed as a "black dusty mass of stuff filling kernels of wheat, replacing whole heads of oats and ears of corn."⁸⁴ In the earlier outbreak the smut was combatted by treating the seed with immersion in a solution of bluestone for twelve hours, then allowing it to dry thoroughly. The seed thus treated was not planted for at least ten days. The treatment appeared to work successfully. Smut returned in 1905, and in that year approximately 25% of western wheat was rejected because of the condition.⁸⁵ Cotton was convinced the cause of the problem was the bluestone used in the treatment, which had been adulterated. After the government had taken to inspect and certify the bluestone, the smut had vanished. However, inspection had fallen into disuse and once again smut was "making headway." Cotton agitated to have the government resume its inspection procedures.⁸⁶ Rejection of some of his own wheat in 1906, grown on new land where the offending spores could not possibly be in the soil, further

persuaded him that the fault lay in the bluestone. Rejection of wheat hit A. J. hard, for while he had been at Treherne he had "never sold a single ear of rejected wheat!"⁸⁷ During the second outbreak the bluestoning process was refined. After removal from the bluestone solution the wheat was washed in lime water for five to ten minutes, then dried in sunlight on canvas sheets.⁸⁸ Eventually a method for clearing the smut from the grain was developed. It involved wetting the grain thoroughly in a formalin solution which loosened the smut. The grain would fall to the bottom of the container and the smut would float on the surface to be skimmed off. Cotton quickly adopted the new techniques and was still using the procedure as late as the 1930s.

If Cotton saw himself as a community leader through his own attempts to keep abreast of the times, he was also interested in the promotion of agricultural education in his new locality. There is no record of his involvement in such matters in Treherne, but in the Swan River Valley he was a prime mover in arranging for speakers from the Department of Agriculture to speak in the Harlington District. He undertook to provide transportation for the visitors to and from Swan River, and often entertained them at his home.⁸⁹ The programme under which the Ministry of Agriculture sent out speakers had originally been under the auspices of the Farmers Institute Act of 1890, but although this act was repealed in 1900 and the work carried

on through Agricultural Societies, Cotton persisted in referring to the "Institute" for many years.⁹⁰ His continuing interest in agricultural education in the province may have been one of the chief factors behind his appointment to the Board of Governors of the University of Manitoba in 1917, the major outside recognition he achieved for his manifold activities.⁹¹

Cotton's efforts at better farming finally paid off in 1913, just in time for the halcyon years of the Great War. From that year until 1920 his yields were consistently above both district and provincial averages. Some years, of course, were better than others. 1915 was a singularly good year, coinciding with the largest acreage Cotton had yet planted in the Swan River Valley. Records across the province were broken, but Cotton's yields were little short of sensational. This crop year was undoubtedly the one where Cotton turned the corner in Swan River. He had planted 650 acres of wheat, and harvested a total of 23,338 bushels. On 28 October he calculated his assets at \$108,210.55, and early in 1916 he paid off his mortgage in full.⁹²

The 1916 crop year began late, after a long and severe winter. Seeding was late and more prolonged than usual due to standing water and a shortage of labour caused by the war.⁹³ The year was also a bad one for rust, which had already caused great damage in the Dakotas. It spread to Manitoba in July, its growth accelerated by high humidity.

Cotton's wheat yields - at just over eighteen bushels per acre - were obviously not immune to the conditions, but stood up well against far lower figures for the district and the province. Although Cotton had only harvested 9,325 bushels of wheat, he undoubtedly received a good price for it, since the war had generated an enormous increase in the price of wheat in 1916. Like most western farmers, Cotton benefitted greatly from the war, but he would have regarded his gains as richly deserved, as in many ways they were. It had taken him many years of hard work and adaptation to new conditions to bring his lands at Swan River under control. That his success at so doing coincided with wartime prosperity clearly worked to his advantage, but without the work would have availed him little.

A. J. Cotton plainly operated on an entirely different plane in Swan River than he had in Treherne. There was the emphasis on providing for his sons, of course, but also evidence of willingness to improve his farming techniques. Moreover, there was a sense of community responsibility and leadership which had been absent earlier. Cotton was an influential figure in the western part of the Swan River Valley, and he knew it.

NOTES: CHAPTER IV

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CHAPTER V: A MAN OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A. J. Cotton's activities from the time of the Doukhobor crisis indicate that he perceived a very different role for himself in the new community of Swan River than merely that of wheat king. No record survives of any public involvement in Treherne, although in Ontario Cotton had been auditor of his local school board.¹ He may have been too busy in Treherne in establishing financial security for his family. Public inactivity may also have reflected Cotton's perception of himself as a tenant farmer rather than a landholder. Moreover, when Cotton had come to Treherne he had been unknown in the community. The situation was far different in the Swan River Valley. Cotton's arrival in the district was widely publicized, he was the largest landowner in the entire valley, and he was surrounded by many of his Treherne neighbours.² Indeed, the Harlington and Thunder Hill districts of the valley were for a time known as "New Treherne."³ A number of men from Treherne quickly achieved prominence in the newly-settled area, and by the time of the arrival of the Cottons, Daniel Hawe was already a member of the Swan River municipal council and H. E. Glendenning was the secretary-treasurer of the municipality. In fact, Cotton had helped Glendenning secure his position by writing letters supporting his application. Almost immediately after his arrival Cotton had been offered the reeveship of Swan River,

but he had refused the opportunity.⁴ He was interested in public affairs, but mainly those in his immediate neighbourhood.

Not surprisingly, Cotton became almost immediately involved in the creation and organization of a school district in the vicinity of the Cotton home farm. There had been discussion about the creation of a school district for some time before Cotton's move to Swan River, but nothing had been accomplished.⁵ There had in fact been sufficient children of school age in the vicinity for over a year, and Cotton had hoped that a school would be already in operation for his younger children Frances, Alman, and Allan.⁶ Cotton had been fortunate at Treherne, finding the school district already in place on his arrival.⁷ The two eldest Cotton boys, Nelson and Herschel, were among the first seven pupils on the role when the Treherne School had opened in June of 1888.⁸ When he realized that nothing had been done in the Harlington area, Cotton in 1901 moved swiftly. A plan was drawn up, a site for the school settled - on land donated by Cotton - and all the necessary paper work required by the 1890 Public Schools Act was submitted to the Swan River municipal council. Cotton also wrote separately to H. E. Glendenning asking his aid in getting the matter expeditiously settled, reminding him that he owed his position in part to the good offices of Cotton himself.⁹ Cotton wrote as well to Dan Hawe, the ex-Trehermite who was his councillor and to the reeve himself, J. W. Robson. The message to both was the same: "Now settle

this district as we want it at the next meeting and dont delay."¹⁰ If the council moved quickly it would be possible to start building in the spring. The council acted and the Harlington School District (number 1164) was established.¹¹

Limits prevailed as to how much pressure Cotton could exert. The issue of the siting of the school was not so easily settled as the establishment of the district. Cotton at the outset had offered a two-acre corner site on his section 19 for the school. But at a public meeting on 3 January 1902 to discuss the question of location, Cotton's choice of situation at the north corner of the district and a half-mile from the centre, was rejected in favour of a site near the centre. Cotton, who had been elected chairman of the school district at an earlier meeting in December of 1901, joined the two other elected trustees in opposing the popular choice on the grounds that the land was "not a proper and fit place for the school as it is in a swamp and would have to be put on piles." Furthermore, the vast majority of the school-age children resided in the northern part of the district, only one child living on the south side.¹² Despite these objections the Department of Education overturned the decision of the January meeting on technicalities - the meeting was illegal because the name of the school district had not been officially registered and the trustees had not taken their "oath of office," the Declaration of Trustees. There had also been voting irregularities.¹³ Cotton and his col-

leagues soon fulfilled their obligations under the 1890 Public Schools Act. But the contretemps meant that construction of the school building was delayed beyond Cotton's target date of April 1902. Not until August was A. J. able to ask for estimates for a qualified carpenter to supervise the five volunteers whom the trustees were hoping to find to erect the 22' by 34' building.¹⁴ The Harlington school finally began classes on 19 January 1903.¹⁵ In 1904 a 16' by 50' stable was added at the school site, also erected by volunteer labour.¹⁶

Cotton remained on the school board for seventeen years, for fifteen of them serving as Secretary-Treasurer.¹⁷ One of his major tasks during these years was the recruitment of teachers. A general scarcity of teachers prevailed in the rural districts of Manitoba, a situation exacerbated by the mobility of teachers in search of better conditions and higher pay. The reports of the Department of Education continually noted the problem, but the department seemed powerless to change conditions, being particularly helpless in the face of the skimming off of the most highly qualified teachers to other professions such as law and medicine.¹⁸ In December of 1903 Cotton attempted to use an agency to find a teacher for Harlington. He hoped to obtain a female teacher with a second or third Manitoba certificate who was also a Methodist. He also emphasized, despite the extra paperwork involved, that he would accept a teacher from Ontario. Teachers from Ontario required a permit issued by the Department of Education to teach in Manitoba, and it was the responsibility of the

school trustees to apply for it on behalf of their prospective employee. Failure to obtain the required permit could result in a school losing its municipal and provincial funding. In 1903, twenty-five percent of all teachers in the North West Inspectoral District, which included Harlington, were teaching on permits, mostly with no further certification. Over the years a number of teachers in the Swan River Valley were products of Ontario, often the daughters of men who had moved with their families from the east.

Even before assuming his position as school trustee, Cotton had strong views on teachers. In 1899 he had written to the Tribune, making clear the importance in his mind of having "a teacher of the right stamp and ability" who was committed to the profession and who would inculcate in the pupils the importance of doing any task well.¹⁹ Ontario Methodist background, Cotton obviously felt but did not emphasize in his letter, helped in producing the "right stamp." Despite his views, A. J. did not often have the luxury of choosing his teacher on merit. By and large the district took from those applying the candidate willing to work for the lowest salary. In 1903, for example, the average salary in the North West Inspectoral District was \$480 per annum, with the range from \$420 to \$600.²⁰ Harlington was prepared to offer only the minimum of \$420.²¹ Although Cotton received nine applications for the post at Harlington, only one candidate was prepared to come at the minimum, with two more willing to come for \$450 and the remainder seeking higher terms. The board attempted to hire the cheapest appli-

cant, but when offered the job he did not reply. Cotton then opened negotiations with Vita McKay, one of the higher-priced applicants. Vita was the daughter of one of the Ontario settlers in the valley, and she had received her teacher training in the eastern province. Although she had originally asked for a larger salary Cotton persuaded her to accept \$450 as she was already "in the valley."²² Miss McKay obviously met Cotton's criteria, and she subsequently became his daughter-in-law when she married Nelson Cotton in 1906.

Cotton's experiences in hiring teachers over the next few years confirm the pessimistic reports of the Department of Education, and indicate that despite his preferences, he took what he could get. Teachers changed schools frequently, and although school boards usually had a fixed salary limit regardless of qualifications, teacher salaries continued to rise.²³ By 1906, only three years after haggling over \$450, Cotton was offering \$600 to anyone who would come to Harlington.²⁴ The appointment of teachers always seemed to be a last minute affair, with Cotton desperately sending off letters and wires at the end of December in an attempt to find someone who would open the school at the beginning of January. Since such frantic activity was not characteristic of Cotton, it seems likely that the hiring system was geared to last-minute decisions by the teachers. The search process was not always successful, and the beginning of school was often delayed to the end of January. Appointing a teacher

became an annual ritual, as few teachers remained longer than one year and some did not even last that long.²⁵

Cotton remained a school trustee until March of 1918. After seventeen years of service he resigned because while he was away in Winnipeg a dance had been held in the school. During the early years of settlement the school house at Harlington had served multiple functions. Two denominations had held their services there before the completion of their own buildings.²⁶ Sunday worship and the occasional social evening connected with the church were the only extra-hours uses for the school which Cotton could countenance. Under his administration the Harlington school differed from others in the locality in not serving as the venue for a variety of community events.²⁷

In the end, Cotton proved unsuccessful in imposing his religious values upon the Harlington School District. Although hardly an introspective man, Cotton was a dogmatic one, committed to the social values of Methodism: "temperance, Sabbath observance, decent living standards and adherence to other aesthetic principles."²⁸ Cotton paid more than lip service to these precepts; they were an integral part of his life. He neither drank alcohol nor smoked, and he made clear to his family and to prospective employees that he would not tolerate their indulgence in these habits, or in bad language. Cotton's children were brought up to observe the same principles as their father: "My boys are Temperance in all things and do not know the taste of Liquor. Neither do

they know the taste of a pipe or tobacco, neither do they know what bad language is."²⁹ The Sabbath was observed on the Cotton farm and Cotton followed his precepts even when travelling, as on his first journey to Swan River. He also had deep suspicions of what the Methodists called "frolicking," as his behaviour with the school building demonstrates. To what extent Cotton's success could be attributed to his social beliefs is incalculable, although plainly hard work and clean living were not likely to hinder his advancement as a farmer.

Cotton shared his Methodism with many of the Ontarians who came to Manitoba in the decades after 1870. In the strength of his asceticism he probably was not typical. His values were partly a result of a heritage of sectarianism within the Methodist umbrella, partly a result of his own personality. The Cottons had begun as Bible Christians, adherents of a sect which had originated in Devon and Cornwall, the region from which John Cotton had emigrated in 1838.³⁰ In the early 1830s the Bible Christians had sent missionaries to Prince Edward Island and to Upper Canada to minister to those from England who had settled in Canada. John Hicks Eynon, the missionary sent to Upper Canada, made his headquarters in Cobourg, only eight miles from Port Hope where John Cotton settled. It is likely that, like most emigrants to Canada, John had joined others of like persuasion in the new land. Gradually, the Bible Christians faded away, with most of their members and congregations joining the ranks of the Meth-

odists.

As an early member of the Methodist Church in Treherne, A. J. had occasionally become involved in church matters, especially as he became more successful. As his finances improved, so did his financial contributions to the church. By October 1897 he was contributing over \$200 annually, and by 1899 he felt in a strong enough position within the Treherne Church to write to Methodist leaders in Winnipeg complaining about the transfer of the Reverend W. L. Armstrong from Treherne. According to Cotton, Armstrong had brought the Methodist Church in Treherne to a sound spiritual and financial position. Since one more year would see the liquidation of the church's debt and because of such "harmony and general satisfaction . . . between Pastor and Congregation," Treherne had requested the Methodist Conference to allow Armstrong to remain in Treherne for the extra year. The Conference had initially turned down this request and assigned Armstrong to Fort Rouge, although the minister had himself made clear that he was willing to remain in Treherne.³¹ The issue was not simply the removal of the minister but the fact that the delegate from Treherne to the Conference had not been consulted in the matter. A strong exponent of the rights of the laity, Cotton felt that ignoring the layman's view was a major weakness in the Methodist Church, leading as it did to the alienation of congregations from the hierarchy. Cotton threatened in his letters to withdraw his support from the church if Armstrong were not allowed to remain. Such bluster was character-

istic of his relatively unpolitical response to situations of which he did not approve.

One of the Treherne congregation's major concerns was the quality of Armstrong's replacement. Like teachers, ministers were in short supply in Manitoba. The Methodist Church at this time was so short of manpower that it was forced to recruit in Britain.³² The Treherne people obviously wanted an experienced Canadian minister, fearing that his replacement would be either an inexperienced Canadian or someone whose British background might not be immediately applicable to a church that was still struggling to find its way in the Canadian West. The Methodist Church had developed a strategy of sending clergy of humble origin to the more remote and backward areas, although it was hardly unique in this practice.³³ What men like Cotton resented was that the western church was totally controlled in the east. The Ontario Methodists dominated the General Conference which determined policy for the entire church. The Methodist journals like the Guardian were published in Toronto and in the early years of western expansion both clergy and laity originated in Ontario. As time passed and the west became more settled, there were increasing problems with the control exerted by the Ontario section of the church. Cotton shared with others his perception that the east consciously ignored the needs of the west for men and resources. As he put it, "The Eastern Methodists must wake up and send us men." Those in the east had the privilege "of having services three times every Sunday and twice through

the week," while in the west many districts had no ministers and services at all.³⁴

Cotton only became really conscious of the weaknesses of Methodist organization in the west after his move to Swan River. The first clergyman in the valley was a Presbyterian, the Reverend Eben Johnson. Nova Scotian by birth, Johnson had been educated at Dalhousie University and Pine Hill Theological College. He had then worked in missions in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and thus was no stranger to the problems of establishing churches in new areas.³⁵ Johnson had been active in the valley since 1898, had spent his first winter in Tent-town with other pioneers, and was extremely popular among the settlers. Men like Johnson helped convince Cotton that the Methodist Church in the west was losing ground because it had become soft and effete. While other denominations were "active, alert, watching the Immigration," and laying the "Foundation of a Mighty Church," the Methodists were "passing by on the other side."³⁶ Cotton did his best to prevent any other denomination gaining a foothold in the Harlington/Thunder Hill district. For the first years the Cotton family's church was part of the Thunder Hill mission and one minister was in charge of six congregations. As a result only one worship service every two weeks was held in the district, at the Harlington School. When another denomination attempted to establish itself in Harlington by utilizing the school on the alternate Sunday, Cotton made very plain that he did not

favour the intrusion.³⁷

The Cotton extended family was very active within the Methodist fold. Will Ford, Mrs. Cotton's brother, was a lay preacher, Samuel Henderson was a member of the board of the Thunder Hill Mission, and various Cotton offspring came to hold lay positions at the local level.³⁸ From the outset Cotton was the financial backbone of the Thunder Hill Mission, providing not only money but a home for the minister. For a number of years the incumbent lived in a small house in the farmyard of the Cotton home farm. One suspects that A. J. was pleased to "keep an eye" on the fellow. Later in 1911 when the church was becoming self-sufficient and no longer a "mission" supported in whole or part by the central board, Cotton donated a lot in the Kenville townsite for a church and a parsonage. Kenville at this time became the head of the circuit. Cotton had firm ideas about what sort of man the area needed. He realized that the personality of the incumbent was very important in the building up of a congregation, as had been the case in Treherne. In 1911 he asked for the removal of the minister because he lacked "push and energy." Cotton felt that the Thunder Hill Church would have progressed more rapidly had there been a livelier man in charge. What was needed, in Cotton's view, was a "good man that will work . . . and act the square man all the time."³⁹ In short, Cotton wanted a clergyman who measured up to Cotton's own self-image. Having donated the land, A. J. was also one of the organizers of the subscription list for the erection of build-

ings. Small fund-raising events had been held over the past few years in the form of socials and thanksgiving suppers, but the major sum was raised by Cotton's subscription drive, which produced just under \$4000.⁴⁰

Cotton's campaign for a new minister was as successful as his subscription drive. From his standpoint, success would be assured if, once the new church building was completed, the minister held in it "a good old fashioned genuine revival." Not only does this desire speak volumes for the sectarian/pietistic nature of Cotton's personal religion, but it also suggests that the Methodist Church, as George Emery has suggested, was losing its appeal in rural areas through its loss of "the old time religion."⁴¹ Supporters like A. J. Cotton did not understand the commitment to the social gospel, and however unnecessary revivals may have been in the west to keep the church growing in numbers, many rural folk still yearned for their return.⁴²

Church and school were the twin pillars of rural society in both Ontario and Ortario-oriented Manitoba, and A. J. Cotton was active in supporting both in the Harlington District. While such involvement was hardly surprising, Cotton's candidacy in the 1903 provincial election was more out of keeping with his character. A. J. was not politically ambitious, as his refusal of the Swan River reeveship had demonstrated. Nor was his personality suited to the political arena. Dogmatic, stubborn, and self-righteous, Cotton had not a compromising bone in his body. He prided himself on his honesty, often

expressed to the point of bluntness. However, his involvement in the 1903 election was really an extension of his personality rather than an aberration. The combination of two life-long commitments - to temperance and the Liberal Party - plus Cotton's concern for the proper development of the Swan River Valley, brought him into politics. When it was suggested in the fall of 1902 that he should run as a candidate in the next provincial election as the first representative from the new constituency of Swan River his first response was to refuse, observing there was "not much more than abuse in those petty offices."⁴³ But circumstances pushed him toward candidacy.

As the time of the 1903 election drew nearer the Swan River Liberals began to look around for a suitable candidate. After discussions with Hugh Harley and T. A. Burrows, amongst others, Cotton approached the reeve of Swan River, J. W. Robson, to see if he would stand as the Liberal candidate for the new constituency. Cotton had always held a high opinion of Robson, and one of his reasons for refusing the reeveship in 1901 had been because he felt Robson was a good man.⁴⁴ Robson made clear to Cotton that he had already been approached by the Conservatives and that if he were to put his name forward as a candidate it would be in that party. Robson would run under the Conservative banner, he said, because he saw "better chances in the Conservative Party . . . than in the Liberals."⁴⁵ Cotton and Robson had obviously had a candid conversation. Robson also told Cotton that if Cotton were to run as the Liberal candidate that Robson would not oppose him.⁴⁶

A. J. Cotton made no such calculations as J. W. Robson obviously had done as to the state of play of the provincial parties. Robson was undoubtedly accurate in his assessment that the Liberals were in trouble in Manitoba in 1903. But Cotton was a lifelong Liberal in the nineteenth-century tradition of party loyalty, which in many communities included duplicate businesses to serve adherents of the contending parties. Cotton had been brought up in Edward Blake's constituency of West Durham, had cast his first vote for Blake, and in Manitoba he supported the Greenway government and the Laurier-Liberals unstintingly. While not active in constituency organizations, Cotton worked in his own way for Liberal candidates. "That man of mine . . . never polled a Grit vote in his life before," he wrote J. G. Rutherford in 1900, "but I made him promise to vote for you and he did."⁴⁷ Cotton recognized the importance of a friendly ear in Winnipeg and Ottawa. After T. A. Burrows lost the Dauphin federal seat to the Conservatives, Cotton's letters to various federal departments always made reference to the unfortunate fact that they no longer had a "Liberal member at Ottawa."⁴⁸ If the Liberal Party and Swan River really needed A. J. Cotton, he would find it difficult to say no.

What initially pushed Cotton into the political fray was undoubtedly the emerging temperance issue. His Ontario Methodist background combined with a practical objection to drinking led him to believe that the temperance question was of "vital importance to the Province . . . as well as each individual."⁴⁹ The temperance movement had been growing in Manitoba since the

first Temperance Referendum in 1892, when twelve thousand votes had been cast against stronger control of liquor, with only seven thousand votes supporting it.⁵⁰ One of the chief reasons for the increased interest in liquor control was the fear of Protestant Anglo-Canadians that the province would be overwhelmed with the values of the new foreign immigrants. The question, therefore, had complex undertones which made it far more than merely a matter of personal health.⁵¹ It was the Prohibition movement rather than the Liberal party which initially nominated A. J. Cotton as a candidate for the provincial legislature. He was chosen at the Swan River Temperance Convention on 28 March 1903, making clear in his acceptance speech that he did not wish to stand merely on a prohibition platform or ticket. If offered the Liberal nomination he would accept. His reasons for preferring a joint ticket stemmed from his observations of the 1899 provincial election at Treherne, where a Prohibitionist candidate had split the vote and allowed the Tories to emerge victorious. Cotton had argued at the time that standing simply as an anti-drink candidate did a disservice to the Prohibition movement, since reform could only come through one of the major parties. Not surprisingly, Cotton believed that Prohibition would be achieved more rapidly through the Grits than through the Tories.⁵² Cotton was prepared to ginger the Liberals along on a single-issue platform, but he was no supporter of third parties.

When the Liberal convention met on 11 April 1903 to choose

their candidate, A. J. was unable to be present because the roads were flooded and impassable. Despite his absence he was chosen as the Liberal candidate, emerging triumphant on the second ballot over the other candidates, William Sifton and W. J. Osborne.⁵³ The convention had disclosed some serious Liberal weaknesses in the new riding. Sifton was influential in Minitonas in the eastern end of the Swan River Valley, and J. W. Robson had warned Cotton of the danger from Minitonas as early as February 1903.⁵⁴ In the ensuing campaign the warning proved accurate. Cotton often complained of the lack of support he received from the eastern part of the constituency, which regarded itself as a rival to Swan River. When Cotton gained the nomination, the Minitonas Liberals became "sulky," and during the campaign Sifton went out of his way to undermine Cotton's position, at one point suggesting that it would be better to vote for the Tories or not at all than to vote for A. J. Cotton.⁵⁵ Since the constituency was farflung and difficult to canvass, much depended upon the organization's willingness in each district to work for the candidate. Sifton's lack of support was very serious. A visit from Thomas Greenway to speak on Cotton's behalf did go some way to bring the Minitonas Liberals into line, but it was not enough.⁵⁶

In addition to splits within his own ranks Cotton had to face a strong opponent. Despite his assurances to the contrary, J. W. Robson had accepted the Tory nomination and was waging a very energetic campaign. From the outset Cotton realized that Robson would be difficult to defeat.⁵⁷ A. J.

suspected that there were more Tories than Liberals in the valley, but hoped that the alliance of "the Prohibitionists with the Liberals or the Liberals with the Prohibitionists" would make the difference. In this calculation he was doomed to disappointment, an interesting illustration of the difficulties of single-issue politics. A feeling developed among some Conservative Prohibitionists that Cotton had only accepted the Prohibition nomination to "catch Prohibitionist Conservative votes for the Liberals."⁵⁸ In short, some suspected that Cotton was a True Grit for whom prohibition was only a secondary issue. Cotton refuted this charge, which bothered not only Tories but those who attached no political label to their prohibitionism. Cotton had sat beside Redford Mulock at the Prohibition convention and had made clear his belief that an independent candidate would merely split the vote. Mulock, however, was later critical of Cotton's position. Cotton offered to resign the nomination, although he made it clear that even if he did so he was still a "dry" candidate. The offer was not taken up.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, A. J. would not benefit from his position on the liquor question in the way that he had hoped.

While Cotton was in some ways a strong candidate, his total lack of political experience and party involvement worked against him. He had been drawn into the election and had played no part in the creation of either Liberal or Prohibitionist constituency organizations in the valley.⁶⁰ As a prominent settler with both Liberal and Prohibitionist

commitments, he was an obvious candidate, but success depended on skills and traits that Cotton did not possess. Whatever his inadequacies, Cotton could not be accused of lack of energy. He mounted an extensive campaign: "I was three weeks on the platform every night and only missed one night. And some nights it would be 2 and 3 and 5 o'clock in the morning before I would get home and bad roads and a hard constituency to work."⁶¹ As the campaign progressed Cotton developed into a good platform speaker.⁶² But in the end he was unable to overcome the many disadvantages with which he operated.

One of his greatest problems was the timing of the vote in his riding. The 1903 election had been called on 25 June with an election date of 20 July. However, the campaign in the Swan River Valley constituency was allowed to carry on two weeks longer than the main provincial campaign, ostensibly because the size of the new constituency made voter registration difficult. Some suspected a fancy piece of political gerrymandering by the Tories, particularly as "charges of plugging the voters lists were general throughout the province."⁶³ For any candidate running with a delayed vote, the greatest danger is an opposition sweep. Such a result is what Cotton faced, with the Roblin Conservatives taking twenty-nine seats to the Liberal nine, Gimli and Swan River still not having voted. Cotton became extremely disenchanted, but fought grimly to the end. The Swan River election was in effect a by-election, and as one newspaper observed, "To the victors belong the by-elections in Canada."⁶⁴

Despite their advantages the Conservatives did not slacken their efforts in the two weeks which elapsed between main polling day and the polling day in Swan River. After his victory Roblin promised that the proposed railway line down the valley would finally be built; that government support would be given for the much needed and long awaited bridge across the Swan River; and finally, that the municipalities of Minitonas and Swan River would be exempted from their seed grain indebtedness.⁶⁵ These issues were dear to Cotton's heart, and indeed ones for which he had campaigned.⁶⁶ However, their attainment would benefit his opponent. The final stages of the Tory campaign in Swan River were organized by that grand master of politics, Robert Rogers, the man who had forged the Roblin political machine. Cotton had feared that the opposition "will leave no stone unturned to cause my defeat." He had suggested that the Tories might go so far as to bring in a special train to import electors from outside the valley. He was therefore hardly surprised when "Rogers and his car load did him up," revelling in a sense in describing how "the minister of the opposition came up and side tracked their private car at Swan River and brought nine /campaigners?/ with them and money galore and whisky and made a good job of it for themselves."⁶⁷ While Cotton continued to respect Robson, writing "He was a very decent fellow," he felt only disgust at the tactics used by the Tories to carry the election.⁶⁸ Behind them were the liquor interests: "They had not a speck of shame or decency in the whole campaign.

The Hotels spent about \$10,000 to carry the constituency."⁶⁹

In the end, Cotton carried only one poll, his home poll 5, which was largely populated by ex-residents of Treherne. The final result was Robson 503 and Cotton 272.⁷⁰ Despite the defeat, Cotton had developed as a campaigner and speaker. He had clearly stated positions on the major issues of the campaign: government extravagance, the railway question, grain handling, elevator combines, the box car shortage, and of course prohibition. Running simply as a prohibitionist candidate would not have aided him. Although he claimed there was more chance of prohibition legislation being introduced by the Liberals, he could not ignore the failure of the Greenway administration to deliver any temperance legislation while in power. While Greenway would later attack Roblin for not implementing the Macdonald Act, Greenway's disputes with the Prohibitionist leaders during the campaign did little to help Cotton.⁷¹ Had A. J. not been a strong contender the Tories would not have put so much energy into the "lame duck campaign." Had polling occurred in the valley on 20 July, Cotton might well have emerged victorious.

A. J. Cotton did not come away from the 1903 campaign with his taste for politics whetted. He had done reasonably well for a newcomer, and had he persisted in politics he would ultimately have won at the polls. But he lacked the patience and the ability to observe the first rule of politics, which was to carry on regardless. For Cotton, 1903 confirmed his view that taking a stand in politics was like

taking a bath in a dirty pond.⁷² The foray was his only attempt at a political career, and the experience left him bitter. He refused the Liberal nomination for the federal seat when T. A. Burrows retired, as well as a seat in the Senate.⁷³ He even refused to consider the reeveship of Swan River. When the time came he would have nothing to do with either the Grain Growers movement or the Progressives, although he recognized the importance of farm representation in government.

NOTES: CHAPTER V

1. Cotton Account Books, 28 December 1881, CPPAM.
2. Swan River Star; Dauphin Herald, 1901-1902.
3. Treherne Times, 9 April 1902.
4. A. J. Cotton to J. S. McAdam, 28 December 1901, CPPAM.
5. A. J. Cotton to Albert Smith, 2 August 1900, CPPAM.
6. A. J. Cotton to Daniel Hawe, 12 November 1901; Cotton to H. E. Glendenning, 12 November 1901, CPPAM.
7. Mary Brewster Perfect, One Hundred Years in the History of Rural Schools: Their Formation, Reorganization and Dissolution 1871-1971 (unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1978).
8. Tiger Hills to Assiniboine, p. 21.
9. A. J. Cotton to H. E. Glendenning, 12 November 1901.
10. A. J. Cotton to Daniel Hawe, 12 November 1901; Cotton to J. W. Robson, 12 November 1901, CPPAM.
11. J. H. R. Clark, The Development of Education in the Swan River (unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1949).
12. A. J. Cotton to Colin Campbell (Department of Education), 14 January 1902, CPPAM.
13. A. J. Cotton to A. W. Hooper, 13 March 1902, CPPAM.
14. A. J. Cotton to H. E. Glendenning, 12 November 1901; Cotton to D. Bornhott, 5 August 1902; Cotton to J. C. Gallagher, 5 August 1902; Cotton to T. C. Silverthorne, 5 August 1902; Cotton to James Manley, 12 August 1902, CPPAM.

15. PAM MG8 A31 (Kenville); Cotton to A. W. Hooper, 9 February 1903, CPPAM.
16. School Meeting Minutes, 5 December 1904, CPPAM.
17. A. J. Cotton to E. H. Dewart, 13 March 1918, CPPAM.
18. Manitoba: Report of the Department of Education, 31 December 1903.
19. A. J. Cotton to Tribune, 2 November 1899, CPPAM.
20. Manitoba Department of Education Report, 1903, p. 44.
21. A. J. Cotton to Dominion Teachers Agency, 23 December 1903, CPPAM.
22. A. J. Cotton to V. L. McKay, 28 December 1906, CPPAM.
23. Manitoba: Report of the Department of Education, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907.
24. A. J. Cotton to E. W. Walker, 24 December 1906, CPPAM.
25. See, for example, A. J. Cotton to Edith Croll, 4 December 1904; Cotton to Department of Education, 4 January 1905; Cotton to E. W. Walker, 24 December 1906; Cotton to Manitoba Free Press, 4 January 1907, CPPAM.
26. A. J. Cotton to E. H. Dewart, 13 March 1918; Cotton to E. W. Walker, 4 December 1905, CPPAM.
27. PAM MG8, A31 (Kenville).
28. The phrase is George Emery's, from his Methodism on the Canadian Prairies 1896-1914: The Dynamics of an Institution in a New Environment (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1970).
29. A. J. Cotton to W. Neil, 10 February 1899; Cotton to William Williams, 29 November 1906, CPPAM.

30. A. J. Cotton to George Bond, 1 September 1905, CPPAM.
For the Bible Christians, see W. H. Brooks, Methodism in the Canadian West in the Nineteenth Century (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1972), p. 260.
31. Cotton Account Books, 1896, 1898, PAM. Cotton to Dr. Sparling, 17 June 1899; Cotton to Thomas Argue, 17 June 1899, CPPAM.
32. Emery, Methodism.
33. Brooks, Methodism, p. 327.
34. Cotton to Sparling, 17 June 1899.
35. Eben Johnson Journal, PAM.
36. A. J. Cotton to Rev. George J. Bond, 1 September 1905, CPPAM.
37. A. J. Cotton to Mr. Atkins, 22 February 1904, CPPAM.
38. "Annual Report of the Methodist Church, Thunder Hill Mission, May 1908," CPPAM; Cotton to Rev. O. Darwin, 28 March 1904, CPPAM.
39. A. J. Cotton to Dr. Woodsworth, 12 June 1911, CPPAM.
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47. A. J. Cotton to J. G. Rutherford, 12 December 1900, CPPAM.
48. See, for example, Cotton to Department of Interior, 11 March 1909, CPPAM.
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52. A. J. Cotton to W. I. Ford, 3 December 1899, CPPAM.
53. Tribune, 13 April 1903.
54. A. J. Cotton to H. Harley, 3 February 1903, CPPAM.
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56. Swan River Star, 8 July 1903; A. J. Cotton to Robert Watson, 11 July 1903, CPPAM.
57. A. J. Cotton to J. S. McAdam, 29 April 1903, CPPAM.
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59. A. J. Cotton to W. R. Mulock, 4 April 1903, CPPAM.
60. Cotton to Mulock, 29 April 1903.
61. A. J. Cotton to Colonel McLean, 22 October 1903, CPPAM.
62. Swan River Star, 29 July 1903.
63. Larry Fisk, Controversy on the Prairies: Issues in the General Provincial Elections of Manitoba, 1870-1969

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64. Manitoba Free Press, 4 August 1903.
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67. A. J. Cotton to T. A. Burrows, 4 April 1903; Cotton to William Williams, 10 December 1903, CPPAM.
68. A. J. Cotton to Colonel McLean, 22 October 1903.
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70. Manitoba Free Press, 4 August 1903.
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72. A. J. Cotton to W. L. Armstrong, 12 December 1900, CPPAM.
73. Cotton to William Williams, 31 January 1908, CPPAM.

CHAPTER VI: THE GARDEN OF EDEN

When A. J. Cotton came west in 1885, he had little knowledge and less experience of the province to which he was moving. Much of what little he could learn would have been conflicting. An earlier view of the west as a cold and frozen wasteland suitable only for fur-bearing animals had given way to an enthusiasm for the region's agricultural potential, thanks to the scientific work of men like Henry Youle Hind and Simon Dawson. The reports issued by investigators like Hind and Dawson, while favourably disposed, were exaggerated out of all proportion by later writers, particularly that inveterate booster, John Macoun. A region which had only recently been recognized as fertile became a veritable Garden of Eden.¹ Significantly, Macoun's optimistic account of agricultural potential seemed supported by the results obtained by many of the first farmers.

Working easily-cleared virgin land and enjoying excellent overall weather conditions, the early settlers often achieved excellent yields. Reports of these successes were undoubtedly widely circulated throughout Ontario via unofficial grapevines as well as by the more formal mechanisms of newspaper reports and immigration pamphlets.² The years of Macoun's visits to the west - 1879, 1880, 1881 - had been marked by heavy early rains which helped shape his enthusiasm.³ Moreover, the value of the yields was enhanced by the high price of wheat; between 1871 and 1875, for example, the average price for a bushel of

wheat was \$1.22.⁴ Since all wheat produced in these years was consumed locally, the farmers did not have to add the cost of transportation to distant markets to their costs, thus adding further to tidy profits. Because most of these early settlers were experienced farmers, they had come with the proceeds of farm sales in Ontario, although the cost of travel to Manitoba often swallowed up a large chunk of their capital. The Ontarians who settled the area around the three crossings on the Whitemud River are generally regarded as classic examples of the early Ontario settlers. Their story has been lovingly chronicled by Margaret Fahrni and W. L. Morton in Third Crossing.⁵ As settlers, the aim of these early arrivals was to secure larger opportunities not only for themselves but for their children than were available in rural Ontario. They tended to regard Manitoba as another of the moving frontiers of settlement in the nineteenth-century Upper Canadian experience, a bit further afield but no different than the counties of the Canadian shield which had been filling up since the middle of the century.

News of the success of the early agricultural settlers spread throughout Ontario, adding impetus to a movement out of that province which had been underway for many years. Many had left Ontario in search of inexpensive workable land, and for want of other alternatives had often ended up in the United States. Those who continued to prefer the British connection could not consider this alternative seriously, and

such Ontarians had helped make the yearning for cheap and empty agricultural land to the west a major factor in Confederation. The response of the native population in 1869 to what Red River perceived as an Ontario annexation had raised some doubts in the eastern province about the worthiness of the west, but pressure for land, rumours of profitability, and the seeming pacification of the mixed bloods reduced criticism to a mere undercurrent. Events in the early 1880s again raised the question of feasibility, initially in a quite different context. A land boom in 1881-82 had been triggered off by the decision to run the Canadian Pacific Railway through Winnipeg rather than Selkirk. The resulting rise in land prices affected agricultural as well as urban lands, although the rise in the price of farms was not as precipitous as in town lots.

When the boom of 1881-82 collapsed, many who had speculated were badly burned. Those involved were not merely urban boomers but experienced farmers, recent arrivals who had gotten caught up in the speculative fever. Once they had established their homesteads, such men waited for the day when they could sell out at a profit to an incoming settler; the agricultural frontier in Canada had long been peopled by such individuals. In some cases the initial farm was mortgaged and the money put into other land or another homestead further west, taking advantage of homesteading regulations at the time which allowed those who had received a patent for one homestead to take up a second.⁶ The collapse of farm prices made it difficult to

to sell either farm, however. Many Ontario farmers (and investors) were wiped out in the busts of the early 1880s, and Manitoba gained an unsavoury reputation which had little to do with the quality of its land.

Events developing further west in the 1880s also tended to frighten off new settlers. The Riel Rebellion of 1885 brought back all the ill feelings created by the earlier troubles in Red River between metis and Canadian newcomers. The cumulative effect of the economic problems combined with the political repercussions from the Riel Rebellion led Ontario to distance itself from the west, no longer thinking of it in terms of an extended Ontario but as an "ungrateful" child.⁷ Earlier undercurrents critical of the cost of western development came to the surface. News of the threats by the Farmers Protective Union of Manitoba to call for a halt of immigration into Manitoba and the Northwest as well as a secession from Confederation further lowered the region's credit rating with many Ontario farmers and investors. At the same time, the new climate of opinion (and a substantial reduction in demand for prime land) could work in favour of any determined Ontario farmer willing to chance Manitoba in the 1880s. Such a farmer was A. J. Cotton.

According to Cotton himself, "the name Manitoba alone was enough discouragement," suggesting that he was thoroughly familiar with the misgivings of Ontarians and the reputation of the new prairie province.⁸ But Cotton was sufficiently desperate - and sufficiently Canadian - to take the plunge.

When he did so, he discovered that the effects of the economic difficulties of the early 1880s in Manitoba had been greatly exaggerated. The collapse of the Winnipeg land boom brought neither development in Winnipeg nor in the agricultural regions surrounding it to a halt, but merely slowed it down to the point where some necessary consolidation could occur.⁹ Settlers continued to take up land, and while the rate of acquisition may have slowed, the rate of actual farming increased. In 1883 there had been a fifty-four percent increase in Manitoba's wheat acreage to 260,842 acres, and the acreage planted continued to climb steadily through the remainder of the decade. There was a fall in the acreage of oats and barley sown in 1884, but this occurrence was isolated and acreage of these grains also continued to rise in succeeding years.¹⁰ The increase in wheat acreage planted also offset to some extent the fall in the price of wheat. Prices for wheat had been falling since 1875 across the continent and around the world, and while low prices for grain and high prices for agricultural equipment undoubtedly deterred many would-be settlers, for others there was more profit to be gained from raising wheat on inexpensive western land than shifting to mixed farming on the more expensive lands of the east.

Prior to the completion of the railway in 1886, many Ontario farmers who had begun to move west failed to reach Manitoba. Not everyone cared as much about a flag as about the quality and price of land.¹¹ Many of A. J. Cotton's

family had moved to the United States, and it was not clear at the time of the Cotton farm auction in the fall of 1887 exactly what A. J.'s destination would be. The agreement with Major McLean was not settled until well after Cotton had decided to abandon Ontario and had taken the first step in so doing. It seems possible that he ended up in Manitoba more by chance than design. Whatever the case, once in Manitoba Cotton became an almost instant convert to the Canadian West, and within a few months was writing back enjoining Ontario farmers to put aside their reservations and come to Manitoba, where they could "live" instead of merely existing.¹²

Although no record of them has survived, A. J. Cotton undoubtedly wrote many letters to friends and family over the first few years of residence in Manitoba. When he entered into a formal arrangement with the Immigration Commission in 1900, Cotton sent a list of two hundred and eighty names of Ontario farmers he thought would be interested in information about Manitoba.¹³ As he prospered in the west, many of his old neighbours and acquaintances learned of his success and wrote for advice. A major factor in the development of emigration from any locality was the success of one person or family unit in a new district. One Ontario newspaper, reporting the move of a local man to Treherne in 1899, commented that its informant said there were "so many people settled there that he formerly knew that he could hardly realize that he was in a strange country."¹⁴ The extended grapevines created by personal contact probably did more to encourage further settle-

ment than a dozen pamphlets by government agencies, and in fairness to the government agencies, some within them soon realized the importance of personal testimony. Early Manitoba immigration pamphlets contained lists of names, details of whence they had originated, as well as information about their present prosperity.¹⁵ In time both provincial and dominion agencies would finance trips by successful farmers to the United States or the United Kingdom, such as the visit made by A. J. McMillan to Warwickshire in 1896. Although McMillan was a paid official of the Manitoba Immigration Service he had originally homesteaded successfully near Brandon and was introduced in Warwickshire as one who had gone to Manitoba and made good.¹⁶

Like McMillan, farmer delegates were usually sent to the area whence they had originated, but wherever they went they were regarded as Canada's best advertising agents.¹⁷ Within Canada, the Canadian Pacific Railway was encouraged by the Manitoba government to provide cheap excursion fares from Manitoba to Ontario over the winter. In 1889 it was estimated that 2,000 people had taken advantage of the opportunity to return home to visit with relatives and friends.¹⁸ A. J. Cotton took his wife and two younger children on such a trip during the winter of 1895-96. The family left Manitoba in December of 1895 and returned the following March.¹⁹ From the standpoint of the Manitoba government, the family members were unpaid immigration agents for the province. The traffic in visitors was not simply a one-way business. Excursions

were also arranged for farmers from Ontario to Manitoba. For a fare of \$25 return, interested farmers could visit Manitoba in June, August, or September.²⁰ Many who came were converted, Cotton maintained, and returned to the west as settlers.²¹

The cheapest way of spreading the message of the west across a wide area remained the printed pamphlet. Immigration pamphlets came more and more often to contain personal testimony from farmers in different districts, describing both their success and the ways in which it had been achieved. Within Canada, newspapers in both west and east ran pictures and paragraphs depicting successful farmers. A. J. Cotton himself had come to prominence in such a fashion. In 1896 the Montreal Daily Witness had published a photograph of Cotton's seven teams ploughing simultaneously. The publicity resulted in Cotton's receiving a great many enquiries from would-be settlers.²² After Cotton had become Manitoba's "Wheat King" in 1899, features on his success had appeared in many Canadian newspapers.²³

Despite A. J.'s increasingly high profile, it was Mrs. Cotton who first appeared formally in print. In 1899 Louise Cotton contributed to a pamphlet of ladies' testimonials issued by the CPR, entitled "What Women Say of the Canadian North West."²⁴ As a result, the Cottons began to receive even more enquiries from prospective settlers about Manitoba conditions. In February of 1899, Cotton approached the Manitoba government's immigration agent, W. D. Scott, for some pamphlets to send out in reply to the letters he was

"receiving almost daily from the United States as well as Ontario enquiring about the country."²⁵ Cotton's own entry into immigration promotion came as a response to a letter published in the Glasgow Chronicle in the spring of 1900. A Scot who had emigrated to Canada and returned home dissatisfied wrote a number of unfavourable comments about Manitoba, and Cotton penned a refutation which was sent to the Glasgow paper.²⁶ The individual involved had worked for Cotton, who regarded him as utterly useless and unsuited for farm life. Cotton maintained that other employers agreed with this assessment. He went on to list the names of a number of Scottish settlers who had been successful in the country.²⁷ After this letter Cotton wrote an article, "Success of a Manitoba Farmer," which was included by both the provincial government and the CPR in their promotional literature. This article described how Cotton had come to the Canadian West with few assets and through hard work had prospered. Full of praise for the region, like most of the published immigration material it was not very specific. The article marked the beginning of Cotton's association with the office of the Commission of Immigration, however. He never received any payment for his efforts on behalf of immigration, although he did receive stationery and reimbursement for the cost of postage from the commissioner.²⁸

The Commission of Immigration had been established by Clifford Sifton in 1897. Based in Winnipeg, the Commission administered the various activities of the immigration board

and worked in close liason with the Dominion Lands Office of the Interior Department and the land office of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The first commissioner was W. F. McCreary, a Winnipeg lawyer and former city mayor who was as well a strong supporter of Sifton. McCreary held the position until he was elected to the Dominion Parliament in 1901. His successor was J. Obed. Smith, who remained in Winnipeg for seven years until he went to London as Commissioner for Immigration for Canada. The arrangement which Cotton had originally made with McCreary about postage and stationery was continued by the commissioner's successors.

The accounts which Cotton irregularly submitted to the commission give some idea of the volume of enquiries with which he dealt. In the fourteen months between December 1901 and February 1903, for example, Cotton had answered 373 letters from prospective immigrants, most of them farmers.²⁹ An average of approximately twenty six letters per month remained steady through 1906; in the last year he received 329 enquiries within the space of twelve months.³⁰ In 1907 the number of letters fell sharply to 121, a decline attributed by Cotton to the withdrawal of his name from the government immigration literature.³¹ However, in the early years of the century, A. J. Cotton had corresponded with nearly 2,000 prospective settlers, and he continued to receive a steady flow of letters for many years, some as late as 1922. In addition to his private letters and entries in promotional

literature, Cotton wrote a number of articles which appeared in print in various forms, all extolling the value of the Canadian North West. He regarded this promotion as part of his civic responsibility, writing at one point that immigration was "something we all should take an Interest in and work up."³² "Boosterism" was not entirely a phenomenon confined to town and city businessmen, nor was it totally self-interested and spawned by land speculators, although in the Swan River Valley Cotton would play the more typical booster role.

In Cotton's case, an enthusiastic interest in fostering immigration to the North West had begun within months of his arrival in the region. In August of 1888, a letter sent initially to Major McLean by Cotton was published in the Port-Hope Daily Times.³³ This letter was one of Cotton's earliest attempts to persuade people outside Manitoba that the recent disillusioning reports about the province were in fact overstated. In addition, he was able to convey to his friends and acquaintances the message that he and his family, at least, were prospering. Many of the themes that appear in this early letter would recur throughout Cotton's correspondence. From this first letter's "I believe there is no country under the sun as well adapted for farming" to an 1899 "Manitoba is not merely 'as good as' but the best farming country under the sun," and through the subsequent correspondence with hundreds of prospective newcomers, Cotton often sounded much like the early writers of promotional literature for the province.³⁴

But unlike most of the promoters, Cotton was a working farmer, and indeed his success did come close to embodying the promises made by those who could not distinguish a plough from a harrow. For A. J. Cotton, the "promise of Eden" was no myth, but a living reality. On the other hand, Cotton did not pretend that success came simply by throwing a few seeds in the rich Manitoba topsoil. Eden came only to those who worked hard and were willing to endure privations along the way. The land was good, but could be mastered only with hard work and determination: "those willing to roll up their sleeves and pitch in - get on."³⁵ What was required was "ambition to strike out, to build up a home and become independent."³⁶

Cotton came increasingly over the years to speak and write in such clichés, but he genuinely believed and embodied them.

The expansionists of the 1870s believed that the west would rapidly fill up with people, resulting in a bounteous wealth created by the vast amounts of agricultural produce grown and harvested.³⁷ This scenario was never quite fulfilled as the boosters had hoped. The Canadian West did not attract settlers on the same scale as lands simultaneously opened to settlement in the United States. In fact, even the best land of the North West failed to attract the kind of land rush witnessed at the opening of far more marginal lands in Oklahoma. As part of his total commitment to the west, Cotton held long to the vision of unlimited growth. In 1899 he wrote that "At the present time we are only exporting about forty millions of wheat where inside of twenty years the

country will export over one hundred millions and there will be only one third under cultivation."³⁸ When espousing this expansive view Cotton was no longer thinking as an Ontarian. The original expansionists had seen the success and prosperity of the wheat economy of the west accruing to Ontario, but Cotton wrote as a westerner when he insisted "this country will rule the world's wheat supply in the future and will be the wealthiest portion of the Dominion of Canada."³⁹ Moreover, when times became difficult for the farmer - even a successful one like Cotton - he had no hesitancy in blaming the eastern (i.e., Ontario) dominated government for not understanding and supporting properly the developing west. Cotton could express his attitude in less negative terms: "We can hardly grasp the extent of development and possibilities of our Great West. Therefore we cannot expect the people of the East to place the same importance on the West as it deserves."⁴⁰ But the underlying complaint remained the same. Cotton's letters show that the increasing disillusionment about the west in Ontario was paralleled by disillusionment about Ontario-dominated eastern government in the west.

When he wrote in 1888 Cotton had extolled the virtues of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was, after all, the existence of the railway and its branch line that had made possible for the Cottons a relatively easy and inexpensive journey to their new home. The CPR had made an enormous difference to Manitoba, and Cotton initially shared the new

optimism: "now it is different, the hard times are past and the hardships are less."⁴¹ However, the railway ultimately failed to measure up to the expectations of Cotton and his neighbours. There was no other way to get grain to the Lakehead and the farmer had to pay the going rate. The absence of competition between Lake Superior and British Columbia meant freight costs were higher on the prairies than elsewhere in Canada. Cotton did appreciate the value of competition, and at one point he suggested to T. A. Burrows that the latter should use his influence with Clifford Sifton to get the projected Grand Trunk Pacific Line to go through Dauphin and the Swan River Valley on its westward course.⁴² Complaints about the railway were exacerbated by a chronic shortage of locomotives and grain cars. Cotton might write glowingly about the railway expansion that was flooding shops in Canada, the United States, and Scotland, with work, but he also felt that the west had been let down by the eastern interests over the question of the railway. The addition of the Canadian Northern Railway had little practical effect on the farmer's problems, for although it lowered rates it did not resolve the shortage of rail cars.⁴³

If one cuts through the hyperbole and rhetoric about the problems and prospects of the west, the letters of A. J. Cotton do contain both a great deal of sound practical advice to the intending settler and a fair picture of the thinking of the agricultural community of the period. Cotton and the

other farmers who contributed to the promotional literature and replied to the personal correspondence sent them as a result of their appearance in print provided an inestimable service to both the incoming settlers and to the provincial and dominion governments. Despite their efforts to encourage settlement, neither level of government gave much practical advice about clearing or developing the land. The assumption was that anyone, experienced or not, could succeed. Cotton, like other farmers involved in immigration assistance, was prepared to offer all sorts of advice on developing a prairie farm, and he was willing to enter into a protracted correspondence on the subject if requested. For Cotton, the principal requirement was hard work. Not insensitive to the havoc that weather, pests, and ill fortune could wreak on the most diligent efforts, he nonetheless knew that he had come to Manitoba, worked hard, and succeeded. He held up his own progress as an example to intending settlers.

For Cotton the principal requirement besides hard work was experience. As might be expected, he always held that farmers' sons made the best farmers.⁴⁴ If a man had no experience, Cotton always suggested that he should come as a hired man for a year to see if he were suited to the life.⁴⁵ For the affluent settler, an alternative was to buy land and then engage a tenant farmer and his wife to work it while the owner observed and assisted.⁴⁶ Even if he had farmed elsewhere, a new settler should always listen to the advice of a "good trusty neighbour."⁴⁷ If Cotton emphasized experience, he also

stressed the hardships of a pioneering life. He detailed the "inconveniences, isolation, loneliness, hard work, hardships and poverty" of life in a new district, and added that while hard work was indispensable, it would not bring instant prosperity. Success was slow and the upward path was subject to many discouragements.⁴⁸

The question of nationality, especially on either side of the border between the United States and Canada, does not seem to have been any more a concern of Cotton than of most farmers. Cotton received letters from all over the world and treated everyone equally, sharing Clifford Sifton's view that what the Canadian West needed was farmers. To those who wrote confessing ignorance about farming, it was true, Cotton often recommended an urban destination, particularly if there were a trade to be practised. But most of his letters came from North America, and with so many farmers crossing and recrossing the international boundary in the opening of the west, the matter of nationality for most of his correspondents was more than a bit blurred. The Webb family offers a good example of the process. In the 1770s the Webbs had left the American colonies for Nova Scotia as Loyalists. A descendent, John Webb, left Nova Scotia as a young man and settled in Bruce County, Ontario. In 1881 he and his family followed three other families from Bruce County to Dakota. Some of John Webb's grandchildren moved back to homestead in Saskatchewan, and some of their children went to Washington state and to California.⁴⁹ When asked directly, Cotton did explain the

necessity of being a British subject before one could receive the final homestead patent.⁵⁰ But otherwise, he remained silent about nationality.

At the same time, Cotton was unquestionably proud of being both a Canadian and a British subject. There is an occasional mention of the British Empire in his correspondence, usually in response to initial comments or queries and tending to extoll Canada over other settlement colonies as "the banner Colony under the British flag."⁵¹ An article Cotton wrote for the Christmas edition of The Nor'West Farmer in 1900 probably summed up his attitude:

Is not this great West a country to be proud of? Under the British flag a land of freedom! No wonder the old Lion is proud of his whelp which in the future will almost eclipse the old land.⁵²

As even this statement suggests, Cotton's main loyalty was neither to Britain nor Canada but to the west, and especially to his own district. He might write to a would-be settler who opposed conscription on religious grounds that after a few years in the country the anti-conscriptionist would want to fight for British ideals and values. But he went on to point out that the Canadian army was a purely voluntary force and that there were plenty ready to fight: "When the Canadians went to South Africa and when the Indian rebellions were to be put down there were five times more men offered themselves than were wanted."⁵³ The First World War changed conditions,

but none of the Cotton family ever seems to have felt the urge to volunteer, and when Almon was threatened with conscription Cotton acted to prevent it.⁵⁴ Like many western farmers, Cotton was no great friend of conscription.⁵⁵

In general, Cotton accepted people for what they were. He may have learned something from his experience with the Doukhobors. Those foreigners whose coming he had opposed in 1899 were by 1902 "a fine class of people, living all to themselves and are industrious, hardworking, thrifty people, very moral and religious and inoffensive."⁵⁶ The foregoing were values which Cotton appreciated. Like most people, Cotton was more comfortable in dealing with the familiar, and in looking for tenants for his farms (and teachers for his children) he turned first to Methodist Ontarians. But there is little evidence of overt racism or intolerance in his correspondence.

In his immigration letters, Cotton's major aim was to encourage settlement in western Canada, although he usually managed to mention the superior advantages of the Swan River Valley after his purchase of land there. However, he knew that while he thought that there was "no place elsewhere equal" to the valley, others who settled elsewhere generally believed their situation to be best.⁵⁷ Running tandem to his general encouragement of immigration, nonetheless, was an effort to boost the Swan River Valley. Later he would even attempt to create his own town. Even before he had relocated in the valley in the fall of 1901 Cotton's letters

were full of praise for its agricultural potential.⁵⁸ Rapid settlement of the valley would mean more people, and consequently earlier achievement of the amenities that made life in a new district less arduous: schools, churches, railways, shops. Cotton became an early subscriber to the Dauphin Press and quickly made clear to the editor that he felt the newspaper should carry more Swan River news.⁵⁹ He was both among the first subscribers and contributors to the Swan River Star. One of the early issues of that newspaper, intended as a booster issue for the new town and area, contained an article by Cotton singing its praises.⁶⁰ Cotton continued as an occasional contributor to the paper's pages over the years. He also wrote about the Swan River Valley for a potentially larger audience in The Nor'West Farmer.⁶¹

Cotton's efforts were not confined to the printed page. He actively concerned himself with the provision of those amenities which provided the necessary substructure for any agricultural community. Not only was he involved with church and school, but also with the provision of roads, bridges, postal service, and later telephones. The town of Swan River had not been established on the site of the original tent town described in Douglas Durkin's novel The Heart of Cherry McBride.⁶² Instead it emerged further west on the site chosen by the Canadian Northern Railway. A branch line was projected southwest down the valley, but until it was constructed the only means of access to the town from Cotton's district was by roads that were little more than cart-tracks impassible

in spring and fall. Cotton had discovered the problem in the spring of 1900 when trying to haul two cartloads of effects to his new farm. "Those first two miles out of town," he wrote, "were something terrible to contend with."⁶³ In the autumn, difficulties were encountered by farmers trying to bring their grain to the railroad for shipment to market. Waiting until freeze up made the roads more usable, but also might make difficult the realization of the proper cash value of their crops.⁶⁴ Bad roads also hampered settlement. The original arrivals expected limited access, but later comers would find, as Cotton argued, that the condition of the roads would be "enough to discourage anyone from becoming a settler" and would leave "a bad impression in the mind of the land seeker and intending settler." He joined a number of prominent businessmen and settlers in agitating about the conditions of the roads.⁶⁵

Bridges were another problem. During the early settlement period there had been several accidental drownings as settlers attempted to move themselves and their belongings to their new land. Crossings usually simple would suddenly become treacherous.⁶⁶ Will Ford had experienced difficulty in this respect when he went to meet his parents. As Cotton wrote to his wife, "He could not cross the Swan where we crossed it last year. He tested it by tying a rope around his waist and the Irishman held one end and he could not make the other side and had to be hauled back again and try another crossing."⁶⁷ Cotton organized a petition for a bridge to be built between

sections 24 and 25, tp 35, Range 29W, arguing there had already been one life lost at this crossing as well as several narrow escapes.⁶⁸ The bridge was eventually built after the municipality provided the materials and the settlers the labour. Cotton and his sons did the lion's share of the work themselves.⁶⁹ He was also the prime mover in a drive for a foot-bridge to get the children to the school. In addition to organising the petition and the labour, Cotton also arranged for the necessary material.⁷⁰ In this instance the council bought the wire and paid for putting in the piles, although the remainder of the work was done by local residents.⁷¹ Cotton continued to encourage and support the construction of other roads and bridges for many years, even in parts of the valley where he had no immediate interest.⁷²

The question of mail delivery was yet another pressing matter. For any pioneer farmer, access to mail was a crucial link with the outside world. For Cotton, his involvement with the immigration people brought a good deal of unsolicited mail. But like most of his neighbours, Cotton appreciated the newspapers and periodicals which the mail brought as much as the letters. Initially mail had only been delivered to the town of Swan River, but as the valley had developed post offices had been established in Thunder Hill and Durban. Harlington, the district where Cotton resided, was six miles from Thunder Hill and eleven miles from Swan River. Mail came from the Thunder Hill Post Office once every two weeks. Not a particularly good service at the best of times, prior

to the erection of the bridge noted earlier it was most erratic. "Address me Swan River P.O.," Cotton wrote to one correspondent, "as the river has broken up and we can't get any mail from Thunder Hill P.O. for at least 6 weeks."⁷³ But after the bridge was erected, the Harlington inhabitants became really critical of the service. A petition to the Postmaster General for a post office in Harlington in the summer of 1901 had gone unheeded, and so Cotton wrote to W. F. McCreary, M.P. and former Immigration Commissioner in Winnipeg. He not only pressed for a post office but had suggestions for ways of implementing a positive decision.⁷⁴ After Harlington did receive its post office, Cotton continued to ensure that the service was adequate.⁷⁵

When the telephone system was extended to the Swan River Valley, A. J. Cotton was again in the forefront of activity, organizing the settlers to sign up and pressing the Manitoba Government Telephone System to provide them with service.⁷⁶ As with the post office, Cotton had his own ideas about how the system should be run and forcefully made his points to those in authority.⁷⁷ When there were more delays, Cotton appealed to his old political adversary Rodmond Roblin to use his influence to ensure the completion of the phone line.⁷⁸

Roads, bridges, mail, and telephone service were all important, but the principal need of the settlers in the Swan River Valley was a railway branch line. Since the advance of settlement in the west, railroads had become the

carriers of trade, absolutely essential for a market-oriented farmer anxious to move beyond subsistence operations.⁷⁹ For settlers in the Swan River Valley, the town of Swan River was the nearest point on the railway; but most had come because of the promise to build a branch line in a southwesterly direction down the valley toward Fort Pelley and the Saskatchewan border. On his initial visit to the valley in 1898, Cotton had consulted with T. A. Burrows in Dauphin. While Burrows was Land Commissioner for the Canadian Northern, it is not clear that Cotton gleaned any inside information from the conference, but as it would have been impossible to farm on the scale envisaged by Cotton without a rail line, he was undoubtedly told by Burrows that one would eventually be built. Cotton bought only railway land, of course, and was sufficiently experienced to recognize the likely coincidence of a line with the railway's land holdings. He wrote his wife regarding the railroad that at a later date everything would "be all right."⁸⁰

But eventual branch lines were quite different from ones actually in operation. Even before his removal from Treherne, Cotton had begun agitation for the construction of the projected branch line.⁸¹ The railway company seemed in no hurry, however, and its delay became an issue in the election of 1903 in which Cotton had run as a candidate. After his party's sweep but before the vote in Swan River, Premier R. P. Roblin had promised that the line would be constructed. Cotton's concern was not simply with the line's presence, but with its route.⁸² Like most westerners, he realized that

the location of the railroad would dictate the siting of towns, and he was convinced that the "four corners of Sections 29, 30, 19 and 20.35.28 . . . will make a fine townsite."⁸³

Section 19 had been one of Cotton's first purchases. The Mackenzie and Mann railroad did not heed Cotton's advice about the best route, but the projected line did cross another Cotton holding on section 13.⁸⁴ Once the route was known, Cotton began to campaign for the townsite to incorporate part of his section 13.⁸⁵

Construction of the Thunderhill branch line finally began in August of 1904.⁸⁶ Part of the townsite was to be on the southeast quarter of 13.35.28W.⁸⁷ Under the agreement signed between Cotton and the railway company, it was to have "50 acres for a townsite. I am to have every other lot."⁸⁸ Progress in construction was slow, and despite Cotton's urgings the townsite was not actually surveyed until November 1905, the steel actually arriving a month later.⁸⁹ By the latter date the town was already taking shape. Cotton wrote many letters encouraging tradesmen to establish themselves in the fledgling community, and he became its chief booster.⁹⁰ "There's no doubt about it," he wrote, "the town is sure to be a success, as it is backed by a first class grain district. Naturally those who can get in on the floor will have the advantage."⁹¹ Although there were attempts to name the new town "Cotton," it was named Kenville by the Canadian Northern in honour of John Kennedy, the contractor in charge of building the grade.⁹²

Cotton continued to write letters to small businessmen

who might locate in "his" town, and he had sufficient political connections to ensure that Kenville acquired a post office as well as enough economic influence to obtain a bank.⁹³ Kenville never properly flourished, however, partly because the volume of wheat produced in the district never reached the figures projected by Cotton. He was convinced that political considerations gave preference to other places, especially Durban, which lay on the land of J. W. Robson.⁹⁴ It appears unlikely that Kenville ever produced much financial gain for Cotton, or that he invested much in its development beyond time writing letters.⁹⁵ The town did not even perpetuate his name. Cotton was a successful farmer, not an entrepreneur. While his interest in Kenville doubtless included the possibility of increasing the value of his land and making some speculative profits, he also was concerned to have services as close as possible to his little empire in Harlington. Boosting Kenville was typical of the sorts of activities in which local leaders like Cotton became involved, but it never became a consuming passion.⁹⁶ He left his mark on the district more in terms of the overall leadership which he provided for the pioneer settlers.

NOTES: CHAPTER VI

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EPILOGUE

A. J. Cotton's dream of the good life in the Swan River Valley took many years to come true. He had envisaged his land being developed by others as he had developed Colonel McLean's land, before being turned over to his sons. Instead, much effort and money were required to bring the various Cotton holdings into production, and he was forced to do much of the work himself. Not until 1916 was Cotton free of the mortgage he had taken out to develop his lands, and there were occasions when money had been very tight indeed.¹ However, once the mortgage was paid off with the profits of wartime prosperity, Cotton was able to relax a bit. The increased price of wheat made it possible in 1917 for Cotton to invest \$20,000 in a Victory Loan. His lands were secure and he had enough acreage improved to settle his sons and nephew. Furthermore, the younger generation were taking more and more of the burden of the daily farm work off his shoulders.

By 1917 Cotton had both time and money to spare. In 1906 he had refused to serve on the executive of the Manitoba Branch of the Dominion Alliance because of the pressure of work. After his defeat in 1903 Cotton had refused any further involvement in politics on either the provincial or the federal level, but in 1917 he did accept an invitation to become a member of the newly-formed Board of Governors of the University of Manitoba. This position

required both time and money, time for travel to and attendance at the meetings in Winnipeg, and money to support his involvement, since there was no remuneration for it.² Under the terms of the University of Manitoba Amendment Act of 1917, the newly-formed board was to consist of nine persons who were British subjects resident in Manitoba. They were to be appointed by the lieutenant-governor in council.³

Cotton was one of two farmers appointed to the new board, the other being William Iverach, president of the Manitoba Trustees Association.⁴ The membership of the board, under the chairmanship of Isaac Pitblado, was well received by the press.⁵ The agricultural interest was considered to be well represented, and the board was viewed as being as "thoroughly representative of the different elements as a group of nine men could be."⁶

The new board was faced with an onerous task. It had been given all the non-academic legislative powers of the old council together with plenary and final power over all matters of university policy.⁷ Cotton was present at the organizational meeting of the board on 11 May 1917, where the programme for future meetings was outlined. There was to be a review of teaching and administrative staff. The board was to consider the question of a permanent site for the university, and to establish a way of managing university lands and investments and the work of the bursar and accountants.⁸ There were seven meetings of the Governors

in the first year of the board's operations, some running over to a second day, and Cotton was present at all of them. Some of the issues dealt with, such as the matter of extension work, were ones close to Cotton's heart. Others, like the move to debar from registration males over twenty, were merely contentious.⁹ Cotton was one of the members who lived outside the city, and the board decided soon after it began meeting that those who lived outside the urban area should receive travelling expenses. A definite figure was to be fixed for the journey to Winnipeg with extra amounts for the second and third days.¹⁰ Cotton was allowed \$25 expenses for attending meetings plus five dollars per day for additional time.¹⁰ He had agreed to serve before these arrangements were agreed to, and they did not adequately reimburse him for his time. But although he was initially appointed for only one year, he agreed to serve an additional three years in 1918, and was regularly reappointed until 1934.¹¹

The years that Cotton spent on the University of Manitoba Board of Governors were crucial ones for the university, during which the institution as we know it today was being created. Cotton was regular in his attendance at meetings, missing few during his term on the board. The distance between Swan River and Winnipeg did preclude him from serving on many of the committees which did the actual work of the board. But he did serve on a committee to revise the 1924-25 estimates of the Agricultural College,

and in 1932 was appointed to the Staff and Appointments Committee.¹² Although Cotton was unable, because of the short notice at which some of the meetings were called, to be present at all those which dealt with the Machray crisis and its repercussions, he was present at most of them, and when important decisions were taken in the Machray case in his absence he was consulted by telephone.¹³ Unfortunately, his views on the scandal have not been preserved, either in the Board's minutes or in the Cotton papers.

1917 was a busy year for A. J. Cotton in other ways besides his involvement with the provincial university. In 1916 he had written a letter for an immigrant pamphlet issued by the Manitoba government. Beginning early in 1917 his letter, "A Plain and Unvarnished Statement Concerning the Swan River Valley," elicited many responses from the United States. Cotton's immigration correspondence had dwindled to almost nothing prior to this letter, and although the volume of queries did not reach the large numbers he had dealt with during the early years of the century, he did during the next two years reply to eighty-four queries.¹⁴ The majority of the letters were from the southern United States. A sign of the changing times came in a letter from New Mexico, the correspondent writing that he was "thinking of coming up by car." Cotton was forced to point out that unfortunately there was as yet no automobile road into the Swan River Valley.¹⁵ There were, however, "car roads" within

the valley itself, for Cotton bought an automobile in 1917, following the example of his son Nelson, who seems to have purchased a car a year earlier.¹⁶ The widespread acceptance of the internal combustion engine during and after World War I completely altered the nature of agricultural life. By this time Cotton was no longer attempting to operate a major wheat farm, having divested most of his land to his children. He left the problems of mechanizing the land largely to his heirs, and by the 1920s contented himself with acting the role of the patriarch to a large number of grandchildren. A marvellous photograph from the mid-20s shows A. J. standing proudly at one side of his lawn, set up for croquet, surveying a large assortment of members of the younger generation.

In 1931 an article about Cotton appeared in The Country Guide. Entitled "Every Kick Did Me Good," the article obviously recorded Cotton's mythologization of his early life. Nevertheless, it did provide the essence of A. J. Cotton. Cotton had suffered some setbacks, but a combination of hard work and good fortune had enabled him to succeed. The "Cotton Farm" was surrounded by the holdings called "Cotton Corners," "Cotton Creek," "Cotton Bridge," "Cotton Valley," and "Cotton View," all operated by his sons and adopted nephew. The nephew, Frank Ford Cook, had taken over a farm of his own in 1925. Thus Cotton's children were provided with a more than adequate patrimony, settled on farms in an agricultural community

that their father had done much to create. In his success, A. J. Cotton epitomized the "Promise of Eden" that so many Ontario farmers had hoped for when they moved to the west. Eden, of course, not only required fulfillment of success for self, but also for the generations to come. In this ambition Cotton had certainly been fulfilled.

NOTES: EPILOGUE

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