

CAUSES OF SOUTHERN RURAL CONDITIONS AND THE SMALL FARM AS AN IMPORTANT REMEDY.

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NATURAL ADVANTAGES OF SOUTH ATLANTIC AND SOUTH CENTRAL STATES.

If delightful climate, fertile soils, satisfactory rainfall, a large number of navigable rivers, an abundant supply of valuable timber for construction purposes, an inexhaustible wealth of minerals, and a marvelous topography—wonderful valleys, fertile hills, and picturesque mountains—are essential factors in the making of a mighty nation, then the South Atlantic and the South Central States of our Union were designed by nature to be the seat of great activities along broad lines, with a dense population rich in all material things—the masses well housed, broadly educated, independent, and progressive. No equal area upon the globe surpasses these States in the natural resources enumerated.

ECONOMIC ERRORS OF THE OLD SOUTH.

These States were settled mainly by one of the most virile races that ever touched foot on western shores. Why, then, did many of the results which appeared certain to follow fail to materialize? It was because of some economic errors that crept into the civilization of the South at an early period, and shows the far-reaching effect of even slight deviations from the fundamental laws that govern civilization.

(1) The labor was mainly compulsory and performed by another race. This lowered the dignity of labor, because unavoidably the character of the doer determines the dignity of the thing done. It ought not to be thus, but it is and has been the case from the formation of human society. This condition was a barrier to free labor and an obstacle to the immigration of small farmers accustomed to till their own lands. These influences in many cases contributed to an emigration of these classes from the South.

(2) The second great economic error was the adoption by the Southern States of the one-crop system of farming. True, they chose their staples with wisdom—tobacco, rice, sugar, and cotton—four of the best staples—and they found world markets for them. Upon the surface it appears just as sound a policy for a farmer to produce one cash crop and supply all his wants from the sale of it as it is for a manufacturer to limit his output to one article instead of many. There is, however, this difference: The manufacturer is sure of his product, at uniform cost and of standard quality; the farmer is never certain of the quantity, quality, or cost of his crop, and should throw out an anchor of safety, so that whatever may occur to reduce the cash crop it will not curtail the supply of food or clothing, interfere with the schooling of the family, or place in jeopardy the home.

The great objections to the single-crop system are that it limits knowledge, narrows citizenship, and does not foster home building, but does promote commercial farming. It lacks the element of safety; if the one cash crop fails, everything goes—living, clothing, and all. It might be asked why the many small farmers of the South did not diversify their crops. Farmers can not produce any cash crop they like. It must be something recognized by the local market, and the large planters make the local market.

(3) A third economic error from the standpoint of the state was the great number of large plantations in the South. A plantation of several thousand acres worked under one management is like a great factory; each person employed is limited to one kind of labor. He may work in the stables or garden, be a field hand, or be assigned to making general improvements and repairs. In any event, there is one line of work he follows for life, and he knows no other. That may be satisfactory from the machine standpoint, but it is bad for the citizen. The large plantation, as generally managed, blocks highways, interferes with schools, retards rural development, and promotes class distinctions as against mass development.

(4) A fourth economic error was failure to utilize the wealth of minerals, the vast forests of woods matchless for construction purposes, and other natural resources of the South in such a way as to build a commonwealth that would furnish markets as well as raw material and thus in a measure become self-sustaining and independent.

The neglect of common schools throughout the rural sections and the slight attention paid to internal improvements were the natural results of the other policies adopted.

The price of virgin lands averaged so low that in many cases it was cheaper to make a new plantation than to restore the impoverished soils of the old.

The foregoing statements present only the general view. There were under the old conditions many planters of high character and great intelligence who maintained an excellent standard of agriculture. They bred the best stock of the world and followed an excellent system of crop rotation.

DISASTROUS TRANSITION PERIOD.

The period of greatest disaster to agriculture in the South was from 1861 to 1890, when nearly all that was excellent in the old civilization was swept away and little of value substituted. During this period the South was laid waste by the barbarism of war; then an unlettered and previously subordinate race, in some States more than equal in numbers to the rural white population and but slightly amenable to its public opinion, received the ballot and came into the possession of lands as owners, renters, or occupiers. A lowering of country life drives out the better classes just as an inferior coinage usurps the place of the more valuable. That the lands were first held by a great and virile race is shown by the fact that Caucasian civilization was not completely overwhelmed by such masses of another race and condition. Nonresident ownership increased, and with it came a more careless tillage, immense waste of fertility by erosion, and a general deterioration in the character of farm improvements and equipment. Until within the last decade and a half rural conditions and general influence upon National life steadily declined.

ADDITIONAL CAUSES OF DECLINE.

Two other causes of universal effect have operated with tremendous force in the depression of rural conditions in the South: One is transportation and the other is money—both vital to farm values and farm profits. The cost of transportation of products from the farm to the seaports has been too high. The poor highways have been one factor contributing to this; the single commercial crop system has been another, because it supplied freights only a few months in the year, furnishing an oversupply for such periods and a deficiency for the remainder of the year. The one cash crop intensified the want of money. It took most of the annual proceeds of the crop to buy needed supplies, and it created an abnormal demand for money to move out the main crop when it matured.

Another serious obstacle to rural progress has been a scarcity of labor. The employers of labor in factories and in the construction of railroads have been able to pay much higher wages than farmers could afford and have drawn not only the hired laborers from the farms but many small independent owners of land from their homes.

RECENT AWAKENING AND BETTER PRICES.

Notwithstanding these adverse conditions there has been a great improvement in the South in the last twelve years, due in part to the general prosperity of the country and in part to the heroic efforts of her people. They have put forth almost superhuman efforts to reconstruct upon the best basis what was left, to rebuild what of value had been destroyed, and to create whatever was necessary to round out the best civilization of the age. No people ever worked more heroically and with greater unity of purpose.

The higher price of cotton, sugar, and rice, three of the great cash crops of the South, has, for the first time since disaster came, provided the means to get out of debt and improve conditions. With the improvement of fortunes prompt attention was given to home building, the encouragement of education in the founding of schools, the establishment of manufactures, and a comprehensive system of internal improvements. The South is rural, and her most significant sign of awakened interest is her effort to place agriculture upon a better basis.

SMALL FARMS ESSENTIAL TO PERMANENT PROSPERITY.

One object of this paper is to urge that in this great uplift which marks the people of the South as patriots there shall not be omitted from the solid foundation placed under their new civilization some of the essential supports that uphold and perpetuate a republic.

In the great cities and in the manufacturing centers there has been for centuries and probably will continue to be an unrest that arises from a conflict between aggregated capital and organized labor. The great counterbalancing force is a body of prosperous and contented small farmers distributed over the entire country.

A prosperous, intelligent, and contented rural population is therefore essential to our National perpetuity. The world's experience has shown that the best way to secure this is to encourage the division of all the lands into small farms each owned and operated by one family.

There are two ways to look at a small farm: One view—the common one—is that it is a place to make a living, but rather a hard place, and should be sold as soon as anything easier is found; the other is that the ownership of land is a mark of honor, that a patent to land is a title to nobility, a right to sovereignty. The ownership must be absolute and subject only to the state, so that each proprietor is the independent sovereign of a portion of the United States, with the final authority through the ballot to control the local, county, and National governments—a position of great dignity and power.

We speak of "the sovereign people." Are they to be sovereign in fact or only in theory? If in fact, then each citizen must own and control something. In a sense he must be lord of a certain territory. This territory is called a farm, but legally it is a subdivision of the state, to which the farmer receives perpetual title in order that he may have the means to support his position as an independent sovereign with dignity and by absolutely governing a small portion of the United States learn to assist wisely in governing the whole.

BEST SIZE FOR SMALL FARMS.

This is the attitude of the state toward individual ownership of land, and these lands should be of an area that will come nearest to the development of the perfect citizen and ruler. The area must not be so large that the income will support the owner without effort on his part, nor should it be so small that it will make a mere toiler out of the owner, for this narrows the intellect. It should be large enough to provide good farm equipment, buildings, machinery, and stock and furnish labor for the family. The annual income must be sufficient to improve the farm, educate the family, assist in starting its members in ways of independent support, and provide a reserve for old age. The United States has fixed that area in some States at 160 acres. The right acreage of the farm depends upon conditions. In semiarid sections it may require more than double that number of acres, while near large cities less than one-fourth may answer the purpose.

CHANGES NEEDED TO INCREASE THE DIGNITY OF RURAL LIFE.

Under the new order of things, to attain the best results, the policy of maintaining large plantations in the South must be abandoned; all the idle lands must be brought into use and made profitable; labor for men and women must be held in honor; diversified agriculture must supplant the one-crop system to insure safety, and all the best conditions for a life of usefulness, culture, and influence must be established in the country.

Before rural life can be held in the highest honor the following conditions must be secured:

- (1) A much larger percentage of the farmers and their families must be broadly educated and of high character.
- (2) The farm lands must be so improved and managed as to yield a more certain and profitable return for labor expended and afford greater profit than employment in the city.
- (3) The farm improvements must be durable, suited to the requirements of the farm, convenient, and attractive.

(4) Churches, schools, means of communication, social conditions, and opportunities for accumulating wealth and for civic preferment must be better for the masses in the country than in the city.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE TRAINING ALONE NOT SUFFICIENT.

The problem is how to effect these rural changes for the better. Education being so important, many have thought and still think that the establishment of agricultural colleges will accomplish the object. Forty years' trial has shown that most of the college-trained youth, whether in schools of agriculture, science, or classics, leave the farm for reasons not difficult to understand. The education required is one that can reach the adult masses as well as the young and will hold them to the farm. The error is in a failure to see that the situation can not be overcome by a college education, however helpful it may be to a man as a citizen. It is a mass problem and must be met by a mass training.

THE SMALL FARM THE BEST SCHOOL.

The practical and sane way of accomplishing the result is to induce the farmers to try better methods and note the result in improving their farms—to make tillage less expensive and production more certain, to double the crop to the acre and halve the cost. While the farmer successfully solves the problems of the farm his experience widens and he becomes a broader man, till he is broad enough to size up the whole situation and has the means to execute his plan. As men broaden they have higher aspirations for their children, and better scholastic education will accompany the general uplift.

Well-informed men who are successful farmers are generally agreed that a thorough knowledge of agriculture can be acquired in one way only, and that is by working out the problems of the farm upon the farm. There is a world of details, of business knowledge, skill, and tact about farming that can be acquired only by contact with the soil and experience in the life of a farmer.

This education of the farmer upon his farm by working out problems in the field and receiving the answer in the crib or granary is, like all education, a personal matter, and each man must acquire it for himself. This points to the small farm, personally worked, as best for the man, for the land, for society, and for the state.

Education is what a human being absorbs in a usable form by experience, by observation, and from oral and written instruction. The world's most important school is the home and the small farm. To secure the best results the small farmer is forced to diversify his crop and to have a personal knowledge of all details relating to the farm. For safety he must get an income from a variety of products,

because a single crop may fail in yield or meet a nonresponsive market. This wider range of products broadens the knowledge of the farmer, and in the natural course of training he becomes skilled in the management of soils, cereal and grass crops, fruits, forests, domestic animals, farm machinery, and farm improvements. He is forced to be a student of markets and of the art of buying and selling to the best advantage; he learns the requirements of society and the advantages of cooperative effort. Cooperation may commence with an exchange of labor with a neighbor because he is short-handed, and it may be extended until there is cooperation with several in buying and selling, in promoting better highways, schools, and churches, and in the general uplift of the neighborhood.

This small farmer acquires his knowledge from many viewpoints—as a laborer and an employer; as a wage-earner and a capitalist; as a producer and a consumer; as an owner of land and a payer of taxes; and as a recipient of the benefits that come from rural improvement and the maintenance of law and order. No school or college in the land affords such varied instruction as this farm life or impresses it so lastingly upon the mind.

It is a school in which common sense is taught. Common sense is a thorough appreciation of common things and how to use them to the best advantage, or, if principles, how to apply them. This sort of wisdom can only come through experience. Many persons with slight acquaintance with books are perfect encyclopedias of the common and exact knowledge so useful in everyday life.

THRIFT AND CONSERVATISM CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SMALL FARMER.

No nation can be great without thrift. Thrift is the conservation of the products of toil and is taught by lessons of privation. Opulence and large incomes are not teachers of thrift. Even such as receive a fixed salary or the wage-workers learn less of thrift than the small farmer. Once the harvest is ended, the products must be stored with care to meet the wants of the family, and all the more care is necessary if there is no credit system.

The small farmer becomes conservative. He is not sure of the harvest or of the markets, and when these are made sure he has learned that the problems of another season must be met before the present income is safe from depletion.

Communities of small farmers tend to promote common honesty, a respect for the rights of others and for law. No one is rich enough to dominate his neighbors or so poor that his influence may be disregarded. The stock, products, and property of all are alike exposed to trespassers and depredators; hence, a common interest unites them for mutual protection, and the primary lessons of society are thus taught.

The education acquired on the small farm broadens citizenship, because it is a many-sided education and gives correct impressions of many phases of life. All over the world the small, independent farmers are staunch supporters of conservative government. They are intense lovers of home and opposed to radical changes.

Ultimately the small farmer learns to keep a reserve of cash against emergencies, and these aggregated accumulations become very important factors in the capital of the Nation, for they are more reliable than deposits from commercial sources. The vast sums of money necessary to carry on the business of a nation are not derived from the deposits of capitalists, but from the aggregation of millions of thrifty small depositors. This is especially true in England, France, Germany, and the United States.

It has been observed for years that the sons of small farmers develop managing ability. From their earliest years they are compelled to do things and to act independently. It is from this source that the greatest number of managers of the various enterprises of our country have been drawn.

A BODY OF SMALL FARMERS ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE NATION.

If all is considered education that "leads out," develops, or trains the individual, then the amount of education acquired in even the best schools is only a fraction of what the average man must know to succeed in life. It is, then, of the highest importance to the state that this greater mass of knowledge should be correct, broad, conservative, and elevating. Liberal provision has been made for schools by the state, by churches, and by individual gifts, but the molding of this greater knowledge to the best interests of society has been mainly left to the caprice of individual effort. The state can with propriety specially foster such conditions of society, such lines of industry, or such occupations as evidently tend to mental and physical vigor, to breadth of understanding, to the best citizenship, and to the stability of the state. For these ends no more potent influence has been found than an intelligent, prosperous, and contented body of thrifty small farmers.

POSSIBLE STEPS TOWARD THE FOSTERING OF SMALL FARMERS.

The States and the National Government have aided by the gift of lands for homes and by the promotion of rural schools and free mail delivery. What further steps can the Government rightfully take to improve rural conditions? Inasmuch as the net values of all the products of the farms depend upon the cost of transportation as well as the markets, the National Government should see that rural districts are served at a freight charge based on the cost of service

performed, thus equitably distributing the burdens of transportation. From the fact that country roads are just as much a part of the transportation problem as railroads and waterways, the more important highways through the country should come under State and National supervision, and thus be made a part of our great system of improved transportation.

Some plan should be devised and framed into law by which the farmer may participate in the use of an equitable portion of the vast time deposits of the people's money at a moderate rate of interest and upon such securities as he possesses. This would open the door of opportunity for thousands of thrifty toilers to seek and establish rural homes.

By every means possible the great dignity of land ownership should be impressed upon the men and youth of the present generation; but mere reiteration, whether verbal or printed, will not accomplish the object. There must be real dignity; that is, the men on the farms must have character, manliness, education, and energy. The farms must show by their improvements and judicious management that they belong to that type of men, for the improvements are the visible expressions of what is in the man.

It is impossible to impress upon anyone that there is dignity in residing upon a farm with impoverished soil, dilapidated buildings, and an environment of ignorance.

The adult rural people of the South are open to conviction and eager to learn. The problem that confronts the States and the Nation is, Shall the opportunity be given to them or to their children?

Shall the better conditions be wrought out by successful demonstrations that influence the present toilers upon the farms, or shall the reforms be deferred until the next generation and accomplished by the education and training of the youth?

Why may not a prosperous people carry on both methods simultaneously and reach the desired end in the briefest period of time?

The great value of educating and training youth for agriculture is so universally conceded that it does not require discussion. The necessity of presenting and impressing better types of husbandry upon adult farmers through demonstrations under their care is rapidly being accepted by the American people as a most important means of education for the rural masses and necessary to any general and rapid advancement.

The opinion that the municipality, the State, and the Nation are responsible only for the mental training of youth, mainly through books, has been too common. A broader conception of education includes instruction to adults in all useful knowledge applicable to

their vocations. In agriculture, the knowledge of the best animals, implements, seeds, methods of culture, and farm management is a necessary part of the equipment of the farmer to do his best, and this knowledge must be made so intensive by demonstration that it will result in achievement. If the rural masses can be influenced to accept and adopt the best methods of tilling the soil, the best plants and fruits of their kind, animals of the greatest merit bred for the purposes intended, and a general farm policy and management that tends to the improvement of the soil, the most economic production, and the greatest thrift, a proper material basis will be laid for all other reforms and improvements leading to a broader National life. It is the intention in this statement to claim that this material improvement is a necessary factor in any permanent uplift and that the education of adults is essential to the great plan of human betterment.