CLUTTS, Betty Carol, 1921–
COUNTRY LIFE ASPECTS OF THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT.

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1962
History, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
COUNTRY LIFE ASPECTS OF THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Betty Carol Clutts, B. A., M. A.

The Ohio State University
1962

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of History
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE GOLDEN AGE OF AGRICULTURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD COUNTRY LIFE</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE COMMISSION AND ITS WORK</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. &quot;... THERE ARE VERY MARKED DEFICIENCIES ...&quot;</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. PUBLIC RESPONSE</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. &quot;A CAMPAIGN FOR RURAL PROGRESS&quot;</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. &quot;THE GREAT NEED ... IS ... LEADERSHIP.&quot;</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. PROGRESSIVE ASPECTS OF THE COUNTRY LIFE MOVEMENT</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

There has never been a time when the American farmer was as well off as he is today, when we consider not only his earning power, but the comforts and advantages he may secure. Yet the real efficiency in farm life, and in country life as a whole, is not to be measured by historical standards, but in terms of its possibilities. Considered from this point of view there are very marked deficiencies. . . .

. . . We have found . . . more or less serious agricultural unrest in every part of the United States, even in the most prosperous regions.¹

This quotation, occasionally cited in whole or in part, verbatim or in substance, constitutes all that is generally remembered of the Report of the Commission on Country Life. But this Report was more than a summary statement of the achievements and complaints of the early twentieth century farmer. The work of a Commission appointed by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, it is indicative not only of his interest in farm and population problems but also of his concept of social reform as a result of scientific appraisal and conscious, enlightened planning. Composed primarily of journalists and academicians from land grant colleges, the Commission on County Life could be expected to take an exceedingly broad view of agriculture, untainted by the passé radicalism of Populism. Conservative in its economic recommendations, it nonetheless made suggestions for the reform of the agrarian community that were advanced in their social implications.

Ostensibly it was to supply information and suggestions on which the President could base recommendations for legislation; in reality it was a device to force upon the public conscience the need for measures to raise the social and intellectual, as well as the economic, level of rural life to an equilibrium with that of urban life. As such it was the prism through which were focused into one broad stream the many reform proposals which had been gathering strength since the early eighteen nineties so that it was a benchmark in the development of a movement of considerable contemporary importance, the country life movement.

The prestige and publicity attending its association with the popular President, together with the eminence of its members, enabled it to articulate in an authoritative form the deficiencies and discontents to which farm papers and agrarian reformers had long been pointing as problems needing study and action. Some of the particular shortcomings had constituted subject matter for the agricultural press since its beginnings; others had appeared as the result of the rapid industrialization of the economy and urbanization of the population.

In addition to formulating these problems, the Report proposed tentative, specific solutions, many of which, again, had been suggested in earlier periods. However, in consonance with the spirit of the age, the Commission urged, not a patchwork of superficial remedies, but a well-considered and integrated program of reform to be determined by a careful study of the community. This recommendation gave tremendous impetus to the growth of a nascent social science, rural sociology, so that it rapidly became an accepted discipline and served to perpetuate interest.
in improving country life long after political interest in the topic had subsided.

Not only did the Commission define the deficiencies of agriculture and suggest diverse methods of improvement, it also gave a mighty stimulus to public opinion so that, in conjunction with other reform campaigns, it eventually forced the federal government to take cognizance of these conditions and to accept responsibilities heretofore unrecognized. The public interest aroused added, also, to the demand that state and voluntary agencies improve their services to the rural population.

The publicity given the Commission during the investigation, and to the Report after its publication, heightened the suspicion that all was not well among those engaged in the most fundamental industry of the nation. Reaffirming the traditional adherence to the agrarian myth, the Commission focused attention on the fact that the accepted pillar of moral virtue, of political democracy, of economic individualism, and of military prowess—the small, landowning farmer—was crumbling. It was to preserve this repository of homely virtue and simple strength that the Commission was called upon to make its recommendations.

Yet the Commission submitted its report of defects and deficiencies in the year which inaugurated the period which was to be accepted, a generation later, as the basis of parity computations because it had been such a prosperous period for the farmer. What, then, was the situation of agriculture with relation to the rest of the economy? What were the discontents that created the unrest among the farm population? What were the conditions that enabled these diagnosticians of the rural problem to receive a hearing from a national audience?
CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN AGE OF AGRICULTURE

By the winter of 1908-1909 the political protest of the farmers of the west and south as manifested in the populist movement was but an uneasy memory. The rise in agricultural prices resulting from the increase in the gold supply and mounting consumer demand had taken the sting from the economic demands of the farmer. The role of Roosevelt as "trust-buster" and railroad regulator had sapped the strength of the demand for government ownership of common carriers. The demand for political reforms had been recognized and specific reforms were now advocated by the major political parties, ensuring their eventual adoption. The extension of mail delivery into rural districts, along with the expansion of telephone and electric trolley systems, promised to mitigate the evil effects of isolation. The farmer was not only making more money, he was living better than ever before.

There were many other indications that American agriculture was becoming "mature" and "stable," striking a satisfactory balance with the rest of the economy. As a result of the "closing" of the frontier new lands in large quantities were not being brought into cultivation and it was predicted that the depreciation of land values and the depopulation of the countryside of longer settled areas would thereby be retarded. The effects of the mechanization of agriculture were gradually being
absorbed and it was not generally expected that any new applications of American inventive genius would be made in this area. The completion of the railroad network and its promise of speedy and relatively reasonable transportation of agricultural products allowed the farmer to specialize in commodities especially suited to the resources and markets available to him. Production continued to increase, but more slowly than heretofore.

In responding to these developments the agriculturist received leadership, advice, and encouragement from a number of sources vitally interested in his welfare. Among these were the agricultural publications which were increasing in both number and quality. Most of them, during this period as in earlier years, were concerned primarily with the technical aspects of increasing production; but some were beginning to devote space to advising the farmer on the marketing of crops to obtain the greatest profit. And occasionally there were articles urging the farmer to remember that although agriculture was a business, and profit should be realized from it, it was also a way of life.

Instrumental, also, in aiding the farmer to increase production and to adjust to new demands and conditions were the agricultural colleges and the experiment stations associated with them. Emerging victorious in the struggle with the prejudice against "book-learnin'," the land grant colleges were reaching increasing numbers of farmers through their short courses, extension work of many kinds, and faculty participation in farmers' institutes, disseminating information about both new and proven methods of cultivation. Of importance, too, was the fact that these contacts of professors with practical farmers enabled academically trained professors to recognize the problems of the man whom he was to
serve. As a result of these contacts new fields were beginning to be developed in the agricultural colleges which attracted little attention at the time but were to have great influence in later periods. While the primary concern continued to be improvement in the techniques of production, a few far-sighted leaders were starting to develop such fields as agricultural economics, farm management, and rural sociology. It was those who were aware of the problems in these areas who were to become leaders in the movement for improving country life by improving social conditions and relations in rural areas.

Cooperating with the college in the application of principles of science to production was the United States Department of Agriculture, which was also carrying on experiments and disseminating information through its bulletins. During this period, too, the federal department assumed a new leadership by taking over sponsorship of a promising new program, education by cooperative demonstration.

On lower governmental levels, most states had established, by the turn of the century, Boards or Commissions of Agriculture which were more or less effective in aiding the organization of farmers, voicing agriculture's complaints and needs, obtaining favorable legislation, and encouraging husbandry through fairs and publications. Moreover, the state public school systems were beginning to recognize, although slowly, the demand for instruction in agriculture on the elementary and secondary level.

In a very tentative manner business interests, especially railroads, were also showing interest in the farmers' welfare by activities which would encourage production. Philanthropic foundations, too,
evidenced awareness of the farmers' problems and provided funds for various purposes. The best known venture was the Rockefeller General Education Board's sponsorship of demonstration work to combat the boll weevil in the south.

Among the more enlightened farmers themselves there was a movement to organize along the lines of specialization. So Horticultural Associations, Dairymen's Associations and similar organizations were founded to spread information about production and, in some cases, to improve marketing procedures.

The interests of agriculture, then, were not being neglected in the first decade of the twentieth century. Both private and public agencies combined to provide for the farmer the scientific information which was responsible for the continuing increase in production.

* * * * * * *

On the other hand, there was considerable unrest in the countryside. Apparently economic prosperity was not entirely successful in alleviating the dissatisfaction responsible for the rural revolt of the nineties. The agrarian radicalism which had risen to the surface in Populism withstood the "acid test of good times," not in partisan revolt but in pressure to have economic and social demands satisfied by governmental action. The farmers, especially those of the western middlewest, although abandoning third party activity, gave support to the statesmen who were rising to prominence in the progressive movement. The emphasis of leaders such as LaFollette, Cummins, Johnson, and Folk
on railroad regulation and the direct primary provided a distinct continuity with the radicalism which had demanded government ownership and direct control of government.\footnote{Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, \textit{Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951) pp. 31-55.}

The unrest was not due entirely to remembrances of past injustices and the recollection of the momentary success of rebellion against them; the twentieth century brought new conditions and changing emphases on old relations which directed attention to new demands. Although the gold inflation seemed the answer to "free silver," the problem of speculation in agricultural commodities was not solved by any substitute for the sub-treasury plan. Nor had the government done much to prevent the development of monopoly. Increasing concentration of control in the manufacturing industries appeared to the farmer to be a primary reason for the ability of the industrialist to maintain the price of his product. The farmer, by the nature of the organization of his industry, found it impossible to attain this control individually and attempted to accomplish it by combination with his fellows.

The first decade of the new century, therefore, saw a revival of interest in cooperative marketing organizations designed to perform the function of the middleman, traditionally regarded by the farmer as his exploiter. A movement to dominate the marketing of dark-fired tobacco was begun in Kentucky and Tennessee which attracted national attention because of the violence associated with it. The year 1902, furthermore, saw the establishing of two farm organizations of a new type, each of
which hoped to become national in extent and importance. Both the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union and the Society of Equity placed their primary emphasis on marketing arrangements.

The problem of mortgage indebtedness assumed new proportions at the century mark. Traditionally one of the greatest of farm problems, the reason for the farmers' susceptibility to easy money schemes, this persistent problem was intensified by rising land values. Past experience had assured lenders that farm mortgages were a good investment so there was plenty of money available for the agricultural debtor. The expectation that land values would appreciate in the future as they had in the past gave the farmer confidence that he would be able to repay, so he was not hesitant to borrow. On the other hand, the rising cost of farm land made it necessary for the prospective farm purchaser to borrow in larger amounts. Moreover the need of the farmer for additional capital was increased by the growing use of farm machinery and commercial fertilizer—in response to the urging of farm magazines and agricultural colleges and to compensate for the declining fertility of the soil. For an increasing number, farming was becoming a highly capitalized enterprise.

The problem of indebtedness was closely allied with another which had just begun to be serious enough to attract attention—farm tenancy. The renting of a farm on a cash or kind basis had been regarded, in all parts of the country except the south where share-cropping was a permanent condition, as a rung on the ladder to farm ownership and independence. The tenant, after several years of renting, expected to be able to save and borrow enough to become a proprietor. The tremendous
rise in the value of agricultural land meant for many the relinquishing of the hope of acquiring a farm of their own. This was particularly true of the more fertile areas where the farmer was able to accumulate enough wealth to retire to the adjacent town and continue to draw income from his land.

Primarily an economic problem, tenancy also had important social implications for the rural community and there was much concern in general periodicals about its influence on the deterioration of the social and institutional life of the rural areas. The removal of the more prosperous and responsible farmers to the country town and their replacement by renters with an insecure tenure weakened both the rural and the town community. Farm owners who no longer resided in the open country were unsympathetic to taxation for purposes of improving country schools and country roads. Their withdrawal from the country church deprived that institution of a large measure of its financial support and diminished its status as a leading social force. Moreover, the substitution of tenant for owner on the farm did not constitute a replacement so far as the community organization was concerned. The custom of renting on a yearly basis and the insecurity of tenure meant that the renter seldom took an active part in community life. Although he might have children in school, he was not seriously interested in the curriculum nor in the quality of instruction; nor was he concerned about the expenditure of money or effort in the upkeep of roads. Even less was he careful to maintain the fences and buildings of the farm he rented. To exert energy in these ways brought him no financial return and the
expectation of moving gave him no incentive to keep up the physical appearance of the farm and the attractiveness of the neighborhood.

The further complaint was made in some areas that those who came as tenants were not desirable additions to group social life because of their foreign extraction. The low standard of living of these immigrants in conjunction with the high cost of land accentuated the fear that an important part of the farm problem of the future would be the development of the landlord-peasant system unfortunately characteristic of European agriculture.2

The increase in the ratio of tenant to farm owner-operator accentuated the social problems which constituted another potent cause of unrest—the deficiencies of the social life of the rural community. Attention was called to these shortcomings of country life by writers of fiction and non-fiction alike.

The deterioration of the country church was one of the first of the rural social problems to be noted for it was concern over the "impending paganism" of rural areas which originally suggested that the inadequacies of the agricultural community were social as well as economic. The most obvious of the symptoms of the degeneration of the rural church was that of declining membership, due in part to the exodus of the rural population and in part to the attraction of other social stimuli. Also contributing to the problem was a general apathy towards religious affairs and, it was feared, toward social morality. This

apathy, born of a narrow emphasis on doctrine, was manifested in both a diminished attendance and an attitude of cheerful determinism which discouraged any attempt of the church to deal with social issues. The decimation of congregations made the insistence on sectarian separatism seem ludicrous. The number of church-going members of a rural community might have shrunk to the extent that only one church could be adequately supported. Yet the emphasis on doctrinal differences remained so strong that three or four churches feebly struggled to preserve their separate identities. Even with the common expedient of employing a clergyman to supply several adjacent parishes it was sometimes necessary for him to engage in farming or other business in order to provide for his and his family's needs. Under such conditions it could hardly be expected that the minister could maintain the whole-hearted devotion enabling him to provide the stimulus and inspiration to spur his congregation on to higher personal and community ideals.  

The school, too, was singled out by friendly critics, for failing to take initiative in solving the social problems of the country. The principal grounds for criticism was the absence of any attempt on the part of the rural elementary and high schools to educate their pupils

---

for appreciation of and participation in rural life. The absence of subject matter which would lead rural youth to understand nature and to derive profit from their future occupation was in part the fault of the curriculum and in part that of the teacher. The literary orientation of the course of study with its emphasis on theoretical mathematics, classical languages, foreign geography and similar subjects projected ideals and goals of the city so that rustic scholars were educated away from the country. The teachers, by popular demand, were more concerned with maintaining discipline than in imparting knowledge. Furthermore, they were unable to introduce their students to the scientific era in farming because they were usually unprepared to teach agriculture or the sciences on which it was based. Finally, the country teacher like the country preacher, was not only ill-equipped by training for country life leadership, but was uninterested in the problems of the rural community. Both were serving there only until a more promising opportunity presented itself in town or city.

But the most often noted rural social problem was a personal, not an institutional one. The outstanding shortcoming of country life was the lack of social contacts, the isolation of the rural family—felt particularly by the farm wife, for the husband was forced by business to make trips to the village or town. Obviously the all but impassable condition of country roads during the winter months made for geographical

---

isolation. But some writers pointed out that this was not the only, nor, indeed, the most important cause for the isolation of the rural household. Even more serious was the psychological attitude of the country resident which made him suspicious and withdrawn and, accordingly, reluctant to indulge in social visiting or community affairs. Without social interaction no community life could develop and man, essentially a gregarious creature, became dissatisfied.  

Causes for discontent, then, were these: memories of severe depression and exploitation; mounting indebtedness and increasing tenancy; physical and psychological isolation; inadequate social institutions. Although politically the period ending in 1909 did not appear to be one of great unrest, there was evidence of dissatisfaction with the economic and social status of agriculture.

The creation of Village Improvement Societies in New England, the movement for consolidation of schools and for agricultural education, the revival of the Grange, the establishment of the two new national farmers' organizations, and the continued support of such political insurgents as La Follette, Cummins, Grona, and others provide evidence of this chronic dissatisfaction. The most eloquent statement of discontent, however, was unaccompanied by any of the usual manifestations of unrest. It was the ever-increasing rural exodus, the silent protest of farmers always and everywhere to the social isolation, cultural

---

stagnation, and economic privation of life away from the city in a rapidly urbanizing civilization. Indeed, it was this manifestation of agrarian unrest which played a predominant role in gaining a hearing for advocates of improvement of country life.

* * * * * * *

Throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, there was much discussion in the press about the diminishing proportion of the rural to the total population. Periodicals of all types, agricultural, scholarly, and popular, called attention to the fact that villages and country towns were losing their population at an alarming rate and that in the older and less fertile sections farms were being "abandoned" by their owners.

Neither the rural exodus nor the concern about it was a new phenomenon. On the contrary, literary testimony on the threat to the state of allowing the rural population to decline is found in the writers of antiquity. Aristotle and Vergil had extolled the rustic virtues and the advantages of country life in much the same terms as did those who would have halted the tide of twentieth century migration. In the American experience it was, of course, Thomas Jefferson who publicized the philosophy and initiated the policies which would maintain and encourage the growth of the class of small land-owning farmers. Throughout the nineteenth century there had been journalistic and political concern over the relative decrease of rural population. Then, too,
suggestions had been made for making country life more remunerative economically and attractive socially. "Keeping 'em down on the farm" was an old story long before any of the boys saw "Paree"!

To the analyst just before and just after the turn of the century, however, the long-term nature of the trend was somewhat obscured. The panic and depression of the seventies had brought a temporary reversal of the general direction of population movement and encouraged a momentary back-to-the-land movement. The Panic of 1893 had had somewhat similar but less marked results. Nonetheless the proportion of the rural to the total population had declined less noticeably than in the previous decade, giving rise to optimistic statements that the tide of the rural emigration had been turned. On the other hand, calling attention to the relative decline of the rural population was the practice adopted in 1890 of enumerating urban and rural populations separately.6

The progress of the industrial revolution, the growth of cities, and the increased efficiency of agriculture had accelerated the process of concentration of population to such an extent that a difference in degree appeared to be a difference in kind. Consequently, as the long term trend was manifest again in the census of 1890 which showed a decline of rural population in relation to total population from 71.8 to 64.9 percent, and, although to a smaller extent, the further decline to

60.3 percent in 1900, there were many to observe that the ranks of the yeoman farmer were being decimated. These commentators enumerated the dire consequences for a civilization whose traditions and strength were based on agrarian ideals and whose economy had been dependent on agricultural exports.7

There was a generally accepted belief that the farmer was in every way a superior individual. His individualism and habits of independence made him politically incorruptible and economically conservative. Because of his closeness to nature he was believed to be more virtuous and religious. Because of his residence far from the dissipations of city life he was healthier and stronger of body, less likely to fall prey to "nervous diseases." Strangely enough, because he was born in the country, the farm boy was considered better able to withstand the rigors and strains of urban life and more likely to attain a position of importance in business or government. As a result of the habits of reflection acquired in a country environment and the opportunity to exercise manual dexterity, the country boy was assured of a better chance of achieving distinction in the arts or literature—if, that is, he came to the city for the "blossoming" to take place. Certainly, in times of military crisis, it was the rural portion of the population

---

which was called upon to man the guns with strong arms and sturdy hearts—and it had never been found wanting. 8

The implication was clear. When the more able and energetic youth from the countryside were attracted to the city they succumbed to the urban trend toward a lower birth rate. Fewer individuals, and these the least able, were left in the rural districts to procreate in larger numbers. For the generation that had enthusiastically accepted Darwin this was a doleful prospect. For those who followed Galton, it was unthinkable that action to prevent the genetic deterioration of the nation should not be taken. In short, the attraction of the city for promising rural youth played an important role in the widely discussed danger of "race suicide." 9

The rural exodus had a further threat for the welfare of the early twentieth century. As a result of the advances of medical science and the adoption of more effective methods of sanitation, the death rate was dropping faster than the birth rate. This was certainly not to be


deplored, but it did seem to raise a problem of providing sustenance for the population increment and led to a resurgence of interest in the theories of Thomas Malthus. Authors, scientists, men in public life, pointed out that the chemist, the inventor, and the farmer must cooperate to provide food for the rapidly increasing world population. Even the surpluses of the New World would not be sufficient to satisfy the demand for bread if current population trends continued. Disciples of the pessimistic prophet had almost unreservedly accepted the doctrine of diminishing returns—at least in agricultural production—and regarded the day near at hand when the application of additional units of capital and labor to land would not produce sufficient increase to provide sustenance for the added labor, nor profit for the capital.

This doctrine acquired greater significance as the result of the realization that the virgin arable land of the nation was soon to be

---

exhausted. How much of the remaining public land was cultivable became a widely discussed subject. The general approval of the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902 is a measure of the degree of concern over the vanishing reserves—and that in spite of the fact that the Act involved another extension of government subsidy. There were optimists who subscribed to the belief that irrigation would provide food for tremendous increases in production. There were others who, in computing the density of the future population that the United States could support, blithely ignored the fact that much land, especially in the west, could never be farmed. There were still others who believed that production on those lands already under cultivation could be enormously increased by more intensive cultivation, by the application of methods of the "new agriculture." The latter pointed to the difference in the acre yields of American farms and their European counterparts and urged greater use of fertilizer, farm machinery, and land-conserving techniques.

---


To those who argued in this vein the Malthusian, diminishing return theorist replied that more intensive methods were more expensive and that more capital and labor would have to be directed into the field of agricultural production. The increasing value of land would also mean mounting costs for the farmer. All this would bring increasing prices for the consumer. The rise in agricultural prices in the first decade of the century and the declining relative importance of agricultural exports seemed to substantiate the contentions of those critics who made these points.

If these logically plausible arguments were based on facts, the prospect was indeed alarming for the consuming public. If the premises were correct, the reduction of the rural population and the abandonment of previously tilled land could well mean shortages of the foods and fibres needed to supply the needs of a population which was continuing to grow.

The situation was not without its elements of hope, however. The more scholarly of the population experts were pointing out that, although the population was continuing to increase, the rate of increase was declining. The possibility of the population outgrowing the ability of the economy to sustain it was therefore remote, if not impossible. Others called attention to the fact that the decrease in rural population had not been as great between 1890 and 1900 as in the preceding decade. Instead of noting the possible relation of decreased migration to the
Panic of 1893, they attributed it to the increasing attractiveness of country life.\textsuperscript{13}

Furthermore, in New England, the area of abandoned farms, state governments were making efforts to repopulate the rural districts. The Boards of Agriculture of both Massachusetts (1891) and New Hampshire (1889) published catalogues listing and describing the farms no longer under cultivation. The response was reported to be very encouraging.\textsuperscript{14}

To be sure, not all of these were purchased for the purpose of returning them to agricultural production. Many of them became summer homes or country residences for city people. But to the governmental units which were unable to provide minimum social services because of failure to obtain revenue from unoccupied land, the distinction was unimportant. The new function served as well as the old!

To the enthusiasts of country living for its own sake, the advocates of improving the enjoyment of life through closer association with nature, the idea of rehabilitating an abandoned farm home and growing vegetables indicated a promise of rehabilitation for a nervous civilization. To encourage this trend—and because of the popularity of the idea—almost every issue of many leading magazines included an article


or story recounting the delights of purchasing and refurbishing an old homestead. So far as New England was concerned, it seemed that it might recoup its losses in staple crops by more intensive cultivation of the crop of summer visitors.

Technical advances, too, promised to make country life more appealing so that, it was hoped, the flow of young people to the city would be retarded. Innovations and inventions such as rural free delivery, better roads, the electric trolley, and the telephone did reduce the isolation of country families. These new developments had their economic as well as their social value. They enabled the farmer to market his crops to better advantage by allowing him speedier access to market information and providing him better transportation facilities for his produce.¹⁵

But perhaps the most promising sign of the revival of rural areas was found in the changing attitudes of farmers. Their willingness to cooperate for business purposes promised better returns in marketing their products. The renewed interest in farmers' institutes and increasing acceptance of the advice and information tendered by the agricultural colleges, experiment stations, and the Department of Agriculture indicated a receptiveness to new methods which promised much for the

increase in production. The revival of the Grange, farmers' clubs, and agricultural societies bespoke an awareness of need for social intercourse and a display of initiative in satisfying it. The establishing of Village Improvement Societies, lecture courses, and university extension courses indicated a reawakening of intellectual interests.

The appearance of these symptoms of improving rural conditions encouraged many of those concerned about rural problems to discern a grass roots awakening and movement for progress. The work of the Commission on Country Life stimulated further interest, especially on the part of institutions and organizations that could discover among the deficiencies of rural conditions a void their services might fill. This groundswell of interest in the social and economic needs of the farmer developed two types of leaders. On the one hand were the men who would improve the farmers' condition through economic organization and emphasis on the commercial aspects of farm economics. This group was prominent in the establishment and leadership of such farmers' organizations as the Farmers' Union, American Society of Equity, and—much later—the American Farm Bureau Federation. Although they recognized the existence of social problems they believed that those deficiencies would be solved by increasing the farmers' income.

The other group was associated with the land grant colleges, farm magazines, and the social institutions of school and church. As their relationship would indicate, they placed emphasis on the development of social institutions, community spirit, intellectual stimulation, and spiritual idealism. They recognized the importance of a reasonably
prosperous economic base, but discouraged the tendency to stress materialistic goals.

The first group regarded agriculture as a business, the farmer as a businessman, engaging in buying and selling his products like any other producer; the second visualized farming as a way of life, the farmer as a priest of the earth, deriving his satisfactions from identification with the processes of nature and science and the enjoyment of a wholesome community life with others of his kind. For a decade after the submission of the Report of the Commission on Country Life, there was no sharp differentiation between the policies of the two sets of leaders. The organizations responding primarily to the demand for "better business" also devoted attention in their periodicals and statements of goals to "better living." The surveys and conferences of the "better living" advocates inevitably included questions, papers, and discussions on cooperative organization or other improved marketing methods. All these expressions of the modification of a traditional agriculture to adjust to the conditions of the modern world accepted the interrelationship of "better farming, better business, and better living."

The developments of the year 1919 indicate that the two phases of the country life movement were parting. In that year, two new organizations were projected. The National Country Life Association was established by those who would place "better living" first, and its membership
ran heavily to those interested in social reform. The American Farm
Bureau Federation, whose preliminary organization was begun in that year,
eventually accepted as its *raison d'être* the organization of agricul-
tural marketing interests on a national scale, "better business."
CHAPTER II

THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD COUNTRY LIFE

A trend which attracted such widespread attention as the rural exodus could not fail to awaken the interest of a president whose reading was as omnivorous and whose interests were as universal as Theodore Roosevelt's. Especially was it inevitable since it touched upon his fear of the relative decline in the birth rate. This phenomenon threatened both national military power and the domination of American politics by "native American" elements, two questions of great significance to him. Yet, although historians have devoted much attention to the attitude of Theodore Roosevelt toward the development of labor organization and capital accumulation, they have been comparatively negligent in exploring his relation to the land and the farmer.

On the face of it, it would seem that of all American presidents, he would be the least likely to be spurred to action by concern for the welfare of the farmer and the living conditions of his family. Referring to himself as "straight New York City," he could not recall a boyhood on the farm; nor was there an old family homestead--not even a country estate--in the ancestral background. His branch of the Roosevelt family had confined its activities to banking, law, and similar urban pursuits. City-born, privately educated, his contacts with the soil before his
ranching experience on the Little Missouri had been confined to nature study and hunting and fishing trips.¹

His infrequent relations with farmers in this early period and his occasional remarks on agriculturists indicate, not sympathy nor identification, but a degree of condescension. Aware of his upper class origins and background, he allowed himself to express surprise when, staying with Illinois farmers on a hunting trip in 1880, he found that they considered themselves his social equal, and excused them because of the rough dress and unshaven appearance of himself and his companions. A few years later he still found it unusual enough to require comment to attend a hunt dinner at Austin Wadsworth's to which New York farmers were also invited. However, he did not allow his aristocratic orientation to obscure the broad humanitarianism which was later to serve as the basis for the bond between him and plain dirt farmers. Despite their roughness, he admitted, "I like them very much." Perhaps his liking was due to his observation that "like all rural Americans they are intensely independent."²

His ranching experiences did not help Roosevelt to gain an extensive understanding of the typical farmer and his problems. Attracted to ranching because of its adventurous appeal and the opportunity for intimate contact with nature, his relation toward the

¹Earle D. Ross, "Roosevelt and Agriculture," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIV (Dec., 1927), 288-90.

land was quite different from that of the farm boy who grew up doing routine chores and who was expected to remain on the farm because he was born there. Roosevelt's activities as owner of a ranch—the round-up, shooting for food, hunting horse thieves—were far more dramatic than the monotonous if less dangerous cycle of planting, cultivation, and harvesting which was the lot of most farmers. Moreover, he identified himself with the big stockman and easily recognized the superior qualities of such an individual who was engaged in supervision of the investment of considerable capital and the employment of numerous hands. As a result of his western residence he did gain a knowledge of the cattlemen and cowboys—and came to share their prejudices against both sheepmen and the "ordinary prosaic farmer." Indeed, he publicly indicated his preference for the companionship of cowboys, remarking: "They are much better fellows and pleasanter companions than small farmers or agricultural laborers." With regret, therefore, he observed the inevitability of the taking over of much of the range by the granger or homesteader and the passing of the heyday of the rancher.3

Nonetheless, this acquaintance with the men and women of the west gave him a basis for understanding rural personality and character; his recognition of the hardships and loneliness of the lives of the women

led him to realize that there was a problem in rural America that hard work alone would not solve. 4

Nor did Theodore Roosevelt's early political experience lead him to sympathize with farmers and their needs. He considered his rural colleagues in the New York Assembly as superior to those from the city, but he observed that oftentimes they were "narrow-minded and slow to receive an idea." 5 But in his experience in the Assembly he was primarily interested in urban, not rural, legislation. So, too, his problems as Civil Service Commissioner, as Police Commissioner, and as Assistant Secretary of the Navy had no rural aspects.

The first position in which he was called upon to serve in any way as representative of country as well as city constituents was as Governor of New York, still a semi-agricultural state. His annual addresses commended the work of the State Department of Agriculture and complimented the farmers on their energy and ability in increasing production. But his recommendations showed no awareness of the need for a new approach. At the turn of the century his concept of the farmers' needs was increased production and decreasing transportation costs. Yet he evinced sufficient interest for a friendly critic, Albert Shaw, to point out that Governor Roosevelt had recognized the fundamental


importance of the occupation of agriculture and had furthered the cause
of the farmer, the dairyman, and the market gardener whenever the oppor-
tunity arose.  

His tenure as governor also gave him occasion to make personal
contact with the farmers of the state. Undoubtedly he performed at
least adequately the role he was called on to play at county fairs and
old-settlers' gatherings. Unquestionably he enjoyed the opportunity
"to meet the men who make up the backbone of the bulk of the Republican
party in this state." Moreover it was his responsibilities as governor
of New York that acquainted Roosevelt with the problem of forest conser-
vation and enabled him to know Gifford Pinchot who was to have so much
influence on his policies, especially those of conservation and country
life.

Roosevelt's debut on a national stage, first as Vice President,
subsequently as President, brought no warning of any particular awareness
of agricultural issues or of the development of a novel philosophy with
relation to the position of agriculture in the national economy. Cer-
tainly he was not unaware of the presence of a large rural voting popu-
lation. In frequent public addresses he paid tribute to the place of
the farmer in the economy, to the importance of agriculture as a

6 Annual Message to the New York Legislature, Jan. 2, 1899, Works
(Nat. Ed.), XV, 21, 28-29; ibid., Jan. 3, 1900, pp. 70-71; Albert Shaw,
"Roosevelt's Work as Governor," The Review of Reviews, XXII (Aug., 1900),
188.

7 Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Cabot Lodge, Aug. 28, 1899, Henry
Cabot Lodge, Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt
and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918 (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1925), I, 418-19; ibid., Sept. 11, 1899, p. 420. Hereafter cited
as Lodge, Correspondence.
vocation, and to the superior qualities of the rural citizen. He
displayed an active if not unusual interest in the Department of Agri-
culture which was steadily increasing its organization and scope.

Successive annual messages revealed an increasing awareness of
certain deficiencies in rural life. Gradually he indicated that he
believed the federal government had the responsibility to use its power
to overcome the farmers' handicaps in certain specific areas. Until
near the end of his administration, however, he showed no unusual
interest in the problems of farm life. But by 1907 he was urging the
Department of Agriculture to embark on a new type of research, one which
would inquire into the social aspects of farming as an occupation. The
next year he appointed the Commission on Country Life to survey the
whole field of agrarian discontent and report to him. 8

* * * * * * *

In spite of this want of direct experience, Theodore Roosevelt
had definite ideas about the importance of agriculture and the signifi-
cance of the farmer in American national life. The accumulating evidence
that conditions did not comport with his views led him to create the
Commission to recommend measures that would restore agriculture as an
honorable and desirable occupation. To understand such unprecedented
action it is necessary to keep in mind both the President's convictions

with regard to the farmer and his concept of government and its relation to the economy.

Theodore Roosevelt inherited certain firmly founded tenets regarding the farmers. That these beliefs were not original but were shared by the majority of the American people as a part of their subliminal cultural heritage does not detract from their importance as a part of the mental furniture of the Chief Executive. That they were being challenged by the course of events does much to explain the arousing of the President's concern about the condition of country life.

The first of these attitudes can be described as his pride in quantity production and, indeed, production in ever increasing quantities. In the second place, Roosevelt was enough of a physiocrat to proclaim agriculture, if not the source of all wealth, at least the basis of the economic prosperity of the nation. Finally, and most important, was his belief that the farmer was the surviving repository of the fundamental virtues of independence, individualism, initiative, and industry that had made the nation great.9

To the chief representative of a nation which placed a premium on size, the fact that each year saw the totals of agricultural staples produced greater than those of the preceding year provided cause for pride. Moreover, the fact that the increase in production was the result of expansion of the cultivated land offered assurance that man

9Ross, "Roosevelt and Agriculture," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIV (Dec., 1927), 288-90.
was continuing to conquer in the contest with the forces of nature on
the agricultural frontier.10

The "closing" of the frontier, however, promised to terminate
the constant increment in agricultural production. This, in turn,
threatened to disrupt the equilibrium between agriculture and manufactur­ing which had accelerated the industrialization of the nation. The
difficulty of feeding a growing population on a constant, limited land
base which was decreasing in fertility excited the apprehension of
President Roosevelt as it had those of other observers.

There were two obvious solutions: increase production per acre
of land already under cultivation; add to the land under cultivation by
reclaiming land hitherto considered unsuitable.

It was possible to increase production per acre on the existing
farmland by adopting and practicing the principles of the "new
agriculture." This was an area in which the federal government was
already active through its Department of Agriculture and, indirectly,
by appropriations to the land grant colleges and experiment stations.
In his annual messages and other addresses the President regularly paid
tribute to the achievements of the Department of Agriculture in its
research activities and in its attempts to convey the information thus
obtained to actual farmers.11 He was particularly enthusiastic about

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 300; Speech at Bangor, Maine, Aug. 27, 1902, The
Works of Theodore Roosevelt (14 vols.; Exec. Ed.; New York: The Coop-
erative Publication Society, n.d.), I, 127-28; Speech at Sioux Falls,
S. D., Apr. 6, 1903, ibid., p. 303; Annual Message to New York
the pioneering experiments in cooperative demonstration work in the southwest because it was such a practical approach to education by action. 12

Total farm production could also be augmented by reclaiming the semi-arid lands through irrigation. President Roosevelt was, from the beginning, a strong advocate of legislation which would extend federal government activity into the field of planning and financing the dams, reservoirs, and canals that would make irrigation possible. By 1902 it was evident that private enterprise and state initiative were unequal to the task of organizing and underwriting the extensive engineering projects required to make desert land productive.

Roosevelt's concern over the success of the reclamation program went farther than mere publicity through speeches and personal encouragement through letters. His anxiety for its success caused him to exert the pressure of the presidential personality through a conference with the House Irrigation Committee. Subsequently he referred to the Newlands


Act as one of the most valuable of his administration because it had extended to the small farmer the opportunity to "homestead" in the arid regions.  

The President admitted that it was a "mere truism" to point out that the prosperity of the nation rested on the well-being of the farmer and the wage-earner. In his system of economic thought the farmer, even in an increasingly industrialized economy continued to play an important role. He contributed to the economy by providing both a large supply of cheap food and much of the raw material that was processed by American factories. "The American manufacturer," he asserted, "never could have placed this Nation at the head of the manufacturing nations of the world if he had not had behind him, securing him every variety of raw material, the exhaustless resources of the American farm, developed by the skill and enterprise of intelligent and educated American farmers."  

In spite of repeated references to the farmer's economic importance, however, Theodore Roosevelt found that the greatest contribution of the American farmer lay in his character. Again and again, in public

---


addresses and personal letters, he revealed his acceptance of the current myth that the small, landowning farmer class was the backbone of the nation. Steadfastness, singlemindedness of purpose, and industry; rugged independence, masterful resolution, individual energy and resourcefulness; self-help and initiative: these, he pointed out at one time or another, remained the outstanding characteristics of the rural classes. These virtues had been responsible for the success of the leaders of the Republic in the past; these he denominated "typically American." And these qualities were more likely to be found in country areas because of the conditions of life and work in the lumber camp or on a farm or ranch.¹⁵

These were the virtues that led the farmer to develop a stable political philosophy. Their independence, intelligence, and self-respect "augured well for the future of the country . . . there is not room for an anarchist or communist in the whole lot," he observed. "They are the kind of people who have a tendency to vote right as citizens and to make mighty good soldiers if the need comes." Indeed, they would be happy to take forcible action, he was sure, to quell the disorders misguided, radical mobs might create.¹⁶

Roosevelt's appreciation of the rural classes was heightened by the currently observed phenomenon of the relative shrinking of the rural


¹⁶Theodore Roosevelt to Kermit Roosevelt, June 1, 1907, Morison (ed.), op. cit., V, 675; T. Roosevelt to Anna R. Cowles, June 7, 1886, Cowles, Letters, pp. 80-81.
population. He was well enough aware of the attractions and rewards of urban industrial life not to condemn altogether the drift toward the cities, but he hoped that it would not be carried to the degree of threatening the security and strength of the nation. "... No growth of great cities, no growth of wealth, no industrial development can atone for any falling off in the character and standing of the farming population." Again, "It is not a good thing to see cities grow at disproportionate speed relative to the country; for the small landowners ... have hitherto made the foundation of our lasting national life ... and if the foundation becomes either too weak or too narrow, the superstructure, no matter how attractive, is in imminent danger of falling."17

Early in his presidential career Roosevelt recognized the dangers of the rural emigration by giving his hearty public approval to measures which were expected to retard it. He applauded, in 1903, the work of the International Good Roads Convention. He found several opportunities to commend the Post Office Department for its creation of rural routes. He strongly recommended that it be allowed to go farther and provide parcel post delivery in the open country.18 True, none of these ideas was new or startling. Since the 'nineties they had been urged as a means of reducing the isolation of farm life and thus stemming the


18 "Good Roads," April 29, 1903, ibid., p. 446; Annual Address, Dec. 2, 1902, ibid., XV, 160; Annual Address, Dec. 7, 1903, ibid., p. 189; Annual address, Dec. 3, 1907, ibid., p. 455; ibid., Dec. 8, 1908, p. 529.
exodus. But never before had there been a supporter for these projects in such a high place—and never one with such vigorous appeal.

Roosevelt's solicitude for the maintenance of the small, land-owning farming class was not confined to official recommendations and presidential publicity for movements already underway. He intervened actively in the legislative consideration of the Newlands Act to ensure that adequate precautions were taken to limit use of the irrigated land to those who would farm the land themselves. He also insisted that it was the responsibility of the federal government to prevent the land thus made available from being taken up by speculators or large landowners who would rent it for profit. His pride in the accomplishments of the government in this respect caused him to refer to the Act as one of the great accomplishments of his administration. It was, he believed, equal in significance to the Homestead Act and of even greater importance for the arid area to which it applied.\(^1\)

Roosevelt's convictions of the desirability of increasing the number of homes on the land led him to advocate the extension of the homestead principle to Hawaii as well as to the American west. He urged

---

that the ideal of a "healthy American community of men who themselves
till the farms they own" should be the goal of agricultural policy in
the Islands. In a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture he stated his
intention firmly: "Hawaii, whether it wills or not shall, so far as in
my power lies, be kept for the small landowners."  

He applied the principle of aiding the family farmer to other
phases of the public land policy. The Agriculture Department's policy of
favoring small neighboring farmers in setting fees for pasturing the
forest reserves received his ardent approval in the face of opposition
and the competition of big and powerful interests.  

Ethnic as well as ethical and economic considerations further
motivated Roosevelt in his concern about the rural exodus. The nation-
ality background of most of the American farmers endeared them to him.
He saw in their migration the development of a trend which seemed to
threaten the strength of the nation because it challenged the perpetu-
ation of the dominance of the "native American" stock. As early as 1899
he saw in the "excessive urban growth" and in the "diminishing birth-
rate here and in Canada," the threat of "grave signs of deterioration
in the English speaking peoples."  


21 Roosevelt to Senator Francis Emory Warren, Feb. 11, 1907, ibid.,
V, 583; Roosevelt to Wilson, Dec. 21, 1905, ibid., pp. 121-22.

22 Roosevelt to Anna R. Cowles, Dec. 17, 1899, Cowles, Letters,
p. 226.
The passage of time, the acceleration of the rural exodus, the increase of immigration from southern and eastern Europe, and the increase of farm tenancy did nothing to assuage his fears. Like many others concerned about the "racial" composition of the American population, Theodore Roosevelt looked to the rural areas to produce the natural increase to counterbalance the influx of "unassimilable" immigrants. This consideration, added to the others, made it seem imperative that effective measures be taken to enhance the appeal of the country to country people.23

* * * * * * *

In spite of his concern about the yeoman farmer, Roosevelt's political conservatism, his acceptance of the status quo and intent to maintain it, his fear of violent revolution are as apparent in his approach to agricultural policy as they are in his attitudes toward the regulation of big business. Here, too, is to be found his reliance on morality and character for the solution to the problem and the emphasis on social rather than economic factors. Equally evident is his recognition that current trends in economic organization were inevitable but that they must be accepted and diverted into desirable channels.

The President's approach to the agricultural problem was characteristically compounded, over a period of time, of reliance on existing

23Roosevelt to William Howard Taft, Dec. 21, 1908, Morison, op. cit., VI, 1433.
institutions, agricultural education, exhortation to exercise the typically Calvinistic virtues of hard labor and thrift, and the vision of social betterment through the cooperation of voluntary organizations and federal agencies. His interpretation of the rural problem and the possibilities for its solution provided no encouragement for agrarian reform movements which proposed to alter in any radical way Republican policies of government.

Theodore Roosevelt's adamant opposition to Populism is sufficiently well known to require little comment. Yet it might be enlightening to consider it in the light of his avowed interest in the plight of the farmer.

Describing Populism as a "semi-socialistic agrarian movement," he regarded its inflationary goals as an attempt on the part of debtors to repudiate their just debts. The agrarian discontent which fed it, he attributed to the "unreasoning feeling which made the farmer in Kansas hold the government responsible because he himself had tried in vain to carry on an impossible agriculture in the arid regions." His condemnation of the Populists was due in large part, then, to his characteristic nineteenth century attitude that poverty was the result of bad judgment, laziness, extravagance and moral turpitude.\(^{24}\)

More serious than the offense of Populist economics to his ingrained Calvinism was the spectre of class hatred aroused by their

---

\(^{24}\)Roosevelt to Anna R. Cowles, Sept. 13, 1896, Cowles, op. cit., p. 192; ibid., Sept. 27, 1896, p. 194; Roosevelt to Henry Cabot Lodge, Sept. 27, 1902, Lodge, Correspondence, I, 533; Theodore Roosevelt, "The Three Vice-Presidential Candidates and What They Represent," The Review of Reviews, XIV (Sept., 1896), 294.
rhetoric. Sharing the middle class fear of the development of class consciousness which was to be a hallmark of the progressives, Roosevelt condemned what he considered the Populist tactic of stirring up class and sectional hatred. He saw the movement as a rebellion of the poor against the prosperous carried on by fanatics who were anxious to "strike down those who are more fortunate," whether they could thereby improve their own position or not. Unusually sensitive to the threat of revolution he was intensely distrustful of any manifestation of class organization and repeatedly warned against the danger of considering any economic group as members of a class instead of as individuals. In an interview not long before his death he attributed his efforts to alleviate the discontent of the farmer to his fear that unless the farmers were enabled to solve their problems through voluntary, cooperative social and economic action, they might indeed turn to the formation of a political pressure group, a "farm bloc," to seek special interest legislation.25

It would seem, however, that much of Roosevelt's objection to the agrarian reform program of the Populist party stemmed from partisan opposition. His ardent support of reclamation through irrigation financed by the federal government is hardly consistent with his criticism of Kansas farmers trying to hold the government responsible for their ill

fortune. His very appointment of a commission to inquire into the condition of life in the country side might well be interpreted as evidence of his recognition that farmers as a class had grievances which the federal government might redress. It was, moreover, recognition of the farmers as a class. A further comment in 1912 to the effect that it was government encouragement of the industrial revolution that was responsible for the "inferior" status of the farmer as a citizen suggests the same thing. Implicitly it set farmers apart from the rest of the population as a special class and hints that the federal government had a responsibility to equalize their status as citizens. 26

Populism was not without its influence on President Roosevelt, to be sure. Its appearance and sudden growth was evidence of the existence of discontent with the prevailing system which might recur and lead to revolution unless some modification was made. With the instinct of a sound conservative, Theodore Roosevelt was convinced that the Republican party was best suited to make the adjustments which would keep the social and economic machinery operable. 27

Although the Populist movement was clearly a lost cause by 1908, there was new evidence of agricultural radicalism. Reviving memories of the earlier agitation were the activities of the "Night Riders," an adjunct of the Planters' Protective Association of Kentucky and Tennessee. The "Night Riders" used violence, threats of violence, and destruction

27 T. R. to Platt, Bishop, op. cit., I, 126.
of property to organize the marketing of tobacco. The disturbance was localized and failed to elicit the sympathy of farmers in other areas, but it was incontrovertible evidence of the persisting possibility of agrarian violence. It may be more than coincidence that the commission was appointed the year after the depredations and attempts at coercion of the Night Riders reached their height.

In short, Roosevelt's inclinations in farm policy, like his reactions in regard to business, did not lead him to depart basically from time-honored concepts of the role of government. He did not countenance any fundamental alteration of the government's economic functions of regulating money, credit, or trade. Needless to say he continued to be an exponent of sound currency. Nor did he ever give support to federal action to liberalize credit available to farmers. He was equally unresponsive to the "Iowa Idea," an agrarian proposal for remedying farm distress by lowering the tariff. On the contrary, he dismissed it as a "formless and vague uneasiness about the trusts in favor of tariff revision." Justifying the tariff to the farmer he used the familiar argument: the tariff, by stimulating the growth of home

---

industry, enlarged the domestic market for farmers thereby making possible higher prices for their produce. 29

* * * * * * *

In his acceptance of the "agrarian myth" Theodore Roosevelt showed his sympathy for the farmer and his problems, but the program he would approve was limited by the terms of the myth itself. If the farmer was independent, the source of individualism and initiative, there was no need for special concessions, no necessity for government aid to the agricultural industry.

He asserted, again and again, that the farm problem could, in the last analysis, be solved only by the farmer, himself. By hard work, self-help, intelligence, and initiative the agriculturist could find the answer to the problems of production; by voluntary cooperation with other farmers he could at once improve his marketing position and enhance his social life. Other agencies, public and private, could and should aid him in obtaining knowledge and rectifying conditions, but the rural population must remedy its own discontents.

From the time he first officially recognized rural problems in his first annual message to the New York legislature until his death, Roosevelt emphasized the necessity and value of the farmer's helping

himself. In that first address he noted that although the state department of agriculture had helped the farmers to increase production, the "chief credit must be given to the industry, energy, and shrewd foresight of the farmers themselves," who did not "look for aid from the State," and probably would not approve "special legislation in their favor." At that time, the Governor interpreted their desires as simply "protection against improper competition and improper legislation." In subsequent addresses, the theme was repeated. The individual, only by the exercise of the cardinal virtues of initiative, energy, thrift, enterprise, and resolution, could be successful.

With the passage of time the President showed greater interest in government aid to farmers. He also recognized the desirability of farmers forming associations. But the activities of these organizations, be it noted, were to supplement, not supplant; the idea of self-help was primary.

By 1902 he was admitting more explicitly that, although only the practice of the essential virtues could make a man a success, yet the activities of government "could do much for him." In his annual tribute to the Department of Agriculture the point was specifically made that the scientific aid given by the Department to the farmers was for the purpose of "showing them how most efficiently to help themselves." He


recognized, in 1904, the beginning of the crop reporting system as an aid in marketing provided so "that the people may know as nearly as possible with what they must compete." 32

It must be remembered, too, that Roosevelt at this time was throwing the full measure of his support to the project of federal underwriting of the reclamation of arid lands. But this also was an instance of helping farmers to help themselves. Over the years the homesteaders were expected to be able to buy the irrigation facilities thus reimbursing the government and providing funds for the construction of additional facilities. 33

Federal aid was more effective if it could be rendered through groups, the President pointed out in 1906. He also indicated that farmers could improve their production by voluntary cooperation in associations organized along lines of special agricultural interests such as dairy associations, horticultural associations and similar societies. 34 It was evident that industry, initiative, independence, and individualism alone were not enough. There must also be interaction.

Roosevelt did not fail to call attention to the parallel between organization of rural interests and those of the financial, business,


and labor interests. In his whole-hearted endorsement of the principle of cooperation he pointed out that it had become an accepted principle in the latter field. 35

In the realm of encouraging organization of farmers as in so many other fields, Roosevelt's great contribution lay in bringing the matter to public attention. So he pointed out that the individual farmer could work to his own best advantage by close association with his fellows. As the pioneers in rural sociology were doing, he emphasized that in addition to the obvious economic benefits of cooperation there were even more important social and intellectual dividends. Accordingly he paid tribute to the Grange, the farmers' institutes, and similar organizations with educational and social objectives. Significantly, he neglected to mention the marketing organizations sponsored by Equity and the Farmers' Union which sought to organize farmers for the purpose of fixing prices. 36

Roosevelt's increasing recognition of the values of organization did not, however, lead him to lose sight of the fundamental virtue of individualism. He explained that the farmer must learn to cooperate while still retaining his independence. 37 Even after his appointment of the Commission he found opportunity to point out that his goal was the cooperation of national and state governments with the farmer in a

35 Ibid.


combination of self-help and mutual assistance. In November, 1908, he repeated his firmly held conviction: "... the prime thing to be done for the farmer, as for everyone else, is to help him to help himself."

On occasion he linked his moral advice with his growing awareness of the social needs of the rural areas by extending the principle of self-help to social and cultural as well as economic activities. In a speech dedicating a library for a rural community he welcomed the growing realization that rural areas needed cultural facilities. But he abjured his rural audience that the usefulness of the newly acquired institution would depend upon the degree to which they, the rural citizens, made use of it. In speaking of the cultural revival he hoped to see in the country side he returned to his basic theme: "I hope ... to see the farmers bend their energies toward making life in the country more interesting and more attractive and in educating our people to understand how really attractive our country life is at present."

* * * * * * *

Although these convictions and beliefs with regard to the farmers and to politics and morality furnished the seedbed of Roosevelt's concern about the welfare of the rural classes, it was his association with Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester of the United States, and Sir Horace Plunkett, pioneer in the cooperative movement in Ireland, which provided

---

38 *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1908.

the germination and forcing of his decision to appoint a commission to investigate rural conditions.

His relationship with and dependence upon Pinchot is so well known as to require little comment. Although Pinchot's profession made his chief interest conservation of forests, he was also aware of the need for forethought in the use of mineral resources, improvement of navigable streams and rivers, reservation of water power sites, the prevention of erosion, and the preservation of the fertility of the land. He was one of the articulate believers in the agrarian myth and an opponent of the rural exodus. Cognizant of the loneliness and narrowness of life in many rural areas, he was an enthusiastic supporter of cooperative organization among farmers. 40

But it was the appearance of Horace Plunkett on the Roosevelt horizon which served as the catalytic agent which crystalized the hopes and fears of Roosevelt and Pinchot and brought about the Commission. It was after Plunkett's friendship with the President progressed to the point that he felt sufficiently at ease to make recommendations with regard to American agricultural policy that Roosevelt's speeches show a clearer perception of the problems and a firmer grasp of the goals and methods by which they might be solved.

Sir Horace's background prepared him well to become Roosevelt's agricultural adviser. He was of the English nobility in Ireland which felt concern about the plight of the Irish people. His education at Oxford came at a time when that institution was feeling the stirrings of

a social consciousness and when many of those associated with the University were urging further reforms. He had had almost thirty years of experience in organizing farmers' cooperatives in Ireland and had had first-hand knowledge of ranching in the United States. Moreover, he had extended his interest in country life to the western hemisphere and was acquainted with the men and movements seeking to improve rural conditions in the United States and Canada.

Making him particularly acceptable to Roosevelt was the fact that they shared the same beliefs with regard to the farmer and to politics. Plunkett, too, subscribed to the belief that the agriculturist was a superior citizen and that the hope for the regeneration of society rested upon him. He was even more concerned about the agrarian exodus, for the cities to which his Irish countrymen migrated were three thousand miles from Erin—American cities.

The Irish political situation made him unusually sensitive to the relationship of politics to economic life. Of course the predominant political question of Ireland was the relation of that country to the growing demand for home rule. More than that, he considered the tendency of the Irish Nationalists to subordinate all other questions to that of home rule, a political question, a serious obstacle to solving the fundamental human problem, a social and economic one. He was sure that it was much more important for the future well-being of Ireland that the economic life of the country be reorganized in such a way as to relieve the grinding poverty of the agricultural population than that autonomy be granted. As Roosevelt feared the development of a class consciousness that might result in revolution, Plunkett feared the excesses of both
Unionists and Nationalists that might culminate in the separation of Ireland from the Empire. Both men hoped that the economic situation might be modified to prevent political disaster. 41

Also important in developing understanding between the two men was their belief regarding the fundamental importance of self-help in the ultimate solution. Furthermore, both considered the development of morality and character essential to the working out of any problem. On the other hand, both recognized the benefits that organization could confer on the individual who was willing thus to help himself. Finally, both agreed that government could aid the farmer to a certain degree by creating conditions that would enable him to improve his condition. Especially in the realm of education, they emphasized, could the government facilitate the efforts of the individual.

No wonder Roosevelt could write, in 1906: "You take an interest in exactly the problems which I regard as vital, and you approach them in what seems to be the only sane and healthy way." 42

On a more personal but not unimportant basis, Roosevelt and Plunkett shared a common experience in ranching. Neither of them had devoted his full time and attention to being a cattleman, but both were vitally interested in the problems of the west, and both were sincerely


appreciative of the qualities and character of the ranchman and cowboy. This common experience enabled them to communicate in "cowboyese" so that Plunkett could observe, "I think I understand him right."\(^3\)

Strangely, although their western residences had overlapped, their trails had never crossed, in these years. They met first, briefly, in 1895, in New York. In 1901 Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson, took Plunkett to the White House for lunch. On his annual business trips he again visited the President in 1903 and 1904. It was not until December of 1905, however, that their conversation really touched seriously the problems which were always uppermost in Plunkett's mind and which were of serious concern to the American President as well.

At this meeting Sir Horace explained the Irish agricultural situation and the approach he and his colleagues were taking to improve it. This was the occasion upon which Plunkett observed that, although there were great differences between agricultural Ireland and industrial America, there were enough common elements that the methods he was applying in Ireland could be adapted to American conditions. At this time, too, he explained his slogan: "Better farming, better business, better living." Certainly the idea of better farming, the use of scientific methods to increase production was not a new one for the American President. The ideal of better business through cooperative organization had already received some attention from him, too. After this conversation, however, Roosevelt was increasingly emphatic in his recommendations for the formation of voluntary associations and the advantages of

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 120-22.
cooperative organizations. The third idea, that of better living, of building up in the country a social life that would be sufficiently attractive to prevent the migration of the best elements of the rural population to cities, certainly appealed to his desire to maintain the small, landowning farmer on the soil.

The ideas of conservation and country life reform were already maturing in the President's mind. The full scope of the conservation program was revealed to Plunkett by Pinchot on this visit and Sir Horace was impressed with the breadth of vision of the Forester whose goal was "that every national resource must be husbanded." Plunkett's conversations with Pinchot brought him to "regard the Conservation and Rural Life policies as one organic whole."44

It was providential that Plunkett should have made his appearance in Washington at this time to aid the President in defining the country life aspects of his policy. Roosevelt's approval of what was being accomplished in Ireland was so great that he asked Plunkett to set his views down in writing. This Sir Horace did, not in a letter, as expected by the President, but in a pamphlet-length document. For when he began to explain his methods and how they might be adapted to the American situation his narrative exceeded the limits of normal correspondence.

Roosevelt had to remind him of his promise, incidentally, for Plunkett had interpreted the first request as arising from politeness. 45

The President was delighted with the exposition and did not hesitate to admit that it influenced his agricultural policy. At their next meeting he apologized for incorporating many of Plunkett's passages into his annual message. 46 During this visit in 1906 Plunkett dined not only with the President but also with Pinchot and Garfield, soon to become Secretary of the Interior. Roosevelt suggested that the three of them discuss the country life situation and make recommendations for a policy and methods to carry it out. With regard to both means and ends there was agreement. A new government agency, a Bureau of Rural Social Economy, should be established, presumably in the Department of Agriculture, to encourage cooperative activity among farmers and stimulate farmers intellectually and socially in other ways. This was a dream Plunkett had had for some time and he was, understandably, pleased to see the idea apparently coming to fruition in the United States. 47

Early in January, Pinchot and Plunkett conferred with Liberty Hyde Bailey, Dean of the College of Agriculture at Cornell University, on the project with the thought that he would be the logical choice for the head of the bureau. Bailey strongly approved of the idea since he had been urging for some years that the great problems that must be


solved in the rural areas were the social and economic, not the agri-
cultural and technical, problems. Pinchot was also interested in obtaining
from Bailey ideas the President could use in a speech to the
American Association of Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations
the following May.48

Roosevelt helped to prepare the ground for the proposed new agency
in this speech when he advocated, in general terms, that the Department
of Agriculture should concern itself with the welfare of the farmer as
well as the production of the farm—the idea he had received from Bailey.
As a result of Plunkett's visit in November, 1907, he was charged with
the pleasurable responsibility of preparing a memo of arguments for the
President to use in presenting to Secretary Wilson of the Agriculture
Department the idea of the new bureau. The end of December he was
elated to receive news that the project would soon become a reality.
The Secretary of Agriculture, however, objected when he learned that the
adoption of the idea would involve the organizational structure of his
department. He was subsequently to be adamantly opposed to any depart-
mental recognition of the ideology represented by the Commission.49

Pinchot, however, was not willing to let the matter drop. When
it became evident that Wilson's opposition would prevent the material-
ization of the project in its original form, the Chief Forester turned
to the suggestion that a commission of disinterested authorities be
appointed to study rural conditions. In spite of his current involvement

48 Clayton S. Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Com-
49 Ibid., pp. 160-61; Digby, op. cit., p. 125.
with the Governors' Conference on Conservation he was willing to help
with the planning, recommend the personnel, and serve as a member of
such a commission. 50

The appointing of the Commission on Country Life was, then, a
result of both planning and compromise. It represented not only the
sympathy of Roosevelt with the plight of the farmer and his concern for
the decline in the class of yeomen farmers, but also the well-considered
judgment of advisers who had been students of the rural problem for
years and who had already formed opinions as to the proper remedies. As
a commission appointed by the President it would not have to be subjected
to the consideration of Congress, a not inconsiderable advantage at a
time when the President was not on unusually good terms with the Old
Guard of his party. It could stimulate interest, it could create opinion,
it might lead to further action at a later date.

50 Ellsworth, loc. cit., p. 161; M. Nelson McGeary, Gifford
The discussions of the President and his farm advisers began to bear fruit in the spring of 1908. Spurred on perhaps by news that Senator Hansbrough intended to call for the creation of a commission to encourage cooperative organization among farmers, Roosevelt seized the initiative and announced his intention of appointing a commission as soon as Congress had adjourned. Whereas the Hansbrough proposal would have called for some of the members to be selected by farmers' organizations, the Roosevelt commission was to be chosen entirely by the Chief Executive. Nor was the President's commission to confine itself to the narrow field of farm economics; it was to study the whole problem of farm life, social and ethical as well as economic.¹

In the course of the speculation about the membership of the proposed commission the fact that a number of outstanding men were already devoting attention to the problems of country life received publicity. Among those mentioned, the names of Liberty Hyde Bailey, Dean of the New York College of Agriculture at Cornell, and Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester of the United States, were appropriately prominent.²

¹New York Times, May 17, 1908; ibid., May 19, 1908.
²Ibid., May 19, 1908.
It was not until August 10, 1908, with the Republican nominating convention out of the way and the campaign well started, that the President formally announced the appointment of the Commission on Country Life by releasing to the press his letter requesting Bailey to accept the chairmanship.\(^3\) For several days there was doubt as to whether Bailey would accept the appointment. His hesitancy may have been due to the reluctance of the Cornell administration to forego the services of one of its most dynamic deans. Possibly it was, as Bailey pleaded, the pressure of his work as administrator, teacher, author, editor, and research scientist that made him unwilling to add still another demand on his time. Perhaps he was reluctant to be identified with a movement that was suspected of being a political device to swing the farm vote to Taft.\(^4\)

Apparently Bailey at least needed assurance that the Commission would be able to conduct its investigation in accordance with accepted research principles and be allowed to take into account the social aspects of the farm problem. As a guarantee of these prerequisites he made his acceptance of the chairmanship conditional on the appointment to the Commission of Kenyon L. Butterfield, an academician who was not only trained in scholarly research methods but also one who had already

\(^3\)Ibid., Aug. 10, 1908.

demonstrated interest in the social and educational aspects of rural life.\(^5\)

It was fortunate for the success of the Commission that these two authorities on the agricultural situation were persuaded to serve. Indeed, it was imperative that all its members be well-chosen. In a nation which did not yet accept unquestioningly the phenomenon of executive commissions inquiring into the economic and social structure and functioning of society, it was essential that the investigators possess unimpeachable authority if their report were not to be subjected to ridicule from all directions. Since the principal purpose the Commission could perform, in the limited time allowed it, was to bring the shortcomings of rural life to public attention, it was necessary the members be already well-informed as to the current situation and familiar with current investigations and proposals. For the report would have to be drawn in large part from the knowledge and experience of the members instead of from data obtained during the investigation. This could be no "scientific" investigation of the type soon to be made famous by the Pittsburg Survey. Indeed, the President's letter of appointment placed emphasis on a "summary of what is already known, a statement of the problem, and the recommendation of measures tending towards its solution."\(^6\)


In view of these requirements the President was well-advised in his selection of Commissioners. In addition to Bailey and Butterfield they included Gifford Pinchot, Henry Wallace, friend of Secretary Wilson and editor of *Wallaces' Farmer*, Walter Hines Page, editor of *The World's Work*, William A. Beard, an editor of California's *Great West Magazine*, and Charles S. Barrett, president of the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union. Those not sympathetic to the idea of a commission could point out, with considerable truth on their side, that none of the members was a "plain dirt farmer," for none relied on cultivation of the soil as a primary means of livelihood.

Most of them, however, had spent their youth as farm boys and practically all came in contact with many types of farmers. All were vitally interested in the farm problem, and each had become familiar with measures taken to correct similar situations in other countries. They were also well informed about existing agencies and organizations in this country that might be stimulated to improve the quality of country life. Without exception each was already engaged in bringing attention to the deficiencies of farm life and publicizing his own particular prescription for relieving them.  

In many ways it was a remarkably representative body. Geographically each of the significant agricultural sections had a spokesman, an important consideration in a nation in which regional differentiation influenced agricultural specialization to such a great extent. It was

representative, too, of the various classes and forces making themselves heard in the discussion of country life. Academic theoreticians, journalistic popularizers, public servants, and practical organizers were all included in the Commission's membership.

All were articulate, and each had access to a different channel of communication and a different audience. Moreover, each had a well-developed philosophy with relation to the causes of unrest, the goals to be realized, and the methods of action.

* * * * * * *

The Chairman of the Commission, Liberty Hyde Bailey, epitomized all aspects of the solution of the agricultural problem. Son of a pioneer Michigan fruit grower, he had spent his youth on the farm. A graduate of Michigan Agricultural College, his graduate study was in the field of biology, a "pure" science. He had a national reputation as a botanist, a horticulturist, and an educator. Prominent as an administrator of a leading agricultural college, Cornell, and its associated experiment station, he was active in inspiring and encouraging research to respond to the challenge of feeding the increasing population.

Bailey's position and research contributions thus identified him with the principles of the "new agriculture." His perception of the failure

---

of farmers to adjust to modern conditions, psychologically, socially, and economically had led him to develop a country life philosophy which he ardently promulgated in speeches, articles, and books.

The Commission Chairman did not share the apprehensions of many of his contemporaries about the rural exodus and abandoned farms. His great interest was that farming as an occupation and as a way of life should become at least as stimulating and as satisfying as any other. He was convinced that for those who understood the principles of nature and of agriculture there was a greater potential for intellectual and spiritual rewards than in any other occupation.9

Bailey believed that the revelation of the biological and chemical principles which explained the mysteries of nature with which the farmer dealt would quicken his interest in his vocation. Knowledge that he was cooperating with the forces of the natural world would not only enable him to increase production but would enhance his enjoyment of what would otherwise be routine and monotonous toil. It would heighten his realization of the importance of the practice of agriculture. Most important, knowledge of and appreciation of nature would stimulate the qualities of spirituality and reverence in the farmer's life.10

---


Man stood as an individual in his relationship to nature and Bailey was a staunch believer in the individualism and independence of the farmer. He recognized, however, that the farmer was a social being, living in an increasingly interdependent world. Early in his career he began to point out that the farm problem was more than that of production. As early as 1896 he called to the attention of the agricultural colleges and experiment stations that if their influence was to be effective they must study the "fundamental difficulties of the farmers' social and political environment." Subsequently he pointed out that the "greatest problems of American agriculture are not technical ones, but the relation of the industry to economic and social life in general."  

As director of the New York State College of Agriculture, Bailey was instrumental in the encouragement and development of the infant rural social sciences. He helped to lay the foundations for the study of agricultural economics and stimulated the use of the statistical method and of the agricultural survey. His interest in the social aspects of farm life led him to encourage the study of rural sociology and its introduction into the curriculum at Cornell.  


abetted the development and adoption of another of the new "sciences," home economics. Insisting that the "ideals of living" should receive as much attention as the "ideals of farming," he regretted that, although the "home is the center or pivot of our civilization, it is the last thing to be taught in our schools." He would remedy the oversight by having "the whole range of household subjects" taught in both the public schools and in the colleges. He would, moreover, extend the scope of domestic science to include the external appearance of the home and farm as well as its internal management. 13

The key to the solution of the many faceted rural problem, the Commission Chairman believed, lay in education. Country schools, however, would require modification before they could perform their function, and Bailey's suggestions for reform bear a marked resemblance to those currently being developed by John Dewey. The schools needed not only to add nature study, agriculture, and domestic science to their curriculum, they needed to change their whole point of view to bring them into more vital contact with the life around them. By bringing the environment into the school and teaching the pupils in terms of their experience the school would not only give motivation to the students, it would, itself, become a more vital institution. All subject matter could and should be reoriented to focus attention on the locality and its characteristics and its principal vocations. Geography could be

taught in terms of the school grounds, roads, forests, hills, and streams. Arithmetic, by problems in measuring land; history, in terms of better civic ideals, and on down the list of formal subjects.  

Bailey, himself, contributed to the realization of the ideal he preached by editing a series of nature study pamphlets for use in the elementary grades, collaborating in the writing of a Beginner's Botany, and publishing an elementary agriculture text. In all these he took care to present his subjects and phrase his explanations in simple terms of everyday experience. All reflect his belief in the importance of emphasizing the understanding of basic principles and their relation to life.  

Always insistent on the necessity of guarding against the dangers of over-organization, standardization, and centralization, Bailey yet realized that to prevent wasteful duplication and competition, some guidance was necessary. It was one of the functions the agricultural college might perform if more appropriate organizations neglected their responsibility. Under Bailey's leadership, Cornell did take the lead by providing a model rural schoolhouse close to the agriculture building. It differed from all others in the state only by the addition of a  

---


15 Rodgers, op. cit., pp. 352, 368, 373.
separate room for a laboratory to be used for the teaching of nature study and agriculture. 16

Bailey did not think it inappropriate that the agriculture college should concern itself with elementary rural education, for his interpretation of the role of these "peoples' colleges" was a broad one. Their responsibilities and opportunities were great. They should "stand bravely for rural civilization," for the "human affairs of the whole open country. . . ." They should respond to the needs of "any man standing on the land, unattached, uncontrolled, who feels that he has a disadvantage and a problem. . . ." 17

They had the opportunity of developing "an entire philosophy or scheme of rural life . . ." on a scientific basis. Through making surveys and other investigations they could determine what actual conditions were, learn what progressive communities had done to improve them, and discern the social laws that would apply everywhere. They thus had an unparalleled opportunity, through research and extension facilities, to "apply science to the reconstruction of society. . . ." 18

Extending the influence of the college into the state, Bailey would have it engage in many varieties of extension work so that it

---


would aid every "man to help himself on his own farm." "Demonstration work, reading courses, surveys . . ." could all be used for the purpose of disseminating information. Although the extension work would emanate from the college, Bailey saw it as a corrective for the "effects of too much centralization at a distance." In this respect it would, by stimulating and inspiring farmers, encourage the development of "local initiative, and [be] probably the best single contribution to the new social order. . . ."

Local initiative and response would also be stimulated by college extension personnel who would find that their services would be most beneficial if they could be given through groups, institutes, clubs, and other organizations. Indeed, Bailey explained, to extend the instruction or demonstration to as many farmers as possible it was worth the agent's effort to take the initiative in forming such a group if none existed. These associations, in the progress of time, would become the "germs of the new social order." He even foresaw, in 1908, the possibility of these groups becoming permanent and being organized into larger groups, even on a national level, to form a powerful farmers' organization.

As important as the agricultural college could be in the direction of country life progress, Bailey certainly would not have it monopolize the development of the new rural civilization. Aware there were many types of organizations in rural areas, he would have had them strengthened

---

19 Larson, loc. cit.; L. H. Bailey, *State and Farmer*, pp. 81-88; 169; Dorf, loc. cit.

and redirected. In addition to fulfilling their original, specific purposes, they had the opportunity of "lifting the individual by developing the associative spirit in such a way that he may retain his own self-help at the same time that he secures the help of his fellow and the incentive of community action." Country schools, local governments, churches, agricultural societies, farmers' clubs, Granges, fair associations, cooperatives—all these and others could be used to carry the "gospel of cooperation, companionship and better farm life." 21

Bailey emphasized that these local institutions and associations must be organized as the result of local initiative and that they must respond to local needs. He warned against the efforts of reformers who would seek to centralize them. He especially feared the misguided enthusiasm for efficiency which might organize them under one department or bureau of the federal government. His reluctance to call upon the Department of Agriculture, or any other agency of the federal government, to take a compelling leadership role in the creation of the new rural life is a curious compound of his concept of the place of the country in the greater society, his desire to ensure local control, and his faith in the individualism of the farmer. 22

He did not want to see rural affairs isolated from those of the rest of the nation, for the social forces which directed rural life were

21Ibid., pp. 111-32, 95, 104-105.

human forces and should not be separated from the same forces operative in urban life. Indeed, instead of increasing the division between city and country, every effort should be made to narrow it through cooperation--on an equal basis. The country needed the stimulation of city ideas, the city could use the inspiration of country ideals.  

It must not be forgotten that the individualism of the farmer was the basic tenet of Bailey's agrarian philosophy. He had unbounded faith in the farmer's ability to solve his problems by himself--given the opportunity. The role of the government should be regulatory, removing the disabilities which put the farmer at a disadvantage. The extension work of the colleges was only to make information available; the local organizations and associations were to stimulate the farmer. Only he, however, could take the action which would make his life and occupation enjoyable and attractive.  

Although there was much in Bailey's philosophy that adumbrates the underlying concepts of modern governmental agricultural policy, the mid-twentieth century advocate of planned agricultural production will look in vain for approval of government assistance in crop control and price regulation. The chairman, like other members of the Commission, accepted the idea of the regulation of the economic system by the automatic operation of the natural laws of supply and demand. Economically, 


this new order would be based on the adoption of better, more intensive farm methods; the price system would indicate whether increased production was, indeed, overproduction and instruct the farmer to modify his operations accordingly.\textsuperscript{25}

Liberty Hyde Bailey had a vision of a new rural civilization which would stand apart from that of the city. It would produce its own schools, its own recreation, its own literature instead of borrowing these from the urban centers. The new rural social order would reflect the intimate association of man and nature. For the most basic tenet of Bailey's agrarianism was his reverence for the almost religious relationship between the man and the land he cultivated, the bond between human endeavor and the forces of nature.

The background and career of Kenyon L. Butterfield, the other member of the Commission from academic circles, was similar in many ways to that of the Chairman. His childhood was spent on a Michigan dairy farm and he, too, was a Michigan Agricultural College graduate who soon moved into an administrative position in an eastern college. He, too, had a vision of a better life for the American farmer which placed a premium on social and psychological rather than economic satisfactions.

Butterfield's training and experience identified him more closely with the social aspects of farm life than the technical or scientific phases of agriculture. His graduate training was in sociology and for several years he worked with Michigan farm organizations: first the Grange, later the Farmers' Institute. He was also responsible for the

\textsuperscript{25}Lord, \textit{Agrarian Revival}, p. 46; Rodgers, \textit{Bailey}, p. 355.
introduction of the first course in rural sociology to be taught at any land grant college.26

This background made Butterfield very much aware of the institutional structure of society and the importance of association in the achievement of "the good life." He recognized, of course, the need for the spread of principles of scientific agriculture, the importance of improving economic conditions through better marketing arrangements, the value of instruction in nature study. But he devoted his efforts to the encouragement of institutions which would strengthen community spirit. To a greater extent than Bailey he emphasized the values and virtues of organization. The political and economic benefits were obvious, but Butterfield emphasized the social and psychological rewards. Schools, churches, parents' associations, rural Y. M. C. A.'s, farmers' clubs, Granges, neighborhood associations---Butterfield was enthusiastic about the potential for social stimulation and response inherent in any type of organization, but he felt that the rural church and the rural minister had a special responsibility for the regeneration of country life.27

With a sincere religious devotion, and in complete sympathy with the concurrent development of the "social gospel" movement, Butterfield sought to elevate country life by exhorting rural churches to play a more dynamic role in rural society. His pre-Commission writings outlined


the recommendations the Commission was to make and the activities to be urged on the church in the subsequent country life movement. He would have had the church define the needs of the community and provide leadership in economic and technical as well as social and spiritual endeavors to at once satisfy the needs and "Christianize" the community. Most important of all, the rural minister should assume the responsibility of stimulating other institutions to perform vital social services and to prevail upon them to work together in a spirit of real cooperation.  

Butterfield also looked to the rural school to bring about the new rural civilization. In addition to emphasizing the importance of relating the curriculum to everyday life by introducing nature study and agriculture, he would have the schools prepare pupils for leadership in the solution of the social problems of the countryside. Even more he emphasized the role of the school as a community center, attracting adults for community activities and further education as well as students for extracurricular activities. A teacher who could serve a school carrying on such varied functions must have an understanding of and appreciation for country life drawn from a knowledge of the principles of rural sociology. 

The preparation of ministers, teachers, and other leaders who could execute the leadership roles to bring about the new rural community

---

28 Ibid., pp. 35-38, 170-82; Sanderson, loc. cit.
29 Butterfield, *Chapters in Rural Progress*, pp. 27-33, 121-35.
Butterfield assigned to the land grant colleges and universities. Indeed, like Bailey, he expected these institutions to play an important role in the direction and guidance of the progress of the new rural society by educating these leaders to take a broad social outlook on rural problems. Even more should those who expected to return to the farm be brought to realize that they had a responsibility for community leadership; so they, too, should be acquainted with the principles of rural sociology.\(^{30}\)

Needless to say, Butterfield also stressed the responsibility of the agricultural college for research in the social and economic problems of rural life. He, too, was an early and ardent advocate of university extension and would have the extension department "incorporate into its work the economic, governmental, and social problems of agriculture." He also made the point that extension activities should not be restricted to farmers but should bring in the professional people who served the agricultural community. The country school teacher, lawyer, physician, clergyman, and newspaper editor should have rural problems brought to their attention and be encouraged to help in their solution.\(^{31}\)

Butterfield's greatest contribution to the country life movement, however, was his insistence on the importance of an agency to coordinate

---


the activities of all institutions, organizations, and individuals interested in improving rural conditions. There were numerous organizations in many communities; if each should try, through its own unaided efforts, to awaken and rehabilitate the surrounding area there might be competition, duplication of effort and facilities, and the development of dangerous division in the community. Each institution had a specific function to perform; none could successfully perform the functions of the others; yet all must be brought to cooperate toward a common goal.  

As early as 1901 Butterfield was presenting this idea to the American Civic Federation, an organization of business leaders, and in 1904 he challenged the Association of American Agricultural Colleges with the assertion that the institutions they represented should accept responsibility for coordinating leadership. By 1908 he was pointing out that other forms of organization, Leagues for Rural Progress, associations of representatives of school and farm organizations, for instance, might successfully direct a coordinated plan for rural betterment. Until an agency could be established, the various forces attempting to improve conditions could exchange ideas and experiences, reconcile differences, and work out a unified program of action by participating in conferences. The sponsoring of conferences was therefore one of the leadership responsibilities of the agricultural college. Butterfield was not one to

shirk a self-defined obligation, thus the various colleges with which he was associated were active in the conference phase of the country life movement.  

Walter Hines Page's childhood had been in a southern rural community where he learned to love and appreciate nature. Even when he turned to journalism, living in northeastern cities, he retained his interest in farming. He saw agriculture in the context of an expanding, increasingly industrial economy whose achievements he celebrated in The World's Work. His enthusiasm for new agricultural techniques and methods was conditioned by his concern about the status of the south, still primarily an agricultural region. In this respect, too, his vision was a broad one, and he devoted much of his effort as an editor and publisher of national periodicals to goading that section to forget its particularism and take its place in the advancing national economy.  

Page was a whole-hearted believer in the agrarian myth and the superiority of country living. He sustained a firm, Jeffersonian, belief in the humanizing influence of life in the country and the

---


character-building and soul-satisfying value of land ownership. He subscribed unreservedly to the belief that the strength and security of the nation were derived from the farmers who owned their own land.\(^{35}\)

As a consequence, he was deeply disturbed about the rural exodus and sought not only to stem but to reverse the tidal wave of population movement. The only one of the Commission members who made the back-to-the-land movement a major objective, he attempted to stimulate and encourage it through the pages of *The World’s Work*. Because of his own interest, and because he detected a similar trend of thought in other Americans, his company, Doubleday, Page, and Co., embarked on the publication of *Country Life in America*, a periodical devoted to the preservation of rural values. His sympathy with the new emphasis on rural life and his knowledge of the leaders of thought of the theoretical aspects of it are indicated by his making Bailey the first editor of the magazine.\(^{36}\)

If Page's country life ideals and goals were derived from the nineteenth century myth of the farmer, his methods of achieving them bore the unmistakable stamp of the twentieth century. His prescription for curing the ills of the farmer and the rural community and increasing the attractiveness of country life were scientific agriculture, education, and organization. He publicized the achievements of agricultural

---


\(^{36}\) "Why Back to the Land?" *ibid.*, XXIV (June, 1912), 239; "A Word from the Editor," *Country Life in America*, XV (Dec., 1908), 228.
production using new methods in his magazine; he expected the principles of the new agriculture to be spread by new and more vital forms of education. A firm supporter of improved public school education, he had made the adoption of vocational education a special interest. In carrying out his service in this field he was a member of the General Education Board, the Southern Education Board, and a trustee of the Jeanes Fund. The World's Work editor was also an enthusiastic champion of adult education through extension work. Making the acquaintance of Seaman A. Knapp through the General Education Board, Page became a firm advocate of extension education on this extremely practical level.37

Organization was the other social force that would contribute to the improving of farm life and the reversal of the rural exodus. Organization was the "greatest invention of modern times," and the agricultural industry was at a disadvantage in large part because it had lagged behind in this particular. Page was the Commission member who most closely agreed with Sir Horace Plunkett in his insistence on the necessity of creating cooperatives to carry out the "better business" phase of the country life movement. But he, too, pointed out that organizations for cooperative marketing could have as much value in terms of human association as in increasing profits.38


Henry Wallace's farm background lay in Pennsylvania, but in his early career he served the Presbyterian church in Illinois and Iowa. He continued, however, to be interested in good farming, and eventually became the owner of several successful and progressive agricultural enterprises. Because of his health he was forced to give up the ministry and turn to farming and agricultural journalism in 1877. Responsive to the complaints of the farmer, he was so severe in his criticism of trusts and the railroads that he had to terminate his connections with first the Madisonian, a local Republican paper, and then the Iowa Homestead. He did not, however sympathetic to the farmers' problems, accept their prescription of populism and free-silver. With his sons, in 1895, he established the weekly Wallaces' Farmer, soon to become one of the most widely known and highly respected farm papers in the middle west. Having kept abreast of the developments of the agricultural revolution, aware of the broad scope of national politics and social and economic trends, Henry Wallace was in an excellent position to serve as the intermediary between the theoretician and practitioner of agriculture. He was personally acquainted with many of the midwestern leaders in agriculture, including Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson and the founder of cooperative agricultural demonstration work, Seaman A. Knapp, and his own position of leadership and respect is attested to by the almost universal use of the familiar title, "Uncle Henry." 39

Wallace, too, was greatly concerned about the agricultural exodus and its effect on the productive ability of American agriculture—and

on the deterioration of rural social institutions. He was also aware of
the national implications of the much discussed disappearance of the
frontier. He was not dismayed, however, for he maintained a superb
optimism in the effectiveness of the principles of scientific agricul-
ture to overcome all these aspects of the agricultural problem. He
devoted the pages of *Wallaces' Farmer* to persuading farmers to adopt
the new techniques.  

But the most important agency in disseminating the knowledge
about scientific agriculture, and for developing favorable attitudes
toward farming as a vocation and a way of life, in his opinion, was the
common country school. He was an energetic supporter of the introduc-
tion of agriculture into the curriculum and of agricultural subject
matter into every other subject. Although he approved of the agricul-
tural college in its research and teaching activities, he observed that
most rural youths had little opportunity to take advantage of its
facilities. He therefore emphasized that state money be concentrated
on improving the rural schools rather than on increasing the offerings
and activities of the colleges. He was also interested in adult educa-
tion and his *Farmer* urged young agriculturists to participate in all
phases available to them—short courses, institutes, demonstrations.  

---

40"The Man, the Crop, the Soil," *Wallaces' Farmer*, XXXIV (Sept.
17, 1909), 1154; "Maintenance of Fertility, No. 2," *ibid.* (Feb. 19, 1909),
p. 263; "How to Get Information to the People," *ibid.*, XXXIII (Nov. 13,
1908), 1389.

School Problem," *ibid.*, XXXIV (Feb. 19, 1909), 259; "Important School
Statistics," *ibid.* (Dec. 10, 1909), p. 1594; "Farm Questions in Arith-
metic," *ibid.*, XXXIII (Dec. 4, 1908), 1494; "The Short Course in Iowa: A
He was aware also of the values of organization for farmers. After his service on the Commission he became more ardent in his encouragement of social, educational, and economic associations. 42

In spite of, or because of, his theological training, he placed little emphasis on the role of the church in sparking rural progress and providing social services to rural communities. That he felt that religion should be and, indeed, was, a valuable force in rural life is nevertheless shown by his inclusion of "Uncle Henry's Bible Lesson" in Wallaces' Farmer as a weekly feature. 43

Gifford Pinchot, Chief Forester of the United States, was an ardent and articulate advocate of the agrarian myth and the effect of the rural exodus on the quality of the American population. His interest in country life, however, was primarily in its role as a part of the broader conservation movement which he did so much to organize and publicize. He accepted the importance of scientific agriculture, education in all its forms, and organization for both social and economic purposes as important elements in the solution of the country life problem. He


43 Dorf, Bailey, p. 152; Lord, Wallaces, pp. 163-64.
contributed little that was original to the ideology of the Report; his important role had been in the initiation of the Commission. \(^{44}\)

Of even less significance in the formulation of the philosophy and policy of the Commission were Charles Simon Barrett and William A. Beard, appointed in November, just before the Commission began its tour of the country. Barrett's nomination was the result of the pressure of The Southern Ruralist, an Atlanta, Ga., publication, and provided a more typically southern representative than Page.

Barrett's background was life on a prosperous Georgia farm, but he had early shown an interest in farm organizations and had been a youthful member of the Southern Alliance. It was he who introduced the organization of the Farmers' Union into Georgia and he became the national president of the organization in 1906. In this position he was often regarded as one of the major spokesmen for the farmer and was frequently called upon for public service.

Under his leadership the Farmers' Union not only expanded in numbers and geographical area, it also developed a many-sided program of agricultural education, crop diversification, soil conservation, production control, and economic cooperation. It was in the latter area that it was particularly well known. For under Barrett's leadership the Farmers' Union pushed the principle of cooperative organization of the

marketing of farm products far beyond the local level where it was
developing slowly but more or less successfully.  

Although Barrett used the rhetoric of the agrarian myth he was
not blinded by it. He sincerely believed in the moral superiority of
the farm population and that the farmer was deprived of the economic
rewards to which he was entitled. In the spirit of twentieth century
farm organizations, however, he recognized the dependence of profitable
commercial farming on efficient marketing organization. Aware, too,
that the profits of business organizations were due to cooperation and
consolidation rather than to competition, he sought to perfect a national
organization strong enough to control farm prices. These and other
activities of the Union indicated a new attitude toward agriculture and a
timely recognition of the importance of marketing.  

William A. Beard was apparently added to give the far west some
representation on the Commission. Editor of the Great West Magazine, he
was chairman of the executive committee of the National Irrigation
Congress. Not a national figure in the rural reform movement, he was
highly respected in his region.  

45 Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement I, pp. 51-52;
Ellsworth, loc. cit., p. 161; Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discon-
tent, pp. 221, 541.

46 Charles Simon Barrett, Mission, History and Times of the
Farmers' Union; A Narrative of the Greatest Industrial-Agricultural
Organization in History and Its Makers (Nashville, Tenn.: Marshall and
Bruce Co., 1909), p. 44; Saloutos and Hicks, op. cit., pp. 221 ff.

47 "Editorial Correspondence," Wallaces' Farmer, XXXIII (Dec. 11,
1908), 1522; Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Washington), Dec. 2, 1908.
Since each of the major Commission members had a particular interest, each placed a different emphasis on the importance of the various factors that were generally considered necessary for the improvement of country life. All, however, held certain beliefs in common.

In the first place, there was tacit agreement that farming was a way of life, that that way of life was in danger, and that it should be preserved. There was no question but that the farm problem could be solved only by the initiative of the farmers themselves. They needed to be guided through the various forms of education; they needed to be organized; they needed information to be derived from studies and surveys of rural communities. But fundamentally, the farmer alone could work out his own destiny.

All insisted that government bore some responsibility. Its function was to see that obstacles to the equal development of the agricultural industry should be removed. It was the role of government, too, to provide leadership in education and in research to discover the natural and social scientific laws which would enable the new agrarian social order to come into being.

Among the Commissioners there was, of course, no opposition to certain superficial reforms such as the extension of rural free delivery, parcels post, and the like. But for most of them these were secondary in importance to the creation of a new attitude toward country life, a recognition of the importance and dignity of agriculture as a vocation.

The ultimate goal envisioned by all was the establishing of a more satisfying life for the farmer in terms of typically agrarian ideals.
This new social order would be, in fact, a reincarnation of the idealized image of the life of the frontier farmer from the point of view of social life and ideals. It would, however, be economically related to the city and the urban market.

* * * * * *

After its appointment and organization, the Commission proceeded with due consideration for the investigation of farm opinion as desired by Chairman Bailey. Although the techniques and methods utilized would appear crude and inaccurate to those who have developed detailed methods to reduce the error in opinion analysis, they were unusually comprehensive for this formative period. A variety of measures was utilized to tap the sentiment at the grass roots and to uncover causes of local and national discontent. Questionnaires were sent to representative farmers and rural leaders. Inquiries were conducted by individual members. Local school districts were encouraged to sponsor meetings at which farmers could voice their attitudes toward the problems under consideration. Finally, at the insistence of Chairman Bailey who was anxious to get as much evidence as possible, the members of the Commission made a swing around the country to hold hearings.48

The questionnaires were sent to some 550,000 rural residents whose names were obtained from the United States Department of

Agriculture, experiment stations, agricultural colleges, farmers' associations, and other sources. Farm papers and other periodicals sympathetic to the aims and work of the Commission urged interested subscribers to write for a questionnaire if they had not received one. \(^4^9\)

Farmers seemed to welcome the investigation enthusiastically, for responses to the circulars began to arrive almost immediately. Soon they were being delivered at the rate of from two to three thousand a day. By the time the Report was submitted to the President, about 115,000 answers had been received. Of these almost 100,000 had been roughly classified and tabulated by the census bureau. The answers, it was reported, were straightforward and complete. Some respondents attached copious notes pertaining to subjects in which they had a special interest. The ready response indicated to the members that the public was taking the work of the Commission seriously. \(^5^0\)

At least one of the special inquiries conducted by an individual member also provided for direct correspondence with the farm populace. Henry Wallace sent 28,000 circulars concerning the question of farm labor and tenancy. In addition he invited readers to contribute information about these subjects through the pages of his Farmer. To elicit further response replies were published over a period of three months. Tenants

\(^{4^9}\)Ibid., p. 54; New York Times, Nov. 1, 1908; Wallace's Farmer, XXXIII (Oct. 9, 1908), 1210; American Agriculturist, LXXXII (Oct. 10, 1908), 313; ibid. (Oct. 31, 1908), pp. 384-95.

\(^{5^0}\)New York Times, Nov. 1, 1908; Wallace, Uncle Henry's Own Story, III, 100; Wallace's Farmer, XXXIII (Dec. 11, 1908), 1522; Report of the Commission, pp. 54-55.
and farm laborers in particular were urged to write since it was these
the Commission most needed information about.\textsuperscript{51}

The local meetings were suggested by the President in order to
arouse additional interest in the investigation and to give the individual
farmer the feeling of "a sense of ownership" in the work of the Commission.
It was hoped, furthermore, that it would have the additional beneficial
effect of stimulating him to rectify undesirable conditions on his own
initiative.\textsuperscript{52} This, in accordance with the philosophy of both President
and Commission, was the ultimate source of reform, the active interest of
the farmer in improving his own condition.

Undoubtedly it also occurred to such a consumate politician as
Theodore Roosevelt that this would be an ideal method of indicating the
strength of popular approval and providing the pressure to obtain the
legislation required for carrying on the work of the Commission.

The response to the suggestion was apparently satisfactory, at
least to the Commission. In all, some two to three thousand local meet-
ings were held and were given full publicity by the local press. Indeed,
even papers which were critical of or indifferent to the investigation
carried notices of the meetings. Especially cheering was the news that
the meetings had been considered so valuable locally that many communities

\textsuperscript{51} Wallace's Farmer, XXXIV (Jan. 29, 1909), 139; ibid., XXXIII
(Sept. 25, 1908), 1008; "The Landlord, the Tenant, and the Hired Hand," a
series of articles appearing between November 13, 1908 and January 15,
1909, Vols. XXXIII and XXXIV.

\textsuperscript{52} Theodore Roosevelt to Liberty Hyde Bailey, Nov. 9, 1908,
printed in Report, fn. pp. 50-54; Report, pp. 57-58; "A Country Life
were anxious to make them annual occurrences for purposes of "taking inventory" and community planning. In at least one instance such a local meeting led to the formation of a permanent "country life club" whose stated objectives were identical with the ideals set forth by the Commission.53

The most widely publicized phase of the work of the Commission, however, was the holding of open hearings throughout the country. An immediately apparent shortcoming of these hearings as an investigating device was the whirlwind nature of the tour. Between November 5 and December 22 thirty hearings were held in twenty-nine states—from College Park, Maryland, to Spokane, Washington, and back to Washington, D. C. Tacitly recognizing the validity of criticism of the brevity of the hearing in any single locality, the Chairman pointed out that the appearance of the Commission was merely to initiate discussion. It was hoped that consideration would be continued after its departure until all local problems had been fully "canvassed."54

The hearings were widely publicized and farmers and their wives and all those interested in conditions of life in the open country were invited to attend. In addition, special invitations were sent by local authorities to educators, ministers, doctors, and others familiar with rural life in the area. In this way it was hoped that both grass roots sentiment and informed, authoritative opinion would be garnered.55

53 Report of the Commission, pp. 57-58; Raleigh News and Observer (North Carolina), Nov. 27, 1908; Columbus Citizen (Ohio), Wallace's Farmer, XXXIV (Jan. 29, 1909), 139.
55 Ibid.
The Commission was not particularly concerned about the size of the audience; it was more interested in having all classes of opinion represented. Nonetheless, attendance was usually good, in some cases overflowing the hall provided. Wallace estimated that it ranged from 50 to 500. Local and state dignitaries and officials were present as were representatives of the business and professional classes. But the audience was usually made up of farmers and their wives; the latter, it was reported, offered valuable observations on the educational and domestic aspects of rural life. The Commissioners were satisfied that participants in the meetings were typical of rural interests.56

Before the first hearing, Chairman Bailey attempted to dispel the misconception that these meetings were for the purpose of allowing the Commission members to make speeches. He emphasized that they were designed to enable the farmer and the rural business and professional man to be heard. There was no set order of questioning and the usual procedure was to call upon individuals of the locality who could be expected to have the information desired. All present were encouraged to offer observations and recommendations. These contributions were "numerous, and usually short and pithy." Wallace reported to his subscribers that "frank, free, earnest" discussion was obtained on all questions. He explained the eagerness of the people to cooperate as evidence of their

56 Ibid.; Wallace, Uncle Henry's Own Story, I, 101; "Editorial Correspondence," Wallaces' Farmer, XXXIII (Dec. 11, 1908), 1522; ibid., XXXIV (Jan. 29, 1909), 139.
identification of the Commission with the President. They spoke to it freely, as they would have to him.\(^{57}\)

There is evidence that the hearings were not as free and open as they were pictured and that vested interests were able to dominate them. A California correspondent of \textit{Wallaces' Farmer} implied that the big real estate interests and speculators prevented those who had suffered from their schemes from approaching the Commission. In Texas the antagonism between the planter-landlord group and the lower agricultural classes—laborers and sharecroppers—developed to the point that Chairman Bailey feared an open break. To prevent disrupting the hearing, "Uncle Henry" was sent down to talk with the disgruntled elements.\(^ {58}\)

The value of the hearings was also called into question by the presence of representatives of other than the farming classes. At an early hearing the criticism was made that the non-farmers outnumbered the farmers. If the Commission was aware of this condition it was not disturbed. The strong sociological orientation of the dominant members of the group led them to welcome the attendance of representatives of other than the farming interest in the rural community. Moreover, it was their impression that, by and large, "the bulk of the speakers and audiences was country people."\(^ {59}\)

\(^{59}\) \textit{Raleigh News and Observer}, Nov. 12, 1908; \textit{ibid.}, Nov. 15; \textit{Report of the Commission}, p. 56.
Individual hearings sometimes had local repercussions of a far-reaching nature. As a result of one of the most stimulating meetings, that at Spokane, Washington, a vigorous country life movement developed in the northwest. Here the Commission's ideal of urban cooperation in the regeneration of country life was realized and the Chamber of Commerce assumed the responsibility of printing the Commission's report for local circulation. Country life clubs and country life conferences were also called as a result of interest in this area.  

Of equal or greater importance was the totally unforeseen outcome of the Raleigh hearing. That meeting set off a local controversy over the prevalence of hookworm disease. The heated discussion aroused local interest in eradicating the disease; southern physicians and medical societies prepared to give it their professional attention. But the wheels of local reform would have moved slowly without the impetus given by the grant of funds and aid in organization provided by the Rockefeller philanthropic hierarchy. Dr. Charles W. Stiles, the sanitarian of the Commission, was able to convince the dispensers of this largess of the seriousness of the problem and the feasibility of eradication. By the following October plans were laid, a Hookworm Commission established, and $1,000,000 made available for the cure and prevention of the disease.  

---


61 Raleigh News and Observer, Nov. 19, 1908 to Nov. 22, 1908; Hendrick, The Training of an American, pp. 371-73; Mark Sullivan, Our Times; the United States, 1900-1925 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons,
However helpful the investigation was in stimulating local reform efforts, the formal justification for the creation of the Commission had been to gather information for the use of the President. On the basis of the material obtained in questionnaires and meetings the Commission was to make recommendations to guide the President in his own suggestions to Congress.

No sooner had the Commission returned from its journey of inquiry than it had to begin to classify, organize, summarize, and advise. The tremendous amount of work this entailed was recognized by Horace Plunkett, returned for his annual visit in December. He suggested to the President that a brief outline of the findings be presented to Congress along with a message describing its purpose and an indication of the scope and purpose of the investigation. This approach would allow the President to present to the public the most important and enduring of his programs and yet allow the valuable material accumulated to be carefully studied and evaluated later. 62

Even to prepare an outline of the agricultural problem from the evidence disclosed by the hearings and questionnaires would have been an impossible undertaking had the members of the Commission not already had an ideological framework within which to organize their material and it

---

62 Digby, Horace Plunkett, p. 126.
was natural that each member would seek to adapt the new material to his own frame of reference.

There is a hint that this did, indeed, happen in the writing of the Report. Charles Barrett apparently "leaked" to the Farmers' Union News the information that there was controversy over whether Bailey or Page would be responsible for the authorship; from the same source there is the information that there was some disagreement among the members as to what subject matter should be treated. In spite of these differences of opinion, Bailey, after eight revisions, was able to satisfy the reservations and favored projects of all members sufficiently for them to accept and sign it.\(^{63}\)

The Report of the Commission on Country Life was submitted to the President the end of January, 1909. Pleased with it, he sent it to Congress for consideration and it was printed for the use of Congress as a Senate Document. The press received the President's message and a brief summary of the full Report which provided the basis for popular knowledge about the findings of the Commission.\(^{64}\)

It was hoped that the quantity of material accumulated as answers to questionnaires could be carefully studied and that a great deal of knowledge about the needs of rural society would be obtained. Accordingly, there was an attempt to obtain an appropriation of $25,000 to


enable the Commission to "digest, compile, and publish the material already gathered." But not only was the expected appropriation denied, the attempt to obtain it elicited the "Tawney amendment" to the Sundry Civil Appropriation Bill in which Congress expressed its opposition to the use of public monies for the compensation of any "commission, council, board, or other similar body . . . unless the creation of the same shall have been authorized by Congress." 65

The Commission and its purposes did have some defenders among the Congressmen. The arguments supporting the appropriation for the publication and the dissemination of the Report were based on the supposition that it would contribute to the national welfare by preventing the migration of the most intelligent countrymen to the cities. It was also defended as being undoubtedly worth-while because of the national eminence of the gentlemen who served on it. 66

Opposition to the Report took two main lines of attack. Some criticized it because it was a presidential commission, one without congressional sanction. Others objected because it was the work of theorists and therefore could have no practical, beneficial effect. Those who adhered to this line of argument insisted that the farmers of their districts did not need printed material, or the advice of "philanthropists," to tell them how to improve their condition. Ridicule, of course, was employed; the opportunity for it was too appealing for abstention. 67


66 Ibid., Part 4, pp. 3660-62.

67 Ibid., pp. 3663-64.
There was, then, no legislation to provide for the continuation of the work of the Commission. The carloads of answers to questionnaires remained unclassified and unstudied except for a preliminary, cursory scanning by the census clerks.

In his autobiography, Roosevelt attributed the failure of Congress to provide the appropriation to its antagonism to him. From the point of vantage given by hindsight he asserted that he would have vetoed the Tawney amendment with its implicit criticism of the presidential initiative had he not considered it unconstitutional and therefore not binding. Wallace, too, while criticizing Congress severely for failing to make the small appropriation for the valuable research requested, explained the failure on the basis that the "lines were down between President and Congress." 68

Roosevelt, nevertheless, attempted to ensure the perpetuation of his policy by committing the President-elect to its ideals. In December he sent Plunkett to explain his objectives and to pledge Taft to continued support. Taft assured Sir Horace that the policy would have his hearty approval, although he was not quite sure what it was all about and would have to rely on him and Pinchot for guidance. 69

Whether from lack of personal interest or because he was intimidated by the Tawney amendment, Taft made no effort to continue the life

---


69 Digby, op. cit., pp. 127-28; Roosevelt to Taft, Dec. 21, 1908, Morison (ed.), Letters, VI, 1433-34.
and work of the Commission. Referring to the Commission as in "cold storage" in the fall of 1909, Roosevelt continued to exhibit interest in the possibilities of rural improvement and to refer to the Commission. But so far as government initiative was concerned, there was no spark of encouragement for any basic evaluation and reform of rural life. Several of the specific reforms that had become part of the country life movement were implemented, but the broader objective of equalizing the lot of the farmer with that of the rest of the population were forgotten.  

The lack of Congressional response and continued executive interest in country life are not, however, to be interpreted as evidence of failure of the work of the Commission. The publicity attending the investigation had awakened interest and concern that was to outlast the flurry of approval and criticism that followed the publication of the Report. Even without government sponsorship, localities, institutions, periodicals, and philanthropic interests carried out most of the recommendations made in the Report. Surveys were made, studied, and published. Conferences were held. States established their own country life commissions. A "campaign for rural progress" was begun that was to have the support of the social reform forces of the country!

---

CHAPTER IV

"... THERE ARE VERY MARKED DEFICIENCIES ..."\(^1\)

The Report of the Commission on Country Life provided a document which subsequent reformers could appeal to in their various campaigns for agricultural progress. It at once summarized the classic causes of discontent and the traditional remedies and indicated new goals and courses of action. Its pages do reveal the Commission's acceptance of the agrarian myth or agrarian bias; yet they also indicate, if dimly, the new trend of thought that was to be typical of twentieth century farm organization. They at once regard agriculture as a way of life, with unique goals and values, and as a means of making a living, a business competing in the market place for the farmer's share of the national income. In the same breath the farmer is urged to seek his rewards and satisfactions in non-material, intellectual and aesthetic enjoyments and to follow better business methods through organization and the exercise of informed intelligence.

The dichotomous reasoning of the Commission is a reflection of current thought about the causes and remedies for the farm problem and of the instructions of the President. The advice he sought from the Commission was for the purpose of securing both "better business and

better living on the farm." The Report was to point out "the best methods of organized permanent effort in investigation and actual work" that could be pursued to secure these objectives.\(^2\)

The Commission was also to purvey information as to "the present conditions of country life" and "what means are now available for supplying the deficiencies which exist." Both information and advice were to be used as the basis for recommendations the President would make to Congress.\(^3\)

The Commission's statement of prevailing conditions has become the classic summary of the status of agriculture during the period:
"There has never been a time when the American farmer was as well off as he is today. . . ." Although this prosperity was not universal it was unusually well distributed through the agricultural classes. Not confined to land owners who were benefitting from the increased value of the land, it extended to farm laborers and tenants as well. Laborers were receiving higher wages and becoming tenants. Tenants were prospering and becoming landowners. The general prosperity could be attributed to better farming practices and rising prices for the products of the farm.

Economic well-being was reflected, not only in barns and equipment, but also in the improvement of homes and living conditions. It was manifest, too, in the increasing attention of farmers to the

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 45.
non-material aspects of life: better education, use of books, enjoyment of music, incorporation of elements of beauty in the farm home and surroundings.  

On the other hand, "agriculture is not commercially as profitable as it is entitled to be . . . and . . . the social conditions in the open country are far short of their possibilities." In short, there were "very marked deficiencies."

These deficiencies became apparent from comparing the present, not with previous conditions, but with potential conditions that might and should be realized. The farmer failed to experience the benefits to which he was entitled. From a commercial standpoint, he was not receiving the profits that he should—considering the energy he expended and the risks he assumed. Socially, conditions were not as stimulating and as satisfying as they should be.  

The highlighting by the Report of the discrepancy between what was and what ought to be reveals one of the basic premises of the Commission: those engaged in agriculture were entitled to a certain return from the exerting of their labor and the investment of their capital. In the pages of the Report, however, it is impossible to discern any commitment to a specific goal. The closest approach to a definition of the ideal is vaguely phrased: "... to develop and maintain on our farms a civilization in full harmony with the best American ideals." This very general statement is only partially

---

4Ibid., pp. 35-36.  
5Ibid., pp. 18, 37.
explained—and again in very nebulous terms: "... the business of agriculture must be made to yield a reasonable return to those who follow it intelligently; and life on the farm must be made permanently satisfying to intelligent, progressive people."  

Although the authors of the Report shrank from the comparison, the only inference to be drawn is that returns must be reasonable, life satisfying in terms of the economic, social, and cultural opportunities offered by industrial, urban life. Since they clearly stated that returns were not to be compared to those of previous eras, this is the only alternative. There is, in the logical extension of the idea of a "reasonable return," the suggestion of the concept of "parity." But the members of the Commission were not willing to recognize that farmers as a class—or any class of farmers—should measure income or satisfactions against those of urban occupational groups. Both the predisposition of most of the members to deprecate the emphasis on material gain and their dedication to the development of an agrarian civilization prevented the acceptance of such an idea.

In contradistinction to the new farm organizations, the Farmers' Union and Equity, the Report emphasized the non-material returns of farm life. Indeed, it explicitly denied that financial prosperity was the inevitable prerequisite of a good life. And it also pointed out that single-minded pursuit of profit might prevent the realization of the higher goals and ideals that should characterize farm life.

---

6Ibid., p. 24.  
7Ibid., p. 147.
The Commissioners were equally vigorous in their insistence that country life not be measured by city standards. By implication they rejected the subsequent suggestion of Mr. Dooley that the country life problem could be solved by moving the city closer to the country! The answer was not the imposition of urban civilization but the "rebuilding of a new agriculture and a new rural life."\(^8\)

The failure to set a goal meant that the deficiencies experienced by the agricultural classes could not be measured. That they existed, the Commission was convinced. That they were recognized by the people, as well, was indicated by the migration to urban areas to escape the disadvantages of rural life. Reasons for moving were many and varied—but all had a common denominator: life in the country was not satisfying!\(^9\)

The Commission, attempting to determine the cause of the deficiencies, found the most basic explanation in the change in the economic system. The transition from an agricultural to a commercial and manufacturing economy had introduced the principles of organization and combination, yet the agricultural population remained unorganized, acting as individuals. Because the agricultural occupations had failed to adopt the attitudes and methods characteristic of the new order they were handicapped. The failure of the farmer to act in combination was responsible for the insufficiency of his capital and the limited volume of transactions of the typical agricultural unit. He was attempting to operate a small unit in an economy increasingly oriented toward bigness.

\(^8\)Ibid., pp. 24-25. \(^9\)Ibid., pp. 38, 39.
He was endeavoring to deal as an individual, alone, a "separate" man, with interests that were organized. In this situation he experienced difficulties, even injustice, not, perhaps, as the result of evil intentions but as a consequence of the unequal development of the economic system.

The most fundamental of the explanations offered by the Commission for the "lack of a highly organized rural society," for the failure of the "agricultural occupations" to adjust to the new economy was that "the whole structure of a traditional and fundamental system . . . had been involved." 10

By tradition and training the farmer was independent. As the result of the "training of generations" he was a "strong individualist"; he had had to learn "to rely mainly on himself." He had not, moreover, been forced by poverty and want to cooperate with his neighbors because he had, "in the main," been prosperous. Moreover, the farmer was a transient always ready to take advantage of the increased value of his land, to sell out and move toward the frontier. Individuals expecting to move on to areas of greater opportunity were not inclined to develop permanent social and economic institutions. In those older areas where such organizations had been established they had subsequently disintegrated as the result of the population migration.

Everywhere bad roads made travel difficult and hindered the intercourse necessary to establish associations for economic or social purposes. Moreover, the schools had failed to encourage rural cooperation by neglecting their responsibility for "training for country life."

10 Ibid., pp. 18-19, 37, 39-40.
In view of the disabilities suffered by the farmer, the Commission felt the government should "understand" his problems, should "give him adequate consideration and protection." As we shall see, the aid expected of the government was of a very limited nature, from the point of view of the mid-twentieth century. But here is another of the unexpressed but basic premises of the Commission, another indication of their acceptance of the "agrarian myth." The government had a responsibility to help the farmer.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 19-20, 110-11.}

* * * * * *

The \textit{Report} deals at length with the principal deficiencies requiring immediate attention. It records the farmers' complaints; but it does not invariably accept them as valid. Nor does it unquestioningly adopt the remedies that many farmers would like to have had a semi-official organization recommend. It does look beyond a specific shortcoming reported by farmers to call attention to its social implications.

The first group of shortcomings entitled: "Disregard of the Inherent Rights of Land-Workers," gives some satisfaction to the farmers' suspicion of "conspiracy." These inherent rights, it is disclosed, have to do primarily with equality of opportunity. The farmer should have "an equal opportunity for enjoyment of the land, forests and streams, and of the right to buy and sell in the open market without prejudice."
These were rights to which all Americans had a claim, of course. The Commission explored them as they applied specifically to the farmer, and voiced the general theory of intervention and regulation used by the progressive reformers: the principle of the welfare of all should prevail whenever it was threatened by selfish interests.

The inherent right of the farmer to acquire new land was endangered by the operations of land speculators who acquired large tracts of land and held it for resale. This practice was detrimental to the interests of both the prospective small landowner who was prevented from obtaining land on reasonable terms and to the interests of the nation because it impeded the evolution of community life. For if the speculator withheld the land from cultivation, the small farmers in the vicinity were isolated and unable to develop "their necessary institutions or to attract the attention of the market." If he rented it, he encouraged the growth of tenantry, and tenants could not be expected to contribute to the development of socially and economically effective community institutions.

The Report was especially concerned about the activities of land speculators in reclaimed swampland areas. This land was expected to be extremely fertile and therefore to be capable of supporting a large number of small farms if adequate precautions were taken regarding ownership. The Commission, operating on the premise that it was to the national interest to perpetuate the class of small landowning farmers, recommended that the federal government take action.  

---

12 Ibid., pp. 60-63.
Equality of opportunity in the use of stream and river resources should also be guaranteed the farmer. Unfortunately the farming interests were not aware of the value of these resources nor of the threat posed by monopolistic control. The lack of perceptiveness of the agricultural shipper as to the economy of water transportation was due in part to ignorance of its advantages, in part to the high rates of local transportation to the waterways. The latter difficulty should be removed by readjustment of freight schedules, presumably by federal action, or by the organizing of competing companies. In any case, it was essential that the approaches and banks of the waterway not pass into the possession of monopolistic interests. Such a development, apparently already well underway, threatened the welfare not only of the rural interests but of the nation as a whole.

Streams should also be used to provide power for labor saving machinery for farm and farm home. It was hoped that each farm on a navigable stream would have its water wheel to generate power for domestic use. The development of small power companies to provide electricity for local uses such as electric railroads should also be encouraged.\(^\text{13}\)

More obviously related to the farming interests was the use of water for irrigation. Here, again, it was essential that control not be concentrated in the hands of a monopoly. Since it was water which gave value to irrigated land, farmers of these tracts would not be independent unless they could control their water supply. These farmers, the Report held, were peculiarly important to the development of country life.

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 64-70.}\)
because the conditions of cultivation required cooperation with neighbors and promoted the development of community spirit. The new and promising type of rural civilization developing in these communities should serve as a prototype and inspiration for community life in other agricultural sections.

The first step to be taken in the policy of assuring free access to and use of the streams and rivers should be a special inquiry into their control. If this inquiry disclosed, as the Report assumed it would, that these valuable water resources were passing under the control of monopolies, the government, presumably the federal government, strengthened by an aroused public opinion, should take action to protect "the people in their ownership" and to ensure to the farmer "such benefits as should be reserved for these purposes." 14

The conservation of forests had become a nationally discussed subject. Emphasizing the threat of erosion to soil fertility, the Report made a plea for the extension of work already underway on government lands. It also suggested the establishing of national and municipal forest reserves and the encouragement of farmers to increase the acreage of farm wood lots. 15

The question of restraint of trade as a violation of the inherent rights of farmers was one which the Commission handled gingerly. There was no disposition to deny that excessive freight rates and marketing charges were a repressive influence on the business of farming. Certainly the farmers felt they were being injured in this respect; the

14 Ibid., pp. 71-73.  
15 Ibid., pp. 72-74.
Report recorded that complaints about the "injustice, inequalities and discriminations" of these exactions constituted the largest class of complaints received by the Commission. But the Commission was hesitant about bringing a ringing indictment against railroad companies and middlemen.

It agreed that schedules might be simplified and codified for better understanding; there was no question but that favoritism to large shippers by rebates was an evil. Undoubtedly it was unfortunate that local trolley systems, which should provide convenient and reasonable transportation of farm products, had come to be dominated by the railroads for the purpose of eliminating competition. Certainly rates were a subject of public interest and thus governments did have the responsibility of supervising their setting and publication.

But the Commission advocated no additional government regulation. It implied that farmers might be better informed on the subject of transportation costs and suggested that they might solve the inequalities by open and fair discussion of the misunderstandings. The Interstate Commerce Commission, the Report pointed out, already existed to hear justifiable complaints. Most states, too, had railroad commissions to protect the public; if they were not effective the farmers should assume the responsibility of giving them real authority.

The situation was much the same with regard to the middleman. Some were probably honest and fair and gave good service to both farmers and consumers. There was, again, a good deal of complaint that many
levied exorbitant fees. Before recommending overt action the Commission suggested that a "searching inquiry" be made. 16

Additional evidence that land-workers were being denied their "inherent" rights was found in certain government policies. In the field of taxation there was inequality. Possibly because it was visible and stationery, agricultural property bore an "unjust" part of the tax burden. Other government policies of a general nature also operated to the disadvantage of the farmer. Of particular importance at the time the Commission made its report was the tariff. Agricultural interests should be kept in mind and should be made to apply the "reciprocity principle [so] as to open European markets for our flour, meats and live cattle." This was important, incidentally, not only to increase the farmer's profits, but also to encourage the feeding of livestock. For only by an increase in the number of livestock could the fertility of the land be maintained.

In addition to the tariff question farmers needed to be considered in legislation concerning "regulation of railroads, control or regulating of corporations and speculation, river, swamp, and forest legislation, and public health regulation." Since farmers were not organized politically to present their demands and look out for their interests in these subjects, the Commission suggested that their welfare should be protected by the government. There should be a "thoroughgoing study or Investigation . . . of the relation of business practices and

of taxation to the welfare of the farmer. . . ." Such a survey would focus public attention on the prevailing discrimination against the farmer and aid in the development of public opinion to assist in their removal.\textsuperscript{17}

One of the most frequently mentioned disadvantages experienced by the farmer was the dearth of good roads. These social and economic advantages were so obvious that their desirability was unquestioned. But whether the federal government should assume responsibility for financing them was currently an extremely controversial issue. The Commission escaped being impaled on either horn of the dilemma by observing that there should be cooperation between national and local government and that the question of ultimate responsibility could very well be postponed. In the meantime the federal government could contribute by establishing a highway engineering service to advise the states.\textsuperscript{18}

A deficiency of a different type was the declining fertility of the soil as the result of poor farming. That this would inevitably influence the social life of the people was recognized by the proverb: "Poor soil, poor people." The Commission observed that American agriculture had reached the stage of development in which farmers must turn from "mining" the soil to farming the land, maintaining and restoring the fertility. The alternative was "poverty and degradation." The development in the latter direction was already evident in many regions in which agricultural practices had not been modified to accommodate

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 60-61, 80-81. \textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 82-83.
production to the condition of declining fertility. The result was the loss of their farms by former owners and the increase of a vicious system of tenantry. This trend was especially marked in those geographical sections relying on one-crop agriculture, particularly the cotton-growing south. 19

The situation in the south was perpetuated by the combination of poverty and an inadequate credit system on one hand and lack of knowledge and experience with other types of agriculture on the other. The whole problem was rendered more difficult of solution by social stratification. The Commission pointed out that not only was the fertility of the soil further depleted, but also that the most unfortunate social conditions had developed.

Although these conditions were most pronounced in the south they were becoming common in other parts of the country where production of one crop predominated. The wheat-growing west with its "usually monotonous and barren" social life was an example. These conditions might occur, the Report warned, wherever ownership of land was passing into the hands of capitalists and speculators whose only interest was the annual return on their investment and/or their unearned increment.

If these tendencies were allowed to continue there was danger that farmers would become economically and politically impotent. Reduced to a position, theoretically of tenantry, actually of dependent labor working for an uncertain wage, they would no longer be able to direct

19 Ibid., pp. 83-86.
political policy as had been their custom in the prosperous agricultural regions.  

The remedy for this serious situation, the Commission found, lay with the farmers themselves. To escape the grave social, economic, and political consequences they would have to adopt practices of diversified farming and crop rotation suited to their locality. Agricultural colleges, experiment stations, and the United States Department of Agriculture were already offering information about these practices. The Report commended the demonstration work of the Department of Agriculture in the south and noted that some of the land-grant colleges had recognized and were responding to the need for similar work in other areas.

Still another shortcoming of agricultural industry complained about by farmers in some parts of the country was the scarcity of reliable, skilled labor. The shortage was due in part to the fact that the efficient and thrifty farm laborers became tenants and, eventually, land owners. It was due in greater degree to the nation-wide shortage of all labor. The conditions of agricultural labor--seasonal employment, lack of conveniences, long hours, dearth of companionship, and seemingly low wages--made it difficult for the farmer to compete with other employers. Moreover, while mechanization and specialization made possible increased production, they also demanded greater and more diversified skill and ability on the part of the agricultural laborer.

Evidence of the seriousness of the situation was the fact that many farmers, unable to hire labor, ceased to farm. Some rented to

\[20\text{Ibid.}, \ pp. \ 83-89.\]  
\[21\text{Ibid.}, \ pp. \ 89-90.\]
tenants. Some sold outright, "often to foreigners." In either case, "serious social problems" were created. Some reduced the amount of land under cultivation by taking difficult land, hilly land, out of production and using machinery to till the rest. In some areas the land was allowed to return to grass, and grazing, which required little labor, was re-introduced. Obviously the last two expedients were injurious to the welfare of the country because they would result in lowered production and, accordingly, higher prices.\(^{22}\)

Adding to the agricultural labor problem was the intemperate use of alcoholic beverages by some workers. The Commission accepted the testimony of many farmers that this was a "serious menace to country life." It noted, however, that such intemperance was "the result of the barrenness of farm life, particularly of the lot of the hired man." Although they recommended that legislation to protect states that had adopted prohibition from unauthorized commerce in liquor be adopted, they urged more strongly that "every person . . . exert his best effort to provide the open country with such intellectual and social interests as will lessen the appeal and attractiveness of the saloon."\(^{23}\)

Even more difficult to obtain than efficient "hands" were "hired girls." The lack of domestic labor was responsible for much of the criticism of country home life. The overworked farm wife, unable to obtain help, was forced to provide the foods that required least effort with the result that country diet was notoriously dull, monotonous, and indigestible.\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\)Ibid., pp. 91-94. \(^{23}\)Ibid., pp. 98-99. \(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 96.
The Commission had many suggestions forremedying the labor problem. Improvement of rural health conditions would decrease the death rate. Hours could be shortened and the seasonal character of employment reduced by better planning. The provision of better living conditions would make farm work more attractive for potential laborers. More to the point, would be discouraging the city-ward migration of country-born labor by improving rural communities and transforming attitudes toward country life. The schools should contribute to this by including vocational training for both boys and girls which would make their future occupations more respectable and more interesting. Such education would also, incidentally, make them more efficient. Institutions to encourage thrift and to provide security to the laborer would cause him to identify himself with the community and be less likely to answer the call to the city.

The Commission found that in some areas there was a tendency to rely on foreign labor which was believed to be more efficient and reliable. In these areas, it observed, immigrants were beginning to "drive out the native stock." Although use of immigrant labor was recorded in the Report as a possible solution for the labor problem, the tone of the narrative indicates a lack of enthusiasm.

The only permanent and satisfying solution of the labor problem, however, was the same as that for the depletion of the fertility of the soil. Better organization of the work of the farm, alone, would make the conditions of employment sufficiently attractive to interest capable
laborers. The Commission observed that "the best farmers usually com-
plain least about the labor difficulty." 25

Still another serious deficiency in country life was that of
inadequate provision for health protection. Rudimentary sanitary facil-
ities were lacking in many rural homes. Country areas usually had the
services of fewer physicians and public health authorities. Thus there
existed in these areas conditions detrimental to personal and public
health. Some of these threatened the well-being of the city as well as
the countryside. This was particularly true of contagious diseases
spread by food and milk contamination.

To remedy these conditions the Commission urged that elementary
principles of hygiene and sanitation be taught in the schools. Women's
organizations, already alerted to the problem, might also sponsor visiting
nurses in rural communities. This was an area, moreover, in which
the Commission did believe there should be an extension of federal
authority. The government of the United States should be empowered to
send its officials into epidemic areas and to offer its facilities—if
the state requested it. It could do so in cases of animal diseases, it
should be able to in the case of human illness. 26

A special concern of the Country Life Commission, as of the country
life movement, was the welfare of the farm woman. The burdens of farm
life bore more heavily on her than on any of the other members of the
family. It was she more than any other who experienced the monotony and

25Ibid., pp. 93-100. 26Ibid., pp. 100-103.
isolation of farm life. To solve her problems the Report urged the development of a helpful and cooperative spirit in the family. Physical improvements were also strongly recommended: more convenient houses, running water, provision for sanitation, labor-saving devices. As the community creamery had relieved her of the drudgery of caring for milk and other dairy products, a community laundry might relieve her of that other heavy household chore.

To remove the monotony of farm life the Commission suggested the establishment of women's organizations. Finally, the schools should incorporate in their curricula the "domestic, household and health subjects" to educate her in better, less arduous ways of doing her work.27

* * * * * * *

For each of the major deficiencies of farm life, then, the Commission proposed a specific remedy. But the Report was not limited to offering obvious solutions to well-known deficiencies. "The Commission will fail in its purpose," it asserted, "if it confines itself merely to providing remedies or correctives for the present and apparent troubles of the farmer. . . ." Going beyond the time-honored complaints and cure-alls of a superficial nature, it indicated that a permanent and effective solution would be attained only by creating a new agrarian civilization.

---

27 Ibid., pp. 103-106.
The rural utopia referred to by the Report was never clearly described; nor was a detailed plan for its achievement offered. Indeed the Commission felt its responsibility was "to apprehend the problem and to state the conditions." It shared with the progressive movement the belief "that the mere statement of conditions . . . ought of itself to challenge attention to the needs."

Occasional hints were given so that some of the salient characteristics of this prospective civilization can be determined. While the Commission did agree that adequate economic rewards were essential for the "kind of life that should ultimately be established in rural communities," these "economic and industrial" questions of profits and production were significant only as a means of achieving satisfying social and cultural conditions.

The new agricultural community would, of course, provide adequately for the "four great requirements of man—health, education, occupation, society." In short, the rural social unit should combine the "best of the city" with the unique advantages of life in the country. With all there would be developed a farm society characterized by common purpose and unity with provision for wholesome social association.

The growing emphasis on the social needs of farmers had caused many contemporary writers to contrast the geographical isolation of the typical American farm homestead with the European agricultural villages and to propose that American agriculture be reorganized along European lines. The Report was most unwilling to accept this solution. The social ideal it had in mind must be uniquely American, constructed of indigenous elements and in keeping with traditional American ideals and
practises. The structure of American agriculture should be the product of an evolution, different from that of Europe, in which mobility, expansion, and opportunity were the characteristic elements.  

It was also essential that, in so far as possible, local leadership and existing organizations be utilized. Local governments should be made as efficient and effective as possible. Local agencies for improving country life should be encouraged and then "federated" to prevent duplication of activity. All members of the community should be encouraged to participate in its development and to nurture a cooperative spirit.

In every area there were existing institutions—churches, schools, farmers' associations and women's clubs which could contribute to revitalizing country societies. Moreover, some urban institutions could be extended, adapted, and established in rural regions. Rural libraries, for instance, could be founded as social centers and not only stimulate intellectual activity but also facilitate the growth of community spirit by providing "a convenient meeting place for many kinds of activities." Another promising development was the expansion of the activity of the Young Men's Christian Association into the counties.

In the same way, other organizations which could promote recreation and entertainment could be adapted to rural situations. Any organization that would encourage social intercourse—musical clubs, reading clubs, fraternal organizations, organizations for recreational purposes, even local political associations had potentialities for improving the

28Ibid., pp. 109-12.
quality of the social life of the country. In some places beginnings were being made by some of these institutions. But real progress awaited the awakening of a general public interest which would raise up local leaders and provide for the federation of institutional activities.\(^29\)

In the creation of the new rural society with its new attitudes and ideals the Report emphasized four basic corrective forces: knowledge, education, cooperative organization, and the development of leadership. All these were broadly interpreted to include unfamiliar as well as commonly accepted goals and functions.

The Commissioners understood by the term "knowledge," not only the principles of scientific farming, but also the gaining of knowledge about local conditions and resources that would make it possible to utilize these principles to the greatest advantage. To gain this information, state and local authorities should make careful surveys of all agricultural areas to determine, in detail, what the actual situation was and how it could most satisfactorily be developed. The inclusive nature of the survey was indicated in the following paragraph:

This inventory or census should take into account the detailed topography and soil conditions of the localities, the local climate, the whole character of streams and forests, the agricultural products, the cropping systems now in practice, the conditions of highways, markets, facilities in the way of transportation and communication, the institutions and organizations, the adaptability of the neighborhood to the establishment of handicrafts and local industries, the general economic and social status of the people and the character of the people themselves, natural attractions and disadvantages, historical data, and a collation of community experience. . . .\(^{30}\)

\(^{30}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 109, 113-17.}\)  
\(^{30}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 120-21.}\)
It is characteristic of the Commission that it should place special emphasis on scenery as a resource which should be protected and improved. Its value, however, was not considered in the light of a tourist attraction. The Commission's concern with local natural beauty lay in its relation to personal values: "It will be impossible to develop a satisfactory country life without conserving all the beauty of landscape, and developing the people to the point of appreciating it."31 Thus the beauty of local scenery became an important category in the inventory of rural resources.

Although the emphasis was laid on local facts, neighborhood information, the Commission pointed out that it was imperative that this information be collected and coordinated by "federal agencies acting with the states." This "collation" on a national basis would present to the people the picture of the total national resources and facilitate their wisest and most efficient utilization. Moreover, it would probably be necessary for "outside" forces—agricultural colleges, state boards of agriculture, even federal agencies—to stimulate and direct the "resident" leadership.32

Education was the most important of the great forces the Report singled out as essential to the creation of a new rural society. The Commission had found in its investigation that the school system was at once the most often mentioned deficiency and the institution most


32 Ibid., pp. 109, 120.
frequently referred to as having possibilities of revitalizing rural life. Included in the term, "education," were the agricultural colleges, agricultural high schools and university extension work as well as the common country schools. The content of "education" should be broadened to include not only agriculture but also nature study, "the home studies," health, and sanitation as well as the traditional subject matter.

The Report urged the extension of the area of influence of the country school and of the teacher. It would have the school become a social center since most rural communities lacked such a focal point. Other institutions were also mentioned as possible nuclei of community activity, but the Report gave strong support to the school that had come to "concern itself directly with the interests of the people."

To perform its new role, the school would have to become a totally new institution which would "express the best cooperation of all social and economic forces that make for the welfare of the community." Accordingly, a new type of teacher would be required— one who would be sympathetic to the ideals of country life and identify himself with the community.33

The Commission reported that the need for better education was already realized in many areas. The demand for the broadening of the curriculum was already being met. What was needed was a vigorous campaign to "rouse all the people to the necessity of such education."34

33 Ibid., pp. 122-23.  
34 Ibid., pp. 121, 124.
Also imperative, to prevent duplication, was the emergence of a national organization "to coordinate the forces that are beginning to operate." The need for integrating local activity coupled with the feeling that the prevalence of ignorance was "so wide-spread as to constitute a national danger" brought the recommendation that action by the government of the United States was desirable. Thus the Report suggested that the Bureau of Education "be enlarged and supported" so that it would become a "clearing-house, and a collecting, distributing and investigating organization."35

Finally, to carry the benefits of the redirected education to all the people, they recommended the "establishment of a nation-wide extension work." From the context in which this suggestion was made, the Commission expected these extension agencies to be under the guidance and supervision of the land grant universities. It is interesting to note that although the Commission did not specifically deny control to the Department of Agriculture, in the reference to "extension," the term was always qualified by the word, "university." As was to be expected, the work of the extension service was to encompass leadership in the development of the social as well as the economic phases of country life.36

Obtaining and spreading knowledge were not enough. To protect himself, the farmer must learn to organize, to cooperate, to work with his fellows. Here again, the Commission recognized the importance of the social as well as the political and economic phases of life.

On the political side, farmers did not "influence legislation as they should." The Commission did not specify the form this influence should take, but the general tenor of the Report and the tenets of the members indicate that they did not expect the farmer to create a pressure group to obtain class legislation so that it did not bear more heavily upon him than upon other groups.37

From the economic point of view, Americans "had only begun to develop business cooperation." The Report emphasized the necessity of ensuring that organization for economic purposes should be a "genuinely cooperative or common effort," with all individuals sharing in both management and benefits. Care should be taken that control should not pass into the hands of those with whom he was doing business. Complaints to the Commission of collusion and discrimination suffered by the unorganized farmer indicated there was a great need for cooperative marketing and purchasing associations--especially in areas of one-crop production.

The economic position of the individual was precarious in these regions for many reasons and the inequality of his bargaining position was a severe threat to his welfare. Economic insecurity was in turn responsible for barren social life and the rise of rural discontent and economic heresy. Organization among these farmers was most desirable.38

The Report pointed out that economic organization to equalize the farmer's market position could take two forms. One type was of the nature of a combination which sought to control prices and perhaps even to control production. Although no names were

37 Ibid., pp. 27, 79-82. 38 Ibid., pp. 128-32.
mentioned, this was the current goal of the Farmers' Union whose President, it must be remembered, was a member of the Commission. The other type had less coercive influence on the market. It confined its activities to "studying and understanding the natural laws of trade and taking advantage of conditions and regulating such evils as may arise." Most agricultural marketing cooperatives belonged to the latter class, and this was the type the Commission approved of.

The Commission also commended as "capable of producing most satisfactory results" the growing use of cooperative warehouses and community packing houses. The availability of the warehouse enabled the farmer to withhold his product from the market until he felt the price was right. Moreover, it was currently hoped that the negotiable receipts for the stored products would be as good as cash, thus relieving the chronic shortage of money and credit in rural areas.\(^{39}\) The similarity to the Populist program indicates that agrarian hopes die hard.

The persisting concern in rural areas about money and credit made credit agencies another field in which cooperative effort might be beneficial. It was especially needed in those areas where the lien system was in operation. The Report called attention to the success of European farmers in creating credit organizations which suited the needs of the farmer with regard to security, interest, and length of loan.

Agricultural credit organizations might also be able to keep adequate amounts of money in circulation. For closely allied with the complaint of inadequate credit facilities was the current criticism of

\(^{39}\)Ibid., pp. 132-33.
the money and banking system. As many of its rural respondents had undoubtedly done, the Commission called attention to the tendency to drain rural credit resources to the big cities. Characteristically, it recommended investigation before action. In this case it urged that federal bank examiners add to their duties the task of determining "the proportion of the loanable funds of rural banks . . . loaned to the farmers in their locality."  

There were other areas in which organization of farmers would improve the conditions of country life. Prominent among them were the provision of telephone and electric power facilities. The Report suggested that other local needs of a temporary nature might well be met by cooperative organization.  

Important as these cooperatives might be, however, in equalizing the farmers' economic status, this was not their most important function. For the Commission members the principal contribution cooperative organization would make was the development of social interaction which would result in the strengthening of community spirit and organization. Therefore the Report emphasized the need for "associations in which persons cooperate directly for social results." These organizations should be continuous and permanent and hold frequent meetings.  

In line with their personal convictions the Commission emphasized that associations of farmers would be valuable only as they were the "voluntary expression of the people." However, it realistically admitted that government action should "stimulate and facilitate the organization
of such cooperative associations." As governments had encouraged corporate organization, it should give equal legal powers and advantages to cooperative organization.

An equally important although novel influence the state and federal governments could exert was in the direction of federating local cooperative efforts. Again, the actual union of this "associative effort" should be voluntary. But the agencies of the government, the United States and state departments of agriculture, the colleges and experiment stations, the Bureau of Education, could cooperate with local organizations to initiate a general program to encourage each to "do its appropriate work at the same time that it aids all the other and contributes to the general effort to develop a new rural social life."

Undoubtedly recalling the Plunkett-Pinchot project for a Bureau of Rural Social Economy, the Report's peroration pointed out: "the exercise of a wise advice, stimulus, and direction from some central, national agency . . . could accomplish untold good. . . ."43

The role assigned in the Report to the country church indicates the equivocal position of the Commission between the traditional emphasis on individual effort and action and the early twentieth century reliance on social and institutional reform. The rural church had the difficult but challenging opportunity not only of stimulating higher personal and community ideals but also of providing guidance for the reorganization of rural life. Its traditional role of moral and religious leadership remained extremely important in the judgment of a Commission which could

43 Ibid., pp. 133-34, 136-37, 149.
assert "in the last analysis, the country life problem is a moral one." Thus from the point of view of its function as conservator of morals and elevation of personal ideals the church performed an essential function in stimulating individuals and communities to better conduct and higher goals.

Because of its place in the institutional structure of the countryside, the rural church had additional opportunities and obligations of a sociological nature. It could play a prominent role in creating a state of mind essential to the developing of a rewarding country life. It should stimulate the ambition of the community to make its "life wholesome, satisfying, educative, and complete." It could educate the countryman to "love the country and to have an intellectual appreciation of it." 44

The role of the church was to be more than that of inspiration and definition of goals, however. It should actively participate in the betterment of community life; it should make of itself a center for the social life of the community. It might do so in a physical sense, providing facilities for meetings and social gatherings. It was more important that it become the center from which influences would emanate which would "build up the moral and spiritual tone of the whole community." To aid it in this work the church should encourage and ally itself with the county work phase of the Young Men's Christian Association which had an especial appeal to the young men and boys.45

Without question the key to the new role of the church was the pastor. The new country minister must be a community leader. On the one hand he must function as the leader of the community at large rather than of one particular denomination; on the other, he must lead not only in religious affairs but in social and economic aspects of life as well. The latter role presumed some familiarity with production and marketing problems and knowledge of modern methods of meeting them. The Commission suggested that he might acquire this information through cooperation of the agricultural colleges with the theological seminaries. 46

Finally, the successful rural minister must sympathize with the ideals and aspirations of the rural population; he must love the country and identify himself with it. He should go into the rural ministry as a permanent work instead of regarding it as a stepping stone for a position of more prestige and remuneration.

The Report realistically pointed out that one of the outstanding difficulties in obtaining and retaining promising young men for the rural ministry was the low salaries. It had no specific recommendation to make to increase compensation except indirectly through its recommendation for federation of churches. Instead it pointed to the unparalleled opportunities for leadership in rural parishes and implied that an appeal on this basis might awaken the spirit of service in heroic young men. 47

* * * * * * *

46 Ibid., pp. 138, 141-44.  47 Ibid., pp. 141-42, 144.
"Everything resolves itself at the end into a question of personality," the *Report* flatly stated. Only as the powerful forces discussed above influenced the development of higher ideals and responsible leadership would they contribute to the solution of the problems of country life. In the final analysis, the great need was for leadership. The city needed to be led to recognize its debt to the country; the federal government needed to be brought to a realization of its responsibilities to the farmers; the whole population should be guided to an interest in the redirection of rural institutions. Most of all the rural community should be led to the realization that the significant values of rural life lay in areas other than "the making of more money and the getting of more goods."\(^48\)

To awaken this leadership and make it effective the Commission on Country Life made three major recommendations. In the first place, there should be a comprehensive survey of rural conditions to reveal what the specific needs were and how they could best be fulfilled. Then, a nationwide system of extension should be established to provide instruction and inspiration in all aspects of country life. Finally, there should be a "campaign for rural progress"; conferences should be held to arouse national interest in the necessity of revitalizing social institutions. These would also lead to the uniting of the "interests of education, organization and religion into one forward movement for the rebuilding of rural life."\(^49\)

CHAPTER V

PUBLIC RESPONSE

The reformers of the progressive era had great respect for the power of public opinion. Reveal the discrepancies of existing conditions with the democratic ideal, they believed, and the force of an awakened public conscience will be exerted until the shortcomings are removed. Drag out into the merciless light of public exposure the social inequities imposed by an economy in transition and an enlightened citizenry will not rest until the wrongs have been righted. This was the theory upon which "muckraking" was based. It was also an important consideration leading to the creation of the Commission on Country Life. The Commission, itself, pointed out the need of "some means or agency for the guidance of public opinion." 1

If the President and the Commission expected a universally favorable reaction to the investigation, they were disappointed. If they hoped only to direct public attention to the realization that there were rural as well as urban social problems, the reaction of the periodical and newspaper press was more satisfactory. For, from the time of the circulation of the first rumor that there was to be an inquest into rural life, the work of the Commission commanded attention.

---

Some organs of public opinion welcomed the announcement that a presidential commission was to concern itself with rural problems. Some agreed that rural problems needed attention but doubted the effectiveness of the proposed inquiry. Still others received the news with derision and ridicule. Indeed, the prospect of a group of reformers probing into the condition of the farmer, still regarded as the last stand of American individualism, could be expected to provoke a considerable amount of satire—some good-natured, some not so well-intentioned.

The press in general was sympathetic to the project. The Literary Digest concluded. As was natural, however, there were varying degrees of approval and optimism—and some opposition.

The Spokane (Washington) Spokesman-Review was lyrical in its approval of the appointing of the Commission. It proclaimed:

In no other single act has President Roosevelt's deep sympathy, foresight and hard practical intelligence been more in evidence than in his appointment of five eminent specialists with a view to bringing about better social, sanitary and economic conditions on American farms. . . . The national greatness, wealth, glory and vitality must, indirectly or directly, come from the farm, and it is immensely important that the farm retain its full share of the intellectual vigor and sound practical intelligence of the nation.

The Spokesman-Review continued to support the work of the Commission and, during the hearings in the state, reflected the exceptional enthusiasm of the northwest by remarkably detailed and laudatory

---

2 "Presidential Anxiety for the Farmer," The Literary Digest, XXXVII (Aug. 22, 1908), 235.

3 The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Wash.), Aug. 12, 1908.
accounts. Moreover, it helped to generate local interest by sponsoring a poll and a prize contest to encourage farmers to recognize the importance of the Commission. And it took a Sacramento paper to task for "poor taste and false pride" for charging that the Commission was "poking its nose into affairs that are none of its business." 4

The New York Times was also willing to contribute to the success of the Commission by stimulating interest, although it had some reservations. Not inclined to approve, unquestioningly, the products of the Roosevelt initiative, it noted that, as was to be expected, the "social and ethical side of the problem" received emphasis when the economic aspects were obviously the most fundamental. The Times, however, was willing that "all possible steps should be studied, and then promoted as opportunity offers or can be made." 5

To help develop favorable opinion for the investigation, the New York Times gave it several feature articles. One, detailing the background and prospects of the Commission, was an interview in which the Times correspondent allowed Gifford Pinchot to indicate the importance of the problem and the breadth of the questions to be studied. A second, just before the Commission set out for its schedule of hearings, gave Chairman Bailey the opportunity to explain the methods, scope, and social emphasis of the inquiry. To whet public interest, excerpts from some of the replies already received to the circular of questions were printed. 6

---

4 Ibid., Dec. 4, 5, 6, 7, 1908.

5 New York Times, May 18, 1908.

6 Ibid., May 24, 1908, Nov. 9, 1908.
Many newspapers assumed a doubtful attitude. The Omaha Morning World-Herald (Neb.), for example, accepted the news of the appointment with reservations although it agreed that life on American farms was an important subject. But it was hardly optimistic as it made the qualified statement:

If the members of this Commission are fortunate enough to make a report clearly bringing out the facts and to recommend schemes of betterment that are practicable they will have done a signal service to the most important class of people in the country and not very indirectly to the country as a whole.\(^7\)

The Omaha paper did not oppose the investigation, however, and observed that "it may well incite enthusiasm and an opportunity to perform a great service."\(^8\) Apparently it became disenchanted during the tour of the Commission, however, for when the Commission came to Omaha to hold hearings in conjunction with the Corn Exposition, the paper's greeting was sarcastic and it observed that Nebraska farmers did not need "uplifting."\(^9\)

The San Francisco Chronicle also took a doubtful attitude. Sympathetic to the idea that there was a farm problem, it discussed the probable findings thoughtfully. There was little optimism about the Commission's ability to solve the most obvious problem of persuading farmers to organize to perform their business. "The President," it observed, "has never tackled a deeper problem than that of what is the matter with the farmer and how to cure it. If his Commission touches

\(^7\) Omaha Morning World Herald (Nebraska), Aug. 12, 1908.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid., Dec. 10, 1908.
bottom with it it will be a wonder." During the Commission hearings in California, the San Francisco paper recorded its progress with interest but was not convinced that it should be taken seriously. It made the suggestion that the "establishment of vaudeville centers might arrest the tendency to stray cityward." The trend of evidence revealed by the hearings did not convert the Chronicle to support, but elicited a sarcastic editorial. It warned farmers "whose barn roofs leak, or whose hired men stay too long at the town saloon of an evening" that they should consult the Commission at once," since the "sociological administration" would be in office only three months longer.  

There were newspapers which, although not antagonistic to the idea of an investigating commission, believed it unnecessary since there was no real problem. The Washington Post (D. C.), for instance, was conscientiously correct in reporting the appointment and progress of the investigation of the Commission without sarcasm. It obviously did not consider it necessary, however, for it believed that the farm problem was already solved by higher agricultural prices and more efficient machinery and methods. Indeed, it had previously pointed out that the farmers were becoming a "new leisure class."  

An attitude typical of the more prosperous farming regions was expressed by the Circleville Democrat and Watchman (Ohio). This county weekly, which had not noted the appointment of the Commission, questioned

---

why the "agricultural districts are in greater need [of uplift] than other communities"? The lack of enthusiasm of the Democrat is explained by its observation that for years "agricultural theorizers" had been searching for an answer to "how to keep the boy on the farm." So far no "widely applicable solution" had been found; if the "able committee of students of agriculture" had one to suggest, "its report will be interesting reading." The conclusion was typical: "Meanwhile the farmer will concern himself with improving transportation, crops, stock and markets and leave the social uplift end to the women."12

Indifference and ridicule of the same type was exhibited by the Columbus Citizen (Ohio) which had no comment on the appointment of the Commission except to record that Bailey was reluctant to serve and to imply that his hesitation was due to lack of confidence in its purposes. The Citizen was never openly critical of the work of the Commission and chronicled the geographical progress of the hearings, tardily informing its readers of the purpose of the investigation. Its primary interest, however, was the opportunity offered for humor. Late in November, the Citizen printed a "folksy" rephrasing of the questions of the circular. Its version of the question: "Are the sanitary conditions of farms in your neighborhood satisfactory?" was "How's your barnyard? Clean? Are your neighbor's yards clean?"13

12Circleville Democrat and Watchman (Ohio), Sept. 4, 1908.
13Columbus Citizen (Ohio), Aug. 14, Aug. 19, Nov. 24, 1908.
It's interest in the whole inquiry and Report is suggested by the failure to make any evaluation of the latter but to send a correspondent to visit a J. C. Spees, whose reply to the circular Roosevelt had quoted in his letter transmitting the Report to Congress. Even here the emphasis of the interview was on "human interest" rather than rural problems. The paper was impressed by the size of Spees' family (eleven children), but ignored the Commission's suggestions for solving the agricultural labor problem.14

Attitudes openly hostile to both the goals and methods of the Commission were not uncommon. Some papers considered such an investigation an unwarranted extension of the power of the government. A good many dismissed it as a device to obtain farm support in the impending election. Still others objected to it because it seemed to be designed to divert attention from the fact that the farmer was the victim of discrimination which the government could and should eliminate. The latter group emphasized that the farmers' difficulties stemmed from the inequities of the tariff, which the Roosevelt administration showed itself unwilling to consider, and the failure of the government to take effective action against the concentrations of industrial and financial power which continued to exploit the farmer.

The Journal of Commerce, for example, opposed the investigation on the grounds that it was a violation of constitutional power. The responsibility of government to its citizens did not require it to

---

14 Ibid., Feb. 27, 1909.
"concern itself with their sanitary, hygienic, business, social, and domestic interests." The Christian Advocate (Raleigh, N. C.) and the Charlotte News (N. C.) objected to interference in the religious life of the farmer. They especially resented the suggestion that rural churches might unite on a non-denominational basis to become more effective.

A political motivation was suspected by the New York Evening Post. The Raleigh (N. C.) News and Observer also found it strange that it was only in an election year that the President "thought to appoint a Commission to uplift the farmers. . . ." The latter paper charged that the Republican administration hoped to obscure the fact that it was not tackling the real problems of exploitation by the protective tariff, monopolistic prices, and the concentration of credit in urban centers by forming a "hop-skip-and-jump Pullman-car excursion Commission" or sending seeds.

The New York Evening Journal also asserted that more stringent action than the appointing of an investigating commission was needed. It pointed out that the "farmer doesn't care to be either coddled or molly-coddled. . . . He wants plain JUSTICE, and he wants a few of the

15Quoted from The Literary Digest, XXXVII (Aug. 22, 1908), 235.


17Cited by The Literary Digest, loc. cit.

gentlemen that run the Government and spend the Government's money to STOP DISCRIMINATING AGAINST HIM."19

The cartoonists of the nation found the idea of investigating farm life sufficiently ludicrous to serve as a rewarding subject for their art. The New York Times' Hy Mayer, intrigued by the President's phrases "better living" and "social advantages and opportunities," pictured the daily evening scene in the barn over the caption: "When T. R. Will Have Improved Life on the Farm." The farmer with the inevitable corncob pipe and fringe of whiskers is attired in formal evening dress--including cane and gloves. He is feeding a cow similarly apparelled with the addition of spats and monocle.20 Interpreting the Commission as a means of ensuring the farm vote for Taft, Mayer implies that the farmer was satisfied with prevailing conditions. This time, the farmer is "rared back" in a rocking chair, reading, his feet on the mantle, a high-ball glass, seltzer water, and a cigar at his side. This picture of contentment is interrupted by the "Government Emissary for the Improvement of the Farmers' Lot." The "emissary" is assuming an appropriately apologetic attitude. Caption: "Oh, Let Us Alone."21

Other cartoonists were struck by the incongruity of the generally accepted idea of farm prosperity and the need for investigation. A typical cartoon shows the farmer, sitting in a "modern" bathtub using the telephone to communicate with his "hand": "Hello Hank! Have the

19 Quoted in The Literary Digest, loc. cit.
21 Ibid., Aug. 13, 1908.
large car ready to be at the station at nine thirty to meet the President's Commission for Improvement of the Farmer's Condition.²²

* * * * * * *

Periodicals which noted the appointment of the Commission on Country Life were more inclined to approval and optimism than newspapers. The magazines which found occasion to comment, however, were relatively limited in number and interest. Those generally associated with the muckraking phase of the progressive movement had little opinion to offer on the President's Commission. Busy revealing municipal corruption, corporate collusion, and graft in the ranks of organized labor, most of them failed to note either the appointment or the Report of the Commission.

The weekly and monthly publications that did discuss the investigation were, by and large, those interested in social amelioration by conservative means. Most of them had already shown concern about rural problems and some had sought to recruit public interest in a back-to-the-land movement.

The World's Work, whose editor was so interested in agriculture that he was a member of the Commission, pointed out that consideration of the social problems of rural regions, although of great importance, was long overdue. The country badly needed aid in developing the organization techniques and transportation facilities of modern life.

²²Columbus Citizen (Ohio), Aug. 18, 1908.
Once improvement was introduced, however, it would yield large dividends for the nation, since it was on the farm that the largest number of vigorous and normal men and women were produced. The possibilities for success were promising, the magazine pointed out, for there were already many forces operating separately whose efforts would be intensified if intelligently coordinated and directed.  

The Independent, too, had a record of interest in rural conditions, agricultural colleges, and industrial education. It was a strong advocate of the superior attractiveness of country living. The magazine was not, however, entirely convinced of either the necessity or the desirability of a government commission to investigate country life. Pointing out that conditions in rural areas were improving, it warned that the government should not interfere except to assure the farmer "fair dealing." The Independent conceded, however, that there was an opportunity for the Commission to do much good—if it did more than pile up statistics about shortcomings that were already well-known.  

More interested in the scientific and rational phases of humanitarian reform, The Survey was whole-heartedly in sympathy with the President's action. The initial accolade was—"... we know of scarcely any subject more deserving of serious and thorough-going inquiry." After presenting a survey of the most informed thought as to
the directions recommendations should take, this periodical placed emphasis on the social needs of the countryside. Effort should be directed toward providing recreation areas where people could congregate for the sheer pleasure of human association.  

Sympathetic to Theodore Roosevelt as well as to the general reform movement, The Outlook naturally gave strong moral support to the country life investigation and published letters as well as articles discussing the Commission. The success of the inquiry, it felt, was assured if it did "nothing else but . . . turn the attention of both farmer and non-farmer to the importance of considering agriculture in a scientific spirit and with an open mind." Somewhat less promptly, The Review of Reviews, generally a firm supporter of the Roosevelt policies, gave favorable attention to the Commission only in its role as a participant in the National Corn Exposition.

Even Harper's Weekly, certainly not an enthusiastic admirer of Roosevelt, approved of the Commission. Agreeing that rural conditions needed improvement, the Weekly reported that news of the appointment of the Commission was "well-received" in the rural districts and that there had been a prompt response to the circular of questions. Moreover, it

25This periodical was currently entitled Charities and the Commons, but with the March, 1909, issue the name was changed to The Survey and the volume numbers are continuous; therefore it will be cited throughout as The Survey. "The President's Agricultural Commission," XX (Aug. 22, 1908), 604.

26The Outlook, XC (Oct. 17, 1908), 340; ibid. (Nov. 21, 1908), pp. 609-11.

believed, the inquiry had stimulated discussion of the future of agriculture at the grass roots, where concern about it was most valuable.28

The only specific objection to the appointing of the Commission from a magazine came from an unusual source and an unexpected angle. Good Housekeeping, interested in country homes for city people and in improving the homemaking techniques of country women, came up with the query: "Why Are There No Women on the President's Commission?" Accepting both the need and the method of the investigation it took the President to task only for not recognizing the important role of women in rural life by appointing one on the Commission.29

Although the muckraking periodicals ignored the Commission, the uniqueness of an investigation into the quality of happiness of the farmer's life provoked The American's irrepressible Mr. Dooley to comment. After slyly indicating that the farmer was prosperous and that it was impossible to legislate happiness for anyone, Mr. Dooley put his finger on several sore spots:

Th' Commission on th' sorrows iv Cy an' his wife will tell us about th' necessity iv more bath-tubs an' window-screens, whin what they ought to do is to advocate givin' something to the hired man that wud make him faint at th' sight of a buckwheat cake an' teachin' th' dumb animles to feed thimselves without sloppin'. A horse that cud climb up in the haymow an' prepare his own supper wud be iv more use to a farmer thin a presidintial message on Vinzwala. An' if a farmer's wife

---


29Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "That Rural Home Inquiry: Why Are There No Women on the President's Commission?" Good Housekeeping, XLVIII (Jan., 1909), 120.
somethimes had somebody to talk to that she didn't cook an' wash f'r she might be made quite jolly. . . . Th' throuble about our farms is that they're too far fr'm our cities, an' thats th' throuble with our cities, too. 30

By and large, the magazines which had welcomed the Commission commended the Report; those which had failed to comment on the initiation of the investigation neglected to discuss its outcome. Some which had announced their own solutions were mildly critical that their remedies had not received sufficient attention. The typical attitude, however, was of general, if not over-enthusiastic, approval.

The World's Work, again, was outspoken in commending the value of the Commission's work. Discussing the Report in detail, the magazine concluded that it would revive man's pride in winning his living from the soil and preserve rural life as the "nursery of the strongest families and of the hardiest virtues." More than that, the Report presented a program for the development of a higher type of rural life. 31

The Independent gave close attention to the results of the Commission's work and approved it in general. It was particularly well-satisfied with the recommendations to strengthen the educational system, a point it had been consistently emphasizing. It also approved the demand for better roads, parcel post, conservation, and the removal of the discriminations of the protective tariff. It was laudatory of the

---

30 Finley Peter Dunne, "Mr. Dooley on Uplifting the Farmers," The American Magazine, LXVII (Nov., 1908), 95-97.

attempt to awaken the country church to its social responsibilities, to provide leadership toward a "more practical this-worldliness." It was not, however, enthusiastic about the suggestion that the farmers should develop cooperative organizations. Group action was the way of the city, the way of the country should continue to be individualism. Apparently fearing that the Commission erred in the direction of allowing farmers to shirk their duties, the periodical re-emphasized the necessity for increasing production and encouraged the farmers to "find his pleasure in his work rather than in escaping from it."\(^{32}\)

If The Independent feared the Commission over-stated the social and recreational needs of the farmer, The Survey criticized it for the opposite reason. Its approval of the Report was less enthusiastic than its acclaim of the creation of the Commission because it felt the emphasis was too strong on the economic factor. Especially was the latter magazine doubtful about the strong recommendation for cooperative economic endeavors; it professed to fear that as a result "some day 50¢ eggs will be due to a control by cooperation, and ... some other president may feel called upon to appoint a commission on the city consumers."\(^{33}\)

---


The Outlook was complimentary of both the Commission and its Report. Calling attention to the fact that the Commissioners had served without compensation, it praised their service as an example of the "highest type of public spirit." The Report itself and the President's message, it declared, deserved the greatest possible circulation among urban as well as rural populations. The Outlook took the point of view that the urban population was more in need of information about the problems of country life than the rural inhabitants who were familiar with them from experience. It emphasized the need to educate the urban citizen on rural questions because "as long as all men . . . derive their living from the soil, so long will the problems of the farmer be the fundamental problems of the Nation." With regard to specific recommendations, The Outlook especially approved the one urging the Church to serve as a "center of social reorganization." 34

The Chautauquan delayed comment on the Commission until after Congress had refused to continue its work or to publish the Report. By criticizing that action it indicated its sympathy with the goals and objectives of the investigation, but it was mildly critical of the Report. The Commission, it believed, had not sufficiently emphasized the dangers of tenancy and absentee ownership. 35

Directly discussing neither the appointment of the Commission nor its work, The Nation was nonetheless aware that there was a country life


movement. It agreed with some of the Commission's recommendations, such as the need to regenerate both the country church and the country school. To be effective, it asserted, these changes must come from the "rural masses" rather than from "uplifters." The rural exodus, it insisted, was a result of a fundamental economic transformation, the industrial revolution, and no amount of well-intentioned propaganda could retard it.\(^{36}\)

It is interesting to note that the periodical, *Country Life in America*, had little to say about the Commission or its Report. Its sole comment was buried in an article on the aid given by the United States Department of Agriculture to a Delaware farmer who had just joined the back-to-the-land movement. The columnist remarked: "It is needless to say that such men as this are outspoken and vigorous in their commendation of the work President Roosevelt and the Country Life Commission are seeking to do for the American farmer."\(^{37}\)

The negligence of this periodical is not surprising, however, when it is realized that Chairman Bailey, its first editor, had given up the post when he realized that the name was not to be interpreted literally. To Bailey and other serious rural reformers, "country life" referred to the life of those natural inhabitants of the countryside who not only resided there but who also made their living there—farmers and

---


those who served them. By 1908 it was clear that the readers for whom Country Life was designed were the owners of estates and those suburbanites who aspired to the "simple life."

* * * * * * *

If it was important that the population in general be made aware of the presence of a farm problem, it was even more important that the rural population be made aware that there were possibilities of solving it. Especially was this true in the eyes of a Commission whose Report had emphasized the importance of rural leadership and local forces. If rural churches were to revive, if rural organizations were to federate, if local governments were to reform—if the Report were to be successful in its endeavor to awaken the aspirations and guide the energies of the countryman, there must be a strong rural opinion to demand improvement. Whether agricultural journals are considered as reflections of rural opinions or formulators of farmers' attitudes their reaction to the appointment of the Commission and to its work is the best clue to farm opinion.

In the agricultural press there was both approval and opposition. It is significant that the division of opinion followed no discernible geographical lines, thus no special commodity interests can be identified with either commendation or condemnation. All sections had papers that welcomed the inquiry; all had those which castigated or belittled it. Whatever the reaction, there was little indifference; farm papers were either "for" the investigation or "against" it, and opinions were expressed in no uncertain terms.
The Literary Digest, although noting some exceptions, found that "farm journals show much sympathy with the Commission's work." Those laudatory of the investigation interpreted it as a long overdue recognition of the problems of the farmer. They not only welcomed the interest now indicated but also urged the rural population to cooperate with the Commission in every possible way.

Many of the papers which approved the appointment of the Commission singled out the President's part in it for special praise. The Texas Farmer (Dallas) called it "an inspiration on the part of the President," and The Nebraska Farmer (Lincoln) referred to it as "another star in his constellation." Hoard's Dairyman, too, was pleased that the President had not "forgotten to give some attention to the farm problems." Wallace's Farmer, needless to say was ardent in its approval of the inquiry and in its support of the President. It referred to the plan as being almost equal in importance to the "square deal" and the conservation movement. 39

In the south, too, there was strong support for the Commission and praise for the President. It was commended by the Southern Ruralist of Atlanta, the Inland Farmer of Louisville, and the Progressive Farmer of Raleigh. The latter accepted it as a demonstration of President Roosevelt's "genuine interest in the problems of the farm," and

---

38 "Farm Papers on Rural Uplift," The Literary Digest, XXXVII (Dec. 26, 1908), 965.

39 Quoted from The Literary Digest, loc. cit.; Hoard's Dairyman, XXXIX (Sept. 4, 1908), 848; "Farm Life Commission," Wallace's Farmer, XXXIII (Aug. 21, 1908), 994.
proclaimed it as evidence that the "tide is turning toward the farmer on the farm."\textsuperscript{40}

Many of the agricultural journals which were sympathetic to the Commission echoed this sentiment of gratification that the needs and desires of the farmer were finally to receive recognition in Washington. \textit{The American Cultivator} (Boston) pointed out that this was the first time that "farmers as a body have ever had a chance to get into touch with the leaders of the nation's law-making, and the opportunity should be taken full advantage of." \textit{The Ohio Farmer} (Cleveland) sounded the same note.\textsuperscript{41}

A number of the farm papers deplored the initial lack of farm interest in the Commission and sought to stimulate more enthusiasm by frequent articles and editorials. \textit{The American Agriculturist} (New York) was one of these which reminded its readers every week or so that the investigation was to be made. Later it found frequent opportunity to observe that it was underway and reported favorably those hearings held in the area which it served. Its subscribers were urged to request and answer the circular sent out by the Commission, to attend hearings, and to use the local meetings to discuss their own problems. \textit{The Agriculturist} prepared its subscribers to give close attention to the publication of the \textit{Report} by observing, after the completion of the tour of

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{40}Quoted from \textit{The Literary Digest, loc. cit.}; "The Needs of the Farmer on the Farm," \textit{The Progressive Farmer}, XXIII (Aug. 27, 1908), 8; "Country Life Commission in the South," \textit{ibid.} (Nov. 12, 1908), 12.

\textsuperscript{41}Quoted in \textit{The Literary Digest, loc. cit.}; "Investigating Rural Life," \textit{The Ohio Farmer}, XCIII (Nov. 7, 1908), 370.
investigation, that in no section of the country were farmers completely satisfied with their situation. It urged them to consider the Report carefully so that they could get the most benefit from it.42

The Ohio Farmer, too, attempted to develop support for the investigation. Insisting that any effort to improve the condition of agriculture deserved the support of the farmer and the farm paper, it urged its readers to cooperate by answering circulars and participating in local meetings. Furthermore, The Farmer encouraged its subscribers to press for the reforms it had always been particularly interested in: better roads, federal aid for agricultural high schools, postal savings, and parcel post.43

Wallaces' Farmer gave publicity to keep the work of the Commission before the farm public as faithfully as any of the farm papers. Because of his service on the Commission, its editor was able to give more detailed accounts of progress in the making of plans and drawing up of

---


questionnaires. Occasional reports of the success of the tour of investigation were also published.

Other farm papers were sceptical or hostile to the idea of an investigating commission. Some questioned the need of the investigation, some doubted that it could have any value. One of the principal bases of criticism in the farm papers was to be expected: there was no need for government concern and intervention because the farmer could take care of himself! This argument usually proceeded to resent the fact that the farmers had been set apart as a class deserving of "uplift" and to assert that it would have been more to the point for the government to have investigated the urban indigent.

The second major basis for dissent was that, although there was a problem that required government attention, the appointment of an investigating commission was not the remedy. Like the newspapers which made this criticism many agricultural journals urged the government to remove the economic discrimination against the farmer instead of attempting to make political capital out of concern for social reform.

The Farm and Fireside (Springfield, O.) observed that it "did not seem necessary to shed very many tears of sympathy and commiseration over the supposedly disconsolate and woebegone condition of the American farmer." The Maine Farmer made the additional point that although it might be necessary for a government commission to go "slumming in the darker portions of the South and West" it was most unfortunate that the "farmer should have been singled out as a class for special reformatory

work . . . without distinction as to State or section and to be held up
to the public eye as being in ignominious need of missionary reclamation." *The Homestead* (Des Moines) objected that the elevation of
country life could best be accomplished by the farmer, himself.\(^{45}\)

The farm papers which supported the investigation attempted to
answer this criticism from within their ranks by explaining that the
creation of the commission was not a reflection on the self-reliance of
the farmers. *The American Agriculturist* published an interview in which
a leading agricultural educator assured its readers: "To me it seems
not at all invidious that a commission should undertake the investigation
of social conditions among farmers."\(^{46}\)

*Wallaces' Farmer* attacked the dissident editors for attempting to
"curry favor with their readers by 'resenting with scorn' the suggestion
that the farmer needs any help from the government." The *Farmer*, how­
ever, was careful to explain to its subscribers that, although they
probably did not need the attention of a government investigation, they
should cooperate. On the basis of their success and prosperity they
could give information which might make life pleasanter for farmers in
less fortunate areas.\(^{47}\)

In the same vein other magazines urged their readers to sympathize
with the work of the Commission although they, themselves, did not

\(^{45}\)Quoted from *The Literary Digest*, *loc. cit.*

\(^{46}\) *The American Agriculturist*. LXXXI (Nov. 28, 1908), 503.

\(^{47}\)"The Plutocratic Farmers," *Wallaces' Farmer*, XXXIII (Nov. 27,
require its concern. The Ohio Farmer's cartoon character, "Uncle Hiram," complete with beard and pitchfork, observed: "I don't see no reason to kick on the President's appointing a commission to try to improve farm life. Just 'cause I've got all I need and know how to have a good time's no sign that all the rest do. . . ."48

The journals which opposed the commission while recognizing that there was a farm problem had their own solutions. Farm, Stock, and Home (Minneapolis), for instance, insisted that it did not need an investigation to know that the farmers' problems were the result of speculation in farm products. Field and Farm (Denver) referred to the appointment of the Commission as merely a "political move." Its own prescription was the traditional agrarian remedy: cheap money, cheaper transportation, and control of trusts.49

The Country Gentleman (Albany, N. Y.) took the same attitude with special emphasis on the tariff and more pointed opposition of the Roosevelt conservation policy which it held responsible for the lack of prosperity of the eastern farmers. By providing for the reclamation of arid western lands, the government had placed the eastern farmer who had a farm to sell or who tried to hire labor at a distinct disadvantage. Moreover, the willingness of the administration to lower the duty on Cuban and Philippine sugar was interpreted by this journal as an attempt to encourage the importing of sugar at the expense of the American sugar

48 "Uncle Hiram," The Ohio Farmer, XCIII (Nov. 7, 1908), 375.

49 Cited in The Literary Digest, XXXVII (Dec. 25, 1908), 965.
producer. With the exception of the cancellation of this duty, *The Country Gentleman* opposed all government efforts specifically to aid agriculture. 50

This proscription included even the publications of the Department of Agriculture. The education of the farmer, *The Gentleman* argued, could be much better accomplished by schools, universities, and farm papers. In short, the government should not "paternalize" the farmer or appear to placate his remonstrances by appointing a "farm-uplift junketing commission." 51

The journals with commendatory attitudes toward the objectives and methods of the Commission sought to take advantage of the flurry of public interest to press for legislative approval of reforms when such action was appropriate. More important, they urged farmers to bestir themselves to improve those conditions which could be bettered by individual initiative and community action.

*The American Agriculturist* pointed out that not only was it in sympathy with the recommendations of the Commission, it had always advocated just those reforms. Instead of jeering "nothing new," however, it urged its subscribers to read the Report and the President's message carefully and then "get busy" and "do something about them." They should


be able to take advantage of the opportunity to "secure some practical, tangible benefits that every intelligent farmer needs and wants." 52

The Ohio Farmer, too, observed that the Report discussed "seriously and sanely some of the general features of country life." Again, the readers were reminded that the "solution of many of these problems lies with the farmers themselves." The service of the Commission had been to "place the facts before the public in such a way that remedial measures may be started on broad and permanent lines." In other words, The Ohio Farmer hoped to see greater effort directed toward obtaining better roads, better schools, parcel post and postal savings. 53

Wallaces' Farmer not only warmly approved of the Report but devoted its resources to giving it greater circulation and attempting to keep interest in it alive. Liberal extracts were printed from time to time after it became evident that Congress was adamant in its refusal to make an appropriation for its publication and dissemination. Explaining the failure to obtain the appropriation as a political move, an attempt to discredit the President, Wallaces' attempted to develop sufficient opinion for the Report to persuade Congress to continue the life of the Commission. Repeated references were made to the need to tabulate and classify the information now available. Comparisons were


made with the cost of naval appropriations, and the magazine asked:
"Does the prosperity and happiness of this country depend upon agriculture or warships?"\(^5^4\)

The *Country Gentleman* was as critical of the *Report* as it had been derogatory of the Commission. It referred to it as a "verbose report" that "reminds one of . . . a mixture of milk and vichy." It admitted there was some "matter of value in the compound," but this substance was not new. The valuable recommendations were reforms that agricultural magazines had been advocating for years. Its principal criticism, however, grew out of its initial opposition. The Commission had missed a great opportunity to bring to public attention the basic problems. It had not considered the tariff problem and the unfortunate results of the reclamation policy. The *Country Gentleman* professed itself not surprised that it had not tackled these—that would not have been good politics. In short, this farm paper agreed with the summation of Congressman Tawney that an appropriation to complete and publish the investigation would be a waste of money.\(^5^5\)

The role of the Commission on Country Life in the creation of a national opinion which would demand legislative and voluntary, institutional and individual reforms to "even up" the social and economic potential of country life was not entirely successful. Although the


opinion revealed in the press indicated that there was no substantial objection to the creation of the Commission on Country Life or to its findings as set forth in the Report, there was no insistent demand that its conclusions be implemented. The newspapers and periodicals in general circulation which were already sympathetic to the farmers' problems and to the ideals of social reform could now cite the authority of the President's Commission, but there was little change in the nature or tone of their reform proposals. Those whose sympathies lay elsewhere were not converted to support of the country life movement, nor were those who were indifferent to the subject transformed into energetic advocates of rural social amelioration.

Among the agricultural periodicals the situation was substantially the same. Those approving the Commission and its work had been urging many of the specific reforms it proposed for at least a decade. These were strengthened and encouraged by the investigation and the Report and stimulated to even greater exhortation of their readers to exert political pressure and assert individual initiative to improve roads, schools, churches, economic organization, and social and recreational opportunities. The journals opposed to government interference and those committed to strictly business programs of economic organization had their convictions buttressed by the apparent threat of federal interference and the illusions of utopian do-gooders.

Far from creating the insistent demand for rural reform which would result in the creation of "the good society" in the country side, the work of the Commission on Country Life had the result common to most propaganda efforts: it served to strengthen positions already held.
This was not, however, an unsubstantial contribution. For there were, as the Commission indicated, forces already operating to restore the church and school to positions of rural leadership. There were new forces, hardly discernible in 1908, gathering strength which were to have unforeseen influences on agricultural production and rural life. The Country Life Commission gave these institutions and agencies a common vocabulary in which to define their various contributions to the common goal. Moreover, it suggested to them types of action which would provide favorable publicity: surveys and conferences.

The full impact of the Report of the Country Life Commission did not fall on the man in the field to persuade him to undertake personal or community reform; it did not fall on the man in the street to convince him to cooperate politically to remove the farmers' disabilities. It fell on the man in the pulpit, the man in the extension agent's office, and the man or woman in the schoolroom. And it fell on men who, because of its influence, were to turn from preaching, teaching, and research to the study of rural sociology.
CHAPTER VI

"A CAMPAIGN FOR RURAL PROGRESS"

Post hoc reasoning might attribute the agricultural legislation of the succeeding two decades to the influence of the Commission on Country Life. For its Report did outline the measures to aid the farmer which were adopted in subsequent administrations. The expansion of the facilities of the Post Office Department to provide parcel post and postal savings services was accomplished by the Taft administration. Federal action in establishing uniform standards of highway construction was not only initiated but the federal contribution to financing was also begun. In the same way the Wilson administration gave federal encouragement to agricultural and domestic science education in the public schools and to adult education through extension work. Long term credit in 1916 and intermediate credit in 1923 were subsidized by the federal government on a more generous scale than the Commission had visualized. And control over the middleman was provided by encouragement of cooperative organization and by federal supervision of stockyards in the '20's.

Recommendations for revision of general legislation to remove the disabilities of the farmers did not fare so well. As part of the general population they received more protection from the Clayton Act and the Federal Trade Commission; they also shared in the benefits of the more adequate currency and credit provided by the Federal Reserve System.

159
Presumably they, as consumers, would have benefitted from the lower rates of the Underwood Tariff had conditions of international trade remained normal. Their interest, along with that of the rest of the public, received nominal recognition by the creation of the Federal Power Commission for the protection of rivers and streams. There is no evidence, however, that it was concern for the countryman that motivated Congress in the adoption of this general legislation called for by the Commission on Country Life.

Indeed, the influence of the Report on even the specifically agricultural legislation is difficult to determine, for an important consideration in assessing the effect of the work of the Commission is its association with other reform movements. Many of the general reforms identified with the progressive movement contributed to the achievement of the goals outlined by the Commission.

Moreover, the incorporation into its Report of many agricultural reforms which had been advocated for over a decade makes it impossible to attribute their adoption to the work of the Commission. The public support already generated would eventually have brought most of these recommendations to fruition. But while the Commission's endorsement of these reforms may have made it but a stage in their development, it was, nevertheless, an important stage for if the Commission on Country Life was not responsible for the realization of these goals, it did accelerate their attainment.

In almost every instance the proponents of a projected reform seized upon the Commission's findings as conclusive, authoritative evidence that it was needed, and gave credit to it for awakening public
interest and strengthening public support. Moreover, the work of the Commission, by focusing on the inadequacies of country life gave them the center of the stage and established the various proposals as necessary but not exclusive means to the end of making rural life more attractive. The attention attracted by the Commission and its work made a movement out of the previously scattered, if sincere, efforts of individuals and groups.

The most significant result of the work of the Commission, then, was to give birth to the vague, diffuse, and unorganized—but frequently referred to—country life movement. Whether it was also referred to as the rural betterment movement, farm uplift, or rural awakening, there was a general feeling that a significant stirring was taking place at the grass roots which needed only organization and guidance to produce a new, better, and uniquely agrarian civilization. And it was commonly recognized that it was the Commission which was responsible for stimulating this interest.¹

The forces working for rural improvement adopted the techniques suggested by the Report. In its broad recommendations the Commission had urged that there be (1) a survey to reveal, in detail, the problems and possibilities of the countryside, (2) a "nationalized extension work," carried out by the state universities, to spread knowledge about improving living conditions as well as production techniques, (3) a "campaign for rural progress," through the holding of conferences, to unite all the forces interested in "one forward movement for the rebuilding of country life."

These were the three prerequisites for the stimulation of leadership, the modification of habits and attitudes, the inspiration for progress, the spread of knowledge, and the provision of guidance which would enable the rural population to develop its new, more satisfying culture.

Two of the three recommendations of the Commission, that for an extensive program of surveys and that for a series of conferences, were realized spontaneously under voluntary sponsorship. The influence of the Commission is direct and clear. The third, that for a nationalized

---


extension system, was eventually implemented by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 which provided for cooperation of the Department of Agriculture and the land grant colleges in the financing and supervision of rural advisers—county agents. The relation to the Commission's Report is not so close.

* * * * * * * *

The Commission had pointed out that before effective action to improve rural life could be taken by either governmental or voluntary organizations, there needed to be an extensive and intensive program of surveys. The suggestion of the Commission was readily accepted by several types of organizations and the rural survey became one of the major evidences of the growth of the country life movement.

In the adoption of the survey as its principal tool, the country life movement put to work in a broader field a technique which had already been invented. Bailey, the foremost exponent of the survey, had used the method for collecting and disseminating information about horticultural production at Cornell. He encouraged his students and colleagues to expand the technique to include economic conditions and to develop the "Cornell Farm Management Survey," soon adopted by other universities and the extension service of the Department of Agriculture.3

The survey had also been experimented with, independently, as an instrument of social investigation. Under the guidance of Franklin H. Giddings, increasingly critical of the propensity of sociologists to generalize without adequate factual basis, a few graduate students at Columbia University had made studies of individual urban and rural communities. One of these students, Warren H. Wilson, was soon to become a leader in the development and application of the social survey technique to the condition of the country church and a moving force in the country life movement. 4

The purpose of the rural survey was twofold. In the first place it gathered and classified information necessary for defining rural problems and formulating general principles for their solution. In the second place, by publishing its findings, it called attention to shortcomings and stimulated support for a program to remedy deficiencies.

The Commission's recommendation served as a signal for an epidemic of social and economic surveys made by individuals and voluntary organizations. The first of these to be published, and the example for many to follow, was issued in 1911 by the Cornell Experiment Station. Bailey wrote the introduction, stating that it was a response to the suggestion of the Country Life Commission for "taking stock." 5 Subsequently surveys were sponsored by church organizations, educational

---

4 Edmund de S. Brunner, The Growth of a Science, pp. 4, 7; Warren H. Wilson, Quaker Hill; A Sociological Study (New York: Columbia University, 1907).

institutions, magazines, philanthropic organizations, chambers of commerce, and individuals.

Religious institutions in particular hastened to obtain information which might reestablish the influence of the church in rural areas. Among the first of these contributions, in time and in significance, were those made by Wilson as head of the rural work of the Home Missions Board of the Presbyterian Church. In spite of his earlier work at Columbia, it was the Report of the Country Life Commission which moved him to action. In all he contributed some sixteen studies of the rural church. Commission influence is clear, too, on the survey whose publication was sponsored by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. Commission member Gifford Pinchot collaborated with a clergyman cousin, C. O. Gill, to write this classic statement of the causes of decline of rural churches. Gill subsequently, as Field Secretary of the Commission on Church and Country Life of the Federal Council, directed a county-by-county survey of the rural church in Ohio.

Not only did national church organizations sponsor surveys, they also encouraged local ministers to use the technique to gain information about the whole community for use in developing a more dynamic social service program. To facilitate surveys of the individual communities by local personnel, the Presbyterian church published a guide for the making of community studies. This guide emphasized, as did the surveys,
economic and social as well as moral and religious conditions. A similar outline was drawn up by G. Frederick Wells, a frequent contributor of articles on the role of the church in the country life movement.  

Educational institutions also turned the survey to their purposes. It was used, for practical purposes, in the public school system. C. J. Galpin, one of the early rural sociologists, adapted it, at the University of Wisconsin, to the use of the country school districts. Teachers had their pupils bring in information about outstanding "social facts and items." These were summarized and published by the county school superintendent in local papers to stimulate the introduction of farm and household conveniences in backward areas. The Upper Peninsula Education Association of Michigan used the survey to reveal the inadequacies of the existing school system and to stimulate the community to improve it. The possibilities inherent in the use of the survey for local school purposes were sufficient to justify attention in professional educational literature. In addition to a small volume devoted to school surveys, every text on rural education had a chapter on it.  

---

8 Anna B. Taft, Community Study for Country Districts, A Method of Investigating a Small Village or Section of the Open Country (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States, 1912); George Frederick Wells, A Social Survey for Rural Communities, A Practical Scheme for the Investigation of the Structure, Problems, and Possibilities of Rural, Village and Other Communities from the Point of View of the Church and Its Work (New York: The Willett Press, 1911).  

Institutions of higher education, too, sponsored economic and social surveys on a county and community basis. Occasionally farm management surveys encouraged by agricultural economics departments were expanded to include social as well as economic conditions. More often the projects were inspired by the nascent rural sociology departments. Fully as interested in improving rural conditions as in uncovering social laws, rural sociologists justified their work as an incentive and guide to others to engage in similar projects for rural betterment.\(^\text{10}\) That these surveys were, indeed, intended to have immediate practical results is indicated by the program at the State Normal School at Athens, Georgia. There the rural sociology department sponsored an organization, "The Georgia Club," whose members assembled data about their home counties. The information was then published in local newspapers to stimulate interest in better agricultural practices, better education, and similar country life objectives. In addition to getting and publishing the facts, there was a follow-up program by which an "affiliated" member helped to organize the county to improve conditions.\(^\text{11}\)

Beginning to perform the function assigned it by the Country Life Commission, the federal Bureau of Education reported local and state surveys of importance. To enable American rural schools to benefit from

\(^{10}\)Brunner, \textit{loc. cit.}

the experience of the more advanced schools for country life in foreign
countries it also published the results of surveys it conducted abroad. 12

Towns and cities also used the survey to determine how the social
as well as the economic needs of the surrounding countryside could best
be met. The city of Delavan, Wisconsin, for instance, utilized Galpin's
survey of that area to determine the services that would bring them
rural customers. 13

Magazines interested in the life of the rural housekeeper or in
social amelioration also sponsored surveys. The Good Housekeeping,
critical of the President's commission because it included no woman,
inaugurated its own investigation. In cooperation with a number of
agricultural magazines it asked readers to send answers to detailed
questions about the amount and kinds of work done by women, the conveniences and sanitation of the home, and the opportunities for social
intercourse. Well-pleased with the response, the Good Housekeeping
turned over the answers to the General Federation of Women's Clubs for
action. 14 Appropriately, The Survey also conducted a survey.

By 1916 the rural survey had received sufficient status to be
considered at an American Sociological Society meeting which was devoted

12 H. W. Foght, "Rural Education" in U. S., Bureau of Education,
Biennial Survey of Education. 1916-1918, I, 183.

13 Frank Parker Stockbridge, "Two Cities That Turned Farmer," The
World's Work, XXV (Feb., 1913), 467.

14 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "That Rural Home Inquiry: Why Are
There No Women on the President's Commission?" Good Housekeeping,
XLVIII (Jan., 1909), 120-22; American Agriculturist, LXXXIII (Jan. 2,
to rural life. It was compared, on the one hand, to a businessman's
inventory to determine the relative condition of his enterprise, and, on
the other, to a physician's diagnosis necessary to ascertain the appro-
priate treatment of a patient. Both of its purposes were justified.
The gathering of facts would provide the basis for general statements
and conclusions: this was the scientific purpose. The practical con-
tribution lay in providing an object lesson of success or failure.
There was a further, psychological value in that a local investigation
usually aroused interest in local problems and stimulated an effort to
solve them. 15

But the influence and contribution of the survey as a phase of
the country life movement was not confined to the locality in which the
survey was made. That portion of the national periodical press which
was sympathetic to the attempt to better rural social conditions
encouraged and publicized their results. Surveys thereby became instru-
ments of propaganda for the country life movement as a whole. They also
contributed to the impression that modern America was in the midst of a
great era of far-reaching and fundamental social reform based on
scientific investigation and rational planning. 16

* * * * * * *

15 C. W. Thompson, "Rural Surveys," American Sociological Society,

16 "The Great Country Life Movement," The World's Work, XXIII
(Apr., 1912), 616-19; "Beginnings of a Revolution," ibid., XV (Dec.,
1912), 143; "A Remarkable Study of a Rural Community," ibid., XXVI (July,
1913), 263-64.
In much the same way, the Commission's suggestion that conferences be called to reconcile ideas and coordinate action to improve country life was taken up by religious and educational institutions. Urban and commercial interests also occasionally used the device to indicate their sympathy with the needs of the contributory countryside. Innumerable meetings at local, state, and inter-state levels served, as had the surveys, to crystallize opinion and direct attention to the problems of the farmer.

Here, again, it should be recognized that the conference approach was not an entirely new one. Just as Bailey had established the survey at Cornell, so Butterfield had sponsored the agricultural conference at the several colleges with which he had been associated. As early as 1902 he had persuaded the political science department at Michigan Agricultural College to cooperate with the agriculture department in sponsoring a conference on the social and economic problems of the farmer. Under his influence, Rhode Island College of Agriculture, in 1904, and Massachusetts Agricultural College three years later, held Country Life Conferences. By 1908 his influence in New England was sufficiently strong to bring about the establishing of the New England Conference for Rural Progress which held annual meetings thereafter.17

The Commission's suggestion that conferences be called appealed immediately to agrarian social reformers. For the next decade there were conferences sponsored by state universities, agricultural colleges, and normal schools; conferences called by public school officials; conferences sponsored by agricultural organizations and state boards of agriculture; conferences called by church organizations and Young Men's Christian Associations; conferences called by chambers of commerce and other business associations. There were conferences on the county, state, regional and national levels. Some gave more or less formal instruction; some provided exhortation in speeches by commission members and others sharing their agrarian philosophy; some provided only for the exchange of opinion and local experiences. All served to give national publicity to the country life movement.  

Massachusetts Agricultural College expanded its leadership in the summer conference program. In addition to an annual conference for rural leaders, it provided a two-weeks school in which special consideration was given to the preparation and problems of country librarians, ministers, teachers, and other professional leaders. Following this example, many colleges in agricultural states called conferences. The University of Virginia was one of the first and began, in 1908, to hold

---


annual Rural Life Conferences which attracted leaders from all parts of
the south. In 1912, West Virginia followed with its first Country
Life Conference as its contribution to the "present widespread movement
for the betterment of conditions in country life, socially, religiously,
educationally, and economically." In these land grant colleges the country life conference was
often made an adjunct of "farmers' week" in order to secure greater
participation. This was true of the Wisconsin Country Life Conferences
held annually at Madison, beginning in 1911, and of the Missouri Country
Life Conference, established in 1913. Since other organizations con­
cerned with the technical aspects of agriculture were meeting during
farmers' week, the latter conference was free to concentrate its atten­
tion on social and community problems such as church, school, clubs,
homes, and "all those better things of life for which we are all
seeking."

Occasionally the currently popular "institutes," a form of uni­
versity extension, afforded opportunity for a conference. In North

---

20Carney, Country Life and the Country School, pp. 307-308; "Rural
Life Conference Held at the University of Virginia" in U. S., Bureau of

21West Virginia Country Life Conference, Proceedings, 1913.

22Wisconsin Country Life Conference, Proceedings, 1911; Galpin,
My Drift into Rural Sociology, p. 30; "A Country Life Conference," The
Independent, LXXIII (July 4, 1912), 53; "Country Life Conference in
Wisconsin," The Survey, XXX (Apr. 12, 1913), 53-55; "Missouri Country
Life Conference" in Missouri State Board of Agriculture, 45th Annual
Report, 1912, pp. 276-77; "Report of Secretary," ibid., p. 27; "Report
of Missouri Farmers' Week," ibid., 1913, pp. 68 ff., "Report of Secre­
Dakota such a boys' and girls' institute at Fargo was accompanied by a Country Life Conference for adults. Attended by county superintendents of schools, country preachers, and government specialists, there were discussions of the whole gamut of rural problems and institutions in an "atmosphere of practical scientific knowledge."  

Public school officials employed the technique to improve schools and country life. Soon after the Report was completed, the superintendent of schools of Indiana called a conference of the schools of that and the four adjoining states to consider ways they could further the love of country life among students. About the same time the superintendent of the Oklahoma schools called a meeting of citizens of that and surrounding states to meet at Guthrie to confer on methods of improving social conditions on the farm and of awakening a new interest in country life. This convention of the Southwest Interstate Commission on Country Life achieved national prominence as an indication that the Report of the President's Commission had been effective. Attended by delegates from seven states, it devoted its attention to practical subjects such as better country schools and country roads in such a way that it was expected that both the teachers and farmers would be aroused to action.

Church organizations were as ready to respond to the call for conferences as they had been to the suggestion for surveys. Although


their primary motive was to revitalize the rural religious institutions, these church conferences considered the whole series of social and technical problems of rural life. Conferences sponsored by churches, or by agricultural colleges for the benefit of country clergy, were often devoted to complementing the background and information of rural ministers by giving them instruction in rural sociology, agricultural marketing, and even elementary principles of agriculture.25

The sponsoring of conferences for those interested in country life was accepted as one of the major functions of the Commission on Church and Country Life of the Federal Council of Churches. The most outstanding of these conferences was that arranged in conjunction with the 1915 meeting of the Federal Council at which the importance of invigorating the church was confirmed by an address by President Woodrow Wilson entitled: "The Rural Church as a Vitalizing Agent."26

The Young Men's Christian Association, affiliated with the churches in rural as well as urban areas, also utilized the conference method as a means of stimulating interest and unifying effort. Innumerable county conferences were held, and the proceedings of regional conferences were deemed sufficiently significant to deserve publication as small books.


A so-called "International Conference" became an annual event at which county work leaders met informally with country life movement advisers such as Willet M. Hayes, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, and A. R. Mann, Dean of the Cornell School of Agriculture.27

The impulse to confer on country life was not confined to religious and educational institutions. Organizations of businessmen in cities of all sorts and sizes in all areas of the country utilized the conference device in a spirit of enlightened self-interest to show their interest in adjacent rural areas. Although there was undoubtedly an element of commercial promotion in the motivation of these municipal bodies, it must be noted that their action was entirely in conformity with the country life movement.28

Most energetic in its encouragement of the country life movement was the Spokane, Washington, Chamber of Commerce. In addition to other means of encouraging the movement, it sponsored country life conferences including one of a week's duration which was national in its scope. The Commercial Club of St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1913, sponsored the Interstate Agricultural and Industrial Congress and invited farmers from neighboring states to hear distinguished speakers on farm management.

27 Rural Manhood, I (Jan., 1910), 33; "Y. M. C. A. Conference on Country Life," The Survey, XXXI (Dec. 13, 1913), 307. The small books are edited by the County Work Department of the International Committee and are The Rural Church and Community Betterment (1911), The Country Church and Rural Welfare (1912), The Home of the Countryside (1917), and Balancing Country Life (1917).

farm living, and the relationship between town and country. The response was so enthusiastic that the conference was repeated the next year with an expanded program.29

National business organizations also used the conference technique to show their interest in the farmer's welfare. The American Bankers' Association sponsored national and state conferences which followed the pattern of other country life conferences. Speeches and discussions were devoted to the general social and institutional problems as well as to methods of improving production and the question of the banker's responsibility for modernizing agriculture through the provision of capital for better stock and equipment.30

As the snowballing interest in country life brought urban and financial concern about rural conditions, it also brought agricultural organizations, primarily interested in the techniques of production, to include consideration of social questions in their annual conventions so


that they became, in effect, country life conferences. Thus the National Corn Association's Fourth Annual Meeting (1911) terminated in a national Rural Life Conference which attracted leading rural sociologists and country life leaders. In the same way in the far west, the International Dry Farming Congress was, by 1912, beginning to include social issues in its programs and to serve as a "nucleus of a complete country life movement for this section." This organization followed the growing trend toward explicit recognition of the role of the farm woman in country life and the emphasis on "better living" by sponsoring the International Congress of Farm Women.31

As early as 1912 these conferences had become significant enough to deserve the consideration and commendation of social scientists. A volume of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science was, in that year, devoted to rural problems, and included an article on rural conferences which predicted beneficial results from them. They would encourage the scientific study of society through the gathering of social data, and they would develop a group of young social scientists specializing in rural social problems.32

The culmination of the "conference stage" of the country life movement came in 1919 with the calling of the First National Country


32 Kates, loc. cit., p. 115.
Life Conference. Butterfield, active in its formation, could regard it as the climax of his campaign for the federation of forces working for country life reform.

From the point of view of the subsequent development of the country life movement, the institutional affiliations and interests of those present at this first meeting are significant. They were for the most part educators, churchmen, government representatives, delegates of humanitarian organizations and rural sociologists. There were few spokesmen for technical progress and reform of the business aspects of agriculture. Advocates of cooperative marketing, present if not prominent in most of the earlier conferences, did not get a hearing. Nor did the businessmen's organizations and the national farm organizations send delegates.  

In short, the National Country Life Association represented the "better living" rather than the "better farming" or "better business" phases of the country life movement. Its interests were to lie in the sociological rather than the economic problems of the farmer; its influence was to be felt in academic circles rather than at the grass roots. It was to emphasize farming as a way of life rather than as a way of making a living.

* * * * * * *

---

The Commission on Country Life did not originate the idea of extension work; it did introduce it to a wider audience as the most effective method of arousing the farmer to adopt new methods and to develop a new attitude toward his work and his life in the country. The publicity its investigation and Report gave to agrarian discontent, to the failure of most farmers to use scientific techniques, to the hardships and drudgery of farm women, to the rural exodus, brought to public attention the need for such a program.

At the time the Commission made its investigation there was already considerable interest in extending information to the farmers stemming from two principal sources: the agricultural colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture. The agricultural colleges relied primarily on somewhat formal methods of instruction—farmers' institutes, movable schools of agriculture, short courses, correspondence courses, agricultural trains, occasional demonstrations by university experts. The method was that of the lecture or laboratory with the Grange Hall or field or orchard as the classroom. The cooperative demonstration work of the Department of Agriculture made a "demonstrator" of a respected and reliable farmer in the community who agreed to follow the instructions of an agent of the Department. It was the agricultural, adult educational application of "learning by doing."

Although their methods of approach were different, both types of extension work had as their ultimate goal the improvement of the life of the farmer—and both used the authority of the President's Commission to develop national support for federal legislation to provide generous
appropriations for their work. In part because of the difference in philosophy and method and the reluctance with which the agricultural colleges accepted Department of Agriculture supervision and the "county agent system," legislation was delayed until 1914. In that year the Smith-Lever Act brought under one system the primarily educational activities of the land grant colleges and the action programs of the Department of Agriculture. The extension agents were to be advised by the colleges, subject to the approval of the Department. The work was to be financed "cooperatively" from both federal and non-federal funds, the latter to include contributions from local governmental units and voluntary organizations as well as from state appropriations. 34

Historians of American agriculture and farm policy are still debating the wisdom of the terms of this arrangement which emphasized the agent and encouraged the development of local bodies to support him. For as these local organizations grew in numbers and importance they federated into state associations and, eventually, into the American Farm Bureau Federation, an organization whose purposes were more political than educational. 35 The details of the controversy over the


35 In addition to H. M. Kile, the "official" historian of the American Farm Bureau Federation, who, of course, approves the role of the county agent in organizing the early farm bureaus (The Farm Bureau Movement (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924)), J. C. Bailey, in Seaman Knapp, Schoolmaster of American Agriculture, also justifies the farm bureaus because they made the work of the county agent effective. An outstanding critic is Grant McConnell who, in The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), reproves the agricultural colleges for acquiescing in the legislation which he considers compromising in every sense of the word.
relation of the extension agent and the farm bureau are not pertinent in this context, but a brief consideration of the background of these two progenitors of extension work may contribute to a better understanding of the role played by the Commission on Country Life on the passage of the Smith-Lever Act and of the influence of the country life movement on the development of extension work.

Since the last decades of the nineteenth century some of the agricultural colleges had been actively expanding their off-campus programs to provide a more vigorous attack on agricultural ignorance and indifference. Bailey and Butterfield were leaders in the campaign. The latter had successfully importuned the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations to give increasing recognition to the importance of extension as early as 1905. Four years later he cited the Commission's Report to call the attention of the Association to the need for member institutions to expand their extension activities and to urge them to establish separate departments and divisions to carry on the work.36

Extension activities of the universities soon proved to be so popular that currently available funds were inadequate. The necessity for federal appropriations earmarked specifically for this purpose became apparent. In 1909 the Association endorsed the principle of federal aid for extension purposes and began to support legislation which would provide such funds to the land grant colleges. The bill

approved by the Association, the McLaughlin bill, would have left the colleges free to determine how and for what types of extension the money could be spent.37

More obviously effective and better publicized was the cooperative demonstration work carried on by agents of the Department of Agriculture with the financial cooperation of the Rockefeller General Education Board. This work, originated and directed by Seaman A. Knapp, had begun in Texas in 1904 and had been so successful that it had spread throughout the southwest so that its adoption in other sections was soon seriously considered. The success of the cooperative demonstration work recommended it to diverse individuals and groups. In his instructions to the Country Life Commission, President Roosevelt had specifically mentioned it; educational and church organizations recommending extension work had this type in mind; an independent philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, offered to help subsidize the expansion of the county agent system, as the cooperative demonstration work was beginning to be called.38


Cooperative demonstration work was further supported, endorsed, and publicized by business interests which were anxious to stimulate agricultural prosperity and to improve their own public relations in rural areas. Organizations such as the National Council of North American Grain Exchanges, the National Fertility League, the Better Farming Association of North Dakota, and the Commission on Agricultural and Financial Development and Education of the American Bankers' Association worked at national and local levels to encourage the employment of county agents. They also petitioned the Department of Agriculture for increased federal aid for this type of extension.\(^39\)

It should be noted that university extension forces had not been averse to the assistance of private business enterprise. Prior to the work of the Country Life Commission they had begun to cooperate with the railroads in the equipping of agricultural trains to disseminate information on agricultural production, seed selection, road-building, and similar topics. The success of these initial enterprises in combination with the interest aroused by the Commission's Report led to considerable expansion of this particular form of extension activity.\(^40\)

No account of the participation of business interests in the extension movement would be complete, however, unless it also called attention to the grass-roots movement of local businessmen to increase farm efficiency. Again the beginnings of cooperation of business interests


\(^{40}\) True, Agricultural Extension, pp. 28-30.
with farming communities antedates the investigation of the Commission. In 1898 the American Association of Farmers' Institute Managers was informed that the businessmen of Minnesota had recognized that it was to their benefit for the farmer to use improved methods, and that they were lending their support to local farmers' institutes, often a form of university extension. 41

Knapp, too, had recognized the importance of community support for his program and had made every effort to obtain it. He had instructed his agents not only to get the support of the local newspaper but also to organize a committee which should include the outstanding bankers and merchants as well as the most progressive farmers. Soon after the success of Knapp's methods was demonstrated, those local interests in the south which depended on the farming population for their profits began to contribute voluntarily and generously to obtain an agent for their county alone. Beginning in 1906, within five years these contributions were as great as the funds contributed by the General Education Board. Two years later they were almost equal in amount to the combined funds of the Board and the Department of Agriculture. 42

41 American Association of Farmers' Institute Workers, Proceedings of the 13th Annual Meeting, 1898, p. 49.

The effectiveness of cooperative demonstration work in the south stimulated business interests and chambers of commerce elsewhere to take the initiative in employing a county agent. Contemporary reports and those written soon after this expansion of the county agent system into the north and west usually attribute much of the increased interest in agrarian welfare to the work and Report of the Commission on Country Life. The best-known example of the initiative of business organizations in the employment of farm advisers is the "farm bureau" of the Chamber of Commerce of Binghamton, New York, which gave the local organization for the support of the county agent the name it was eventually to bear.  

Country life leaders did not consider the concern of the business community for the financing of an agricultural specialist strange or self-seeking. Indeed, one of the objectives of the movement's publicity had been to awaken the conscience of urban leaders and to encourage such cooperation. Bailey had emphasized the necessity of city people working with country people. He, himself, was willing to cooperate with national organizations of businessmen and, along with other agricultural experts, made suggestions for the work of the crop improvement committee of the Council of North American Grain Exchanges. On the local level he was willing for business organizations to contribute to the expenses of an organization such as a farm bureau--if farmers dominated the organization.

\[43\] Burritt, op. cit., pp. 160-61, 169; Kile, The Farm Bureau Movement, pp. 94-99; True, Agricultural Extension, pp. 73-74, 77-79; Baker, County Agent, p. 33.
and provided sufficient financial support to prevent its being dependent on non-farm donations.  

More significant than their origin and initial support, from the point of view of the country life movement, is the acceptance by the extension service and the farm bureaus of country life ideals. The major question is whether, in their endeavor to extend information to the grass roots, the end was merely increased production or whether it also included the broader goals of "better business," "better living," and the creation of a characteristically agrarian civilization.

Both streams of development of extension work were aware of the social needs of the agricultural community long before they were merged in the Smith-Lever Act. University extension work had already begun to emphasize the ideals of better business and better living as institutes gave more attention to the problem of cooperative economic organization and labor-saving conveniences for the farm home. Fully evident as it may have been before the appointment of the Commission, this trend nevertheless became more decided after the publication of its Report. Women's institutes and women's sections of farmers' institutes grew in number and popularity. The formation of women's clubs to study domestic science became one of the popular new forms of university extension. Another was the sponsorship of boys' and girls' clubs, the forerunners of a national network of 4-H Clubs. Still another was the arrangement of conferences

---

for the encouragement and federation of country life forces. The Committee on Agricultural Extension of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations proposed that "extension teaching must be as broad as the problems of rural life." In addition to better methods of production and marketing it should encompass "rural beauty, the development of rural institutions, and the building up of the rural community."  

The stream of development originating with the Knapp agents, too, was fundamentally concerned with improving social and home conditions. Knapp had always insisted that better farming was only the means to a broader and richer life for the farmer. Although he was firm in his belief that better rural institutions and social organization could be obtained only as the result of better economic returns, he did incorporate...  

---


into his system several of the agents and agencies associated with the
more sociologically oriented phases of the country life movement. He
worked to develop the interest of rural youth in the possibilities of
agricultural occupations by encouraging his agents to cooperate with the
schools in organizing boys' and girls' clubs. He also attempted directly
to improve the efficiency and attractiveness of the farm home by adding
to his system the home demonstration agent. Home economics with its
implications for "better living" was thus introduced into the cooperative
demonstration extension work, as into the agricultural college extension
work, several years before the passage of the Smith-Lever Act. 47

Those engaged in extension activity before 1914, then, interpreted
their duties and objectives in terms which affirm their acceptance of the
ideals and goals of the country life movement. On every hand there was
the insistence that the ultimate purpose of extension, whether university-
sponsored or Knapp-inspired, was to make life on the farm easier, more
pleasant, and more interesting. 48

Country life ideals of better business and better living as well
as better farming influenced the authors of the Smith-Lever Act itself.
The report presented by Congressman Lever to the House of Representatives

47 J. C. Bailey, op. cit., p. 213-14, 233-36; Martin, The Demon-
stration Work, p. 61; Seaman A. Knapp, "Agricultural Education for the

48 F. P. Stockbridge, "The North Dakota Man Crop," The World’s
Work, XXV (Nov., 1912), 90-93; "Better Farming in North Dakota," ibid.,
XXVII (April, 1914), 614; Neale S. Knowles, "Woman’s Work—Its Place and
Importance," A. A. A. C. and E. S., Proceedings of Eighteenth Annual Con-
vention, 1911, p. 198; ibid., p. 216.
stated that the county agent was to assume leadership in every movement "... the aim of which is better farming, better living, more happiness, more education and better citizenship."\textsuperscript{49}

Although the first few years of the administration of the Smith-Lever Act were years of organization and adjustment, there were indications that the extension service would retain country life ideals. Assurance of improved rural homes was had by the specific stipulation that some of the funds provided were to be used for home demonstration work. In the south, particularly, the number of such representatives not only grew but the programs they introduced were extended far beyond the initial limits of tomato and canning clubs to encompass many varieties of rural home and community improvement.\textsuperscript{50} Boys' and girls' clubs grew in numbers and importance, and there was increased recognition of their value as a means of interesting rural youth in their own environment.\textsuperscript{51}

There is clear evidence that the agricultural colleges which would direct the program and train the agents expected county demonstration agents to be country life representatives. A survey of agricultural college requirements for preparation of the county agent revealed general


agreement that his training should include courses in rural sociology, rural economics, and rural social organization. Cornell, showing the persistence of the influence of the now-retired Bailey, in addition to these non-technical subjects, recommended a course in "Landscape Art."

Many of the leaders in the Department of Agriculture and the agricultural colleges, who would formulate the policy of the extension service, asserted strongly that the colleges had the responsibility for taking initiative in organizing rural communities for economic and social purposes. There was some question as to whether agents paid by the Smith-Lever funds could be expected to embark on projects of a social and recreational nature; so far as economic projects resulting in better marketing were concerned, C. B. Smith of the Department of Agriculture pointed out that these did come within the purview of the Act.52

The demands of World War I had their effects on the agrarian reform movement as on other phases of progressive reform. The influence on the extension service, because of its potential effect on increasing production, was most noticeable. In response to the increased need for farm products the production aspect of the agent's role was emphasized to the neglect of the organizational and home improvement phases. The result was not completely negative, however, from the long-range point of view. Local "councils of defense" provided organizations in rural areas which could be and were utilized by the extension service. Habits of working

together were established and methods of cooperation were learned.\textsuperscript{53} In the postwar period these were to be utilized to facilitate farm bureau federation and the development of marketing cooperatives as well as to promote the social and educational phases of the movement.

The home demonstration phase of extension work burgeoned unbelievably during the war, but the necessity for producing and conserving food consumed most of the time of the home demonstration agents. Again, however, the country life movement gained indirectly, for communities which had had the services of an emergency home demonstration agent were stimulated to find funds to employ one under the terms of the Smith-Lever Act. Clubs and "home bureaus" organized to can surplus produce during the war turned their attention to improving home and family life and began to study child care, nutrition, interior decoration, and to strive for the goals of better living.\textsuperscript{54}

Club work with boys and girls also grew phenomenally, but it, too, was geared to production and conservation under emergency conditions. The termination of war appropriations and the removal of war stimulus inevitably resulted in a decline in membership. But again the wartime experience had contributed something. Club leaders at the administrative level foresaw the probability of declining interest and decreasing numbers

\textsuperscript{53}Brunner, \textit{Rural America and the Extension Service}, pp. 74-76; W. A. Lloyd, \textit{Status and Results of County Agent Work--Northern and Western States, 1918}, United States Department of Agriculture Circular No. 37, p. 16.

and adopted a program to put club work on a permanent peacetime basis. To assure year-round interest in the organizations they substituted community sponsors for teachers, thus strengthening the relationship of the club to the adult county agricultural organization and increasing the identification of the club with the rural community.\(^{55}\)

The end of the war found the extension service placing ever greater emphasis on country life ideals, at least verbally. This was particularly true of reports on girls' and boys' club work and home demonstration work. The report on the former for 1919 strongly emphasized the development of community consciousness, habits of working together, and the development of leadership. A postwar report on home demonstration work indicates a similar concern with "community consciousness" and claims credit for the arousing of interest in civic beautification, sanitation, and recreation as well as projects involving the improvement and modernization of the rural home. These community enterprises were interpreted as the result of a new sense of responsibility for community welfare, evidence that the farmer was ceasing to act solely as an individualist.\(^{56}\) Country life was being socialized—one of the major goals of the country life movement had been achieved.

The report on cooperative agricultural demonstration work for 1919 does not give such great emphasis to "better living," although it


does state that it had "at least laid the basis of social reorganization upon which a superstructure of satisfactory country living can be built..." There is clear evidence in this report that the extension service accepted the goal of "better business," for emphasis was placed on farm analysis surveys designed to maximize profits, not production. Agents were also commended for their success in educating farmers to the advantages of cooperative marketing. 57

The extension service by encouraging these social, educational, and economic associations was fulfilling a need that had been singled out as one of the most pressing of country living by both the Commission and the subsequent movement. Organization, it had been repeatedly pointed out, was desirable because it multiplied the social contacts of individuals; organization was necessary to enable the farmer to deal effectively in the market place with other organized business interests.

Furthermore, it was by working through a local organization that the efforts of the demonstration agent would influence the greatest number of people. Both the college extension officials and the Department of Agriculture administrators insisted that there should be a local organization for facilitating the contact between the agent and the community. Although these associations in the beginning were called by many names, eventually the federal administrators adopted the "farm

57W. A. Lloyd, Status and Results of Cooperative Agricultural Work, Northern and Western States, 1919, U. S. Department of Agriculture Circular No. 179, pp. 11-13, 31-33, 36.
bureau" as the preferred designation and urged the local organizations to modify their structure to approximate a standard form. 58

The farm bureau, in its early development, was as much a part of the country life movement as the country school or the country church. It was the farm bureau which was expected to develop active, progressive public spirit. It was hoped that it could unify competing and dissident factions within the community if such existed. Many, both within the extension service and without, expected it to perform the function of federating the other forces operating to improve country life. As an organization in which membership was not restricted and whose dues were nominal, it was anticipated that it would attract all elements of the farm community and perform the function of a town meeting. Questions of agricultural policy would, of course, be of primary importance—but questions of community interest would be discussed and decided and the basis laid for the development of a real community spirit. In the words of a Department of Agriculture circular outlining the procedure for organizing a county farm bureau: it was to be the "... official rural organization for the promotion of all that pertains to a better and more prosperous rural life." 59


The farm bureau was to perform another function accepted as vital by country life advocates. It was the local organization which could provide opportunity for the development of leadership within the agricultural community. From participation in demonstrations to service as county farm bureau president, there were offices and responsibilities to be fulfilled. One of the early extension directors, M. C. Burritt, pointed out that leadership developed with the opportunity to lead—and such opportunity was provided by the county bureau and encouraged by the county agent.60

Yet when country life forces began to organize on a national basis, the farm bureaus instead of casting in their lot with the National Country Life Association formed their own federation. Although giving lip-service to the social and educational goals of the country life movement, it soon became apparent that their energies and finances were to be directed toward more efficient marketing procedures and legislation favorable to the economic welfare of the farmer.


60 R. H. Moulton, "Revolutionizing Farming Methods," The Outlook, CXII (Apr. 26, 1916), 993; Burritt, The County Agent and the Farm Bureau, pp. 68-73, 217, 221, 249.
"THE GREAT NEED . . . IS . . . LEADERSHIP." ¹

While the Report had made specific recommendations with regard to the use of the survey, the country life conference and the adoption of a nation-wide extension service, it had been emphatic in its insistence that the overwhelming need was for the development of aggressive, enlightened, preferably indigenous leadership. All other recommendations and suggestions had been important as they contributed to the development of individual leadership or provided for the organization of institutional guidance.

Indeed, much of the activity and effort of the movement revolved around the problem of discovering and training such leaders. It was the reason for the holding of conferences, for the organizing of farm bureaus and farmers' clubs, for the revitalization of local institutions. The periodical literature related to the country life movement repeatedly recounted little success stories of the improvement in community life and the increase in agricultural profits and land values as the result of the enlightened, determined leadership of some dedicated teacher, minister, or farmer.

The Commission was confident that there were in every community individuals of ability who had the capacity for leadership and that the movement would develop its own leaders. In some communities, indeed, these leaders had already begun to perform their roles; in general, however, they still needed to be found, educated, and imbued with the spirit of unselfish service.²

The Commission also recognized that it might be necessary for "outside agencies" to play a part in awakening and training these leaders for the future rural society. The Report was somewhat vague as to the exact nature of these external forces. Apparently both government and voluntary organizations were to have a part in the stimulation and preparation of local leaders, yet care should be taken that the work of these "centralized agencies should be stimulative and directive, rather than mandatory and formal."³

The responsibility of such governmental or government-financed agencies as agricultural colleges, departments of agriculture, and public school systems in awakening the spirit of rural progress was clear and, in reality, was already beginning to be exercised. In addition, the Report recommended that the federal Bureau of Education should be enlarged and strengthened to serve as a clearing-house of information about rural schools. Obviously, too, the nation-wide extension work of the colleges that the Commission urged would play a major role in the "effective rousing of the people on the land."⁴

Moreover, organizations usually identified with urban problems might also be adapted to bring about better conditions in the countryside. For, as Bailey had pointed out, the social forces which could be activated in the country were rural counterparts of broadly human forces already organized for action in the city.\(^5\)

As the country life movement developed, all these organizations and agencies answered the challenge to provide or to stimulate and develop leaders of thought and action in rural areas.

In response to the Report's suggestion, or to the increasing recognition, of rural problems, most of the organizations concerned with social reform made a place in their framework for the consideration of rural problems and extended their interests to include the demands of country life for their services. The National Playground and Recreation Association began to assert the need for play facilities for rural as well as urban areas, and recognized the country life movement by inviting Commission Chairman Bailey to address its meeting in 1911. Three years later the question of rural recreation was sufficiently important to call for its book-length treatment by the Association President, Henry S. Curtis. Groups interested in the development of social centers also turned their attention to the needs of the open country.\(^6\)

---


Social welfare agencies, national and state, although originally organized to ameliorate and prevent urban problems, also became sensitive to rural needs. By 1913 the Indiana State Conference of Charities and Corrections, alarmed about the social consequences of the rural exodus, devoted a day's session to suggestions for making life on the farm more attractive. The National Conference of Social Work, having previously noted the existence of rural social problems in a few papers, organized a section to consider them in 1917 and called upon outstanding leaders in the country life movement for contributions. Subsequent sessions devoted increased attention to rural communities, rural social centers, land reform proposals, rural social work and related topics.\(^7\)

Because much of the anxiety of the country life movement was directed toward improving the condition of the woman on the farm, Women's

---

Clubs, too, became interested. Their activity was concentrated on rural phases of fields they were already cultivating, especially school improvement and the introduction of home economics into the public school curriculum. In the south, in particular, they played a valuable role in organizing "school improvement associations" to improve physical facilities and to provide better prepared teachers. In consonance with their interest in home economics they were active in introducing that and other vocational subjects into rural schools. Women's Clubs also accepted rural health and sanitation as being within their province. In North Carolina the State Federation cooperated with the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the eradication of hookworm. Another project often undertaken by rural clubs, and occasionally by their urban counterparts, was the provision of restrooms for farm women to use on their trips to town.

On the national level there are several evidences of the awareness of the Women's Clubs of the existence of rural problems. The national Federation volunteered to take over the answers to a "Farm Home Inquiry" sponsored by The Good Housekeeping and the Orange Judd farm magazines.

---
Additional evidence of the recognition of the country life movement is found in the recommendation of the "Modern Development of Country Life" as an appropriate program topic for a Woman's Club.  

Among the forces of organized philanthropy, the Rockefeller organization, which had already created the Southern Education Board and the General Education Board to improve rural schools and sponsor cooperative demonstration work, responded to the new rural needs disclosed by the investigation. Rockefeller money was provided to finance the "Hookworm Commission" and to cooperate with the Department of Agriculture in the organization of a new division, the Office of Rural Social Organization. Rockefeller largess also promoted research to determine the causes of the decline of the rural church. On a less grandiose scale, Julius Rosenwald offered to contribute to the expenses of the first one hundred counties to employ a county agent. The Peabody Fund, long interested in improving education in the south, reflected the new interest in rural education by helping to meet the expenses of rural school supervisors and elementary agricultural and home economics.

---

teachers. It also encouraged agricultural education by sponsoring contests for students.¹⁰

Leadership for the country life movement was not, however, confined to these altruistic, humanitarian agencies. Whether motivated by fear of recurrent populism or, as they freely admitted, by considerations of enlightened self-interest, the business interests of the country contributed to the attempt to "uplift" the farmer. Although railroads, banks, implement dealers and manufacturers, and similar corporations were most energetic and effective in promoting the cooperative demonstration work, they accepted the whole gamut of Commission goals.

The bankers of the nation particularly active in attempting to improve farm conditions, interested themselves in the farmers' problems ranging from soil fertility and erosion to better country schools and churches and the need to develop the social aspects of country life. They also evidenced their interest by considering country life problems at their national conventions, by establishing an Agricultural and Financial Development and Educational Committee which held annual

banker-farmer conferences, and by publishing a periodical, The Banker-
Farmer. State associations also worked to promote all the objectives of
the movement. Better roads and better schools campaigns, boys' and
girls' clubs, corn contests, educational fairs were all sponsored on
state and local levels by bankers.11

With somewhat less unanimity and enthusiasm bankers also consid-
ered the problems of rural credits. The Annual Convention of the National
Association and the conferences of the Agricultural Commission heard
papers on the need for greater capital investment in agriculture and on
French and German institutions for agricultural credit. The general
feeling, however, was that current banking regulations and practices
were suitable for the farmer who could show that he was a good credit
risk. This attitude was responsible for the interest in cooperative
agricultural demonstration work which would give the farmers the informa-
tion that would mean the difference between profit and subsistence.12

11 B. F. Harris, "What I Am Trying to Do," The World's Work, XXVI
(Aug., 1913), 433; American Bankers' Association, Proceedings, 1912,
pp. 128, 209-210, 212-13, 216, 223; "Banker-Farmer Alliance for Cooper-
ation," The Survey, XXXIV (July 24, 1915), 383; "Forward to the Land:
Oregon Organizing Country Children," The World's Work, XXVI (June, 1913),
239; "What the Banker Is Doing for Agriculture," Journal of the American
Bankers' Association, VIII (Aug., 1913), 135; "Banker-Farmer Conference
Brings Exchange of Ideas of Practical Value," ibid., pp. 114-16; "Missour-
"s Campaign for Better Farming," ibid. (Sept., 1913), p. 245.

12 American Bankers' Association, Proceedings, 1911, p. 387;
Charles A. Conant, "Land and Agricultural Credit," ibid., 1912, pp. 188;
Charles L. Stewart, An Analysis of Rural Banking Conditions in Illinois,
prepared at the request of the Illinois Bankers Association (Champaign,
Ill.: Committee on Agriculture, 1914); Myron T. Herrick and R. Ingalls,
How to Finance the Farmer, Private Enterprise--Not State Aid (Cleveland,
O.: The Ohio State Committee on Rural Credits and Cooperation, 1915);
"Banker-Farmer Conference," loc. cit.; "Banker-Farmer Alliance for Coop-
eration," loc. cit.; Harris, loc. cit.; Herman N. Morse, "Marketing and
Farm implement dealers and manufacturers displayed the same broad interest. A pamphlet published by the Agricultural Extension Committee of the National Implement and Vehicle Association included articles on community social organization, consolidated schools, the country church, rural sanitation, civic beautification, and home improvement. 13

Railroads, also, were often eager to provide and cooperate with leadership in the country life movement. James J. Hill had been interested in the subject of the conservation of resources, including the soil, for some time before the Commission made its recommendation. Scornful of the sociological orientation of the Report's recommendations he continued his efforts to improve agricultural methods and the quality of livestock, eventually aiding in the adoption of the county agent system in the northwest as the best way of accomplishing these ends. Other railroads had begun to cooperate with agricultural colleges or farm papers, also before the Commission made its investigation, in order to purvey the new scientific knowledge to farmers. All these efforts were increased after the publicity given the farm problem by the Commission and acquired more sociological overtones. 14

13 Agricultural Extension Committee of the National Implement and Vehicle Association, Agricultural Extension as Related to Business Interests (Memphis, Tenn.: American Agricultural Extension Committee, 1915).

Ordinary citizens, on the state and local level formed organizations such as "rural progress leagues" and country life commissions to promote the interests of country life. A few of these were already in being. Massachusetts and Rhode Island, for instance, under the inspiration of Commissioner Butterfield, had already sponsored a federation of agricultural organizations and a "League for Rural Progress." In some cases rural life organizations grew out of earlier organizations with rural interests. This was the case in Illinois where the Country Teachers' Association served as the nucleus for the Illinois Federation for Rural Progress in 1912. The Federation was made up of all organizations and forces interested in rural life in the state. About the same time Maryland established a Country Life Commission and Pennsylvania, a League for Rural Progress.15

On the local level, too, permanent comparable organizations were created. In Prescott, Wisconsin, the "People's Club" was established to improve the community through delegating to committees such


responsible as physical beautification, provision for social life, and stimulation of growth by advertising advantages. A similar community organization was established on a county basis in Bennington County, Vermont. Its objectives were broad, ranging from better farming through better roads and schools, to the more unusual idea of the encouraging of more home industry.  

With the change of Administration in 1913, the Department of Agriculture, now under the Secretaryship of David Houston, was more responsive to the demand for social and economic rather than purely technical leadership. It initiated an inquiry into the needs of farm women and laid the foundations for what was to become the Bureau of Home Economics. It also began to make studies of rural communities and established the Rural Organization Service. Economic problems such as farm tenancy and marketing began to receive attention, and interest in the latter culminated in the establishing of the Bureau of Markets. Although somewhat belatedly, the United States Department of Agriculture joined the country life movement.  

16 Ibid., pp. 194-99; "What the Bennington Neighbors Did," Country Life, XXV (Feb., 1914), 62.  
It became much more intimately related to it after the passage of
the Smith-Lever Act with its provision for federal subsidy and supervi-
sion of county agents. The role of the Extension Service in providing
and developing leadership is obvious. Although expected primarily to
give advice on technical production problems, the agents were soon caught
up in the movement and found themselves leading activities as varied as
cooperative marketing and community singing. Their responsibilities for
asserting leadership themselves and encouraging it in others was recog-
nized and extolled by the publications of the States Relation Service in
its reports on extension activities.18

Among all such agencies, however, none were as active as the
institutions of church and school. It was natural and logical that they
should assume responsibility for training leaders and providing guidance
for the awakening of the countryside. They were the two institutions to
be found in every rural area; moreover, it had been ministers and teachers
who had first called attention to the decline of the farm community.
Furthermore, both these institutions were experiencing and contributing
to the general reform attitudes of the early twentieth century. The
campaign for the "revitalization" of the country church was closely
related to the "Social Gospel" influence in American protestantism; the
"redirection" of the country school was obviously the rural phase of
"progressive education."

18 John R. Howard, "The Country Man," The Survey, XXX (May 17,
1913), 241; "Making Over the New England Farm," Review of Reviews, LIX
(March, 1919), 278-80; O. H. Benson, Results of Boys' and Girls' Club
Work, North and West, 1919, U. S. Department of Agriculture Circular No.
66, pp. 36-37; W. A. Lloyd, Status and Results of County Agent Work,
The response of institutional religion was immediate and vigorous. Within a few years many of the organizations devoted to religious reform and reorganization had created rural or country life subdivisions. The national interdenominational organization, the newly formed Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, was among the first and the most active. Although it was particularly interested in the movement because of the possibility of federating churches on the local level, it was also concerned about increasing the social service functions of the country church. In 1914 it created a Commission on Church and Country Life of which Gifford Pinchot was Chairman and Henry Wallace and Kenyon L. Butterfield, members.19

Regional and state religious organizations that cut across sectarian lines were also prompt in acknowledging the special problems of rural religion. The New England Country Church Association was created to consider these. Federations of churches in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Nebraska conducted surveys to remedy "overlooking and overlapping" as early as 1912, followed by similar campaigns in at least thirteen additional states from Maine to California. In several states laymen's associations, dedicated to the general improvement of country life,

---

worked to bring the church into closer cooperation with other institutions of the rural community. 20

National denominational organizations, too, recognized the necessity of arresting the decline of the rural church and created departments to meet the problem. The first of these was the Presbyterian Church which organized its Department of Church and Country Life, in 1909, as a direct response to the stimulus of the President's Commission. Headed by Warren H. Wilson, a minister with graduate training in sociology and one of the earliest of the rural sociologists, this department established the prototype soon to be followed by other Protestant denominations. 21

"Allies" of the church, the Young Men's Christian Association and the Young Women's Christian Association, also provided in their organizations for rural divisions. For several decades the Y. M. C. A. had been exploring the possibilities of rural organization on a limited scale. The national attention aroused by the Report accelerated this "county work" and stimulated the establishing of an organ, Rural Manhood,


to provide a forum for discussion of the problems of rural youth and the church and for reporting the progress of the country life movement.²²

Individual churches were also to be "revitalized" to provide local leadership. It was generally accepted that the church should maintain a closer contact with the life of the countryside, that it must respond to the needs of the community, that the minister should be aware of the problems of farmers. Sharing the ideals of the social gospel as well as the country life movement, country church reformers emphasized the social rather than the theological aspects of religion. They would apply institutional church methods to the rural community, at once strengthening the church and improving all aspects of country life.

These reformers, both those of the cloth and those on the sidelines, would have had the rural church use its position of prestige to participate directly in the solution of the problems of production, marketing, and recreation. The church building should become a "social center," for community gatherings; the auditorium might be used for lectures, musicales, discussions, and forums; facilities should be provided for community cooking and dining purposes. The minister should sponsor clubs for youth and adults; he might initiate athletic and corn contests, sewing and reading circles, community betterment discussions. Nothing that would contribute to a fuller social and recreational life,

"better living," should be beyond the competence or beneath the dignity of the country church.  

In their enthusiasm these advocates of the revitalized country church would have the minister contribute to the economic prosperity of the community by stimulating the congregation to "better farming" and "better business." If no other community agency accepted responsibility for spreading information about scientific agriculture, the rural pastor should arrange for institutes and demonstrations and stimulate his congregation to take advantage of information available from the agricultural colleges and the Department of Agriculture. If it seemed desirable, and no other leader stepped forward, the preacher might even

take the initiative in organizing cooperatives for purchasing supplies
and marketing produce. 24

Recognizing the fact that most country preachers were not, from
the point of view of information or attitude, prepared to perform these
multiform functions, much of the country church literature was devoted
to recommendations for the training and reorientation of the rural
clergy. A generally accepted suggestion was that the training of the
young minister include courses in agricultural science and rural social
science. Some urged that these be made a part of the curriculum of the
theological seminary; a few suggested that one of the years usually
spent at the seminary be transferred to an agricultural college so that
the future minister could study agronomy and animal husbandry. By 1915
a number of the seminaries had responded to the extent of incorporating
rural sociology into their regular curriculum and devoting summer schools
to the preparation of prospective rural ministers. In that year, too,

24 John T. Bramhall, "Back to the Soil Movement of California,
The Survey, XXXI (Jan. 24, 1914), 486-87; A. F. Corbin, "Country Preaching
from the Bureau of Plant Industry," ibid., XXXI (Oct. 18, 1913), 68; Fred Eastman, "Farmer Smith and the Country Church," ibid., XXX (May 17,
1913), 243-44; Van Schraick, loc. cit.; Wallace, loc. cit.; Bemies, loc.
cit.; "New Crusaders in Agriculture," The World's Work, XXIII (April,
1914), 615-17; Warren H. Wilson, The Church of the Open Country, pp. 63-
64; Albert E. Roberts, "Christianizing Rural Business," The Rural
Evangel, I, pp. 14-16; C. O. Gill, "Report on the Social Effects of
Cooperation in Europe," Federal Council of Churches, Annual Report, 1914,
pp. 126-43.
the Federal Council of Churches formally recommended such preparation for country pastors. 25

A more immediate problem was that of stimulating interest on the part of those ministers already having country charges. These older ministers needed both a new vision of their work and information about scientific agriculture. The most common and effective suggestion was that instruction and inspiration be given to them in special schools and conferences. Throughout the nation, therefore, summer schools, short courses, and conferences were arranged by Y. M. C. A.'s, denominational organizations, and agricultural colleges—all for the purpose of making rural clergy more able and more eager to provide technical and social as well as spiritual leadership to their congregations. 26

More than making training available was necessary. Prospective ministers had to be persuaded that the rural church field was one that should challenge their abilities and reward their efforts. The idea had to be eliminated that it was a stepping-stone to an urban church, a retiring place for the worn-out, or a refuge for the unsuccessful. The


most convincing means of persuasion would be the raising of salaries, of course, but this would be difficult because of the small size of most country congregations. The unfortunate result was that ministers usually had to serve several churches so that most rural parishes were deprived of the leadership of a resident pastor. The remedy which most reformers urged was the federation of churches, using the term broadly, to create a community church which would unify not only all denominations but also all classes and interests. Such a church would de-emphasize doctrinal differences and assert genuine and far-reaching community leadership by furnishing spiritual, social, and economic guidance for the entire community. 27

There were those who were interested in strengthening the country church who objected to both the idea of federation and to the emphasis on social service. They opposed federation on the basis that the primary purpose of the church was religious interpretation which would be neglected by the compromise of conscience inevitably involved in consolidation. These "enlightened conservatives" also objected to the church entering the field of social service because it was out of the

realm of religion. The minister should inspire, he should encourage. In the classic tradition of individualistic Protestantism he should achieve the reform of society through the exhortation and conversion of the individual.28

All those who were concerned about the rural church, however, agreed that it was the religious institutions of the community which should nurture and guide the new spirit of rural progress. The church was the heart of the community. As it should dominate the individual it should rule the community. Its awareness of the problems of its congregation, its identification with the community would enable it to invest every act with a religious and ethical motive. Again and again are found the twin relationships between the reform of the country church and the country life movement: there could not be a strong and healthy religious congregation without a prosperous farming community, for bad farmers did not make good Christians. By the same token good farming, with its conservation, improvement of soil fertility, understanding of nature would lead "rapidly and inevitably \[to\] the Kingdom of Heaven."29

---


Educational institutions of all varieties and at all levels were as ready as the churches to provide active leaders for the country life movement. It was no surprise that the schools had been singled out as both the despair and the hope of country life reformers. Since the 1890's and earlier, agricultural and educational journals, general periodicals, government agencies, and farmers' and teachers' organizations had been urging reforms that would make country schools more effective.

Educational associations and institutions had already begun to modify their organization to provide subdivisions concerned with the rural school. The National Education Association, accepted as the spokesman of the public school teachers and administrators, had been studying the rural schools for over a decade and had created a permanent Department of Rural and Agricultural Education in 1907. Growing interest in vocational education had prompted the establishing of a new organization, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, in 1906. Although this society was primarily interested in mechanical and commercial education, its founders included the introduction of agricultural education in rural schools among its objectives.  

---

An organization of a different type was the Conference for Education in the South. Its purpose was to stimulate the interest of the general public in better education rather than to consider specific pedagogical issues. In part because the majority of public schools of the south were in the country, the Conference had, from its beginning, devoted attention to the problems of rural schools. Conference leaders recognized that better education was dependent on improved economic conditions; since the south was primarily an agricultural area this required better agricultural practices and implied the teaching of agriculture in the schools. To emphasize these needs the Conference had frequently invited Seaman A. Knapp to be a speaker on its program.31

Agricultural colleges and normal schools had begun to recognize the growing demand for agricultural education in the public schools. The land grant colleges, through their Association, staked out a large area of responsibility in guiding this program. They proposed not only to provide education for teachers but also to outline courses suitable for the public schools. A few normal schools, too, were beginning to be aware of the special needs of country teachers and to provide some preparation for them.32

31 Conference for Education in the South, Proceedings of the Ninth Conference. 1906, pp. 113-28; ibid., Tenth Conference, 1907, pp. 183-93.

Government agencies, in a small way, had shown concern about agricultural education. The Office of Experiment Stations of the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Education of the Department of the Interior had added rural education specialists to their staffs. These officials cooperated with educational associations at all levels to spread the adoption of agricultural education. Both organizations had also begun to publish information related to the subject.

After the publication of the Report of the Commission on Country Life the National Education Association appointed a special commission to report on rural schools and increased its attention to the subject of agricultural education, the training of teachers for rural schools, and the needs of the country child. The National Society for the Study of Education, a professional organization meeting in conjunction with the Association, devoted half of its Tenth Yearbook (1911) to the rural school as a social center and an equal portion of its Eleventh Yearbook to papers on agricultural education in the secondary schools. The increasing attention to agricultural education led to the founding, in 1911, of the American Association for Agricultural Teaching.

---


The Conference for Education in the South devoted more attention not only to the rural schools but also to all phases of rural life. Its meetings in 1909 and 1911 were largely taken up with these problems. The annual tour of inspection by state superintendents in 1909 surveyed the progress of rural education in the middle west. The 1913 and 1914 Conferences were, to all intents and purposes, "country life conferences."  

State teachers' associations were also moved to acknowledge the shortcomings of their educational systems by the Report. These, in turn, exerted their influence on state legislatures to give greater consideration to the needs of the rural schools. For example, the Iowa State Teachers' Association, in 1909, had its attention called to the Commission's Report by its president. As a consequence it was decided that the subject of the next meeting of the Educational Council should be "Training of Teachers for the Rural Schools." The 1910 meeting included several papers on rural schools and the next year, at the request of the Association, a rural subdivision of the Better Iowa Schools Commission was created.  

---


The Bureau of Education responded to the Commission's suggestion that it become a national clearing house for rural school information as rapidly as appropriations would allow, in admitted response to the recommendations of the Report. In 1911 it established a division of rural education; by 1913 the division employed four specialists and had some sixty collaborators reporting on the progress of rural education. As interest in country schools increased, the Bureau's list of bulletins expanded to include surveys, the training of teachers, and similar subjects. Thereafter, the Bureau sponsored conferences, circulated a "rural school letter" and organized the National Rural Teachers' Reading Circle to guide interested teachers in their professional improvement.\(^\text{37}\)

Agricultural colleges and normal schools also accepted the challenge of the Commission. They not only made ready to prepare more agricultural and rural school teachers, but also began to introduce the rural social sciences into their curricula. Responding to the demand for adult education, the agricultural institutions accelerated extension programs already underway. Too, they were among the leaders in calling country life conferences.\(^\text{38}\)

The acceptance of country life goals by these associations and institutions was important, however, only as they were successful in


\(^{38}\)A. A. A. C. and E. S., Proceedings, 1911, p. 64; ibid., 1912, pp. 19-24.
"redirecting" the individual schools. It was the local school that must be reformed to assume leadership functions and to train leaders. Most of the suggestions for the reorientation of the school were intimately related to the philosophy of John Dewey, for this was the rural phase of the progressive education movement. This meant relating the school to the environment, bringing the community, its geographical characteristics, its occupations, its social institutions into the school. It meant the introduction of agricultural education and nature study into the country school curriculum; it meant the reorientation of other courses to idealize country life; it meant the functioning of the school as a social center and source of community leadership.\(^{39}\)

One of the most persistent demands was for "industrial" education, a term which included home economics as well as agricultural education. Vocational subjects, it was argued, would increase the motivation of students and improve their attendance. By presenting farming and homemaking as scholastic subjects they would become more attractive as occupations to rural youth. Giving the farm boy knowledge of the fundamental scientific laws on which the work of the farm was based was expected to make that labor more palatable to him. Needless to say, agricultural education would be a practical method for introducing new and better methods into conservative communities. On the other hand,

---

it would also serve to interest school patrons and taxpayers in the program of the school. Education could now prove that it had practical value.  

The demand for federal subsidy to encourage the teaching of agriculture, home economics, and other "industrial" subjects in the secondary schools soon arose. As early as 1906 a bill for federal aid to normal schools training teachers in vocational education had been introduced in Congress. Subsequently additional bills with constantly broadening purposes were proposed. Controversies over control and administration held up passage of the legislation for several years until finally, in 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act provided for federal encouragement of vocational education, including home economics, in the public school system.

Those who would relate the school to community life urged that other subjects should be taught in familiar farming terms when possible. Geography and geology could be presented in relation to local land conformations; arithmetic problems could be phrased to present practical

---


41 True, Agricultural Education, 362; Cremin, op. cit., pp. 50-57.
questions such as the determination of boundaries or the shrinking of the dressed weight of beef. Composition topics could be drawn from agricultural and nature study topics; literature could emphasize agrarian ideals and the contributions of great farmers. To facilitate the farm orientation of the curriculum, text books and readers were designed for the rural student in all fields, agriculture, civics, literature, mathematics.  

From a pedagogical point of view, it was pointed out, it was good practice to bring the home environment into the school. From a country life point of view, it was essential to direct the thoughts and plans of pupils toward rather than away from the farm and rural community. In short, the school in the country had an "unsurpassed opportunity to build up an education that shall really provide a basis for a finer civilization."


In addition to drawing the course of study from the surrounding community, educational reformers expected to see the school identify itself with the area and develop into the physical and spiritual center of the neighborhood. The concept of the function of the school as a community center was related, on the one hand, to current interest in community and neighborhood centers in urban areas. On the other, it grew out of the school's need for greater public sympathy and support and the farm community's need for leadership.

The physical plant of the school and its extracurricular program would provide facilities and incentive for drawing the surrounding population to the school house. It could sponsor club work for boys and girls. It should inspire organizations that would bring the community into closer relationship with the school. It might organize programs and community activities such as fairs and festivals to obliterate the differences and divisions within the community. 44

The centralized school, of course, because of its more extensive facilities could offer more services to the community. Its laboratories could be used for practical tests and demonstrations beneficial to the farmers' economic interest; its auditorium could be used for lectures, movies, institutes, meetings, musical and dramatic presentations that would enrich the cultural and social life of the community. Its grounds, for community picnics, fairs, and contests. Its library, too, could be used by the community as a source of information on the new agriculture, methods of cooperating marketing, and other practical subjects.45

Thus the emphasis on the use of the school as a social center added impetus to another long-sought reform, consolidation of schools. There were other arguments for the consolidated school. Transportation, even over longer distances, in covered wagons (later auto-buses) would protect the health of the students. Improved heating plants afforded by the larger schools were also more conducive to health than the primitive stoves found in most district schools. The larger school enrollment would provide more social stimulation and healthy competition in scholastic affairs than could be provided by the dwindling attendance of the "little red school house."

Enthusiasm for agricultural education also contributed to the argument of those urging centralization. The consolidated school alone,

45 Betts and Hall, op. cit., 250-56.
it was argued, could provide the facilities needed for the teaching of agriculture, laboratories, spacious grounds for experiments and demonstrations. Only the greater economic resources of a consolidated school district could afford the salaries of teachers adequately prepared to present the basic sciences, agriculture, and home economics. 46

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the centralized school was the promise it gave for obtaining and retaining better teachers. For, as the quality of the country church depended on the minister, the quality of the country school rested on the teacher. Long before the Commission on Country Life had emphasized the importance of leadership in improving rural conditions, the agricultural press had been deploiring the inadequacies of the rural teacher and extolling the progress which the school, the scholars, and the community might make if the teacher were interested and able to introduce nature study, agriculture, and home economics into the curriculum. They also rejoiced in the success some teachers had had in obtaining community support for the school as the result of teaching these subjects and relating others to country living. 47


The problem of obtaining better teachers was twofold. In the first place it was essential that salaries be improved in order to attract and retain teachers of ability with an interest in country life. In the second place it was necessary that adequate training be made available to acquaint those without country backgrounds with the problems of country life and the principles on which they might act in helping to solve them. The two aspects of the problem were interrelated. The teacher who could make the school a force for the improvement of country life would be able to obtain adequate financial support for the school. On the other hand, it was essential to increase compensation—and the possibility of more pleasant living conditions—in order to persuade persons of the requisite ability, men as well as women, to be interested in careers as country teachers. 48

The need for better preparation required the cooperation of higher educational institutions to instruct prospective teachers—and those already teaching without adequate background and preparation. The agricultural journals urged that instruction in fundamental principles of agriculture and nature study and in rural social problems be provided in the normal schools and teachers colleges, and even in small private schools. Beginnings had been made. Journals such as Wallace's hailed the announcement of each new summer school as a triumph for rural education and called for more.49

48 Betts and Hall, Better Rural Schools, p. 207.

The increased interest in rural education stimulated by the Commission's investigation prompted a vigorous response in professional pedagogical circles. Normal schools began to include agriculture, gardening, and rural sociology in their curricula—along with methods of how to present them. Agricultural colleges paid more attention to their education departments. The Association of American Agricultural Colleges, noting the wide variety in both quality and quantity of offerings, urged that preparation should include thorough grounding in principles of agriculture as well as in methods of how to teach it.  

Professional organizations began to discuss training for teachers prepared to teach in rural schools and to consider very seriously the problems of administration and supervision. The professional literature grew alarmingly. No series of education texts was complete without at least one volume on the country school. There was even a professional journal devoted exclusively to the philosophy, methods and achievements of rural education.  


Institutions responding to the demand for better country teachers responded to the other ideals of the country life movement. They did not confine their efforts to giving teachers instruction in agriculture and methods of teaching agriculture; considering the country school teacher as a natural community leader they urged them to use their position and ability to make surveys to determine the needs of the community and to use the school to satisfy the needs--or to stimulate the organization of associations that would. Not satisfied with exerting their influence through the teacher, some of these institutions attempted to carry the whole country life movement to the local communities, to inspire them to desire better schools, better living conditions, and a more "socialized" community. The role of the agricultural colleges in encouraging the establishing of country life associations and country life conferences can be interpreted in this way.52

* * * * * * *

The ultimate goal envisioned by the Commission was the development of a unique agrarian civilization based on a new rural social life, the product of the revitalized rural community. The statement of this ideal was responsible for hastening the development of a new body of students and a new academic discipline--rural sociology. These

sociologists accepted both the ideals and the suggested techniques of the Commission and devoted themselves to discovering and applying the rules of human conduct to speed the realization of the agrarian utopia.

Yet there was hardly such a subject as rural sociology at the time the Commission made its Report, and no rural sociologists. There were, however, ministers such as Warren H. Wilson, C. J. Galpin, and John M. Gillette who saw the church in its sociological setting. There were educators like Butterfield and Mabel Carney who saw the social responsibilities of the school. There were general sociologists like James Michel Williams and Newell Leroy Simms who saw the rural problem as that of community organization—or lack of it. There were those associated with agricultural colleges and experiment stations like Dwight Sanderson who became aware, as had Bailey, of the problem of human relations and leadership. From the ranks of these, a new speciality in the field of sociology developed. Out of the necessity of finding solutions for the problems these people saw, a new social science was born.

The debt of rural sociology to the Commission on Country Life is obvious and readily admitted by both pioneers in the field and historians of the social sciences. It should be noted that the obligation was not that of information gathered by the Commission, but that of stimulating interest in rural social problems and promulgating the idea that it was possible to solve them scientifically. Indeed, much of the early literature of the country life movement, termed "pre-rural sociological" by Odum, was concerned with rural problems because they were important
phases of the national economy, not because they would lead to the formulation of fundamental social principles. 53

Of equal importance was the Report's endorsement of a technique which had already proved effective in the field of agricultural economics and which was soon to become the work horse of rural sociological research, the survey. Although later rural sociologists, in a more sophisticated stage of the development of the science, might deprecate these early studies as lacking in analysis and theoretical content, designed primarily for practical purposes, these initial surveys created the foundations on which later investigations could be based. 54

The organizational development of the discipline proceeded apace. As early as 1912 the American Academy of Political and Social Science devoted its Annals for the spring quarter not only to the consideration of rural problems but also to the consideration of the study and teaching of them. In 1916 the American Sociological Society recognized both the need for consideration of rural society and the quality of research being done in the field by concentrating its attention on "The Sociology of Rural Life" at its annual meeting. Stimulated by this convention,


perhaps, rural sociologists organized, first, as a special section of the Society, and, in 1921, as an autonomous body. In 1937 the Rural Sociological Society was established with a journal of its own.\textsuperscript{55}

College curricula recorded the same growth of attention to the problems of rural society. Prior to 1900 only the University of Chicago recognized the subject of rural sociology, and it was not until 1904 that the first course was offered in an agricultural college—taught by Kenyon L. Butterfield. Although both Butterfield and Bailey had attempted to focus the attention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges on the need for the member institutions to help farmers in the solution of their social and economic problems, response was tardy until after the publicity given by the Report.\textsuperscript{56}

That document served as a text for a course in rural sociology introduced by Charles J. Galpin at the University of Wisconsin in 1910. About the same time, Michigan Agricultural College offered sociology for the first time, justifying the adoption of a new subject on the basis of the recommendation of "President Roosevelt's 'Rural Life Commission.'" Thereafter interest in rural sociology grew more rapidly. By 1923 twenty-six agricultural colleges were offering courses and the number of


\textsuperscript{56}True, \textit{Agricultural Education}, pp. 256-57.
rural sociology courses taught in non-agricultural colleges had reached the total of three hundred forty-six.\(^57\)

After 1916 a small but growing number of graduate students were specializing in rural problems. These were encouraged after 1919 by occasional small grants for research purposes by the Office of Rural Population and Social Organization established in the Department of Agriculture in that year. In 1925 the Purnell Act made federal funds available on a more generous basis, indicating government recognition of the need for research in social as well as technical problems of agriculture.\(^58\)

These rural sociologists gave an ideological basis and institutional permanence to the country life movement. As instructors of country school teachers, ministers, and extension agents, as officials in the Department of Agriculture they did indeed provide the leadership the country life movement had been sure the movement would call forth. Perhaps the failure of American farmers to achieve the unique society visualized by the Commission lay in the fact that the leaders the movement created operated on an administrative level, not at the grass roots.


Indeed the very existence of the office of Rural Population and Social Organization, and its precedent Office of Rural Organization, is reminiscent of the Bureau of Rural Social Economy that had been the project of Plunkett, Pinchot, and Bailey, the failure of which had precipitated the appointment of the Commission on Country Life. Both these agencies of the Department of Agriculture gathered and disseminated information about rural organization and social conditions. Both were in the hands of men thoroughly sympathetic with the aims of the country life movement, men who were, indeed, pioneers in the development of the science of rural sociology. But neither the Office of Rural Organization nor the Office of Rural Population and Social Organization was able to effect the evening up of society that the Commission had envisioned.

Perhaps the failure was due, at least in part, to the rivalry of too many leaders, too much organization. In addition to the agencies of the Department of Agriculture there were the country school teachers and the colleges training the teachers, there were the rural ministers and the organizations urging them on, there were the county agents and their farm bureaus. Perhaps it was due to the rapid development of those very communication and transportation facilities that early reformers had urged as the solution of problems of isolation and loneliness. As these made the values and rewards of urban civilization more available to rural populations there was less and less of an inclination to be satisfied with uniquely agrarian satisfactions. Undoubtedly, it was due, too, to the weakening and withering of the progressive impulse which had not only believed in but acted on the principle that society could be changed by scientific study and social planning.
CHAPTER VIII

PROGRESSIVE ASPECTS OF THE COUNTRY LIFE MOVEMENT

It was hardly surprising that enthusiasm for the country life movement was found in educational, religious, and social reform circles in the decade after the Commission's Report. For it, like progressive education, the social gospel, and social amelioration, was part of that "rather widespread and remarkably good-natured effort . . . to achieve some not very clearly specified self-reformation."\(^1\) It was entirely fitting that this period which witnessed the realization of "progressive" reform in so many fields should also be concerned about the condition of the farmer, the prototype of the progressive ideal.

The traditional stereotype of the yeoman farmer and his democratic, equalitarian society exemplified the social ideals of the anti-urban, anti-monopolistic majority of the progressives. Whatever their immediate objectives, the bulk of them hoped to bring about a condition in which the ideals and values of a simple rural society could be realized in a complex, urban, industrial economy. The progressives, far from wishing to return to a primitive farm economy, hoped to retain the material benefits of industrial production and also to hold fast to the social and

political virtues of a Jeffersonian agrarian society and an economy in which the rewards were the result of personal enterprise and ethical action.²

The representatives of the country life division of the progressive movement were troubled by the threat to rural society and its traditional ideals and values from the same consolidations of power and concentration of control that were demoralizing other sectors of society. They feared that the individualism, independence, self-respect, and pride in husbandry of the farmer were being eroded by the impersonal forces of the market, the artificial attractions of urban life, and the diminution of status of the farmer. But like other progressives they would not relinquish the increased accessibility of consumer goods made possible by industrialization; they would obtain their wider distribution. Indeed, they sought increasingly to adapt the techniques of industry to the marketing of farm products and to modify methods of production by adopting the rationale of industry—scientific principles and mechanization. In short, they were seeking for rural communities a means of preserving traditional agrarian ideals while adapting agriculture to conditions of industrial production. While urging economic progress through increasing commercialization they retained the moral image of the yeoman.

Dissatisfied with current conditions in both city and country, progressives were eager to expose existing shortcomings in the

realization of the democratic ideal. The muckrakers who bared political corruption, financial conspiracy, and especially those who revealed the vicious and unhealthy conditions of life and work of the urban lower classes, had their counterparts in the country life movement. Much of the early literature of the latter movement was concerned with the abandoned farms, neglected churches, and disintegrating communities of rural areas. As the muckrakers' goal was to awaken public opinion to right the wrongs of the urban dispossessed and underprivileged, the agrarian sought to incite the rural community to recognize its shortcomings and improve its condition by application of principles of social reform.

The country life movement shared with the more comprehensive progressive movement the confident expectation that by judicious reform it was possible to have the best of both the technological achievement of the twentieth century and the equalitarian society and limitless economic opportunities of the nineteenth. In this faith both sets of reformers were influenced by the same climate of opinion and configuration of attitudes. They shared the same confident opinions and optimistic philosophy about the nature of society and human capabilities; they relied on the same agents, techniques, and forces. Moreover, in both movements there was an embarrassment of riches with regard to the number and variety of reform proposals. It can be said of the country life movement as Professor Gabriel comments of the progressive movement:

"... Ideas jostled one another. Persons who called themselves liberals
tried to advance in opposite directions.\(^3\) Country life leaders, too, found themselves presented with numerous, often competitive, although not necessarily contradictory, solutions.

The climate of opinion which smiled so benignly on reform efforts, historians of ideas tell us, was philosophically underlaid by the theories of Reform Darwinism and pragmatism. These relativistic doctrines refuted the nineteenth century ideas of a fundamental, absolute, natural law governing social and economic affairs, and substituted a belief in a society which was not only continuously evolving but one whose evolution could be guided by human intelligence and planning in socially desirable directions. These intellectual battles had already been won before the groups interested in the welfare of the rural resident had coalesced into a movement. Although all acted on the newly established principles, few felt it necessary to argue the premises.\(^4\)

Chairman Bailey, biologist, naturalist, and the poet and philosopher of the country life movement, did devote a public lecture in a nature study series to the question of evolution and its implications. As a scientist, he was most concerned about the use of evolutionary theory in nature study; but he also referred to the influence it had had on thought in general and enlisted in the ranks of those who no longer


accepted the "bondage of doctrine and dogma" and who would free themselves from 'authority' and 'prejudgements.'

Just as it is questionable whether other progressive thinkers ever really abandoned a belief in absolutes, it is doubtful that country life leaders were ready to break entirely with an economic and social system ruled by traditional concepts of economic law and social morality. The social scientists who created the rationale for the progressive movement projected a relativistic, pragmatic, empirical society. Professor Noble, however, questions whether even these theoreticians were able to free themselves from the appeal to the security of absolute ideals and ends. Certainly the activists—the legislators and executives who were in a position to alter existing arrangements—were reluctant to depart from the moral absolutes of American tradition or to make fundamental alterations in the prevailing economic order. The tendency was to use the new flexibility to modify existing institutional arrangements for the purpose of restoring the ideals of equality of opportunity and the primacy of the individual as a free agent—economically and politically.

The dilemma is reflected in the writings of country life leaders. Again it was Bailey who was most concerned about the larger aspects of the problem. In response to the relativistic influence of evolutionary theory, he postulated the desirability, even the necessity of developing


6David W. Noble, The Paradox of Progressive Thought (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), passim.
new institutions, new beliefs, new attitudes, consonant with the evidence of science and the needs of an industrial society, to supplant old dogmas and doctrines. With regard to agrarian society at least, he expected it, because of the unique conditions which differentiated it from the rest of the American economy, to develop its own culture. In book after book, article upon article, address added to address, he emphasized the value of a nature poetry, an agrarian literature, rural recreation, pastoral music. Institutional forms and content, too, he believed, should be related to the vocational and social needs and characteristics of the rural resident.  

On the other hand, Bailey reveals an implicit reliance on eternal ideals and virtues. His enthusiasm for a less rigid system seems to stem from the expectation that comparatively minor modifications in customary attitudes and forms of social and economic action would ensure the realization of an agrarian civilization which would both prize and produce those homely virtues such as hard work, plain living, and appreciation of nature, which he considered characteristic of farm life.  

Other adherents of the country life movement followed the same reasoning. Educators expected the school to serve as the stimulus and nucleus of the new agrarian society which would preserve the old virtues. Country church reformers saw the church in the same role. Rural sociologists urged the organization of social and community forces for

---


the same purposes. All were convinced that the institutions with which they were associated would restore that ideal equalitarian, agrarian society of the past by using the most modern and enlightened methods.

Whether progressives, including those incorporated in the country life movement, accepted the dissolution of a fundamental, universal law or not, they not only accepted but acted on the principle that man could modify existing institutional arrangements and adapt them to achieve the more equitable distribution of the benefits of the economic system. The "sociocracy" of Ward, the planned economy of Patten, the New Nationalism of Croly and Theodore Roosevelt, the regulatory aspects of the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson, all were founded on the assumption that man could obtain the knowledge and wisdom to direct the economic and social activity of the nation. This assumption, in turn was supported by the progressive premises of the scientific and practical nature of social research—especially as exemplified in the social survey—the efficacy of the educational process, the power of publicity, or, failing the effectiveness of the latter, the responsibilities of the positive state.

Each of these assumptions was applied in the same manner by the country life movement. Indeed, the raison d'être of the country life movement was the supposition that rural communities, by conscious and concerted effort, could recreate that idealized society which the unimpeded processes of industrialization had weakened or destroyed.

The Report of the Commission had strongly suggested that rehabilitation of country life begin with detailed surveys of the economic and social life and institutions of rural areas. These surveys, as explained above, would not only give a scientific basis for reform but would
also, by arousing and educating public opinion, provide the impetus to accomplish it.

Country life reformers relied heavily on the school as the principal agent for social reform. Not only did they partake of the same faith in education to regenerate society, they were strongly influenced by the same considerations with regard to subject matter and method as were the progressive educators. The life of the community should be brought into the school; learning should be, not by rote, but by experience; the school should be at once an expression of and a participant in the life of the community.

Although country life leaders relied primarily on the initiative and ability of the individual and the local community, they were willing to look to government, state and federal, if local forces needed stimulating. They visualized the exercise of government power primarily in the field of organizing and financing educational facilities. They also insisted that it had a responsibility for equalizing opportunity for the countryman by removing the artificial disabilities that it and conditions of the economic system had imposed upon him.9

Neither country life reformers nor other progressives objected to government intervention in the regulation of economic processes. Like most progressives, country life economists were willing to accept an amalgam of John Bates Clark's assertion that competition must be maintained and Simon Patton's theory of a planned economy through

---

cooperative effort. They accepted a market economy responding to "natural" laws of supply and demand and urged the farmer to accommodate himself to it to his advantage. But for the individual enterpriser to adapt himself successfully to a market organized on a national and world scale, it was necessary for him to depart from traditional concepts of individual action and participate in marketing and production associations. 10

Bailey minimized the role of these economic organizations by pointing out that for most farmers who were reasonably prosperous, competition rather than cooperation would continue to be the general rule of action. Moreover, he insisted that in the formation of the cooperatives for economic action, participation must be entirely voluntary and the opportunity for the exercise of independence and individuality must be carefully safeguarded. 11

The reliance on cooperative organization as the device by which farmers would gain their equitable share of the national income would seem to put the country life movement on the side of what has been referred to as the "hard" side of agrarian organization. 12 Such a conclusion is questionable, however, since country life leaders were wont to emphasize the social benefits of such cooperative association even

---


more than the economic returns. Indeed, as has been emphasized, the country life movement was not entirely—or even primarily—concerned with the economic welfare of the farmer. As the progressive movement was a broad reform movement seeking to improve the individual as well as his environment, the country life movement encompassed spiritual and social goals for the individual as well as more equitable economic opportunities.

Country life enthusiasts, like other progressives, were influenced by the anti-materialist tradition of the American past which distrusted the accumulation of great wealth as of questionable morality. There was little danger that members of the agricultural community would be threatened by the corrosion attending the amassing of real property or financial resources, but there was the possibility that in seeking pecuniary rewards they would lose sight of the more important things of life. Bailey was particularly concerned about the tendency to over-emphasize the economic returns of agriculture as an occupation. He urged that it be evaluated from the point of view of the opportunity it afforded its practitioners to lead "useful and contented lives." In a speech to the New York College of Agriculture he pointed out: "We are measuring agriculture by the wrong standards. Here is a realm of living which is beyond gross ambition, beyond the greed of wealth, a place where unselfish patriotism may grow unchecked. . . ."

---

In his numerous works Bailey emphasized the spiritual and aesthetic opportunities of the farmer. He urged the countryman to preserve the beauty of natural scenery and to improve both home and community surroundings to make them more attractive to the eye.

Among the non-material values which are important to man is the opportunity for social stimulation and response. Because these were so often lacking in rural areas, country life theorists emphasized more than progressives generally, the values of social organizations. More important even than the satisfaction of the individual's need for response was the need for him to recognize his obligations to his group and society. To fulfill his role completely he must develop a community consciousness. By learning to accept responsibility for supporting school, church, and community organizations, in Bailey's words, he would arouse a "fine community helpfulness to take the place of the old selfish individualism." The emphasis on the "socialization" of the farmer, the development of collective action and organization, was one of the major points of emphasis of the country life movement. 14

It is particularly important to consider the question of collective organization in exploring the relationship of the country life movement to the progressive movement, for one of the apparent paradoxes of the progressive was his retention of a firm belief in individualism and personal leadership as a cornerstone of progress at the same time that he was urging collective action to achieve progress. It is,

14 Ibid., pp. 56-57, 132-33.
moreover, especially pertinent to consider it in this context because it was expected that social and economic organization would retard the rural exodus thereby maintaining a class of "yeoman farmers." And the major benefit to be derived from maintaining such a class was its preservation as the source of independence, initiative, and individualism.

Bailey recognized that this might be a problem if organization were carried too far. Unprepared to give up his belief in individualism as one of the essential qualities of the farmer and of the American, he found justification for it even in the evolutionary process since the latter "enforces the importance of the person as distinguished from the mass." Nonetheless, Bailey was able to insist that all kinds of organization were necessary for the elevation of country life to make it equally appealing with other vocations. He concluded that the conditions of agricultural production, the unpredictability of nature particularly, would keep the farmer from loss of self-reliance; the challenge to "conquer his farm" would force him to maintain the "fighting edge" that would prevent his becoming soft and dependent.  

There were opportunities for similar challenges in other areas, engineering feats such as the construction of the Panama Canal, the reclamation of waste land, the exploration of the earth's surface. But only agriculture, in its day-by-day experiences, could be expected to attract and retain those with "the feeling of mastery in them." There

---

would thus be conserved a human resource of responsible, effective citizens to reconstitute a strong urban working class when the existing one became enervated by industrial conditions and organization.  

Bailey here reveals the agrarian bias common to most progressives. In regard to the country, he was convinced that the demands of the farm and the proximity to nature did indeed breed a superior class of individuals; as for the city, he was equally sure that industry and industrial organization were producing a class of "dependent men and managed men, . . . clockwatchers and irresponsible gang-servers." His reservations about industrial organization and labor unions, of course, were shared with other progressives as well as agrarians.

In consonance with the progressive adherence to individualism as a cardinal virtue was the approval of strong individual leadership. In the end, progress would come only from the contributions of able, efficient, enlightened individuals committed to the ideals of creating a better society. Country life progressives shared this propensity. If there were no men of action of national stature like Roosevelt, LaFollette, or Wilson to point to and affirm the virtue of their acts, there was, nonetheless, a persistent tendency to look to the leaders at the grass roots level to indicate the course of progress by word and by practice.

There was general confidence that the rural communities would develop these leaders, but to make sure, those directing the country

---

16 Ibid.  
17 Ibid.
life movement sought to nurture the trend. Innumerable books and articles presented the "Challenge of the Country" and called for educated young men and women to dedicate their lives and talents to the country church, the country school, the country home or farm bureau, and the country community. There was a parallel development on the urban reform scene in the movement to direct the altruistic impulses of college youth into settlement house work and other social services.

On numerous other specific issues there was agreement between the country life movement and other segments of the progressive movement. The advocates of woman suffrage could find support for their cause in the new emphasis on the role of the farm wife, not only as homemaker but also as partner in the farming enterprise.

The supporters of the initiative, referendum, and recall could find their enthusiasm for direct democracy mirrored in the country life emphasis on fuller participation in community life. Both groups thereby harkened back to the principle of individual responsibility for community welfare and, at least by implication, accepted the guilt for the degeneration of American political and social institutions. To ameliorate, perhaps to remedy, the undesirable conditions thus developed, however, rural as well as urban progressives relied on institutional forms such as settlement houses and social centers to develop the group cohesiveness, community spirit, and neighborhood interaction that were among the traditional values threatened.

18 G. Walter Fiske, The Challenge of the Country, uses the phrase as a title. It appears innumerable other times in the works of Bailey Butterfield, Warren H. Wilson, and others.
If it was unnecessary for country life reformers to manifest concern over the adulteration of food, they were not hesitant about extending the influence of authority into the farm household for its betterment in other ways. The improvement of the dietary habits of the farm family was a major objective in the organization of classes and clubs of farm wives and one of the principal responsibilities of the home demonstration agent. Also in the field of the regulation of consumption habits was the issue of prohibition which, it will be recalled, found its most ardent supporters in the rural districts.

The nativist of the progressive movement had his counterpart in the subsidiary movement, not only because the immigrant was identified with the big city, but also because, where he supplanted the "native American yeoman farmer," he contributed to the deterioration of traditional American community institutions. The country life reformer shared still another expression of progressive nationalism. As the progressive showed his supreme confidence in the superiority of American institutions by his willingness to export them, the country life progressive would extend to the world the benefits so recently realized as a result of the country life movement. Commissioner Butterfield, indeed, was particularly active in organizing and participating in international country life conferences.

Needless to say, the conservationist could see in the scientific agriculture aspects of the country life movement the accomplishment of a part of his objective. Moreover, the reliance of the country life movement on surveys to inventory the physical and human resources of the community was clearly influenced by the same ideals of efficient
utilization without waste and complemented the resource surveys
envisioned by the conservation movement.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic the country life movement
shared with the more inclusive progressive movement, however, was the
appeal to a large number of diverse groups of middle class status and
outlook. For the country life movement, too, was a middle class reform
movement. There was the same reliance on middle class methods—education,
personal responsibility for community redemption, legislative regulation—
and the same acceptance of middle class values—individualism, rational-
ity, social morality, and the protection and wider distribution of
private property. There was, moreover, the same realization of the
importance of the middle class in the maintenance of a stable society.
For the country life philosophers regarded the farmer as the balance
wheel which would provide a sane equilibrium between the excesses of
concentrated capital and organized labor.

Finally, in the country life movement, as in the progressive
movement, there was the same broad appeal to many groups with a general
belief in reform but with a particular enthusiasm for a specific project.
There was not only a feeling of progress, but of forward movement along
all lines. School, church, local government, all social institutions
in both city and country were to be made more vital and more efficient.
Moreover, they were all working together in a concerted effort for the
regeneration of the entire society.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

State and Federal Government Publications


_______. _______. Status and Results of County Agent Work, Northern and Western States, 1918. Circular 37. Washington: 1919.


U. S. Congressional Record. 60 Cong., 2 sess., 1909.

U. S. Congress. Senate Document Nos. 705, 734. 60 Cong., 2 sess.


Proceedings and Reports of Organizations


**Newspapers, Periodicals and Other Serial Publications**


*The American City*. 1910.


*The American Mercury*. 1925.

*The American Yearbook; A Record of Events and Progress*. 1910-1915.


*Columbus Citizen* (Ohio). 1908-1909.


*Country Life in America*. 1901-1915.

*Farmers' Union News*. 1908-1909.

*The Forum*. 1890-1912.


*Good Housekeeping*. 1908-1912.


*Hoard's Dairyman*. 1908-1909.

*The Independent*. 1908-1919.


The Literary Digest. 1909-1919.
The Nation. 1909.
The North American Review. 1892, 1898.
The Ohio Farmer. 1908-1909.
The Outlook. 1893-1919.
The Playground. 1908-1912.
Rural America. 1936-1938.
The Rural Educator. 1913-1916.
Rural Manhood. 1910-1919.
The Rural Evangel. 1916.
San Francisco Chronicle. 1908-1909.
The Survey. 1908-1919. Name changed from Charities and the Commons in March, 1909. Volume numbering is continuous so it is referred to as The Survey throughout this work.
Wallace's Farmer. 1908-1909.
Articles in Scholarly Reviews


Ross, Earle D. "Roosevelt and Agriculture," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIV (Dec., 1927), 287-310.


**Collections of Letters and Speeches**


**Books, Monographs, Pamphlets, and Unpublished Works**


Herrick, Myron T. and Ingalls, R. How to Finance the Farmer: Private Enterprise--Not State Aid. Cleveland, Ohio: The Ohio State Committee on Rural Credits and Cooperation, 1916.


Saloutos, Theodore and Hicks, John D. *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1951.


AUTobiography

I, Betty Carol Clutts, was born in Bowling Green, Ohio, February 24, 1921. I received my secondary education at the demonstration school of Woman's College, U. N. C. which was also a part of the public school system of Greensboro, North Carolina. I received my undergraduate training at Woman's College of the University of North Carolina which granted me the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1940. After teaching a year in the public schools I commenced graduate work at the University of North Carolina but interrupted it to serve in the United States Navy during World War II. I received the Master of Arts degree from the University of North Carolina in 1949, meanwhile teaching at St. Mary's Junior College in Maryland where I continued to teach until I began graduate work at Ohio State University in 1954. At Ohio State I held appointments as graduate assistant to Professor F. Rhea Dulles, teaching assistant, and University Fellow. Since 1958 I have taught history at the South Bend Extension Division of Indiana University and the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina.

I am returning to Woman's College.