

be trained. These leaders will see the great underlying problem of country life, and together they will work, each in his own field, for the one goal of a new and permanent rural civilization. Upon the development of this distinctively rural civilization rests ultimately our ability, by methods of farming requiring the highest intelligence, to continue to feed and clothe the hungry nations; to supply the city and metropolis with fresh blood, clean bodies, and clear brains that can endure the strain of modern urban life; and to preserve a race of men in the open country that, in the future as in the past, will be the stay and strength of the nation in time of war and its guiding and controlling spirit in time of peace.

It is to be hoped that many young men and women, fresh from our schools and institutions of learning, and quick with ambition and trained intelligence, will feel a new and strong call to service.

#### I. GENERAL STATEMENT.

Broadly speaking, agriculture in the United States is prosperous and the conditions in many of the great farming regions are improving. The success of the owners and cultivators of good land, in the prosperous regions, has been due partly to improved methods, largely to good prices for products, and also to the general advance in the price of farm lands in these regions. Notwithstanding the general advance in rentals and the higher prices of labor, tenants also have enjoyed a good degree of prosperity, due to fair crops, and an advance in the price of farm products approximately corresponding to the advance in the price of land. Farm labor has been fully employed and at increased wages, and many farm hands have become tenants and many tenants have become landowners.

There is marked improvement, in many of the agricultural regions, in the character of the farm home and its surroundings. There is increasing appreciation on the part of great numbers of country people of the advantage of sanitary water supplies and plumbing, of better construction in barns and all farm buildings, of good reading matter, of tasteful gardens and lawns, and the necessity of good education.

Many institutions are also serving the agricultural needs of the open country with great effectiveness, as the United States Department of Agriculture, the land-grant colleges and experiment stations, and the many kinds of extension work that directly or indirectly emanate from them. The help that these institutions render to the country-life interests is everywhere recognized. State departments of agricultural, national, state, and local organizations, many schools of secondary grade, churches, libraries, and many other agencies are also contributing actively to the betterment of agricultural conditions.

There has never been a time when the American farmer was as well off as he is to-day, 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. There has been a complete and fundamental change in our whole economic system within the past century. This has resulted in profound social changes and the redirection of our point of view on life. In some occupations the readjustment to the new conditions has been rapid and complete; in others it has come with difficulty. In all the great series of farm occupations the readjustment has been the most tardy, because the whole structure of a traditional and fundamental system has been involved. It is not strange, therefore, that development is still arrested in certain respects; that marked inequalities have arisen; or that positive injustice may prevail even to a very marked and widespread extent. All these difficulties are the results of the unequal development of our contemporary civilization. All this may come about without any intention on the part of anyone that it should be so. The problems are nevertheless just as real, and they must be studied and remedies must be found.

These deficiencies are recognized by the people. We have found, not only the testimony of the farmers themselves but of all persons in touch with farm life, more less serious agricultural unrest in every part of the United States, even in the most prosperous regions. There is a widespread tendency for farmers to move to town. It is not advisable, of course, that all country persons remain in the country; but this general desire to move is evidence that the open country is not satisfying as a permanent abode. This tendency is not peculiar to any region. In difficult farming regions, and where the competition with other farming sections is most severe, the young people may go to town to better their condition. In the best regions the older people retire to town, because it is socially more attractive and they see a prospect of living in comparative ease and comfort on the rental of their lands. Nearly everywhere there is a townward movement for the purpose of securing school advantages for the children. All this tends to sterilize the open country and to lower its social status. Often the farm is let to tenants. The farmer is likely to lose active interest in life when he retires to town, and he becomes a stationary citizen, adding a social problem to the town. He is likely to find his expenses increasing and is obliged to raise rents to his tenant, thereby making it more difficult for the man who works on the land. On his death his property enriches the town rather than the country. The withdrawal of the children from the farms detracts from the interest and efficiency of the country school and adds to the interest of the town school. Thus the country is drained of the energy of

youth on the one hand and the experience and accumulation of age on the other, and three problems more or less grave are created—a problem for the town, a problem for the public school, and also a problem of tenancy in the open country.

The farming interest is not, as a whole, receiving the full rewards to which it is entitled, nor has country life attained to anywhere near its possibilities of attractiveness and comfort. The farmer is necessarily handicapped in the development of social life and in the conduct of his business because of his separateness, the small volume of his output, and the lack of capital. He often begins with practically no capital, and expects to develop his capital and relationships out of the annual business itself; and even when he has capital with which to set up a business and operate it the amount is small when compared with that required in other enterprises. He is not only handicapped in his farming but is disadvantaged when he deals with other business interests and with other social groups. It is peculiarly necessary, therefore, that Government should give him adequate consideration and protection. There are difficulties of the separate man, living quietly on his land, that government should understand.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMISSION.

The commission is requested to report on the means that are “now available for supplying the deficiencies which exist” in the country life of the United States and “upon the best methods of organized permanent effort in investigation and actual work” along the lines of betterment of rural conditions.

The President's letter appointing the commission is as follows:

OYSTER BAY, N. Y., *August 10, 1908.*

MY DEAR PROFESSOR BAILEY: No nation has ever achieved permanent greatness unless this greatness was based on the wellbeing of the great farmer class, the men who live on the soil; for it is upon their welfare, material and moral, that the welfare of the rest of the nation ultimately rests. In the United States, disregarding certain sections and taking the nation as a whole, I believe it to be true that the farmers in general are better off to-day than they ever were before. We Americans are making great progress in the development of our agricultural resources. But it is equally true that the social and economic institutions of the open country are not keeping pace with the development of the nation as a whole. The farmer is, as a rule, better off than his forbears; but his increase in well-being has not kept pace with that of the country as a whole. While the condition of the farmers in some of our best farming regions leaves little to be desired, we are far from having reached so high a level in all parts of the country. In portions of the South, for example, where the Department of Agriculture, through the farmers' cooperative demonstration work of Doctor Knapp, is directly instructing more than 30,000 farmers in better methods of farming, there is nevertheless much unnecessary suffering and needless loss of efficiency on the farm. A physician, who is also a careful student of farm life in the South, writing to me recently about the enormous

problems and discouragements. There is every evidence that the people in rural districts have welcomed the commission as an agency that is much needed in the interest of country life, and in many of the hearings they have asked that the commission be continued in order that it may make thorough investigations of the subjects that it has considered. The press has taken great interest in the work, and in many cases has been of special service to the commission in securing direct information from country people.

The activities of the commission have been directed mainly along four lines: The issuing of questions designed to bring out a statement of conditions in all parts of the United States; correspondence and inquiries by different members of the commission, so far as time would permit, each in a particular field; the holding of hearings in many widely separated places; discussions in local meetings held in response to a special suggestion by the President.

#### THE CIRCULAR OF QUESTIONS.

As a means of securing the opinions of the people themselves on some of the main aspects of country life, a set of questions was distributed, as follows:

- I. Are the farm homes in your neighborhood as good as they should be under existing conditions?
- II. Are the schools in your neighborhood training boys and girls satisfactorily for life on the farm?
- III. Do the farmers in your neighborhood get the returns they reasonably should from the sale of their products?
- IV. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the railroads, highroads, trolley lines, etc., the services they reasonably should have?
- V. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the United States postal service, rural telephones, etc., the service they reasonably should expect?
- VI. Are the farmers and their wives in your neighborhood satisfactorily organized to promote their mutual buying and selling interest?
- VII. Are the renters of farms in your neighborhood making a satisfactory living?
- VIII. Is the supply of farm labor in your neighborhood satisfactory?
- IX. Are the conditions surrounding hired labor on the farms in your neighborhood satisfactory to the hired man?
- X. Have the farmers in your neighborhood satisfactory facilities for doing their business in banking, credit, insurance, etc.?
- XI. Are the sanitary conditions of farms in your neighborhood satisfactory?
- XII. Do the farmers and their wives and families in your neighborhood get together for mutual improvement, entertainment, and social intercourse as much as they should?

What, in your judgment, is the most important single thing to be done for the general betterment of country life?

(NOTE.—Following each question are the subquestions: (a) Why? (b) What suggestions have you to make?)