

COMMISSION TO STUDY COUNTRY LIFE IN UNITED STATES

Inquiry That May Bring Results of Greatest Good to Society in General Set on Foot by President Roosevelt As an Outcome of His Personal Study of Social Conditions in Rural Districts

THAT the corn show is indeed national and not sectional in its scope has been proven in many ways, but nothing gives greater emphasis to the fact than the decision of the Commission on Country Life to give two days of the limited time allowed it to conferences with the representative men of the farm and allied industries who will be in Omaha during the coming exposition.

It is only recently that the commission was appointed and the president has requested that they make a preliminary report by January 1, that he may embody a portion at least of their recommendations in the message which he is preparing to congress. With this time limit set upon them it may be seen that the estimate they have placed on the corn show is no slight one.

The Commission on Country Life was appointed as the result of a widespread feeling, which President Roosevelt has felt and voiced, that life in the country is not as livable as it should and might easily be. There are conditions, social, educational, sanitary and economic which may be improved with the result that dwellers away from the cities may have many of the advantages and escape many of the discomforts of urban life.

The commission will be in Omaha for two days and they have set as their time the first two days of the corn show, December 9 and 10. Invitations have been issued to 150 representative men to meet them informally and give the commission the

benefit of their knowledge and insight into the present conditions of farm life and the improvements which are possible and practical. The men who have been asked to appear before the commission are of three classes. First of all are representatives of the farmers themselves. Then there will be men who handle the products of the farm, including the manufacturers of cereal products, and also there will be men who manage the leading papers devoted to agriculture and rural life. It is the hope of the commission that the hearings will be entirely informal, that they meet those who best know and who can best interpret the real conditions which now prevail on the farm and who can show in what ways they may be improved.



HENRY G. WALLACE.

Some of the subjects which are being considered by the commission and which will be investigated by them during their stay in Omaha may be enumerated here:

Improvement of country schools so that it will not be necessary for farmers to move to town or send the children there to get graded or high school work.



KENYON L. BUTTERFIELD.

The improvement of country roads and establishing a better system of caring for them.

Practical plans for the establishment of social centers in country communities, which will be attractive enough to overcome the tendency to move to the centers of population.

Increasing the practical usefulness of the country church.

Promotion of intellectual interests by the establishment of libraries, lecture courses, farmers' institutes and similar affairs.

Establishment of a system of co-operative buying and marketing among farmers, which will aid in making them independent of middle men and troublesome problems of transportation.

The creation of a public sentiment which will demand and obtain a parcels post.

Encouragement of various forms of co-operation, such as mutual insurance companies, creameries and other institutions.

An increase of interest in the aesthetic and sanitary side of farm life, with reference to more attractive residences, lawns, gardens, etc.

Plans for improving the condition of the women of the farm.

nations. President Roosevelt believes, and so do those whom he has appointed on this commission, that the city has had its share of attention. The problems of the unemployed, the sick and indigent, the criminal classes, overcrowded tenement houses, the fight against the social evil and the liquor traffic, all have been studied for years. Men and women have given years of work and money without end and no means have been spared to find some solution of these evils. Books have been written, lecturers have offered panaceas, pulpits have thundered with explanations, but to many it has never even occurred that there may be problems of country life which are equally important and which will as well repay investigation.

The commission has little faith in the various plans which have been proposed to induce people to leave the cities and locate on the farm. The Salvation army and other philanthropic organizations have from time to time undertaken this work and have established colonies of various sorts, but no practical results have been obtained. It is one of the peculiarities of human nature that even the poorest of the residents of the New York east side prefer their present abode to life in the country, and even in isolated cases where they have been induced to remove to a farm, they almost always become dissatisfied and refuse to stay, and that ends the experiment so far as they are concerned.

Mr. Pinchot stated the feeling of the entire commission when

a problem which is admitted to be the most difficult of all.

These are some of the most salient points which come up in such an investigation as the commission is now making. There are a thousand others which will suggest themselves to even a superficial student of the peculiar conditions of country life, but enough have been mentioned to give an idea of the scope of the work to be done and its importance to those who till the soil and provide the food of the

he said: "We must make our effort to keep the people on the farm once they are there; not to toll them away from the city to the farm."

Even a mere reading of the enumerated objects which the commission now has under consideration will show that when they are worked out and put into operation, even in the most gradual and conservative manner, there is going to result a change in country life which will amount to a social revolution, and some of the objects proposed are certain to meet with vigorous and strenuous opposition from those who are reaping benefits from the present organization of country life.

Consider the one project of co-operation among the farmers. If this should be worked out until it becomes a nation-wide fact instead of a theory, it will mean the death-knell of the country town.

These centers of life are primarily trading points for the territory which they serve, and secondarily, they furnish the social and educational features which are demanded by the population immediately surrounding them. The charge which is made against these towns is that they are wasteful. They put a heavy tax on the resources of the farmer without any adequate recompense. They are charged with being socially demoralizing, as failures as industrial centers and unsatisfactory from an educational standpoint. It is true their schools are better than those in the country, but they are not good and do not furnish the education which should be



WALTER H. PAGE.



C. S. BARRETT.

given to the boys and the girls who are to be the farmers of the next generation.

The decline of the country town is further forecasted by the extension of co-operation in buying and selling the necessities and products of the farm. Rural free delivery has already shown how this is becoming true. The parcels post will augment this condition and the establishment of a postal savings bank would withdraw another important prop, as it would enable the farmer to handle his money in a manner entirely independent of the local financial institutions.

The establishment of social centers in the country, along with the improvement of the country schools, is another long step in the same direction. Farmers' social clubs, with well furnished rooms, pool and billiard tables and reading rooms, have already become an established fact in many places, and as the idea grows and acquires a foothold in the country generally it will be no longer necessary for the farmer to go to the county seat or nearest town to meet his friends and acquaintances or to enjoy social intercourse. As lecture courses are added, libraries extended and institutes are formed, he will find the social life he desires almost at his door and with the establishment of township graded and high schools with courses adapted to the community the advantage of the small town as the educational center shall have passed away.

Instead of the usual cut-and-dried curriculum as now offered in the town schools, it is expected that there will be an effort to add subjects of direct interest and value to the children who live and who expect to live on the farm. Elementary chemistry, the adaptation of some knowledge of geology to the study of soil conditions, practical botany and horticulture; these and many other lines as yet unthought of, would add an element of interest and practical worth to the schools which has never heretofore been supplied.

Good Roads Problem

The good roads problem which the commission is taking up is by no means new. For years the agitation has been spreading and every means possible has been employed to awaken an intelligent public interest in the subject, though the success thus far has been indifferent. And yet, good roads are the very foundation without which none of the other betterments for farm dwellers are possible. The ideal school system, the lecture courses, the club rooms, even the co-operative business projects, will fall short of the mark unless there are good roads.

In the cities this problem has already been satisfactorily worked out in the majority of cases. In the case of country roads, however, the solution is more difficult. One great reason for this is that it is a work which must be carried on with state aid, through the instrumentality of the state legislatures, and this has often been rendered impossible through the indifference of the farmers themselves.

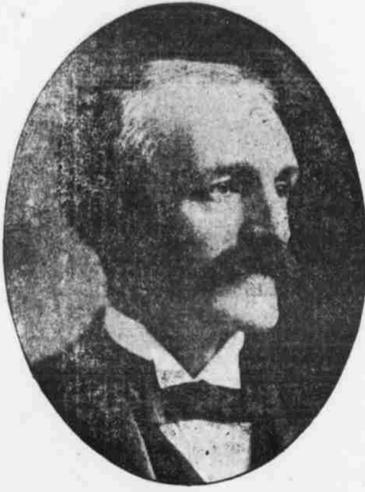
In the minds of many good roads enthusiasts, the problem will be best worked out through the co-operation of the national, the state and the local governing units. Much along this line has been already accomplished. In many states the national government has furnished experts to aid the local authorities in building the best possible roads with the material and the resources available. Another proposition which is being enthusiastically advocated by Congressman Anthony of Kansas, as well as others, is for the government to build a great military highway from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley through the state of Kansas. They are the two largest military posts in the United States, and it is argued that such a road would be a national example of the benefits which would accrue from national and state, as well as local co-operation.

In the minds of the commission nothing is of more importance than the good roads movement and no subject will receive more careful attention from them.

The report which the commission will make next month will be merely preliminary and indeed it is in this light that all the work so far accomplished is regarded, for it is recognized that it will be a matter of years to bring about the changes and improvements which will have been mentioned.

Commissioner Wallace is authority for the statement that the first report will recommend better roads, a better system of country schools, a postal savings bank and a limited parcels post as the objects to be first sought by those who would make country life more attractive. Mr. Wallace further says that the president will send to congress a special message urging legislation along the lines demanded by the farmers.

In the United States the farmers hold the balance of power and if through this commission and in other ways they come to a realization of what they may and should have, all the things sought for will be realized and the conditions of rural life will quietly but certainly change to an extent which can be described only as a social revolution.



GIFFORD PINCHOT.

benefit of their knowledge and insight into the present conditions of farm life and the improvements which are possible and practical.

The men who have been asked to appear before the commission are of three classes. First of all are representatives of the farmers themselves. Then there will be men who handle the products of the farm, including the manufacturers of cereal products, and also there will be men who manage the leading papers devoted to agriculture and rural life. It is the hope of the commission that the hearings will be entirely informal, that they meet those who best know and who can best interpret the real conditions which now prevail on the farm and who can show in what ways they may be improved.

The commission, as selected by the president, was most happily chosen. It is composed of men, each one of whom is an expert in his own line, and all have proved their worth by the success they have made. As the commission now stands it consists of Prof. L. H. Bailey, dean of the New York Agricultural college, chairman; Henry Wallace of Des Moines, a practical farmer and editor of the Wallace Farmer; President Kenyon L. Butterfield of the Massachusetts Agricultural college; Gifford Pinchot, government forester; Walter H. Page, editor of the World's Work, and W. A. Beard of Sacramento, Cal.

Pinchot An Enthusiast

Of these men probably the one best known is Mr. Pinchot. He is of an unusual sort. First of all he is a close friend of President Roosevelt, he is a millionaire, is absolutely devoid of political ambition and is an enthusiast on the subject of preserving and renewing the forests of the nation. When he was a young man his father, a multi-millionaire, sent him to Germany to round out his education at one of their best universities. While there Pinchot fell in love with that old German law which requires that when a tree is cut down another must be planted in its place.

He came back to the United States thoroughly in love with the subject of forestry and has made it the study of his life. Since being appointed government forester, he has, with the approval and support of the president, inaugurated a forestry policy which is radical even to the point of being drastic, and pressure of every conceivable kind has been brought to have him modify it. But he is a man whom it is not easy to get in a corner. He is rich enough that no money consideration can move him. He has no political aspirations and so escapes that usually vulnerable situation. He has the confidence of the president, with whom he is thoroughly in accord. He spends many times the salary he receives from the government in paying assistants who could not be secured on the meager pay the government allows.

In his studies of the forest situation he has been over the entire country. He has lived among the poorest and can tell of many nights spent in seeking sleep on the bare floor of some cabin far from civilization. He knows of the deadly monotony and the unending monotony which fills the lives of these people, and he believes that above the work of creating new institutions is the work of educating the country dwellers to appreciate those they have and to form a public sentiment which will of itself cause them to demand and obtain better conditions.

At the present time the commission is on the Pacific coast, where they are holding conferences with the leading farmers and orchard men of California. San Francisco, Sacramento and other places have been visited and the return trip will be begun in time to enable them to reach Omaha on the date announced.

What They Expect to Do

But the question may well be asked: What is this commission to do? How are they going about this great question of making country life more pleasant, more attractive? What can they suggest or advise which will be practical and at the same time effective? Will it not result in a voluminous report, which will be filled with statistics, but which will be of value from an academic standpoint only? Will they be able to rise above merely material conditions and prove equal to the task of appreciating the inner life of the men and women who have lived face to face with the loneliness and, often, with the drudgery of the agricultural vocation?

In the minds of the few to whom this project is not new or novel, but to whom it has been an ever-present problem for many years, there is nothing vague or uncertain in the work which the commission is to perform. A number of specific problems are involved, and while their handling will involve much research, investigation and tact, yet the results aimed at are clear and well defined and certain objects are being steadily worked for and never lost sight of.

More than a year ago the president, in a speech at Lansing,

Followers of Vedanta at Worship

NEW YORK, Dec. 5.—"A new religion is born in New York every day."

So one of the Vedantic faith expresses herself after the regular Sunday morning service.

She points with pride to the fact that Vedanta has flourished here since Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the Manhattan sect, came to deliver lectures in New York as delegate to the Parliament of Religions in 1894. At first the followers of Vedanta, few in number, met here and there in hired rooms and halls. In October, 1899, the Vedanta society established fixed headquarters, and the fine library, which is one of its most salient features, had its beginning at Tuxedo hall.

In the spring of 1900, augmented and strengthened by the addition of many new members and students, the society took more desirable quarters at 103 East Fifty-eighth street. Public lectures were given at Carnegie hall and other places and in 1904 the society moved again to a large house at 62 West Seventy-first street. Lately, grown still larger, it has moved to 135 West Eleventh street.

There are approximately 150 members on the rolls and many students who expect to embrace the Vedantic faith. The fees of members are small, only \$25 a year, payment of which secures all the privileges of the services and lectures, the library, talks with the residing Swamis and the classes in Yoga and free use of the meditation room. The admission to membership is not obtained by the asking, but an examination is made to determine whether the applicant is moved by mere curiosity or by some deeper motive in seeking membership.

"We are not desirous of a large membership," one of the society explains; "in fact, we look upon that as rather a detriment in many ways. Vedanta is the religion that one comes to after one has passed through the preliminaries of other faiths, and so, in the nature of things, it could not reach the great mass of people."

The Sun reporter asks what the Vedantins think of the Emmanuel movement, Christian Science and other similar creeds.

"Christian Science," one says quickly, "is, after all, only the Americanized Buddhism, or the religion of the Oriental brought down to and adapted to our western conditions. Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy did not hesitate to admit in her earlier books the help that she had obtained from Hindu teaching."

"When people come here and say that they have backaches or headaches and desire to gain relief we tell them very courteously that what they probably need is the Christian Science treatment or that of the Emmanuel, for we do not wish to have the Vedantic religion connected in the minds of the public with physical ailments. Vedanta does not turn its back on such necessary parts of our existence as the physical help

in time of sickness, but wants to reach those through the spiritual path."

As the conversation proceeds people begin to drop in for the regular Sunday service. There is a noticeable lack of the firkness in dress and manner that is associated in the public mind with strange creeds.

The men, who predominate in number, are of all ages, from the young business man with alert glance and clear eyes to the gray-haired veteran who, to judge from the absence of worry lines, has certainly gained some help from the Oriental doctrine. The women wear up-to-date costumes.

The chairs in the two rooms are soon filled and at 11 precisely a young woman, one of the officers of the society, enters with a lighted taper. She approaches the altar on the side on which are vases of Easter lilies, sticks of incense and candles in cobra cardsticks. Having lighted candles and incense, she takes her place with the rest of the waiting members.

Besides the altar, the room set apart for worship is practically without ornament. On a raised platform in the center is a high chair with carved back and above it a star, in the center of which is an inscription of which "I am He" is somewhat near a literal rendering. The tuning of the room, paper and hangings is quiet and there is a certain atmosphere of peace apparent to even the casual dropper-in, while the members bask in it visibly.

Someone leans over and explains the symbols of worship.

"The altar stands for the altar of the heart and is dedicated to the Supreme Spirit, which is the soul of our souls and whose nature is Absolute Existence, Intelligence and Bliss. It is dedicated to the self-effulgent light of the Sun of Infinite Wisdom, which dispels the darkness of ignorance in the human heart."

"It is not meant for any individual spirit, but for the infinite spirit which is the source of all personal manifestations and divine incarnations. A worshipper of Christ should think of Christ upon the altar, a worshipper of Buddha or Krishna, Shiva, Jehovah or Allah should think of his ideal as seated upon this symbolic altar of the heart."

"In every case it should be remembered that the altar stands as the symbol of the heart of the worshipper. Names and forms are merely the manifestations of the one nameless and formless infinite being to whom the Vedanta altar is dedicated."

The speaker sits back and loses herself in a reverie that her explanation has evoked, while on the other side a student takes up the lesson and proceeds with the explanation of the other symbols.

"The light of the candle is the symbol of the light of the intellect. It is the light of the pure intellect that reveals the spirit seated upon the altar of the heart. Purified heart and intellect must be united before spiritual realization is attained."

"Flowers are symbolic of the good

thoughts and pure feelings which should be offered to the supreme spirit. When fruits are offered they stand for the fruits of our works."

"The followers of Vedanta who live up to their professed creed spend half an hour every day in meditation. Meditation, we believe, is the most important step in the path of spiritual progress."

Like the first speaker, the second whisperer becomes suddenly quiet, lost in one of the trances which pervade the assembly and to which the perfume of flowers and incense lend encouragement.

Soft steps approach. The worshippers become more alert, although they do not turn their heads. Coming through the side door, tall, erect and graceful, Swami Paramananda enters.

He does not look on close scrutiny more than 25. His face is of the ageless type. He is a fine type of the intellectual Hindu. Without his saying a word his personality is felt at once.

He sits in the carved chair, allows his dark eyes to glance over the worshippers and, clasping his hands in front of him, invites to silence. His own eyes close and the eyes of the worshippers follow suit.

Swami Paramananda is robed in an apricot-colored gown which falls a little below the knee and is fastened about the waist with a sash of silk of the same color. Like the later swamis who have come to America and discarded the turban on account of the comment it excited, he has no head covering and his black hair is worn short. His response is absolute, there is not a motion of an eyelash, not a twitch of a nervous muscle. To all intents and purposes he is a bronze idol, carved and curious, not a human being.

Finally, the long, tapering fingers on his knees unlatch, the eyes open, he stands erect and begins in a strange singsong recitative to intone a prayer in Sanskrit, which he translates into English with a slight accent:

May He protect us from all evils. May both the teacher and the taught enjoy together the blessings of the Lord. May whatever we study be well studied and strengthening to us. May we never hate each other. Om. Santi, Santi, Santi. (Peace, Peace, Peace.) O Light of the Universe from the unreal to the real lead us. From darkness to light lead us. From death to immortality lead us. Peace, Peace, Peace!

The last "peace" dies away in the perfumed silence. Again the Swami invites to meditation and again, idol like, he gives example of one of the most persistent articles of the cult—the need of absolute spiritual relaxation and mental rest.

By this time the worshippers themselves have lost any semblance of restlessness. Like the Swami, they are able to attain perfect rigidity of body while the mind rests. "You cannot," he says a little later to them, "think along straight lines unless you sit straight, unless you walk erect." There are no drooping shoulders visible, even those of

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