

NEGLECT OF THE LAND

The neglect of the land as the true basis of society is one of the major evils undermining Western Civilization. This lack of appreciation for, and slightening of, the role played by the soil and its tillers in the cultural and economic life of a country are producing ominous results. The most obvious result is the movement which George Boyle refers to as "the flight from the land". Less obvious, but equally deplorable, are the dangers to the State through an excess of the principle of centralization and the disallusionment and privation suffered by the individual inherent in such a trend.

The value of land to society began to decrease with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. As the Industrial Revolution progressed, the production of goods for sale became more important than production for use. The increased emphasis on the sale of goods, as a means of obtaining wealth, resulted in the factory system and its evil effects. The most important of these was the creation of a new class of property-less workers — the urban proletariat. With the continued rapid advancement in technology, the machine replaced the soil as the basis of this new economy.

Machine power soon became too strong for man to control. As industrialism spread, and the sense of justice decreased, great numbers of workers became the slaves rather than the masters of the machine. The increased production of goods and the accumulation of wealth by the few in no way balances the de-humanizing influences on, and the financial insecurity of, the men who help to produce the goods. The machine, instead of providing leisure and articles necessary for the cultural advancement of man, has become a scourge in the hands of avaricious and greedy men.

The new set of values arising from the Industrial Revolution, or Evolution, spread to the rural areas, and soon rural culture and values disappeared from most of the Western World. The dignity of labor and the production for use and consumption, necessary foundations for the farmers' self-respect and welfare, are not in harmony with the sense of values of modern capitalism. For capitalism (as an economic system) has as its driving force the profit motive and the possibility of indefinite gains. The dignity of toil is lost to a great degree in the modern world. Men work to get clear of work. They look forward to the day when they will have to work no longer. They fail to realize

that the human spirit is realitively creative and hence the need of self-expression for man's proper development.

Many rural dwellers, in attempting to apply the method of big business to farming, have ended in failure. Nature gives, but she expects something in return. The "mining" of the soil and the unintelligent destruction of food lots soon force the "miner" and his family to seek employment in the nearest city.

The anti-social advertising of the radio and the newspaper is another underestimated force influencing the trek of rural people to the cities. Anti-social because it is not conducive to the common good. People are told that they need this or that, and that if they do not have it they are not up to date. Constant repetition of this theme causes them to purchase articles which they cannot afford. The farmer gets in debt, mortgages his farm, and soon leaves for the city. The detestable installment plans of modern business houses accelerates this purchase of unneeded articles. The constant emphasis on the superiority of manufactured goods has also resulted in an almost complete disappearance of the handicrafts. Articles that could be made just as well at home are now purchased by the farmer's family at the nearest town. Again, home-made articles are not the style in urban culture. The influence of anti-social advertising has made life, for many, a struggle to keep up with the Jones'.

The modern "ideal man" is the man who makes a great deal of money. The means used are not important. The farm youth, for whom this is the ideal, realizes that to be a success according to modern standard, he must leave the soil and enter professions or business. And so, the more ambitious of the farmers' sons, potential leaders in a community, forsake the plow for the desks of white-collar workers. The distinction between **living** and the making of money seems to be fading from the minds of men.

Many rural folks have become fascinated by the gay life of the city. They consider their lot as one of monotony and incessant toil. The city holds out to them the life of the bright lights, motion picture, and other phases of commercial recreation. They are attracted to the city like beetles to a lighted kerosene lamp. The entrance of these people into the cities helps to underscore the dangers of which Dawson warns in *Beyond Politics* (1939): "For the greatest danger that threatens modern civilization is its degeneration into a hedonistic mass civilization of the cinema, the picture paper, and the dance hall, where the individual, the family and the nation dissolve into a human herd without personality, or traditions, or beliefs."

It is always easier to point to the ills of society than to suggest any tangible remedy. The Western World is in dire need of a return to the source from which it sprang, and from which it has wandered so far, a return to Christian values of things, and more specifically to Catholic values as set forth by the infallible teaching authority of the Church. For in the ultimate analysis, the religion of a people gives form to a civilization.

Since we are here concerned with the neglect of the land, the immediate need is a true picture of rural life, and a change of social and economic values which will restore the tiller of the soil to his rightful place in society.

The farmer's life contains a great deal of work, but work is man's lot since his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. He has no fear that the power of the soil which he uses to satisfy his wants will make him a slave. Nature works slowly, and she takes time out, as it were, to rest in each season. The overall result is that the average farmer does no more work than the average city wage-earner. But note the tremendous difference. The farmer works primarily for himself and his family. He works on land of his own where he can plan and improve things for himself. For him there is not the haunting fear of unemployment which is ever in the minds of the urban proletariat.

The farm is the ideal place for the rearing of children. In the country there is plenty of space, air, and sunshine. How different from the hideous slums to which our so-called "progressive" society condemns millions to suffer in silence. How different, too, from the cities, where selfishness and the pursuit of pleasure on the one hand, and misery and degradation on the other, has caused a serious drop in the birth rate. Rural life, also, develops a sense of responsibility in the child at an early age. The young child is often entrusted with the duty of watering cows, feeding poultry, and closing gates. He realizes that failure in those duties would mean a loss to the family. The only dark spot in the picture, and the important one, is in the shape of the neglect of the child's education by the state. Despite this serious handicap, the farm has supplied many leaders in all spheres of social life.

The complaint that country life is dull and monotonous is generally made by people with a superficial knowledge of country life. There is repetition, but not necessarily monotony. The modern "mind" fails to see the beauty and value of simple things. Modern adventure and drama reaches its heights in the deeds of the Superman of comics or of Buck Rogers and his ray guns. But one will find on the

farm, if one looks close enough, adventure, beauty, mystery, life and death. The growing plant, the color which the rising sun gives to the dew on the spider's web, the smell of new hay, the birth of new life in the barns, the war between cats and mice in the grainary, are a few of the farm's "tremendous trifles."

Do not confuse the above paragraphs with the sentimentalism of Rousseau and his generation; nor for a moment suppose that the problem dealt with is slight or imaginary. A brief glance at the headlines of the daily newspaper is sufficient to show that grave perils to our economic system are present and rapidly increasing. "Wherever the Industrial system has reached a second generation, it is threatened by two mortal perils. The first is a demand by an organized proletariat for sustenance relation to the products of its labors: a demand which threatens the very existence of **profit**, (on the necessary presumption of which capitalism reposes;) the second, and immediately graver danger, is that of a revolt for the confiscation of the means of production." (Hilaire Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals*). A Communistic state is the logical conclusion of the latter peril.

The farmer and other rural dwellers have need of many true friends; men and woman who will aid them in establishing correct economic values by fostering among them the principles of the co-operative movement, a movement based on charity and fellowship; literary people who will supply them with rural literature, and poetry necessary for the re-establishment of a rural culture; men who will be instrumental in moving governments to provide rural children with the standards of education they deserve; friends who will lead them and urban workers away from the dangers in the Communistic camp.

Peoples and governments of Western civilization must no longer blind themselves to the truth expressed by the poet Goldsmith in these famous lines from *The Deserted Village*:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ill a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made:
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

—P. J. McINNIS '47