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Some Aspects of the Farmers' Problems

By BERNARD M. BARUCH

(Reprinted from Atlantic Monthly)

I

The whole rural world is in a ferment of unrest, and there is an unparalleled volume and intensity of determined, if not angry, protest, and an ominous swarming of occupational conferences, interest groupings, political movements and propaganda. Such a turmoil cannot but arrest our attention. Indeed, it demands our careful study and examination. It is not likely that six million aloof and ruggedly independent men have come together and banded themselves into active unions, societies, farm bureaus, and so forth, for no sufficient cause.

Investigation of the subject conclusively proves that, while there is much overstatement of grievances and misconception of remedies, the farmers are right in complaining of wrongs long endured, and right in holding that it is feasible to relieve their ills with benefit to the rest of the community. This being the case of an industry that contributes, in the raw material form alone, about one-third of the national annual wealth production and is the means of livelihood of about 49 per cent of the population, it is obvious that the subject is one of grave concern. Not only do the farmers make up one-half of the nation, but the well-being of the other half depends upon them.

So long as we have nations, a wise political economy will aim at a large degree of national self-sufficiency and self-containment. Rome fell when the food supply was too far removed from the belly. Like her, we shall destroy our own agriculture and extend our sources of food distantly and precariously, if we do not see to it that our farmers are well and fairly paid for their services. The farm gives the nation men as well as food. Cities derive their vitality and are forever renewed from the country, but an impoverished countryside exports intelligence and retains unintelligence. Only the lower grades of mentality and character will remain on, or seek, the farm, unless agriculture is capable of being pursued with contentment and adequate compensation. Hence, to embitter and impoverish the farmer is to dry up and contaminate the vital sources of the nation.

The war showed convincingly how dependent the nation is on the full productivity of the farms. Despite herculean efforts, agricultural production kept only a few weeks or months ahead of consumption, and that only by increasing the acreage of certain staple crops at the cost of reducing that of others. We ought not to forget that lesson when we ponder on the farmer's problems. They are truly common problems, and there should be no attempt to deal with them as if they were purely selfish demands of a clear-cut group, antagonistic to the rest of the community. Rather should we consider agriculture in the light of broad national policy, just as we consider oil, coal, steel, dyestuffs, and so forth, as sinews of national strength. Our growing population and a higher standard of living demand increasing food supplies, and more wool, cotton, hides, and the rest. With the disappearance of free or cheap fertile land, additional acreage and increased yields can come only from costly effort. This we need not expect from an impoverished or unhappy rural population.

It will not do to take a narrow view of the rural discontent, or to appraise it from the standpoint of yesterday. This is peculiarly an age of flux and change and new deals. Because a thing always has been so no longer means that it is righteous, or always shall be so. More, perhaps, than ever before, there is a widespread feeling that all human relations can be improved by taking thought, and that it is not becoming for the reasoning animal to leave his destiny largely to chance and natural incidence.

Prudent and orderly adjustment of production and distribution in accordance with consumption is recognized as wise management in every business but that of farming. Yet, I venture to say, there is no other industry in which it is so important to the public—to the city-dweller—that production should be sure, steady, and increasing, and that distribution should be in proportion to the need. The unorganized farmers naturally act blindly and impulsively and, in consequence, surfeit and dearth, accompanied by disconcerting price-variations, harass the consumer. One year potatoes rot in the fields because of excess production, and there is a scarcity of the things that have been displaced to make way for the expansion of the potato acreage; next year the punished farmers mass their fields on some other crop, and potatoes enter the class of luxuries; and so on.

Agriculture is the greatest and fundamentally the most important of our American industries. The cities are but the branches of the tree of national life, the roots of which go deeply into the land. We all flourish or decline with the farmer. So, when we of the cities read of the present universal distress of the farmers, of a slump of six billion dollars in the farm value of their crops in a single year, of their inability to meet mortgages or to pay current bills, and how, seeking relief from their ills, they are planning to form pools, inaugurate farmers' strikes, and demand legislation abolishing grain exchanges, private cattle markets, and the like, we ought not hastily to brand them as economic heretics and highwaymen, and hurl at them the charge of being seekers of special privilege. Rather, we should ask if their trouble is not ours, and see what can be done to improve the situation. Purely from self-interest, if for no higher motive, we should help them. All of us want to get back permanently to "normalcy;" but is it reasonable to hope for that condition unless our greatest and most basic industry can be put on a sound and solid permanent foundation? The farmers are not entitled to special privileges; but are they not right in demanding that they be placed on an equal footing with the buyers of their products and with other industries?

II

Let us, then, consider some of the farmer's grievances, and see how far they are real. In doing so, we should remember that, while there have been, and still are, instances of purposeful abuse, the subject should not be approached with any general imputation to existing distributive agencies of deliberately intentional oppression, but rather with the conception that the marketing of farm products has not been modernized.

An ancient evil, and a persistent one, is the undergrading of farm products, with the result that what the farmers sell as of one quality is resold as of a higher. That this sort of chicanery should persist on any important scale in these days of business integrity would seem almost incredible, but there is much evidence that it does so persist. Even as I write, the newspapers announce the suspension of several firms from the New York Produce Exchange for exporting to Germany as No. 2 wheat a whole shipload of grossly inferior wheat mixed with oats, chaff and the like.

Another evil is that of inaccurate weighing of farm products, which, it is charged, is sometimes a matter of dishonest intention and sometimes of protective policy on the part of the local buyer, who fears that he may "weigh out" more than he "weighs in."

A greater grievance is that at present the field farmer has little or no control over the time and conditions of marketing his products, with the result that he is often underpaid for his products and usually overcharged for marketing service. The difference between what the farmer receives and what the consumer pays often exceeds all possibility of justification. To cite a single illustration. Last year, according to figures attested by the railways and the growers, Georgia watermelon-raisers received on the average 7.5 cents for a melon, the railroads got 12.7 cents for carrying it to Baltimore and the consumer paid one dollar, leaving 79.8 cents for the service of marketing and its risks, as against 20.2 cents for growing and transporting. The hard annals of farm-life are replete with such commentaries on the crudeness of present practices.

Nature prescribes that the farmer's "goods" must be finished within two or three months of the year, while financial and storage limitations generally compel him to sell them at the same time. As a rule, other industries are in a continuous process of finishing goods for the markets; they distribute as they produce, and they can curtail production without too great injury to themselves or the community; but if the farmer restricts his output, it is with disastrous consequences, both to himself and to the community.

The average farmer is busy with production for the major part of the year, and has nothing to sell. The bulk of his output comes on the market at once. Because of lack of storage facilities and of financial support, the farmer cannot carry his goods through the year and dispose of them as they are currently needed. In the great majority of cases, farmers have to entrust storage—in warehouses and elevators—and the financial carrying of their products to others.

Farm products are generally marketed at a time when there is a congestion of both transportation and finance—when cars and money are scarce. The outcome, in many instances, is that the farmers not only sell under pressure, and therefore at a disadvantage, but are compelled to take further reductions in net returns, in order to meet the charges for the service of storing, transporting, financing, and ultimate marketing—which charges they claim, are often excessive, bear heavily on both consumer and producer, and are under the control of those performing the services. It is true that they are relieved of the risks of a changing market by selling at once; but they are quite willing to take the unfavorable chance, if the favorable one also is theirs and they can retain for themselves a part of the service charges that are uniform, in good years and bad, with high prices and low.

While, in the main, the farmer must sell, regardless of market conditions, at the time of the maturity of crops, he cannot suspend production in toto. He must go on producing if he is to go on living, and if the world is to exist. The most he can do is to curtail production a little or alter its form, and that—because he is in the dark as to the probable demand for his goods—may be only to jump from the frying pan into the fire, taking the consumer with him.

Even the dairy farmers, whose output is not seasonal, complain that they find themselves at a disadvantage in the marketing of their productions, especially raw milk, because of the high costs of distribution, which they must ultimately bear.

To Be Continued

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A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT AMERICAN

"Do you covet distinction? You will never get it by serving yourself. Do you covet honor? You will get it only as a servant of mankind."—Woodrow Wilson's Address at Swarthmore College, October 5, 1913.

Within a few days the American public will be given an opportunity to express tangibly its faith in liberal ideals, and in the world democracy for which Woodrow Wilson has been the chief spokesman. This opportunity will be the national free-will offering for the endowment of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the purpose of which is to make periodic awards, in Mr. Wilson's name, for distinguished public service. The collection, under the auspices of a nationally representative committee, which begins this week, will have as its goal the raising of a fund of $1,000,000 or more.

Woodrow Wilson saw beyond the momentous conflict of his day and made clear to men certain ideals of world relationship that helped them to prosecute the ugly business of war until victory rested with the peoples of democracy. Plain men, the men in the ranks, had begun to believe that the world had come to a pass where living was beyond endurance; yet they felt, vaguely maybe, that they were fighting and dying to establish some principle of human freedom which would in effect constitute a rebirth of civilization. It remained for the American to become their highly articulate spokesman. By word and deed he clarified the issue so that all the world could see it as a struggle between democracy and autocracy.

Any student of Mr. Wilson's life, any undertaking related to him, must come to consider this question: What is the motive that actuated him in his public life? His ideals have been published to the world; but what is the source from which they come? The answer seems to be found in those prophetic words uttered early in his first term as President of the United States, "Do you covet distinction? You will never get it by serving yourself. Do you covet honor? You will get it only as a servant of mankind."

The Foundation created in his name can find no better watchwords.

On Christmas Eve, 1920, a group of women met to consider what was then a nebulous wish to pay some sort of tribute to the man who was shortly to leave the White House. There was no doubt in their minds as to the verdict of history; rather the thought was to establish a precedent, if possible, and honor a great American while he lived. Great men had seldom been so honored.

The thought of a tribute was discussed among the women and then presented to a group of men, friends of Mr. Wilson and former members of his official family, and finally the nebulous desire to honor him while he lived became the Woodrow Wilson Foundation.

The materialized idea has been developed far beyond the thought of a tribute to the former President. It is to be that, of course, but chiefly it is to perpetuate his ideals of democracy and human freedom, and in such form as to be both an inspiration and a reward to other men whose ambition it is to "enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement."

The Foundation, "created in recognition of the national and international services of Woodrow Wilson," will provide awards for "meritorious service to democracy, public welfare, liberal thought or peace through justice."

The founding of an institution which is to be a significant demonstration of America's belief in idealism is an historical occasion, and to be commemorated as such. An emblem has been adopted which will permanently represent the spirit of the Foundation. The central feature of the emblem is a portrait of Woodrow Wilson.

A number of reproductions of this emblem have been struck off in the form of certificates to be presented to subscribers to the endowment. They will mark the recipient as one of the founders.

It is the present purpose of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation to raise the endowment. When that has been done a board of trustees composed of eminent Americans will be appointed and entrusted with the administration of the fund and the granting of the awards.

Maximilian Harden has said of the war and its aftermath: "Only one conqueror's work will endure—Wilson's thought."

Acting with Franklin D. Roosevelt, the national chairman, is an executive committee of national distinction, including Cleveland H. Dodge, chairman.

For Maryland the state chairman is Clarence K. Bowie, Baltimore head quarters, 1006 Fidelity Building, Baltimore. Mrs. S. Johnson Poe, Baltimore, is chairman of the women's committee.

On the national committee, among the Maryland members are Governor Albert C. Ritchie, Dean John H. Latane, of Johns Hopkins University; ex-Governor Harrington and Hon. Blair Lee.

Mistletoe Brains.

One of the most curious illustrations of the working of intelligence in plants is offered by the mistletoe, whose sticky berry, finding lodgment on a tree branch, throws out a tiny rootlet, which tries to pierce the bark and thus obtain a roothold. If the bark is too tough, the rootlet swings the berry over to a fresh spot, and makes another trial. In this way such a berry has been known to make five jumps in two nights and three days. On one occasion a number of them were discovered by a botanist in the act of vainly journeying along a telegraph wire, trying to find a place to grow.—Milwaukee Sentinel.

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Men's Heavy Fleeced Underwear, val. $1.50..... 79c
Ladies' Fine Cotton Hose, formerly sold for 25c..... 11c
Full size Bed Sheets, val. $1.50 95c
Pillow Cases, val. 35c..... 19c
Middy Blouses, val. $2..... 95c
Ladies' Ribbed Vests and Pants, val. 75c..... 44c
Men's Khaki Pants, val. $2.. $1.19

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Coats, Trimmed with Opossum Fur, made of Velours and Bolivia Cloth, Latest Models, values up to $40, Inventory Sale Price..... $19.95
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Ladies' and Misses' Coats, all sizes, values up to $25, sale price $12.95
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Ladies' and Misses' Suits, all sizes, values up to $25, inventory sale price..... $12.95

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Ladies and Misses Coats, all sizes, values up to $25, to close out at $12.95
Ladies' and Misses Suits, all sizes, newest models, values up to $25..... $12.95

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Ladies' Gingham Dresses, all colors, were $2.50, now.. $1.59
All Mendals Make Dresses, values up to $3.50, now.. $1.95
Boys' Suits, with 2 pairs pants, values up to $12.. $6.95
Boys' All Wool Suits, were $18, now $9.95

MEN'S SHIRTS

Men's $1.50 Shirts..... 95c
Woven and Printed Madras Shirts, Lion Brand, value $3, now $1.69

LADIES' WAISTS

Voile Waists, new patterns, were $1.50, now..... 95c
Silk Waists, value $5..... $2.95
Georgette Waists, all colors, were $6.50..... $3.95

SPECIAL!

Ladies' Silk Dresses that sold up to $25, now..... $9.95

BEAUTIFUL PLAID SKIRTS

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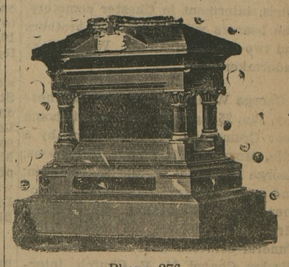

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