

THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

VOLUME VIII

NOVEMBER, 1927

NUMBER 9

PEASANTRY OR POWER

A LONG look once saved my life. Our boat was caught in a jam of floating logs below the high dam. We hoped it would soon drift free and permit us to continue safely down the river. The great jam of logs that hemmed us in seemed to be standing perfectly still; they seemed not to be moving at all. Suddenly we were conscious that the roar of the river plunging down over the dam above us was growing louder. We looked once more at the logs about us; they seemed to lie perfectly still. But the roar of the river was growing louder and louder. Then we lifted up our eyes and took a long look at distant objects; we were not standing still; we were moving slowly, steadily, remorselessly, straight toward destruction. The logs that seemed to be lying so quietly about us were carrying us steadily toward the place where the great river bristling with floating logs came plunging and roaring down over the dam. No boat could live a moment there. The near look had deceived us; the long look told us of our peril. 'Twas the long look that saved us from destruction. What does a long look show us about the farm people of America? What has it to tell us of the way in which we are drifting? Are we standing still as a near look seems to indicate, or are we drifting toward destruction?

A long look backward over our history shows us that there were no finer farming lands in all the world than those which lay waiting for man in North America. These farm lands were settled by the very choicest people from the dominant nations of Europe—a people of great virility, industry, enterprise, courage and high ideals. These farm families were the leading families of the new nation; they produced the author of

the Declaration of Independence—Thomas Jefferson, the first president of the republic—George Washington, the leader of northern thought—Daniel Webster, the leader of southern thought—John C. Calhoun, and those towering figures of the war between the states—Abraham Lincoln of the North, and Robt. E. Lee of the South.

What does a long look at the drift of agricultural conditions since that early period show us? What do the farm people themselves say about it? During the past fifteen years I have gone into farm homes and have talked with farm families from ocean to ocean and from Canada to Mexico. I talked with these people about farming in their communities and about the hopes they have for their children in the future. The things they tell me, often with quivering lips, set one thinking. They suggest a problem which is greater and more far reaching than that which rent the nation in the War between the States. That was a problem of the freedom or servitude of five million blacks. This is a problem of the economic freedom or servitude of thirty million white people—the very people who form the economic foundation of the nation.

In making these studies I investigated farm communities in Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and Maine from 250 to 300 years old; farm communities in Tennessee, Ohio, and Michigan from 100 to 150 years old; farm communities in Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas, Kansas, Nebraska, and Texas from 60 to 100 years old; and farm communities in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and California from 20 to 60 years old. The age of the farming community is important because of what happens as one generation goes and another comes.

The farm people tell me that those who do the actual work of farming in their communities are losing the ownership of the land; that every year the people who till the soil own less of it than they owned the year before—that "dirt" farmers are becoming landless—that they are steadily losing the ownership of the farms. They say that farm land is now so high and the earnings of the farm so low that many young people just starting out in farming will never be able to pay for their land and must remain tenants for life. The U. S. Census records confirm this; they show that by 1880, 26 per cent of the farm people had become landless and that by 1920 the proportion of landless farmers had increased to 38 per cent of the entire number of farmers in the United States. In nine agricultural states of which my own state of Iowa is one, nearly 50 per cent of the farmers are now landless and in two states—Georgia and South Carolina—more than one-half of the farmers are without land of their own.

What about increasing landlessness by the mortgage route? The farm people tell me that the mortgages against the farms in their communities constantly increase and that the farmers who till the soil actually own a smaller share every year in the mortgaged farms than they owned the year before. The census records verify this statement. They show that by 1890, 28 per cent of the farms were mortgaged and that by 1920, the number of farms mortgaged had risen to 40 per cent of all the farms in the United States. In 1920 the farmers who tilled these mortgaged farms owned about 70 per cent of the value of the farms; the holders of the mortgages owned about 30 per cent of their value. By 1925, the share which the farmers owned had shrunk to 60 per cent and the share which the holders of the mortgages owned had increased to 40 per cent. Before the World War the mortgaged indebtedness against American farms was about $4\frac{1}{2}$ billions; at the close of the

war it was about 8 billions and it is estimated to be now about 11 billions. Every year American farmers lose more of their land by the mortgage route and the burden of interest on the increasing farm mortgages is bleeding many farm communities white. The mortgaged indebtedness of the farmer is growing so great that the children will never be able to pay it off.

What would we say of the great United States Steel Corporation if every year it owned less of its producing properties, its furnaces and mills, than it did the year before? What would we say of Henry Ford's great business if every year he owned less of his producing properties than he did the year before? Would we say that in the long run they were headed toward success or toward failure?

Serious as is the loss by the farmers of their basic producing properties, it is not as serious as the loss of the best brains from the land. The farm people tell me that their more capable young people will not stay on the farm. They say that their brighter ones see that the farm is a losing business—that it is losing its buying power and losing its land. They say their more far-seeing young people go to join prosperous big business in the cities. The farm people say that their smartest young people leave the losing game on the land and go to join in the winning game in other lines of business which enjoy the prosperity that President Coolidge and Secretary Mellon and the cities of the East talk about.

Recently I heard a brainy farm leader in Iowa remark that he did not know whether his son, a capable young man of twenty-one, should stay with the farm or accept one of the many better opportunities that are offered him elsewhere. Not long ago I visited the farm home of the most famous farmer in Nebraska—J. Sterling Morton—who was chosen by Grover Cleveland to be Secretary of Agriculture. On the mantle over the fireplace in the living room of this farm home I saw a photograph of this

farmer, his wife, and four fine, intelligent sons. I said, "Where do these boys farm now?" A Nebraskan standing near said, "None of them farm now; they have gone into other lines of business. That keen looking older boy is now the head of a big organized business—Morton's Salt, one of the largest in the country." In Illinois they called my attention to a farm on which was reared a bright young man who asked himself the question, "Shall I stay on the farm or is there a larger opportunity for me in other lines of business?" He left the farm and today is the head and directing brains of the largest organized business in the world—the United States Steel Corporation. In Michigan, they pointed out the farm where a capable young man grew up who decided to leave the farm and use his business genius in developing another great industry. He is today the head of one of the largest industries in the world and he is one of the world's richest men. Maybe you've heard of him; his name is Henry Ford. Today many of the most capable young people reared on American farms are turning their backs on the farm for the same reason that Morton and Gary and Ford did—they see more promising opportunities elsewhere.

We need not be concerned about the fact that many young people are leaving the farm communities. That is a wholesome economic readjustment. There is not room on the farm for every boy and girl born there. What is of vital concern is the fact that it is the big potatoes that are going, leaving the little potatoes to be the parents of the next generation in the farming industry. Every housewife knows what will be the result if she constantly shakes the barrel and picks the big potatoes off the top. Finally, there will be nothing left but the little potatoes.

This is the crucial point. This is the matter which is of most grave concern to those of us who are of the farm ourselves. What does a long look show? The investigations

which I conducted in farm homes from ocean to ocean and from Canada to the Gulf show that from 85 to 90 per cent of the cream of the young people in the farm homes—the brightest and most competent—are leaving the farm and going into other lines of work. When the brightest and most capable young people leave the farms from generation to generation, what of those who are left?

Every farmer knows that if he continually sells off all of his best animals and reproduces his herd from inferior stock his herd will deteriorate. If the most capable young people are constantly drained out of the farming communities leaving the inferiors to be the parents of the next generation, the race of farmers will gradually deteriorate. This is nature's law. Investigations conducted in rural communities in Indiana¹ by mental experts at the request of the State Legislature revealed the fact that in some of the most runout old rural communities from which the more capable young people had been drawn away generation after generation, as high as 27 per cent of the children in the rural schools were found to be feeble minded. Pintner² reports identical intelligence tests with the children of the big potatoes which had gathered into cities and with the children of the little potatoes left in some old runout rural communities in the same state. He reports that the average intelligence quotient among the city children was approximately 100 while that of the rural children was but 77. Pintner says, "Abraham Lincolns come from the country, but they never go back."

A farmer in Louisiana said to me as he looked off across the fields toward the other farm places we could see, "I have farmed this farm for more than forty years now and have known the neighbors about here for that length of time. As I take a long

¹Report of the Sixth Conference of Educational Measurements, Extension Division, Indiana University.

²Rudolf Pintner, *Intelligence Testing*, p. 250.

look backward I see that the land isn't as good as it used to be; we have taken more out of it than we have put back. The fences and the buildings aren't in as good repair as they used to be; but the worst thing I see is that our brightest and best young people are leaving us for the oil wells and the cities, and a class of tenants is taking over the farms that is not as competent as the old families used to be." A New England farmer expressed the same idea this way; he said, "Our best young people have left the farms until this old farming community is like a fish pond with all the game fish fished out; all we've got left now is the suckers and bullheads."

You can't expect 77 per cent people to compete with 100 percenters in the game of life and win. It is highly important to discover before it is too late what is reducing our farm people to 77 percenters. If rural education is to assume any responsibility for producing an intelligent successful rural people, it is high time we were finding out what is causing rural people to lose their buying power, to lose their land and to lose their brightest young folks. In short, what is causing the rural people to lose the game of life?

Here come two football teams running on to the field to play a game. Each team has the same number of men. One team is thoroughly organized; it has been trained to strike all together as one man on offense and hold all together as one man on defense. It has learned all the most effective plays in the game. It has drilled over and over on these plays until it can execute them with great speed and power. It is led by one of the brainiest quarterbacks in the game of football. The other team has just as many men. There is one striking difference. This team is unorganized; it cannot crash through its opponent's line as one man; it cannot hold against attack as one man. It has not learned any team play. It has not drilled on any team game. It has no quarterback. Each man plays as best he can for

himself. Often the men on this team actually play against each other. We know before hand that one team will win every game; the other will lose every game. One team will bring home the bacon—the other will have only defeat.

So it is in the great game of business which supports life itself. More people play the game of business than play any other game. They play it more earnestly than they play any other game. Life itself depends upon it. In the modern game of business as in the modern game of football the well organized, skillfully led team wins; the unorganized team without team-play and without a leader loses. That is why business everywhere in the cities is now organizing into stronger and stronger teams and selecting as quarterbacks the keenest business brains in the world.

A big organized team like the United States Steel Corporation with 87,000 stockholders and thousands of workers, with a keen quarterback who knows the game of steel as well as anyone in the world, wins its games. It takes home winnings that enable it to pay a good rate on the money invested in the game, to pay the steel workers a good wage, to provide for depreciation and depletion and to cut a 40 per cent melon now and then.

The farm team by contrast is unorganized. It has no team work; it has no quarterback; it cannot play the game of selling the different farm commodities to win. It loses every time; it loses in bargaining power; it loses in buying power; it loses in the comparative conditions of its homes and schools; it loses the ownership of its land; it loses every game. But worst of all, it loses the best brains from the farm.

The ablest business leaders from the farm go over and lead the big business organizations in the cities. Brains from the farm are running the biggest business in the world. Elbert Gary from the farm is now the quarterback of the Steel Team and plays the game of business to win. He plays to

win from the farm people. He has a voice in fixing the price of steel products. He wins every time a farmer buys steel machinery, steel implements, steel fencing, steel hardware or an automobile. Henry Ford is another great quarterback from the farm who has now gone over to lead the other team to win. He has a voice in fixing the price of Ford products. He wins every time a farmer buys a Ford car, a Ford truck or a Fordson tractor. Is it not time for the farm people to make use of the same means to win a few games for themselves? Is it not time for the farm people who now sell at the other fellow's price and buy at the other fellow's price to organize their own team in the game of business and have a voice in fixing the price of their products? Is it not time for the farmers to organize their own teams to win and invite their ablest young people to stay and lead the farm team to victory instead of going over to join the other team to play against the farm people? Is it not time that the farm people began to make use of the team game to make agriculture what it ought to be—the biggest and most prosperous business in America?

When the farm people have organized the team game of business so well that they have something to say about the tariff, the crop surplus, and the orderly merchandizing of their products, they will win their share of games. When they win their share of games they will be able to raise their bargaining power to par, to buy the land on which they toil, to buy a standard of living and a standard of education on a par with others and to attract into agriculture a fair share of their ablest sons and daughters.

Learning the team game of business is a matter of education. That is why it concerns those of us who teach. It is a matter of education for organization and of organization for power. We who have part in the education of the rural people have here an opportunity to make our work count vastly more in developing the power of the

rural people than we have ever done in the past. The failure of rural life, its drift toward peasantry, can be traced to ignorance and indifference on the part of the rural people themselves. Hence it is our failure as well as theirs.

Before farmers can win in the games of business they must learn to stick together in intelligent, effective group undertakings. Learning to stick together is a matter of education. The problems of co-operative agriculture are too big and too difficult to be solved by ignorance. Intelligent, enlightened co-operation by the membership is absolutely necessary to the success of Co-operative Agriculture. Lack of intelligent understanding of what constitutes sound co-operative business practices, lack of co-operation on the part of the membership, unwillingness to follow the leadership of the self chosen manager, disloyalty to the group, lack of vision, lack of faith, lack of courage, lack of spirit, and lack of ability to stick, are all spawn of that arch enemy of successful co-operative business—Ignorance. There is but one weapon against Ignorance and that is Education.

The co-operatives, the Farm Bureau, the Farmers Union, the Grange, the Agricultural Press, the Agricultural Colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture are all hard at work attempting to educate farmers in these matters. They all understand that these problems are too difficult to be solved by ignorance; that the very nature of co-operative team work demands the enlightenment to a high degree of the individual farmers who engage in it; that there are certain essentials to co-operation that members must possess; and that this is the problem of education. Present educational efforts are being made largely with adults. Many of these adults have worked and thought and lived for years as individualists. It is hard for them to change their mode of business life; many of them will never be able to do it.

It is hard to teach old dogs new tricks,

but if you begin with the puppies you have better success. As the twig is bent the tree is inclined. Theodore Roosevelt stated a great truth when he said, "If you would do anything for the average man you must begin before he is a man. The hope of success lies in working with the boy and not with the man."

We knew that intelligent comprehension of the principles of successful teamwork in business, loyalty to an ideal, faith in one's fellows, obedience to a self chosen business manager, willing co-operation in group action and indomitable courage in economic affairs are qualities of slow growth through the years. They cannot be put on quickly like a new coat. They must grow slowly from within; this growth should begin in childhood. The largest and most permanent success lies in beginning with the boy; teaching the man must remain at best an uncertain risk.

How can the public schools help prepare the farm people to win the team game? This is the most important problem of rural education in the United States today. To assist the public schools in educating the farm youth in the principles necessary to win the team game, a committee of the National Education Association headed by former Governor F. O. Lowden, is preparing a textbook on Co-operative Marketing for use in the schools. The lessons in this textbook are drawn from the most successful co-operative marketing organizations now in operation in the United States. The principles by which farmers stick together and win in the great game of organized business are clearly set out. The causes of failure are also carefully pointed out. It is clearly understood by the writers of this school text that years will be required to educate the farm people to the point where they can make the largest success of co-operative agriculture. In a great undertaking like this the people must learn to creep and then to walk before they can run successfully the exacting race of business.

Rural life today is at the crossroads. It has reached a critical period. Either the farm group must learn to co-operate successfully or they must go down into economic servitude. The hope of rural America lies in the education of its youth. Better education and better organization are the only hope of saving American life from peasantry, which many students of history declare to be the inevitable end of every agricultural people. If the American people are permitted to descend into peasantry they will eventually pull down the nation after them. This, too, is the warning of history. The hour is struck! Which way rural life?

MACY CAMPBELL

THE USES OF THE POTOMAC RIVER

*A Fourth Grade Geography—
History Unit*

This unit, *The Uses of the Potomac River*, has been made into a group of smaller units, each unit showing the development of one problem. The problem at the beginning of each unit is numbered with a Roman numeral: the sub-problems are listed under A; the jobs or activities of the children under B; the information gained from each problem under C; and the materials used in solving the problems under D. Thus the reader will see how one large unit of work is merely a group of small ones.

I. How the Potomac River Helps to Give Us Food

A. Problems the pupils solved:

1. What food fish are found in the Potomac
2. How the fish are taken from the river
3. Why so many fish are found in the Potomac
4. Why the supply of fish in the Potomac has not given out

B. Jobs the children did:

1. They discussed the kinds of fish they knew and how they were caught
2. They prepared and gave oral reports about: