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A FARMER-MADE DEMOCRACY**XVII—A LITTLE ACCOUNT OF THE DANES**

A people that can rise out of poverty and build a rich state on agriculture alone in one hundred and thirty-five years is a people worth studying. The geographers call Denmark a kingdom, and so it is in name but in fact it is a democratic commonwealth, more democratic than England and more nearly a commonwealth than any state I know in America. There are very few rich people among the Danes; there could not well be many in an agricultural state on any continent. The answer to Solomon's prayer for neither poverty nor riches seems to have been reserved for the latter-day Danes. Denmark almost realizes today the dream that Bishop Grundtvig had for it in the last century; it is "a land in which few have too much and still fewer too little." There is no peacock-parade of wealth in Copenhagen or any other Danish city. Also there are no slums, no beggars, and no palpable poverty. Or none that I have yet discovered, and I look for these everywhere I go, for I have a conviction that the essential character of a civilization is best judged by the poverty it is willing to create and excuse with pharisaic complacency.

How They Deal With Poverty

I was discussing this proposition with a Dane at a cafe table the other day in Copenhagen, when my eye was attracted to a disreputable wretch loitering hungrily along the edge of the restaurant sidewalk. "Isn't that a beggar?" I asked. "Oh no," was the answer. "He won't beg, or at least not in words. It is a jailable offense in Denmark. He's a drink-ravaged wreck, a victim of schnaps. Practically all the poverty we have in Denmark is among the feeble-minded fools of his sort. He's on his way to the ladegaard or municipal workhouse. Tomorrow he'll be in a dark uniform cleaning the streets. That's the particular job of the ladegaard-lemmers. You pay your White Wings five dollars a day to clean the streets of New York, we pay our Dark Wings board, clothes, and medical attention in the public workhouse. We have some disreputable poverty of this sort, but not much. Come a little way with me and I'll show you what Copenhagen and every other Danish city does for the reputable poverty of old age and illness and other providential dispensations." I went with him into the Home for the Aged, located in the City Hall Square. The immaculate cleanness of the place and the bright happy faces of the old men and women were a revelation. No wonder Bishop Grundtvig was proud to have this establishment under his pastoral care during the last years of his life. I doubt if such poorhouses exist anywhere in America. But they are common in Denmark. The care of the poor, the feeble, and the aged is even more wonderful in Elsinore. The mayor is sending me a brief story of the municipal social enterprises of this little city, and later I shall be passing it on to North Carolina.

Looking Backward

The Danes are not a perfect people. There are no perfect people in this imperfect world. But Shaw Desmond's chapter on their imperfections is enough for readers with horse-fly instead of honey-bee instincts. I refer such readers to his *Soul of Denmark* and pass on rapidly to consider in a letter or two the Danish people, and the obstacles they overcame in developing a wealth-retaining agriculture and a farm-helping state.

One hundred thirty-five years ago the masses of Denmark were serfs bound to the land, and sold with it like the trees, the cattle, and the wild animals of the fields. All the land belonged to the crown, the court, and the church. Unlike the peasants of France who then owned one-third of the land, the fourth estate in Denmark owned nothing. They were not property owning creatures under the law of the realm. Nevertheless it was true, as an old chronicler says, the Danes did generally read and write. Even in their days of slavery they deemed illiteracy a disgrace. In 1788 they received their freedom from

serfdom, but little else—nothing else indeed but the occasional gift of some noble lord to a beloved retainer of low estate. Such property as they owned was very like the property owned by free persons of color in the Southern States of America in 1860.

Self-Effacing Sovereignty

The middle years of the last century were another period of social upheaval in Europe, and again the masses of Denmark won without a struggle. In 1849, they were given the right to vote and to hold public office. Denmark is still a kingdom because during the last century or so no king has been witless enough to oppose the common people in their efforts to rise into full-statured citizenship. The *oldeborgers* have been wise, they have stooped to conquer, and as a result no king wears a crown with less uneasiness than Christian X. The self-effacement of the crown is complete. Like the national flag, the king is a symbol of statehood, merely that and little more. In the annual volume of parliamentary acts his official title is The Civil List to which is voted a million kroner a year, which is around \$200,000 in our money. Like the dowager queen and most of the hereditary nobles he lives on a country estate and occupies his royal residence at the capital only upon state occasions or during the opera season or the yacht races, and such like events. His arrival, stay or departure is so unostentatious that the Copenhageners are accustomed to disregard it altogether. Such a display of royal grandeur as the King of England makes when he moves in state from Buckingham Palace to dine with the Lord Mayor in the Mansion House has not been ventured by any King of Denmark in a half century or more. Count the princes, the people are nothing, was long a common saying in Germany and Scandinavia. Count the people, the princes are nothing, is now a fact so common in Denmark that apparently nobody has stopped to phrase it.

Hereditary Nobles Few

As for the hereditary nobles, they are perhaps a thousand all told in a population of three and a third million people. The counts and barons who claim their titles are fewer than three hundred. No new titles have been created in more than a century. The nobles that remain are becomingly modest. If they own estates, they claim their titles as a rule, but they make no parade of their rank. They know full well that hereditary titles are a liability and not an asset in Denmark. I have in my pocket book the card of a young baron whose estate of eight hundred acres in North Jutland I visited a few weeks ago. He is a grandson of the baron who so nobly supported Dalgas in his struggles to establish the Heath Reclamation Society and whose bust in bronze arrests attention as one enters the home of that society in the market square of Viborg. But no title appears on the young man's card, and it was quite by accident that I learned of his descent from a noble ancestry—noble in fact as well as in name.

Democracy's Nobles Many

Hereditary titles count for little or nothing in Denmark. But official titles earned by personal worth and conferred by popular vote in a free democracy are quite another matter. The souls of the Danes fairly itch for such titles and their meticulous parade of them is highly diverting to plain Americans. And the wives are the worst of all in this particular. If Henry, for instance, lived in Denmark, his wife would be mortally affronted if she were not addressed as Fru Professor Henry. And our Mayor's wife, if he had the wit or the nerve to have a wife, would have to be addressed as Fru Mayor Robertson, or Borgmesterinde or some other mouth-filling title that recognized her rank in an official aristocracy. I brought with me into Denmark a letter of introduction to the wife of a former minister of state. It was addressed to The Honorable Mrs Blank, *Eftatsraa-*

TEACH COOPERATION

We have failed to teach the essential principles of co-operation and group action made necessary to our social organization. We have failed to teach group interrelationship, so that farmers have little ability to see the effect upon the farming group of other group programs. Those who have led in rural thought have failed to convince farmers in general that organization, as a means of economy in distribution and self-preservation, in the struggle for existence against other organized groups bent upon their exploitation, is a necessity. This explains why the farmer of the United States, although the most efficient agricultural worker of the world, has not bettered his lot even though he has bettered his practice. Uneconomical distribution and inability to compete against organizations have robbed him of a considerable portion of his profits. He has managed to live and accumulate wealth. He has not been pauperized, but he has avoided it in too many cases only through drudgery, exploitation of his wife, and children, and adopting a standard of living such as is unjust. His lot is little better than in pioneering days. He is entitled to more of the rewards of his toil than he has been able to get.—From School Leaflet No. II, U. S. Bureau of Education.

dine. There are nine grades of these official titles and the owners of them pay annual taxes of three to forty dollars for the right to flourish their honors. An official title once enjoyed never dies in the immediate social circle and the family chronicles. It lives on forever, like Dickens's postboys and mules. All of which means that Democracy when it feels its feed breeds aristocracies as rapidly as a Dutch cheese breeds maggots. So it has done in Denmark and so it has already begun to do in Germany.

A Peasant-Made Democracy

So much by way of making it clear that royalty and nobility are unconsidered trifles in Denmark, that the people of hereditary rank are a small and rapidly disappearing group in the population census, and that Denmark is today a peasant-made democracy. The remains of feudalism are few and faint. The crown lands and properties or most of them have been surrendered to the state, and quite freely surrendered. The glebe lands have passed into peasant ownership and the church has been compensated by support from the state treasury. And in 1919 the Danish parliament blotted out the law of entail, took over one-fourth of the land of entailed estates along with a fifth to a fourth of the accrued capital wealth of such estates, the purpose being to multiply more rapidly the number of small farm owners. This invasion of the private rights of property ownership is probably a violation of the constitution of 1849, but no large estate owner has cared or dared to contest the issue in the courts and so the law has been in full effect for nearly three years. The Danes justify it on the grounds of public necessity, and they decorously decline to argue, as they say, about a last year's bird nest.

A Country-Loving People

The population of Denmark is three million, two hundred and sixty-eight thousand. Twelve hundred thousand or forty percent of the total are living on the land directly engaged in farming. Twelve hundred thousand more are living under semi-agricultural conditions in country towns and cities that owe their existence or their prosperity to the cooperative enterprises of the farm organizations. They handle the products of the farmers for the farmers, frequently they are farmers themselves in a small way in the neighbor-

ing farm territory, and universally they are poultry raisers and growers of vegetables, fruits, and flowers. A Dane will fill his dwelling with conveniences and comforts, but he will spend twice as much money in making a little paradise of the land around it. And always he must have a shady place in some corner of his yard or garden for chairs and a table on which he can have a summer evening meal with his family. These little Danish towns make one think of Southern California where a man spends more money in beautifying his lot than he spends on his bungalow and the furnishings within it. The Danes explain the loveliness of their town dwellings and farm homes by saying that the Danish masses are descended from landless ancestors, who lived next to nature, hungry for long centuries for land of their own, and when they came into possession of it the passion of their lives was to improve it and beautify it for their children and children's children to the remotest generation. Whatever the explanation, the Danish towns and farmsteads are charming.

Feeding Copenhagen

The rest of the Danes, some seven hundred thousand in number, live in the ancient city of Copenhagen. There are more people in this one city than the combined population of all the cities and small towns of North Carolina. It is a great local market for the products of a little farm state—an unfailing source of ready cash for the food-producing farmers of Denmark. Filling the mouths of Copenhageners alone is a trade proposition of a hundred and fifty million dollars a year, and the Danish farmers get the bulk of it. The largest cooperative dairy in Denmark caters to the Copenhagen trade in whole milk, butter and cheese, and does not bother to reach any other consumers. The truck farmers of Amager, the little island joined to the city by bridges, trolley cars and trains, have thrived for centuries on the appetites of Copenhagen. They hardly know or care about any other city on earth. The same thing is true of other farm organizations and other farm territories in Denmark.

City and Country Balance

A city of this size in North Carolina would give our farmers a chance to base their cash-crop farming on food production. Lacking a chance to turn food and feed products into instant ready cash, our farmers have concentrated on cotton and tobacco the only cash-crops they know much about. And it must always be so (1) until the cities of the state are more in number and larger in size, (2) until country producers and city consumers work together to solve the problem of local markets for home-raised food supplies, and (3) until our farmers learn the arts of salesmanship in cooperative enterprises that reach the ends of the earth as well as the nearby towns. Our Carolina cities are too few and too small to give our farmers a fair chance at any large volume of profits in surplus food production. Farm producers outnumber city consumers more than two to one in North Carolina. It is the other way around in Denmark where the city consumers outnumber the food producers in the ratio of three to two. It is a safe ratio and it is likely to persist because it conditions prosperity for the home-owning farmers and the city consumers alike. I have yet to hear of a Danish farmer with a city bee in his bonnet, ready to sell out and move into town at the drop of anybody's hat. The cityward drift is a fact in Denmark as in every other land of multiplying factories—in Denmark mainly because the holdings are too small for division among heirs, one of whom may stay on the farm while the rest must go into the cities, most of them into Copenhagen or into other countries. It is for this reason that Denmark is already developing areas of static populations, in Funen for instance where the census shows no increase of resident inhabitants in twenty years. The country exodus in North Carolina and the United States in general is produced by a combination of very different causes. Unless it is promptly and properly checked, the country life of the nation will disappear in another generation or two. Our statesmen will be stupid to blink this problem much longer.

Banking on the Farmers

A final word about Copenhagen—a word that concerns its relation to the surrounding civilization that sustains it. It is suggested by a conversation with the foreign credit chief of a Landsmans Bank, the oldest and largest bank in the city. Upon my first visit for money on my letter of credit, I said to him: By token of its name this is a farmer bank, and by the same token every other bank in Copenhagen is a farmer bank. Are they the cooperative farm banks that we hear of in America? Do the farmers own the capital stock of these landman banks or a majority of it? Is their business long-term loans to farmers mainly or short-term loans mainly to merchants, manufacturers, and shippers?

His reply was; "Oh no, this is a commercial bank, not a farm bank of the sort you have in mind. To be sure the farmers own large blocks of stock in all these landman banks. Their deposits are largely farm deposits and their securities are largely farm paper—credit society bonds based on farm lands, and the like. Farm collateral is a large part of the total bank resources of the city. There are no better securities and the banks all know it. The landman banks are all farmer banks in this sense, but their business is mainly commercial banking. The *Andelsbanken* are the cooperative farm banks and they are slowly but certainly developing a farm business of large proportions. Landman is simply a popular word in a bank name. The bankers know that it is a word to conjure with in Denmark. They know perfectly well on which side of their bread the butter is. The farmer creates much the biggest business in Denmark and no bank with any name is unaware of the fact."

So! I said. And tried impossibly to say it as the Danes say it. I am not surprised, I continued, to find the bankers of Denmark with a sensitive finger on the community pulse. What the bankers do not know about the folks and the fundamental facts of existence everywhere is less than nothing. If the teachers and the preachers knew as much about this work-a-day world as the bankers know, the levels of civilization might be jacked up in a jiffy. He smiled at my youthfulness, as I bade him good morning.—E. C. Branson, Copenhagen. August 15, 1923.

CURRITUCK SETS PACE

Currituck, long noted principally for ducks and sweet potatoes and for that classic North Carolina phrase "From Currituck to Cherokee," has climbed into the limelight from an entirely unexpected quarter.

This historic Tar Heel county has undertaken to set the pace for rural school efficiency in northeastern North Carolina and starts right off the bat with a record that is going to be hard to beat or even to equal.

All the school work above the sixth grade in Currituck will be done in two superior junior-senior high schools, which will be accessible to almost all the children in the county by motor truck. These schools will run nine months in the year, and will make it possible for all the children in the county to have the advantage of a high school education which is something that few counties in the State can boast of.

The schools of the county have been organized in accordance with the standards approved by the Federal Department of Education under the direction of an expert from that department. Country schools will run eight months in the year.

Now watch Currituck go forward by leaps and bounds. If one reason more than another can be ascribed as to why North Carolina is progressing so rapidly in the South, it is her school system.—News and Observer.