

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
**NEWS LETTER**

The news in this publication is released for the press on receipt.

Published Weekly by the University of North Carolina for the University Extension Division.

AUGUST 20, 1924

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS

VOL. X, NO. 40

Editorial Board: E. C. Branson, S. H. Hobbs, Jr., L. R. Wilson, E. W. Knight, D. D. Carroll, J. B. Bullitt, H. W. Odum.

Entered as second-class matter November 14, 1914, at the Postoffice at Chapel Hill, N. C., under the act of August 24, 1911

## VIEWING RURAL FRANCE

### XXXVI—SEEING FARM LIFE IN FRANCE

My business in France during five months of my year abroad was the particular business of seeing the country-end of French civilization—not the chateaux, royal palaces, parks, gardens and forests of the olden days, nor the picturesque aspects of countryside France nor the spectacular life of Paris, but the farm people, farm systems, and farm practices of a state four times the size of North Carolina. What I was trying to see was the marvelous diversities of a rich, self-sufficient agriculture, the farm villages, the life in the farm homes, the ways of marketing farm products, the informing ideals of farm home and farm village life, and the relation of all these to French civilization as a whole. And I was quickly aware that I was puzzling at a thing of little or no interest to the French, namely the farm people themselves and their ways of life.

Country life in France is not supposed to have any direct relation to French civilization. Rural sociology is not a course offered in any lycee or college or university, church or state, either now or at any time in the history of France. In America nearly five hundred colleges, teacher training schools, agricultural institutions, and universities are busy training students to interpret the problems of country life. But in France there are no country-life problems or none worth attention beyond those of producing crops and animal products. Farming is a bread-and-meat matter in France and nothing more. There are formal courses in agricultural economics, but no institution is offering courses that concern human values in country areas. Nor is it likely that any French institution of learning will be giving itself for long years to come to the study of French country life and its essential relations to French civilization.

#### Few Books on Country Life

Indeed it was hard to get anybody to attach any meaning whatsoever to the phrase rural social-economics. I spent most of my time in Paris trying to get a bibliography of the country-end of French civilization. There are many books on the problems of producing, protecting, and preserving agricultural wealth in France. The French very well understand that farm products are a fundamental form of wealth and that farming is causally related to the business well-being of France; but as for French books on the social problems of farm areas, they number barely a half-dozen all told. The very first book on the farm life of France was written by Arthur Young, the English traveler, more than a century ago, and the next most important volume is the report of the French Minister of Agriculture in 1795. It concerns the distribution of farm lands by the national conventions during the French Revolution. But it was impossible to secure a copy of it, or even the reprint of some forty years ago. One volume stands out beyond all the rest in the rural economy of France, and that is a book by Lavergne, a copy of which was brought to me by one of our Tarheel doughboys when he returned from France in 1919. No French library has a section on the social problems of farm areas. There are no bibliographies in this new field of learning. There are literally thousands of such bibliographies in America, but not one could I find in print in France. Nor could I find anybody who would undertake to compile such a book list for me. When I detailed to various librarians just what such a list ought to contain, without exception they threw up their hands in despair. It seemed impossible to get a Frenchman to understand the meaning of rural social-economics. It kept me thinking of the statement repeatedly made to me that farming has always been the least considered and the most despised occupation in France. Nothing is lacking in French agriculture but country life itself—that is to say, life lived upon such high

levels as one finds in the country homes of Denmark.

#### Yards of Red Tape

It was impossible in a few months to see French agriculture in detail, even if it had lain wide open to observation. And there's the rub. Nothing in France lies wide open to observation. Everything is ambushed, everything is withdrawn from prying, curious eyes whether they be student eyes or not, everything is hedged about by conventions, customs and ceremonies that create unbelievable difficulties for the investigator. In Germany my native-born couriers had no difficulty whatsoever in getting me into the farm villages and the farm homes of the peasants, the gentry, and the nobles alike. In Denmark I needed no native courier. I did not hesitate anywhere in that little farm state to go right into any farm establishment and pull the latch-string. The Danes are hospitable, and they are proud to show you everything they have in the farm homes and on the farms, no matter what the size of the establishment or the rank of the farmer. But not so in France. I had dozens of letters of introduction, from Governor Morrison and President Chase, from the officials of three state commissions, and from two of our own ambassadors abroad. These were all mailed to the French Minister of Agriculture after a personal visit of proper kow-towing. The letter which carried these credentials carried also a request for a bibliography of French books on the social problems of rural France. I waited six weeks for a reply.

#### Punctilious Conventions

I finally approached my French courier for an explanation. He at once asked me whether or not my request had gone through our French ambassador, whether or not it was written upon the required size and quality of stationery, whether or not it was in my own personal handwriting, whether or not the margin on the left was an inch and a half wide, whether the space between the lines was a half-inch, whether the address and the salutation of the letter were in accord with French conventions, and so on through a long list of ceremonial details. I looked at him in amazement. You will probably get no reply from the French Minister of Agriculture, said he, unless all these things down to the last detail are scrupulously correct in form. And I didn't. What I saw of the country life of France I had to see without any help whatsoever from the state authorities. Life is too short and my stay was too brief to hope to see the country-end of things if I followed the course of immemorial custom in France. My dinner-table friend was a Kentuckian in the nearby consular offices, and he had been long enough in France to know, said he, that if I did not do things after the French fashion they could not be done at all in France. I then attempted to get into the great libraries to compile a list of the French volumes I wanted for my seminar library in rural social-economics at the University of North Carolina. The librarians of the American Library Union in Paris gave me a half-dozen addresses and letters of introduction. My first approach to the French librarians put me promptly upon notice that I should be obliged to finger a long line of red tape in order to handle any single volume on any shelf anywhere, that I must be introduced, identified, inspected, and rubber-stamped by numberless American and French officials. Being presented to a book in a French library is very like being presented to King George in Buckingham palace. I confess that it irritated me beyond words. The truth is I am an American democrat with little respect for conventions. In order to save time I was finally obliged to go to an English bookselling firm in Paris and put into the hands of its bibliographer a statement of my needs. I finally succeeded in spending for French books on rural social-economics about one thousand of the five thousand francs allowed me for the French section of our seminar library at the University of North Carolina.

## THE KEY TO PROSPERITY

The safety of our country and the perpetuation of her free institutions depend upon a great body of honest and intelligent people, living contentedly upon the farms of the Nation.

It is tremendously important that the banker take the lead in a united effort by good business men in every agricultural county in the land to cooperate with the farmer in as practicable a way as may be found, that he may again become individually prosperous, and that the business of farming may be put upon a basis economically sound. Not legislation, but intelligent cooperation.—Frank J. Wikoff, Member Agricultural Commission, Tenth Federal Reserve District.

I should probably have seen very little of French farm systems, farm homes, and farm villages if it had not been for the help of a grand daughter-in-law of Ulysses S. Grant, Mme. Cecile Sartoris, the executive chief of the College for Strangers in the Rue Caumartin. With her assistance I established a working relationship with the French Society of Agriculture and the Count Francois de Vogue. I promptly received an itinerary that directed me into the various farm regions of France, and letters of introduction that gave me entrance into particular farm homes, farm estates, farm establishments, and farm schools from one end of France to the other. But even with these it was necessary to write in advance to each name in my itinerary, inclosing my letters of local introduction and my home credentials. I was expected to arrive on some particular train, at some particular hour of some particular day; but also I was not supposed to start until I had received replies to my letters.

#### A Frenchman Talks on France

It was so easy to see everything in Denmark and so difficult to see anything of all the things I wanted to see in France that I could well understand the remarks of my courier, a native Frenchman. "Everything in France," said he, "is strictly private—French homes, French businesses, French institutions, and even French offices of state. I would not say that the soul of France is concealed, but I will say that we insist on living life as we please and establishing ways, manners, and customs of existence that suit ourselves, without being exposed to inspection, foreign or domestic. We barricade our homes with high stone walls topped with broken glass set in concrete, we build our dwellings around squares or interior courts and we barricade the entrance doors, we live our lives within our own courts as remote from the outer world as though we lived in the heart of Sahara, we barricade our business houses and when nightfall comes we lock down gates, doors, and windows with sheet iron shutters; even our public buildings are surrounded by stone walls topped with picket fences of iron javelins. It is impossible not to see that France from one end to the other is cocked and primed for defence against mobs and revolutions, and can get into instant readiness for any sort of siege." And it is necessary. I was myself caught in two mobs, one around the Spanish Embassy and another around the Opera House.

"Moreover," said he, "French conventions, manners and customs are extremely ceremonious, for the simple reason that behind our ceremonies there is a proper withdrawal into privacy. Our customs smoothe out the roughnesses of contact while our souls live such a life of aloofness as pleases us. Conventional correctness in manner and even in the turning of a phrase is everything in France. The friendships that I found so easily and quickly established in the American Army of Occupation would be almost unthinkable in France. The casual acquaintance that issues into a warm personal regard and brings an invitation into the homes of newly-made friends is one of the wonders of English and American life. We know almost nothing about such intimacies in France."

## A French Banker Talks

It is fair to say that there are exceptions, and I chanced upon some of these exceptions during my stay in France. And lovely exceptions they were. They made possible the business of my visit in a far more liberal measure than I had come to believe possible in the most highly artificial civilization I have ever known. But I should like to illustrate further the aloof, sequestered, I had almost said the ambushed soul of France. For instance, it was impossible for me not to be profoundly interested in the approaching political upheaval. Signs of it were unmistakable even to the casual stranger resident in France in the fall of last year. My purpose was to study country France, but the political crisis and its causes kept my mind busy for weeks. Finally I sought out the foreign credit chief of one of the great banks in Paris—a Frenchman by name and descent but charged with the French business of a great foreign bank. I told him my mission in France and he received me with stately courtesy. I should like to know, said I, the total national debt of France, bonded and current, the total issue of francs at present, how far out of balance the state budget has been year by year during the last ten years, the total revenue receipts and the new issues of francs needed to balance the budget during this period, the total sum expended in the devastated areas for all purposes whatsoever, the unsettled trade balance of France, the total loans to Poland, Jugo-Slavia, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, and other allies rimming Germany on the east and south. My questions brought a look of consternation into his face. I am asking these questions, said I, because I have seen in the French papers such a variety of conflicting and confusing statements that I am completely bewildered. I should like to know the facts because they seem to me to be causally related to the disquieted soul of your industrial classes on the one hand and the ugly humor of the farmers in the provinces on the other. What the facts are, is what I want to know.

After a moment's silence he said, We know the facts, of course. Every banker knows the facts. He could not safely do a banking business in France without knowing the facts. But there is not a banker, French or foreign, that would be allowed to do business in France fifteen minutes if he dared to give the facts to the public.

And then, I said, I am completely bewildered by the financial pages of the French newspapers.

I do not wonder, said he. Our financial pages are so different from such pages in your American papers that it would take hours to explain the difference. There is at least something official and authoritative in the financial figures of the English and American papers. These pages are carried as authoritative instructions to the investing public in England and America, and carried without charge as news. Nothing of the sort occurs in any French paper. Industrial news is paid for in a French newspaper. It is business propaganda. It may be purely fabricated news. It may have no basis of business fact of any sort. It is advertising pure and simple. Let the buyer beware, he buys at his own risk, is an accepted doctrine of business in our stock and bond markets. It is perfectly well known in the sacred inner circles of big business exactly where France stands in public finance and in unsettled trade balances; but the French have no idea that it is anybody's business but their own.

His replies to my inquiries were conventionally correct, but they were not enlightening.

#### Herriot's Dilemma

I kept working at all these inquiries until I felt fairly sure at last that I had my fist fairly well around the facts. And these facts are facts of tremendous import. They are driving Herriot like a fiend at this very moment in the London conference. The gist of it all is that France is lost without at least thirty billion gold dollars paid by the Germans into the French treasury. The French prime minister must not only cover this vast total of gold into the French treasury, but he must yield not a franc of the reparations total and

not an inch of the ground France now holds, without complete equivalents guaranteed by the Allies. But what the actual facts are that have so steered the French soul these last five years nobody outside of France knows. Without German gold in her treasury France is bankrupt, hopelessly bankrupt, but nobody in France appears to know it but the prime minister and a little group of bankers, manufacturers, and merchants—the business clique that holds France in the hollow of its hand now as always during the last half century.

I came out of France wondering whether or not one of my former students at the University of North Carolina, now a student at the Sorbonne, was right in his statement that the French are the Japs of Europe, and as little to be understood by an Anglo-Saxon, so different are they in the essential things of civilization, in national traits and characteristics, in ethical standards, in moods, humors, tempers, in manners, ways, and customs.

I have made three visits to France, I have been a life-long student of French history and literature, my sympathies are now and have always been with France, nevertheless the longer I rub noses with the French the less certain am I that I really know them.

To illustrate a single particular. All over France I heard these things said: "Why should we pay any war debts to any nation? The World War was really a war between England and Germany. France was an innocent bystander. The war was fought in the main on French soil and France suffered more than all the rest of the allies. What we borrowed from England was really spent in saving England. And why should we pay any war debt to the United States for loans or war materials left in France? Didn't your Ambassador Harvey say that America went into the war to save its own skin?"

Mr. Harvey, by the way, is quite famous in France, judging from the frequency with which he is quoted. My conclusion is that Germany is just as ready to pay reparations as France is to pay war debts, and that neither has the sense of sacred obligation and business honor that makes England essentially great.—E. C. Branson, New York, March 15, 1924.

## A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM

It would be difficult to draw a more enlightened agricultural program for farmers in this region than was adopted last week by the state convention of farmers and farm women in session at Raleigh for the farmers of North Carolina. Recognizing the fact that North Carolina already takes high rank in crop production, the resolutions adopted by the convention call for the development of agricultural industry along other lines so as to give the state a well rounded and comprehensive farming establishment. Among the important objectives for which Tar Heel farmers are urged to strive are the development of livestock raising, the readjustment of cotton culture to boll weevil conditions, the evolution of a wider and more satisfactory forestry policy, the creation of more adequate credit machinery for agricultural needs, the expansion of rural educational facilities, the perfection of cooperative marketing machinery and the improvement of the state's system of taxation.

On the theory that the problem of road construction is already in process of solution satisfactory to North Carolina's farmers, this program would seem to embrace every reform necessary to sound agricultural development. It goes further than the agricultural independence program which was urged on Virginia farmers during the first week of April, but its general purport is the same. Activity in support of such a program promises more beneficial results to any state than are likely to follow from the attempt to encourage the importation of immigrants to reclaim waste lands, which is often put forward as a means of improving agriculture in Virginia. The time for the encouragement of immigration may arrive later on, but the immediate need is for reforms like those for which the North Carolina convention is calling to promote the interest of farmers already on the job.—Norfolk Virginian-Pilot.