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## NATIVE WHITE ILLITERATE WOMEN

### OUR FORGOTTEN WOMEN

Almost a half-million of them in the United States, three-fourths of them east of the Mississippi river, and more than half of them in the South Atlantic and East South Central states. Nearly 1,200 of these forgotten women are in Aroostook county, Maine, nearly 1,400 in Clinton and Franklin counties, New York, and more than 2,000 in Berks, Lancaster, and York counties, Pennsylvania.

Forty-four thousand of them are in North Carolina. Nearly forty-three thousand are in Kentucky—more than 2,200 in Pike county alone. Twenty-four thousand in Virginia, almost exactly half of them massed in the twenty southwestern counties of the state, more than a thousand each in Pittsylvania, Wise and Buchanan, nearly three thousand more over the line in Wilkes and Surry counties, North Carolina, and five thousand in the four border counties of Kentucky. Thirty-nine thousand are in Tennessee and more than half of these are in East Tennessee.

### Native-born White Women

They are not negro women nor women of foreign birth. They are native-born white women twenty-one years old and over, who cannot write their names or read a letter or a newspaper or their Bibles. In round numbers 477 thousand of them! So read the dull figures of illiteracy in the 1920 Census. This in America, whose other name is said to be Opportunity! And after three hundred and ten years of history!

They are the women God forgot—"thin and wrinkled in youth from ill-prepared food, clad without warmth or grace, living in untidy houses, working from daylight to bedtime at the dull round of weary duties, the mothers of joyless children, worn out by excessive child-bearing, and encrusted in a shell of dull content with their lot in life." They are the forgotten women lamented by Walter Hines Page in an address delivered in his home state twenty-five years ago, and I have described them in his phrases.

They are the women described by Ellen Glasgow in one of her Virginia stories: "It's goin on ten years since I have stopped to draw er easy breath, and I am clean wore out. 'Taint no better than a dog's life, nohow—a woman and a dog air about the only creatures as would put up with it, and they air the biggest pair of fools the Lord ever made. I have had a hard life and it warn't fair."

Uncle Tut in one of Lucy Furman's Kentucky stories delivers himself about one of these forgotten women: "My sympathies allus was with the women-folks anyhow—'pears like the universe is agin' 'em, and God and man wuz con-federates to keep 'em downtrod. In all my travels I have seed hit, and hit's been the same old story ever sence Eve et the apple. I gonnies! I'd 'a' had the ordering of things then, I'd 'a' predestined the female sect to better things! If replenishing the earth was to be their job, I wouldn't have laid on 'em the extry burden of being overly subject to some misbegotten, hell-borne man-brute! Yes, dad burn my looks, when I see a puny creetur like Cory there, not only childbearing every year reg'lar, but likewise yearning the family bread by the sweat of her brow, hit fairly makes my blood bile, and ends my patience with the ways of the Lord."

### They Are Country Women

With rare exceptions, they are country women, born and reared in the lonely, lowly farmhomes of the sparsely settled rural regions of the United States. In North and South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama they swarm out of their dreary country homes in large numbers into the cotton mills. In Maine, New York state and Pennsylvania they are descendants of devitalized stocks. Everywhere native white illiteracy of all ages and sexes is a country problem. It long ago disappeared in our towns and cities, or nearly so. Nine-tenths of it is rural. Not so in the North and West where for the most part illiteracy is foreign born, in city and country regions alike.

### Difficult Social Problem

The illiteracy of our native-born white women is self-perpetuating and hard to cure (1) because their homes are solitary dwellings in obscure places,

(2) because they are scattered a few families to the square mile in the vast open spaces of countryside America, (3) because they are sensitive and shy. They are crab-like souls who before advancing light steadily retreat into the fringe of darkness, to borrow Victor Hugo's figure. And (4) because they are wives and mothers and older daughters, and it is women everywhere in all ages who lift or lower the culture level of homes. Educate a man and you educate an individual, but educate a woman and you educate a family, said Charles D. McIver. There were 47,000 of these illiterate native-born white women in North Carolina in 1850 and there were 44,000 in 1920. In seventy years the decrease the United States over has been less than 100,000. The ratios have been greatly reduced in all the states since 1850, but the totals are little changed from year to year in any remote rural region.

These are the women who unaware sign away their homes and dowers with a cross-mark. These are the women who ate their hearts out in dumb agony during the World War. Their absent sons and brothers were as dead. Absent—that's about all that most of them knew; swallowed up by the big outside unknown world; gone somewhere, they hardly knew where; the camps at home, the trenches overseas, Flanders, the Somme, the Argonne were all one to them. Their loved ones were gone—lost in the sealed silences of illiteracy; that much they knew and little more. Whether safe and well, or ill or maimed for life or in prison or dead, they did not know and many of them do not know till this very day, as the authorities in Washington will tell you.

### Ephraim's Curse

The essential curse of illiteracy lies in the suffocating loneliness it imposes. The world the illiterates live in is mainly the little world of the home and the neighborhood. They are cabined, cribbed, confined by the here and the now. They are heirs of all the ages, to be sure, but they cannot claim their birthrights. The accumulated wisdom of the race reaches them in traditions passed on by word of mouth alone. The great tidal-waves of world affairs break in tiny ripples on their far distant shores after many days. They are oftentimes dowered by nature with magnificent possibilities, their brains and fingers are nimble, their characters are substantial, fine and capable, but they live in a pint-cup world where the largest men are little and the largest achievements are insignificant—a drab, dreary, uninspiring world. Their wits stew in their own broth, their brains fry in their own fat. They are seethed in their own milk, like David's ewe lamb!

Oftentimes they are people of the very finest character and capacity, good neighbors and upright, law-abiding citizens. The unlettered are not necessarily stupid in brain and sodden in life. But they have only a bare chance to cash-in their possibilities at their full value. They may be and sometimes they are gems of purest ray serene, but they are lost in the dark, unfathomed caves of illiteracy, the world forgetting and by the world forgot. They are diamonds in the rough that never can be marketed for lack of polish.

Natively great without letters, as occasionally they are, they fail of the full greatness they might have achieved, and die unwept, unhonored, and unsung. The tragedy of such lives wrung the heart of Carlyle. That one soul should die ignorant that had capacity for learning—that, said he, I call the tragedy of tragedies, were it to happen twenty times a minute as by some computations it does.

### A Home-Mission Task

These 500,000 white women that God forgot have made a feeble appeal even to men and women of heart—to teachers and preachers, to church and school and Sunday-school workers. Perhaps because they are a home-mission problem. It might be different if they were in Korea or Siam. But they are near at hand, a few under the dripping of the eaves of every country church, a few hundred or a thousand or so in almost every county east of the Mississippi—so near as to be commonplace and uninspiring. They lack the distance that lends enchantment to foreign missionary adventures.

The situation reminds us of Emer-

### A GREAT PROVINCIAL

Nature pays no tribute to aristocracy, subscribes to no creed or caste, renders fealty to no monarch or master of any name or kind. Genius is no snob. It does not run after titles or seek by preference the high circles of society. It affects humble company as well as great. It pays no special tribute to universities or learned societies or conventional standards of greatness, but serenely chooses its own comrades, its own haunts, its own cradle even, and its own life of adventure and training. —Woodrow Wilson.

son's cryptic address to a New England audience in the eighteen fifties. Don't talk to me, said he, about your incredible tenderness for black folk a thousand miles away: go love the woodchoppers in your backyards.

Secular effort fails. It is a task for the church, and in my opinion this social sewer will be healed unless tender-hearted home-mission workers can bring to this task the fever and fervor of religious zeal.

Let him alone, was the curse laid on Ephraim. And it is Ephraim's curse that lies on these wives, mothers, and daughters. Public schools and mission schools and moonlight schools have not solved the problem anywhere. Adult education is nowhere a success as yet in America. The daylight schools reach the children measurably well, but not the mothers. The largest promise of such success lies in such settlement work as the Hindman and the Pine Mountain teachers give themselves to in Kentucky, and in the consecrated efforts of Elizabeth Morris in Buncombe county, North Carolina. In their rounds of friendly visitation, they really reach and teach the mothers of Lonelyland. —E. C. Branson, published in part in *The World's Work*.

### PLEASE NOTE

Anyone wishing a copy of the recent Mecklenburg Survey, 317 pages, announced in the December 1 issue of the News Letter, must provide the postage, which is eight cents, when ordering from the Department of Rural Social-Economics, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C. This book is also being distributed by the Chamber of Commerce, Charlotte, which financed the publication of the volume.

### USE BUSINESS METHODS

We all know, in every community, some farmers who seem to have a kind of magic which enables them to maintain a relative success and security, regardless of bad seasons and price depressions. It is often a very simple wizardry, such as any good bookkeeper or thoughtful executive could explain; a simple planning for results and study of costs and regard for experience and knowledge of conditions. Sometimes this may be instinctive in the man, but the principle is there and it underlies his action.

How can we reach the average farmer on whom the prosperity of all of us depends and bring him to give to his most important work the attention, the care, and the analysis that are necessary in any other business? We may answer that education is the real remedy, but we have then to encounter the human equation of getting a great and important part of the population to accept the instruction necessary. Government agencies, direct or indirect, may and do make available for all who will study and learn the principles and the knowledge of soils, of cultivation, of farm methods and economy, and of profitable marketing which are essential to produce the better product and obtain for agricultural effort an equal return when compared with profits accruing from other industry. Agricultural colleges can and do teach these methods and give instruction in the application of science to the soil. We are every day acquiring a more and more complete understanding of agriculture from the point of view of production, but how far we have advanced toward winning the average farmer to take advantage of this knowledge is problematical.

For this lack two things are perhaps responsible. One is that the average farmer for one cause or another is a poor reader. We know how hard it is to get the farmer interested vitally in the meetings and teachings and demonstrations which the government provides

at great cost for his benefit. Another thing is that the farmer is an individualist—a fine and proper quality in itself but one that has its drawbacks when it is applied to a pursuit which is in natural competition with every other trade, calling and industry—all without exception more and more highly organized. No legislature, no governmental agency, no practice of "cussing out" the buyer of his products, no goodwill and respect for the farmer is going to help him greatly until he decides to help himself. He can do that only when he learns his situation, takes account of his disadvantages and realizes his opportunities to improve his methods, by thinking and acting in his own interests as his trade competitors do.

It is only as the farmer comes to think of himself as in business and to use business methods in his daily tasks that the people as a whole, in industry, trade, or the professions, will remotely approach a proper use of and profit from our State's richest endowments. A prosperous agricultural industry is the prime necessity not only in North Carolina but in America today. —Gov. A. W. McLean.

### THE SHORT BALLOT

The short ballot is the people's ballot—the long ballot is the politicians' ballot, according to a paper by Alvin S. Kartus, of Asheville, University student, read before the regular fortnightly meeting of the North Carolina Club.

"It is impossible for the present-day voter to cast his ballot intelligently owing to the large number of petty offices to be filled by men with whom the voter may not even be acquainted," Mr. Kartus asserted.

"This situation," he said, "leads to voting the straight ticket," a practice very common with present-day voters. He said that was a system which plays into the hands of the political rings and bosses, since the voter never knows for whom he is voting for the inconspicuous offices but contents himself with casting his vote for the party's candidates.

All this, Mr. Kartus reasoned, was responsible for misrepresentative government, "a system which America should not and will not be content with."

The remedy, he stated, lies in shortening the ballot to a point where the average man can and will vote intelligently and in making most of the minor offices appointive instead of elective.

"If we are to have good government," he concluded, "if we are to have representative government, we must have government that fits in with the mood and habits of the people. The people have refused to give cognizance to the minor offices, which has led to general inertia and misrepresentative government. The long ballot does not work! Its rule is machine rule and machine rule is not democracy. If it's democracy that we want, we must ascertain how much civic work the people are willing to do, and plan our government accordingly. The only way that we will have government by the people in reality is to simplify government sufficiently for the average

voter to maneuver it intelligently. The long ballot prohibits this; it is the politicians' ballot. It is the short ballot that is the people's ballot."

The Club is devoting its time this year to a study of "Problems for Democracy in North Carolina," and last night's discussion was the fifth of a series of such studies, which will be continued through the year.

### GOOD ROADS AND SCHOOLS

North Carolina not only has progressed amazingly during the last decade or more, but has seen to it that her advance has been made known to an otherwise ignorant world. What she has done has, indeed, deserved recognition. One of the results of her emphasis on the building of roads, for example, has recently been pointed out by her State Superintendent of Instruction. He remarked that the quickening of the rural school system of the state has been made possible by the road program started in 1921. Good roads facilitate the consolidation of school districts. They also increased the attendance at school by making possible the establishment of bus lines to carry the children to and from the schools. As a result many small schools not efficiently operated could be abolished, and more attention was concentrated on developing the combined schools. The number of schools for whites having two or more teachers increased threefold, and the number of schools for negroes having two or more teachers increased eightfold.

The dependence of the educational system on the status of the roads has not always been obvious to advocates of good roads throughout the country. To be sure, the foresight and energy which North Carolina has shown in carrying out an improved educational program are as important as the wisdom in planning and executing the road program. But it is becoming apparent that we are turning again to roads as great factors in the economic and social development of the country. George Washington, who was one of the few Americans to think in terms of empire, understood this a hundred and fifty or more years ago, and throughout his life of public service tried to make his countrymen realize that roads were the skeleton of the state and that on good roads depended the economic progress and welfare of the people. Shortly after his death canals were hailed as the great means of communication, and no sooner had these been started than the railroads promised to outstrip the canals. With the development of the automobile the emphasis has shifted again to roads. North Carolina has now dramatized the value of a constructive road program in enriching and developing an entire community. Ten years ago the greater portion of that state, barring a few main highways, had so-called roads of clay or sand, which were occasionally traversable by motor, but too often so sticky and covered with mud, that travel was slow and unprofitable. They differed little from the roads in that same state a hundred years before. The highway improvements during the last few years are only beginning to have their reaction on the general development of the state. Already they have justified heavy expenditure on them, and are giving an example to others. —New York Times.

### ILLITERATE NATIVE WHITE WOMEN

#### Twenty-one Years of Age and Over, 1920 and 1850 Censuses

The following table, based on the 1920 and 1850 censuses, shows the total number of illiterate native white women twenty-one years of age and over by states for the respective census years.

The 1850 total for the U. S. was 573,234.

The 1920 total for the U. S. was 477,123, nearly ten percent of whom were in North Carolina.

State	1920	1850	State	1920	1850
Alabama	26,331	20,594	Nebraska	1,150	
Arizona	1,212		Nevada	53	
Arkansas	15,632	10,009	New Hampshire	712	1,295
California	3,679	881	New Jersey	3,723	8,241
Colorado	4,188		New Mexico	13,574	11,765
Connecticut	1,134	2,702	New York	10,826	52,111
Delaware	958	2,524	North Carolina	44,053	47,327
Florida	5,242	2,123	North Dakota	431	
Georgia	25,533	24,648	Ohio	13,224	38,036
Idaho	271		Oklahoma	10,937	
Illinois	12,175	23,421	Oregon	679	71
Indiana	11,455	44,408	Pennsylvania	16,937	42,548
Iowa	2,805	5,192	Rhode Island	1,019	2,010
Kansas	2,650		South Carolina	15,815	9,787
Kentucky	42,763	38,933	South Dakota	505	
Louisiana	31,967	11,379	Tennessee	39,250	49,053
Maine	2,323	2,888	Texas	24,964	5,537
Maryland	5,833	12,258	Utah	308	65
Massachusetts	3,066	15,961	Vermont	1,197	2,588
Michigan	4,756	3,875	Virginia	24,340	46,761
Minnesota	2,021	260	Washington	800	
Mississippi	3,063	7,883	West Virginia	17,251	
Missouri	17,985	21,323	Wisconsin	3,635	3,431
Montana	308		Wyoming	107	