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IN LAND SPECULATION RURAL DEVELOPMENT HAS GRAVE PROBLEM

How To Attract Newcomers To North Carolina, and Some of the Difficulties Encountered—Small Farmer or Big Landholder—Ten-Cent Land or Ten-Dollar Land

By BION H. BUTLER.

Southern Pine, Feb. 24.—I have just received a letter from a man in the country, which says:

"Knowing that you are interested in the development of North Carolina, and especially in the rural sections, I write to ask if you can put me in touch with any good homeseekers, either North or South. I live in a community that is in need of such people. Our land is mixed clay, with clay subsoil, adapted to wheat, corn, oats, cotton and the like, and a variety of crops. Land is bought cheap, within four to six miles of a good town, and two or three miles from a smaller place. I am interested in the upbuilding of my community and want to see it filled with good, land-owning citizens, men who would be something for the country and themselves. I know there are plenty of such, if I only knew where to find them. We have three churches near enough to attend to live months in the year. I have no land to sell, being only a farmer, and am not looking for any financial gain, but for the betterment of the section in which I live. But there is some land that could be bought, and I think, considering the price of land in other sections, the price would be attractive. I would be glad to give homeseekers any information or to show them about free of charge, and if you can put me in touch with any such I would appreciate it very much."

There is a man who is typical of the men in several hundred communities of North Carolina. I hear that story nearly every week, and some weeks many times. In fact, I hear it right at home, for I live in a thirty-settled part of the Sandhills country, and we would like to have more neighbors. And it brings up a subject that is right pertinent in the State.

I look back to the section of Pennsylvania from which I came. It was a community of small farmers. I do not recall a renting farmer in the whole assembly of four or five townships that constituted my neighborhood. The farms were owned and tilled by the owners, a hired hand or sometimes two or three on the place or all of the year, but the farmer himself being the main dependence. I never heard of time prices there, nor of mortgaging a crop, nor of interest above 6 per cent, nor of distressed crop, nor of several things that I have seen since these. I have seen no big landowners figuring out a rental in the fall, and deducting the cost of carrying the tenants, for no one carried anything very far. Each small farmer carried himself, and while he did not carry a very big load he carried enough that a sheriff's sale of farm land was a rarity. I cannot now look back and recall one. The small farmers were looked on as men of sound financial condition, men of limited financial power, but thoroughly sound to the limit of their rating.

Since then I have been in many communities, big and little, in many parts of the United States, but never in any that showed a more marked thrift and modest prosperity than in that community of small farmers.

Now, that seems to be the idea that my correspondent has in mind, and that many men have had in mind in the effort to increase the population of rural North Carolina. I had in some sections of the State where small farmers are more numerous there is a more substantial general prosperity. To secure this condition of more people and more developed rural neighborhoods North Carolina has tried many expedients. They all help more or less, but they usually in a short time run against one common snag. That has its foundation in the early colonial practice of granting to one man or one association vast acreage of land. In my own neighborhood the Dixon grants amounted up to, I presume, several hundred thousand acres, for in Cumberland alone something like a hundred thousand acres in one lot once belonged to the Dixon property, and it was a common holding in other counties adjoining. There started the trouble.

When the West started a homestead of 160 acres was granted to a settler, and he had to live on it a certain period of each year for five years until he proved up. That made the West a prison of small settlers. The big grants in North Carolina made this State a region of big land holders, many of the men who rarely if ever saw their lands. Follow the situation. A man went West and he secured 160 acres on paying the homestead fees of about \$15. He comes South and he secures a similar sized lot of 160 acres by paying, say \$10 an acre, which means \$1,600 more. My correspondent has no land to sell. He wants neighbors who will help him develop his community, and make it a community of thrifty, companionable, prosperous people, with the modern conveniences that population makes possible. But standing in the way of those settlers is the price of land. He did not tell me the price in his section, but I know what the price in my section, and I know what it is doing in my neighborhood, and what it is doing in every neighborhood. It is putting the bar against development and settlement.

North Carolina has about \$1,000,000 acres of land. Let us call that land worth \$10 an acre. There you have \$10,000,000. If we could sell all our land at that price we would have about as much money as the farms are capable of making in little over a year, for if I recall right Major Graham reports that the farm products last year reached a total value of \$275,000,000. If North Carolina could give away its land to men who would farm it the crop in a year would be worth more than the land.

A certain portion of the land of North Carolina is farmed. That portion is producing not less than \$2,000 an acre a year. That is productive industry, and is what my correspondent desires. But standing in the way of the rest of the land becoming productive is a cost price of the land, and that cost price is such that many men who would become good farmers are not able to become farmers at all. For want of ten dollars to pay a speculative price for land the men are prevented from developing that land and making for the community much more than the selling price of the land every year.

Our land system is not a system that has for its object the development of



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bars, just as other lands there keep me from getting neighbors in that section. We are all sinners alike.

For the sake of the speculation in lands we are all standing in the way of the substantial development of our communities, and some of these days we are going to move to town with the children, who will not stay in the country in a lonely neighborhood, and that is what takes the country boy and girl to town, and will take them there as long as we continue such conditions.

But I have not answered my correspondent's letter yet. I would have gone this far except for one thing. He is not a land speculator. He is one of the kind of men that show an interest in the development of his community, which means the development of the State and nation. Therefore he is entitled to every word of encouragement and information that any of us can give him. First of all, he must figure that if he wants settlers he has to stay free from the land speculation ban. He must make himself the representative of the prospective settler, and if he finds a settler he must keep in mind constantly that the object is not to sell

(Continued on Page Twenty-four.)

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