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THE SOUTH'S OPPORTUNITY!

(Continued from page one)

been devitalized, not only by this uneconomic system but by the drain on the country by the growing towns. Furthermore we have a class of people living in such sections on so low a scale, so ignorant and so inefficient, that they may be termed a submerged, dependent, class; the greatest enemy that can menace a democracy. I am speaking of the floating white tenants; the man with a vote, but no property, no education.

The one crop—cotton—system of agriculture always has bred and always will breed a class of floating laborers, "tenant farmers," we call them, who have no ties or interest in any one place that they can call home, who do not raise food enough for their family and stock, who are shiftless, without hope, dependent. They procure their money and supplies at exorbitant rates of interest from the landlords or the merchants; a rate of interest so high that any possibility of success for them is precluded by it. Behind them is a hopeless past, facing them is an equally hopeless future. ¶ Occasionally, beaten and discouraged by their own ignorance, by their poverty and by a game in which the odds are against them, they drift into the cotton mills as a last haven of refuge from the loneliness and the hardships of country life. ¶ Yet for a large part, gentlemen, these people form the nucleus from which the farmers of tomorrow must be made if North Carolina is going to develop into the prosperous agricultural State she ought to develop into.

In the South, as elsewhere in America, the efforts for social betterment have been made in towns. Here you find the best schools, the best churches, the hospitals, the best roads. Social life is here concentrated, amusements are close at hand, and here is the clamour and excitement that always attends a congregation of people. There has been a steady tendency for such people as were financially able, to move from the country to the towns simply because social and educational conditions were better. But every time a man of superior intelligence makes this change he either sells his land or leaves it in the hands of a tenant of inferior intelligence. The evils of absentee landlordism immediately appear and the productive power of that land either stands still or declines. And not only does the productive power of the land decline with this loss of the superior individual, but also does the quality of the general structure of country life decline. The roads are neglected, new ones not built, the schools are badly administered, the thought of the community lags and becomes stagnant, and progress comes to a standstill. In fact, the locality turns into such a place as every live man is glad to leave and never see again if it can be avoided.

But we are concerned with the economic aspect of this country problem most particularly though it is by no means purely an economic problem. He who thinks that its solution is merely to make the farmer prosperous hits very wide of the mark. There is no use in making the farmer prosperous if his first move is to

leave his farm for the city, and desert the army of producers for the army of non-producers. ¶ Yet the economic aspect is basic. The wealth of the town depends to a large proportion on the wealth created by the country about it. The merchants, the professional men, the bankers, live on a percentage of the wealth produced by the farmers. As that wealth declines so does their percentage decline, and we do not need to go far afield to see the effects of such an event, especially where that wealth is largely based on one crop. ¶ Another point. We hear on all sides, of the organization of Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce and Boosters Clubs, to develop the towns. ¶ It is no advantage economically for the merchant to multiply the number of merchants in a town by two, or for the banker to multiply the number of bankers, unless the production of wealth which that town depends on has been multiplied. But this is a thing the merchants and bankers often fail to realize, or if they do, they seem unable to do anything constructive to increase the production of wealth in the territory about them.

This is the point, gentlemen, that we must consider tonight. What can the bankers and business men of North Carolina towns do to increase the agricultural wealth of North Carolina? I wish I had time to tell you fully of the attitude of the bankers and merchants of this Sand Hill section who have joined in the organization of a rural Board of Trade covering a circle of forty miles in diameter and embracing seventeen towns. An organization with the avowed purpose of improving the social conditions and developing the wealth of the territory it covers. An organization of farmers and bankers and merchants and business men working in unison to better their common cause. ¶ But let us, at least, take an example of how this works out. ¶ It has been my observation that it is easier for the non-productive store keeper who lives just around the corner from the bank, to get a loan, than for the productive farmer who lives ten miles out in the country. Why? For one reason because he wants the money for a shorter time than the farmer does, but mainly because he has the virtue of *being known* to the banker, or if he is not known, it is easier for the banker to make an investigation of him than to hitch up his horse and buggy and drive ten miles, probably over a bad road, to investigate the farmer.

The Page Trust Company, at Aberdeen, have gotten round that objection by appointing the County Demonstration Agent as their agricultural loan advisor. In consequence if a farmer comes to them for a loan they can turn to the demonstration agent and get an expert opinion from him as to the advisability of the loan, and furthermore, they have reached the point where they will not loan to a farmer unless the agent tells them that the method he intends following will not only prove profitable, but will build the soil up, and unless the farmer agrees to keep accounts of his operations and follow the advice of the agent. ¶ Thus they have taken the big stick in their hands and are swinging it in the interests of better farming. And