

EDUCATION, COÖPERATION, LEGISLATION

(1) Education to Develop Power, (2) Coöperation to Multiply It, and (3) Legislation and Good Government to Promote Equal Rights and Human Progress—Plain Talk About Men, Measures and Movements Involved

By CLARENCE POE

A Study of the Tenant Problem

AS I have said before, I have lived the life both of landlord and renter, and I think I can sympathize with both classes of our people and hold the scales equally between them. As I see it, a study of the tenant problem points unerringly to two great needs:

1. The conservation of soil fertility.
2. The conservation of manhood.

Both these issues are, of course, of the highest importance to our future civilization. "The highest conception of a nation," said the late James J. Hill in his famous St. Paul address, ten years ago last week, "is that of a trustee for posterity." The Nation must think of the generations yet unborn, and take steps to safeguard our one great inheritance from the Almighty—the fertility of the soil—through which the life of these generations is to be sustained.

The Nation's Duty to Conserve Soil Fertility

THIS last idea was the thought that was perhaps oftenest in the mind and heart of the late Henry Wallace during the last years of his life. "The Voiceless Land" was a subject he was constantly writing about—meaning to say that while both landlord and tenant speak out their views as to their own interests in every rental contract, the land itself, more important than either, is silent, voiceless, and its interests are too often outraged. This is the way the great Iowa farmer-leader put it on one occasion:

"In every lease there are really three parties interested—the land, the landlord, and the tenant; and the most important of this trio is the land itself. It will be here when the grave has closed over the other two parties to the contract, and will be here after the tombstone, be it marble or sandstone, has crumbled into dust. From the land generations yet unborn must be fed, and whether they are fed well or compelled to starve will depend on whether the rights of the land are recognized in such leases as are now being made all over the Corn Belt. The land is voiceless, and someone must speak for it, and in so doing speak for the generations yet to come.

"Some forms of leasing are especially vicious; for example, a lease for one year for a share of the crop on land farmed for grain exclusively. This means nothing more nor less than the rape of the voiceless land, which cannot cry out nor protect itself. It is simply a conspiracy between the owner of the land and the tenant to rob it as thoroughly as possible and as quickly as possible, and divide the swag. A lease for a series of years, without an efficient method of feeding the land, is only prolonging the agony."

There is indeed, as Henry Wallace pointed out, a great moral duty here. The Almighty did not make the earth and the fullness thereof just for those of us who happen to be living in 1916, nor our immediate offspring. He made it, for all we know, for people who are to live ten thousand or ten million years from now. And for this reason it is the high duty of the state, "the trustee of posterity," to safeguard the interests both of the "voiceless land" and the voiceless unborn who are to come after us—their right to life and sustenance as sacred in God's eyes as is our own right to life and food.

Home-Ownership and Rural Civilization

NOT only must we consider the tenant problem as it is related to the conservation of soil resources, however, but also as related directly to the conservation of our human resources. In fact, we are interested in soil conservation simply as it affects future human life, and we must also consider how conditions of land-renting, etc., affect human life at the present time. For it is not enough merely that human beings shall exist on the land, but our aim must be to develop on the land the highest possible type of hu-

man beings, the noblest possible form of rural civilization. Here then is our twofold problem—to promote as amply as possible (1) the conservation of soil fertility; (2) the highest human development.

Now there can be no doubt about it that home-ownership favors both these desired results. It helps the soil because, as James Oliver used to say, "Happy is the land that is tilled by the man who owns it." "The magic of ownership," as a philosopher of another era has said, "converts deserts and sand banks into blossoming gardens."

Moreover, home-ownership has always been recognized as promoting the highest human development. This has been recognized from the time when Goldsmith generations ago sang of its "bold peasantry" as the mainstay of England's greatness, until our own time when Dr. Carver proclaims that "next to war, pestilence and famine, the worst thing that can happen to a rural community is absentee landlordism."

We Must Encourage (1) Permanence of Residence (2) Sureness of Rewards

ALL in all, therefore, we hardly think that anyone will deny that home ownership promotes both soil-conservation and the flowering of a richer civilization. Let us not be content, however, with the simple statement, but go further and ask why this is so.

We think it is true for two reasons: (1) because of the permanence of the home-owner's residence on the land; (2) because of the sureness that he will reap what he sows, whether that is soil-pov-erty or soil-fertility.

And then it follows as the night the day that the further we get away from these two characteristics of home-ownership—(1) permanence of residence, (2) sureness of rewards—the worse becomes our condition. And in the one-year renting system of the South, we get just as far away as it is possible for us to get in any business governed by such circumstances.

We reach, then, these conclusions—that home-ownership is the ideal; and that where home-ownership cannot exist, we should aim at least to provide as far as possible the conditions that make home-ownership better both for the soil and for civilization. And these conditions are (1) permanence of residence, (2) sureness of rewards.

The Iniquity of Taxing the Poor at Higher Rates Than the Rich

INSTEAD of encouraging home-ownership and discouraging absentee landlordism the contrary now seems to be the policy of both our states and the Nation. Taxes are usually higher per acre on small farms cultivated by industrious,

useful citizens than they are on large tracts held for speculation by absentee landlords. And not only is this true, but taxes are higher yet, in proportion to value, on the personal property of the landless man struggling to become a home-owner. Take a case mentioned by Mr. R. F. Beasley in our "Renters' and Landlords' Special" one year ago. In his county last year he said the tax assessors valued cotton at 9 cents a pound, corn and wheat at \$1 a bushel, horses at \$200 and cows at \$50, etc.—all the personal property of the poor fellow struggling to get a foothold in the world being assessed at practically 100 per cent value while land was assessed at probably less than 33½ per cent of its real value.

This is an iniquity in the sight of God, a sin against His poor; and the nation, state, or county guilty of such a policy is sure to pay the penalty with all the accumulated interest of the Almighty's vengeance. And any political party endorsing such a policy should be in peril of the people's wrath.

Reforms in Taxation and Rural Credits

I BELIEVE that provision should be made for encouraging home-ownership by providing that a resident's first \$1,000 of real estate should be assessed at only half the rate at which the rest of his holdings are assessed. And certainly the double iniquity of taxing large holdings higher than small, and of taxing personal property at a higher rate than real estate, should be forever done away with.

Our systems of state and local taxation should (1) encourage small holdings rather than large; (2) home-ownership rather than absentee landlordism; and (3) should seek to encourage the landless man in the accumulation of personal property as the necessary route to home-ownership.

Our states are at fault for not engrafting these principles into their systems of taxation, and the Nation is at fault for not engrafting the same principle into what would then become an excellent system of rural credits. But so long as money is lent to land speculators through joint-stock banks as cheaply—or virtually as cheaply—as to resident, home-owning farmers through national farm loan associations, the Nation is almost as guilty as the states in the crime of promoting absentee landlordism.

Rewarding the Renter for Improvements

SO MUCH then for legislation to encourage land-ownership. Now let us see what we can do in our renting systems to encourage the saving principles of home-ownership—first, permanence of residence; second, sureness of rewards.

We ought, of course, to have longer leases, and we ought to have some plan whereby the renter would be rewarded for increasing soil-fertility and punished for lessening it. In England legislation assuring these results has long been in successful operation, as explained elsewhere in this issue by a Virginia correspondent, and also in a quotation from the late Henry Wallace.

Of course, we are hardly ready yet for such legislation in this country. We must suffer more, or must see a greater body of now fertile farm lands converted into waste, gullies, and old fields. We shall also be delayed by the fact that such a small proportion of our tenants are financially responsible. Still, as time goes on we shall have an increasing number of landowners who will find renters with sufficient personal property and say, "You take this farm at a certain rent, the understanding being that it is to be kept as fertile and in as good condition as now—I to pay you if you improve it, you to pay me if you injure it." It is no use to dismiss the idea as "impracticable" for everybody and in all cases simply because it is yet impracticable in the great majority of cases. The thing to do rather is to recognize the desirability of the idea and seek to put it into practice wherever two men of the right sort can get together on a satisfactory plan.

We must encourage (1) permanence of residence; (2) sureness of rewards.

SEPTEMBER

I HAVE not been among the woods,
Nor seen the milk-weeds burst their hoods,

The downy thistle-seeds take wing,
Nor the squirrel at his garnering.

And yet I know that, up to God,
The mute month holds her goldenrod,
That clump and copse, o'errun with vines,
Twinkle with clustered muscadines,

And in deserted churchyard places
Dwarf apples smile with sunburnt faces.

I know how, ere her green is shed,
The dogwood pranks herself with red;

How the pale dawn, chilled through and through,
Comes drenched and dragged with her dew;

How all day long the sunlight seems
As if it lit a land of dreams,

Till evening, with her mist and cloud,
Begins to weave her royal shroud.

If yet, as in old Homer's land,
God walks with mortals, hand in hand,
Somewhere today, in this sweet weather,
Thinkest thou not they walk together?

—John Charles McNeill.