

BACK TO THE SOIL

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Some of my friends have been telling me recently that this back to the soil movement looks very much like work to them. Well, there is an old saying that some people are bent with work while others get crooked trying to avoid it. Then you have probably heard the story of the old darkey who said you couldn't get anything in this world without work, even by prayer. As an illustration he told how he had planned to have a turkey for his Thanksgiving dinner. He said he prayed one night that the turkey might come to him the next day, but the turkey didn't come. The next night he prayed that his master would give him a turkey, but still there was no turkey. On the third night he prayed that the Lord would send him out after a turkey, and that night he got a turkey. That seems to be a very general rule. If we get anything in this world we have to go after it.

Speaking about work on a farm, I read an article in a magazine a few years ago written by a farmer. Among other things he said, "I know that I shall work more hours than my fellows in the town, I know that I shall never make a million dollars. But then, too, I know that I shall not be obliged to lie while I am living, or be lied about after I am dead." Then he called attention to the freedom and independence which he enjoyed, to his love for the great outdoors with its mystery and miracle of the rolling years, and to the real enjoyment he experienced as he walked over the old fields and in imagination tried to make live again the old scenes and forgotten memories. Those things which appeal to the sentiment—the things which money can not buy are the things which make life on the farm worth while to him.

In a book entitled "City Homes in Country Lanes," Wm. Smythe says we should say "forward to the land" instead of "back to the land." However, I have chosen "Back to the Soil" as the subject of my talk this evening for the reason that a century ago 95% of the people in this country lived on farms, while at the present time less than 50% live on farms. In the state of California with its enormous areas of agricultural land and its wonderful opportunities for intensive farming, not more than 25% of the Americans live on farms.

This condition has not only filled our country with poverty and crime, but it has brought us face to face with a problem which is causing alarm among our foremost economists. Dr. Baker of the Bureau of Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture has recently called attention to the fact that the population of this country is increasing at the rate of 1,500,000 each year, exclusive of the increase from immigration, and that the number of farmers is increasing. Within the next one hundred years our population will be more than 300,000,000. The feeding and clothing of this great increase in

population, he said, is a problem which faces the American people. He suggested that we can take care of the increase in population for a long time by a change in the diet; that is, by eating less meats and more fruits and vegetables. This will necessitate not only more intensive farming, but also a very general movement back to the soil.

Wm. Smythe, from whom I have already quoted, says: "If the war had lasted ten years longer this country would have learned the greatest single fact in the world—that a man can make a living from a very little land. And when that fact is finally learned in the length and breadth of America there will be neither a homeless man nor a hungry child."

Abraham Lincoln, in an address before the pioneers of Wisconsin, said: "The most valuable of all arts will be the art of deriving a comfortable subsistence from the smallest area of soil."

While I am quoting from prominent people I want to quote further, especially in view of the attitude of some people toward the farmer and farm life.

George Washington said: "Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful and most noble employment of man."

Napoleon said: "Agriculture is the soul and chief foundation of empires."

Benjamin Franklin said: "There seems to be but three ways for a nation to acquire wealth—the first is by war, as the Romans did in plundering their conquered neighbors—this is robbery; the second is by commerce which is generally cheating; the third by agriculture, the only real increase in wealth."

Daniel Webster said: "The glory and prosperity of our union are based upon the accomplishments of agriculture;" also, "the farmers are the founders of civilization."

Emerson said: "Agriculture is the venerable mother of all arts."

Henry Ward Beecher said: "He that would look with contempt on the pursuits of the farmer is not worthy the name of man."

Lord Chatham said: "Trade increases the wealth and glory of a country, but its real strength and stamina are to be looked for among the cultivators of the land."

Edward Everett said: "It is agriculture alone that enables the work of civilization to go on."

Such have been the views and sentiments of many of the foremost individuals of all time.

It is true that conditions in the country for a long time were such that life on the farm was somewhat undesirable. The roads were bad, the schools were poor, transportation facilities were inadequate, and the conveniences of the city were generally lacking in the country. Such conditions, however, do not apply at the present time. The up-to-date farmer now has his automobile, his roads are good, he gets the daily newspaper before breakfast, he lives in a house with modern plumbing and he has his own private telephone. The automobile, the telephone and the radio have brought the whole world to the very door of the farmer. The barriers between city life and country life have been largely wiped out. This is bringing about a change in the class of people who are becoming interested in agriculture. Farming as it is being carried on in many places

requires the highest skill which the country can produce. Consequently, the scientist, the teacher and the professional man are taking up farming. Scientific methods are being introduced, and this is bringing about intensive farming of small tracts of land by individual owners.

Large tracts of land under one ownership have a tendency to build up a sort of a peasant class as helpers and tenants, while intensive farming of small tracts of land by individual owners has a tendency to build up communities of self-reliant citizens. This is essential to a proper agricultural development which is the basis of prosperity for any country. Just a few weeks ago the National Industrial Conference Board of New York sounded a warning to the United States not to neglect agricultural development through any preoccupation with other industrial and financial interests. They called attention to the reduced agricultural production all over the world, and urged the United States to consider the agricultural problem from the broad viewpoint of national economy in order to avert serious consequences to our whole economic structure.

There is no denying the fact that the farmer has many serious problems to contend with at the present time. He is not only confronted with such problems as the improvement of his product, increasing the yield and maintaining a satisfactory market, but he continually faces certain hazards, such as frosts, insect pests, plant diseases and other destructive agencies. Such problems, however, are a challenge to the intelligence of farmers as a whole. These and other agricultural problems can be solved and the time is near at hand when these drawbacks will cease to worry the farmer. Scientific methods are being introduced into agriculture just as they have been introduced into manufacturing. That means that the problems of the farmer will be successfully solved, just as industrial problems are being solved.

Then there is the possibility of low prices which an occasional oversupply may cause. The problem of prices, however, will be solved to a large extent by an increase in the demand for farm products. The next few years will see a tremendous increase in the use of fruits and vegetables in the diet, not only to meet the food requirements of the increase in population, but also to maintain the health of the people. This is only a matter of education. At the present time more than nine-tenths of the people of this country have some physical ailment. There is something the matter with their eyes, or their teeth, or their tonsils, or their adenoids, or their digestion; or possibly they have rickets, or neuritis, or arthritis, or bursitis, or some other "itis." Experiments by chemists during the last few years have shown that most of these troubles and many other diseases can be produced in animals, can be completely cured, and reproduced and re-cured time after time, and it has been found that such troubles are largely due to a lack of vitamins and mineral salts in the diet. It has also been shown that fruits and vegetables are the great storehouse of vitamins and mineral salts. As people become educated to the value of fruits and vegetables in the diet, there will be a great increase in the demand for farm products, which will help to maintain fair prices. Consider the case of the orange. The discovery of the antiscorbutic vitamin in the orange has brought forth the slogan that every child must have an orange every day. This has been an important factor in keeping up the prices of oranges during the last few years. When the education is complete there will be added to that slogan that every adult should have two oranges every day, and when that time comes there can be no oversupply of

oranges.

Another thing which will help to develop and maintain reasonable prices is co-operation. As this is an avocado meeting I want to emphasize the importance of co-operation among the avocado growers. It is just as necessary for the avocado growers to join forces in trying to improve the avocado and develop a satisfactory market for it, as it is for them to join forces in constructing roads and building schoolhouses. That which benefits the community should be done by the community as a whole. Individual efforts cause unnecessary duplication of work and a needless waste of time and money. The success of the avocado industry depends upon co-operation, and it must be remembered that the real purpose of co-operation is not to maintain unreasonable prices, but to develop adequate markets at reasonable prices. And I want to say further that those who join the co-operative organizations formed by the avocado growers and do so willingly and in a friendly spirit will not only feel a certain satisfaction in doing their part, but in the end they will be amply rewarded financially.

One of the most profitable and one of the most interesting forms of agriculture is the growing of trees. There is something about trees that appeals to the sentiment. Other crops come and go, but the tree remains. It becomes a sort of a friend. Not long ago I read an article by Lannie Haynes Martin in which are the following lines: "In turning to pay tribute to a friend lower in the scale of existence than man, many will name with gratitude that docile, patient, burden bearer, the horse. Others will express genuine affection for that dumb, loyal worshiper of man, the dog. But who pays tribute to that friend of man which has followed him down through the ages, which has given him sustenance and shelter, which stands like a standard bearer of beauty, calling continually to the soul of man, the tree? . . . What would the world be worth if suddenly all of the trees of the earth were to perish and wither away? Picture the grim, gaunt, ghastly desolation of the naked hills, the loneliness of the rugged, rocky canyons, robbed of verdure and unsoftened by the shade of the spreading boughs. Think of the bleak, barren roadways stripped of those friendly sentinels, and visualize, if you can, a city without a tree!" This is a beautiful tribute to a much neglected but deserving friend.

The tree makes its appeal, not only from the standpoint of beauty and sentiment, but also from the practical side. One of the most important industries in the world is the growing of fruit trees. And I know of no greater opportunity for persons of moderate means who are intelligent and willing to work, than to grow a small orchard of avocado trees in Southern California. It is a wonderful opportunity for intensive farming which will greatly increase the production of the soil; and those who succeed in producing several tons of wholesome food where only a fraction of a ton was produced before are truly benefactors of the human race. To make a success of this work requires intelligence and a willingness to work. Those who do not meet these requirements might as well go into the factory or somewhere else where a definite number of hours are prescribed for them each day, and where their thinking is largely done for them. Those who do meet the necessary requirements will find the work both interesting; and highly profitable, and they will enjoy a certain freedom and independence in their environment which will add years to their lives and give them health and happiness while they live. Thomas Edison once said, "What do I consider the nearest approach to happiness of which the present human nature is capable? Why, living on a farm which is one's own, far from the hectic

artificial conditions of the city—a farm where one gets directly from one's own soil what one needs to sustain life, with a garden in front and a healthy normal family to contribute those small domestic joys which relieve a man from business strain." The things which all human beings really crave—the things which they continually long for are health, happiness and knowledge; and by knowledge I mean all that is necessary to fit mankind for the duties of life. The great outdoors— nature's playground and nature's workshop— not only bestows health and happiness in full measure, but it opens to us an inexhaustible source of knowledge—the kind of knowledge that can be acquired only through contact with nature. Hamilton Wright Mabie in his essay on "The Open Fields," said: "Nature confides to those who love her some deep and precious truths never to be put into words, but ever after to rise at times over the horizon of thought like vagrant ships that come and go against the distant sea line."

In summing up, then, I would say that intensive farming and the movement back to the soil are of the utmost importance for the following reasons:

First, to provide an adequate supply of food and clothing for the rapidly increasing population.

Second, to maintain the health of the people by supplying foods rich in vitamins and mineral salts.

Third, to furnish employment and homes for a large number of deserving and competent people, and thereby relieve the congestion of the cities.

Fourth, to add stability to the whole economic structure of our government, and to solve, in a measure, some of our social and political problems. A general movement back to the soil, whereby a majority of the people of this country could own small farms on which they could make a good living by intensive farming, would do more to quiet the unrest and eliminate anarchy than all the oratory which Democratic and Republican politicians can pour forth in a century. The late James J. Hill said, "Not armies or navies or commerce or diversity of manufacture or anything other than the farm is the anchor which will hold through the storms of time that sweep all else away."

Then try to imagine what a difference it would make if the children of this country could have the orchards, the meadows and the healthy wide open places for play grounds instead of playing in the back alleys and in the gutters. One of the most sensible wills ever made was written by an insane man, Charles Lounsberry, once a prominent member of the Chicago bar, who later lost his mind and was committed to the Cook County Asylum, where he died penniless. The following item was taken from his will: "I leave to children inclusively, but only for the period of their childhood, all and every, the flowers of the fields and the blossoms of the woods, with the right to play among them freely, according to the customs of children, warning them at the same time against thistles and thorns. And I devise to children the banks of the brooks and the golden sands beneath the waters thereof, and the odors of the willows that dip therein, and the white clouds that float high over the giant trees. And I give to said children all the meadows with the clover blossoms and the butterflies thereof; the woods with their appurtenances, the squirrels and the birds and echoes and strange noises. And I give to each child his own place at the fireside at night with all the pictures that may be seen in the burning wood, to enjoy without let or hindrance, and without any encumbrance of

care."

If the terms of that will could be carried out, it would not only add health and happiness to the lives of children and open to them unlimited opportunities for education, but it would be an important factor in eliminating juvenile crime; and eventually it would add tremendously to the stability of our government and even to the stability of civilization itself. It was Josiah Strong who said: "If I were going to enter this world again and Providence permitted, I would ask by all means to be born on a farm in the United States."

In closing, I just want to say that the avocado growers of Southern California are doing much to foster the movement back to the soil and to encourage intensive farming. Your product—the avocado—is a wonderful food. It is truly the aristocrat of all fruits. Someone has said that there is nothing in which God asks so little of us and gives so much as in the planting of a tree. I believe that is especially true of the avocado tree. It adds grace and beauty to the landscape, it offers large returns to the grower, and it gives to the world an incomparable food. It is a great satisfaction to grow such a tree; and then there is something about owning a little land that gives one a feeling of independence and real contentment that nothing else can give. Edward Everett, in trying to describe the feelings of the owners of the soil, said: "Words cannot paint them; gold cannot buy them; they flow out of the deepest fountains of the heart; they are the very life-springs of a fresh, healthy and generous national character."

The California Avocado Association is a very remarkable organization in many ways. It is remarkable on account of the scientific manner in which it has undertaken the solution of its problems. The only hope for progress in any industrial or agricultural undertaking is through the application of scientific methods. This organization is remarkable also on account of the great variety of individuals which make up the membership, and because of the cordial and friendly spirit which prevails. The membership includes, not only representatives from various lines of agriculture, but also bankers, lawyers, physicians, teachers, tradesmen, laborers and practically all classes. We have among us the rich and poor and those of moderate means. Some are young people with all the enthusiasm of youth; others are at middle age, just in the prime of their business careers. Then we have some with snowy crowns, and even those in the purple twilight of old age. And always there is present among us, not only a spirit of enthusiasm and optimism, but also a spirit of cordiality and true friendship—those intangible somethings -which flow from the human heart, and give to life its greatest blessings. It is not the size of the bank account or the belief in any creed, but it is the attitude of human beings toward each other—it is this spirit of cordiality and true friendship among the different people, which forms the only substantial basis for a stable government and makes possible the only civilization that can endure.