

National Movement to Improve the Life of the Farmer

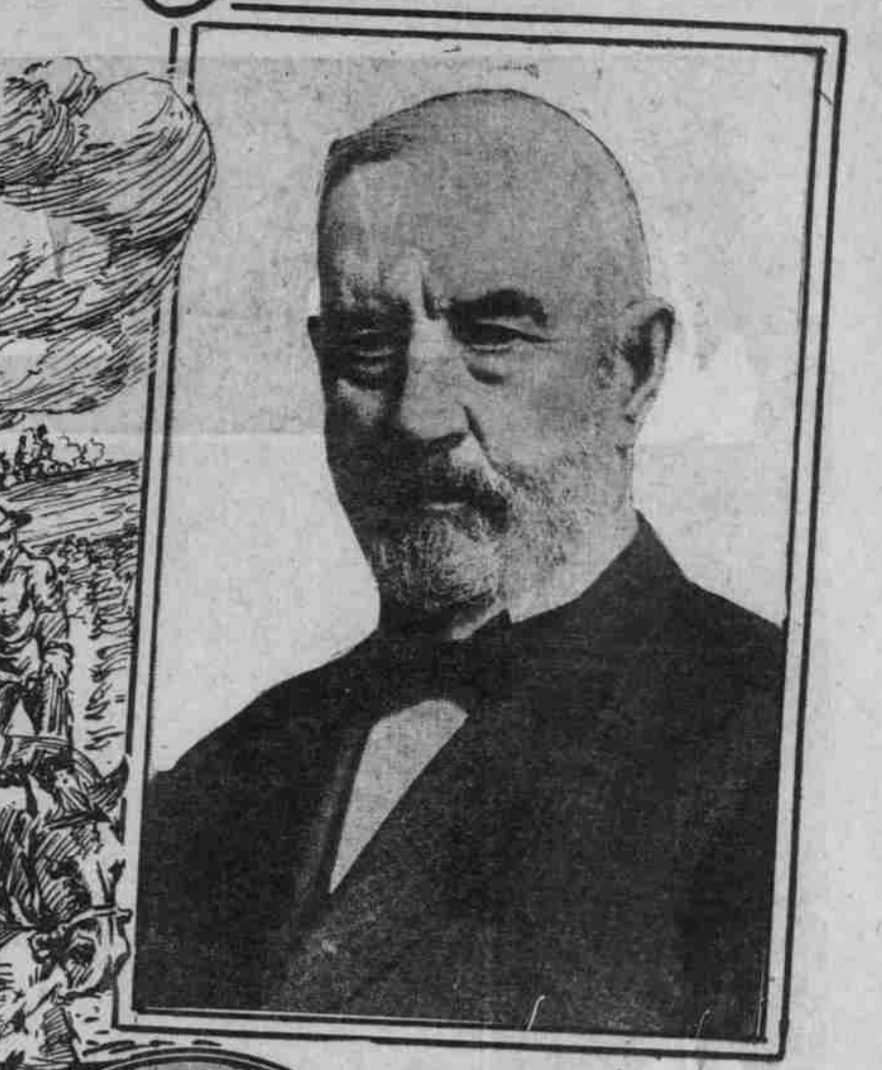
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S COMMISSION AND THE COMPLEX PROBLEMS THEY WILL UNDERTAKE TO SOLVE



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PEOPLE who have had best opportunities to know and understand Theodore Roosevelt have said that his great distinguishing, dominating intellectual characteristic is his highly developed social sense. It is this that makes him resolve all problems of government and administration into terms of ethics; that makes him preach sermons in state papers and from the stump; that inspires his marvelous resourcefulness of ideas for bettering the condition of his fellow-men; that leads him instinctively to gather around him men who understand what he is trying to do, and sympathize with the ambition.

It is this dominating social sense that moves him one day to order prosecution of some aggregation of selfish interests which he has become convinced is unjust; on the next, to press for passage of legislation to prevent discrimination by public service corporations; the next, to call a congress of Governors to consider the immense problem of conserving natural resources; and that, finally, has recently moved him to appoint a commission of experts for the study of means to improve country life, to make it better, fuller, broader and more attractive.

The project thus stated may seem a bit vague and academic, but resolved into its elements it is a great enterprise, which in its development will be found to involve the most practical handling of a number of specific problems. It is in one way a corollary to the proposal for effective conservation of natural wealth; but it is a more complex and difficult problem because it involves dealing with people rather than with things, with souls rather than with acres and corporations.

- Reforms That Will Be Attempted.**
- This problem of the farm and its economics and its life has for a long time been interesting the President. He laid the foundation of the present movement in a speech at Lansing over a year ago, when he told his hearers that, beyond the very important business of producing good crops, the farm must be made to produce the vastly more important output of good manhood and good womanhood, all of which sounds well, but still exceedingly vague. To be specific, the movement for uplift of the rural population involves such problems as:
 - Improvement of country schools so that it shall not be necessary for farmers to "move to town" in order to "give the children some schooling"; a process which generally takes both parent and children away from the farm, to the ultimate misfortune of parents, children and farm.
 - Improvement of country roads.
 - Establishment of social centers in rural communities, and development of a social life which shall be attractive enough to counteract the gregarious instinct always tending to draw people together into towns.
 - Improvement and broadening of the practical usefulness of the church in the country.
 - Establishment of libraries, lectures, farmers institutes, etc., and general promotion of intellectual interests.
 - Promotion of cooperative buying and marketing among farmers, which shall free them from the impositions of the middlemen and transportation interests.
 - Preparation of intelligent interest in, understanding of and demand for the parcels post, so that it may be brought about.
 - Encouragement of such forms of cooperation as the mutual insurance company, the community creamery, etc.
 - Improvement of farm life from both the sanitary and esthetic sides, by inducing interest in better arrangement of the farm home plan, construction of more attractive residences and more economical farm buildings, with more general diffusion of the "modern conveniences" that the farm has thus far known.
 - Helping the woman of the farm to improve the conditions of her life, which by all the students of the problem is conceded to constitute the most difficult problem of all.

These are only a few of the questions which the President's country life commission must consider. They are mentioned as among the most striking, and as suggestive of the great scope of work for the farming population which is proposed to be taken up.

attention; that the country needs and is entitled to intelligent consideration. To keep the people from deserting the farm for the city is a great problem nowadays all over the world. England has grappled with it and been hopelessly defeated; it presents a decadent agriculture and overcrowded cities, full of ignorant and vicious elements, as a result of this defeat. Germany faces the problem with misgivings; her defeat has not yet been made so signal and overwhelming as that of England, but the tendency to concentration in the cities is marked and alarming. Austria and Italy confront like conditions, especially Northern Italy. France has best stemmed the tide toward the cities, France being a country of small holdings of land, while the others are countries of landlord proprietors and tenant farmers; and as one of the dangerous aspects of it is urged that the United States strongly tends in the same direction.

At the outset, it is the opinion of the commissioners that such projects as the "monocroft" and Salvator Army enterprises, to induce people to leave the city and go back to the country, represent a useless and ineffective waste of effort. The one trouble is that the people will not move in that direction; at least, not till the country is made more attractive to them than now. It is useless to moralize and preach about it. "The people whom we regard as unfortunate, on New York's lower East Side, would rather stay right there and continue living the life of the city than to move away to the really better conditions of the country; and there's the end of it," said Gifford Pinchot, one of the commissioners. "We must make our effort to keep the people on the farm, and not to get them away from the city to the farm."

Personnel of the Commission.
Mr. Pinchot is that rara avis, a practical altruist; he is a millionaire, who instead of driving a coach and six over the beautiful roads of England, or automobile in France, for mere pleasure, rolls up his sleeves and works without vacations for the Government at a per annum salary which represents his private income for a week or two and then pays a good slice of the salary to place out the meager allowance made by the Government for a private secretary. In order that he may have the necessary funds to study these problems for years. As chief forester he has lived much among the poorest country people. He knows their conditions and their needs, and can tell of nights spent in the effort to sleep on the floors of their humble but hospitable homes; of meals of "sow-belly" and pone of the dead-end monotony of their lives, and the unending drudgery of their work. He believes that this work is one of education as well as of institution-creating; of making the people understand, of instilling a social consciousness, an ambition and aspiration for better things. He believes that new institutions must be created; but before these can be secured there must be aroused an aspiration for them and for the better conditions which they will bring. Bring the people to know what better road laws, better school laws, better corporation laws, better transportation and communication, co-operation in buying and selling, elimination of the middleman, establishment of social centers, libraries, lectures, etc.; education in the things which come close to the farm and its life; better houses and more conveniences, with bigger profits and therefore a larger margin to spend in better living; bring the people to understand what all these things will mean to them, and that these things are what the new movement seeks to give the world. These gentlemen will meet shortly at Washington, D. C., and prepare for their work, on which the President has asked them to report.

An Economic Revolution.
This is rather a big problem with which to grapple. It involves running counter to a vast power of interest and prejudice; a power which has thus far been successfully appealed to in the effort to prevent adoption of the parcels post adjunct to the postal service, for instance. But, urge those who believe the country town an excellent institution, when it is abolished the farmer will co-operate in marketing his products. His butter and eggs, instead of being produced at home and marketed at the country store by the pound and dozen and paid for "in trade," will be marketed directly to the city in quantities; the butter will be made at the co-operative creamery and sold for cash;

gent appeals have thus far aroused the people of the cities to the need of better roads, much more than they have convulsed the country people. To get laws through Legislatures, looking to better roads, is commonly regarded most difficult, because of the conservatism of the farmers themselves, who would be chief beneficiaries. Yet it is conceded that this must somehow be accomplished as a very beginning of the whole scheme of social reform for the country.

Tenant Farming.
One interesting aspect of this inquiry will be the light it will shed on the tendency to tenant farming in this country; absentee landlordism and tenant management; on the question of farm labor and wages; and on the reasonableness of current prices at which lands are held, and of rentals charged for them. In different sections of the country, it is well known that lands of equal economic value, located in different regions, are of widely different values in the market. The reasons for this will constitute an important light on the whole question of farm conditions.

Better Roads.
When it comes to the problem of better roads—and this is essential to working out all the other features of the ideal country town—legislation is necessary, and it must be secured from the state. Co-operation of the Nation, the state and the local governmental division in development of better roads is the ideal of many; perhaps impractical and chimerical, but a month teaching the three R's to a half score of infants in Summer and to a half-hundred youth of all ages in Winter, there would be skilled teachers in each grade, some higher courses, and good work throughout the year for those who wanted it. More than all this, the textbooks for country schools, and the

night his canine spirit revolted. He broke the stillness with high pitched, tremulous howls, and on the second morning out a delegation of hollow-eyed passengers waited on the pier, the uproar of the matter being that "Tootsie-Wootsie" was rescued to the status of an ordinary bow-wow.

Log of an Ocean Traveler
THE pursuer on one of the great ocean liners, suave, genial, but firm, as he must be the autocrat of this human beehive, subject to the captain, of course, in common with all on board, but safe from his interference in any but the one case in a thousand. His position is like that of the manager of a large resort hotel, except that he receives but a tithe of the salary of such a one and has not the sweet privilege of saying, "Go to!" when the spirit moves him. Manifestly, there is no place to go, unless one can walk on his hands. And so he listens to the fault-finding many with an expression of deep sympathy, which would make the fame of any fashionable physician, and something of the trepidation of the boarding-house mistress, who carves the Sunday fowl, knowing that there is only so much white meat and that dire insult goes with the legs. When there is no foundation for his interference in any but the one case in a thousand, he usually succeeds in placating the passenger by appealing to his, or her, sense of justice; or, in an extremity, by a judicious show of brass-buttoned authority. But there are some cases in which his company is in error, or derelict, and there he is energetic in correcting, for a big steamship company can no more survive the ill-will of its patrons than could a big hotel.

A complaint of this sort was brought the morning after sailing to the pursuer of a crack ship in the Mediterranean service by a young woman with snapping black eyes, who was facetiously called by her friends "Becky Sharp." No sooner did the pursuer catch sight of her than he recognized the type, and breathing a sigh, assumed his most benign manner. Nor was he unprepared for the substance of her complaint, for regularly, after quitting a big Italian port, there begins a battle royal with fleas and other crawling things even more objectionable. "I will have the room fumigated at once, madame. But as for giving you another cabin, I am sorry to say that is quite impossible."
"But you can't fumigate it with us in it! Really, we got not a bit of sleep