THE RURAL SETTLEMENT: ITS SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ÆSTHETIC ADVANTAGES: BY C. H. FORBES-LINDSAY

N CONNECTION with its wonderful work of transforming the arid lands of our Western States, the Reclamation Service is carrying out a far-sighted plan for the reformation of the hardly less arid lives of the agricultural population of that region. We are fairly familiar with the engineering operations that are converting the desert waste—"dreary and vast and silent"—into tracts of smiling soil and luxuriant vegetation, but it is not generally known that this great economic enterprise involves the establishment of towns. These are to be placed at carefully selected sites in every project, and to be laid out and developed upon lines no less scientific than those regulating the irrigation works. The design of the Service, which is pursued under the express authority of Congress, extends beyond the reduction of the land to a condition of fecundity to the creation of homes and industrial centers in accordance with the most advanced ideas. The basal feature of the system is centralization—the very reverse of the condition usually obtaining in our agricultural communities. Although far from new as applied to a rural population, its practice among us has been confined to a few scattering sections of the country.

Town and country are economically interdependent and they should be closely allied industrially and socially. The principle involved in these almost axiomatic statements has been conformed to in Europe since the birth of the burgs from the feudal communities. So obvious is it that we see its recognition among primitive peoples who follow agricultural pursuits. The Zulu kraal and the Maori village, each surrounded by fields of crops or pasture runs, are not merely provisions for defence, but also agencies for the promotion of convenience, coöperation and social intercourse.

When Coronado and his adventurous followers broke upon the peaceful people of Mexico, they found the Pueblo Indians living, as their name implies, in permanent villages. The adobe huts were grouped about a central building, designed to serve as council house and, on occasion, as fort. Around this aggregation of habitations lay a circle of cultivated fields, with roads and irrigation ditches radiating from it in every direction. The Indian husbandman went out to his work each morning, returning at nightfall to his village home and the companionship of his fellow tribesmen.

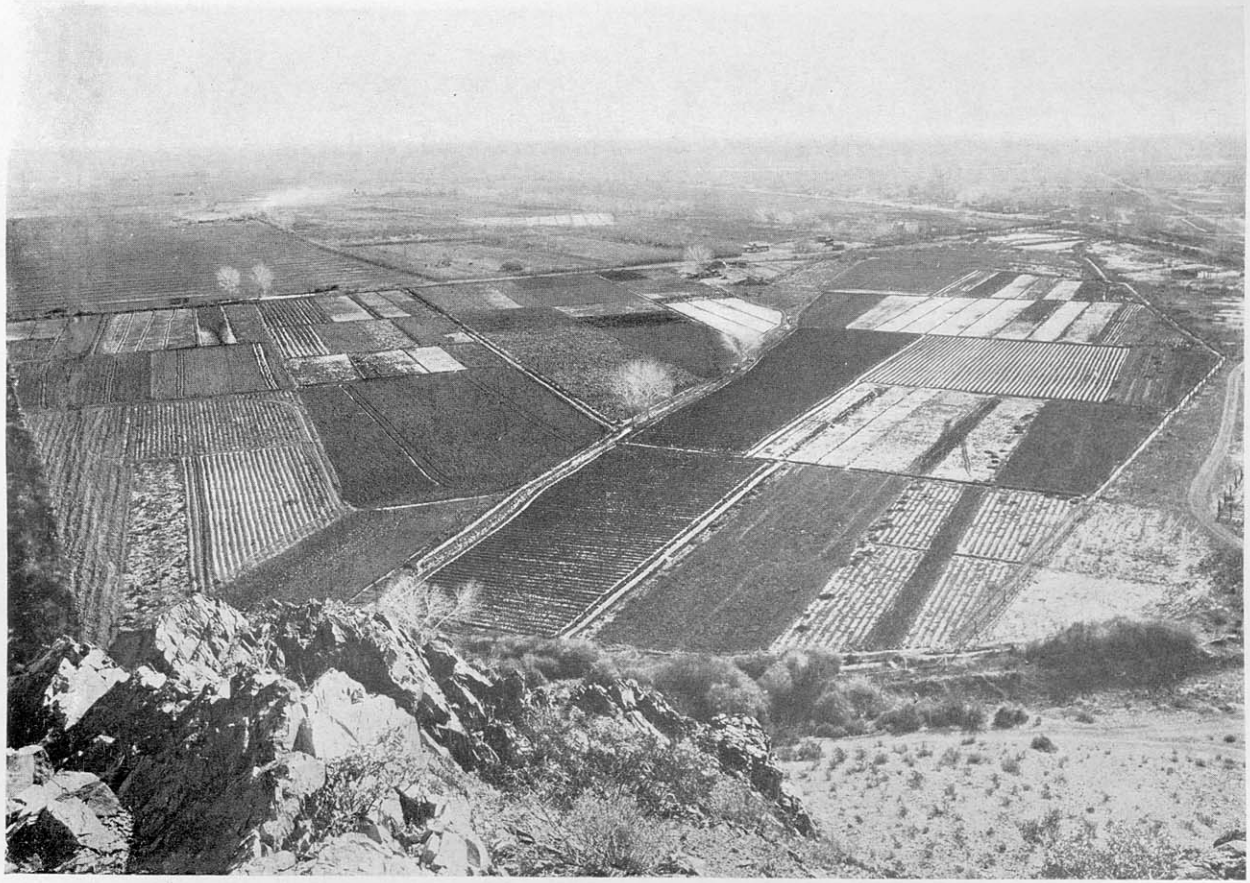
At a much later period, the Mormon settlers of Utah adopted a similar system of agricultural communities, each with a common urban center. But in their case the place of worship occupied the position in the town corresponding to that held by the fortified building in the Indian village, and the purpose of the arrangement was chiefly disciplinary. It was the policy of the church in its earliest days to keep its followers in sight and under the closest surveillance. Nevertheless, in the pursuit of this object important economic advantages were unpremeditatedly secured by the Mormon rural settlements.

In still more recent times, the idea of agricultural centralization has been carried to practical perfection in the orange districts of California. Redlands and Riverside are notable examples which have furnished the Reclamation Service with models for their townsite plans. The fruit growers live in these centers, which afford all the ordinary conveniences and comforts of urban life and are connected with the outlying orange groves by excellent roads. The happy blending in these communities of the most attractive features of town and country strongly impressed former Secretary Gates, on the occasion of a visit made a few years ago. He declared that their inhabitants more nearly attained to the ideal home life than any to be found elsewhere in America.

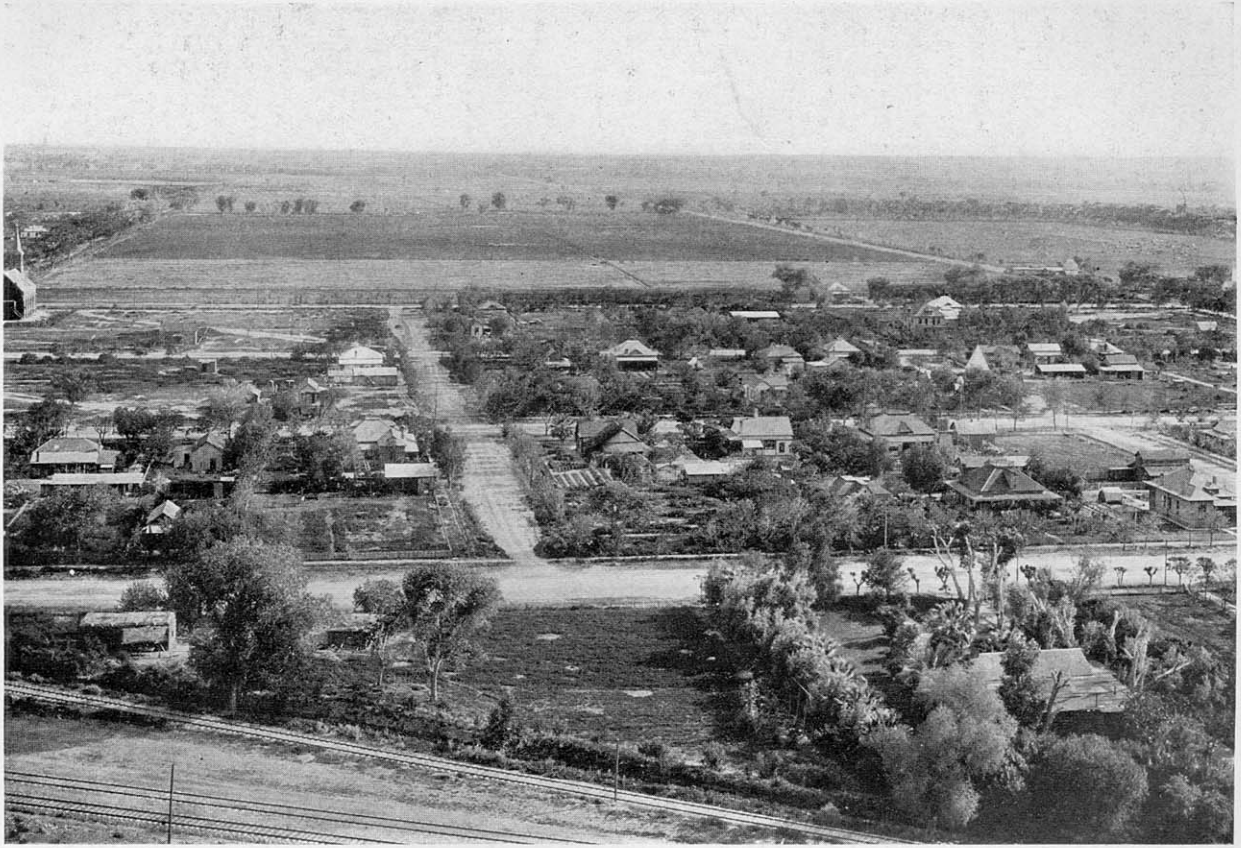
Isolated rural settlements are scattered here and there in various parts of the West, and in some of the Middle States the first step toward centralization has been taken by consolidating district schools and transporting pupils to a central graded establishment.

FOR an exhibition of the prosecution of rural centralization in a systematic and complete manner we must look to the large areas of arid land that the Reclamation Service are rapidly converting into productive soil. These tracts, in several instances exceeding three hundred thousand acres in extent, are laid out in holdings of forty and eighty acres. Town sites are located in the first surveys of the projects and are so distributed as to bring every farm within three or four miles of one of them.

The towns, which will contain populations of from one to five thousand, are laid out upon the plan presented in the accompanying chart. The thoroughfares are broad and regular, even the alleyways being thirty feet in width. The principal streets and avenues are continued out through the adjacent farm land until they merge into the highways radiating from neighboring towns of similar origin



CULTIVATED FIELDS ADJACENT TO A RURAL SETTLEMENT: EDGE OF THE DESERT IN THE FOREGROUND.



A RURAL SETTLEMENT IN ARIZONA: MANY OF THE FARMERS LIVE IN THE ADJACENT TOWN.

FARMERS' HOUSES IN A RURAL SETTLEMENT BUT EIGHT YEARS OLD.

A TROPICAL GARDEN
IN THE DESERT.

and plan. In the central position, corresponding to that occupied by the Indian stronghold and the Mormon temple, will stand the school building with the main roads converging upon it. Around this, along the sides of the public square, will be ranged the town hall, post office, public library, telephone exchange, telegraph office and fire station. Two blocks of the main street are planned to accommodate stores and business offices. The plaza itself will afford a playground for the children and a resort for their elders, as it does in Spanish-American towns. The inner portion of the settlement will be occupied by residences with ample yards and flower gardens, while the outer edges are marked off in larger lots for occupation by dairies and small truck farms.

The little red schoolhouse will soon be no more than a picturesque memory. The central graded school has such obvious advantages, and its introduction has met with such unvarying success, that its rapid establishment in all our agricultural districts is practically certain. It has been operated for several years with the most satisfactory results in Kansas. A bus service is maintained in connection with it for the purpose of carrying the children to and fro. The innovation has been followed by the most marked improvement in health and regularity of attendance. Representative Reeder, who is an enthusiastic supporter of the system, lays great stress upon the moral effect of a teacher in each of the conveyances. This arrangement insures the children proper guardianship while absent from their parents and curtails the opportunities of the "bad boy," whose malign influence is most frequently exerted on the road to and from school.

The central graded school permits of the employment of a better class of teachers and of the establishment of a more extensive course of study. It is found that the cost of supporting it is little more, in the case of the individual farmer, than the expense of maintaining the small district school, with its distinctly inferior benefits. In connection with the rural settlements of the Reclamation Service, the system of central graded schools can be carried on with the maximum of economy and effect.

THESE rural settlements will enjoy not only an unlimited supply of good water for drinking and domestic purposes, but in most instances the irrigation works will furnish power for a great variety of uses. Electric railroads will be installed, connecting one town with another and affording ready access to all parts of the farming district. Aside from the convenient passenger service, such roads

will act in the more important capacity of freight carriers, conveying merchandise and machinery to the farms and hauling produce thence to the shipping points. The farmer will be supplied with power to operate his agricultural machinery, and his wife with power to run her churn or her sewing machine. The settlements will be lighted by electricity. The same force will be employed in their industrial plants and in their homes, for heating and cooking.

The Western farmers are quite alive to the economy and convenience to be derived from the use of electricity. On the Minadoka project, where the power-house is in operation, eighty-five per cent. of the farmers have subscribed to the service, which is furnished to them at a fraction above cost. It is worthy of note that the source of all these public utilities will in every case be in the hands of the people, for the Government is pledged to turn over to the landowners the entire irrigation systems, with the exception of reservoirs, ten years after their completion.

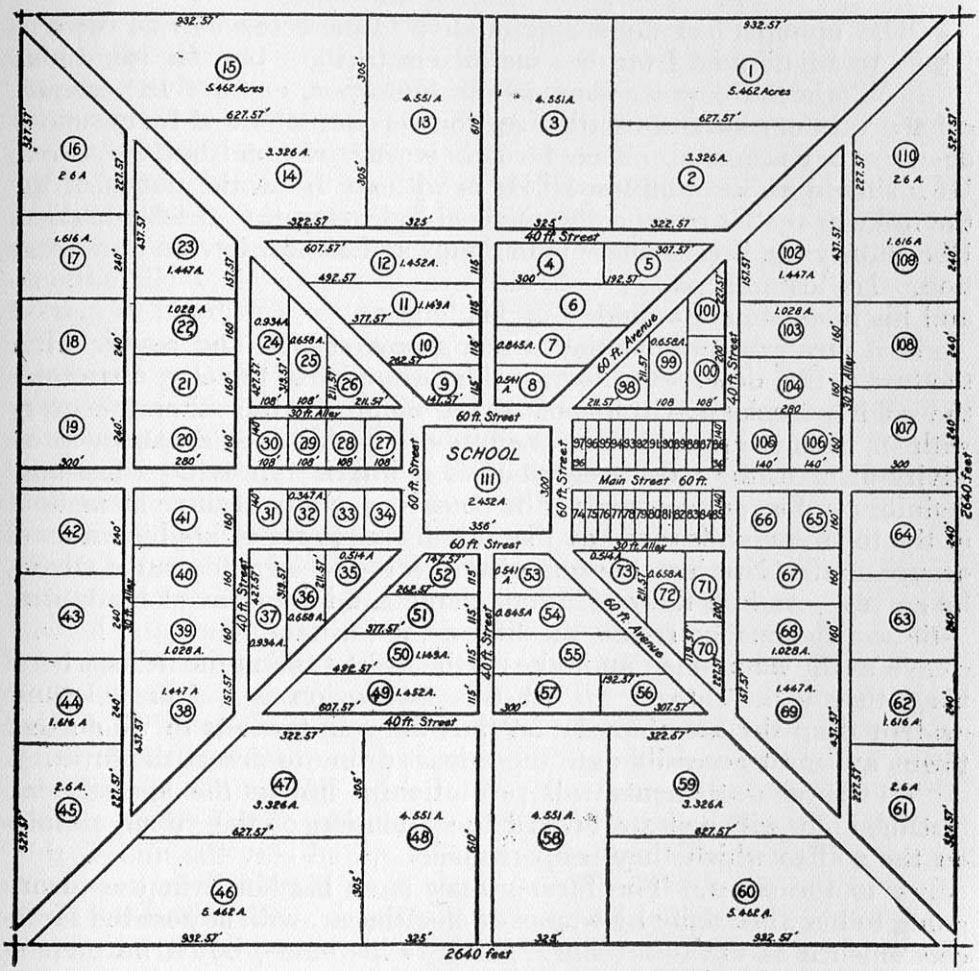
Each settlement will be a logical station for a railroad, a market for the farmer's produce and a shipping depot for the buyer. The centralization and community of interests will effect many economies which it is impossible at present to particularize and will enable every farmer to enjoy conveniences and comforts that would otherwise be beyond his reach. Not the least of these will be improved professional services. The settlements will become the permanent residences of lawyers, doctors, dentists and veterinary surgeons of ability who will displace the itinerant quacks that infest the agricultural districts. With the concentration of the demand, a better class of craftsmen, too, will make themselves available to the farmer.

Next to the home, the three great social institutions of the rural districts are the church, the school and the grange. None of these is extending anything like the degree of benefit that should be derived from it and this in each case is because of the scattered constituency. Upon the rural settlement plan all of these institutions are afforded greatly enlarged scope for activity and influence, while their maintenance is effected with increased economy.

Our agricultural life differs greatly from that in European countries, where the farmers live mostly in villages, and the isolated farmhouse is the exception. The difficulty experienced by our farmers in getting help is largely due to the fact that hired labor in the country is almost exclusively performed by single men, and necessarily so. Very few farms have dwellings to accommodate the families of laborers. This not only militates against the employment of a married man

but also operates against the permanency of the unmarried. When one of the latter takes a wife, he is generally compelled to engage in other work. And this is one of the potent causes for young men leaving the country.

The rural settlement greatly simplifies the labor problem. The



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RECLAMATION SERVICE

PLAN FOR RURAL SETTLEMENTS

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farmer may reside in the town and have a married helper living on the land, or the helper may live in the settlement, and go out to his work, in case his employer occupies the only house on the farm. The latter arrangement would usually prove convenient, because the farmer would naturally be glad to establish daily communication with the urban centers.

THE aphorism of John Burroughs: "Where the cow is, there is Arcadia," might without sacrifice of truth be paraphrased thus: Where the cow is, there is accidie-torpor, ennui. In general, existence in our sparsely settled sections is characterized by the most deadly commonplace. The farmer is narrow and self-centered. How should he be otherwise? He is without the world, cut off from the influences that expand the mind and develop the social qualities. His solitary life is toilsome, monotonous and almost devoid of relaxation. He loses all perspective, all sense of proportion. His outlook and his interests are bounded by his fences.

Is it any wonder that the farmer's boy, strong, and restive with the lust of life, deserts the soil for the pavement of the city, abandons the cold, unsocial environment of his home for the stirring center, with its human appeal? He is simply responding to a natural proclivity of man, the most gregarious of animals. He seldom has any definite purpose in view, nor is he conscious of any positive attraction in the town, much less of any distinct dislike to following his father's occupation. Give him the opportunities for social intercourse which he craves, give him the relaxation, change and amusement he desires —these in connection with the life of the husbandman—and he will cleave to the homestead and take up the task of tilling the fields where his father lays it down. That this conclusion is justified seems evident from the ascertained fact that the country lads to whom the towns are most accessible are those least prone to desert the farm.

The rural settlements will revolutionize life in the agricultural districts. It will operate toward the retention of the young people on the soil to which they properly belong, and stay the undesirable efflux to the cities. The farmer may have his home in the town, going to his work daily by wagon or electric car, with almost the same convenience as the suburbanite going to his office, but if he prefers to live upon his land, the settlement will be readily accessible. Its school may be easily reached by his children and his family may take part in its social life.