

RURAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE UNITED STATES

A Catalogue of Problems Suggested by Rural Leaders in the Various Sections of the United States.

INTRODUCTION

The rural problem of the United States is both economic and broadly social in character, with aspects so closely connected in real life that any sound treatment of the one phase will require a corresponding study of the other.

That the general sections of the nation vary as to type of agriculture and as to stage of social and economic development, and hence present problems widely different in character is evident and significant. If it is true that in some sections farms are too small, and farmers too plentiful, it may be true in other sections that farms are too large, and farm families too few. While, moreover, it is generally felt that the country as a whole needs a larger number of people engaged in agriculture, it will not of course be lost sight of that a disproportionately large number of farmers would render farming unremunerative. All good farms seem to have their farmers, in spite of the widespread alarm at farm people's leaving the land; and in the human attempt to provide the poor people of cities a place in agriculture, it will be noted that the general complaint among farmers is that farming frequently does not pay, and that altogether too many farmers are poor. It is not simply farmers that are needed, but good farmers—farmers with ample capital to make farming pay.

The agricultural economist has already come to problems needing the point of view of the rural sociologist. The economic philosophy of getting the most out of the land and winning the largest labor income needs to be supplemented and modified by the doctrine of doing the best by each farm family in any system of working of the land. As the philosophy of largest industrial output has been modified by the labor philosophy of a minimum wage and an eight-hour day in order to protect the human worker and his family, so the rising generation in country life requires the protection of public opinion in a theory of agricultural production and living which will not exploit the farmer, soul and body.

Farm labor furnishes an acute problem in some sections of the United States; but no treatment of this problem on purely economic grounds is sufficient. Proper housing is a distinct and important element in the question for married laborers and doubtless some form of continuation school is imperative for the unmarried work-