

The Improvement
of the Social Conditions
of Country Life.

By
James Courtney Bolton.

Analytical Outline.

I The conditions at present.

The drift of people from Country to City.
Because.

1 Theories.

(a) Lack of employment.

(b) City has better social conditions.

2. Farmers place themselves low.

3. Location of Farm.

(a) Distance to town.

(b) Distance to neighbors.

(c) Results of this isolation.

(d) Distance to school.

(e) Length of school term and when.

(f) The Teacher.

4. Farmer's wife.

(a) Her health and etc.

(b) The change marriage has caused.

(c) She is almost the slave of her husband.

(d) How she entertains company.

5. Farmer's boy.

6. Bad roads.

7. Lack of dignity or reverence of work
on part of farmer.

Makes the boys discontented.

II Methods of improvement.

1. The farmer to demand his place.
 - (a) In Congress.
 - (b) In public meetings.
2. How to get farmers up to this.
3. Improved roads.
 - (a). How it will help.
 - (1) Socially.
 - (2) Less expensive to market crops.
 - (b). How to improve.
 - (1) Have a road engineer.
 - (2) Have taxes paid instead of worked.
 - (c). Essential of good roadmaking
 - (1) Thorough drainage.
 - (2) Proper grading.
 - (3) Systematic repair.
4. Get daily paper.
5. Farmer to work only 10 hour a day.
 - (a) Work in cool of day.
 - (b) Observation on this point.
6. Improve the conditions of farmers wife.
 - (a) To be better educated.
 - (b) Help not first to go.
 - (c) Have the latest improvements.
 - (d) Must have time to educate the children.

7. Farmers Institutes.

(a) Past and present.

(b) Program to be interesting and instructive.

(c) Have traveling libraries.

8. The Christmas vacation work of Y.M.C.A.

(a) Where: In school districts and small towns.

(b) Results.

9. Farmers reading.

(a) Papers on his line.

(b) Magazine. North American Review or Reviewing Reviews.

(c) Papers on other lines.

10. District school libraries.

(a) Get the child to form the habit of reading.

(b) Why not have Experimental bulletins in them?

11. Extension of Y.M.C.A. into country districts.

(a) The plan is to have a band of young men in small town and school districts, and have a County secretary to have oversight of whole County.

(b) Membership limited to men.

(c) The need of this work.

(d) Socials.

(e) Lectures and entertainments.

(f) What has been done elsewhere.

(g) What we hope for Kansas.

79

Before we take up the improvement of country life, let us take a look at the conditions at present.

The social standing of the farmer is rather low at present, although it is improving somewhat.

We all know of the drift of people from the farm to the city, and often those that do not go wish they could because they have such poor society where they live.

Let us see what causes this this flow of people to the cities, and this poor social condition of country life.

There are several theories why people are drifting from the country to the city. One is that people are getting out of employ — ment on account of machinery that is now used on the farm. Another claim is that the social condition of the city is so much superior to that of the country.

This seems to be the greatest reason, for it is the owner of farms that are moving to the city.

The real cause is doubtless, that the farmer looks upon his vocation as inferior to many other callings.

The location of the farm is one cause of this idea. It is usually several miles from a town, or even a post-office, and often a mile or more from the nearest neighbor. Under these conditions, the farmer begins to think that there is no one in the world but himself and family. When he does come in contact with people, he feels awkward, and thinks that he is insignificant and knows nothing. The school house is from one-fourth to two and one-half miles from his home, and seldom, if ever, is there more than six months of school, and that during the winter months. The farmer's children are small, and of course miss

1901
1898
12

81

mosh of the school in the winter;
and when they are older, they
have to stay at home and help
with the work.

Frequently, the teacher is only
a common school graduate, who
has succeeded in getting a third
grade certificate.

The farmer, his children or his
wife goes to town about once a
week; and many farmers do
not go that often. At these times,
they get a few groceries, some
clothing, a ~~Weekly~~ News Paper,
and perhaps a letter from some
friend. If they are of the better
class of farmers, they may also pur-
chase a story paper for the children.

The wife, not very old, looks tired
and weary and almost ready to
die. All the bloom has faded
from her face. It is work from
morning to night, and frequent-
ly, from night to morning.

Very likely she was married when
young, and this has caused such

a radical change that it has produced poor health, and perhaps an irritable temper, although very likely at the time of marriage she was one of the sweetest disposed women of the neighborhood; but married life brought more duties and harder times than she expected. She has no time to read: she is really the slave of her husband. She is so busy with domestic cares that she does not go to town, even to buy her own clothing, and soon gets so that she is at a loss when does go to buy.

If company comes to see her, she has to be in the kitchen all the time getting the meal. This meal consists of every thing she has in the house; if she has pie, it goes on the table whether it is breakfast, dinner or supper. Less than a year ago, I was at a table on which there were three or four varieties of fruit, two or three kinds

of cake and pumpkin and mince
pie. Of course I was almost forced
to take something of everything.
I do not believe in such work.
I would have the women put
less time in feasting their visitors
stomach, and get more benefit
from the social and intellectual
side. Let the women sit down
and have a good common sense
talk, and both will be better
off.

The farmer's boy grows up
on the farm away from other
people except his parents.
All he associates with are of the
same class or have had the same
surroundings as he, so there is
not very much growth. He
lacks that mingling with
men that grinds the corners
off and makes the smooth, round,
clever acting boy or young man of
the city.

One of the great reasons
why farmers do not go to

town often and associate with their fellows more is because of bad roads. It is a fact that it costs the farmer more to get his grain a few miles to market than it does to take it the rest of the way to Chicago or New York.

Another great cause of this rush for the city is the lack of dignity that the farmer puts upon his work. As a result many farmer boys get it into their heads that it is not honorable to do work. They look with envy upon the lawyer, doctor or professor. They forget that these men do as much work and some of it just as hard and tiresome as any work that the farmer boy does. They never stop to think that the lawyer and doctor see the dark side of life. The doctor sees suffering, while the lawyer sees all kinds of frauds.

Now for the way to improve these conditions and how to keep people on the farm.

It seems to me that there is but one way, and that is for the farmers to bring themselves up to their true position, which is the most scientific and social and free that there is.

Instead of letting Congress be composed of seventy-five per cent of lawyers as it is now, let the farmers rise up and be represented by farmers who will look out for the farmer's interest not just to get his vote, but because they know what will be good for the farmer.

Another improvement that there can be made is to have some good farmers instead of a lawyer, judge or a politician, to make our Fourth of July speeches. In this way, the farmer will get to hear men that knows what his conditions are and what he needs to make him to enjoy himself. While the lawyer or politician will tell him how nice it is to be a farmer and perhaps give some suggestions which are impossible for

the farmer to carry out.

I expect I had better tell how we are to get farmers up to this high standard. We can do it in several ways. One will be to educate them. This is something that will take a long time to accomplish much.

We must get hold of the children that are growing into young manhood and young womanhood, and educate them up to seeing the great opportunities that there are on the farm.

I believe our system of teaching and method of getting teachers is at fault. I would have a two year course at the State Normal School or at the State Agricultural college provided for this purpose. I would have these teachers study the common branches and some industrial work, and something of agriculture and fruit growing. At the end of two years give them a certificate good for two years to

87
teach in the schools of the country districts. When this certificate has expired I would have them take two years more and then give them a life certificate. After taking such a course, they would see something of the possibilities in these lines, and would teach the children to honor the occupation of their parents. These teachers will be able to get the farmers to read the farm papers and the Experiment Station bulletins.

It seems foolishness to give a person a life certificate to teach when the graduate knows nothing of the greatest industry that there is - employing one-half of the people of the United States. Therefore, I would have teachers educated along these lines.

One of the things that is keeping the farmer down is the bad roads. As has been said, these not only make it cost the farmer more to get his crop to market, but

it also keeps him from church, society, entertainments, political meetings and etc. Improved roads would better the farmer's condition in two ways: 1st, Socially, and 2nd, make it less expensive to market crops. It will not be necessary to build stone roads or even to increase the taxes that we now have. But I would have a different method of road supervision. We should have a road engineer who should hold his place by examination. The taxes should be paid instead of worked out, as they are now; Europe has long ago done away with the system of working out road taxes. Men who have considered this subject, say that several times as much could be done to keep the roads in shape as now. The use of machinery promises to be a great factor in the improvement of our roads. It is said that there are three main points in road building,

as follows:

- 1st. Thorough drainage.
- 2nd. Proper grading.
- 3rd. Systematic repair.

All of the requirements can be met by one who understands his business without use of any more stone or anything of the kind than is now used.

Another thing that will help to keep our roads in good shape is wide tire vehicles. Some states require wide tires to be used.

The improvement of the roads is the same as shortening the distance from the farm to the city, to school, church, and to neighbors; so if we have better roads, we ought to have an improvement of society.

After the farmer has good roads; he or some of his family can go to town every day and get the daily paper that every farmer ought to take to be up with the times, for this will bring him

self and family into truck with the rest of the world.

Of course, this is taking for granted that every farmer is going to have a horse and buggy free from work for this purpose.

Now that we have the papers, we must have time to read them. The farmer ought to spend ten hours in the field, that is from the time he leaves the farm until he returns should be ten hours. I mean that he should work during this time the same as he would in any other business.

I would work in the cool of the day and rest and sit in the shade and read during the heat of the day. I have watched and as a rule, the farmers that work long hours get along but very little better than those that work fewer hours and are fresher when they do work. Now for the good

and up building of the hired man,
and also for farmers in general.
Give the hired hand all holidays,
and let him off early Saturday.

If there is one class of people
overworked more than all other,
it is the farmers' wives. There
can be some improvement
here. By the system of education
that we are going to have
for the country and by send-
ing the girls as well as the boys
to college, the wives of the future
farmers are to be very intelligent
women and they ought to be, for
they will be the mothers of at
least one-half of the people of
the United States. They will be
women that can play the piano
as well as cook a dinner, and cook
a dinner as well as play the piano.
They will have time to read and
to keep up their music and
painting and etc. They can get
time for all of these things by
putting the system they have learned

at school into practice. The husband must know that the wife's help is not to be the first to go, but rather the last.

As the farm gets improved machinery, so the kitchen should be supplied with the latest improvements. When our farmers' wives have time to train their minds and instruct their children, the social condition of the country will be improved, and the farmer will take the place among men that he ought to.

The Farmers' Institutes have done much, and will continue to do much for the betterment of the farmer. At these meetings the farmer hears men that have ^{had} much thought along the different lines. Men that have tried different methods of feeding, sowing, marketing, and etc. Farmers will meet farmers and they will discuss these different things, and will see that there are

better methods of farming than they have been following, consequently, they will take up the improved methods. Not only this, but it will also give the farmers another place to go and to mingle. In these ways, in time, farming will become the most scientific occupation that there is.

The programme should be so arranged that it will be interesting even if it is not quite as instructive as it would be otherwise, for by having it interesting we can get more to attend.

The program ought to be made so entertaining that the young folks of the county will get interested in agriculture.

Along with these institutes I would have traveling libraries left in charge of some competent person so that they will be given out to be read and returned and another sent in their place.

94
I would have the bulletins of the Experiment Station and those of the United State Department of Agriculture placed on file. I believe the United State Department of Agriculture has all of the bulletins indexed so that they can be used as references. In this way there will be books that the people can refer to, for help in their farming club.

There is one method of improving the country life which could be made a success in connection with these institutes. There are a number of colleges in the state, and they are somewhat scattered, so that they can reach a great many neighborhoods without going far. The plan is to have these colleges send out some of their best members and give a literary programme in the small towns and country districts. This will be an education to the students and an advertise-

73
ment for the colleges, and get the
the country people acquainted
with college life and they are
more apt to want to go to
college themselves. A very small
fee could be charged to pay
the expenses of the members
of the group.

For the last three years
the Young Men's Christian Associ-
ation of the state has been
sending bands of four college
students into the country districts
and small towns to hold meetings
during the Christmas vacation.
These bands improve the
religious conditions of the country,
and give the people a view of
college men, and get the young men
of the country thinking of things
high and noble. Seeing men
of education gives the young a
desire to attend college themselves.
This work has grown from one
band three years ago to seven the
past vacation. We can tell

96

the results but by quoting some things the people where these bands were have said.

"The boys that were here carry the blessing of the people with them. Their coming to our village was like a ray of sunshine, we only wish they could have stayed longer."

"Those were all fine fellows, the salt of the earth, that you sent here. They did work with all their might. Our church is wonderfully revived, especially do we notice more interest among our young men and young people." I could give what others have said but this gives an idea how the people take to this work.

At present, there are very few farmers who take a weekly farm paper. All the reading most farmers do on farming is the "Farm Column" of the weekly news paper, and many do not

read that. Every farmer ought to be wide enough awake to be up on his work by reading the leading farm papers.

In order to be up with the times, every farmer should take a magazine like "North American Review," or "Reviews of Reviews". He may not get any thing that will be of direct help to him on the farm, but he will get the material that keeps him in touch with the rest of the world and his family will have a higher and better conception of the world than his neighbors children who do not have such reading.

The farmer's children ought to have good story papers and plenty of books to read; for, if we can get children to read, they will form a habit that will go with them through life.

The farmer should take not

97
only the papers relating to his
line of farming, but also those
papers that treat of other
lines of farming. Yes, even
of other business, for the
more the farmer keeps in
touch with the rest of the
world, the better is going
to be his social condition.

Another thing that promises
to be for the betterment of
the social conditions of the
country is the "School Libraries"
that are being established in
many of our district schools.
The child that begins to
read when young will form
a habit of reading that
will go with him through
life, to say nothing of the
noble ideas that the child will
get from ^{books} that are in these
libraries.

I know that there is a tenden-
cy to get the books for these
libraries either too simple or too

complex for the class of scholars. Never-the-less, they are doing a good work, and will continue to be a force in improving the social condition of country life. The Experiment

Station bulletins could be placed in these libraries. Then the scholars would read some of them, and carry them home and the folks at home would also read them. This would cause the farmers to become more interested in their occupation and there would be great improvement.

The extension of the Young Men's Christian Association into the county districts will do much to improve the social condition of the young men of the country.

In several states, the Y. M. C. A. has been organized in county districts. There is usually a "County Secretary" who

99

organizes and visits the different bands of a few young men in small towns and school houses wherever there are enough to undertake this work.

The plan they follow is to get a band of active Christian young men organized to improve the religious, social and intellectual standard of the people of the county districts, and bring to them the conditions of the city association as near as practicable. The membership is limited to men. But as the great question to-day is "How to interest the boys in County life and in religious matters", there will be no objections to that limitation.

We all know that as a rule the young men of the farm when they go to town on a Saturday or a rainy day or Sunday meet in small groups or go to the joint or the

10
saloon and talk of things that they would not want their mothers or sisters to hear. Now, if the Y. M. C. A. room is open, and there are some papers and a few instructive games, some good books, and some good clean jolly fellows that can talk of current news and that will not tolerate anything that is coarse or vulgar, such a place would improve the morals of many a neighborhood.

The Y. M. C. A. band at these small towns or school house, not only have religious meetings and Bible classes, but they also frequently have a social.

At these socials, the County Secretary tries to be present, and brings some decorations with him so that the social will be up to date and interesting, and hold the young people. These socials are

not limited to men, but the boys get all the help they can from the women of the neighborhood and, as a rule, there are several women very much interested in this work.

Often, the Y. M. C. A. has a man to give a lecture. They also get up entertainment and interest the people in that line. The band of college students that I have mentioned in connection with Farmer's Institutes would come in here well, although I have not heard of this being tried.

This work, as I have said, is carried on in several states, but to the greatest extent in Minnesota, and the Assistance Secretary says the following of the work: "It has proved quite successful thus far, and we believe has passed the experimental stage, and will become

10
a permanent feature of state work.

The work that we have spoken of in connection with the Christmas vacation, follows very closely along this line.

The Y. M. C. A. of this state hopes to see this work organized and the influence of the Y. M. C. A. which has done so much for the betterment of the city, railroad, army and college men and life, reach out and take in the largest class of all - the farmers.