# THE CITY AND THE LAND

Address
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Before the Conservation Forum
Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chapter of
Friends of The Land
Benjamin Franklin Hotel, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday Morning, February 20, 1945

# THE CITY AND THE LAND

It may strain your courtesy even in this City of Brotherly Love, famed for its friendliness, for you to give sympathetic hearing to a long range subject like mine while the world is on fire. It is hard to put our hearts in it, and more than the fringe of our minds. Millions of our sons are risking their lives on foreign soil. Governments are tumbling and being rearranged. Mankind, in the desperate consciousness that chaos and darkness are the alternatives, is groping for a new and more hopeful pattern of world organization. We go about each day's task and deal with its problems with our attention fixed on the rumble of the distant guns.

But life does go on, and we who are left at home must deal with its shapes today while events are moulding its form for tomorrow. So responding to your call I shall talk briefly, I hope, and inadequately, I am sure, about a few of the many faces of the subject assigned to me - the relationship between the City and the Land.

That topic is as broad as our economic life. The industrial worker in the city and the farmer on the land are mutually dependent; they are tied together so closely in our social and economic society that every move by the one affects the other. The interplay of rural and city forces takes place in an environment that year by year grows more sensitive to disturbance. With the advancing speed of communication and travel, with increasing specialization, our economic world has tightened up. There is less and less room for play in the working of its parts. A hurt in one part of the body swiftly communicates itself to the rest.

There are many ways to branch out from this topic. Our complex industrial structure was made possible by advancing agricultural technology, and the development of specialized, commercial farm production. Many people wish that it hadn't gone so far, but the process was inevitable and hasn't yet run its course. At the dawn of the 19th Century, more than 90 per cent of the population of the new nation of the

Western World dwelt and made its living on the farm. Their surplus production fed and clothed the other 10 per cent. A hundred years later only 40 per cent of the nation's labor force was engaged in farming. In 1940 that figure had dropped to 20 per cent, and last year, in spite of the relative shortage of new farm machinery, it had fallen to 15 per cent of the nation's total labor force.

Less than one worker out of six was needed on the farm last year to produce the food and the farm-grown raw materials needed by this industrial giant of a nation even with the war and lend-lease demands thrown in.

The high rural birth rate, the chronic over-population - in an economic sense - out on the farms have produced from the beginning a flow of new blood into the cities. They make up part of our industrial army. Expanding non-agricultural employment, the making of goods and the provision of services for a constantly rising standard of living, that is what is needed and will continue to be needed, to make a place for them.

Another aspect, commonly recognized, is the mutual dependence of the industrial worker and the farmer upon the market each by his purchases makes for the products of the other. All of my life I have preached the wholesome effect which a prosperous farm population has on factory employment and wages. The corollary to this should also be stressed and I want to emphasize here the effect which high wages and sustained industrial production have on farm income. The fact that our employable population is now working regularly - most of it at good wages - has been the principal factor in building up a high and mainly profitable demand for the products of the farme

I think we face a continuing need for far-reaching adjustments in agriculture as long into the future as anyone can see. These adjustments will not be easy, and in some areas like the cotton belt they are likely to be drastic, even revolutionary. But these adjustments will be easier to make if the farm business operates in an

economy of high industrial production with a high level of employment at as high a wage level as is supported and justified by the volume of production. Only a high level of national income, of consumer purchasing power, can make a good market at good prices for our meat and milk, our vegetables and fruit. If I could be granted one wish on behalf of a prosperous agriculture, it would be that the rest of the population might learn the way to full employment and high volume production.

Still another aspect is the one seen by those who envision the land as the unlimited place of refuge from the effects of industrial depression, and from the dreariness and the ugliness of our industrial slums. I suspect it was that phase, more than the others, that the program committee had in mind.

I have the deepest sympathy with those whose nostalgic longings paint a picture of pastoral bliss on the countryside, with all economic care and strife barred at the city limits. But a word of warning is in order though I know some of you won't like what I am going to say.

In 1939, on more than half of the farms of the United States, the operators and their families produced altogether for sale and trade and for home use a yield that averaged $625 or less per farm.

In 1940 the average net income per worker engaged in farming in the United States was just $526, or about 40 per cent as large as the wage income per employed factory worker.

We have rural slums in America - far too many of them. Some of these slums were produced by past back-to-the-land colonization movements. I simply say: Let's watch our step. Again and again I am moved to say that there is real danger in plans now generally talked for placing returning veterans out on farms, on reclamation projects and elsewhere. The warning does not apply, of course, to farm boys with

the "know-how" who want to get back to the land. They deserve every assistance society can give them.

A good case can be made for industrial workers who have an assured cash income from non-agricultural employment, and who want the satisfaction of country living. The decentralization of industry away from large centers of population will help this along. But whenever I think of that I think of the mechanical and social revolution that is going on out on the farms, releasing men already on the land for non-farm employment. Take the case of the cotton belt: More than half of the farm population of the United States lives in the 13 states that grow cotton. After the war mechanization on the farms of that area will proceed at a very high rate. New equipment has been planned during the war period. I recently watched the new mechanical cotton pickers at work. One such picker operated by one forty-cents-an-hour driver was picking as much cotton in a single day as 50 adult, experienced hands or a hundred of the field-run workers could pick. New power machinery has been developed which will work a similar though less dramatic revolution on other types of farms from coast to coast.

With this increase in farm mechanization, worker productivity on the farm will rise very sharply, which means in turn that agriculture will continue to find itself over-populated.

Part of the displaced population will be employed in producing a better living for the cotton belt, in taking better care of the land, and part must be absorbed by non-agricultural employment. To bring these workers and their jobs together, either they must migrate, or factories and the vocations that grow around them must move where the labor surplus develops . Probably both movements will take place. But if factories move or send out branches, it will be for the purpose of tapping a new labor supply; they will not generally move factory workers along with them.

Then there is the case of the exceptional men and women who move out on a farm, and produce a special product or quality to fill a special market. These people will make good on the farm; they would make good anywhere. But it is self-evident, I believe, that everyone cannot do this.

To sum up this aspect: As far ahead as I can see, the trend toward a greater use of machines on farms will continue. One man's labor will handle more land, will produce more goods, than farmers before him have done. In an economic sense, this development will free rural workers for other work, producing goods and rendering services that can be absorbed in a rising standard of living. I see no prospect that this trend can or will be reversed to make place for the simple, pastoral self-sufficiency for everyone so many would like to see,

And finally there is another side to the subject - what we have been doing to harm the land and what that eventually will mean to the cities unless we improve our behavior. We are depleting our soil and plant-food mineral reserves at a rapid rate, and without the soil and those minerals in the right supply we cannot have healthy plants or healthy people. The farms are giving up to the cities in the process of land mining which is what most farming is, a mineral wealth which the farmer does not figure in his costs. He is depleting his reserves year by year, but he can't charge it against his taxes. That is one good reason why we on the pavements owe it to our farmer neighbor to take more than just a passive interest in the protection and restoration of the land. That is a big postwar job, and we haven't all eternity for it, either.

I suppose all of us hold in our minds some picture, some things we ourselves have seen, that point up and dramatize to us the mishandling and destruction of the land. In 1930 I drove out west of Des Moines to see the home farm we had sold after the death of my father 25 years before. I remembered it as a pleasant farm in rolling country, with black loam plowlands and fine woodlots, and a great variety

of fruit trees and berry shrubs about the place. I drove past the farm without recognizing it, and turned back to find it. The black land was gone, the plowed slopes were yellow and gullied, the yard weedgrown, the house a derelict. What we had called "the woods" had been cleared, and the land row-cropped to death. That happened in 25 years of "square farming in a round country," of up-and-down hill plowing.

The other day I heard the great conservationist, Jay N. Darling, talk about what he had seen happening out there in Iowa, the great grain and meat belt. I wish for your sake that great conservationist were talking to you today. A great artist, he not only draws pictures; he talks them.

"Look," he told a group the other day, showing some photographs, "where do you think those were taken? Along Tobacco Road? In the cottoned-out hill country of the Southeast? No. That is what is left of some of the finest natural grass and timber land in Iowa.

"People get the wrong idea about the corn belt country. They think the Prairie states are flat, but they're mostly slopes and hills. It all slants, and two thirds of Iowa, for example, is broken or rough. Most of its soil is washing and a lot of it is washed out, after only a generation or two of high-pressure farming.

"Much of the damage was done in the corn belt during and since World War 1. First it was high prices and patriotic driving, then low prices and the urge for more cash crops to meet payments and fixed charges on over-priced land.

"More woodland was hacked away. More grass was plowed under. The hills washed. The rivers grew muddier. The water table fell. Springs went dry. Game went dry, too, and starved and died."

Jay Darling knows what he is talking about. To those of us who believe the human animal is smart enough to learn from experience, let me add that we seem to be going hell-bent along the same road in this war. Jim Russell, editor of the Des Moines Register told me the other day that since 1941 Iowa has reduced its grasslands, its hay land and meadows, by 3 million acres, from 9,000,000 down to 6,000,000 acres, and moved it into row crops, into corn and soybeans.

When the Friends of the Land met in St. Louis in 1942 we organized a tour to visit one county that has within a few miles of each other two contrasting areas - one neighborhood a scene of desolation and total abandonment of hundreds of farms, the other a community of organized restoration and conservation. The blighted area contained one solid block of at least 150,000 acres which had been entirely abandoned. The county agent told me that at the turn of the century the population had averaged one farm family to about every 100 acres, according to court house records. Plowing for corn and wheat during the last war finished this land for economic use until the long and costly process of restoration has been applied.

I hope such auto tours will soon be possible again. There is nothing a conservation society, a Friends of the Land Chapter can do that is so productive of understanding; there is no community that hasn't its object lessons.

There are a few thoughts I want to leave for the Pennsylvania Chapter. To reach its maximum usefulness a community organization must be big enough and alert enough to generate its own current so that it will not need to depend on power from the outside. Look about you - everywhere you can see the right way and the wrong way to handle the land. There is enough to be seen here, to be done here, and there is enough leadership here so that you will not need to draw for object lessons on Georgia or Ohio or Iowa.

The truth and importance of these things are well-known to you. Friends of the Land brings no new philosophy. Perhaps it can help add to the light and force that is already here. It is what we do for ourselves that counts most; the values most worthwhile will not be brought to us from the outside.

Let me in an official role bring you the greetings and the best wishes of the other local chapters. For those of us who hold temporary posts as officers in the national organization, let me tell you that we need the help, the force, and the leadership which you can give. There is work to be done if we know how to do it.

Now in conclusion let me return once more to a broader note, the essential unity that ties us together, whether we work in the city or on the land. In war this country has demonstrated a capacity to produce goods that, if used in peace, would give us a much higher standard of living than we have ever known. The problem is how to distribute and consume that product. There is no simple answer. If we find it we shall enjoy a total national product 30 or 35 per cent above that of 1940. If we cannot find the answer, the alternative will be mass unemployment and restricted production, with consequences to our economic system, perhaps our form of Government, that are not pleasant to contemplate.

The big question that confronts the farmers is the same question that lies ahead for the whole economy. Can we, in peacetime, use our magnificent plant and labor force in reasonably full production? Agriculture is one member of one body. It cannot be healthy if the rest of the body is sick. The rest of the body cannot long thrive if agriculture is ailing. We are all in one boat with rough weather and a long pull ahead. Only one spirit can bring us through - the spirit of good-humored and tolerant cooperation, with industry and agriculture and labor and

Government pulling together. This calls for leadership in all callings abler than we have had in the past. It is the function and opportunity of economic clinics like this to help provide an atmosphere of understanding in which that leadership can develop and thrive.

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