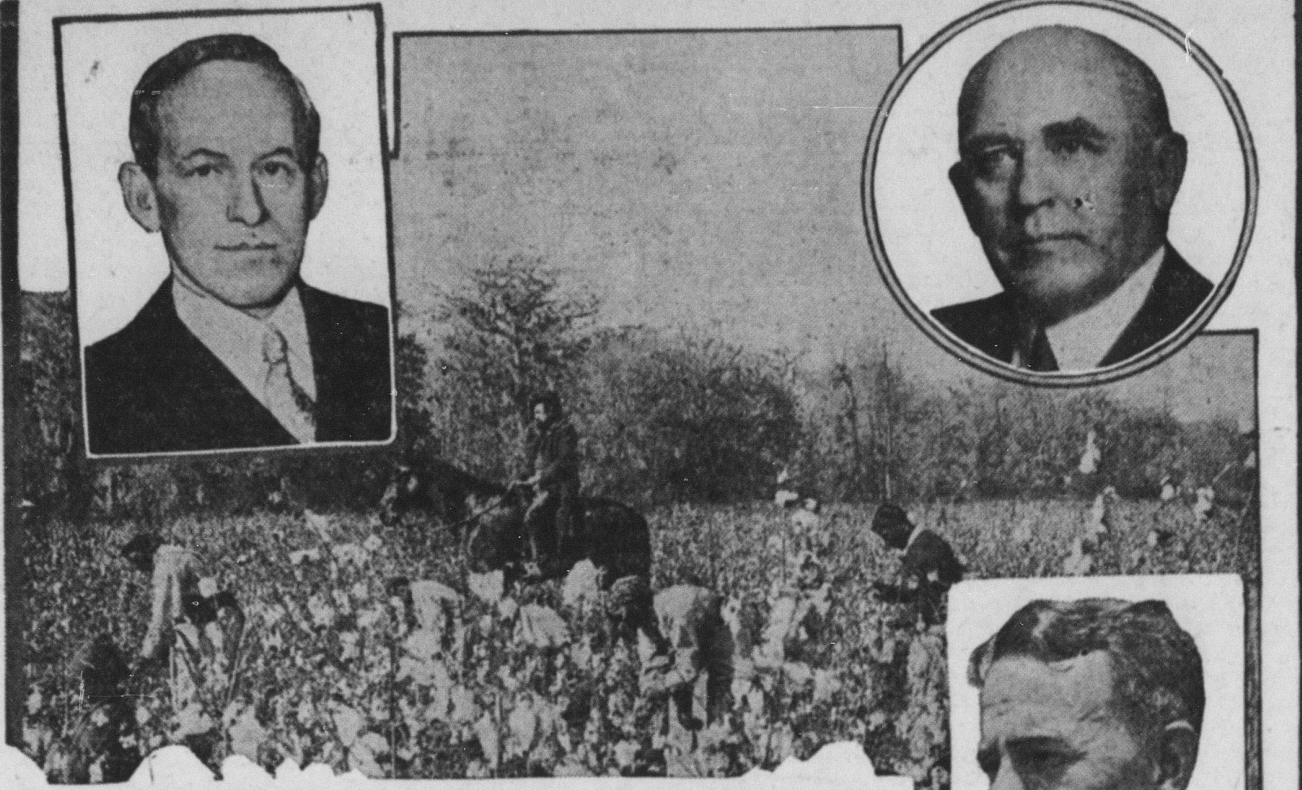


Desperate Plight of the Share-Croppers



Above, Southern Cotton Field. Top, Left, Senator Tydings; Right, Senator Bankhead. Below, Right, Edwin R. Embree.

By WILLIAM C. UTLEY

HALF of all the farming in the United States is done by tenant farmers. Most of them are in the southern states, and despite their numbers—there are some 1,800,000 of them, mostly cotton farmers, in 16 of these states—they have of late come to be regarded as the "forgotten men" of the New Deal's agricultural experimenting.

They are the share-croppers. Virtually illiterate, never at any time prosperous in the true sense, these unfortunate have in the last few years been forced into circumstances every bit as pitiable as old-time slavery, according to investigations public and private which have been made within the last few months.

For cultivating, planting and picking their landlords' cotton, these poverty-stricken Twentieth century serfs are given half the harvest from the crop, unless they furnish their own implements, in which case they get three-fourths of it.

The income from this harvest is largely spent before they get it. Before harvest time they are paid in commissary scrip which is good only in the landlord's store. It is alleged that the usual allowance for a family of five is two dollars a week before the harvest. Then if there is any balance it is paid off in cash.

Meanwhile the share-cropper is often charged prices for his food and essentials which are considerably greater than those paid by his neighbor who owns land and may buy where he pleases. The landlord, in addition, takes a 10 per cent levy in advancing scrip, making \$2 worth really cost \$2.20. The ordinary food supply for half a week for one family runs about like this: Half-sack flour, 55 cents; gallon of sorghum black molasses, 60 cents; 24 pounds of cornmeal, 60 cents. That leaves little for clothing. And these people simply don't eat meat.

Villainy of Fate.

The share-cropper until 1920 was able to eke out a fair sort of existence, getting enough to eat in the sense of a sufficiency to keep body and soul together, and having something of a roof over his family's heads. Then prices began to fall. The machine, which had been steadily growing as a threat, became a competitor real and overwhelming. Competition from new cotton-producing areas, soil erosion and sterility of the soil from constant production of a single kind of crop added their woeful work to the villainy of what some might call fate.

What these had knocked down, the depression trampled upon. And into what the depression had trampled upon, the Brain Trust ground its heel when it decreed that cotton acreage must be reduced 40 per cent. AAA crop reductions and processing tax meant loss of income and loss of livelihood to many a tenant farmer who already had little enough of either.

Probably the first really comprehensive analysis of the situation was that recently made public by the committee on minority groups in economic recovery, headed by Dr. E. R. Embree of Chicago, president of the Julius B. Rosenwald fund. As might be supposed from Doctor Embree's presence (for the late Mr. Rosenwald was far famed for his sympathy with the black race), the original purpose of the committee's survey was to investigate the condition of the agricultural negro in the South. It found more whites than blacks suffering and reported that the problem was so serious that all racial angles to it were overshadowed.

No less than 58 per cent of the farmers of the South—and 71 per cent of the cotton farmers—are without land. Exports are on the decline, while cotton production abroad is increasing. The South faces a major crisis, says the committee.

The committee found that of 3,088,111 farms in 13 southern states, 1,780,000 were cultivated by tenants. Of these, 1,091,000 were white and 689,000 colored. In certain regions farmed almost entirely by negroes, 80 per cent of the farmers were of the share-cropper variety. Practically all of the increase in the number of tenant-farmers since 1920 is accounted for by whites, approximately 200,000 of them, who were unable to keep a hold on their property. A good share of the tenant farmers and others have been released upon the world with no means of sup-

port until millions who should be getting a living from southern soil are now on the relief rolls. Last year one family in every four was on relief.

Chances Are Slim.

According to the report, the tenant farmer's chances of recovery are slim under a credit system which enables the landowner to borrow money at 4½ to 6½ per cent interest while "the tenant farmer cannot secure this cheap credit unless the landowner waives his first lien on the crop." The landowner can seldom afford to do this.

"If he refuses to release the crop lien to the governmental agency, the Federal Farm Credit administration, the landlord may then secure the loan for all his tenant farmers at 4½ to 6½ per cent, and then advance supplies and furnishings to his tenants at customary prices—20 to 30 per cent above cash prices.

"Here again the tenant bears the brunt of the risk. If he can repay, his surplus is wiped out by the extortionate credit charges; if he cannot repay, he loses his crop and whatever work stock he may possess," says the report.

"So far the various debt reconciliation commissions have made no attempt to have the landlords scale down the debts owed them from previous seasons by croppers and share tenants. Such proposals would be resented, no doubt, by landowners who had just had their debts scaled down by creditors."

Doctor Embree's committee says that the United States must "reorganize the system of land tenure in the South." The negro problem has long been an obstacle to such a program, but the committee is of the opinion that the country has "seriously over-estimated the importance of the negro farmers numerically as competitors, since tenancy in the South has come to be essentially a problem of white farmers."

The committee distinctly frowned upon continuing indefinitely to encourage landlords to cut down their production. It advised the raising of crops other than cotton in the Southeast, "with foreign competition in cotton growing increasing and Texas and Oklahoma able to furnish all the cotton needed for the national market at cheaper cost of production." Yet it admits an advantage in the fact that the government, having cut down cotton growing by some 8,000,000 acres, is in a position to force a balanced agriculture on farmers who can't get cotton off their minds.

No money crops and no crops to be sold can be raised on these 8,000,000 acres. Rather, crops for home use are encouraged, as well as crops which tend to improve the soil and prevent erosion and leaching.

"In the course of time the government might find the outright purchasing of certain farming lands less expensive than the payments of rents. Such payments rightly expended would serve to start worthy tenants in land ownership and remunerate large and absentee owners for portions of their excessive holdings," the committee says.

Would Need Help.

Of course such farmers turned loose upon their own land, but restrained from raising the only crop with which most of them are familiar or experienced would need helpful supervision, but their properties—small subsistence homesteads—might bid fair to approach the economic state of some of the most prosperous peasant-owned farms in Europe, the committee believes.

Such a program would certainly meet with approval from the thousands of homeless share-croppers who have hit the southern roads without food or chattels, bound in most cases for the cities, there to seek what relief they can from the proper agencies. Some of them write to the President in pitiful, hardly readable letters, imploring him to aid them. Some of them have formed the Southern Tenant Farmers' union, whose allegedly radical members have been said to be the instigators of violence in some instances.

Designed to give these tenant farmers land of their own, after the manner of European land-owning peasants, is the Bankhead bill, proposed by Senator John H. Bankhead of Alabama, father of the glamorous Tallulah Bankhead, the stage and screen star, and a member of a family which has repre-

sented Alabama for many years in the government. It is quite in accord with the suggestions of the committee under Doctor Embree.

The Bankhead bill, which at this writing had gained a unanimously favorable report from a house committee, would provide legislation patterned after that which has allowed the tenant farmer of Ireland, Denmark, Finland and Germany to become a landowner. What has been done for owners of mortgaged homes, it plans to do for the share-cropper—make federal credit available to lift him out of the financial morass.

Senator Bankhead contends that the administration's crop reduction and tax on processing were measures adopted in defense of the farmers, protecting them from curtailed production by industries and manufacturers after the crash. In sharp opposition to him has been Senator Millard F. Tydings of Maryland, who claims that the only result of the whole Roosevelt "economics of scarcity" program has been to reduce the total wealth of the nation. He demands the end of crop curtailment by the AAA.

Bankhead Explains.

Senator Bankhead points out that the United States at the start of 1933 was faced with the biggest cotton surplus on record, a full year's crop of 13,000,000 bales, the effect of which was to cause a tremendous drop in cotton prices. Cotton was 19½ cents a pound in 1929, but by 1932 it had fallen off to 5½ cents a pound, he pointed out, explaining that the processing tax was designed to give the farmers the same "scarcity" which manufacturers had effected to maintain their prices.

"The more money you put into people's hands, the more they can buy," was Senator Tydings' answer. "The higher the price, the less they can buy. If the cost of goods is increased, then consumption is reduced. The higher the price of cotton, then the less you can sell."

Doctor Embree's committee was more interested in Senator Bankhead's proposals to enable the tenant farmer to gain independence.

"Life in the rural South is capable of being lived to the fullest," said its report. "In our modern scheme of things it has proved much easier to produce a steady flow of goods than to produce a steady income with which to purchase those goods or their equivalent. Of all the laborers and craftsmen, the general or all-round farmer is the only one able to produce the type and variety of goods suitable for his own consumption."

Fundamental Changes.

"In the South we have lost much of this immunity to the fluctuations of the price system by an almost insane devotion to an export cash crop whose price fluctuations have become proverbial. This is due, no doubt, to the historical conjunction of slavery, the plantation and the cotton plant."

"Theoretically, the area saw slavery abolished. Actually, it changed the plantation pattern to tenancy and incorporated a white peasantry which finally came to outnumber the negro tenants in cotton culture."

"The plantation is not interested in feeding its lower-level denizens with the vegetables, milk, meats and fruits of a beneficent soil and climate, but only wants its cash crop of cotton."

"Meanwhile, the system supplies its laborers with a meager diet of fat-back, corn pone and molasses under as extortionate a credit system as can be found in the world's agriculture."

Tenant farmers will undoubtedly find the bluebird singing for them once more, possibly in trees on a farm of their own, when the administration gets around to spending the much-talked-about \$4,500,000,000.

For much of this is going to make rural America all over again, principally by moving broken farmers to new and fertile fields where they can start all over again, on land described in deeds made out in their own names. Mr. Rexford Guy Tagwell will superintend the rural remaking.

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Need for Faith in Trying Times

Permanency of Nation and of Home Depends on High Resolve.

This is an era of curtailments, of economies and limitations in financial matters in the United States, and such a state of affairs bears direct results in the home and on the family. It is a period which should be met with firm purpose and steady determination to wrest success from difficulties. Such things have been done in former years. They can be done today.

It is interesting to note the high place which faith holds. We have heard much about the misery which lack of confidence has brought to the masses. We have been urged to discard fears, and thereby restore confidence. And the good old word "faith" has come into its own. Those who have not cherished faith and who have discounted it, have overlooked the fact that faith does not apply to religion solely, but to all things in which reliance upon others is involved. One of its synonyms is confidence. Those who have an abiding faith and confidence in a Supreme Power are those who can meet emergencies without the depressing elements which are so ready to crowd around. They have a Foundation Rock on which to stand. The

waves may beat about them and times be turbulent, but they are not dismayed.

The stability of one's country is dependent upon the faith and confidence the individual citizens have in it. Such faith and confidence is the rock of the nation. However much of a ferment certain specific issues cause, the belief that they are but evanescent and that the high fundamental principles of the country will not be shaken beyond its ability of recovery must remain inviolable. Such a belief and confidence is the greatest reviving element. Such is the faith that is ours behind and below the existing clamor about depression. Such is the faith that becomes knowledge of our country's ultimate power of readjustment and future success without exhausting delay.

In the home, faith is its foundation also. The confidence of an abiding love which can surmount tran-

slent disagreements and disturbances is imperative. The home is wrecked where faith is lacking. It grows into a stronghold of happiness when faith is fostered, and confidence is invincible.

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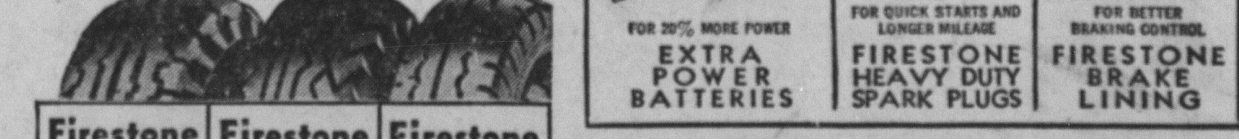
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