Wherein the "Average San Franciscan" Has Much the Best of the "Middle American"

SAMUEL RAGGERS HAD TO WORK AS A BOY

By G. Lindsay Campbell

JOSEPH JACOBS, in a recent number of the American Magazine, has a socio-mathematical study which he calls "The Middle American," and which is an attempt to extract the equation of a dead center from the maze of figures comprising the last national census. This equation represents "The Middle American," and with figures for material, Mr. Jacobs builds in fancy an image of the man who represents the type that forms the center of gravity of American civilization.

To a Californian the Jacobs picture is not alluring and no San Franciscan can read and accept Mr. Jacobs' deductions without realizing that out here on the shores of the Pacific man's lot is, indeed, cast in pleasant places; and that if the mathematical mind of Jacobs had centered around the "damndest finest ruins" he would have painted a picture that would have added body to the tide of westward travel.

The middle American, estimated by processes that Mr. Jacobs explains, but which it will not be necessary to elucidate here, was born March 20, 1872, in a two roomed farm house a few miles from Leesburg village, Ohio. His name, arrived at by the aforesaid process, is Samuel Thwaites Raggers.

"Raggers!" Such a name. Hardly a week passes that some willing-to-be-a Californian does not take a better sounding name than Raggers into the superior court and ask the judge's permission to change it to something more euphonious. Raggers!

The name is not the greatest of Raggers' misfortunes. His bill of fare reads like the menu of a relief camp in earthquake season. His boyhood sport includes the feeding of poultry and herding of cattle, but he knows nothing about chicken dinners and eats fresh meat only in winter. The story of Raggers' life will start no expeditions from this point to Leesburg village as a destination.

The story of Raggers' boyhood, told in a San Francisco police court, would incite the society for the prevention of cruelty to children to frenzied activity, and like as not some newspaper would start a subscription to obtain funds for the purpose of giving the boy a chance.

An attempt to figure out the middle San Franciscan by Mr. Jacobs' method has proved a difficult task. The twelfth biennial report of the bureau of labor statistics, the only literature of this kind not consumed in the late fire, looked promising, but after digging deep into its pages I reached the conclusion that for an unmathematical mind it was a poor "dope" sheet.

Raggers' income is twice as great as the one on which his father reared Samuel and five others, but even Raggers' pay amounts only to $10 a week. Let him live until he reaches the age of Methuselah and $15 a week is the highest income he can attain. Mr. Jacobs kills Raggers at the age of 65, and this allotment of years is the most liberal prize that falls to the lot of Raggers.

Passing a building in course of construction the other day I saw three men conversing. Two of them were working. The other, judging by his clothes, was taking a day off. His raiment was well worn and somewhat discolored. There, said I to myself, is what Raggers must look like. As I passed by one of the workers, addressing the "day off" man, said:

"Why ain't you workin', Bill?"

"'Cause I don't have to," replied my idea of Raggers. "Think I'm durn fool enough to work for $5 a day? Nit!"

And Raggers works for $10 a week!

Raggers, remember, is the middle American. There are 7,500,000 heads of families in the land better off than Raggers, according to Mr. Jacobs' figures, and an equal number who manage to get along on less.

The story of Raggers, as figured out from the census returns, is, in brief, as follows:

He was born in 1872. For five years he attended a common school which was open on the average eighteen weeks a year. The rest of the time he helped to make hay, raise vegetables, cared for cattle and poultry, did rough carpentry and mason's work. His food was white flour and corn meal, sugar, lard, stewed fruit, salt pork and fish, vegetables and berries in summer. Coffee was his usual drink. In winter Raggers used to help cut timber and help make brooms indoors. Occasionally he would run up to the attic, the floor of which was a foot deep with corn in the ear, to play with his brothers and sisters.

In the late fall Samuel assisted the neighbors in making roads. His social diversions included attendance at paring bees, huskings or, later on, spelling bees. Occasionally he would attend a town meeting or a hulled corn supper.

Raggers' acquaintance with the histrionic art was limited to the occasional traveling show. Raggers gets his living at the cotton mill established at North Vernon, where he is employed as a spinner at $10 a week. Deducting for days off on account of sickness and public holidays, and figuring 52 hours as his week's work, Raggers is paid at the rate of 19 cents an hour and his total annual income is $490.95.

For food for himself Raggers spends on an average 22 cents a day and is slightly underfed. He is something of a patent medicine fiend; buys few books but writes many letters. He is a Methodist and a Knight of the Maccabees, in which he is insured for $500 in case of death and smaller benefits for lesser afflictions. He will begin to buy his own home at the age of 47 and will have it paid for ten years later. He will die August 29, 1937, of cancer and his wife, who will survive him four years, will have ample provision for her old age.

Raggers does not travel much. He and his wife go about sixty miles a year visiting and on excursions. He patronizes the trolley occasionally and once a year goes on an excursion with his fellow workmen and their wives. He has no free library in his neighborhood. He knows not the theater, but occasionally has penetrated into a vaudeville. His chance of improving his condition is limited to the possibility of some day earning $15 a week.

The more one studies Raggers the better California looks and the more one is convinced that San Francisco ranks high as a place to live, brick dust and graft notwithstanding.

Compare Raggers' school days with the springtime of a San Francisco boy's life and the existence of the mature Raggers with life in California and be glad you were born here or came west.

The California boy has nothing to do but grow. Spring in the Golden state is not a time of recuperation from the chills, chilblains, frost bites and other accompaniments of an untempered winter; and the fall is not a season of convalescence during which victims of summer's heat regain their strength and lay in a stock of vigor for the stress of the coming winter. Spring, summer, fall and winter in California are seasons just as distinctive as in the east and middle west, but in California each season means a different kind of joy of living. Climatically the middle Californian, or even the Californian at the lower end of the line is so much better off than Raggers that comparison is almost ridiculous.

While Raggers, the boy, is making hay, digging trenches in the vegetable garden, or toting pails of food and grain between house, chicken yard and barn, young San Francisco is playing baseball in a beautiful park or splashing with the seals and mermaids in the waters of the Pacific. While Raggers, the boy, is laying the foundation of chronic indigestion for Raggers, the man, young San Francisco is sipping the nectar in the garden of the gods, fattening on a well balanced, health giving ration in the best equipped larder within the radius of the sun's smile. Instead of Raggers' stewed fruit and occasional dish of berries, young California has the golden apples of the orange groves and every other fresh fruit that ripens under temperate and tropical skies.

Raggers' winter playroom is the floor of a dusty attic, where the poorly developed lungs in Raggers' underfed body absorb dust, dirt and disease germs. Young California spends his winter days out of doors, breathing the undiluted ozone of the great Pacific.

The unexciting nature of Raggers' simple social diversions may be a better preparation for the battle of life than the more complex affairs of the metropolitan youth, but Raggers wouldn't think much of a Leesburg husking bee if Mr. Jacobs would allow him to spend a social season in a California town.

As Raggers grows up his horizon widens but little. The traveling show that occasionally entertains Raggers at the town hall of Leesburg gives him his closest view of the art to which the stage is consecrated. If Raggers lived in San Francisco he could, at no greater expense, see the world's greatest actors, hear the sweetest singers and grandest music and at the school of experience equip himself as a dramatic critic whose opinion was valuable.

There are some mean occupations in San Francisco and many men who work weary hours, but there is not a job in all California quite so miserably unhealthy as the one at which Raggers wins the meager pay on which he exists. Raggers, it will be remembered, is a spinner in a cotton mill, where the floor vibrates like a perpetual earthquake and where every inhalation of the breath carries fluff and dust to the lungs.

Discontent is probably as prevalent in California as in Leesburg village, perhaps more so; but discontent in Leesburg is a chronic disease, while in California it can be cured by the simple process of reading the story of Raggers and accepting Mrs. Jacobs' word for it that there are 7,500,000 heads of families in the United States worse off than Raggers. When we realize that none of them lives in California we can cheer up.

The population of San Francisco today is estimated at about 480,000, which would mean between 90,000 and 100,000 heads of families. The 45,000th pater familias would be the middle San Franciscan, the Raggers of the West. As far as can be estimated from the statistical information at hand and based on present conditions, the middle San Franciscan's income is about $26 a week, out of which, judging by savings banks reports, he is saving $10 a week, two thirds of which he is investing in real estate, either by way of purchasing his own home or as a form of investment, permanent or speculative. The speculative feature makes it impossible to estimate with any exactness, but as the certainty of a steadily increasing population insures increasing values in real estate, it is safe to assume that the middle San Franciscan will be a man of affairs long before Raggers, the middle American, has his little home paid for. Raggers will not own his home until he is well on in years. The middle San Franciscan will own his home when he reaches the age of thirty-five, and by the time he is fifty will have an income from other real estate sufficient to support him for the rest of his days and to provide, when he is gone, for those dependent upon him until they can care for themselves.

The difference between Raggers and the middle San Franciscan is that conditions where fortune placed Raggers are practically at a standstill and that the San Franciscan is right in the middle of the biggest natural boom that ever blossomed in the far west. If Raggers holds his own and pursues his course of temperate thrift, he is Raggers to the end of the chapter. If the middle San Franciscan of today retains his grip the conditions around him will boost him within reach of comfort and luxury that Raggers lacks the imagination ever to dream about.

If Raggers would only quit that job in the cottom mill, sell his equity in the cottage and come west, he would not be in this city more than a few hours before he had a healthier job at better pay. For one opportunity that he enjoys at Leesburg of owning his own home he would have ten chances here, and being in better health would enjoy it more and for a longer time. His horizon would expand and he would learn to realize that if Leesburg village, Ohio, is a sort of hub it also is something of a hole in the ground and that to get on top of the earth, where the sun shines always, where the outlook is wide and fair, one must come to California, where winter is unknown, where we can assimilate even earthquakes and where the destruction of a city by fire acts merely as a spur.

Jacobs' picture is not a pleasant one and, viewed from California, it is difficult to accept it as the truth. Whoever the middle Californian, or middle San Franciscan may be, wherever he may live, it would be safe to assure Mr. Jacobs that if he will come out here and try his system on us the result of his calculations will be a fairer, more inspiring picture than the one he presents when he revealed the middle American. Poor Raggers!