

# THE AMERICAN'S COUNTRY HOME. *By Hon. E. A. Bryan* President Wash. Agricultural College

## Some Pen Pictures and Contrasts. The Charm of Rural Life.

Let me recall a scene which has lingered in my mind from boyhood. I was riding on horseback through one of the most remote and thinly settled parts of Indiana—the Brown county hills. The land was thin and poor, covered with a scraggy hardwood forest with a dense growth of underbrush—hoopoles, the paw paw and the hazel bush predominating. Here and there a struggling chestnut oak—the tanbark tree—had escaped the almost universal destruction. Every mile or so there was a little “clearing,” planted to corn or tobacco which gave promise of a scanty crop of “nubbins” and fodder, or a few plugs of “long green.” The rude log huts with stick and mud chimneys were forlorn evidences of the presence of man. Through the dirty and broken-down doorway tow-head urchins in bare feet peered wonderingly at the passing stranger. In other “clearings” the cabin was wholly deserted and the roof fallen in. The patch of open ground was grown up to sassafras, which with the ragweed and the mullein stalk, was striving to hide the naked white earth beneath from which the soil had long since disappeared. A mile away across a ravine, the timber and brush had all been removed from an entire hillside and it had evidently been “improved” years ago, for now all the soil was gone and the barren red clay, gashed with long deep gullies was without a sign of vegetation. The red sun glared down upon it hot and fierce, and the red earth glared back at the sun just as fierce and nearly at hot. A desolate world, a worn-out world, an exhausted, helpless, hopeless, unresponsive world, soon to eliminate its hopeless, helpless population for bare lack of subsistence. But here the road led through a longer stretch of forest. A grateful shade from overhanging branches relieved the glare of the white roadway. A red fox broke cover and trotted down the road in front of me, to disappear again in the thicket when he heard the hoofbeats of the horse. A few miles of denser forest and then a turn in the road-way brought us into another clearing. What a flush of pleasure! A cabin of neatly hewed logs with the chinks filled with gleaming white mortar. The one small window in front so clean and bright was filled with blooming plants. Smooth green turf covered the little dooryard save where an old-fashioned well sweep with its curbing and wooden bucket and gourd held sway. Through the open door-way, the wooden floor shone white and clean. The post and rail fence in front was straight and firm. Over the end of the cabin a mass of vines clambered. By the garden gate the hollyhocks and morning glories vied with each other in the brilliancy of their hues, while farther back the golden glories of the marigold compelled the Johnny-jump-ups to drop their heads and hide their faces from such brazen effrontery. How quiet and lovely and restful this lodge in this vast wilderness. A peaceful, joyous, beautiful world, where your good neighbors, the chattering squirrel, the drumming pheasant and the ivory-billed woodpecker make their cheery morning calls while you breathe in the delicious forest odors. I did not see the people who lived there, but I know what manner of people they were. Truly

“The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

Which is very true even if the devil did say it. The vision of that beautiful home in the wilderness has been with me to this day and has not been without its lesson.

Our philosophy of life is false and our philosophy of education is inadequate and in part untrue. When I was a boy I was taught the Catechism answer to the question, “What is the chief end of man?” and when I became a man I found men making their chief end something altogether different. Our people, by their hopes, their activities, their so-called successes and failures, their

disappointments and their fears show that the chief end they actually have in view is a nearby end, a gross, materialistic, sensual end. Shall we say it is to get money in order that they may get fine houses to live in, and goodly apparel to wear, and costly equipages to be stared at, and more gold with which they may buy pleasures, and distinction—distinction—distinction, in its thousand lying forms—almost the strongest of human incentives? At least we all know that along with the great good that comes with that organized society which we call civilization there has come somewhat of evil. The wholesome current of human life has developed in and from itself a poison—a blood poisoning—which threatens its very existence. Commercialism, artificial society based upon false principles, the grossest selfishness, to say nothing of seductive vices which allure the so-called “better classes” to destruction—these are the things which are absorbing the minds and souls of our people. We shall discover an antidote for the poison. Wholesomer by far in many ways, meager as it was, was the simple pioneer life of our forefathers than is the strenuous, conventional life of our more highly organized and developed system. Who shall discover antidotes I say, so that we may possess the good to which we have attained and yet retain our healthful, simpler life! I think the two bodies I have the honor of addressing tonight, The Inland Empire Horticultural Association and its guest (or host) the Floral Society of Spokane, are organized in part for the very purpose of presenting an antidote for the evils I have mentioned. For, I take it, that, while the former body is chiefly concerned with economic subjects and the latter (I have not examined its constitution) with ministering to the pleasure of the sick and the needy, yet the larger objects of both are educational and include greater social gladness and social health.

I have sometimes wished that with the modern accumulation of large fortunes there should arise a distinct movement toward seeking again the building up of country homes of an altogether new and more generous type than was possible in our forefather's day, but which the larger wealth of today would make possible. If the men who have won such wealth and the women who have attained the coveted social distinction have not thereby been disqualified for the enjoyment of such rural pleasures, it will be well. And indeed there are many things to indicate that my hopes in this regard may be realized at no distant day. It is too bad that “the good” of life which we all seek so strenuously should be so illy conceived of. That the purely artificial should seem so much better than the simpler and more natural. That the beauty all about us should be lost in the struggle for a seeming beauty which fades in our very presence. Highly complex society and its accompaniments flares up so before our imagination that we are deceived thereby. The sounds are so loud, the sights are so bright, the odors so pungent, that the quiet and delicate beauty of nature is quite lost upon us. The lights of the city street are so brilliant that we are dazzled. The moving throng of human beings sweep us into the current so that we feel that we are a part of it and cannot be separated. The windows are gay with colors, music and dancing and revelry fall upon our ears, gorgeous pageants file by, everything is intense. The quiet of the garden, the noiseless pushing of the tiny plant through its earth covering, the dropping of mellow fruit in the orchard, the delicate petals of the daisy are all too unobtrusive for us to see or hear or be conscious of. Out of the busy whirl we feel stupid and relaxed. The senses have been so overcharged that they do not respond to such gentle stimuli.

Now, to such as these and to many others your societies have come with the gospel of flowers and fruits and beautiful homes, whether on the farm

or in the village or city. “The good of life”, you have said, “is to be gotten through a perfectly natural and rational adapting of yourself to your environments. The beautiful flower is as much your proper food as are bread and meat. The laws and operations of nature are as much your proper business as is money-getting. While surrounding yourself with attractive surroundings you are fulfilling an obligation to make those about you better and happier. Awake to this new meaning of your life.” Your mission as the herald of this gospel serves as well the cause of democracy.

The difference between the classes and the masses is not so great as it seems and need not be so great as it is.

The cottar can produce a more beautiful tree, if he love it, than the millionaire can require his hired slave to produce. Roses and honeysuckles and the old-fashioned pink are democratic. The rudest home on the rocks out there may be a very bower of beauty. Your gospel comes to the rich man hard pressed with business cares, and bids him find a new source of rest and joy. It comes to the poor man bowed down under severe daily toil and teaches the same lesson. It gives to both a truer conception of life and happiness. We err so greatly in the source of happiness. The merchant prince with stately mansion richly furnished, driven to his business in a shining carriage drawn by glossy horses, liveried coachman on the boot, is an object of envy. How about this farmer prince? A cozy white cottage embowered in roses in the midst of a pretty yard. The cottage is clean and simple within and there are evidences of a love of books and music and art. In the meadow, sleek and stately cattle drink at the limpid brook. Young lambkins skip from bank to bank or troop away to their bleating dams. The young corn is full of sap and grew so much last night that you can begin to hear the rustle of the rich dark green leaves. The cherry trees are reddening in the orchard and you can hear the quarrel of the woodpeckers over the first ripe cherries. The sweet smell of the red clover comes floating over the field and you can hear the hum of the bees at their joyous task. The farmer is hitching a pair of strong contented horses to the mowing machine, for the clover must be cut today. His brow is not so drawn as that of the merchant prince and he is whistling to himself in an undertone. Why should not he also be envied, and is this life less wholesome and worthy than that? Maybe, after all, he would not be willing to exchange all with the merchant prince.

I have said that our real philosophy of life is wrong and have indicated the fact that part of your mission is to correct it and teach a truer and better philosophy.

Our educational philosophy also is inadequate. We create elaborate school systems, provide them with buildings, books, apparatus and teachers abundantly, send our children to school five days in the week for ten months in the year, and think that the task is done. All this is very well, or at least most of it is very well. But education is a very complex affair. It goes on by night as well as by day. It does not stop during the play hours. The process continues as the child goes and as it comes. Vacation period is not vacation so far as education is concerned. “My child's education shall not begin until he is six or more,” said the mother. “Oh, no, fond mother, you are powerless to control that matter. His education began when lying in your lap he first opened those round, wondering eyes.” “My daughter's education is complete at seventeen,” said the mother whose child had just returned from a fashionable finishing school. Alas! if it were so, seeing how meager it is. Alas, that it were not so, considering the nature of the educational process of the next few years of social gaiety. No. School education,