Editor's Pages

AN AGE OF CHANGE

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There have been long periods, some of them lasting for centuries, in which the essential, everyday features of life changed very little. Mehods of growing crops, harvesting crops, and preparing them for use were not greatly modified among settled, civilized peoples from the time of Pericles to that of George Washington. It was much the same with the making of clothing and the processes back of this important human activity, as it was indeed with most of the things that made up the round of life. Better hand tools, household utensils, carts and wagons, ships, buildings, and other individual commodities were slowly devised, but, for extensive alterations in the ways of life and ways of making a living, the world had to wait for the machine age. When one reflects on the extremely slow evolution of society, government and education through many centuries of simple economic conditions, it is not so difficult to understand the bewilderment that prevails in regard to finance, industrial output, employment of laborers, transportation and international relationships that mark the present complex set-up.

Should the world come to another static period of several centuries, or one century, or even a half century, one wonders whether the leaders of men would be better able to understand and solve the economic problems confronting them—whether the lack of rapid changes would be a handicap or a helpful feature of the situation. When our nation was born the leaders faced not only intricate international problems and profound political problems at home, but they lived in a world transformed by the commercial revolution and in a period of expansion in commercial banking such as the world had not seen before. They also lived in a period when Europe had been tremendously influenced by the colonization and exploitation of the New World. A new period of unrest was to follow when the interior of the United States was to be colonized with astonishing rapidity, with an economic crisis coming at the end of Jackson's presidency and another on the eve of the Civil War.

It is in the period since the Civil War that changes have come to our country with such startling speed. The spread of

the industrial revolution and the invention of new machines and processes in rapid succession have transformed America and furnished undreamed of problems in regard to production, transportation, finance, labor, social welfare, education, morality and government.

A vast number of living American men and women can remember conditions as they were sixty years ago. It was long after that before I carried on my first telephone conversation. I saw the first electric street-car on September 3, 1888, in Lafayette, Indiana. Railroads had reached a high stage of development by the opening of the Civil War, but the vast interurban system of Indiana was constructed after 1890. In fact most of the lines were built between 1900 and 1915. Strange to say, in this field of transportation, the lines and rolling stock have disappeared as rapidly as they came in. The high period of the interurban lasted less than a quarter of a century.

It was in the spring of 1898 that I first saw an automobile, or horseless buggy. By 1908, there were quite a few in every city. Three years later, they were numerous enough to furnish all urban areas with a real traffic problem, but with no parking problem as yet. In the summer of 1916, I bought a Model T Ford car, and have owned some kind of an automobile for almost twenty-three years.

I remember the day when the farm wagon was the means of transportation for my father and his family. This was followed by a period when two-seated spring-wagons were used. The family was growing in this epoch. "Growing" being interpreted, means that the number of children increased from four to seven during the spring-wagon age, while, at the same time, the older children increased considerably in stature and weight. The truth is that the two-seated carry-all worked pretty well as long as there were not over five children. The parents, a baby, and one small child could occupy the front seat. The three older children could sit comfortable in the rear seat. More was accomplished at times but it was with difficulty. There were emergencies, I believe, when the two seats held all nine of us, which meant five in the rear, with two youngsters, who at frequent intervals stood up to rest all concerned, seated on the knees of older children. As the rising generation grew older, one, two, and sometimes three single buggies were maintained.

There were country families who maintained carriages, but these were expensive luxuries for both rural and town families. In the ante-automobile age, country families held a distinct advantage over city people in the matter of transportation. There were always horses and wagons on farms, and, when a farmer purchased a carriage or spring-wagon, he simply supplied himself with a light set of double harness and transformed a farm team into a pair of drivers at will. Two blacks, greys, bays, roans or sorrels equipped with shiny harness and hitched to a Sunday vehicle always attracted attention. The city family that could afford a carrige must also be able to own horses and assume the burden of upkeep. This caused the phaeton, an equipage that required but one horse, to be popular with dwellers in towns. The real situation was this, however, that business and professional men and their families walked while many country families, who could not otherwise compete with them, rode in spring-wagons, carriages, or buggies. In the larger cities, street-cars faced little competition in the horse and buggy days. Just as gunpowder made all men equal in height a few centuries ago, so motor cars have placed urban residents on a par with their country cousins in the matter of local transportation.

The sickle, of similar design to the familiar grass-hook of today, was the simple grain-harvesting tool for a long age. The cradle, which superseded the sickle, was a boon to harvesters, but it was largely superseded by the reaper in a comparatively short time. Born on a retarded frontier, where there were numerous stumps in most of the fields, I saw much grain (wheat, oats, rye, flax) harvested with the cradle. The reaper was in successful use twenty years before my day, but many farmers in frontier areas of the Old Northwest were twenty-five years late in reaching the stage where they could use it to advantage or afford to purchase it.

For a few years after I was old enough to gather sheaves or help shock wheat, I saw harvesting done by the reaper. One man drove the machine, and unless the crop was light, there were four binders and two shockers. This meant a force of seven men, with two or three boys, to gather sheaves and carry water. In a good field of grain, a farmer with a brisk team could keep the entire gang on the jump. The regular harvest wage was $2.00 per day. To avoid a heavy outlay on labor and to ease the high cost of machinery, two

farmers often joined in the purchase of a reaper. It was not uncommon for the owner, or owners, to harvest the crop of some neighbor and let him pay by his labor. When the cutting of a field of wheat started, four stations were agreed upon. These separated the distance around the field into four approximately equal sections. Each of the four binders must finish one section during every round of the reaper, advance to the next section and so on till the field was finished. Whenever the driver was able to catch a harvest-hand before his last bundle was tied and thrown out of the way, the men in the field were apt to let out some lusty yells. In fact, as I remember it, the annual harvest season was a time of much hilarity, though, as a rule, nothing but cold water was served to the men.

From time immemorial, each sheaf was bound with a handfull of grain stalks. Just as the harvester was ready to tie up a bundle, he would deftly size a proper amount of straw, divide it into equal parts, and skilfully turn one part about the other at the heads so that when drawn about the sheaf the "double-band" would hold together. Grasping the band at the union he would stoop quickly, pick up the grain for his bundle, place the band around it, move his hands back towards the butts of the two parts of the band, draw it up tightly, connect the ends with a hurried twist and force them under a part of the band. An expert binder could do all this with real speed and efficiency, but sheaves tied up by a poor workman would often fall apart before they could be placed in the shock. I have never forgotten the moment when I succeeded in binding my first sheaf of wheat.

Many farmers continued to use the reaper for a time after the appearance of the self-binder. It was in the early eighteen-eighties that I saw the first mechanical binder in action. It was but a few years until binders were a part of the equipment of all grain farmers. I need not mention the more modern combiners that are now used on many farms.

The steam thresher, succeeding the threshing machine operated by horse-power, was in general use before I was born. I remember very well separators that were not equipped with stackers, blowers or self-feeders. The grain was carried to the bin or hauled to market in bags. Grain sacks were made to hold two bushels. When filled with wheat, the weight was one hundred twenty pounds. A country boy was

respected by his elders and companions when he could stand flat-footed, place his hands and forearms about a two-bushel bag of wheat and lay it on his shoulder. I never won renown for physical strength or prowess, but I recall that I first shouldered a sack of wheat when I was seventeen years of age.

The development of moving pictures, the evolution of the radio, the rapid perfection and extensive use of air craft —each of which has greatly changed the world in which we live—I feel no call to write about. These are phases of the shifting twentieth century scene for men and women of a younger generation to handle. Like others of my age, I can, of course, appreciate the difference between the new period and that which preceded the advent of the cinema, the transmission of sound over the ether waves, and the navigation of the air. It is difficult, I am sure, for all who have reached maturity since 1910 to correctly envision the conditions of the day when there were no movies, no radio to turn on, and no airplanes, but humanity actually did somehow struggle through long ages without them.

I have written about tangible things, the changes connected with which it has been easy for anyone to observe. In the wake of industrialism and the building of the accompanying financial structure, there have come new conditions more baffling to the understanding. The simple civilization of yesterday has gone forever. Millions of people are riding the surging waves produced by evolving economic and social forces without rudder or compass. The leaders in the fields of industry and finance seem to be as completely lost as the masses. Using his creative ingenuity, man has invented numerous labor-saving machines, discovered marvelous processes, and developed intricate financial methods. He has also perfected effective means of destruction for use in war. The result is that civilized peoples are seemingly overwhelmed by the forces that have been turned loose in the world. Men are at the mercy of these forces, it appears, and they must now employ their creative energies to get in control of the powerful factors they have permitted to get the best of them or perish.