

CHAPTER VI

THE GOVERNMENT AS PROMOTER

The colonies would be promoted and made ready for sale and occupancy by the government. [The cost involved is too great for private capital. Moreover, private ventures are speculative. The government, on the other hand, wants to promote citizenship, to make it easy for men to obtain a home, to stimulate food-production, and offer to the soldier as full a life as possible.

The colony should be like any other village. The inhabitants would have complete independence. They could come and go and do as they pleased. Military control over the soldier would end with demobilization, while the public officials would be for the purpose of promoting self-help and co-operation rather than for restraint. There would be nothing charitable about the undertaking.

Social Motives.

A difference in motive distinguishes the farm community from the old style of farm-

ing. We have proceeded on the assumption that the individual farmer is able to look out for himself. As a matter of experience he has to battle with every kind of obstacle. He has to find his own transportation, his own markets. This is true of the wheat-grower, the cattle-raiser, the dairyman, the truck-gardener, the fruit-grower. He has to find his own credit and take it on the banker's terms. He has to buy his supplies, his machines, his seed, from trusts—often working in collusion with the middlemen, packers, and other agencies. Against these agencies he is powerless.

The government is interested in seeing the farmer prosper. It is interested in the production of food at as low a price as possible. And the government alone can cut out the profiteering agencies and supply the organization, the transportation, the credit, and the opportunities for marketing.

A Field for State Activity.

The colonies should be developed by the States and cities; although there is no reason why the federal government should not make experiments and co-operate with the local

authorities in this field. It could advance a portion of the cost. It is far better, however, that the enterprise should be locally managed. For it is desirable that the soldiers should return to their home States. Moreover, the federal government is distant; it is slow in making changes; it tends to standardization. It is not likely to be as efficient in administration as the State government, which is close to the people.

Through local action we should have variety. The colonies would be adjusted to local conditions and local markets. A successful idea developed by one State would be carried to another. Possibly the method of financing would be for the State to acquire the land, while the federal government would advance the working capital and supervise the local expenditure. The local authorities would, however, administer the enterprise. Such federal-state co-operation has already been developed in the Smith-Lever agricultural bill for county experts in the building of roads and in other federal-state activities.

The farm colony should be substituted by the federal government for the present recla-

mation projects which too often result in failure and bankruptcy. All future reclamation and irrigation projects should be developed as ready-to-work colonies. For land distributed under the reclamation acts, like land distributed to homesteaders, has too frequently fallen into the hands of speculators and landlords, which has destroyed the purpose of these acts.

The Farm Colony in the Past.

The farm colony is a return to the village type of farming which prevailed for centuries all over Europe. Only outside Europe, in fact, do farmers live widely separated from one another. In America the isolated farmer was the result of our vast domain of free land. Each farmer took as much land as he could possess. He ventured beyond the settlement in search of the most fertile sites. In the West, farm units were fixed at 160 acres, with allotments of less fertile land of 320 and 640 acres. It was the apparently inexhaustible resources of America that led us, as well as Canada and Australia, to abandon the old type of agriculture. The farm village was the accepted type of organization in a great part

of the world for many centuries. It is the oldest and most universal form of life the world has known.