

## The American Country Life Association

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The twenty-fourth American Country Life Conference will be held at Nashville, Tennessee, October 21-24, 1941, under the auspices of the American Country Life Association. The general theme of the Conference, according to Dr. Benson Y. Landis, Executive Secretary, is "The Role of the Rural Community in a Democracy." Dr. Clarence Poe, editor and president of *The Progressive Farmer*, is President of the Association and he will give the address at the opening general session, the evening of October 22. Present plans include other sessions on "Rural Education," including Federal Aid for Public Education, "Improvement of Rural Life Conditions," "Church Contributions to Community Life," and a consideration of "The Impact of the War on American Rural Communities." The Tennessee Cooperating Committee includes C. E. Brehm, Director of Agricultural Extension, University of Tennessee, and Norman E. Frost, George Peabody College for Teachers.

During recent years the Association has brought together about 800 farm leaders and professional people who are engaged in rural education, library work, the rural church, agricultural colleges, and extension work. The 1938 conference was held in Lexington, Kentucky. Some of our readers who are not acquainted with the American Country Life Association may be interested in learning something of its organization and of the first twenty years of its history.

In August, 1908, Theodore Roosevelt, then president of the United States, appointed a Commission on Country Life. "No nation has ever achieved permanent greatness," he wrote, "unless this greatness was based on the well-being of the great farmer class, the men who live on the soil; for it is upon their welfare, material and moral, that the welfare of the rest of the nation ultimately depends." "Agriculture is not the whole of rural life," he continued. "The great rural interests are human interests, and good crops are of little value unless they open the door to a good kind of life on the farm."

The Roosevelt Commission of exploration and

investigation, with Liberty H. Bailey as chairman, and Kenyon L. Butterfield as secretary, took the pulse of rural life. According to their findings, "the main single deficiency" was lack of the right kind of education. Also there was need of higher personal and community ideals, greater intellectual appreciation of rural life, and the development of a greater love of country life by country people, especially boys and girls. In concluding their report, the Commission recommended an exhaustive survey of economic and social conditions of rural life, extension work on a national basis, and the beginning of a campaign of rural progress which should include "the holding of local, state, and even national conferences on rural progress."

The chary attitude of Congress and of the nation generally toward the work of the Commission is indicated by the fact that its members served without compensation, and their report was printed by the government for use of Congress only. The report was finally brought out by a regular book publisher in 1911.

That same year, the chairman of the commission, Dr. Bailey, brought out his book, *The Country Life Movement*. He defined the movement as "the working out of the desire to make rural civilization as effective and satisfying as other civilization." The reconstruction of rural life, as he viewed the situation, "must depend in the main on the efforts of country people themselves." In this point of view, perhaps, inheres the difference in philosophy between this seer and prophet of the Country Life Movement and that of Kenyon L. Butterfield and some of the others who later organized the American Country Life Association. Dr. Bailey evidently inclined to the yeast or leavening theory: "The open country will rise no higher than the aspirations of the people who live there, and the problems must be solved in such a way that they will meet the conditions as they exist on the spot." Butterfield and his associates appear to have had greater faith in the more typically American way of forming an organization, holding national conferences, and adopting a program.