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Senior Orations,

"Urban Growth at Expense of Rural"

by

Paul Appenzeller.

There cannot, to a close observer
of history, be anything more significant
than vast movements of population whether
to or within any country.

A casual glance at any census report
in which the percentage of growth
of the cities is given in connection
with the percentage of increase of rural
population will convince anyone
that in comparatively a few years
a crisis must be reached.

That this tendency is dangerous
cannot, with any reflection on the subject,
be doubted and that its stoppage
is one of our national problems
is equally certain.

Not only does the question of the future of the country arise with the discussion of this subject, but the question, equally important, of what will the City do with need for its vast and ever increasing numbers.

This trend of population is not confined to any section or States but is as plainly visible in New England as in our Western States and not only in America but through all Europe. Statistics show that in one century the population in Cities of eight thousand or more has risen from $\frac{1}{30}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the whole and during the decade from 1870-1890 the rural population increased only

14%, while the urban increased over 60%.

The silent monuments of this movement we note all over the country abandoned farms - farms once productive and centers of industry, now deserted and left to grow up as timber.

A few years since, the Commissioner of Agriculture of New Hampshire reported 1442 vacant or abandoned farms with tenable buildings in that State. The same is true of all New England. In Michigan there were 700 fewer farmers in 1890 than in 1870 tho' the population had meanwhile increased almost 500,000, even with the high

limits of 8000 to a city, then were
several states whose rural population
actually decreased during the decade.
These statistics suffice to show how
general and widespread is the movement,
and lead us to a consideration of ^{results}

If we look at the farmers who
remain at home we find their burden
multiply. The cost of keeping up the
roads falls heavier on them and
necessarily the roads suffer and
the farmer finds himself being gradually
moved further and further from the
city or village. The school and
churches are not kept up, and
those who prize them most highly

have increasing reasons for leaving. The general tendency to degradation and demoralization coincident with decreasing population and increasing isolation can be well seen in the case of the mountain whites of the South.

Turning now to the cities we find the results equally bad if not worse. The increase in population intensifies the competition of the city laborer and this, in turn, reacts on those coming to the city who find their opportunities constantly growing less. But there are graver evils than this in the large city.

The American large city is the most

heterogeneous collection of individuals
in the world. In London 98 out of
every 100 inhabitants are natives
of Great Britain and Ireland, all foreign
countries together constituting only
1.6% of her population. Contrast
this with our large cities.

The tenth census shows that, of the
population of fifty of our principal
cities, thirty per cent are foreign born
and $\frac{4}{5}$ of the population of foreign
parentage.

Another of the great evils of the
American city is the lodgment of
the power of the ballot in the hands
of these degraded and uneducated masses.

From the very nature of a city we should expect the governing power to be the strongest and most centralized while in fact it is just here that it is the weakest because controlled by the very element that produces and fosters vice. The better element of the city has almost no power in its government and, realizing this, most frequently stay away from the polls. In any political campaign it is the "machines" the "Irish or Catholic vote" that must be gained at any expense of good representation or government. To such an extent is this corruption carried that it is seldom

a man of high character and official
said Mr. Andrew D. White in the "Forum"

"Without the slightest exaggeration
we may assert that with very
few exceptions the City governments
of the United States is the worst in
Christendom - the most expensive,
the most inefficient, and the most
corrupt"

Summing up, then, the results of
this tendency we can find nothing
but evils as necessary consequences.

We are not the first nation
to encounter this evil. Rome felt
it and it was one of the chief
causes of her overthrow

It is now almost universally conceded that the real crisis in Rome's later history was met when she not only refused the "Agrarian Law" of Gracchus but killed its noble defender.

His aim was to establish a powerful yeomanry, to plant liberty in land, and to perpetuate the Roman Commonwealth by identifying its principles with the culture of the soil.

Such is the need of America today, and how to secure it is the problem.

Could America but realize and act on that famous dictum of Gracchus "nihil est agriculturā melius, nihil uberius, nihil dulcius,

nihil Lomine, nihil libero dignus,
the Crisis now imminent could
never come.

Commencement Oration of Paul Appenzellar, Class of 1895
Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

Senior Oration
“Urban Growth at Expense of Rural”
Paul Appenzellar

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