RURAL SOCIOLOGY

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PREFACE

My previous work on rural sociology was published in 1913, and its distribution was widened year by year. But it was a pioneer work, with obvious defects. Realizing that ultimately I should be faced with the necessity of preparing a thorough revision, I made a new study of the rural situation with a view to writing an entirely new work in this field. The present volume is the result.

In the preparation of this volume I have sought to make it factual, representative, comprehensive, interpretive, and suggestive of improvement, where advisable. I have preferred to keep closely to the facts rather than to make easy and sweeping statements. Indeed, my chief aim has been to make clear the actual conditions of rural life. While the work embraces the whole field of rural sociology, it seeks to give a picture of the rural situation in the United States by reference to the several sections of the country. Thus it will be found representative of the nation as a whole, and also of most sections of the country. Although I have carefully avoided generalizations and theories where there were no facts to warrant such interpretation, I have attempted to draw conclusions, and make inductions wherever the concrete facts permitted. I have not found it possible to suggest improvement in farm life at all points, but wherever remedies could appropriately be given, they have been presented. It may be that I have been over-modest in refraining from all dogmatic statements.

It will be noted that the book is divided into parts, and these parts into chapters. It is true that there is a great amount of overlapping of the material from one part to another; and that certain sections might as well have been placed in one part as in another. However, the division into parts should be useful, as it represents a rather natural subdivision of the material.

The bibliographies appended to the various chapters are intended to be suggestive, rather than entirely comprehensive. No reference has been made to a large amount of equally good

material; but the lists represent the books and articles which have aided me in the preparation of this work, and which I believe will be of value to others.

I take this occasion to thank writers and investigators whose material I have used in constructing this volume; and also the publishers of *The Annals,* the *American Journal of Sociology,* and the *Quarterly Journal* of the University of North Dakota, for large use of material which I had previously published in their columns.

J. M. GILLETTE

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PART I

RURAL SOCIOLOGY AND RURAL SOCIETY

RURAL SOCIOLOGY

CHAPTER I

RURAL SOCIOLOGY AS A SCIENCE[1]

Development of the subject.—Practically all subjects which we regard as sciences or systematic treatises have been, in their origin, more or less connected with some great societal movement of their age or with some particular intellectual ferment. Rural sociology is no exception to the rule, for it is the product of the demands and insight of this generation. In speaking of its development it will be necessary to speak of the formation of the subject and of the influences causing its formation.

1. Every science or discipline is somebody's organized ideas about the field of facts the subject treats, the knowledge so organized being the product of many minds. It is needful that the facts shall come to attention and be collected and studied before the organization can be made. The term rural sociology has been used loosely to include all kinds of attempts to study and understand rural life. However the subject is rapidly undergoing organization and is developing into a fairly well defined discipline. The phenomena of agricultural communities have become better known by systematizers and the lines of organization better worked out and more clearly defined. Consequently the future of rural sociology as a science looks bright.

At the present time rural sociology is widely taught in our educational institutions. A few years ago it was taught in 64 per cent of the 48 agricultural colleges, 45 per cent of the separate state universities, 32 per cent of the 91 normal schools, 9 per cent of the 301 other colleges and universities, or 21 per

[1] Considerable portions of this chapter are taken from a paper read by the writer before the American Sociological Society in 1916. The entire paper entitled "The Scope and Methods of Instruction in Rural Sociology" is to be found in the Publications of that society, Vol. XI: 163-180.

cent of the total 460 institutions studied by the investigator relative to the teaching of the subject.[1] In 1920-21 it was taught in 140 colleges and universities, 90 normal schools[2] and 30 theological seminaries. This is a creditable showing for a new subject to make in a short time. It represents only the academic interest of the field of rural society. The larger interest deserves attention.

2. The influences which have called attention to rural life affairs and thus forced the development of rural social sciences in general and of rural sociology in particular are so numerous that only the leading ones can be mentioned. This brief treatment makes no attempt to indicate the historic order of their appearance.

Long ago, marketing conditions attracted the attention of farmers, and in their organizations the control of markets and of rates of transportation was seriously discussed. In fact some of the great agrarian movements in this country, such as the Grange, Alliance, Union, Society of Equity, Gleaners, Nonpartisan League, and others, have been directly or intimately connected with problems of farm marketing. While primarily an economic matter, marketing touches vitally so many social interests of rural communities that it thereby becomes of sociological importance.

The production of agricultural goods likewise forced itself into conspicuous notice sometime ago. The rapid growth of population in the United States and the relative decrease in per capita exports of farm products caused an alarm in some quarters. This reduction appeared to threaten national commercial interests and to menace the domestic food supply. Consequently the deterioration of the soil and the improvement of methods of agricultural production were widely discussed, not only by agricultural experts but by publicists. Farm production, like marketing, is more than an economic affair, involving as it does the various interests of national and local society.

In quite different directions other large problems of country communities came into view. With the growth of progressive educational discussion the schools of rural districts

[1] Sanderson, Dwight, "The Teaching of Rural Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology*, 22:434.

[2] Letter from W. J. Campbell, Young Men's Christian Association College, Springfield, Mass.

were laid on the public dissection table. Their shortcomings were revealed and the little country school became anathema to many instead of an object of veneration. Similarly the country church was convicted of sin and "ministerial vivisection" and other heinous practices were brought before the bar of judgment. Rural church decadence and overlapping were pointed to as symptoms of community inefficiency.

The Census reports on "rural depopulation" contributed their stimulus to popular agitation. Backward neighborhoods, the condition of farm women, the drift to the city, the farm boy and girl, and many other subjects received a hearing. The Report of the Country Life Commission in 1909 greatly intensified interest in rural affairs and vastly widened discussion. Newspapers, periodicals, books, national gatherings of many kinds, farmers' meetings and institutes, extension and Chautauqua lecturers, preachers, teachers, agricultural specialists and workers, all became agents in pointing to rural deficiencies and expounding rural improvement. The "rural problem" became an epidemic. Curiously enough, multitudes of articles from city people, many of whom had never been on a farm but who believed they knew how to cure the evils of farm life, went into print.

Out of this national ferment, rural sociology and other subjects concerned with farm life were born. The truth embodied in President Ide Wheeler's admonition to an agricultural association gained recognition: "Our business ultimately is a sociological business. Considerations of soil technology but scratch the surface. What we are busied with here is trying to find out how to adjust the soil to the use of families," and, he might have added, to communities.[1]

Courses of instruction on rural sociology appeared in institutions of learning during the emergence of social consciousness of rural society and became a contributing influence to its formation. The University of Chicago offered rural sociology for the first time as a college discipline in the scholastic year 1894-5; the University of Michigan in 1902-3; Rhode Island College and Cornell University in 1904-5; the University of Missouri and Massachusetts College in 1906-7; the University of North Dakota in 1908-9. Since 1908-9, educational institu-

[1] Sanderson, *loc. cit.*, 434.

tions have entered the field rapidly, attaining the number and proportion previously reported.[1]

Purpose and scope of rural sociology.—If by sociology is always meant a rigidly scientific attempt to account for group phenomena, and if, further, the attempt must be dissociated from utilitarian motives, then the title "rural sociology" is incompetent to express the scientific import of sociological studies of rural communities. But, for the same reasons, there are few treatises which may be called sociologies, and the newer works bearing that name are especially ineligible because they deal so largely with the solution of practical problems. If to treat rural life quite largely as a set of problems to be solved is unscientific, rural sociology at present cannot qualify for the scientific class. It arose out of a growing demand for the application of rational intelligence to the conditions obtaining in country districts, and its initial spirit and motive was thereby necessarily rendered practical and utilitarian. The great business of rural sociology is, and perhaps ever will be, the attainment of a sympathetic understanding of the life of farming communities and the application to them of rational principles of social endeavor. But general sociology, at its best, is but a wrought-out structure of intellectual problems, and if rural sociology pursues its mission of understanding and solving in a rational manner the issues of rural life, it will become scientific, but will differ essentially from sociology in general by reason of its more restricted and immediate sphere. Its first imperative is to understand rural communities in terms of their conditions. Its next imperative is to formulate right ways of action. We may think of rural sociology as that branch of sociology which systematically studies rural communities to discover their conditions and tendencies, and to formulate principles of progress.

Relation of rural sociology to general sociology.—Since it falls within the general sociological field, rural sociology must sustain a somewhat definite relation to the former discipline. Historically, of course, it is obviously subsequent to general sociology since it is embryonic, while general sociology is attaining its adulthood.

1. However it cannot be regarded as a derivative of general

[1] Sanderson, *loc. cit.*, 443.

sociology, in the sense that any particular or peculiar part has been extracted from that subject and formed into a new discipline. Nor has the general subject furnished the facts or the situation out of which rural sociology has been formed. Only in this sense may rural sociology be regarded as a derivative of general sociology: the way of viewing society and the general community principles developed in general sociology are being applied to the organization of the subject by men who have been trained in the larger subject.

2. Rural sociology presupposes general sociology, since it assumes a knowledge of the nature of society and of its inner processes. This knowledge has been developed by general sociology, by a study of the life of primitive groups, of present national and functional groups, and of social evolution in general. One who has gained this knowledge possesses a means of interpreting community conditions which is indispensable for an adequate appreciation of rural neighborhoods. If the student of rural conditions has been unable to equip himself with this broader vision and deeper insight he may yet receive great benefit from the study of rural sociology. We may say, then, that rural sociology depends on general sociology for its wider point of view, its method of approach to social situations, and its grasp of guiding principles for organization and interpretation of facts.

But this does not signify that rural sociology is not an independent discipline—independent in the sense that it is a distinct scientific subject. It is quite as independent of general sociology as the latter is of it, for general sociology is dependent on rural sociology for some of its material and content. The rural social sciences, by means of investigations and findings in rural society, are adding to the sum of human knowledge—knowledge which general sociology or general economics had not possessed previously. Inasmuch as general sociology is forced to rebuild and reorganize itself on the basis of new material and insight consequent to the study of the rural and other social fields, it is dependent on the special social sciences. Consequently, it at least presupposes the knowledge which rural sociology yields and is in that far dependent upon it.

3. Rural sociology is an applied science, while general sociology is a theoretical science. An applied science has more

immediate regard to the application of principles and methods than has a general science. General science seeks to establish wide generalizations, principles of rational procedure, laws of phenomena—factors which may serve as a foundation for practical art and control. It does not concern itself greatly with the art and control situation. Applied science, on the other hand, while it involves generalization and law, has an important interest in their application to concrete situations. It is deeply concerned with art and control results. However, it is not art, application, or control; but it develops principles and organizes its facts with a view to execution, leaving it to administrators and organizers to get practical results.

In this sense, rural sociology is an applied science relative to general sociology. It is an application of the principles and methods of approach of that science to the collection and organization of the material gained by a study of rural conditions.

The field of rural sociology is represented as that of a series or set of problems. But every science, general or applied, is constituted of a series of intellectual problems. Rural sociology is quite as much a series of intellectual constructs and problems as is general sociology; but in that it assumes the truths and principles of the latter and gives more attention to formulating programs of betterment, its intellectual problems bear a stronger resemblance to practical solutions and reforms than do those of general sociology. This is the only justification for calling it an applied science.

Main tasks of rural sociology as an applied science.—Rural sociology deals with rural society exclusively; and it must do this scientifically. We have passed through the rhetorical and preachment stages of treating rural life problems. Rhetoric, oratory, and preachment are, no doubt, still demanded in the practical work of arousing agricultural inhabitants and citizens at large to an appreciation of the country life situation and of stimulating them to appropriate action. This is assumed. But antecedent to doing this practical educational work lies the imperative scientific task of establishing competent and valid knowledge relative to rural society. The more scientific knowledge in general becomes, the more adequate and efficient will the educational process be. Whether speaker, writer, or teacher, the practical educational propagandist and worker must have

the assurance that his facts are accurate and that his illuminating and guiding principles are true.

So much being taken for granted, there are several successive steps for rural sociology to take in the execution of its scientific and practical aim. Without undue expansion, these tasks may be considered as investigation, organization and interpretation of data, and the formulation of improvements wherever required.

1. Like other sciences, rural sociology must find or ascertain the essential facts which lie within its domain. In order to garner these facts it will be necessary to conduct investigations into the conditions obtaining in non-urban communities. This does not imply that the rural sociologist must conduct a personal investigation in all rural neighborhoods, or in a great number, or possibly in even one of them. It is quite likely that, if properly equipped by previous study, the scientist who thoroughly investigates rural life through all available published sources of information will be able to speak more authoritatively on rural society than will the one who has made one or more local studies but who is without wide reading. Investigation may consist of observation of rural phenomena, of local surveys and studies, and of the collection and study of what has been published on rural society.

2. With the essential facts in hand, rural sociology will proceed to organize the data into a body of knowledge, accurately representative of rural society and its conditions. Facts are so much rubbish until played upon and given significance by intelligence. A study of the facts brings a comprehension of the conditions they represent. The facts will be related to each other and assembled into groups according to their significance. Thus related they may represent rural conditions relative to crop production, health, education, the home, and other subjects. So ordered and arranged, they speak of what is, and furnish a foundation for interpretation.

A science which stops short of interpretation of its data is destined to be neither very interesting nor very useful. Science must interpret, if it is to have significance for life; and significance arises when objects and conditions are shown to be related causally. When we know why the one crop system persists in some regions and what it means for the family and