

A NEW DAY COMING

Liberty Hyde Bailey's Prophetic Educational Vision

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Each soul is necessarily a teacher, and he teaches best who sees farthest. The teaching is in the vision, not in the facts. (Bailey 1923, p. 114)

As the title of the special exhibition that opens today suggests, Liberty Hyde Bailey was a complex “man for all seasons” who is not easy to categorize. He was, in equally accomplished ways, a scientist, a teacher, an administrator, an author and editor, a philosopher, an environmentalist, an explorer, and a public servant. He was also in no small measure a prophet.

Bailey's prophecy was, in his own words, of “a new day coming” in American country life (Bailey 1898, p. 14). The “new day” was not only to be one of enhanced agricultural productivity, economic prosperity and material comfort, but also of deep civic, cultural, moral, environmental and spiritual vitality and integrity. It was to be the outgrowth of a new rural civilization “worthy of the best American ideals” (Bailey 1909a, p. 1), and the colleges of agriculture in the nation's system of land-grant universities were to be the central means for bringing it about. “We are now beginning to be consciously concerned in the development of a thoroughly good and sound rural civilization,” Bailey announced in 1909. “The colleges of agriculture will be the most important agencies in this evolution” (Bailey 1910, p. 25-26).

Bailey's interpretation of the mission of land-grant institutions—particularly their colleges of agriculture—was extraordinarily broad and ambitious. He placed this interpretation at the center

of his 1907 speech given at the dedication of the buildings for the New York State College of Agriculture, established under his leadership on May 9, 1904. While noting that the “main or central business of a college of agriculture is to teach the science and the practice of farming”, Bailey proclaimed that

such an institution really stands for the whole open country beyond the bounds of cities, taking this field because it is indivisible and also because other institutions have passed it by. There are whole universities that have a lesser scope than these leading colleges of agriculture. These institutions mean not one iota less than the redirecting of the practices and ideals of country life. (Bailey 1907, pp. 27-38)

Land-grant colleges of agriculture, in Bailey’s view, “contribute to the public welfare in a very broad way, extending their influence far beyond the technique of agricultural trades.” (Bailey 1907, p. 40) Pointing to the larger work of the colleges, he said: “Out of all our facts and discoveries we must now begin to formulate a new social economy.” (p. 40) “In twenty-five years,” he prophesized, “there will be a new political and social philosophy of the open country born out of these institutions.” (p. 37)

On February 26, 1909, almost two years after his speech at the dedication of the new buildings, Bailey delivered an address in the auditorium of Roberts Hall before an audience gathered for Farmers’ Week. Bailey used the address, titled “The College of Agriculture and the State,” to lay out a detailed description of the work of the college. Just as he had done in 1907, he placed the same broad, ambitious educational vision at the center of his speech. “While the College of Agriculture is concerned directly with increasing the producing power of land,” he said, “its activities cannot be limited narrowly to this field. It must stand broadly for rural civilization. It must include within its activities such a range of subjects as will enable it to develop *an entire philosophy or scheme of country life.*” (Bailey 1909a, p. 11) He continued:

All civilization develops out of industries and occupations; and so it comes that agriculture is properly a civilization rather than a congeries of crafts. The colleges of agriculture represent this civilization, in its material, business and

human relations. Therefore, they are not class institutions, representing merely trades and occupations. The task before the colleges of agriculture is nothing less than to direct and to aid in developing the entire rural civilization; and this task places them within the realm of statesmanship. (pp. 11-12)

When Bailey spoke these words he was at the height of his powers and the peak of his academic career. He had just finished his work as chair of President Theodore Roosevelt's national Country Life Commission, having delivered in January the Commission's final report—which he authored—to the President. The final volume of his monumental *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture*—a four-volume work running over 3,000 pages that he served as both editor of and largest contributor to—was just coming off the presses.

At the time, American agriculture was entering what historians have termed its “golden age.” “Most prosperous of all years is the place to which 1909 is entitled in agriculture.” (Wilson 1910, p. 9) So Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson proclaimed in the opening sentence of his annual report to the President, published in the 1909 *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture*. Though agriculture had receded in importance as compared with the nineteenth century, over one third of the nation's workforce was still engaged in agriculture in 1909, a larger percentage than any other type of employment. There were approximately 5.74 million farms, and the nation's rural population stood at just over 25 million people. New York State had about 1 million rural people and nearly 227,000 farms, including more than 67,000 dairy farms. Overall, New York stood fourth in the nation in the total value of its farm products. It stood first in several commodities, including hay and forage, milk, butter, and cheese, apples and small fruits, hops, flowers, and potatoes. (statistics from Bailey 1907, pp. 27-29)

However prosperous agriculture was in the state and nation in terms of yield and financial return for some (but certainly not all) producers, in Bailey's view, larger civic and cultural ideals were yet to be fully realized, and the challenge of sustainability remained to be met. As Bailey observed in 1911, in his typically prophetic voice,

When all the new lands have all been opened to cultivation, and when thousands of millions of human beings occupy the earth, the demand for food will constitute a problem which we scarcely apprehend to-day. We shall then be obliged to develop self-sustaining methods of maintaining the producing-power of land. We think we have developed intensive and perfected systems of agriculture; but as a matter of fact, and speaking broadly, a permanent organized agriculture is yet unknown. . . . It is the ultimate problem of the race to devise a permanent system of agriculture. It is the greatest question that can confront mankind; and the question is yet all unsolved. (Bailey 1911, pp. 195-196)

It is in relation to unrealized civic and cultural ideals—combined with the challenge of pursuing sustainability—that we must work to understand Bailey’s vision of a “new day” for American agriculture and country life. And it is in relation to this vision that we must work to understand the nature, scope, and significance of his prophetic vision of the educational mission and work of the New York State College of Agriculture.

It must be said that Bailey’s vision was extraordinarily tough and demanding to pursue in practice. The things he attempted to bring together—science and democracy, individual freedom and collective action, ecological responsibility and material progress, a high-minded philosophical outlook and a gritty down-to-earth practicality—created a set of tensions that were difficult to hold in balance; too difficult, as it turned out, for in the end, the vision was unrealized. It was overcome and ultimately dashed by the dynamics and realities of the time: partly because it was flawed in certain ways, partly because powerful forces worked against it, and partly because it was simply too demanding.

We think of Bailey’s life work as a great success. But with respect to his hopeful prophecy of a new day, he was in his own judgment a failure. As I was researching Bailey’s papers, I came across a note card on which he had written the following: “I have been 50 years at the job. All my life I have hoped for some great consummation, worthy of the subject and the country of my birth, but I shall pass into the twilight with the vision still unfulfilled.”

Unfulfilled as it was, Bailey's vision still has much to teach us. I want to explore it with you today, and see what we might make of it. To do so, in what follows I will first briefly review Bailey's contrasting views of the old and new days in country life. Second, I will outline his vision of the educational work of the land-grant colleges of agriculture in pursuing the new day. Finally, I will reflect on the significance of Bailey's vision, in his time and ours.

The Old Day

In Bailey's view, the old day in American agriculture and country life was marked by five related problems.

1. The first and most serious problem was the destruction, erosion and "exhaustion" of the soil due to an unsustainable, unscientific, and irresponsible agriculture. In his writings Bailey used harsh words like "blind haphazard", "plunder", "theft", and "robbery" to characterize the farming of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bailey was of course not alone in criticizing American agriculture in this way. A long line of critics reaching back to the founding of the nation had pointed out such problems. (see Stoll 2002) Representative Justin Smith Morrill's first speech on the floor of Congress in 1858 in defense of his bill for the granting of federal lands to endow a new system of colleges was almost entirely focused on a condemnation of American farming practices, with dire warnings about the consequences to the nation's well-being. (Morrill 1858) But Bailey took the critique much deeper than Morrill and many of his fellow critics did, partly by arguing that farmers alone were not to blame. He wrote in 1911:

The natural resources of the earth are the heritage and the property of every one and all of us. A man has no moral right to skin the earth, unless he is forced to do it in sheer self-defense and to enable him to live in some epoch of an unequally developed society; and if there are or have been such social epochs, then is society itself directly responsible for the waste

of the common heritage. We have given every freeholder the privilege to destroy his farm. (Bailey 1911, p. 188)

2. Second, in the old day farmers and rural folk lacked what Bailey termed “full opportunity and full justice”. (Bailey 1915, p. 300) For thousands of years they were exploited by governments and rich landowners. More recently, rural folk were targets of ridicule as “hayseeds”, “bumpkins” and the like. “When the final history is written,” Bailey once said, “the lot of the man on the land will be the saddest chapter.” (Bailey 1915, pp. 299-300)
3. Third, in the old day formal education was disconnected and detached from both the work and affairs of country life, and from nature. The rural school, Bailey wrote, was “in a state of arrested development.” (Bailey 1908, p. 17) Following a “sit-still and keep-still method” (Bailey 1908, p. 139) its pedagogy was based on a “pouring-in-and-dipping-out process”. (Bailey 1903/1909 p. 54) Higher education was even worse than education in the lower grades because it was elitist. In Bailey’s words:

It was the property of the few rather than the many. It was exclusive and selfish. It was considered to be adapted only to certain classes of persons, to certain professions. It was thought to be of no use to all men. Scholars, therefore, were apart from others, from the world. They were a class. It was not strange that learning finally became scholasticism. It shut itself up, and did not associate with the daily business of mankind. It had no direct bearing or influence upon the humble arts of life. (Bailey 1893, p. 3)

4. Fourth, the old day was infected by a corrupt and self-serving politics, marked by divisive partisanship and patronage. “We hear much of boss rule and of graft in municipal politics,” Bailey wrote in 1909, “but it is probable that the difficulty is as great in rural politics . . .”. (Bailey 1909b, p. 27) Bailey viewed the “American system of government as a process of self-education.” (Bailey 1909b, p. 26) But rural government had in Bailey’s view ceased being educational and had “fallen into the hands of men who seek

mere personal advantage.” (Bailey 1909b, p. 26) He described county boards of supervisors in rural districts as being unconcerned with developing their counties as a whole. In Bailey’s judgment, the typical county supervisor “is likely to be chiefly concerned to force down the expenses in his own township and to put the cost of improvements off on somebody else. This spirit runs through rural government. In most cases, such government is dead, as compared with what it might be.” (Bailey 1909b, p. 27)

5. Fifth, in the old day religion was no better than education or politics. Bailey wrote that the rural church was “largely inert or lost . . . concerned in too many cases with technical religion, formal piety, small and empty social duties . . .” (Bailey 1908, pp. 17, 132) Detached from life and split by various contending sects, it offered only a stern and distant God and an otherworldly theology of sorrow and gloom. It preached a fear of nature that encouraged endless complaints about the weather (one of Bailey’s pet peeves), and more importantly, “unsympathy” with nature. As Bailey put it in 1909, “Our traditional idea of God as a ruler who sits on a distant throne and manages the universe is another expression of our unsympathy with nature, because we put God above, beyond, and outside nature.” (Bailey 1910, p. 26) It also preached a philosophy of dominion that falsely placed humans at the center of creation. But “The living creation is not exclusively man-centered”, Bailey proclaimed in 1915 in his most important and prophetic book, *The Holy Earth*: “it is biocentric.” (Bailey 1915/1980, p. 23)

The New Day

The new day Liberty Hyde Bailey prophesized featured a transformation of all of the above:

- from an agriculture of tradition and blind haphazard that plundered the soil to one of intelligence that maintained and even improved the soil;
- from a situation of oppression and exploitation of rural folk to one that granted them full opportunity and justice;

- from an education detached from life and nature to an active, place-based, experiential education;
- from a corrupt, self-serving and ineffective politics of patronage and partisanship to a public-spirited democratic politics that served and involved the public; and
- from a gloomy otherworldly religion that feared nature to a religion of joy and of sympathy for all creation.

“I have no socialistic program to propose” to achieve the new day, Bailey wrote in 1911. (Bailey 1911, p. 189) Neither did he have a technocratic program. The new day was to be built voluntarily, arising naturally out of the country itself. As Bailey put it:

What I have in mind is far more than the mere relief of symptoms here and there. I want to see the development of a virile and effective rural society; and I know that such a society can come only as the result of forces arising directly out of the country, as a natural expression of the country itself, not as a reflection or transplanting of city institutions. The country must develop its own ideals and self-respect. (Bailey 1908, p. 64)

The central feature of Bailey’s vision of the new day was a full and widespread embrace of science and the scientific spirit. This was the foundation stone of the new day, the one thing on which everything else was to be built. Listen to Bailey in the following passage, taken from a lecture titled “The Better Preparation of Men for College and Station Work,” given in 1909 at the annual convention of the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations in Portland, Oregon:

The beginning of all real rural development is a rational outlook on the part of those who live in the open country. Country people must interpret nature from cause to effect rather than by tradition, notion, or prejudice. . . . By removing extraneous interests, the spread of the scientific spirit should enable men and women to work together without conflict, and it should develop a fine idealism. . . . Now, if this spirit were to guide all men it would revolutionize all our business;

for a large part of the business of the world is essentially morally unjust, even though it may conform itself perfectly to the statutory law. It would also revolutionize our politics, for it would take out of political operation the element of expediency and compromise which now dominates it. And it would shatter much of the theology that we now think we believe. There is just as much need that we develop politics and government on a scientific method as that we develop chemistry, or botany, or physiology on that method. It is first necessary actually to study the conditions and to determine what are the facts; then on these facts to establish a constructive procedure and to let the whole question of favor and of patronage be forgotten. Government by patronage and by influence is a phase of an undeveloped and dishonest society. Only as we found government on evidence and develop it in the scientific spirit can we expect to have really good government, or to make the best progress in civilization. (Bailey 1910, pp. 28, 27)

Educational Vision and Work

The theme of science and the scientific spirit brings us directly to the topic of Bailey's vision of the work of the land-grant colleges of agriculture. Grounded in his embrace of the scientific spirit, he called for a remarkably active and aggressive role for faculty, staff and students in stimulating an evolution toward a new day. But their role was not to be one of technocratic manipulation and control: rather, it was to inspire, inform, and organize a broad, democratic voluntary movement committed to building the new day. For Bailey, the challenge of building a new day and a new rural civilization was primarily an educational challenge. To put it another way, the solution to the problems of the old day was education.

With respect to farming, the new permanent agriculture was to be highly diversified and complex, requiring civic-minded and also ecology-minded producers. "We are to take from the earth much more than we have taken before," Bailey said, "but it will be taken in a new way and with better intentions. It will be seen, therefore, that we are not here dealing narrowly with an occupation but with something very fundamental to our life on the planet. (Bailey 1915/1980, p.

20) In light of this point, education—both technical and civic, liberal and practical—was essential: “Highly diversified agriculture demands the highest degree of special and technical skill, as it also develops a wide diversity of affairs and a high type of citizenship.” (Bailey 1907, p. 34)

Bailey’s view of the farmer’s obligations highlights the importance of the non-technical moral and civic dimensions of farming, helping to explain why he placed them inside the educational mission and work of the college. The farmer, he wrote,

is engaged in a quasi-public business. He really does not even own his land. He does not take his land with him, but only the personal development that he gains from it. He cannot annihilate his land, as another might destroy all his belongings. He is the agent or the representative of society to guard and to subdue the surface of the earth; and he is the agent of the divinity that made it. He must exercise his dominion with due regard to all these obligations. He is a trustee. The productiveness of the earth must increase from generation to generation: this also is his obligation. (Bailey 1915/1980, p. 24).

Given this view, we can understand a large part of the logic behind Bailey’s rejection of a narrowly technical education for farmers in favor of a broad liberal and practical education. “The man who is to till the land must be educated,” Bailey insisted, “there is more need, on the side of the public welfare, to educate this man than any other man whatsoever. When he knows, and his obligations to society are quickened, he will be ready to become a real conservator.” (Bailey 1911, p. 189)

The spread of the scientific spirit or attitude was to be seen as a key result of the educational work of the colleges and their experiment stations. The point was not to have scientists do things *for* farmers, but to develop in them and other rural citizens a “new and open-minded attitude” that would help them improve their situations and meet their public obligations:

Beyond all “practical” application of the work of these institutions is the new and open-minded attitude that they develop on all problems under discussion. They

banish all guessing, all moon farming, and all think so. The farmer is now willing to learn and to cast old notions aside; and for this reason the world is becoming a new world to him and he is beginning to understand his situation. As rapidly as he understands his situation he will master it. (Bailey 1910, p. 28)

It is only in relation to the mission of spreading the scientific spirit and stimulating and informing a voluntary movement devoted to pursuing the new day in country life that we can fully understand the significance of Bailey's view of the educational work of the land-grant colleges of agriculture. Such colleges, Bailey believed, had three "proper" lines of educational work: "the regular or ordinary teaching; the discovery of truth, or research; the extending of their work to all the people." (Bailey 1909a, p. 12)

The regular teaching was to be based on direct engagement with common objects and affairs, using agriculture as a means of education. "To educate young men and women by means of the common affairs of country life, is the primary object of this College of Agriculture," he wrote. (Bailey 1909a, p. 16) Speaking about the national land-grant system, he said:

The agricultural colleges are rapidly developing a system of education for country life, meaning, by that phrase, the utilizing of agricultural and outdoor subjects to develop the student into a man of sensitiveness and power. The home, the school, the church, the road, the rural community, the relation of all this to citizenship and politics, the love of nature, the development of the art-sense and the love of literature—all these, as well as the specific agricultural subjects, are comprised in the curriculum of the modern college of agriculture. (Bailey 1909a, p. 465)

Bailey proposed two broad, interrelated aims for his experiential view of education: to "set the pupil in relation with his environment and to fit him for the work of the world." (Bailey 1909c, p. 430). Good education, for Bailey, helped individuals to develop "breadth of view, clear reasoning power, good judgment, tolerance, high ideals, sensitiveness to art and nature, [and] devotion to service." (Bailey 1905/1911, p. 98-99) While he most certainly viewed the development of technical knowledge and skills as important aims, he wrote that the larger aim of

education was not the “mere training of the mind” but rather putting students “into sympathy with common affairs and the questions of the work-a-day world.” (Bailey 1905/1911, p. 101) “[S]ensitiveness to life is the highest product of education,” he wrote. (Bailey 1905/1911, p. 99)

For Bailey, the vehicles for an active education that set people in relation with their environment and fit them for the work of the world included both the “institutional” school and the “school of affairs” (i.e., life). His ideal was the “addition of the school work to the real work.” (Bailey 1905/1911, p. 104) Schools and colleges were thus seen as complements to the educational aspects of life and work, rather than as substitutes.

With respect to the college’s research work, Bailey said: “It is impossible to have a good college of agriculture without careful research work as its basis. Therefore, every effort must be made to secure able investigators and to enable them to pursue their work with perfect freedom, and not to hold them rigidly merely to problems of immediately so-called practical importance.” (Bailey 1909a, p. 13) He therefore firmly and equally embraced both so-called “pure” or “basic” research and “applied” research.

The teaching and research work of the college included a wide range of technical subjects, including crops and livestock, household subjects (i.e., home economics), mechanical and engineering issues, landscape architecture, training teachers for rural education, and farm management. Also to be included was what Bailey termed the “human problems.” “There is as much need of an agricultural application of economic and social questions as there is need of an agricultural application of chemistry,” he said. “[I]n fact, there is a greater need of it, for at the bottom all civilization is but a complex of these human questions.” (Bailey 1909a, p. 25)

The final component of the educational work of land-grant colleges of agriculture was extension. Bailey’s view of extension’s mission was decidedly not as a means for propaganda for the college, or for the dispensing of facts. “Facts are trivial as facts,” Bailey wrote.

They do not open the eyes of the blind, nor kindle the soul with enthusiasm. We are slaves to facts. Wake a man up. Shake out localisms and prejudices. Inspire him. Set him to work. Send him on his mission with joy. (Bailey 1898, p. 13)

For Bailey, extension education was an awakening, arousing, and organizing process. As he put it in the *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, extension was a means for the “rousing of the people on the land” (Commission 1911, p. 127). Its mission was to “reach every person on the land . . . with both information and inspiration.” (Commission 1911, p. 29)

In his 1909 Farmers’ Week speech, Bailey spoke of extension work as “all kinds of teaching with the people at their homes and on the farms.” (Bailey 1909a, p. 28) In his view, “The best extension work must attack the fundamental problems of country life, as well as merely the betterment problems. (Bailey 1909a, p. 31) Extension education was not to be a means for technocratic control and manipulation, but rather, through inspiration, a means for helping people help themselves. “Now, a man’s farm is his laboratory,’ Bailey noted. “No one may direct him how to manage his farm; but a good teacher coming to his place may set him into new lines of thinking and put him in the way of helping himself.” (Bailey 1909a, p. 32)

Bailey did not view extension as an afterthought or add-on to the college’s “real” mission. Rather, he viewed it as an embodiment of its larger public or civic mission, more important even than the education of resident students. “I should like to see the principle officially recognized that the office of universities is primarily a mission to the people,” he wrote in 1893, “and that mere graduation of students is an incidental or secondary feature.” (Bailey 1893, p. 11)

The core of the extension program Bailey proposed was the development of agricultural surveys in every agricultural community or district. Such surveys were to be broad and comprehensive, taking into account

the detailed topography and soil conditions of the localities, the local climate, the whole character of streams and forests, the agricultural products, the cropping systems now in practice, the conditions of highways, markets, facilities in the way of transportation and communication, the institutions and organizations, the adaptability of the neighborhood to the establishment of handicrafts and local industries, the general economic and social status of the people and the character

of the people themselves, natural attractions and disadvantages, historical data, and a collation of community experience. (Bailey 1913, p. 248)

Agricultural surveys would “result in the collection of local fact, on which we could proceed to build a scientifically and economically sound country life.” (Bailey 1913, p. 248) Importantly, the surveys were to be a means for discovering and organizing local leadership:

No small part of the value of such surveys will be the discovery of great numbers of earnest, competent men and women on the farms who may be made local leaders, and the recognition that it will give to good agricultural practice everywhere. Every thorough survey should be the forerunner of new ideals for the communities, and of new points of crystallization of local effort. It should make new paths. (Bailey 1908, p. 84)

Reflections

After laying out his vision of the educational work of land-grant colleges of agriculture in his 1909 speech during Farmers’ Week, Bailey acknowledged that for some of his listeners, “All this may seem to be far away to the philosopher and the dreamer . . .”. For many, it was. But, he confidently proclaimed, “the plain people are ready.” (Bailey 1909a, p. 33) He concluded his remarks by saying:

I have wanted to present this outline in the formative stage of the College, in order that the people may discuss the institution at their leisure and be able to make up their minds what kind of College they want and how far they desire to see it developed. (Bailey 1909a, p. 35)

What are we to make of Bailey’s “outline” of the college? What are we to make of his prophetic vision of a new day for American country life and his vision of the mission and work of land-grant colleges of agriculture in pursuing it? How are we to understand and interpret the significance of his vision for his time, and for ours?

These are difficult questions to answer.

Bailey's vision reflects a sophisticated attempt to reconcile and integrate a set of conflicting forces, ideas and ideals during a key moment in American history. As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, these included science and democracy, individual freedom and collective action, ecological responsibility and material progress, a high-minded philosophical outlook and a gritty down-to-earth practicality. The integration of these forces, ideas and ideals in such a way as to result in the social order Bailey envisioned for the new day was an enormously demanding intellectual, political, cultural and moral project—not only for rural citizens, but for the faculty, staff and students of agricultural colleges, for a wide variety of professions, and for society at large.

Bailey rejected a technocratic path that would engineer the new day from on high. He rejected a path that would simply have government scientists and other technical experts solve farmers' problems for them, either through legislation on their behalf or through the provision of quick and easy technical fixes. Instead, he chose the tough and much longer-term path of democratic public work. For Bailey, the new day was to be a collaborative public work project, the creation of a voluntary movement composed of rural citizens and a broad coalition of groups, institutions, and professions organized from the ground up, devoted not simply to technical advances and material betterment but to deep cultural, moral, political and spiritual transformation.

The success of Bailey's vision depended on two crucial hopes, both of which failed to pan out. First was the hope that rural citizens would become avid environmentalists, developing a distinct rural culture built primarily on a close "sympathy" for and connection with nature. As Bailey put it, the rural citizen's "entertainment and contentment must come largely out of his occupation and his contact with nature, not from mere extraneous attractions . . . the countryman must be able to interest himself spiritually in his native environment as his chief resource of power and happiness. (State and the Farmer, pp. 64-65) I hardly need to say that this did not come to pass.

Second was the unrealistic—we might even say naïve—hope about the power of science and the scientific spirit in revolutionizing every aspect of life, leading even to the elimination of conflict. As Bailey put it, “By removing extraneous interests, the spread of the scientific spirit should enable men and women to work together without conflict, and it should develop a fine idealism.” (Bailey 1910, p. 28) This is certainly a fine hope. But it was not and is not possible to realize in the sweeping way Bailey thought it would be.

Despite its flaws, Liberty Hyde Bailey’s prophetic vision, articulated in his many writings, continues to serve as a source of wisdom and of considerable inspiration, even in our time. Its lasting significance is not to be found in its exact details. Rather, it is to be found in its overall humanity, its infectious and inspiring hopefulness, its effect of lifting and expanding our own vision, and in its remarkably eloquent communication of core human ideals that transcend time and place.

Bailey once wrote: “Each soul is necessarily a teacher, and he teaches best who sees farthest. The teaching is in the vision, not in the facts.” (Bailey 1923, p. 114) In his voluminous writings on all manner of subjects, Bailey always took the long—and larger—view of things. And yet, this accomplished scientist, this man with a grand and far-reaching vision was at heart a farm boy from Michigan who loved and celebrated the commonplace.

“I preach the near-at-hand, however plain and ordinary”, he wrote in 1905.

the cloud and the sunshine; the green pastures; the bird on its nest and the nest on its bough; the rough bark of trees; the frost on bare thin twigs; the mouse skittering to its burrow; the insect seeking its crevice; the smell of the ground; the sweet wind; the silent stars; the leaf that clings to its twig or that falls when its work is done. Wisdom flows from these as it can never flow from libraries and laboratories. (1905, pp. 9-10)

Toward the end of his life, Bailey wrote the following:

We deceive ourselves if we turn from the essentials and try to satisfy ourselves with the small and trivial gratifications of this age. Let us look more closely about

us and see how good are the common things, how marvelous are all the things made at the beginning. The meaning of life is in its beauty. And ten thousand years from now children will call across the centuries that the world is young, that the sunshine is good, that love and faith, and mystery and the buoyancy of life are the only realities. (Bailey 1950, p. 129)

Here, perhaps, is Bailey's most important and enduring teaching.

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