

## The Farmers Union as an Educational Movement.

Address by Mr. A. C. Davis, Nat'l Sec'y.  
Before annual meeting of North Carolina Farmers Union at Raleigh, December 11th.

This is the first time since the organization of your Union that I have had the pleasure of addressing the delegates to your meeting, and through them the membership of the entire State. The opportunity of getting away from the office and greeting the brethren comes as a pleasant relief from the daily office routine.

In no State would there appear to be less need of the voices of National officials to encourage the membership than in North Carolina, possessed as you are of such a compact State organization, and the evidence everywhere manifested of a determined stand for progress. However, amid the most promising surroundings there is often a necessity for saying something to encourage those who are not so familiar with the work of the Union as might be hoped. It is to reach just such a one through your returning delegates, rather than to give you the message, that we shall spend a few moments in discussing the Farmers' Union as an educational and co-operative force, its accomplishment and its prospects.

This is distinctively an age of advancement and enlightenment. Changes in every department of life come with lightning-like rapidity. The wonderful things of to-day are forgotten to-morrow in the contemplation of greater improvements. Business methods well suited to the Puritan and Cavalier find no place in the commerce of the world. Plans of government applicable a hundred years ago are now obsolete. Ideals and standards of our nation of a few thousand population do not apply to America's teeming billions, assembled from the four winds of the earth.

The man whose ingenuity can devise a way for lessening the cost of manufactured articles commands the highest salary. The business man has a mania for cheapening the cost of production. His financial rise often depends solely on his ability to produce a commodity at a minimum of expense. Business methods of our farmers do not compare favorably with those of other lines of activity. Production has been carried on without reference to the cost. Aside from the changes brought by the introduction of labor-saving devices, the science of cheap production has not improved with the centuries.

In my judgment the greatest problem before the American people to-day is the economic production and distribution of the necessities of life. The questions of tariff regulation, the monetary system, the restriction of immigration, and dozens of other issues before the nation to-day are very important as problems of government, but they pale before a subject that has to do with the very life of a people. This matter has not been given the prominence due it as a great national problem. True a tardy government has been aroused in recent years to expend considerable energy in promoting the study of production, but neither the government nor the people have taken seriously the matter of distribution. Farmers have for years realized, without knowing just what, that something was wrong. They have time and again through the mercies of a kind Providence produced abundant crops only to see them swept away in the greedy game of commerce without realizing a just share of the profit. Spasmodic efforts have been made by them at irregular intervals to get at whatever was in their way by organization. These efforts failed to secure desired results largely because the real cause being somewhat obscure, the scope of the work was at right angles to the main trouble. Not until the Farmers' Union appeared preaching the doctrine of economic distribution has there been a blow struck that was at all effective.

The founders of the organization were broad enough to realize that any remedy suggested as a means of relief from the iniquities of the present wasteful system would not be adopted until farmers were taught its value, and for this reason they styled the movement the Educational and Co-operative Union.

The activities of the Union as a factor in education have not been confined to teaching the doctrines peculiar to the organization. Many problems affecting country life are before the farmers of America, and the Union has no desire to shift its part of the responsibility for their solution.

The efforts of the Federal Government to demonstrate the ability of our soils to produce more abundantly under judicious management has met with remarkable success, especially in the South. This has been due in no small part to the co-operation of our organization. The mere fact that a man affiliates with a movement for the betterment of his class is evidence of his progressiveness, and wherever the Farmers Union is found, progressive farmers are found. These men are not content to be soil robbers, and have actively assisted Government demonstration because they saw in them help in solving the great problem of economic production. The National Union maintains a standing Committee on Education whose present Chairman, C. C. Wright, represents your State on the National Board of Directors. This committee has done some very efficient work in the organization of State and local committees for the promotion of scientific agriculture, and the organization of clubs among the boys and girls that farm life may be made attractive to the youth of our land.

Great stress is being laid upon the importance of teaching scientific agriculture, in an elementary way at least, in the common schools, and laws have been passed or will be enacted in the near future in each State where the Union is a working force, making this a part of the regular course of study. The idea suggested by us does not stop with the teaching of scientific production, but includes the art of distribution. One State Union at least, California, is demanding that this phase be given equal prominence in her schools with that of production.

This idea appeals to me very forcefully. It opens up a field of activity for our educational committee, which in my judgment they would do well to enter. The cry over the "high cost of living" has aroused the people, and those who erroneously believe that the farmer is to blame will bend every effort to have the production increased that prices may be lowered. They are not at all concerned about your making a profit. The working out of a plan of co-operation distribution is peculiar to the organization. We need not hope for help in this gigantic undertaking, other than that we may be able to force from the Federal and State governments. That it is difficult to teach men the benefits of co-operation, who by constant years of plodding have become set in their ways, has been proven time and time again. The idea carried to the children of our schools through a course of years need not prove so difficult, and it is gratifying that our membership is awakening to the advantages thus afforded.

The idea is prevalent that the greatest crop of recent years has been an over-production of consumers, and on every hand is heard the injunction, "Back to the land," coupled with, "How shall we solve the rural problem?" Many offers of assistance in its solution have been made by persons who are earnest in their intentions but unless the farmers are actively enlisted we are apt to see no betterment in the near future. Speeches have been made and volumes written about how to keep the boys and girls upon the farm. To many this is the real rural problem. Speaking personally, I think there should be some modification of this attempt to keep boys and girls upon the farm. Not all coun-

try children are adapted by nature to become farmers or farmers' wives, any more than the children of a minister are peculiarly fitted for the ministry. The children of city parents are prepared so far as the circumstances will permit for the particular avocation which they may select, and we have no right to circumscribe the life of a child merely because he happens to be born in the country. Cities have drawn and will continue to draw upon the country for men in whose veins flows the red blood of energy, and for one I say, God speed the young man whose horizon has broadened and whose application merits success in any undertaking.

The great rural problem, as I see it, is not so much keeping the boys and girls upon the farm as it is giving them a preparation which will fit them for intelligent citizenship in whatever calling they may elect. It is probably true in many instances that the young life in rural districts has become discouraged by daily routine of drudgery and hard work and the lack of healthy amusement, and has harkened to the call of the city and its "gay White Way." Many of these, being poorly fitted to cope with life in the mad whirl, have not risen above mediocrity, but after all has been said about children leaving the farm, the truth is that by far the great majority of our country youth will live out their lives on the farm. It is for these who are to be the farmers of the future, as well as for those who leave the farm to enter other professions, that the Farmers' Union is stressing the importance of our rural schools as a factor in the development of our citizenship.

Every advance step of the human race has been made as a direct result of educational forces. Civilization advances by slow processes of education. No country, no matter how learned may have been its aristocracy, has long survived that has neglected the educational needs of its struggling citizens. Man is, and always has been, an aspiring creature. In society relations he reaches out after the highest attainments of the foremost of his race. No locality should be content with an educational system that does not place the most advanced thought of the age before its pupils. No single agency is so potent a force in shaping the life and fixing the standards of a community as its public school. Our rural schools must be so safeguarded by the State as to insure to the pupils a training for citizenship with at least some attention to the sphere in life which, by reason of environments, they may reasonably be expected to occupy.

Poets may sing of the bewitching beauty of scenes around the old farm home and we may all be seized with a sentimental longing for life in the open in the pleasant days of spring, but boys and girls whose lives are a monotonous round of chores, relieved by only an occasional feast of merrymaking and that given grudgingly, need not be expected to go into any such raptures.

Life in the rural communities must be made as attractive and inviting as in our towns and cities, else all the urging back to the land will pass as so many empty words. We may argue the beauty of country life until we are red in the face, but until it can be demonstrated that the farmer not only receives a just recompense for his labor, but is surrounded with the comforts and some of the luxuries of modern civilization, our exhortation will vanish as a midnight dream.

The Farmers' Union offers itself to the farmers of America as an agency for bringing about these better conditions. We hope by continuously urging the necessity for teaching agriculture to soon place within the reach of every boy and girl of rural America a training that will develop in them a love for farm life. Statistics show that over 90 per cent of the attendants in our country schools go no higher, but for those who can attend them we are now creating special agricultural schools on every hand. We hope not only to fit the curriculum to the needs of the pupil but to augment the general efficiency by lengthening the term.

To the men of the South especially do we appeal to take a firm stand for this reform. It is appalling that the average length of term in some of our Southern States is less than one hundred days, yet we expect our boys and girls with such meager facilities to cope with minds trained through several years of eight or nine months each. No wonder that many of the children who leave the farms never rise above mediocrity.

(Continued next week.)