

The American Farmer
in relation to the Economic Crisis #

Printed

On behalf of some 7,600,000, (according to U. S. Census 7,670,439) of our countrymen who are directly engaged in the various branches of agriculture, I wish to thank the Program Committee of this Conference and acknowledge the courtesy of this body, for the representation provided for on this platform. Counting the families, these 7,000,000 farmers stand for a population of over 23,000,000, or about one-third the entire population of the United States. This large class of citizens might, of course, in a way be represented by lawyers, clergymen and the members of other professions and occupations; they have often been so represented in the United States Congress, and even in the political conventions which nominate congressmen and presidents. But there has been a growing feeling among farmers, for a decade or two, that the old saying "he that would be well served must serve himself" applies to their political affairs. A conviction has become prevalent among them that they have vital interests that no other class of citizens

Address of General Charles H. Howard at Buffalo N.Y.
June 29, before the National Social and Political Conference. Pub-
lished by the National Farmers' Union.

The House of Representatives
in relation to the Farmington

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in the political conventions which nominate congressmen and presidents.
But there has been a growing feeling among farmers, for a decade or two,
that the old saying "he that would be well served must serve himself"
applies to their political affairs. A conviction has become prevalent
among them that they have vital interests that no other class of citizens

can appreciate as well as themselves; that other classes such as manufacturers, merchants and bankers may indeed represent interests more or less in conflict with those of the farmer.

On the other hand, I am not here to plead for any public policy which shall favor agriculture to the injury of any other business. The farmers of our country have come in for some pretty hard names of late. At some of these, such as "hayseeds", "horny-handed sons of toil", etc., they can afford to smile good naturedly; at others like the "man with the muck-rake" or "the man with the hoe" they are thoughtful. Does the occupation of agriculture necessarily tend to degrade?

Classic literature, both Latin and English, afford an answer:

"Beatus ille qui procul negotiis

Ut prisca gens mortalium

Paterna rura bobus exercet suis."

-Horace.

"In ancient times the sacred plough employed

The kings and awful fathers of mankind,

And some, with whom compared your insect tribes

are but the beings of a summer's day

Have held the scale of empire, ruled the storm

of mighty war, then with unwearied hand

Disdaining little delicacies, seized the plow

and greatly independent lived."

-Thompson's Seasons.

—H. O. L. W. CO.

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(3)

And yet some of our farmers ~~clinged~~ ^{advanced} inwardly when, lately, ^{you could read in their faces:}
they looked upon Millet's ^{picture} "The Man With the Hoe." ["] This is not my like-
ness. ["] It is not a picture of my boy. ["] Is it to be a portrait of my
son's son? ["]

"A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,

Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox."

If not our occupation, do its conditions mean this for those who come
after us? Must the descendant of the American farmer revert to the
European peasant type?

"Bowed by the weight of centuries, he leans

Upon his hoe and gazes upon the ground,

The emptiness of ages in his face,

And on his back the burden of the world.

#

There is no shape more terrible than this —

More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed."

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(4)

The speaker spent a brief period in the 70's on a sugar plantation in Cuba. It was before the emancipation of the slaves. The field hands rose at three o'clock in the morning. A piece of cold corn bread stood for breakfast, eaten as they were hurried to their task. At ten o'clock they were served from a great kettle their one principal meal of hominy or rice. Men and women were herded and driven like animals under the lash of the brutal overseer. The sad and hopeless expression on the faces of some of these slaves -- especially of the women -- has never in all these years been effaced from my memory. This was Spanish slavery; and that on the sugar, rice and cotton plantations in our own country was like it. But those negroes whom I saw in Cuba were emancipated and the men and their sons made up the rank and file with Gomez and Garcia. They have fought for their country; they will be citizens; their children will be better educated than they. They are looking up.

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Our farmers' sons find that the old farm is depreciating every year; the income from it is diminishing; there is not enough for all;

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(5)

the sons and daughters cannot be sent away to school or to college as
was the practice forty-four years ago when the speaker left home on
the New England farm for his four years' course of study. The boys, and
also! *also,* *What is their life here?*
~~also~~ the girls seek employment in the cities. Take Wykoff's pen picture
of what he saw at a manufactory of agricultural implements.

He lost his name and almost his individuality and identity. He became
a number, a cog in the wheel of labor. Up before light in the morning;
released late in the evening; a steady grind of toil; no recreation;
no hope of promotion. If unmarried, small chance to save enough to own
a home; if married, with a family of children, the temptation ever before
him to make virtual slaves of his offspring and, if not, the certainty
of seeing them come up street gamins, with the saloon for their univer-
sity and the chances of the jail and prison the goal of manhood.

but is it any better?
This is not European peasant life, one may say; yes, *in our own country*
is the history of many a boy who has been forced from the farm by its
hard conditions during the past six or seven years — nay, for twenty-
five years past. These sons of the farmer are looking down. Their faces

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are toward the ground.

"But those that do ~~come~~ ^{stay} on the old farm, surely they are better off?" Let us examine more carefully ^{to} in their condition:
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Taking Census Bulletin 378 and the figures of the official statistician of the Department of Agriculture, we find that the value of farm products for the average farm in the United States was \$538.94. Allowing 5.74 persons to each farm, as reported by the census, and divide the \$538.94 among them equally, we find that our agricultural population receives an average annual per capita income of \$93.89. Divide this amount by the number of days in the year (365), and we have for those who depend on the farm for a living an average per capita income of 25.8 cents per day.

It must be borne in mind that this \$538.94 per farm, or 25.8 cents a day per capita, is not the profit made from the average farm or day's labor, but constitutes the value of the entire crops. It includes that portion consumed on the farm as well as that portion sold. Out of this amount the farmer must pay his taxes, insurance, interest, the cost of seed, hired help, wear and tear of farm implements, repairing of fences

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seed, hired help, wear and tear of farm implements, repairing of fences

and buildings, and feed for his team for one year while cultivating the crops. All these items must be paid out of the \$538.94 before the farmer can have anything for himself and family. The question then is, how much will the average farmer and his family have for their own support after paying all these items? Will they have 15 cents per day per capita? No. Will they have ten? Possibly yes, but I doubt it. For argument's sake, however, we will admit that our agricultural population receives a per capita income of ten cents per day, with which to buy food and clothing, educate the children and pay incidental expenses.

COMPARE FARMER AND PAUPER.

Now, to bring out the meaning of these figures in bold relief—the moral force, if you please, of this condition of things — take two facts and compare them.

1. Cost of keeping a pauper at public expense in Illinois, 28.5 cents per day.

2. Price paid to the state of Illinois for the labor of a convict, 39.4 cents per day.

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1. Cost of keeping a pauper at public expense in Illinois, \$8.5

cents per day.

2. Price paid to the state of Illinois for the labor of a convict,

\$3.4 cents per day.

(8)

Please set down in your memory again and let it burn ⁱⁿ a little, if you will: The average daily income of every one dependent on the farm for a living is ten cents!

The agricultural population of the United States is compelled, under present conditions, to live on an income below that provided for paupers; and receive less for their labor than is paid for convicts.

Is there no moral significance in these figures? Do they not appeal to a sense of duty, of equity on the part of those who hear me? If there be any condition of finance or currency or of economic laws which can be reached by us, as citizens, through our Congress, and which has produced such a result, can we shirk our plain duty to remedy this condition?

It does not make it any better that such facts pertain to other industries.
~~This is but a single specimen fact. It can be multiplied from~~

~~almost every class of industry. Thousands are tramps and beggars to-day.~~

~~We know it.~~ For my part, I cannot ignore these facts and figures.

They mean not starvation alone, they mean the wrecking of homes, the breaking up of families, the crushing out of the bright hopes of youth,

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They mean not starvation alone, they mean the wrecking of homes, the

breaking up of families, the crushing out of the bright hopes of youth,

the shattering of faith. They mean the poorhouse to the sick and aged. They mean tears and untold sorrow. They mean the breaking of hearts. They mean despondency, despair and suicide. They mean crime.

Alas: with such conditions Millet's picture or Edwin Markham's poem will not have to wait for ages or centuries to find its counterpart in our country. If we do not yet, in vision even, see "Times' tragedy," "in that aching stoop" we already find traces of famished minds, suffering hearts, desperate resolves, bitterness and hatred.

But this is not Christian, some ^{one} ~~of my brethren of the church~~ may say. "These are the necessities of life and they should be meekly borne and develop patience."

Here we take issue. It is not an inevitable and cruel necessity that pauperizes the American farmer and degrades his children and enkindles in his heart too often the spirit of retaliation and revenge.

The economic or financial system of our country is somehow wrong when 91 per cent of the families own 29 per cent of the wealth and 9 per cent of the families own about 71 per cent of the wealth.

(foot note) * George K. Holmes, Political Science Monthly.

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9 per cent of the families own about 71 per cent of the wealth.

(10)

According to a carefully obtained list published in the New York Tribune, of those who own the 71 per cent of wealth, there are 4,047 known millionaires. These average at least \$3,000,000 each.

Another statistician ^{of high reputation for accuracy} Charles B. Spahr, sums up the wealth distribution as follows: "Less than half the families in America are propertyless; nevertheless, seven-eighths of the families hold but one-eighth of the national wealth, while one per cent of the families hold more than the remaining 99 per cent."

According to an estimate of Mr. Edward Atkinson 14,000,000 of the 15,000,000 families in our country are supported on incomes of less than \$400 a year, 700,000 on less than \$1000 and the remaining 300,000 on larger incomes. But the average annual income of the richest 100 American millionaires is estimated by good authority (Thomas G. Shearman in Forum) at \$1,500,000. Put this again by the side of four-fifths of American families whose earnings average less than \$500 per annum.

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According to a carefully obtained list published in the New

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Causes

(11)

9
~~The speaker~~ purposely refrained from a discussion of the causes which have produced these deplorable results. They are attributed by some to the development of monopolies, combines and trusts by which the wealthy, under favoring legislation, have greatly added to their riches and of necessity the poor have become poorer. *What has been said in this conference of monopolies* Some have attributed this enormous inequality to the effects of contraction in the currency or the quantity of standard money, so enhancing the purchasing power of money and giving to those who had capital great advantage over those who had not. *The* (This is styled monopoly of money.)

Others attribute both the trusts and the riches acquired by them to the effect of the policy and laws of the protective tariff. And as wheat and cotton and such farm products as depend on a foreign market have no protection, the tariff is pronounced very unjust to the farmer. He is taxed in so far as he exports his products, by the increased price on the protected goods which he buys but gets no corresponding protection on his own exports. The price of these is simply the world's price. To remedy this an export bounty has been earnestly advocated.

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The important fact is that

(12)

R For many years there has been an almost unvarying fall in prices of farm products, including live stock. (See Table from Agricultural Dept. for 1892 to 1898 attached). This is destructive to the property values of the agriculturist and is more the source of disappointment and distress than would be the mere fact of low prices, if stable.

The Boston Times.

But times are better, says my Republican friend: Yes, the price of breadstuffs advanced greatly from the increased demand, growing out of the loss of crops in several foreign countries in 1897. Even in 1898 prices kept up and as late as till June, 1899, the export of wheat and cotton had continued to be about as great in quantity as the previous year. But just here we are met with an appalling fact. The receipts on wheat and some of the other cereals and on cotton have, *(the year ending June 1899)* owing to reduced prices, this year fallen off \$50,000,000. as compared with the year before. That \$50,000,000 is now to be subtracted from the income of the agriculturist of our country — about \$2 for each man, woman and child of the farmer's family. This means another pinch; and this notwithstanding that we are still feeling the effects of the short

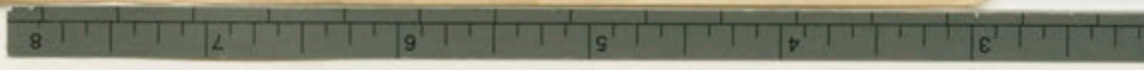
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crops abroad. We must surely count on another drop if there is a return to normal crops in all countries.

With the ^{accy} income already down to ten cents a day — less than that of the prisoner or the pauper of Illinois — and then subtract ^{of three members} \$7.14 more from each head of family for the year with almost an absolute certainty of another drop next year and the general conditions such as to force the conviction that all prices and values, except money, will continue steadily to fall, what are we to expect in moral effects except what is most deplorable?

Falling Prices the great evil.

Until some remedy is suggested for the evil of falling prices and until the rich cease to become richer and the poor poorer, how are we to bring any good cheer to the farmer? Look again at our sore-hearted, discouraged, desperate son of the soil. May we not quote the inspired words of the poet? the prophecy as well as protest?

How will you ever straighten up this shape;

Touch it again with immortality;

Give back the upward looking and the light;

Rebuild in it the music and the dream;

Make right the immemorial infamies;

Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

*Get
at factory*

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Make right the immortal intemperance;

Perdition wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,

How will the Future reckon with this Man?

How answer his brute question in that hour

When whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world?

How will it be with kingdoms and with kings --

With those who shaped him to the thing he is --

When this dumb Terror shall reply to God,

After the silence of the centuries?

This is the pathetic side. It is true; but there is a brighter side. Wykoff found no happier spot in all his travels than on the

Minnesota farm. The family and the neighborhood life were idyllic. *And*

It would be equally true in New York, Ohio or any other State.
But these hard statistics are averages and tell of a terrible depression

and a wrong to be righted.

Farmers never avoid it.

On the other hand, it would be almost impossible to make anarchists out of American farmers. They love their country. In the Civil War and in the last war the best recruiting grounds were in the great agricultural states. In peace they are industrious; in war they are patriotic. They are the great conservative and preservative element in social life -- in politics. They will stand by the free public school -- the uncorrupted ballot box -- and will not easily adopt rash

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,

How will the future reckon with this land?

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or revolutionary measures.

I am
~~The speaker is~~ not a "calamity howler" and ~~is~~ ^{am} not here to
represent such a class. The late war has come in to increase markets
and innumerable activities which brought relief to all industries,
and the general increase in the production of gold
including agriculture. The Klondike ^X is another unexpected source of
relief — both in the employment of men and in the vastly increased
output of gold — meeting the argument of those who have asked for an
increase in the per capita quantity of money.

Even the final necessity of renewing the worn out farm
implements, the wagons, the windmills, the engines — the numerous
appliances of the modern farm, in states where wheat was a product, has
contributed to the prosperity of the manufacturer and the merchant and
reacted upon the whole community.

These are facts of the hour for which we should be grateful.

But because the 23,000,000 to 25,000,000 of our people who are
getting their living by agriculture are good and reliable citizens —
American and patriotic to the very marrow, are we to forget their rights
and allow a system to grow upon them which must inevitably crush out

or revolutionary measures.

The ~~argument~~ is not a "calamity howler" and is not here to represent such a class. The late war has come in to increase markets and innumerable activities which brought relief to all industries, including agriculture. The Klondike is another unexpected source of relief — both in the employment of men and in the vastly increased output of gold — meeting the argument of those who have asked for an increase in the per capita quantity of money.

Even the final necessity of renewing the worn out farm implements, the wagons, the windmills, the engines — the numerous appliances of the modern farm, in states where wheat was a product, has contributed to the prosperity of the manufacturer and the merchant and reacted upon the whole community.

These are facts of the hour for which we should be grateful. But because the \$2,000,000 to \$3,000,000 of our people who are getting their living by agriculture are good and reliable citizens — American and patriotic to the very marrow, are we to forget their rights and allow a system to grow upon them which must inevitably crush out

their manhood? Or because there is a streak of daylight from the unexpected sources of Divine Providence-the war and the Klondike and the failure of foreign crops — and the farmers are permitted for one year to draw a breath of relief, shall we sit down to indifference or conclude that they are well enough off with such appalling facts and figures staring us in the face from the United States Census?

What I ask of this Conference, and through you of the people of the United States and of Congress, is to readjust our economic and financial system so that the farmer shall only be called to bear his equitable share of the burdens of the citizen.

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