

THE GREAT FARMERS' MOVEMENT

THEY ORGANIZE TO ENFORCE EQUITABLE PRICES FOR THEIR PRODUCTS

WHAT is in many respects the most remarkable economic movement ever inaugurated, in which over 500,000 agriculturists are already enrolled, has just received surprising impetus in a gathering of farmers from all parts of the United States at East St. Louis.

This movement is an expression of the theory that the hitherto "down-trodden farmer" need be down-trodden no longer; that he, who is both a capitalist and a workingman, is the most independent of any producer or laborer; and has a power greater than that of any other force in modern economics, as the public are primarily dependent upon him for the clothes they wear and the food they eat. The real necessities of life, besides many of the luxuries are in his hands to do with as he sees fit.

The Farmers' Tremendous Power
This, at first glance, seems to be a latent power over mankind more terrible than that now being wielded by trusts, corporations, labor unions or any modern organization that affects the public.

An organized movement by men with such power, actuated by naught but greed, might easily become a menace to the public's comfort and prosperity, even to their very existence.

Particularly is this the case when it is remembered that in the force of numbers alone agriculturists outnumber the rest of the population of the United States engaged in agriculture, and personal services can only boast five millions and a half, and even the manufacturing and mechanical pursuits have but seven millions, trade and transportation four millions, three-quarters, and the professional service one million and a quarter.

The Idea of a "Square Deal"
And yet—here is the most surprising, the most remarkable, the most important thing about this movement of the engaged in farming and allied callings—

Their policy as expressed at their gathering is the outcome of no dog-in-the-manger idea, of no intention to use the tremendous power which they command to the hampering of a live-and-let-live, but rather of a live-and-let-live, there's-room-for-all-of-us, greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number, which means you-as-well-as-us, they-others-as-you-would-etc., sort of policy.

And that is the reason the association which is at the back of this wonderful movement is termed "The American Society of Equity." That is why this name—which one might at first consider more suited for an association of lawyers than for one of farmers, has a distinctive force. This is a time when the idea of a "square deal" is deservedly popular with the public, and "equity" in the sense in which this society employs the word, means, say its members, just this: In the first place, membership in this body is not confined solely to farmers. All friends of farmers are likewise welcomed, and it is the notion of this association that this should let in pretty nearly everybody.

The prime idea of the society is to fix and maintain equitable prices on products of the farmer, stock raiser, dairyman, fruit grower, etc. But members distinctly claim that they are not engaged in a fight with anybody. They are simply organized to attend to their own business. Though this might hurt the middlemen, the speculators, the trusts, it would not be hurt by any particular antagonism to them, but would simply show that they were getting some of the profits that rightfully belong to the farmers. But though this association is not combined to fight, it is evident when one looks upon their firm mouths and set chins, that though "they don't want to fight," yet by Jiminy, if they do—they will fight "all right, all right." It will be a case of "Where the embattled farmers stood, And fired the hot heard 'round the world."

And even more than in that former farmers' fight for equity to all their shots will be likely to scatter round the world, and hit hard, too.

But that there should be no fight, and it likely to be no fight, between these men and anybody engaged in legitimate business, that there should be no fight, and it likely to be no fight, between them and the consumer, was brought out in several striking ways at the convention in East St. Louis.

The Delegates Were in Earnest
Another thing about this convention, it was not like an assembly, a gathering of men of a particular calling, and so ready to permit themselves to be easily "dined," to spend their time in sight-seeing, joking and general high-jinks. How many of these farmers, for instance, no matter how far they came, took occasion to go across the river to St. Louis? They did not care to "see the elephant"; they were too busy in endeavoring to find out how not to be an elephant of the white variety continually. They were not refused all sorts of invitations such as are generally extended by municipalities and individuals to such bodies at such times, and are generally accepted. They came to East St. Louis for business; they had no time, morning, noon, nor night, for play. They felt it incumbent upon themselves to "do things," and so were in dead sober earnest all the time they were in town. At dinner, late at night, on their way to the convention, anywhere you found them—they were not swapping stories, unless they had a distinct bearing on the business on hand. They were not absenting themselves from our meetings with the mixed pleasure of trusts and shillings. They were not even discussing the technical side of their calling. They were talking business, thinking business; looking upon themselves as being the most important business force in this business age.

How They Plan Control of the Markets
C. O. Drayton, of Greenville, Ill., president of the Illinois state organization, briefly explained that the objects of the society were not to "bull" the markets or to obtain extortionate prices, but to obtain those prices which bring a fair return on the farmers' capital, toll and business.

"We expect to do this," said Mr. Drayton, "by regulating the law of supply and demand, and by controlling the markets. We will try to hold the products in the country where they are produced

until they are called for by a profitable market. The national society has no capital, and is simply a controlling power to direct the movements of the different local societies. We are not a trust or combine, and the capital is held by the stock companies, which are formed at the various shipping points.

"We expect to provide granaries, warehouses, cribs, elevators, hay barns and cold storage houses for the use of the farmers in storing their products if the market is below our minimum price. To illustrate this, suppose a farmer has his products ready for the market and cannot afford to hold them and needs money. He can haul his stuff to the shipping point and store it in the society's warehouse. He will be given a shipper's receipt for his products, and can take that receipt to the bank and get the agreed price. His products will then be sold and he will receive the balance of his money.

"We also expect to establish a system of price bulletins by which the members will be told each day what the market price (made by the society and not by "bulls" or "bears" on boards of trade) for products and what price it is best to ship to. In this way we can prevent any certain market being overloaded, and by doing this, all can obtain the top price for their products."

A Vast Organization
The society seeks to organize all farmers into local unions, the local unions to organize county unions, and the county unions, state unions. The country is divided into seven districts, each district with a headquarters. All these unions and headquarters will be presided over by the National Union. Every thing is claimed, is now working to the end of having a crop report from every farmer every day. The rural mail routes and the rapidly growing use of the telephone on the farm are among the things that will speedily make this plan possible.

First, the local union knows what its members have to sell, or will have in a day or two. Second, the county union knows every day how much of each farm crop is ready to market in the whole county and exactly where the supply is, and on what railroad it can be shipped.

Third, the headquarters knows every day how much of each farm product is ready for market in all of the states in its district, exactly where it is and on what railroad.

Fourth, there is an average of fifty members to each local union with something like phone messages to the secretary of the local union. There are fifty local unions in each county, this means fifty messages to the county union. If there is an average of seventy-five counties in a state and six states in a district, this means five messages from the county unions to headquarters. This plan, it is pointed out, is very simple and not nearly as complicated as to gather reports of freight for railroad systems.

The six district headquarters will give a summary of all reports to the National Union; and there you have a complete report of all crops that are ready for the market every day. The reports of demand and distribution of the crops will be similarly made.

What Has Been Already Done
In the four years of its existence the society has already done things. The "farmers' strike" in March of this year forced the price on all the chief farm products, save wheat, in accordance with recommendations as to minimum prices made at the convention held in Indianapolis a year ago. At the convention this year minimum prices were fixed on all farm products, and the members bonded themselves to hold their crops for these prices. It is pointed out that during the life of this society all crops have been sold for higher prices than ever before for crops of the same size, and that these prices were brought about through the work of this organization.

"Tobacco growers," said President Everitt, speaking of a class well represented at the meetings, "organized on this plan. They compelled the tobacco trust (one of the most powerful in the world) to give equity. The trust is still in existence and the farmers are glad to do business with it on their (the farmers') own terms. Thus, instead of trying to 'bust the trust' we will tame them and make use of their fine machinery to serve the people in fairness and equity, as they should."

An Interesting Body of Men
The delegates afforded an interesting study. One or two (suspense entirely,

even when they "come to town" with what even the dandified Baconstitch wore immaculate linen, in striking contrast with their rough hands and faces, and cloths that would do credit to modern Beau Brummel. The big soft that was a favorite article of headgear, and furnished a most picturesque setting to some of the faces. Some of the farmers would be taken for doctors of divinity. Some of them like the farmers, and are, indeed, prominent representatives of the agricultural press. Some would never be taken for anything else but farmers. But any business man who would be a close judge of human nature would probably leave the delegates severely alone.

For among these farmers, ranchmen, dairy and fruit growers, selected to voice the opinions of over 500,000 of their class, there is clearly an up-to-date, an alertness, a fine distribution of common gray matter. And any outsider who attended one of the meetings would likely be impressed with their genuine aptitude for modern oratory.

Route of a Day Debating
Possibly so, it is pointed out, a certain ignorance of the law of supply and demand, and had to be explained to the chair because of their slight acquaintance with parliamentary usage. But the day given to the "Common sense" was thoroughly in evidence. Those of them who spoke had something definite to say; they had evidently done some high thinking in connection with their duties, and had been inspired with ideas in keeping with the times from their reading in the long winter evenings and their rumination in the silence of their vast acres. And so the expression of their thoughts was wonderfully impressive, even though some of their sentences might not meet with the entire approval of Lindley Murray, one of the finest pieces of oratory—that of a state organizer—showed a surprising unfamiliarity with or disdain of the ordinary rules of grammar; and yet was a masterpiece of argument, with hard facts, genuine humor and impassioned appeal magnificently arrayed. It was a man with a message; and it is no wonder that he had never held a meeting that did not result in a goodly following being added to the strength of the society. Natural

eloquence, right from the heart, and straight from the shoulder—that was the basis of many of the speeches. And shows what a potent force such men as these may yet become in the highest councils of the land. And it is in just such gatherings as these that the farmers themselves realize their power—not only as producers and setters of prices in organizations of their own, but also as possible law-makers for the nation. The writer congratulated one honest delegate on his speech, and found he was quite as appreciative of it himself, and quite as surprised. Moreover, one could see he was ambitious. Were he called, like Cicero, from the plough, he would doubtless respond where hitherto he would have been satisfied to leave political ambition to lawyers who might need their knowledge of law to help to make those laws which could be interpreted in various ways, to the confusion of business.

"Nobody who listened to this gathering of agriculturists could doubt that the farmer as a business man, as a force in trade, as a power in politics, had arrived. Moreover, these men were not sheep, which followed wherever some better wether would lead. They were men with opinions of their own, and the convention was not, at times, a typical political feast. There were heated discussions, shaking of fists and loud protests, but out of all this came a gratifying harmony of action such as would be credit to more experienced deliberative bodies. The consensus of opinion at the close of the meeting was that it had hastened the farmers' millennium as much as has hitherto done, and that naught could now hinder the continued power of a new organization, and its speedy increase in membership in accordance with the laws of geometrical progression.

A New Leader of Men
Much of this restoration of order from what once seemed to some to be the disruption, is undoubtedly due to the leadership of the president and founder of the society, J. A. Everitt. This man of the day comes from Indianapolis. He is a center of labor organization, it being the home of John Mitchell; and it is also likely to soon be made famous through the organization of farm forces under President Everitt. This man

again unanimously elected to fill this important position in a new movement, is of simple tastes in dress and an elusive quietness that is one of the characteristics of many natural leaders. He is not a man who would be likely to attract much attention in any place, but whose business to attract it. But the strength and determination of his belief, and his quietness, is remarkable. He has none of the grand orator, but his annual message, which is of considerable length, is a striking example of a man's having something to say, and saying it plainly, bluntly, honestly and effectively. He does not appear to be of that numerous class of orators who love to hear themselves talked down, and even to be talked down. He has to talk cannot be done in fewer words. And yet this could scarcely be done; his addresses could not be talked down without loss of some of their salient elements.

What President Everitt Says Can Be Done
This is the rosate picture which this man draws of the "good time coming," and when you listen to him, talking in his plain, even tone of voice, without gestures, without excitement, without rhetorical flourishes, one is largely convinced that with such a man and such followers, these things will eventually be brought to pass.

"The completion of the American Society of Equity means the solution of all the following vexatious problems: They will be solved in equity, to the people and the nation. Steady, uniform and profitable prices for farm products will prevail. The end of speculation in farm products will be at hand. Markets at home and abroad will be enlarged. Elevators, warehouses, cold storage houses, etc., will belong to, or be controlled by, the producers. Unnecessary toll gates between producers and consumers will be guaranteed lower prices to consumers and steady values. Adulteration of food will end. This alone will wonderfully increase farmers' markets. Farmers will reap the benefits from new discoveries in their field, from improved machinery and from the utilization of waste products instead of their being appropriated by others. Then farmers will control production as well as marketing. Child labor on the farm will cease as it has done in the factories. Boys will stay on the farms. Farms will increase in value. Higher intelligence will pervade rural communities. Protection will be given farmers from the products of cheap labor in foreign countries and our island possessions. God roads can quickly be built all over the country. Parcels post, postal currency and savings banks can quickly be secured if they are wanted. Home insurance and safe banking will be among the things desired and obtainable. The trusts will be regulated. Business men will find most of the present-day uncertainties removed and business failures will be almost unknown. In accomplishing all these things no war will be waged against any trust or institution, including the government. The only demand will be for equity. Is there any class or corporation that will go on record as opposed to receiving equity and giving equity?"

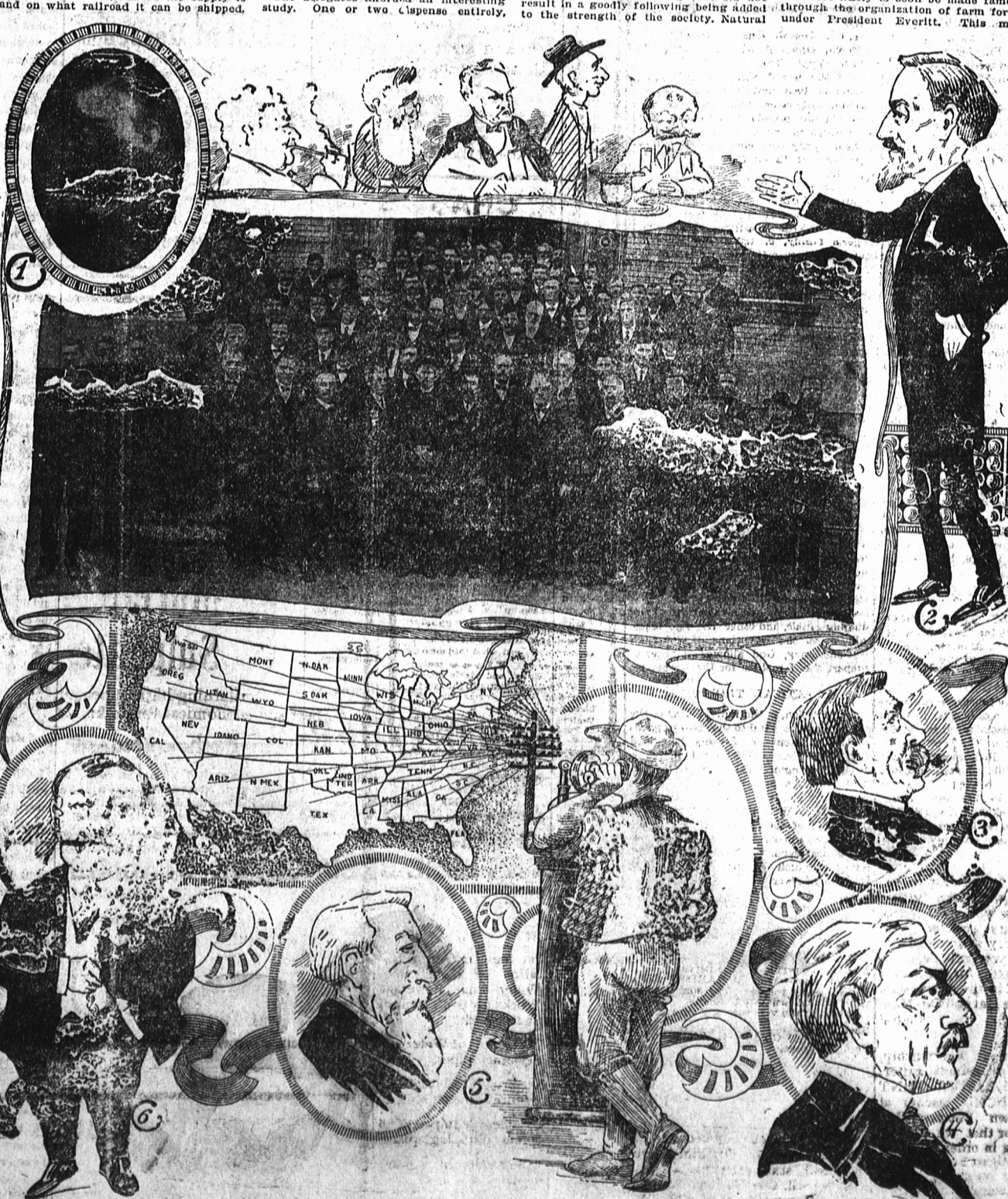
A Priest One of the Members
One of the most ubiquitous members at the convention of this open-to-all society was a Roman Catholic priest, Rev. Dr. Tuohy, "its constitution," Father Tuohy said, "is broad enough to admit farmers and their friends and also business men, who likewise are, or should be, their friends. The sound ethical principle for any commodity is based upon the cost of production. If the farmers, by organizing, can get a profitable price for their products, commensurate with the cost of producing them, I do not believe in excommunicating their society by holding aloof from it. I deem it my priestly duty to aid such an organization if it is within my power."

Dr. Tuohy believes that an organization such as this should serve to unite both producer and consumer in a great and truly American society of equity for all. He claims that this was the intention of the founders, and says that he sees no desire, on the part of the members to override this idea—if he did, he would not fight for the organization with pen and tongue.

A Discussion on Advertising
One significant feature of the up-to-date business tone of the convention was the discussion of publicity, which is so frequently ignored by conventions of men in various lines of business which require it. A discussion on "Publicity" was held under the three heads, "The Agricultural Press," "The Secular Press" and "General Publicity." William Borsodi, a New York newspaper man in attendance on the convention, read a paper on "Advertising the Farmers' Aid in Purchasing and Marketing," which was received with enthusiasm. It showed, among other things, how the farmer has reason to use the newspapers to advertise what he has to sell as well as the business man, and that newspaper advertising would largely help to solve the problem of the farmers' market, and a fair price for the products of his knowledge and toil.

The Nation Will Take Notice
In short, this convention, by far the most representative and successful gathering of farmers ever held, will in its effects, make the nation sit up and take notice. It was a meeting of moment and direct importance to all who eat food or wear clothes. It was the forerunner of something which will soon attract and hold the attention and interest of the whole people, even if they are only momentarily or coldly interested in other political news. It is a manifestation of what may be expected from a great body of men—even now in a peculiarly independent position, who have a more tremendous economic power through which to obtain their economic desires than any other class, and who will have to be reckoned with in future trade councils and political conventions.

A Remarkable Gathering of American Farmers
(1) J. A. Everitt, founder and President of the American Society of Equity. The portrait sketches represent St. Louis cartoonists' ideas of some of the most prominent men in the movement as follows: (2) J. B. Whiting, National Vice-President, Put-licken, N.Y. (3) Geo. W. Stone, Illinois. (4) H. B. Sherman, National Organizer, Indiana. (5) G. W. Cole, Kentucky. (6) Frank Treatise, Kansas. The large picture represents a gathering of some of the delegates at a meeting at the City Hall, East St. Louis.



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