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FARMERS AS BUSINESS MEN AND CITIZENS.

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First Paper.

Hon. HIRAM SMITH in the Chair:

Man and the World's Work.—The business which a man has is not simply his means of getting a living, but is his part of the world's work. Each human life is a tack, a nail, a spike, a cog, a bolt, a lever, a walking beam or a band of steel in the inter-dependent machinery of the world's business. Only when all the parts are perfect will we be able to dispense with that costly governor called government. It is the business of the State to look after the business of its citizens that it may have less business to do. When labor and thought are linked together in every phase of our industrial life, we shall have less grit in the machine and more gold in its product.

A business man, unless misnamed, is thoughtful, methodical, persistent, industrious, ambitious, and above all things, honest. He understands thoroughly the fact that coiled up in his head is the mainspring of his business. He will run in a rut as long as anybody while it pays, but when it fails to pay out he goes, if it loosens every screw in the machine. He is neither morbidly courageous nor superstitiously cautious. He is a man who has reason, and out of it gets reasons. Sink or swim, he plants his feet on his judgment and stays there. Many men in business have only a few of the symptoms of being business men—hence, failures innumerable along all the lines of trade and commerce, in the professions, on the farm, in the domain of art and poetry where men think that the eagles of their imagination can lift them above the laws that underlie success in the winning of bank accounts and of homes.

The World Thirsty for Money.—The world is hungry and thirsty after money. It likes the men who get what it likes. The modern hero is shod with a business suit. The coat of mail has gone to the museums. The tyrants of to-day shed blood under the forms of laws and in the white light and with the sanction of a christian civilization. Their palaces of trade should be corniced with grinning skulls and their chambers of commerce frescoed with broken hearts. The love of money is the root of some evil and much good. It is drawing the love of war from the minds of men; it is tying nations together with chains of gold; it has stimulated invention and lessened the burdens of labor; it has peopled this continent, builded its cities and made its country homes. It is an honorable love, and no man need be ashamed of it.
There is no essential virtue in poverty. The strong man poor is a giant in chains; the strong man rich is a giant free to do the world's work and his own. Poverty brings bent bodies and warped minds; it causes more divorces and more heartburnings, more suicides and more murders, more hatred of men, society, government and God than all of the jangling curses that rattle about the heels of wealth. We want less poverty and more wealth on the farms of this country. We want a condition of things where the American farmer can save more and spend more. We want him to have the luxury of time, of rest, of recreation, of social enjoyments, of literature of those beauties of art which in the homes of any people shape in a degree both the souls and bodies of their children. These things can be obtained for money. Money can be obtained on the farms as elsewhere by good business men. It is idle bosh to say, as men do say, that little or no money can be made in legitimate farming in this State; that farmers as a class are losing ground. The first part of the statement is disproved by the success of hundreds of farmers in all our agricultural counties, from Hiram Smith in Sheboygan to A. O. Fox of Dane; from A. A. Arnold in Trempeleau to Chas Miller of Rock; from J. M. Smith in Brown to T. J. VanMatre of Iowa; from John Linse in La Crosse to H. S. Weeks of Waukesha; and from examples in every country neighborhood in Wisconsin, where men are becoming independent from the profits of their farms.

Farmers Not Growing Poorer.—It is not true that farmers as a class are growing poorer. The prosperity of any class is safely indicated by the appearance of their homes. Go anywhere in this State today in rural neighborhoods and you see better fences, cleaner fields, more ornamental trees and shrubs, broader barns better painted, more tasteful and commodious houses than you saw ten years ago. We raise just as much wheat per acre as we did then, and can buy more things with the money we get for it. We are making more butter per cow, more meat per steer, more pork per hog in the same time than we were then.

Lessons for the Farmer to Learn.—The Wisconsin farmer is a better business man than he was ten years ago, but he has many lessons yet to learn of the sharp men who run railroads, factories, stores and banks. He must understand the value and character of credit, and not be superstitious about debt. An endless amount of twaddle is preached about the horrors of debt. Some capitalists carry a placard in one
hand saying do not run in debt while with the other they slap a mortgage upon every man who comes within their reach. The agricultural press dribbles homilies about going in debt from January to December, while nine out of ten of these very papers would not have been born at all if it had not been for a debt. Lecturers upon farm topics invariably season their remarks with sage injunctions about avoiding debt as a plague. Any gathering of farmers will cheer a man to the echo who can pile up a good rhetorical climax of denunciation of the practice of buying more than can be paid for. And yet there is not one farmer in one hundred in Wisconsin to-day who did not get his first title to a home through a debt. They are men who came here with a capital of ambition and industry, ran in debt for their farms, took their risks like men and fought their way out to independence and comfort. It is not business-like for these men to "scorn the base degrees whereby they did ascend." It was a long and bitter struggle for many of them, but the fight was not against debt—it was against poverty. The business farmer should look upon credit as a part of his assets; as something to be drawn upon when profit seems probable. Debts differ. To go in debt for productive property is one thing; to go in debt for unproductive property is quite another thing. To buy land for less than it is worth, to buy stock which can be fed or sold at a profit, to hire labor needed to make or save crops, to buy machines that save expense, to buy fertilizers to maintain fertility of soil—these things make business-like debts, debts that are the eggs of profit. But for the farmer to run in debt for fast horses and costly buildings, for stock that he does not understand; for enterprises outside his business over which he has no control; for costly apparel and furniture for his family that they may move in social circles which regard these things only—these are unbusiness-like debts and are the eggs from which are hatched failure and dishonor. When credit is to be used, let it be in a straightforward way. Floating debts and store debts are abominations. The farmer who forces a merchant to carry him deserves a rough ride and generally gets it. Banks are made to loan money. The farmer has no business to force the men with whom he deals to borrow money because he does not pay it. Let him get his money where they make a business of loaning it, clean up his scattered accounts and then redeem his paper promptly on time though the heavens fall. Men then look upon him with respect. What is better, he can look at himself with respect.

A Debt to Folly.—A farmer can contrive one debt which never can be paid. It is a debt to folly, to be forestalled by misery and disappointment every day of his life; a debt which will eat out his heart and scorch his soul; a debt which is incurred when his judgment goes into bankruptcy and he goes into the business of farming in opposition to his own tastes and inclinations. It is hard enough to win success in any calling when the whole bent of a man’s mind is in the direction of his business. It is doubly hard when the mental drift is the wrong way. It is like scaling a rock fast foremost. Dean Swift well said: "No man ever made an ill figure who understood his own talents, or a good one who mistook them," and Sydney Smith gave the idea a little more emphasis when he wrote: "Be what nature intended you for, and you will succeed—be anything else and you will be ten thousand times worse than nothing." The only difficulty with this kind of wis-
dom is that it does not apply to that very large and unfortunate class of men who have no special bias for any particular pursuit, and drift into the different channels of human activity upon chance currents. For these men there is this consolation on a farm: They are there more completely masters of their own fate than in any other line of business. Cyclones and droughts may come, but they do not as a rule— they are exceptional, and the last has been a blessing rather than a curse to the business farmers of the Northwest. Whether a man has a predisposition for farming or not, he will develop a preference for certain branches of the business as he continues in it. Those tendencies should be followed religiously. They will make the farmer a specialist perhaps. It is to be hoped they will.

Specialties.—The specialist understands one sound principle of business at least—it is easier to ride one horse than two; a rifle is a better weapon than a shotgun; the point of a needle can be driven deeper than the head of a stick; a burning ounce of oil makes a gallon of water warm, a quart simmer and a pint boil. Men are dropping into specialties everywhere as the world becomes older, richer and smarter. Years ago men could be found who made watches entire, or a whole pair of boots, or a carriage from bolts to cushions. Go into the great factories now. You see men who do nothing but sharpen tools for others to use; who do nothing but drive rivets; who do nothing but rub spokes year after year; who, upon a simple trifling act, constantly repeated, spend the energies of a lifetime. The general-purpose man who can do everything goes down before the deadly competition of the man who can do one thing.

In Law.—The drift is in the same way in the professions. Lawyers are labeled railroad lawyers, criminal lawyers, divorce lawyers and advertise themselves as specialists in the laws of inheritance, in commercial law and in all the branches of legal business. They are paid, not for running tilts on all sorts of horses in every direction, but for a trained effort in one direction.

In Medicine.—The same thing is true in medicine. If all the good doctors are not specialists, to a man they would prefer to be. They know enough to know that the intricacies and variations of the human organs, and the laws that underlie health are too vast for any one mind. They may be general practitioners, but they send very bad eyes to the oculist and useless ears in the same direction. The complicated case of nervous derangement goes to the man who treats nothing but diseases of the nerves. The specialist in medicine runs from the corn doctor to the dismal creature who claims to know all the mysteries of the human heart. These things are so because the world wants better service and is willing to pay for it.

On the Farm.—What is true elsewhere in this line is true on the farm. Concentration of purpose and of talent is as important there as anywhere. It is urged in objection that remarkable talents are needed to run specialties on the farm; that the average farmer does not know enough to be successful in this way. Is not the objection a poison to itself? Does it require as remarkable talents to do one thing as to do half a dozen? Does it require more capacity to be a dairyman, or a fruit-grower, or a beef-producer, or a raiser of swine, than to represent successfully all four interests in one? Can one of the parts be greater than the whole? If so mathematics and common sense should be tied up together and plowed under. The farmer ordi-
narily makes the most out of that part of his farm work which he likes the best. Why should he not conform himself to that part? Drudgery and mental friction make men old when they might be young. They curse the man who is afraid to follow his own tastes.

The farmer should have the business sagacity to see that when these things are at the maximum a strong partnership is formed between grey hair and empty pocketbooks. Farmers have plenty of talent—more than they think, more than other classes suppose them to have—but very few are broad enough and deep enough to properly manage all branches of farming.

Faith and Enthusiasm.—Men have made money at mixed farming. They make money in Mexico to-day plowing with a stick. It proves nothing. The specialist has almost invariably that most vital quality of a good business man—enthusiasm—an enthusiasm born of faith. Faith may be a good thing in religion; it is a ten times better thing in business, cynics and "I told you so" people to the contrary notwithstanding. The man who enters into his work on the farm with enthusiasm has a place there. Communities respect men who believe in what they do. The namby-pamby dawdlers who stalk up and down the streets of cities and in country places mooing at enthusiasm, and ridiculing the ardor of men who love their work are the "sheeted dead who squeak and gibber" in our modern life. They are not business men.

Men Who Attract Attention.—The men whose thought and work are attracting the most attention from the agricultural minds of the country are specialists. The mixed farmers of Wisconsin, while objecting to specialties in farming, are glad to receive special instructions from Prof. A. J. Cook, of Michigan, about bees, from Charles P. Hamilton about blackberries, from Thos. Louis and Geo. Wylie about swine, from J. M. True and H. D. McKinney about horses, from J. C. Kiser and George Harding about cattle, from F. C. Curtis, Hiram Smith and John Gould about dairying, and from W. D. Hoard about his splendid exposition of the principles of breeding, which has made the modern dairy cow. These men are all specialists. They have left no half-turned furrows over every head which can be struck upon the farm, but have worked each his own vein and uncovered a great richness of knowledge himself. The Wisconsin farmer will be a better business man when he gives up his mission of trying to raise everything; when, to use a homely and well-chewed figure, he is contented to bite off what he can chew.

Important Tools.—The first tools which a business farmer needs are a pen, oil and paper. The farmer who grows a crop should estimate the cost as carefully as the architect who plans a building counts its cost. It is farmer-like to guess, it is business-like to know. Thinking and figuring are deadly enemies of failure on the farm. Crops should be raised not as the result of jerky impulse but of careful calculation. A cash account should be kept as rigidly as the the sabbath day. What kind of business is that which cannot be introduced to its outgoes and income at the end of the year. Nine-tenths of the farmers of the country ought to take lessons in the matter of peanut stands and millinery shops. Many of them say that they are afraid to look a cash account in the face. It is a singular modesty which shrinks from bare figures. The business farmer will charge his cash account with every cent expended. If his expenses for tobacco or cigars are such that his wife can make odious comparisons between
his financial investment in smoke and in
dry goods, make the charge to charity,
for it is a charity to a man who is so
poor in resources of enjoyment that he
must smoke to be happy, to buy his ci-
gars. I charge mine to charity. At the
close of each month or year accounts
should be drawn off and classified in a
ledger under proper heads.

What Keeping Accounts Shows.
—The farmer will then know exactly
where his money comes from; he will
not be obliged to pay bills twice; he will
know what he has paid for clothing, for
household expenses, for repairs and for
improvements; for machinery, for labor,
for seeds and plants; for stock, for the
education of himself and family and the
adornment of his home. If he is finan-
cially sick, he can tell what part brought
disease.

How to Spend Money.—The man
who keeps a cash account thinks twice
when he spends money. Robert Ingersoll
has been cheered all over the United
States because he said that if he had
but a dollar to spend he would spend it
like a king and not like a beggar. The
antithesis is striking; the idea is as
beautiful and as hollow as a soap bubble.
The average business man is neither a
king nor a beggar. He should ape neither
the magnificent spendthrift airs of a
monarch, whose bills are paid by the
people, or the close-fisted wolfish man-
ners of a beggar, whose bills the people
pay. The American farmer gets money
by hard work and hard thinking, and if
he is a good business man he will spend
thoughtfully what he gets laboriously.

Farmers Extravagant.—Farmers
are extravagant. They are as a class
wasteful not of their money but of their
time; of their energies of mind and
body. Mental and physical strength
and vital force furnish the most produc-
tive capital a business man can have.

It is a kind of wealth which cannot be
stolen but may be thrown away. That
eight hour system on the farm which
has been described as meaning eight
hours work in the forenoon and eight
in the afternoon makes small men and
dead men; it makes women as narrow as
their sisters who do no work; it makes
boys and girls who look upon farms as
graveyards of comfort. The farmer
in ordinary circumstances should work
and work hard with his hands. The
flippant contempt for manual labor
which lurks in otherwise vacant places
in society should have no sympathy
from him. But when all his force is
used in muscular action, he robs his
brain. He squanders the splendid
chance which each man has of mental
growth. The farmer in his business is
dealing with all the laws which have
statement and definition in natural
science; he is dealing with not only the
complications of those laws which make
plants and animals but he is dealing
with men, men who have minds sharp-
ened in the keen contests of business
life and broadened by the culture of
schools and society. He cannot afford
to measure himself by the standard of
muscle, for in that case he must stand
uncovered in the presence of that his-
toric animal which spoke to Baalamb.

Thinking Saves Working.—Thinking
saves working. The thought of the
race worked out in the application
of steam to machinery is said to be do-
ing each year the labor of 1,000,000,000
of workingmen.

The farmer who is a business man will
never call anything “good enough”
which can be bettered; he will have that
splendid discontent which is looking and
working for better soils, better crops,
better stock, better buildings, stronger
sense and more perfect character. On
the other hand he will accept the inevi
table, with the grace of that old woman who said that although she had only two teeth, she thanked God they were opposite each other.

Farmers in Politics — Every American voter should be a politician in the best sense. Our political system suffers because the business men of cities are timid and the business men of the country indifferent. The political bully weighs too much in municipalities. His country cousin, with better manners and a sleepless activity, has a wide-spread influence. The obligations of citizenship should make every farmer active in politics, not for the good of his class alone, but for the good of his country. It is not good citizenship for a farmer to neglect the primaries of his party and then growl about nominations; to keep away from the polls for lack of time to vote, and then spend days in the post-office or corner grocery bewailing the result of the elections. Good citizenship means an interest in, a knowledge of, and a devotion to the general welfare. With the farmer it means good work in the road district, and active thought and work to make township, county, State and national governments what in his best judgment they should be. He may be beaten by men of less brain and microscopic moral sense, but he is fighting under the American flag and for it, and he should surrender to neither fools nor rascals, though routed a thousand times. Men say they do not like to meddle in politics because the atmosphere of political life is full of moral poison. Why do they not stop business because of the tricks of trade, and the dishonesty of some business men? Why do they not forswear society because it does frequent honor to hollow hearts and hollow heads, when balanced with well-filled pocket books? Will the political atmosphere become purer by the absence of good men?

The men in this country who are too dainty to help govern themselves ought to pay taxes in Turkey and get justice in Russian courts. Certainly they should disguise their cowardice or laziness with thicker garments than professions of their own superior virtues.

Dignity of Labor.—The farmer who is a good citizen will never be oppressed with that nightmare of nonsense which pictures the tiller of the soil as carrying all the burdens of the world. A good citizen respects the rights and virtues of all classes and does not magnify those of his own. There is no more essential nobility about the business of working land than making chairs or cutting off limbs. There is as much dignity in driving a shoe peg as in hoeing a beet; just as much virtue in selling a railroad ticket as a strawberry.

Not one farmer in one hundred has as hard and laborious a life as a railway president of an average, first-class road. There is no dignity conferred by unthinking labor. Thoughtfulness and wisdom dignify all labor, whether of farm, factory or law office. A political party devoted to farmers' interests alone would be an abomination. Strong, moneyed interests have too great power in State and national legislatures; but a remedy which would set one class in opposition to all others would be worse than the disease. It is not farmers that we want in public life so much as men. It should be no reason that a man should be elected to this or that office because he is or is not a farmer. The old question—is he capable and honest?—should stand until the end of time as the only test. Manhood should stand above vocation. It is more important to know whether a man has brain or not than it is to know whether he pays taxes in a town or out of it. When farmers bring a strong intellectual life into their citizenship their interests will be taken
care of. They will never climb to a po-
titical heaven upon bubbles of bombast about their own superior virtues, or get any higher by pulling down other
classes.

Justice to Public Men.—Farmers
as a class will be better citizens when
they do justice to public men. It is con-
sidered a proper thing in almost any
gathering of farmers to speak of public
officers as dishonest. This sentiment is
contaminating all classes of people in
the United States. We meet it every-
where. Every woman who reads an
essay, talks glibly about the awful cor-
rup tions of the public service; the news-
papers are filled with squibs and edi-
torials aimed to unsettle belief in the in-
tegrity of officials. Rumors of corrup-
tion hover over every movement in legis-
lation and government. The extent of
this sentiment in the country is almost
beyond belief. And yet there is not one
 iota of evidence to prove that the repub-
licans and democrats who hold office in
the United States to-day are not as hon-
est and conscientious as the average far-
mer himself. They are not all honest,
it is true, and a prismatic partisan press
gets all colors from their acts, but as a
class they represent a proper idea of
what integrity in the public service
means. If there is anything which will
tend to make officials corrupt it is the
continued insistence of the people that
they are so.

Love Your Vocation.—The farmer
who would represent that which is best
in business and citizenship should love
his vocation; he should carry into it en-
thusiasm and persistence; he should
have knowledge; he should know men
and things; he should be broad in his
charity, strong in his friendly sympa-
thies for other men and other classes; he
should be loyal to himself, loyal to his
class, loyal to his country, and, above all,
loyal to the truth.

Tribute to Wisconsin.—This com-
monwealth of Wisconsin, with its laws,
its schools, its institutions, its mills, its
factories, its mines, its forests, its mil-
lions of cultivated acres, its populous
cities, its happy homes, where children
learn the lesson of labor and of love,
its wealth of matter and its wealth of
mind, is a splendid monument to the
business ability and the citizenship of
those men who, in an early day, came
here to build for themselves homes in
the Western wilderness. We should hold
this splendid heritage and make it
grander still with unselfish labor and a
patriotism which shall do honor to their
memory and lead our children to do
honor to ours.