

FARMING IN INDIANA. THEN AND NOW.



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A Word About the Author

George Ade, one of the best known authors and playwrights in America, a graduate of Purdue University in 1887, has achieved fame because of his ability to interpret life as it is. With powers of observation unusually keen, and whetted by study and travel throughout the world, Mr. Ade is in a position to give the benefits of his wealth of experience to others. This he did when he addressed the Tenth Annual Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club Round-up, May 3, 1928, at Purdue University. It is the hope of the Agricultural Extension Department of Purdue University that each person who reads this message will gather from it facts and inspiration for a better and more satisfying country life in Indiana.

FARMING IN INDIANA-THEN AND NOW

Address delivered by George Ade at the Tenth Annual Boys' and Girls' Club Round-Up, Purdue University, May 3, 1928

If you wonder why I have been invited to come here and speak to you today, I will explain that I am a farmer. I could not break a colt, or show the tile ditcher where to put the laterals or ring a shoat, but I can sit at my desk and write magazine stories and picture plays and make enough money to keep all the farm buildings painted and the fences in repair and the taxes paid--so that makes me a regular farmer.

Nearly everything I have in this world is invested in farm lands. Let me tell you why I bought this land. Along about 1895 I began to travel into all parts of the world. Within ten years I had been in most of the states of the Union, to Europe several times, as far east as Constantinople; out to China and Japan and the Philippines and down into Mexico.

I made one discovery while roaming through a great many different countries, and that was that only a small part of the land surface of this earth of ours is productive without being expensively irrigated or expensively fertilized. Also, I became convinced that we were not getting the crop per acre that we should get. I saw the farms of Belgium and Germany and France, which have been under cultivation for hundreds and hundreds of years, and these farms were yielding two or three times as much per acre, counted in money value, as we were growing on our best virgin soil here at home. I found out that everywhere in the world productive land within easy reach of a great city steadily increased in value, probably striking an average of five hundred dollars an acre in the countries where the farmers knew how to farm. It seemed to me that here at home the corn belt and the wheat belt had expanded until they could not greatly increase their area and that the new farming regions in the West would have to be irrigated or heavily fertilized. I decided to invest my savings in farm lands in Indiana.

Some easy money came my way and I bought a number of farms--more than I have actually needed at times. I bought it all the way from fifty dollars an acre up to a hundred and sixty dollars. Probably the average price was about a hundred and ten dollars an acre.

During the land boom which followed the World War I was pestered every day by real estate agents and farmers from Illinois and Iowa who were offering me three hundred and fifty and four hundred dollars an acre for my land. I

could have sold all of it at somewhere around those figures. As I had several farms, I could take a pencil and sit at my desk and figure that I was getting into Mr. Rockefeller's class. As young as you are, you know what has happened since then. Land prices and crop prices have shrunk--but the taxes and the cost of living have never weakened for a moment. We have been through a tough period for the farmer--even for the farmer who sits at his, desk writing pieces for the *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and photo plays for Hollywood.

The whole trouble has been we didn't figure on what was going to be done to us by a smooth-faced and kind looking gentleman who lives up in Detroit, Michigan, meaning Henry Ford. So far as the farmer is concerned, he has been a good friend and a disturbing influence. In the good old days all of the city hauling and all of the power for transportation and heavy field work on the farm was provided by horses and mules. Today a horse on the streets of New York or Chicago attracts almost as much attention as an elephant passing by. You know what the tractors are doing on the farm. Within a few years the great demand for corn and oats as feed for work animals has been shot all to pieces.

Sees Future in Farming

Just now the value of farm lands is a very uncertain quantity. For a few seasons the farmers have been somewhat discouraged. The fact is, we are trying to adjust ourselves to new conditions and we will do it all right. I still believe that this good rich black farm land of ours, already drained and requiring no heavy fertilization, is bound to become valuable again, not as the result of any wild-eyed boom such as we had just after the war, but because of the fact that land is the source of all wealth. The demand from the cities for food-stuffs is going to increase rapidly and the farmers are going to change their methods and raise something besides corn and oats, with a little patch of wheat on the side. In other words, I believe that the farmer is going to come back and get a fair return for all of his produce. I am hanging onto my farms for two reasons. One is that I believe high prices are, coming back and the other is that just now I can't find any buyers.

I spend most of my time in the country because I like the country better than the city. When I was a small boy, living away out in the country, it was a pretty dismal proposition, but now the city has moved out to the country. You can live out in the country now and have everything the city folks have except noise and dirt and high rents. Within the next few years all of you will be tempted to pick up and go to some large city, thinking that you will find there the opportunities and advantages which you cannot find out on the farm.

Now, advice is a good deal like castor oil--easy to give and hard to take. I am not sure that any advice ever given by a gray-haired has-been made the slightest impression on a live and ambitious boy or girl. Just the same I would like to suggest to you that prosperity and happiness are not measured by the amount of money we receive for our services, but depend largely on what we have to show at the end of each year in wealth and health and usefulness. If you go up to the city and spend all you make for the privilege of looking out at a lot of fire-escapes and tall buildings and simply being one little, ant in a huge ant-hill, I doubt if you will be any better off in the long run. I have lived in small towns and small cities and the largest cities in the world and now I am out in the country again and I hope I have learned a few things, from many years of observation. I will admit that when I was a small boy, being on a farm the year round was a good deal like being in jail except that the prisoners in jail were not required to work fourteen hours a day.

Early Farm Training

In my early youth I worked on a farm every summer. I did not volunteer--I was drafted. My parents thought that if they kept me out in the country, away from the gaieties and temptations of a village of eight hundred people, I might grow up to be a good citizen and a shining example. Their efforts were in vain. I turned out to be an author, just the same. But I did find out something about life on a farm away back yonder in the seventies and eighties. I began my career by pulling cockle-burrs out of the corn. At that time it was pretty hard to look over a field of cockle-burrs and find the corn. Sometimes the corn crop would fail and sometimes the oats crop would fail, but the cockle-burr crop and the mustard crop never failed. I know of only one crop that is more dependable than the cockle-burr crop used to be and that is the dandelion crop.

When I was out on the farm, during the spring and summer, we seldom went to town because the main roadway leading into town was a bottomless streak of soft mud in wet weather and an aggravated streak of hard ruts in dry weather. There was not one foot of stone road in northwestern Indiana. Even the main streets of our good-sized towns were hub deep in mush and mire. If you will take a bottle of library paste and pour a little ink into it and mix it up, you will get some idea of the surface of our highways in wet weather away back yonder.

I am not one of those who become sentimental over the good old days. The good old days were not so good and the nights were much worse. When we were cooped up on the farm for a few days, because the roads were impassable, and it became necessary to go to town, four horses were hitched

to the front running gears of a farm wagon. A box was placed on top of the gears and the trip to town, four miles away and then back home, was an all-day battle with mud-holes and bottomless pits.

Let me tell you what we didn't have out on the farm when I was out there. We had no R. F. D., and by the time we got our newspapers and magazines they were yellow with age. I will tell you how bad it was; we didn't even have a Sears, Roebuck catalogue. We had no telephone. We couldn't call up on the party line and lean against the receiver and talk about nothing in particular for twenty minutes at a stretch while all the other parties on the line were trying to get Central. We didn't have electric lights or any of these newfangled burners--simply the old-fashioned coal oil lamp which threw out a weak yellow glare. After you had one lamp lighted, you had to start another one so you could see where you had put the first one.

Before Farm Homes Were Modernized

We had no base-burners but mostly wood stoves, made of sheet-iron and shaped like a barrel laid flat on the ground, which burned themselves out in the night so that every winter morning a farm house, from one end to the other, was colder than Greenland's icy mountains. We didn't have adequate protection against flies in the summer. The old-fashioned flimsy mosquito netting would not keep out anything under the size of a barn swallow. At threshing time we would have thirty or forty men and ten million flies, all reporting for dinner at the same time. Of course, the automobile and the movie show were still years and years in the future. When we did get into town we didn't find any amusements in the way of basketball or dancing parties or Victrola concerts at the drug store. We couldn't even get an ice cream soda, to say nothing of a nut sundae. We drank pop--which is worse than going thirsty. The grocery store had all the merchandise in open barrels and boxes and crates--open barrels of sugar and crackers, open boxes of cod-fish and prunes, open bags of coffee and beans. You could smell the grocery store before you got into town. Even the lowly banana was a novelty. Imagine a boy becoming excited over a banana! There was a high school in the town but it had no athletic teams, no class organization, no yells, no boys wearing sweaters with large initials on them.

As I look back on those dark ages I can't imagine why any boy or girl found a real good excuse for living. Nevertheless we went along and thought we were having a good time. You see we never had heard of Tin Lizzies or Leaping Lenas or six-tube radio sets or football or knickerbockers or bobbed hair or any of the other blessings of Indiana's civilization as we know it in 1928. We thought we were getting a lot of

excitement if we could pop a little corn once in a while or go rabbit hunting or ride in a bob-sled every winter and see about one circus every summer. If any one had told us that we would live to find every road in Newton County surfaced with hard stone, every farmer getting a free delivery of mail each day--if some prophet had predicted that the time was near at hand when he could ring a bell on a strange looking box and then talk with people miles away, when he could jump into a vehicle, having no horses attached to it, and be in town in ten minutes, when he could push a button and hear music being played in New York City, when he could look up at the sky and see men flying around like chicken hawks, when young ladies would no longer wear hoop-skirts and bustles and corsets and long trailing skirts and mountains of hair piled on top of their heads, when boys would wear shoes instead of copper-toed boots, when the men in town would no longer sport side-whiskers and put oil on their hair, when politics would play second fiddle to athletics, and the comic strip would be more popular than the dime novel--I say, if any one had ventured to make such prophecies he would have been locked up, very promptly, in an asylum for the insane

Early Farm Machinery Required Brawn

I have not ventured to tell you of how the crops were put in and harvested. You wouldn't believe it. One of my earliest jobs was to sit on the front end of the corn planter and pull or push the lever so as to drop three grains of corn every time we came to one of the cross-lines. I regret to say that very little of the corn I put in could be plowed both ways. We didn't have riding plows and the hay had to be pitched by hand. The self-binder was just being tried out but the makers had not yet solved the problem of having the machinery tie a knot in the twine. The first binders used wire which took a single turn around the sheaf and then was twisted and cut off, leaving two sharp points projecting. We had to wear heavy gloves when we were shocking the grain and when I was promoted and became a band-cutter on an old-fashioned threshing machine run by horse power, I had to cut each band with a hatchet. The wire bands got into the straw stacks and proved to be highly indigestible for cattle and horses. Six hundred bushels was a pretty good run for a "thrashing" machine and the grain, when it came out, had to be lifted up to the wagon, a bushel at a time. The straw was not blow into the stack. It went up on an apron elevator and usually about six men were on the straw stack spreading the straw. If the country boys got a town boy on the straw stack they put him at what was known as the "tail end" of the machine where he would get all of the dirt and dust and chaff and crickets. I can say, from experience, that there is no ordeal more unpleasant than that of breathing chaff all day, when

the weather is hot, while several crickets, with spikes on their shoes, are walking around under your hickory shirt.

When a man begins to mumble too much about the past, it's a sign that he is getting old. My ambition is to keep up with the procession and live in the twentieth century instead of the dark and overcast seventies. I can remember when we burned large golden ears of corn in the wood-stove because the grain wasn't worth hauling to the elevator. I like to come with you and look at the Purdue University of today because I can remember when we didn't have on the campus one building as large and commodious and comfortable and well lighted and well heated as the good high school buildings back in your own counties. I can even remember when our national music consisted of sentimental ballads and hymns instead of jazz tunes. I can remember when young people were afraid to go out after dark. You don't know how lucky you were in postponing your arrival in Indiana some thirty or forty years. You have arrived just in time to take in all of the advantages and luxuries and opportunities which have been denied all other human beings from the time of Adam and Eve up to this year.

I know that when we were young we didn't get any of these hilarious excursions to Purdue. Why, if we had wanted to send a lot of our country boys and girls up to Purdue about 1880 we would have been compelled to blindfold them and back them up to get them on a railway train. Purdue is only about fifty years old. It started with one wooden building out here on the lonesome prairie. The first students arriving had to hire a guide to help them find the school. No trouble in finding it these days. We think it is one of the largest and most ornamental and most useful features of the Indiana landscape. We hope that you of the rising generation will come to have the same high regard for Purdue that we, who lived here long ago, are proud to declare whenever we get a chance.