

CLARENCE HAMILTON POE:

THE FORMATIVE YEARS,

1899-1917

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Joseph Anthony Cote. CLARENCE HAMILTON POE: THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1899-1917. (Under the direction of Joseph F. Steelman) Department of History, May, 1969.

The purpose of this study is to examine the formative years in the life of Clarence H. Poe and to evaluate his influence upon North Carolina and the South in the Progressive Era. It deals primarily with Poe's observations concerning education, social reforms, the southern farmer, the Negro, and the growth of The Progressive Farmer.

Poe was one of the leading spokesmen for the New South. He gained this recognition through his work with The Progressive Farmer, a small North Carolina farm weekly. As editor Poe built this paper into the largest in the South, with a circulation of almost 200,000 by 1917. In recognition of his work as a journalist Poe was awarded an honorary doctoral degree by Wake Forest College in 1914.

The young farm editor sought through The Progressive Farmer to improve the lot of the farm population. He organized a staff of competent farm experts who published articles dealing with agrarian problems. Although not a farmer himself, Poe encouraged southern farmers to employ modern techniques and form co-operative organizations. He further worked to break down the isolation and monotony of rural life. He urged farmers to join literary societies, read farm journals, install telephones, demand mail service, and initiate other changes by which they could improve their

lives. Poe's work with the farmer and his opinions concerning agrarian problems were considered by many as the most profound to be undertaken by a spokesman of the New South.

To add to his knowledge of agricultural problems, Poe traveled throughout the United States, Europe, and the Orient. He saw in these areas various successful and unsuccessful ways of coping with agrarian problems. Armed with this first hand knowledge, Poe lectured throughout the South, everywhere stating his opinions as to how the region could update its backward agricultural economy.

The editor further joined or chaired organizations which were concerned with the manifold problems faced by North Carolina. He was an early supporter of Charles B. Aycock's drive to improve the state's educational system. Frequently The Progressive Farmer published articles that advocated better schools, libraries, and compulsory attendance laws.) Through his work Poe became a close friend of Charles Lee Coon and other prominent educational leaders of the state. (In related areas he also chaired the North Carolina Child Labor Committee, the North Carolina Anti-Saloon League,) and the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association.) The farm editor played an important part in practically all organizations that sought the betterment of North Carolina.

Indicative of his prominent stature within North Carolina, Poe was frequently mentioned as a possible candidate for the office of governor of the state. This demonstrated the great appeal that he had gained in a short period of time. Yet he never ran for political office. Frequently the editor stated that his duties with The Progressive Farmer prevented him from doing so. Nonetheless, he exerted much influence upon political developments in the state. He used The Progressive Farmer to indicate his preference in state elections and his endorsement carried much weight with the farmer.

Poe's opinions concerning the Negro were not consistent with his other progressive views. (He feared that the modern agricultural techniques he advocated would result in the South being dominated by the Negro farmer. Accordingly, (he sought the establishment of state-wide segregated rural neighborhoods.) Through The Progressive Farmer he solicited support for this idea. In 1915 the North Carolina legislature failed by two votes to pass a bill that would have allowed the creation of such neighborhoods. To some critics this position reflected Poe's shallow thinking and (he was branded a racist.) He constantly had to defend his position and as a result his outstanding work in other areas was frequently overlooked. More important, however, was the fact that many observers regarded Poe's views as representative

of the entire South. This dynamic editor extolled the virtues of rural life and championed the cause of the small, property holding farmer at a time when the migration of farm population to urban and industrial centers and the increasing mechanization and capitalization of farming operations made his concepts of agriculture increasingly difficult to fulfill.

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FOREWORD

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dr. Joseph F. Steelman for his work in directing this thesis. His extensive knowledge and understanding of the Progressive Era of American History served as a constant source of inspiration to this writer. Of more importance, however, was his patience without which this thesis would not have been completed. Further acknowledgment is made to Dr. Lala Carr Steelman and Dr. Henry C. Ferrell for reading the chapters and suggesting improvements in style and organization.

This writer is also indebted to the librarians at Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Southern Historical Collection for their help in finding materials that related to Clarence H. Poe. Thanks is also extended to Mr. Donald Lennon who compiled the Poe Papers at the North Carolina Department of Archives and History in Raleigh.

Special acknowledgment is made to this writer's parents who were always a source of inspiration in difficult times. Miss Frances Fornes also provided valuable help in typing and proof reading the various chapters. Further acknowledgment is made to the memory of David M. McCommons, 1943-1969, fellow student, colleague, and friend.

Chapter I

RURAL LIFE DEVELOPS A RURAL REFORMER

Clarence Hamilton Poe was destined to become one of the leading spokesmen for the farmers of North Carolina during the Progressive Era. He was born on a farm in Chatham County on January 10, 1881. From this rural environment Poe became prominent as a farm editor and as a leading advocate of progressive reforms in his own state and throughout the South. Chatham County was a depressed farming region in the late nineteenth century, that did not share in the economic prosperity of the nation. It continued to be in the twentieth century what it had been in the nineteenth, a glaring illustration of Henry George's paradox of poverty existing amid progress.¹

A complex set of problems plagued rural counties of the South in the late nineteenth century. One-crop tenant farming characterized by absentee ownership of lands and the lack of credit retarded agriculture. Consequently, 75 per cent of the Negro and 40 per cent of the white farmers in the South did not own the land they tilled.² This system

¹Francis B. Simkins, The South Old and New (1948), 370, hereinafter cited as Simkins, The South Old and New.

²Theodore Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South: 1865-1933 (1960), 237, hereinafter cited as Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South.

characteristic of the South, contrasted with farm ownership and operation in other parts of the nation. John S. Ezell has stated "as a result of the devotion to one crop farming the South found itself restricted to a system of unprogressive agriculture."³

The chaos of southern farming in the late nineteenth century centered around an inadequate financial system. In America's rapidly changing economy the supply of money lagged behind the demands of the farmers. While farm obligations remained fairly constant, the lack of credit deprived farmers of the money that went to the aid of the more favored business interests.⁴ Without money and credit, farmers in the South found themselves heavily in debt. "A chain of debt bound tenant, planter, merchant, and banker together, and in their effort to extricate themselves the banker exploited the merchant, the merchant exploited the tenant, and the tenant exploited the land."⁵

The financial problems of southern farmers were further aggravated by the fact that the farm lands upon which they worked had not been surveyed into small, easily purchasable lots.

³John S. Ezell, The South Since 1865 (1963), 122, hereinafter cited as Ezell, The South Since 1865.

⁴Fred A. Shannon, American Farmers' Movements (1957), 50, hereinafter cited as Shannon, American Farmers' Movements.

⁵Ezell, The South Since 1865, 120.

Instead, there was no significant breakup of large estates and the number of large plantations in proportion to small farms continued to grow.⁶ The final, crushing burden under which the southern farmer worked involved the systems of "time prices" and crop liens. Operating with a lack of money and credit the southern farmer was forced into the position of mortgaging his crop in order to purchase supplies necessary to conduct his operation. Thus, with a lien on his crop, any disaster to his harvest -- natural or otherwise -- would augment his burden of debt. As conditions failed to improve for southern farmers they sought political help to relieve their economic plight. The Agricultural Wheel, the Southern Alliance, the Populist party, the Farmers' Union, the Southern Cotton Association and other organizations became the most effective agencies for expressing the discontent of the farmers. But political action did not always correct economic troubles and conditions for farmers in the South remained backward.

Conditions in North Carolina and in Chatham County in the late nineteenth century were typical of the rest of the South. Although Chatham County was described as "the poorest in North Carolina" at the time of Poe's birth, there were nonetheless opportunities that would challenge a young

⁶Shannon, American Farmers' Movements, 49.

man with ability to escape its economic degradation.⁷ The residents of Chatham County had long exhibited a concern for education; they established one of the first high schools within the state of North Carolina. Prior to 1831 five academies were established in the county. Poe's grandfather, Alexander Hamilton Dismukes attended one of these academies the Bingham School located in Pittsboro.⁸ Just across the Chatham County line was another educational institution, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Here two of Poe's cousins -- Charles Riddle and Thomas Poe -- were students. Another cousin, Peyton Fearrington, attended Trinity College at Durham.⁹ Ransom C. Poe was one of three members of the District Nine School Committee of Chatham County in 1847, although there is no evidence to establish whether Clarence Poe was related to him.¹⁰

Chatham County achieved fame as a health resort prior to the Civil War. Because of its central location, pleasant climate, and good drinking water it attracted some of the larger planters from the North Carolina coast. A stage-coach line was also established in the 1840's to facilitate

⁷Edwin Mims, The Advancing South (1926), 67, hereinafter cited as Mims, The Advancing South.

⁸Clarence H. Poe, My First 80 Years (1963), 2, hereinafter cited as Poe, My First 80 Years.

⁹Poe, My First 80 Years, 33-34.

¹⁰"School Census and Reports of Chatham County: 1847-1924," North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

travel to the county and it "soon became an educational, political, and social center."¹¹ After the Civil War the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad gradually pushed westward and by 1900 the county's railroad system was almost complete. Tracks of the Southern, the Seaboard, and the Norfolk and Southern railroads also crossed Chatham County.¹² With railroad expansion came a scattering of small industries. The first industry of any consequence was the Bynum Manufacturing Company, which began operation in the early 1870's as a cotton mill. Other industries prior to 1900 included grist mills, cotton gins, brick plants, and a canning factory.¹³

The industrial growth that railroads brought to Chatham County prior to 1900 did not compensate for the decrease in farm revenue. Agricultural conditions here were not prosperous. The chief crop of the county was cotton, followed in 1880 by the introduction of tobacco. With the influx of the boll weevil and the decline of soil fertility, however, these crops gradually gave way to poultry and dairy concerns prior to World War I. Indicative of the decrease in agricultural productivity was the slow rise in land values in the county -- less than a \$400,000 increase between the

¹¹William Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina (1958), II, 703-704, hereinafter cited as Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina.

¹²Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina, II, 704.

¹³Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina, II, 706.

years 1879 and 1896. Paralleling the depression in land values was an accompanying decline in population from 25,413 in 1890 to 22,635 in 1920.¹⁵ By the beginning of the twentieth century much of the forest land in the county had also been destroyed.¹⁶

Literary contributions of Chatham County to the state at this time included several weekly newspapers and magazines, most of which were centered around the county seat of Pittsboro. Some of the more prominent were the Central Reflector, the Communicator, edited in 1847 by Poe's grandfather Alexander Dismukes, the Semi-Monthly Record of the Pittsboro Scientific Academy, the Home, and the Chatham Citizen.¹⁷ Mention was made in both the Home and the Chatham Citizen of one F. C. Poe and an O. S. Poe and Sons dealers in general merchandise and farm equipment, but it is not known whether they were part of Poe's immediate family.¹⁸ These newspapers like many other weeklies in North Carolina dealt with the problems and conditions of southern farmers. Clarence Poe was born amidst an environment of general economic decline for both Chatham County and the South.

¹⁴Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina, II, 705.

¹⁵Leonidas L. Polk, Handbook of the State of North Carolina (1879), 59, and The State Board of Agriculture, North Carolina and Its Resources (1896), 413.

¹⁶Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina, II, 704.

¹⁷Poe, My First 80 Years, 21.

¹⁸Home (Pittsboro), October 13, 1887, and Chatham Citizen (Pittsboro), April 1, March 18, 1897.

Poe's first years were spent on his father's farm located adjacent to the main highway running from Greensboro to Fayetteville and near the Haw and Deep rivers. Throughout Chatham County lived relatives of Poe's mother and father; they included Hackneys, Moores, Poes from England, Pattersons from Scotland, and Dismukes from France.¹⁹ Poe's father, William Baxter Poe, and his two brothers and four sisters all settled within three miles of their parents and grandparent's homes. As a result a "rare intimacy" existed among the families living in that part of Chatham County. The large, six-room house in which Poe was born had been given to his father along with a small acreage of land and a few buildings when Poe's grandfather had divided his land among his children. Among the valuable possessions in the Poe family was a set of silverware that Poe's mother had inherited from her great grandparents, Jacob and Pamela Shepperd, whose son Augustine was for thirty years a North Carolina Whig congressman.²⁰

The area surrounding Poe's home was distinguished by two or three prominent landmarks. Fields of corn and cotton cultivated by three generations of Poes lay close by. Cabins of ex-slaves owned by Poe's great grandfather were still

¹⁹Poe, My First 80 Years, 2.

²⁰Poe, My First 80 Years, 4, 57.

standing. In front of Poe's home was "Schoolhouse Hill" upon which was built one of the first public school buildings in North Carolina. Later it acquired the name "Poe-School" in honor of the many Poes who attended it in the 1850's.²¹ A road ran by the front of Poe's home that brought wagons and travelers from other areas with news of the outside world. A covered bridge over Deep River was located less than two miles from Poe's home, while along George's Creek, a small stream that ran through the Poe property, Poe's father and uncles Alvis and Stephen built a millsite in the mid 1880's. This was later abandoned in 1886 owing to the threat of malaria.²²

The Poes showed much interest in their lineage. Uncle John Tyson, one of the oldest relatives that Poe remembered, lived to be ninety-eight years old. Poe's grandfather, Alexander Dismukes, probably lived near Pittsboro. A copy of the Pittsboro newspaper Communicator which Dismukes edited in 1847 became one of Poe's proud possessions.²³ At the home of one of his uncles, John Lea who had served in the Confederate Army, Poe spent many of his Christmas holidays listening to discussions concerning new movements in the

²¹Poe, My First 80 Years, 5, 6, 14.

²²Poe, My First 80 Years, 7.

²³Poe, My First 80 Years, 7, 21.

South that were voiced by Henry Grady in the Atlanta Constitution and Walter Hines Page in the State Chronicle. Poe's uncle, Stephen Moore, was considered the best farmer of the family. Moore, who worked a 150 acre tract of land, remained self-sufficient all his life and rarely ventured into town for supplies of any kind.²⁴

Interest in education was also a common characteristic among many of Poe's relatives. Two of Poe's cousins attended Trinity College. Poe's paternal grandfather, Joseph M. Poe, had tried to start a "subscription school" before the days of public education, while Poe's maternal grandfather, Alexander Hamilton Dismukes, taught school for a number of years. Poe's Aunt Celia had been a school teacher in Mississippi and brought back to North Carolina ideas concerning education from another area of the South.²⁵ Poe was named for another Clarence Poe who was one of the first soldiers from Chatham County to be killed in the Civil War.²⁶ Poe's great grandparents were noted for their kindness to their slaves, while his grandfather, Alexander Dismukes, was characterized as being a man of extreme neatness. A leading figure from his mother's family was Julia Tutwiler, although

²⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 26, 29.

²⁵Poe, My First 80 Years, 32, 26.

²⁶Poe, My First 80 Years, 38.

Poe's exact relationship to her is not clear.²⁷ Educated at Vassar Julia Titwiler became president of Alabama Normal School and later helped open the University of Alabama to women. Poe's great uncle and aunt, Jesse and Rachel Poe, lived during the "Norfolk War," or the War of 1812, and were characterized as being self-sufficient people. There was also some probability that Poe was related to the famous Edgar Allen Poe: "But when I write 'Clarence' it is a reminder of my father's family -- who are descendants of another group of Poes who claim kinship with Edgar Allen."²⁸

The physical closeness of many relatives helped to create an atmosphere of warmth and friendship for Poe, and he experienced a happy though hardy childhood. Of central importance to Poe's development was the influence that his parents exerted upon him. His father, William Baxter Poe, was a Civil War veteran "modest in thought and word" who worked on a farm throughout his life. The elder Poe, who had successfully managed his father's farm after his death in 1868, was considered to be an outstanding farmer of Chatham County. Among the first in the area to order a supposedly improved quality wheat seed by mail, he was also

²⁷Poe described Julia Titwiler's relationship in this matter: "Always on the lookout for kinfolks in other states I found an especially charming and gifted kinfolk in Miss Julia Titwiler." See Poe, My First 80 Years, 39.

²⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 38.

one of the first to subscribe to farm journals and magazines.²⁹ In 1890 an unfortunate business venture, coupled with an attack of fever and "going security" on some of his friend's debts swept away his farm. The character of the elder Poe was revealed when he worked for other men during the depression years of five and six cent cotton until he won back his farm.³⁰ Poe's father evidently was firm in his own convictions but tolerant of other men's views. Clarence Poe recalled his father's influence in this way: "The heritage of such a character is worth more to a son than a golden fortune -- and for him who lived it, too, we know that such a life has its reward."³¹

Poe's mother, Susan Dismukes, profoundly influenced his early development. She had been educated as a school teacher at an academy located in Cary, North Carolina, under the supervision of Professor A. H. Merritt. Because she shared in the difficult circumstances of her family, she emphasized throughout Poe's early life the importance of an education:

My mother was an educated and ambitious woman. She taught me when I was very young that I could only hope to escape

²⁹Poe, My First 80 Years, 28.

³⁰Poe, My First 80 Years, 27.

³¹Poe, My First 80 Years, 28.

the poverty and hardship of rural life by getting myself an education. She taught me, too, that I would have to educate myself as schools were out of the question for me.³²

Only through constant encouragement and prompting from his mother was Poe able to break away from the southern farm life which choked off so many young people from the "outside world." The difficulties encountered by Poe's parents, similar to those of many southern families at that time, made a lasting impression upon him. In recalling his earlier days Poe wrote

the poverty and hardship of the days before education had brought the hope of better things, or cooperation pointed out the way -- the days when no equitable system of rural credits offered escape from the robbery of time prices, whose outworn marketing methods left to others the handling of our products and all voice in pricing what we bought of others or others bought of us; and when the inevitable mortgage followed menacing like a sword of Damocles, while we toiled.³³

Because of these hardships Poe determined that he would work to find "a conspicuous and useful place in the world."³⁴

Poe's life began with a battle for survival. When only nine days old he suffered a severe attack of whooping

³²Clarence H. Poe, "A Biographical Sketch," n.p.n.d., Clarence H. Poe Papers, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Poe, "A Biographical Sketch."

³³Mims, The Advancing South, 67.

³⁴Poe, "A Biographical Sketch."

cough. But unlike many he recovered with no damaging effects. This first struggle for life later influenced Poe to fight for better health conditions for the South.³⁵ Another important event in Poe's early life was his association with the Negroes around his home. Two of his first playmates were Negroes -- "Mose" and "Rufe" -- while "Black Bob" an ex-slave of Poe's great grandfather was also a close friend.³⁶ Poe enjoyed a warm relationship with these friends and there was no indication of the later problem that he would encounter with the Negro.

More important in Poe's early life was the education he received. He began his education by learning the alphabet from the seed bags that his father used in farming. At seven years of age he commenced his little formal education. He attended a small, one-room schoolhouse near his home. There, with thirty or more students, he learned from his "textbook" -- Webster's Blueback Speller -- and occasionally missed recess to study a new or more interesting lesson. When nine years old Poe attended a public school in Greensboro, North Carolina, where his family had moved to enable his father to secure better employment to repay the mortgage on their farm. At Greensboro one of Poe's first teachers, Miss

³⁵Poe, My First 80 Years, 44.

³⁶Poe, My First 80 Years, 13-14.

Elizabeth M. Lindsey, read aloud one of his first compositions and used it as an example of good writing style. A lifelong interest in better schools began for Poe in Greensboro. His father's job required a greater degree of education than he possessed, and consequently the family was forced to return to their farm.³⁷

Poe's formal education continued with his return to Chatham County. He enrolled in another public school while also studying the books that his cousins brought from the University of North Carolina. Poe described his rather sporadic educational background of these early years in this way:

My education in those days came from many different sources: my mother regularly taught me at home, I went to public school during the four-month term, I attended the extended subscription school terms financed by tuition payments of the more interested parents; and I boarded with an uncle some distance away to take advantage of an extra school term in his district while my school was not in session.³⁸

To augment his formal education Poe read all the magazines to which his family subscribed. It was a "red letter day" when the Youth's Companion arrived and Poe's appreciation was heightened by the fact that the editor could take time

³⁷Poe, My First 80 Years, 16-19.

³⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 18.

to write an encouraging letter to the fifteen year old farm boy commenting that his short stories were "most promising."³⁹ With the nearest library fifty miles away, Harper's Round Table, Harper's Magazine, and McClure's Magazine formed Poe's own library. He also read all the books he found in his home including Pilgrim's Progress, John Ploughman Talks, Peter Parley's History of the World, and The Learned Blacksmith, a book dealing with astronomy by Elihu Burrett. A subscription to a small North Carolina farm newspaper, The Progressive Farmer, was purchased from money Poe earned picking cotton.⁴⁰ Viewed in retrospect Poe's early education could not be considered as very beneficial, nor did it expose him to the formal discipline associated with higher, extensive education. But Poe did not allow himself to be restricted by a lack of formal education; rather, by constant reading and writing he gained in his early years an educational background far superior than the limited opportunities would appear to have afforded.

Religion also played an important part in Poe's early life. The Bible, as was the custom in many southern homes at that time, was read daily. Following the beliefs of his mother and father, Poe joined the Baptist Church. Throughout his life he remained a dedicated church member and the

³⁹Poe, My First 80 Years, 20.

⁴⁰Poe, My First 80 Years, 20.

parable of "The Last Judgment" -- the love of God for man -- remained his favorite verse.⁴¹ Of further importance in Poe's early life was his marriage in 1912 to Alice Aycock, daughter of the ex-governor of North Carolina. This marriage had resulted from Poe's close friendship with Charles B. Aycock.

Early political influences in Poe's life came from his father's activities with organizations that reflected interest in southern farm problems. The inadequate farm prices in North Carolina in the late 1880's and 1890's plus the fact that Chatham County suffered from crop failures led Poe's father to join the Farmer's Alliance and the Populist party. Poe's father and Uncle Stephen Moore regularly attended Farmer's Alliance meetings and in 1892 voted with the majority of the farmers of Chatham County for the Populist party.⁴² The fact that Leonidas L. Polk, a leading Populist in the early 1890's, had also come from North Carolina helped instill in Poe an interest in political affairs.

In 1895 as the spirit of the Progressive Era emerged throughout the country Poe wrote: "No matter how great the seeming obstacles now, I shall become a writer and shall make this my life's work."⁴³

⁴¹Poe, My First 80 Years, 49.

⁴²Poe, My First 80 Years, 67.

⁴³Poe, My First 80 Years, 68.

In the next few years he adhered to his statement and wrote articles, short stories, and verses for farm papers among which was The Progressive Farmer, published in Raleigh, North Carolina. The Progressive Farmer had had its origin in 1886 when Leonidas L. Polk, a leader of the Farmers' State Association, an Allianceman, and a well-known Populist established it as a sounding board for the farm interests of his state. After his death in 1892 The Progressive Farmer was operated by his widow. In May, 1897 Poe wrote an article for the paper -- "The Public School Question" -- in which he defended a proposed tax increase to support longer school terms for North Carolina. He also wrote a personal letter to the paper stating that someday he wished to become an editor. Although the proposed tax increase was overwhelmingly defeated, Poe's article earned for him an interview with the editor of the paper, John L. Ramsey, and the business manager John W. Denmark. Impressed with this youth of sixteen they offered him a job as "printer's devil." Poe accepted and on May 25, 1897 left Chatham County for Raleigh to commence his career as a journalist with The Progressive Farmer. He would be identified with this publication for more than sixty years.

Poe's initial duties with The Progressive Farmer consisted of helping to set type for the newspaper and reading the long-hand letters, "manuscripts," that were sent to the

paper by its subscribers. Along with his duties with the paper, Poe also had his first opportunity to discover the city of Raleigh. He made his residence there with J. W. Denmark, the business manager of The Progressive Farmer. Most of Poe's early ventures ended at the State Library where he had an opportunity to read such classical writers as Homer, Plutarch, Dante, and Adam Smith, whose Wealth of Nations impressed him with its idea of "equality for agriculture" -- an idea to which the young journalist dedicated his life.⁴⁴ Poe also was a frequent visitor of the Chautauqua meetings in Raleigh and in 1897 heard Thomas Dixon speak on the topic, "Cuba or the Battle Cry For Freedom."⁴⁵ Poe rapidly gained many new friends in Raleigh, not the least of whom were those acquaintances he made at Peace and Meredith colleges -- schools for women.

Poe's enthusiastic work with The Progressive Farmer led to his promotion in 1897 to assistant-editor and with it came the added responsibility of writing editorials for the paper. His first editorial, "Be Systematic," dealt with the idea of establishing a schedule by which each man could plan his time. It was suggested to him by the editor, John Ramsey. During the next two years Poe worked diligently at his duties with The Progressive Farmer. At the same time, however, he

⁴⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 82.

⁴⁵Poe, My First 80 Years, 78.

was interested in attending college. The Agricultural and Mechanical College at Raleigh was the natural choice for him. However, he did not attend because the advanced courses in agriculture in which he was interested were not offered at that time.⁴⁶ He was urged by some of his friends, notably Josiah W. Bailey, to consider Wake Forest College. This idea was dropped, however, when he was promoted to editor-in-chief of The Progressive Farmer on July 4, 1899. With this promotion his hopes for entering college gradually gave way to the work associated with his new job.

Poe's rapid rise from a farm boy in Chatham County to editor of The Progressive Farmer by his eighteenth birthday was extraordinary. Through his ability, determination, and a number of fortunate circumstances he was able to escape from a rural farm life. Lacking years of formal education he relied upon inspiration from his mother and upon a strong desire to read voraciously in order to equip himself for a constructive career in journalism. Few young men of the South had assumed comparable responsibilities at this early age of eighteen.

⁴⁶Poe, My First 80 Years, 87.

Chapter II

THE GROWTH AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER

The Progressive Farmer was Poe's outstanding achievement in a financial sense and it also served as a podium by which he reached the farmers of the South. The success of the paper by 1917 was due mainly to his efforts in organization, planning, selection of key personnel, and tedious work. The paper was launched at Winston, North Carolina in 1886 by Leonidas L. Polk a leading Allianceman and Populist. With the first issue Polk established a reforming tempo by advocating the creation of an agricultural college which was founded in 1887.¹ The untimely death of Polk in 1892 limited the expansion of The Progressive Farmer and by 1899 its circulation was only 5,000.

In July, 1899 Poe became editor of The Progressive Farmer. He began this work with the advantage of having affiliated with a paper that had been started by a popular and well-known North Carolinian. Indeed Poe continued to use for some time the salutary greeting which Polk had used as the masthead for the first issue of the paper:

The Industrial and Educational Interests
of Our People Paramount To All Other
Consideration of State Policy. Serving
no master, ruled by no faction it will

¹Poe, My First 80 Years, 92.

be true to the instincts, traditions, and history of the Anglo-Saxon race.²

Poe had no illusions about the work that lay ahead of him if he wished to build The Progressive Farmer into a leading paper in his state and the South. In 1899 he described The Progressive Farmer as "a shabby little organ of an uncertain organization. Its good will was a doubtful asset since most of its subscribers were delinquent."³ In his first efforts to build The Progressive Farmer Poe relied almost exclusively upon his own abilities. In later years when The Progressive Farmer became established as a leading farm paper in the South, he attributed its success to the inspirations his mother had instilled in him during childhood.⁴ The battle to establish the paper was, for the young editor, a challenge that had its origin in his boyhood days in Chatham County. "He determined that his paper should take up for the white man a task a great humanitarian had begun earlier for the black -- emancipation."⁵ The achievements and improvements that needed to be made in southern farm life provided Poe with the inspiration needed in his work.

² The Progressive Farmer (Raleigh), February 10, 1886, hereinafter cited as The Progressive Farmer.

³ William Saunders, "The Dixie Plowboy," Success, XVI (May, 1924), 56, hereinafter cited as Saunders, "The Dixie Plowboy."

⁴ Saunders, "The Dixie Plowboy," 56-57.

⁵ Poe, "A Biographical Sketch."

The period from 1899 to 1903, when Poe bought a controlling interest in the paper, were years of much work, change, and experimentation. Although he did not own the paper in 1899, Poe selected the articles that made up its pages. Consequently, the policies which he formulated in this early period indicated the paper's eventual character. The chief objective, he decided, would be the achievement of a better way of life for the rural South. He wanted to gain for the southern farmer the comforts that the city offered, and he insisted that the farmer also deserved good roads, good churches, good neighbors, and all desirable things of life.⁶

In the political realm Poe decided that The Progressive Farmer should not be affiliated with any party. He declared that the paper would not wear "any party collar."⁷ This was unequivocally stated in the following editorial:

The Progressive Farmer is not the organ of any party -- Democratic, Republican, Populist, Prohibitionist, Socialist, or even women suffrage -- is not run in the interest of any party, receives no aid from any party and owes nothing to any party. It is independent of parties and independent of independents. The editor has a party affiliation but he believes that he serves his party best

⁶Poe, "A Biographical Sketch."

⁷The Progressive Farmer, June 5, July 31, 1900.

who serves his country best and that
it is an editor's duty to tell the plain
truth.⁸

Before Poe became editor of The Progressive Farmer he had discussed with one of his friends the idea of some official connection between the paper and the Farmer's Alliance.

Theodore B. Parker, founder and later editor of the Mid-South edition of The Progressive Farmer, wrote Poe in 1898 concerning a possible connection between the paper and the Farmer's Alliance: "It is impossible to faithfully serve any political party, and any non-partisan organization with the same paper."⁹ Following Parker's advice and his own convictions, Poe did not allow The Progressive Farmer to support any political organization. In 1915 The Progressive Farmer became the official newspaper for the North Carolina State Farmers' Union which was non-partisan.

One of the most rewarding aspects that Poe undertook as editor of the paper was the initiation of correspondence with other literary leaders of the South and the nation. As a result of this correspondence, he was offered various editorial positions with other newspapers and magazines. In 1900 he was offered positions with both the American Monthly Review of Reviews, edited by Albert Shaw, and The World's

⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 7, 1905.

⁹Theodore B. Parker to Clarence Poe, December 24, 1898, Leonidas L. Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Polk Papers.

Work, soon to be edited by Walter Hines Page. Both men offered to pay him salary of \$3,000 annually. Although the offers were tempting, Poe refused both jobs. He asserted that there existed within his own area many opportunities for a young man in the newspaper field. He gained the friendship of both Shaw and Page, corresponded with them, and wrote occasional articles for their magazines.¹⁰

The weekly issues of The Progressive Farmer in the years 1900 and 1901 were small -- eight half-pages in length -- and dealt with farm topics. The basic form of the paper in these years was the following: the first two pages dealt with editorial and farm reports, page three contained state and world-wide news, pages four through six contained articles by other members of the staff, and the last two pages contained advertisements, correspondence of farm organizations and other columns devoted to social or religious functions.¹¹ Circulation remained small; the paper counted 5,504 regular subscribers through the year 1903.¹² Subscription rates for the paper ranged from 25¢ for three months to \$1 per year.

As editor during these years, Poe constantly defined and redefined his position as the directing force of The Progressive Farmer. In the first issue of 1900 he set forth

¹⁰Poe, My First 80 Years, 127.

¹¹The Progressive Farmer, January 1, 1901.

¹²The Progressive Farmer, February 14, 1907.

his role as editor "to speak with no uncertain voice on ALL matters relating to the industrial and educational interest of our people. This we consider the proper policy for an agricultural paper...."¹³ Later in the year he stated that the paper would fight for the moral and social welfare of all farmers and present a "fearless, unmuzzled and unprejudiced paper for the farm people."¹⁴ In 1901 he elaborated upon his position as editor as follows:

We desire only to keep the paper in the path of independence and courage marked out for it in its first issue. We expect to make some mistakes; we expect at times to be misunderstood, but our mistakes shall be of the head and not of the heart.¹⁵

Poe's ability as editor of The Progressive Farmer was quickly acknowledged by its new owner, John W. Denmark, who succeeded to this position with the death of Mrs. L. L. Polk in June, 1901. In commenting on his position as "owner of the paper" Denmark observed that it belonged to the people and that Poe, as editor, was a man of high quality.¹⁶ In his role as editor of The Progressive Farmer, Poe experimented with different ideas, attempting to improve its circulation. Sample copies were sent along with subscription copies and

¹³The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1900.

¹⁴The Progressive Farmer, February 27, June 3, November 20, 1900.

¹⁵The Progressive Farmer, February 19, 1901.

¹⁶The Progressive Farmer, August 6, 1901.

reductions were provided to those customers who gained new subscribers. Sample copies were also sent into areas where The Progressive Farmer was relatively unknown. Poe's first attempts to improve the circulation of The Progressive Farmer were directed specifically to North Carolinians. The paper was described as "especially adapted to North Carolina" and a journal that would endeavor to cover all areas of concern for North Carolina farmers "with instructive farm articles, independent and informing editorials presented in readable form."¹⁷ Subscription rates varied little during this time with only a 5¢ increase in the \$1 a year rate. These prices remained constant throughout the first eighteen years of the twentieth century.

In discussing the slightly higher than normal subscription rates Poe both humored and challenged his readers. "Fifty cents will secure the paper for you for six months and if you are not satisfied with the investment, say so and your money will be cheerfully refunded -- provided your sanity is clearly established."¹⁸ He also explained that the paper's price was higher than other farm journals because it was sold on its merits, not on attempts to gain new subscribers with silly games or contests. "If you subscribe

¹⁷The Progressive Farmer, October 6, 1903.

¹⁸The Progressive Farmer, January 15, 1901.

for The Progressive Farmer you pay your money and get a paper with it...."¹⁹ This higher rate reflected the fact that the creation of rural free mail delivery in 1897 did not yet influence the price of the paper. Special rates were also given to subscribers who took The Progressive Farmer with other journals and newspapers. In 1902 a person could receive for \$2.15 a year's subscription to the Courier Journal, the Home and Farm, the American Queen, and The Progressive Farmer.²⁰ These special rates helped to make available more reading material for rural farm areas which in most cases did not have easily accessible public libraries. In addition to these specials The Progressive Farmer acquired articles from other newspapers and magazines. By 1902 its columns usually contained articles from the Farmer's Voice, the Biblical Recorder, Child and Charity, Youth's Companion, Woman's Home Journal, Ladies Home Journal, the News and Observer, The World's Work and other newspapers and magazines. In return Poe was often called upon to write articles for these magazines and newspapers. Consequently The Progressive Farmer circulated opinions from other areas and authors and at the same time became better known to the reading public.

Poe initiated other changes in The Progressive Farmer

¹⁹The Progressive Farmer, July 31, 1900, April 28, 1903.

²⁰The Progressive Farmer, May 20, 1902.

during his four years as editor. In 1901 a Mergenthaler machine was added to do the typesetting.²¹ In August, 1902 the paper was expanded from eight to sixteen pages. This was partially owing to an increase in the number of new departments and articles as well as an increase in the amount of space devoted to advertising. During this year The Progressive Farmer also moved its offices from Fayetteville Street to West Martin Street in Raleigh. A new printing press was installed to provide a more readable paper.²² The Progressive Farmer also combined with two other newspapers, the Biblical Recorder and the Raleigh Christian Advocate to form a co-operative printing company to provide their own press-work. In this way all three papers were enabled to reduce printing costs.²³

Under Poe's leadership The Progressive Farmer adopted a stiffer attitude than many other southern farm newspapers with respect to advertisements. Since it was only a small paper with limited funds, advertisements formed a vital part of The Progressive Farmer's income. Nonetheless as early as June, 1900 Poe stated that the paper would not accept advertisements until convinced of the advertiser's honesty and

²¹Poe, My First 80 Years, 79.

²²The Progressive Farmer, August 26, 1902.

²³The Progressive Farmer, September 16, 1902.

ability to fulfill his promises. "We can recommend every advertiser who solicits patronage through our columns."²⁴ Before state and federal regulation of drugs, tonics, and other "cure-alls", was established The Progressive Farmer set an example for the rest of the South to follow in its early condemnation of products that were injurious to the body. "Not even 'cash in advance' can induce us to insert an advertisement that we regard as unreliable. When you patronize The Progressive Farmer's advertisements, rest assured that you are dealing with honorable men who can fulfill their promise."²⁵ To Poe the idea of guaranteeing the validity of advertisements in The Progressive Farmer would lead, hopefully, to a better name for the paper and also protection for the subscriber.

Poe felt that advertisements used in The Progressive Farmer should be beneficial to all readers. He constantly urged the readers of The Progressive Farmer to take time to examine the advertisements of the paper. At the same time he warned against the "magnetic healing" liquids that were being advertised in some papers. He bitterly denounced concerns that produced these products and warned his readers

²⁴The Progressive Farmer, June 5, 1900.

²⁵The Progressive Farmer, August 28, September 4, 1900.

²⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 23, 1900.

that they were "frauds of the first water."²⁷ Yet for all Poe's good intentions The Progressive Farmer published occasional advertisements that were not in line with the policies it advocated. Advertisements appeared for "Vital-Ore," a stimulant to improve one's health. "Hair-Vigor" guaranteed to grow hair, "Swamp Root" claimed to cure all kidney infections, while "Peruna" was advertised for nervous conditions.²⁸ As late as January, 1905 The Progressive Farmer carried an advertisement for a "permanent cure for cancer."²⁹ In his crusade against the advertisement of harmful drugs and liquors, Poe acknowledged that The Progressive Farmer had printed such fraudulent claims "The Progressive Farmer itself carried some patent medicine business before we became convinced that the whole business was rotten."³⁰ There seems, however, to be some indication that, owing to early financial difficulties, The Progressive Farmer used with indifference such "magnetic-healing" types of advertisement. Money was needed to keep the paper going until it was established upon a firm financial base. Nevertheless, Poe deserved credit for initiating an attack upon the fraudulent advertisement of harmful drugs in the South.

²⁷The Progressive Farmer, February 20, 1900.

²⁸The Progressive Farmer, April 23, 1901, May 20, 1902, June 23, 1903.

²⁹The Progressive Farmer, January 17, 1905.

³⁰The Progressive Farmer, January 10, 1911.

He never solicited advertisements from these companies which usually found lucrative markets in many parts of the South as well as the nation. Poe and The Progressive Farmer were later to be active supporters of the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

Advertisement of another sort was a prime feature of these early issues of The Progressive Farmer. The paper devoted much of its space to the many schools and colleges in North Carolina that sought publicity. In one 1901 issue The Progressive Farmer carried advertisements for Guilford College, Baptist Female University, Greensboro Female College, Elon College, Oxford Seminary for Girls, the University of North Carolina, Madison Institute and Business College, North Carolina A & M College, Buie's Creek Academy, and Salem High School.³¹

The rates charged by The Progressive Farmer for advertisement in these early years varied somewhat, but the typical cost was \$1.68 per inch, per insertion, for a general advertisement. Other rates included \$1.26 per inch, per insertion, for livestock and poultry advertisements, and 10¢ a word for lesser and personal advertisements. In the "Farmers Exchange," a column devoted especially to the buying and selling of farm produce and animals, the rate was 3¢ per insertion

³¹The Progressive Farmer, July 22, 1901.

for each word or figure.³² There was no reduction for either the length of time or increase in space of an advertisement because Poe considered the rates already sufficiently low.³³ Rates also varied for articles sent to The Progressive Farmer, but generally ran \$2 a column for ordinary contributions and \$3 a column for specialists and agricultural leaders.³⁴ In later years when The Progressive Farmer became the best known farm paper in the South it charged \$64 an inch for advertisements.³⁵

From 1901 to 1903, while Poe continued his work as editor, The Progressive Farmer was owned by John W. Denmark. As early as 1901 however, Denmark considered the idea of selling the paper to Poe. In response to a letter from Denmark concerning this possibility, Poe wrote:

I take it that you were not really serious in your suggestion in regard to my buying the paper and I am moreover, best satisfied with editorial duties. Rather than let the paper fall into the hands of any one else, however, I should make an effort to buy it, and so should like to be first notified should you at any time really decide to retire.³⁶

³²The Progressive Farmer, February 27, 1908.

³³Clarence Poe to J. Bryan Grimes, December 12, 1907, J. Bryan Grimes Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Grimes Papers.

³⁴Clarence Poe, "Rates for Contributing Articles," n.p.n.d., Poe Papers.

³⁵Poe, My First 80 Years, 105.

³⁶Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 31, 1901, Polk Papers.

In the same letter Poe stated that he found his work with The Progressive Farmer most congenial but suggested that he be given more control over the circulation department. "In that line I have made a close study of the business methods employed by other papers, especially farm papers, so that I think that I could co-operate with you to some advantage in planning for increasing The Progressive Farmer's circulation."³⁷

For the year 1902 Poe made arrangements with Denmark to receive \$780 for his duties as editor, with Denmark reserving \$15 each month for room and board. Arrangements were also made whereby Poe received a small commission on all new subscribers to The Progressive Farmer during the year. This commission amounted to approximately \$70 or 10 per cent of his salary. At the end of 1902 Denmark approached Poe with the proposal that he buy a half-interest in the paper. The price Denmark asked was \$2,000. Since this was beyond Poe's financial means he hesitated going "heels over head" in debt to acquire the cash needed. Poe had little capital and back wages were owed to him by The Progressive Farmer. "I should greatly prefer to work for a good salary" Poe responded to Denmark's inquiry. It was agreed, however, that, on account of Denmark's poor health and frequent need of rest, Poe

³⁷Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 31, 1901, Polk Papers.

³⁸Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 31, 1901, Polk Papers.

would take over as business manager for 20 per cent of the monthly revenues.³⁹

In 1903 Poe commenced serious efforts to buy The Progressive Farmer. In January he wrote to J. Bryan Grimes, a personal friend who later became Secretary of State for North Carolina, and asked his opinion whether it would be a wise financial move to buy The Progressive Farmer. Poe felt that it would be unwise to begin a new farm paper in North Carolina if he could not buy The Progressive Farmer. "A new farm paper would have difficulty surviving with The Progressive Farmer because it is established and both advertisers and subscribers are afraid of new papers."⁴⁰ Poe also revealed to Grimes in a rather platitudinous statement his plans to buy the paper from Denmark.

If my plans go through the end of the year will see the paper under such ownership and management as will heighten its prestige as a farm paper and remove every excuse for political prejudice against it. Of course there is none now because I control the editorial policy exclusively.⁴¹

In December, 1903 negotiations began between Denmark and Poe for the transfer of the paper. Poe proposed that he

³⁹Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 4, 1902, Polk Papers.

⁴⁰Clarence Poe to J. Bryan Grimes, January 31, 1903, Grimes Papers.

⁴¹Clarence Poe to J. Bryan Grimes, January 31, 1903, Grimes Papers.

be paid \$1,200 for his role as editor in 1904. If this demand could not be met, which Poe already knew, he proposed to purchase the paper for \$5,000, half to be paid in cash and half to be paid within the year.

In view of its poor profits and the probability of increased competition, I think this to be every cent the paper is worth to you. Though it is proposed to form a very strong and very influential company to start a big farm weekly here, provided I will take charge of it, I have refused to enter into the scheme, because I do not wish to leave The Progressive Farmer -- and will not unless forced to do so by failure to get a just salary or to buy at a just price.⁴²

Poe put further pressure upon Denmark with a demand that he be paid the back wages that were owed him -- within two weeks. "With your paper and your mutual stock you should certainly raise the money, and the notice given you was certainly as long as any business man should ask. It is a cold matter of necessity with me."⁴³ Although no mention of the amount that was owed Poe has been found, probably the larger part of a year's salary was due him. Although Poe's demands left little room for Denmark to bargain, it seemed that Poe used some bluffing to obtain the paper. The four successful years with The Progressive Farmer, plus the achievements that he had

⁴²Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 16, 1903, Polk Papers.

⁴³Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 16, 1903, Polk Papers.

made as editor, were not to be ignored even if he thought of beginning an entirely new organization.

Further negotiations took place between Poe and Denmark. In reply to Poe's offer, Denmark demanded \$6,000 for the paper -- \$4,000 in cash and \$2,000 within the year. He informed Poe that if he entered into a new enterprise that "you will find it will cost you several times the amount to build up a circulation as large as you will get to start with." Denmark also reminded Poe that he "knew" the property of the paper was in better shape than ever before and that if he, Denmark, had perfect health he would not think of "sacrificing the paper for these figures."⁴⁴ Poe's reply to Denmark contained the warning that a new farm paper headed by him might be formed: "I fear that one will be established before many months. I wish to save you and your property from this danger." Poe then proposed the sum of \$5,500 for The Progressive Farmer, half to be paid in cash, half within the year. He also promised to keep Denmark with the paper for a year and pay him 10 per cent of all monies received from the special reduced subscription rates that he had established for rural libraries.⁴⁵

An agreement was finally reached with Denmark and Poe

⁴⁴J. W. Denmark to Clarence Poe, December 17, 1903, Polk Papers.

⁴⁵Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 17, 1903, Polk Papers.

purchased the paper. The final terms of the arrangement were specified in a letter from Poe to Denmark on December 22, 1903.

I am to pay you \$6,000 (\$3,000 cash and \$3,000 January 1, 1905) for The Progressive Farmer. In addition I shall pay certain debts now due by you and named in your proposition to the extent of \$1,243.72; all other debts and liabilities of any character whatsoever incurred in printing, publishing, or conducting The Progressive Farmer prior to the time of this sale to be assumed and settled by you.⁴⁶

In buying The Progressive Farmer Poe received $46 \frac{2}{3}$ per cent of the stock of the paper while four of his close friends bought the remaining $53 \frac{1}{3}$ per cent. These four men, all later to play important roles with The Progressive Farmer, included Dr. B. W. Kilgore, director of the State Experiment Station of North Carolina, Dr. Charles W. Burkett, head of the Department of Agriculture at A & M College, Theodore B. Parker, long a leader in the State Farmer's Alliance and active in Farmer's Institute work, and Josiah W. Bailey, editor and chief owner of The Biblical Recorder. With these four men Poe founded a new company for The Progressive Farmer, the Agricultural Publishing Company, and was elected its president. Thus Poe began a career as owner and editor of The Progressive Farmer. Acquisition of The Progressive Farmer

⁴⁶Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, December 22, 1903, Polk Papers.

⁴⁷Poe, My First 80 Years, 90.

was an important step in Poe's plans to become a leader of reform measures for southern farm interests. He had to control The Progressive Farmer in order to build it into the type of farm paper that was to represent the New South, and to break with the past as typified by J. W. Denmark.

With control of The Progressive Farmer now in his hands, Poe wrote into the by-laws of the company the ideal that the paper would serve:

The paper will be kept absolutely free from all partisan politics and political scheming. Its chief and highest aim will be to inform and help our Southern farmers with every vital problem affecting their interest. I shall expect perfect freedom to discuss current events and current problems in a clear and fearless manner, but without bitterness or partisanship.⁴⁸

Poe assumed the dual role of circulation and advertising manager until the paper's growth warranted the creation of separate departments for these posts. In these first years as owner, editor, circulation and advertising manager, he made improvements in The Progressive Farmer. He printed The Progressive Farmer on a better, costlier paper and used more pictures which heretofore had been limited; he published an index for some of the issues.⁴⁹ Through the editorial pages Poe continued to define the purpose of the paper, with special

⁴⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 94.

⁴⁹The Progressive Farmer, September 27, November and December, 1904.

emphasis directed to North Carolina farmers. He remarked that the paper would "singularly and solely be of the greatest possible help to you and your family, to other North Carolina farmers and their families."⁵⁰ Because The Progressive Farmer's appeal was directed primarily to farm groups, Poe had to establish in his reader's minds the fact that both he, and all the leaders of the paper, had dealt with farm problems all their lives. In response to an article written in Charity and Children, a weekly North Carolina newspaper, that some farm papers did not contain any real farmers on their staffs, Poe replied that all the men associated with The Progressive Farmer had been raised on farms or had managed farms successfully.⁵¹ He also cited his own experience as a farmer:

The editor himself, while he very seldom feels called upon to advise farmers about the conduct of their affairs, leaving that to the splendid corps of correspondents he is so fortunate to have, has done nearly ever kind of ordinary farm work, and worked in a cotton field the day before he began the labors on The Progressive Farmer.⁵²

Poe believed a person could stay abreast of new farming procedures not only by the management of a farm, but also by keeping in touch with the work done at agricultural colleges

⁵⁰The Progressive Farmer, January 12, 1904.

⁵¹The Progressive Farmer, July 22, 1902, March 1, 1904.

⁵²The Progressive Farmer, July 22, 1902.

and experiment stations which devoted their time to the scientific as well as the practical side of farming.⁵³ While it was true that The Progressive Farmer dealt almost exclusively with farm problems, Poe in his editorials was concerned more with current events, usually politics or progressive reforms, and delegated to his staff the task of answering the many questions which farmers sent to the paper concerning the right time to plant a certain crop, the correct way to plow, and other farm-oriented problems. Although deeply interested in farming, Poe had left the farm at sixteen years of age and lacked the practical experience of his staff.

The staff of The Progressive Farmer, Poe's most valuable asset in editing the paper, changed greatly from 1900 to 1917. He expanded his staff of writers to meet the growth of the paper from eight half-page issues in 1900 to thirty and forty page issues prior to 1917. The Progressive Farmer's writers usually held important literary or agricultural positions prior to their employment by Poe. He excelled in the selection of these writers for The Progressive Farmer. Combining his ability to judge men with the technique required to get the best from them, he established a strong, close relationship with his fellow workers. In later years Poe admitted

⁵³The Progressive Farmer, July 22, 1902.

that he sometimes considered The Progressive Farmer too largely his own property in the selection of staff writers. But only by his strong, vigorous leadership in these early years did The Progressive Farmer become an established, successful farm paper.⁵⁴ His ability to select key men for the paper led Edwin Mims to comment:

He has a remarkable power of absorbing and using other men. Not a farmer himself, he has kept about him men who were experts, and has given them an opportunity to make their views known. Not a student of science, he has been quick to adopt conclusions of men who have applied scientific knowledge and methods to the problems of the farm.⁵⁵

The staff of The Progressive Farmer grew both in the number of qualified writers and in their understanding of southern farm problems. Small, one line columns were replaced by 1917 with full page commentaries on contemporary problems of farming in the South. Although some turnover occurred in the staff the general longevity of the writers with The Progressive Farmer was again indicative of Poe's ability to select and keep quality writers. The principal writers for The Progressive Farmer were men who had had practical experience with farm problems of the South, and an occasional female writer who dealt more with the social problems of the isolated farm life. The one major column

⁵⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 99.

⁵⁵Mims, The Advancing South, 76.

headed by a woman in The Progressive Farmer was the "Home Department." The column was first written by the daughter of the paper's founder, Miss Juanita Polk, who later married J. W. Denmark. Writing under the pen name of "Aunt Jennie," Mrs. Denmark dealt with family problems, the social life of the rural farm, and other related topics. In 1906 Mrs. Denmark was succeeded by Mrs. F. L. Stevens, a home economist. With the departure of her husband for Purdue University, Mrs. Stevens was replaced by Mrs. W. N. Hutt, who was employed on a full-time basis to write this column of social service.⁵⁶

Most of the regular columns in The Progressive Farmer were written by men. With the exception of space devoted to children's articles, poetry, and advertisements, the bulk of The Progressive Farmer consisted of Poe's editorial comments upon state and national affairs and columns written by his staff on southern farm problems. Two of the most prominent writers on the staff of The Progressive Farmer in the 1900-1905 year period were B. W. Kilgore who wrote the column, "Soils, Crops and Fertilizers," and C. W. Burkett who wrote the column "Livestock and Dairy Department." Both men were qualified farm experts; Kilgore was former director of the State Experiment Station and Burkett had been head of the Department of Agriculture at the A & M College.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁶Poe, My First 80 Years, 97.

⁵⁷Poe, My First 80 Years, 90.

columns these men wrote dealt with means of improving the various kinds of soils and livestock that faced the southern farmer. As was true of all columnists in The Progressive Farmer, these men welcomed letters containing specific questions and in many cases answered them through the pages of the paper or by personal correspondence. In later years Kilgore became editor of the Kentucky-Tennessee edition of The Progressive Farmer while Burkett left to take a position in the Ohio Agricultural School.⁵⁸

One of Poe's main assistants at this time was Dr. Tait Butler who in 1906 succeeded Burkett as agricultural editor of The Progressive Farmer and who became associate editor and manager of the paper in 1909.⁵⁹ Butler had been active in experiment stations in Mississippi and had gained national prominence for his work in eradicating the cattle tick in the South. Butler had founded the Southern Farm Gazette which later became the Mid-South edition of The Progressive Farmer. He was a specialist in the control of diseases of livestock. His columns treated in great depth the new methods of eradication of animal diseases prevalent in southern farm areas such as cattle tick, "hollow horn," hog cholera and other

⁵⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 100; The Progressive Farmer, June 7, 1906.

⁵⁹The Progressive Farmer, July 5, 1906, December 24, 1908.

diseases of livestock. Poe described Butler as "a deep thinker, a forceful speaker, outspoken but scrupulously fair in his views."⁶⁰

Professor William F. Massey was another of Poe's leading writers and consultants. His main concern was the conservation and rebuilding of southern soils. He served in various positions prior to coming to The Progressive Farmer. At one time he was editor of the Practical Farmer, a North Carolina farm paper. Massey joined The Progressive Farmer in 1908 and dealt with the problems that confronted farmers in trying to reclaim "used-up" soils. He later became an associate editor with The Progressive Farmer in 1909. Joining Massey as a key member of The Progressive Farmer organization was W. F. Marshall. Marshall began work as an associate editor with The Progressive Farmer in 1907, became managing-editor in 1908, and took charge of the paper when Poe made a trip to the west coast.⁶¹ In 1909 E. E. Miller succeeded Marshall as managing-editor of the paper. He took charge of the paper when Poe made further trips to Wisconsin and the Mid-west in 1910, around the world in 1910-1911, and to Europe in 1912.⁶² Another key appointment in

⁶⁰Poe, My First 80 Years, 100.

⁶¹The Progressive Farmer, February 14, 1907.

⁶²The Progressive Farmer, December 24, 1908.

1909 was that of John Pearson as secretary-treasurer of the paper.⁶³

A list of all the writers and different column headings for The Progressive Farmer in this eighteen year period would be too extensive to report. But some of the more significant writers besides the aforementioned included Walter Montgomery, former Associate Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court who wrote a column advising farmers on legal matters; Harvie Jordan, president of the Southern Cotton Association who wrote articles concerning cotton prices; Professor John Michel of Clemson College, who discussed problems dealing with dairy subjects; Dr. F. L. Stevens, professor of botany and vegetable pathology from the A & M College, who dealt with plant diseases, and numerous other professors and agricultural leaders in the South. Some column headings for these years included "Practical Poultry Talks," "Thoughts For Farmers," "Sunny Home Stock Talks," "The Home Circle," "Harry Farmer," and other similar descriptive headings.

The years from 1904 through 1911 marked a period of growth, consolidation, and improvement for The Progressive Farmer. A total of 536,000 issues of the paper were printed in 1904. A goal of "Twenty Years and Twenty Thousand" was established for the newly created circulation department and

⁶³The Progressive Farmer, December 24, 1908.

was achieved by 1906.⁶⁴ Weekly circulation increased from 7,000 at the beginning of 1904 to approximately 60,000 by 1911.⁶⁵ Part of this increase in the circulation of The Progressive Farmer was owing to its absorption of the Cotton Planter in 1905. This was a weekly farm paper published in Greenville, South Carolina.⁶⁶ By September, 1905 The Progressive Farmer with 15,482 subscribers claimed a larger circulation than any other farm weekly published between Richmond and Atlanta -- a claim of somewhat dubious honor because of the lack of other large farm weeklies in this area.⁶⁷

Poe employed many techniques in his successful attempts to gain new subscribers for The Progressive Farmer. Appeals were made to "any man or woman who can write and who wishes to reach the best country homes," to send their sketches, short stories, and historical essays to The Progressive Farmer. In return the paper offered prize money for the best written articles and many were published.⁶⁸ Poe offered a commission to any person getting a required number of new subscribers; partial scholarships were awarded to the A & M College for boys who excelled in obtaining new subscribers; cash prizes

⁶⁴The Progressive Farmer, November 8, 1906.

⁶⁵The Progressive Farmer, January 10, 1905, January 7, 1911.

⁶⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 10, 1905.

⁶⁷The Progressive Farmer, September 12, 1905.

⁶⁸The Progressive Farmer, August 6, 1904.

were awarded to the young boy or girl who could grow the most corn on one acre or obtain the best weight for a calf of a certain age.⁶⁹ By 1910 The Progressive Farmer offered prize money from \$500 to \$1,000 for boys under eighteen who produced the most corn on an acre of land.⁷⁰ Every conceivable means was used by Poe to gain the attention of the potentially vast audience of southern farmers. Most of these attempts to gain new subscribers centered upon contests to improve yields, livestock, or other produce by which southern farmers could gain for themselves a better way of life.

As circulation increased for The Progressive Farmer, changes and improvements were made in the paper. New columns dealing with the solution of farm problems were added to enable farmers to enjoy the benefits of scientific farming. In 1907 Mrs. Walter Grimes, "Aunt Mary," was added as a social writer. Charles M. Scherer, past editor of the Southern Farm Gazette of Starkville, Mississippi joined the paper as a staff writer. J. W. Denmark retired as business manager in 1907.⁷¹ The year 1907 also marked the expansion of The Progressive Farmer from a state-wide to a regional type paper. In this year Poe wrote: "It is the intention of The Progressive

⁶⁹The Progressive Farmer, July 2, 1910.

⁷⁰The Progressive Farmer, April 2, 1910.

⁷¹The Progressive Farmer, November 28, 1907.

Farmer to cover thoroughly North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee, and to make a paper as useful for citizens of these states as for citizens of another."⁷² Twenty page editions of The Progressive Farmer became common as it continued its consolidation and growth. One of the leading promotions for The Progressive Farmer at this time was a letter written by Seaman A. Knapp, well-known throughout the country for his work in establishing farm demonstration cooperatives: "Inclosed find a New York draft for The Progressive Farmer. It is one of the few farm papers we desire for our office files."⁷³ Poe and Knapp had a great admiration for each other in that both worked to achieve the same goal -- improvement of southern farm life. Some change also took place in the partnership status of the Agricultural Publishing Company at this time. Poe remained as president of the company with controlling interest but Bailey, Burkett and Parker sold their interests to Dr. Tait Butler and John S. Pearson, the new general manager of the paper. Each received 20 per cent of the company's stock.⁷⁴

From 1904 to 1911 Poe continued his battle against the advertising of harmful drugs and the new, fraudulent

⁷²The Progressive Farmer, January 31, 1907.

⁷³The Progressive Farmer, September 5, 1907.

⁷⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 102.

patent stock foods which claimed to increase many times the weight gained by livestock. Because of the gains made by The Progressive Farmer in circulation, advertisers of "stock foods," "kwik-grow plant foods," and other less reputable dealers attempted to gain endorsement through the advertising pages of The Progressive Farmer, but Poe was not interested. "If we could take \$3,000 to \$4,000 a year for helping foreign corporations swindle you into paying \$2,000 a ton for flavored wheat bran -- we might sell you our paper for 50 cents or we might be able to give it away. But we are not going to do it."⁷⁵ Often in backing up its policy of checking on potential advertisements The Progressive Farmer would send "stock foods" or other similar products to the State Department of Agriculture to allow it to determine their worth. This often resulted in reports to the effect that a product was not worthy to appear in an advertisement in the paper.⁷⁶ Although the operating expenses of The Progressive Farmer approximated \$20,000 a year, Poe refused to consent to stock food advertisements: "We need the money, yet we are going to leave it to the farmers as to the sort of support they will give a paper that is here to fight for their interests."⁷⁷

⁷⁵The Progressive Farmer, January 4, 1906.

⁷⁶The Progressive Farmer, November 8, 1906.

⁷⁷The Progressive Farmer, November 8, 1906.

Poe's repudiation of fraudulent types of advertising resulted in a running battle with many weekly religious papers which carried such copy. Poe felt that the religious papers were among the biggest promoters of patent medicines and stock foods and urged his readers to write these papers and demand that they stop printing such advertisements. He stated:

As a lay member of one of our denominations we simple regret to see them harpooning influence of religion by business policies that not even the most non-Christian magazines can stand for.

We cannot hope to make any success whatever until the religious papers stop carrying this fraudulent business. We take the position only because these papers are hindering reform with regard to patent medicines. The business is simply too rank for progressive publications to endure. How much longer are the religious papers going to stand for it?⁷⁸

Poe also felt that by carrying these advertisements the religious papers were "of one whit less quality than the secular papers that carried whiskey advertisements."⁷⁹ The Religious Press Advertising Syndicate which promoted these advertisements charged that Poe took a "holier than thou" attitude when The Progressive Farmer had also carried such advertisements. Nor they claimed had Poe attempted to return the money made from such advertisements. The Religious

⁷⁸The Progressive Farmer, June 3, 10, October 7, 1911.

⁷⁹The Progressive Farmer, October 28, 1908, May 7, 1910.

Press Advertising Syndicate further stated that the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act prevented harmful drugs from being sold. Poe replied that it would be impossible to repay the money gained by The Progressive Farmer for earlier advertisements and that it would take some time before the rules established by the Pure Food and Drug Act could be effective everywhere.⁸⁰ By January, 1909 The Progressive Farmer guaranteed the reliability of all the advertisements it carried. "We will positively make good the loss sustained by any subscriber as a result of fraudulent misrepresentation made in our columns on the part of any advertiser who proves to be a deliberate swindler."⁸¹ This guarantee was the final step taken by Poe in assuring his readers that The Progressive Farmer advertisements were of the highest quality. In doing this The Progressive Farmer became the first paper in the South to expose both the patent medicine and stock food frauds.⁸²

As The Progressive Farmer became more and more of a regional paper Poe's role as editor became increasingly important. Appealing to regionalism, he warned his readers not to be tricked by northern publishers who added a few columns of southern news to their regular papers and then sold them in the South: "Get a through-and-through Southern

⁸⁰The Progressive Farmer, May 7, 1910.

⁸¹The Progressive Farmer, January 7, 1909.

⁸²The Progressive Farmer, October 7, 1911.

paper, because no other kind is suited to conditions down here."⁸³ In suggesting to his readers other types of newspapers and magazines that should be read in conjunction with The Progressive Farmer Poe included Everybody's Magazine, McClure's Magazine -- especially the articles by Lincoln Steffens, Collier's Magazine and its work against the patent medicine frauds, The Century, the Atlantic Monthly, Cosmopolitan, Success, the Literary Digest, Public Opinion, and the Washington Post, all of which were considered good daily and weekly reading.⁸⁴

Poe continued to express great interest in the reading habits of farmers. Remembering his own childhood and the lack of adequate reading facilities he impressed upon farmers the importance of reading. Appeals were made to them to read constantly, to choose their reading materials carefully, and to be wary of papers that emphasized "yellow journalism" or could be bought for cheap prices.

If you prefer to pay 50 cents for a paper to swindle you -- very good; you mark yourself. The Progressive Farmer is not for you. If we would accept \$2,000 to \$3,000 dollars a year for whiskey advertisements no doubt we could make you The Progressive Farmer for 50 cents a year. We are not selling our soul

⁸³The Progressive Farmer, February 5, 1901.

⁸⁴The Progressive Farmer, November 20, 1900, January 18, 1905.

in order to make a 'cheap' paper and get your subscription. We don't need you.⁸⁵

Poe also believed that farmers should not subscribe to city papers that were "daily filled with horror, and advertisements for patent medicines that won't help." A good farm paper, Poe remarked, should be "instrumental in assisting a reader more than to entertain him" and should be an indispensable part of the farm itself. A local farm paper which fought for the interests of the people, Poe believed, was "one of the surest signs of a progressive community."⁸⁶ In 1911 The Progressive Farmer began to offer a "Reading Course in Domestic Science" for women along with information on how to obtain from the United States Department of Agriculture the hundreds of free bulletins that were available to improve both southern farm conditions and the reading habits of farmers.

Coinciding with Poe's notion that farmers be provided with more reading materials was his philosophy concerning the role that southern editors should play in the publishing of their newspapers. In a speech delivered at Trinity College in Durham, he maintained that editors should eliminate sensationalism from their papers and concentrate upon the presentation of fair and accurate news reports. He commented:

⁸⁵The Progressive Farmer, January 4, 1906.

⁸⁶The Progressive Farmer, April 27, June 15, 1912.

The quickness of public conscience today demands that the editor not only have courage to speak out squarely on public questions, but courage to oppose the men who would use his advertising columns to prey upon the lives and property of his readers.

We need the man who tears down not for the sake of destroying, but in the hope of building better. The crying need of the South today is for the newspaper dedicated not to politics but to community developments.⁸⁷

To augment his beliefs about the role that an editor should play Poe added to The Progressive Farmer a new column, "Current Affairs," in which he expressed his attitudes on contemporary problems. He said: "No man has a right to keep silent when he feels that he ought to speak out, or to fold his hands when he feels that he ought to work...."⁸⁸

To expand his knowledge of farming methods, to learn the techniques employed by other newspapers, and to gain a broader understanding of economic conditions, Poe made various trips throughout the nation and around the world. On his first trip outside the South in 1905, he visited the western part of the United States to observe farming methods and to evaluate the racial strife between Japanese and white landowners in California. In his absence Burkett, Kilgore, Parker, and Denmark took charge of the paper.⁸⁹ In 1908 Poe

⁸⁷Clarence Poe, "The Young Man and Journalism," address delivered at Trinity College, Durham, North Carolina, May, 1906, Poe Papers.

⁸⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 7, 1905.

⁸⁹The Progressive Farmer, June 13, 1905.

made his first visit to Europe especially to observe farming methods. His travels in 1910 included a trip to Wisconsin to observe cooperative farming methods and an around-the-world tour with special emphasis given to the Orient. In 1912 he revisited Europe. While Poe was away E. E. Miller and other top employees took charge of the paper. They were frequently in contact with Poe through telegrams and letters. The length and frequency of these trips indicated that The Progressive Farmer enjoyed new financial prosperity at this time. A further indication of the financial success of The Progressive Farmer was revealed in a letter from Poe to Daniel A. Tompkins, a prominent North Carolina industrialist. Poe asked Tompkins for his advice on whether to invest "heavily" in the publication American Textile Manufacturer, a recently formed magazine.⁹⁰ Having money to invest "heavily" was a sign of prosperity for Poe. But he was nonetheless concerned about the increasing costs of publishing The Progressive Farmer. In a letter to J. W. Denmark he expressed concern about a proposed increase in the charges of the Mutual Printing Publishing Company which printed The Progressive Farmer. Poe revealed that The Progressive Farmer furnished 70 per cent of the company's business -- \$26,863.70

⁹⁰ Clarence Poe to Daniel A. Tompkins, September 14, 1907, Daniel A. Tompkins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Tompkins Papers.

of its \$39,839.56 newspaper work, and \$8,760.23 of its \$11,736.36 job work. He also commented that he was dissatisfied with the service provided by the company both in delivering the paper in the winter and in folding and posting the pages. Because The Progressive Farmer provided the bulk of the Mutual Company's profits Poe threatened to withdraw the paper's business unless the proposed rates were reduced. Acting under this threat the Mutual Company imposed only a token increase in the printing costs for The Progressive Farmer.⁹¹

Throughout Poe's early career as editor and owner of The Progressive Farmer his main objectives were (1) to circulate the paper into as many new areas as possible; (2) to consolidate it with other successful farm weeklies in the South. This plan was pursued with much success. By 1909 the circulation of the paper reached 57,000 homes and in that year a great step forward was taken when The Progressive Farmer consolidated with the Southern Farm Gazette controlled by Tait Butler. Butler and Poe worked out an arrangement whereby Butler bought 20 per cent interest in the Agricultural Publishing Company in return for the consolidation of his paper with The Progressive Farmer. The name Southern Farm

⁹¹Clarence Poe to J. W. Denmark, (1910), Polk Papers.

Gazette was kept for more local appeal in the Kentucky-Tennessee area where it was published but it was replaced in 1911 by the name The Progressive Farmer.⁹² With this addition, henceforth to be known as the Mid-West edition of The Progressive Farmer, 29,000 subscribers were enrolled.⁹³ In June, 1909 Modern Farming a weekly farm paper published in St. Joseph, Missouri was incorporated with The Progressive Farmer.⁹⁴ In September, 1911 The Progressive Farmer acquired the Southern Farm Advocate of Memphis, Tennessee and thereby gained an additional 30,000 subscribers. With this acquisition the 1911 weekly issues of The Progressive Farmer reached approximately 150,000.⁹⁵ The year 1911 marked the opening of a new office for The Progressive Farmer in Birmingham, Alabama; subsequent editions for the Alabama region were printed in this office.⁹⁶ A \$25,000 Hoe Press and Electrotpe Machine were also installed in the Raleigh office by the end of this year.⁹⁷

⁹²Tait Butler to Clarence Poe, February 21, 1909, Polk Papers.

⁹³The Progressive Farmer, April 15, 1909.

⁹⁴The Progressive Farmer, June 3, 1909.

⁹⁵The Progressive Farmer, September 23, 1911.

⁹⁶Poe, My First 80 Years, 103; The Progressive Farmer, September 16, 1911.

⁹⁷The Progressive Farmer, December 23, 1911.

From 1912 to 1917 there were further consolidations that involved The Progressive Farmer. In 1917 the paper had a circulation of approximately 200,000, a great increase from the 1903 count of 5,300. Explanations for this growth rest upon Poe's ability in editing the paper, the selection of key personnel, and the incorporation of other farm weeklies. Poe's outright declaration that The Progressive Farmer was primarily a farm paper for the South appealed to many subscribers. It also expanded into new areas where both a need and desire existed for a truly southern farm paper. At times losses had to be sustained while The Progressive Farmer became established in a new area, but inevitably the quality of the paper attracted subscribers. The issues of The Progressive Farmer from 1912 to 1917 reflected the growth of the paper as thirty and forty page editions became common. These pages were divided into topic headings that dealt with all phases of southern farming. Upwards of twenty regular columns filled the pages of The Progressive Farmer while Poe's comments were usually reserved to the two-page editorial section of the paper. The advertising columns continued to be one of the most lucrative sources for the paper. Poe's general policy in regard to advertisements was to print letters from farmers who had used products solicited through The Progressive Farmer. In writing to John Pearson, head of the advertising department, Poe

remarked: "Ten times more effective than any talk that we can give as to the general value of advertising in The Progressive Farmer is a letter from a man who has tried it and has made money by doing it."⁹⁸ Farmers from across the South paid modest rates for the privilege of advertising their products in The Progressive Farmer, by then the best known farm paper in the area. Advertisements from large companies, however, provided the greater part of money needed to keep up with the paper's ever expanding circulation and distribution. The subscription rate of \$1 a year remained constant.

With the great success enjoyed by The Progressive Farmer regional offices were established to handle the increased circulation and distribution of the paper. By 1917 the paper had established five regional areas, with four home offices, these were: Raleigh, North Carolina which served the Carolinas-Virginia area; Memphis, Tennessee which served the Kentucky-Tennessee area; Dallas, Texas which served the Texas area; Birmingham, Alabama which served the Georgia-Alabama area, and the Mississippi-Arkansas-Louisiana area that was served by the home offices of Dallas and Birmingham. Yet even with this great expansion Poe reiterated that the basic aim of the paper was the same as he stated

⁹⁸ Clarence Poe to John Pearson, December 16, 1914, Poe Papers.

in 1900: "An all-around farm and family paper is what we try to make The Progressive Farmer, so that he who reads it may keep well posted upon agricultural progress, the news of the State, Nation, and the World."⁹⁹ With the great growth of the paper, however, charges were made that The Progressive Farmer appealed more to the big farmer than it did to the small one. There was some truth to this charge as techniques frequently suggested by the paper were too expensive for the small farmer to employ. However, Poe made it clear that while The Progressive Farmer tried to serve all farm interests, it wanted most to help the small farmer. "We have long realized that the farm paper that would do the greatest good must be of special benefit to the farmer of small means, who is the man above all we have most desired to help."¹⁰⁰ In most cases The Progressive Farmer suggested ideas and methods by which even the smallest farmer could profit.

Occasionally issues of The Progressive Farmer during the 1912-1917 year period were devoted to some specific phase of southern farm life which needed improvement. The theme of the 1915 issues was "Diversification and Independence" while the 1917 editions were dedicated to a "Richer Land Year" for the South. Other yearly topics included:

⁹⁹The Progressive Farmer, November 20, 1900.

¹⁰⁰The Progressive Farmer, February 27, 1908, September 23, 1911.

poultry and livestock, the youth of the South, and better yields for crops. A suggestion was also made by William Massey, Poe's long-time friend and contributing editor of The Progressive Farmer, as to how the paper could be further improved. For articles written about farm problems in The Progressive Farmer, Massey suggested that it would be best "to condense, and give facts in as few words as practicable farmers will not read long, drawn-out essays."¹⁰¹

As The Progressive Farmer expanded into a South-wide paper, Poe's work was widely recognized. He became identified with many of the progressive reforms that were initiated for southern farmers. A special issue of The Progressive Farmer in 1915 which dealt with the youth of the South solicited letters on this topic from Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Charles E. Hughes, William J. Bryan, Champ Clark, Henry C. Lodge, Gifford Pinchot, Charles Dabney, William McAdoo, William Sunday, Oscar Underwood, and other leading figures.¹⁰² Within North Carolina Poe became known as a leading figure in political and social circles. Eugene C. Branson, a rural sociologist at the University of North Carolina remarked to Edward Kidder Graham: "There is no

¹⁰¹William Massey to Clarence Poe, September 15, 1917, Poe Papers.

¹⁰²Poe Papers, December 1915. Most of these replies were telegrams containing some word of encouragement for the youth of the South.

place in North Carolina for another agricultural paper. The Progressive Farmer covers the field and does it superbly."¹⁰³ In recognition of his outstanding work with The Progressive Farmer Poe was selected to address in 1914 the forty-second convention of the North Carolina Press Association. In his speech Poe charged that the farmer had generally been ignored by the city and country papers. Poe contended that farm projects, demonstration work, the farmers' institutes, test farms and other similar organizations had not received enough attention in newspaper reporting, and these functions should be given as much attention as the party primaries.¹⁰⁴

With America's entry into World War I in 1917, consideration was given by the federal government to a raise in postage rates for newspapers. With personal expenses of \$14,800 in 1916 and \$18,832 in 1917 Poe worked against this proposal.¹⁰⁵ He argued that an increase in postage rates would mean less reading material for the farmer.¹⁰⁶ In response to this proposed increase Poe wrote to Edwin Yates Webb, a member of

¹⁰³Eugene C. Branson to Edward Kidder Graham, January 24, 1915, Eugene C. Branson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Branson Papers.

¹⁰⁴Clarence Poe, "The Editor Must Be A Crusader," address delivered at the Forty-Second Convention of the North Carolina Press Association, June 24, 1914, Poe Papers.

¹⁰⁵Poe Papers. These figures were found for the years 1916 and 1917, respectively, with an expense list for these years.

¹⁰⁶The Progressive Farmer, July 21, 1917.

Congress from North Carolina, and expressed his views on this subject. Poe revealed to Webb that the average yearly profits of The Progressive Farmer during the years 1909 to 1917 had been \$12,818.32, with a capital stock valued at \$50,000. With the proposed increase in postage rates, Poe argued, the annual cost of postage for The Progressive Farmer would be \$45,126.70. "In other words the government proposes to levy on one single item an annual increase of more than 90 per cent of our total permanent capital stock and more than three times the amount we have been making in one average year."¹⁰⁷ Poe favored a surtax on publisher's incomes, or a 3 per cent tax on advertising. "Put the tax on profits rather than on postage." "Anything so we are left alive."¹⁰⁸ Webb replied that he would give it much consideration.¹⁰⁹

From 1900 to 1917 Clarence Poe's career was inseparably linked with The Progressive Farmer. Advantages had existed for Poe with his take-over as editor and owner of The Progressive Farmer. The South was for all practical purposes void of any large, weekly farm paper. Poe realized this and took advantage of it. With the establishment of a successful

¹⁰⁷Clarence Poe to Edwin Yates Webb, May 18, 1917, Edwin Yates Webb Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Webb Papers.

¹⁰⁸The Progressive Farmer, September 1, 1917; Clarence Poe to Edwin Yates Webb, May 18, 1917, Webb Papers.

¹⁰⁹Edwin Yates Webb to Clarence Poe, May 21, 1917, Webb Papers.

paper in North Carolina, he promoted The Progressive Farmer throughout other areas of the South. He reinvested profits made from the paper and bought out popular but usually small farm papers. With the addition of the Southern Farm Gazette in 1909, two editions of The Progressive Farmer were begun. The rapid increase in the circulation of the paper resulted in the creation of four district offices to serve the entire South.

Poe's greatest asset in promoting The Progressive Farmer into the best known farm paper in the South was his selection of staff writers who understood the agricultural problems of the area. With a competent group of agricultural consultants The Progressive Farmer was able to offer constructive criticism of farming methods in the South and to propose new methods to alleviate the chronic problems that plagued the area. Although stern in his demands upon these writers, Poe welded together a hard working group of competent consultants. In the final analysis, however, it was Poe who built The Progressive Farmer into the most famous farm paper in the South. His dedication to the goal of achieving for the southern farmer a better way of life was best realized through his work with The Progressive Farmer.

Chapter III

THE FARM EDITOR VIEWS COOPERATIVES AND FARMING METHODS

Clarence Poe's expressed purpose for The Progressive Farmer was that it serve as a medium by which reform measures for farm interests in the South could be made known. The achievement of more up-to-date farming methods, the elevation of the region to an economic status comparable with other sections, and the improvement of rural life were the goals that Poe set out to accomplish. The South of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, represented by its large number of farmers, struggled with outdated farming methods, low prices in a period of generally high living costs, inadequate living conditions and the seeming inability to escape from an economic depression. With the continued dependence upon one-crop farming, the influence of progressive reform was slow in reaching the South's agrarian-based economy. As Fred Shannon stated: "The economic and political leadership of the South proved inadequate to cope effectively with problems facing it."¹

The future of the New South, Poe believed, rested upon improvements in its farming techniques. He held that

¹Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier (1945), 100, hereinafter cited as Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier.

brought into shape," Poe remarked.⁴

Poe's ideas concerning the prosperity of every man in the South dealt basically with the farmer but also took into account the growing industrial segment of the economy. Poe contended that there had to exist an interworking of the rising business interests of the South and the struggling agrarian economy. The problem was to convince both farm and industrial leaders that by working together they could achieve greater economy prosperity. He made special efforts to convince the New South's business leaders that they must help the farmer. He believed that they could help the farmer by providing money, investments in farming concerns and a quality of leadership not generally known to agriculture. Poe spoke to many business groups in the South and tried to spark cooperation between them and the farmer. In a 1908 speech delivered to a meeting of the Southern Commercial Congress, Poe presented his case for business-agrarian cooperation:

The hope and deliverance for all of you is to be found only in a revolution in the South's agricultural practice. Many of you say that it matters little to you whether agriculture prospers or not.... I come to you today to tell you that it is this feeling that has cost the South economic leadership.⁵

⁴Clarence Poe, "The Agricultural Revolution." Address delivered at the Southern Commercial Congress, Washington, D. C., December 8, 1908, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "The Agricultural Revolution."

⁵Poe, "The Agricultural Revolution."

The practicability of Poe's ideas concerning economic cooperation between business and agrarian interests is questionable, and they were not to be realized at this time. Owners of mills and factories in the South were usually from other areas and not sympathetic with the problems of agriculture. The industrial workers suffered from low wages and child labor remained largely unchecked. Burdened with these problems neither the industrial workers nor the business leaders could lend economic assistance to the farming interests of the South.

Proposed business-agrarian cooperation was not the only way Poe believed that southern farmers could be helped. Indeed, Poe always contended that improvements in southern farming would first have to come from gains made by the farmers themselves:

The farm papers, the institute forces, the experiment stations can all furnish aid to the solving of the individual farmer's problems, but he must, at last, work them out for himself. We can in our columns, lay down the general principles, but we can not tell you when to plow....⁶

One way by which Poe believed that reform measures for southern agriculture could be initiated was through farm demonstration projects. He believed that farmers would respond more favorably to results they could see rather than to published articles. Accordingly, Poe vigorously supported the Farmers'

⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 22, 1910.

Cooperative Demonstration Work, an organization sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture to help promote progressive farming techniques. The purpose of this organization was to bring together the most successful, progressive farmers of each county and district and have them give practical demonstrations in improvements that could be made by farmers. The program was initiated by Seaman A. Knapp long a leader in southern agricultural reforms. Knapp organized the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work program in Texas to help farmers resist the boll weevil menace.⁷ Knapp's work marked the beginning of progressive farm reforms for the South. Test farms were established which experimented with new types and strains of produce and livestock. Poe supported these test farms and believed they represented the new way for farmers in the South.⁸ These test farms and other agricultural experiment stations helped to initiate more productive farming methods. Although some farmers opposed them as "not practical farming," better farming methods were established with their creation.⁹ Knapp's work also led schools and colleges to assume a more active role in promoting scientific farming.

⁷For more information on Knapp's work see Joseph C. Bailey, Seaman A. Knapp, Schoolmaster of American Agriculture (1945).

⁸The Progressive Farmer, December 13, 1904.

⁹Clarence Poe, "Builders of an Agricultural Commonwealth," South Atlantic Quarterly, VIII (January, 1909), 8, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Builders of an Agricultural Commonwealth."

Poe supported all of the work done by the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work program. He realized that it could transform much of the South's outdated farming methods into up-to-date procedures. He frequently corresponded with leading politicians of the South and attempted to gain their support for this organization.¹⁰ In 1909 he appealed to many southern senators to support an increase in appropriations for the program. Later that year Congress voted an increase of \$79,000 for the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work.¹¹ In writing to Furnifold M. Simmons, a North Carolina senator, concerning the increase in money for the program Poe stated: "Permit me to congratulate you most heartily upon your success in getting \$79,000 extra for Demonstration Work. You have done the southern farmer a conspicuous service, and our entire section is to be congratulated upon your victory."¹² After Knapp's death in 1911, Poe helped organize a memorial committee for him in North Carolina. In a speech dealing with Knapp's contributions to southern farming, Poe paid him

¹⁰Clarence Poe to Robert D. W. Connor, March 10, 1909, Robert D. W. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as R. D. W. Connor Papers.

¹¹The Progressive Farmer, March 11, 1909.

¹²Clarence Poe to Furnifold M. Simmons, March 3, 1909, Furnifold M. Simmons Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Simmons Papers.

this tribute:

Knapp made one of the greatest of original contributions to agricultural science in discovering a new way of disseminating all the vast treasures of truth which others had developed. Knapp effectively reached the ear and heart of the farmer. Under his guidance agricultural principles became live and potent.¹³

Knapp's work coincided with increased efforts by the United States Department of Agriculture to improve farming conditions in the South. As early as 1901 Poe stated that publications issued by the department were written by the "very ablest men in their lines, and there are few readers of The Progressive Farmer that cannot profit from them."¹⁴ Later he suggested that southern farmers begin home libraries with the pamphlets issued by the department.¹⁵ Poe realized that one of the keys to improved farming methods for the South lay in a greater interest by farmers in the activities of the Department of Agriculture. The Progressive Farmer was only a small voice but combined with the literature and activities of the Department of Agriculture it represented the best way to reach the largest number of southern farmers. Poe considered the Department of Agriculture responsible for adding

¹³Clarence Poe, "Dr. Seaman A. Knapp." Address delivered at the Southern Commercial Congress, Nashville, Tennessee, April 17, 1912, Poe Papers.

¹⁴The Progressive Farmer, July 30, 1901.

¹⁵The Progressive Farmer, June 20, 1907.

millions of dollars to the South's wealth by its advocacy of progressive farming techniques.¹⁶

Poe's emphasis upon scientific methods coincided with the Progressive Movement within the nation. This movement represented in its broadest aspects a transformation of the United States from a decentralized, non-technical, loosely organized society, into a highly organized, technical, centrally planned organization.¹⁷ Poe's emphasis upon scientific farming complemented this nation-wide movement. To achieve scientific farming in the South Poe realized, however, that many of the methods used by southern farmers would have to be changed. Many farmers continued to employ outdated methods in spite of the advantages to be gained by newer methods. Poe criticized those farmers who resisted the inevitable changes in farming procedures:

Many of the suggestions offered for the betterment of Southern agriculture are rejected by Southern farmers as impracticable under existing conditions. This is generally not true, the impracticability of their adoption resting entirely

¹⁶Clarence Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits (1915), 92-94, hereinafter cited as Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits. See also Clarence Poe, "The Government and the New Farmer," The World's Work, IX (March, 1905), 5964, hereinafter cited as Poe, "The Government and the New Farmer."

¹⁷Samuel Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920 (1959), 265, hereinafter cited as Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency.

in the disinclination of our farmers.¹⁸

The crusading editor first advocated the use of scientific farming methods in the improvement of southern soils "no system of farming, no plans for improvement will begin to solve the agricultural problems of the South unless they make the permanent improvement of the soil the conerstone and foundation of agricultural development."¹⁹ Poe suggested the use of fertilizers, crop rotation, improved planning procedures and better water control as ways to increase the output of southern farms. He considered water control especially important for southern farmers in their fight for more progressive farming techniques. During the growing seasons, many southern farmers did not practice any means of water control and suffered great losses from soil erosion. Poe's solution to this problem lay in the adoption of techniques such as filling the soil with humus and in deeper plowing to hold the rainfall in the land.²⁰

Scientific farming for Poe also included the use of more farm machinery in the South. "This is the key to agricultural reform: More power and better machinery on the farm, and more accomplished in a day," Poe remarked.²¹

¹⁸The Progressive Farmer, January 21, 1911.

¹⁹The Progressive Farmer, May 13, 1911.

²⁰The Progressive Farmer, April 8, 1911.

²¹The Progressive Farmer, February 27, 1908, April 15, 1911.

He considered the lack of farm mechanization and dependency upon expensive manual labor as one of the most glaring defects of southern farm life.²² He believed that, without farm mechanization, the natural advantages that southern farmers enjoyed -- good climatic conditions and early growing seasons -- could not be realized to their fullest benefit.²³ Poe's great interest in farm mechanization was prompted by the decreasing labor force in the region. The South experienced a movement of its population toward the city, the counterpart of the same movement throughout the nation. Growing industrial regions and growing cities took from farm areas the labor that it once had. It became evident that if the South were to achieve up-to-date farming methods it would have to mechanize:

The scarcity of labor in North Carolina has now become so prominent that the use of better implements and machinery is imperative. Get the catalogue of all the prominent manufacturers and if your farm is so small that you cannot afford to buy alone, 'go shares' with your nearest neighbor for the more costly machinery. Our people must learn the value of co-operation -- profitableness as well as the virtue of bearing one another's burden.²⁴

How could the typical, small southern farmer afford machinery and other costly improvements that twentieth

²²The Progressive Farmer, February 10, 1912.

²³The Progressive Farmer, February 10, 1912.

²⁴The Progressive Farmer, August 4, 1903.

century farming required? Poe proposed the establishment of farm cooperatives as a way to secure necessary capital to provide southern farmers with mechanized equipment. His ideas about cooperative organizations were influenced by his trips throughout the nation and world.²⁵ These trips helped Poe gain first-hand knowledge of farming conditions throughout the world and a better understanding of the farm problems in the South. Although one of Poe's suggestions concerning agriculture would later be considered provincial -- segregated white and Negro farm neighborhoods -- he gained from these trips the opportunity to observe other farm areas, to talk with well-known farm leaders, and to evaluate farm procedures.

Poe wrote extensively about the cooperative organizations and farming conditions of other sections of the world. The pages of The Progresssive Farmer were filled with articles urging farmers to form cooperative organizations. In addition to articles in The Progressive Farmer Poe wrote books dealing with these subjects. As joint-author with Charles Burkett in 1906 Poe wrote, Cotton: It's Cultivation, Marketing, Manufacturing, and the Problems of the Cotton World. In 1909 A Southerner in Europe brought praise from Walter Clark, Robert D. W. Connor and other prominent North Carolinians including

²⁵George Harvey, review of Where Half the World Is Waking Up, The North American Review, CXCV (November, 1912), 718-719.

ex-Governor Charles B. Aycock who remarked "I have re-read most of your book, and I want to say again that it is the best piece of work of its kind with which I am familiar. I shall be glad to see it in the hands of every person who reads in the South."²⁶ In 1912 Poe wrote Where Half the World is Waking Up which dealt with farming techniques in Oriental countries. His most extensive work on farm conditions and cooperative organizations, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, was published in 1915. He said of the book: "It was my belief that farmers want not theories as to what co-operatives might do but accurate and vivid reports showing what it has [sic] actually done. I hope my book meets this need."²⁷ This book brought favorable comment from leading men and literary publications including: the South Atlantic Quarterly; Dr. T. N. Carver, professor of economics at Harvard University; Dean W. A. Henry, emeritus professor of agriculture at the University of Wisconsin; Franklin Lane, Secretary of the Interior; and Professor Harold Clark, head of secondary education for the University of Tennessee.²⁸ A fellow North Carolinian and Poe's close friend, Eugene C.

²⁶Charles B. Aycock to Clarence Poe, November 15, 1909, Poe Papers.

²⁷Clarence Poe to J. Bryan Grimes, June 1, 1915, Grimes Papers.

²⁸Harold Clark to Clarence Poe, n.p. [ca. 1915], Poe Papers; Franklin Lane to Clarence Poe, n.p. 1916, Poe Papers; W. A. Henry to Clarence Poe, n.p. [ca. 1915], Poe Papers; T. N. Carver to Clarence Poe, n.p. [ca. 1916], Poe Papers.

Branson, remarked: "It is almost the only book that shows a competent knowledge of Southern economic problems."²⁹ Branson used the book the following year in some of his courses.

Poe revealed through books, The Progressive Farmer, and speeches and addresses throughout the South what he had observed from his visits to other countries concerning co-operative organizations and farm procedures. The basic principles needed for the successful operation of cooperatives, Poe contended, were knowledge, faith, and leadership.³⁰ With proper leadership Poe believed that cooperatives could be established in the South and provide to farmers all the advantages that other businesses had gained from organization. Without this organization and leadership "nothing else can possibly make your section the progressive community it ought to be," Poe maintained.³¹ "The farmer must take complete control of his business," Poe believed.³² He also felt that the establishment of these cooperatives would lead to more fellowship among farmers "important as are the dividends in cash, the dividends in brotherhood are greater."³³

As defined by Poe cooperatives represented the future

²⁹Eugene C. Branson to Clarence Poe, January 10, 1915, Poe Papers.

³⁰Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 7.

³¹Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 48.

³²Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 27.

³³Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 17.

for farming in the South. Poe pictured cooperatives as assemblages of farmers organized for the purpose of insuring equitable distribution among all farmers by dividing profits on the basis of patronage instead of on the basis of capital.³⁴ Ten phases of southern farming in which Poe felt cooperatives should be organized included: buying fertilizer and feed-stuffs, buying farm machinery, the marketing of staple crops, secondary handling of products in cooperative stores, marketing of county produce and livestock, purchase of pure-bred livestock, a mutual insurance association, rural credit organizations, cooperative telephone companies, and "higher things of existence" which included support for farm clubs, baseball teams, and other community-oriented organizations.³⁵ In January, 1900 Poe wrote at length concerning the establishment of cooperatives in the South:

All signs nowadays point to the fact that the agricultural masses are beginning to realize the advantages of organization and the benefits to be secured by intelligent, hearty co-operation. The full growth of the cooperative idea may be some years away, not everything attempted in its name may prove successful. But grow it will and its growth among agricultural classes means increased prosperity for them just as its growth in

³⁴Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 21.

³⁵Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 10-15.

the business affairs of other classes
has brought prosperity to them.³⁶

One facet necessary for the establishment of successful cooperatives, Poe believed, was that of business experience. Poe contended that it took businessmen to manage business enterprises and that the failure to understand this led to the failure of many cooperatives:

A great many cooperative marketing organizations among the farmers have failed, but some have succeeded to a remarkable degree. For such organizations to succeed, they must be founded on a strictly business basis. The closely organized association, handling comparatively few products and handling them through a competent man, well paid for his service, seems to be the most generally successful.³⁷

The farmer in the South rarely had the necessary business acumen to operate successfully a cooperative market or store. Poe felt that this lack of business experience was the result of insufficient information that could be resolved by work and study of cooperative operations.³⁸ In discussing the need of business experience in order to run cooperatives successfully, Poe overlooked the fact that the southern farmer had been his own boss and had neither understood nor shown a great interest in business-oriented procedures. Only

³⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 23, 1900.

³⁷The Progressive Farmer, May 3, 1906, October 14, 1911.

³⁸Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 70.

through the growth of southern industries and a change in the attitude of southern farmers toward industrial leaders would the business experience be gained that Poe felt was needed for these cooperatives.

Poe's investigation of cooperatives included a fact finding tour of the South in 1907 that was sponsored by The World's Work and Collier's Weekly.³⁹ He wrote articles to these magazines describing various cooperatives, citing a truck marketing association in Virginia and a creamery in Catawba County, North Carolina as successful operations. During this tour of the South, Poe corresponded with leading men in North Carolina, including Daniel A. Tompkins: "I am convinced there is a great opportunity for farmers to organize and establish cooperatives...."⁴⁰ In his travels throughout the nation Poe also observed a successful fruit grower's cooperative in Wisconsin and successful citrus cooperatives in California and Florida.⁴¹ The best example that Poe observed of a community that had profited by the establishment of cooperatives was Svea, Minnesota. Here successful cooperatives were established for the area's grain elevator, telephone company, livestock shipping association, insurance

³⁹ Clarence Poe to Daniel A. Tompkins, July 1, 1907, Tompkins Papers.

⁴⁰ Clarence Poe to Daniel A. Tompkins, May 29, 1907, Tompkins Papers.

⁴¹ Carter, "Biographical Sketch of Clarence Poe, " Poe Papers.

company, bank, library, and high school -- which taught domestic science and agricultural courses.⁴² Poe described Svea as a "pure and unadulterated country neighborhood... there is no village at all except the post office and the offices of the farmers' co-operative enterprises and the homes of their managers."⁴³ Svea was "untouched by town influences."

Svea represented the ideal rural atmosphere which Poe felt should exist for farming. However, this idea contrasted with the various social and economic forces that pointed the nation toward an industrialized, urban society. Svea, which remained Poe's best example of a prosperous community with successful cooperatives, was not representative of the South or the nation. The idea of rural communities "untouched by town influences" represented a step backward, rather than an advance in Poe's thinking.

Poe furthered his knowledge of farming methods and cooperatives by travels in Europe and the Orient. Of these areas he visited northern Europe most influenced his thinking concerning cooperatives. He traveled extensively throughout the area and made observations that would later play an important part in reforms he advocated for the South. Perhaps

⁴²Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 75-76.

⁴³Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 75.

what impressed Poe most about Europe was the tremendous amount of conservation in its farming methods. In A Southerner in Europe, a book dealing with his travels throughout the area, Poe remarked "the wastes of America would make Europe rich. I saw more gullied, wasted, desolated, heart-sickening land in fifteen minutes time between Birmingham and Memphis than I have seen in a thousand miles of European travel...."⁴⁴ The four European countries in which Poe traveled most extensively and discussed at length in his writings were Ireland, Denmark, France, and England.

In Ireland Poe's travels were aided by his close association and friendship with Sir Horace Plunkett. Plunkett, a leader in agrarian reforms for Ireland, had helped establish some eight hundred successful cooperatives by 1899 and his ideas influenced Poe's attitudes about the South.⁴⁵ Ireland's cooperatives were combined to form the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, a general governing body for these organizations. Poe's explanation for the success of cooperatives in Ireland was that they used the abilities of individual members to work together in small, rural neighborhoods.⁴⁶ He noted that the Department of Agriculture in Ireland gave

⁴⁴Clarence Poe, A Southerner in Europe (1908), 107, hereinafter cited as Poe, A Southerner in Europe.

⁴⁵Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 148-150.

⁴⁶Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 156.

demonstrations of progressive farming techniques, "a thing to which our United States Department of Agriculture until recently has not."⁴⁷ The foundation upon which the success of all cooperatives rested, Poe believed, involved the work by farmers to gain control and ownership of their lands from the English government. He was impressed by the improvements that the individual farmers made by "initiative, enterprise, and self-help."⁴⁸ He further noted the gains made by farmers in fellowship from the establishment of cooperatives.⁴⁹ Many of the programs established for farmers in Ireland were later advocated by Poe for his own region.

Denmark made the most favorable impression upon Poe of the European countries he visited. There he found agricultural pursuits to be the main economic activity, with small farms and a rural atmosphere predominant. The prosperity of this country Poe attributed to private land ownership, widespread education and the many successful cooperatives. "Those who would win for American agriculture the strength, independence, and prosperity which has been won for Danish agriculture should give heed to this trinity of essentials."⁵⁰ Poe marveled at the combination of education

⁴⁷Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 167.

⁴⁸Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 169.

⁴⁹Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 170.

⁵⁰Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 187.

and farming in Denmark that was shown in the "folk high schools." These institutions taught subjects that dealt with agriculture, domestic science and other related topics important to the successful functioning of cooperatives. Again the southern editor noted the importance of private ownership of land. Here contracts for land ownership were "definite, binding, compulsory and businesslike."⁵¹ Poe attributed the success of Danish farmers to the help provided them by their government in securing better livestock, and by the publication of bulletins and pamphlets which dealt with farm problems. Other measures he believed were responsible for the success of Danish farmers included the high degree of education, compulsory agreements for cooperative buying and selling of lands, and the sharing of cooperative dividends from the marketing of products.⁵² In contrasting a Danish farmer with a southern farmer, Poe felt that the reason a Danish farmer enjoyed success was that he controlled the buying and selling of his products, while the southern farmer did not. "No people ever got rich merely by selling raw materials -- a fact which explains why the South remains relatively poor in spite of its enormous production."⁵³

⁵¹Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 195.

⁵²Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 191, 196, 219.

⁵³Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 191.

In France Poe's travels reaffirmed opinions gained in Denmark and Ireland about cooperatives. The French farming districts were well kept and highly productive. "With intelligent labor and prudent handling this land, a thousand years in use, is still highly productive; in our country unintelligent labor and careless handling have ruined wide areas which have not grown crops one twentieth as long."⁵⁴ Again private ownership of farm lands impressed Poe, and, although the small size of farms made it expensive to use machinery, he felt that this difficulty had been overcome by cooperative buying.⁵⁵ Indeed Poe considered these small farms as "the ideal condition" for cooperatives and productive methods of farming. "The strength of France is in its millions of contended, prosperous, intelligent small farmers who own their homes, and who make the entire country a dream of beauty and prosperity."⁵⁶ Poe concluded that the success of French farming resulted from the establishment of cooperatives induced by foreign competition. Other reasons for success included the use of more machinery prompted "through all sorts of schemes" and achievements made by farmers themselves, rather than by legislative enactments: "it is in the field of practical agricultural activities rather than

⁵⁴Poe, A Southerner in Europe, 73-74.

⁵⁵Poe, A Southerner in Europe, 75.

⁵⁶Poe, A Southerner in Europe, 75.

in the sphere of legislation that the agricultural cooperative movement in France has won its notable triumphs."⁵⁷

Since England closely resembled the United States, Poe studied the agricultural conditions of this country with great interest, looking for parallel developments. The biggest lesson that the United States could learn from England, Poe believed, was that "proper rural development was impossible where landlordism prevails...."⁵⁸ Poe reported that in 1910 over seven-eighths of the farms in England were worked by tenants, a condition markedly similar to that in the South. Poe felt that private ownership of lands by English and Southern farmers had to come before any progress in agriculture could be made. "Thrifty, progressive, scientific agriculture of the highest type is possible only where the farmers own the lands they till."⁵⁹ The inquisitive editor noted that in the election to be held in England in 1915 the Liberal Party advocated that the government purchase and break up large land tracts.⁶⁰ Poe heartily endorsed this policy and thought it pointed the way to a better future for the English farmer. In discussing the large estates of England, Poe believed that a system of higher taxation was needed to help break up these tracts. He also believed that it would not

⁵⁷Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 180.

⁵⁸Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 171.

⁵⁹Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 172.

⁶⁰Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 173.

be long before the English government created agricultural banks to help farmers purchase the anticipated smaller tracts of land.⁶¹ Poe's earlier advocacy of such measures for the South was reaffirmed by his travels in England. He concluded that England's agricultural state compared unfavorably with Ireland and Denmark but favorably to the South.⁶² He cited the progressive measures in England's agriculture -- the Rochdale cooperative stores, and the 2,700,000 members of farm cooperatives -- as signs of progress. Nonetheless, he felt that England still had much to accomplish before she would have a forward-looking agricultural economy.

In conjunction with his travels in Europe, Poe also visited the Orient on his world tour of 1910-1911. He brought with him letters of introduction from leading men including Walter Hines Page, editor of The World's Work, the Governor of North Carolina, William Walton Kitchin, Seaman A. Knapp, and Theodore Roosevelt.⁶³ While visiting the Orient, Poe wrote articles for The Progressive Farmer and national journals in which he described his travels. His Oriental trip included stops in Korea, India, China, Manchuria, Burma, and Japan. Everywhere he journeyed in the Orient he was appalled at the starvation, destitution, and lack of concern

⁶¹Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 174.

⁶²Poe, How Farmers Co-Operate and Double Profits, 175.

⁶³Poe, My First 80 Years, 182.

shown for human life. In his report on living conditions of Korea, which typified most areas of the Orient, he remarked: "at that time it was almost untouched by Western influences -- it was dirty, squalid, unprogressive, and yet with a fascination all its own."⁶⁴ He was taken aback by the corruption in government, the confiscation of property, and the merciless tax policies of the Orient.⁶⁵ All the Asian countries that Poe visited exposed him to new ideas and concepts. He was astonished at the backward state of affairs in Chinese agriculture and life. India, Manchuria, and Burma revealed the inadequacies of their economies and lack of reverence for human life. Japan, however, most impressed Poe, both by its forward-looking economy and the visible influences of the West.

Japanese agriculture fascinated Poe. He was intrigued with the attitude of the Japanese people that farming was "the most honorable of all occupations."⁶⁶ The "handkerchief-sized" farms and their accompanying high productivity earned Poe's deepest admiration. He explained however that, although the farms were carefully cultivated, most of the people were poor. He considered this condition a result of a "too congested" agricultural population and over dependence upon uneconomic

⁶⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 80, 185.

⁶⁵Poe, My First 80 Years, 80, 185.

⁶⁶Poe, My First 80 Years, 80, 182.

hand labor. The solution to this problem, Poe felt, was "that in the future farmers must combine, as they have begun to, and purchase horses and tools."⁶⁷ While in Japan Poe had the opportunity to meet with some of its leading men. Count Okuma, former premier of Japan, discussed with Poe international arbitration and the rising cost of maintaining large armies and navies.⁶⁸ Poe's talk with Okuma, plus his meetings with other prominent leaders in agricultural and political affairs, lent much to his understanding of other parts of the world. He felt that Japan offered valuable lessons for the United States. Lands in Japan were highly cultivated and waste was unknown in farming. School attendance was compulsory in Japan and education was looked upon as the salvation of the country. But the most important lesson Poe felt that Japan held for the United States was an idea he had long advocated for the South -- that the prosperity of a nation depended upon the prosperity of its average man

the most impressive fact I have discovered in all my travels though the Orient...is that you prosper in proportion to the prosperity of the masses of the people with whom you deal. That if the masses of the people are poor and ignorant, every individual, every interest, every industry in the community will feel and register the pulling down.... Every man who through ignorance, lack of training, or by reason of any other

⁶⁷The Progressive Farmer, November 5, 1910.

⁶⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 184.

hindering cause, is producing or earning only half as much as he ought: his efficiency is making everyone else in the community poorer. In short, your prosperity...depends upon the prosperity of the average man....⁶⁹

What then were the ideas that Poe brought back from these trips to Europe and Asia? Denmark and Ireland impressed Poe with their small farms, homogeneous populations, high percentage of land owners, and successful cooperatives. Farm mechanization had also been initiated in these countries through purchases made by rural credit cooperatives. Educational facilities in Denmark and Ireland appealed to Poe because they placed emphasis upon agricultural subjects with instruction in domestic science, livestock breeding, and other related topics. He also felt that the small farms of these countries offered the advantage of more intensive cultivation and better diversification of crops.⁷⁰ These small farms tended to raise the standard of country life by urging the building of good roads, schools, and the creation of a more congenial social atmosphere.⁷¹ In England, France, and Japan, Poe observed less success in the establishment of agricultural cooperatives. Here cooperatives did not function as well because of the emphasis upon industrial activities in these countries. He noted that France had some farm regions

⁶⁹The Progressive Farmer, March 18, 1911.

⁷⁰The Progressive Farmer, October 28, 1911.

⁷¹The Progressive Farmer, October 28, 1911.

which had profited from the establishment of cooperatives. These regions, however, were practically isolated from industrial sections of the country. The countries of the Orient were in economic chaos. Poe believed that this was a result of insufficient government aid to farming and the lack of successful cooperative organizations.

Poe's travels exposed him to the successful agricultural countries as well as the unsuccessful ones. His prime examples of successful farming countries, Denmark and Ireland, enjoyed success in forming cooperatives and marketing their farm products. Nonetheless, there were great differences between Denmark and Ireland as compared to the South. Ireland and Denmark were small countries. Both enjoyed homogeneous communities and a predominance of one religion -- Ireland being almost totally Catholic while Denmark was predominately Protestant. Both had fairly dense populations with surrounding countries eager to purchase their farm products. Neither country had considerable heavy industry. In the South there was a trend away from agricultural pursuits toward industrialization similar to that of England. Whereas Denmark and Ireland were small countries the South was comparatively large in land area and some sections were hilly and not conducive to mechanized farming. The population of the South was not dense as compared to these countries,

and the presence of the Negro eliminated the idea of a homogeneous community. Many branches of the Protestant religion existed in the South, while educational facilities similiar to the folk high schools of Denmark were just beginning to appear. Indeed the three general conditions which Poe considered necessary for the successful organization of cooperatives, "a fairly dense population, a homogeneous population, and an educated population," did not exist in the South.⁷² Yet these were the conditions Poe felt were needed before successful cooperatives could be established.

Poe's vision of the South as a region of small farmers engaged in cooperative organizations which dominated the economy was unrealistic. Cooperatives required among other prerequisites the willingness of farmers to join together under the control of specific groups of men. This trait was unknown in southerning farming. Seemingly inherent in the traits of the southern farmer was his avoidance of organized groups. He rebelled against the idea of giving up control of the growing and marketing of his product. Yet Poe ignored this fact in advocating the establishment of cooperatives. Rather, he believed cooperatives could be established when farmers "learned to work together." Farmers however remained firm in their opposition to cooperative organizations and

⁷²The Progressive Farmer, December 11, 1912.

most of Poe's ideas were never launched. Coupled with the southern farmer's avoidance of organized groups was the problem of rising industrialism in the South. The influx of mills and factories began to draw farmers to the cities in increasing numbers. This trend reflected the nation-wide movement toward urbanization and industrialism. Again Poe seemingly overlooked this fact and believed that agrarian dominancy represented the future for the New South. Farming indeed would play an important role in the New South, but factories and mills rather than cooperative farm organizations marked the future pattern of the area.

Chapter VIII

THE RURAL REFORMER: PROGRESSIVE OR REACTIONARY?

Clarence Poe's formative years were greatly influenced by the political and economic vicissitudes of the southern region. In the southern states during the late nineteenth century a struggling agrarian economy sought to maintain a place in a nation that was rapidly industrializing, urbanising, and de-emphasizing rural interests. Throughout the South internal political struggles simultaneously produced demagogues who appealed to emotionalism and reformers who fought to secure economic and social justice for all. Poe's reform measures manifested his vacillation between these conflicting trends.

Primarily, Poe was a leader and spokesman of the new agricultural South. His weekly newspaper, The Progressive Farmer, advocated the most modern farming techniques in the nation. To deny that this paper was not responsive to the needs of southern agriculture would be to deny the whole spirit of the Progressive Era. By the time Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, farm demonstration work in the South had made substantial progress, state boards of agriculture had encouraged farm training, and agricultural societies and colleges had become firmly established.¹ The

¹Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 225.

national government had also responded to the movement for better living and working conditions for the farmers. With Wilson's victory came many reforms which would help the farmer in banking, credit, and a lower tariff. Ironically, only when the agrarian ranks were completely disorganized did they secure these reforms.² Poe helped to make this possible. He was in the forefront of those who fought for and secured assistance for the farmer. In this capacity he made his greatest contribution to the South.

As important as agricultural production was to the South, however, it was not in step with the movement toward industrialization in the United States. Poe never understood this trend and therefore his ideas and reforms were in many aspects outdated even before he proposed them. Indicative of this outdated thinking was his belief that all southerners wanted to become farmers. He continually emphasized the negative aspects of city life in the hope that southerners would stay on farms. By failing to understand that the future of the South was inexorably tied to industrial pursuits, Poe's philosophy concerning the New South was revealed as grossly inadequate.

While he defended old fashioned ideas concerning farm life, Poe's attitude toward the Negro was even more indicative of his befuddled thinking. His proposal for segregated farm lands revealed his lack of understanding concerning race

²Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 213.

relations and southern agriculture. Poe's proposals for improving southern agriculture centered around the creation of co-operative enterprises by farmers, but his scheme for segregated farm lands negated the very essence of this plan. Furthermore, Poe did not realize that twentieth century financial demands coupled with the trend toward mechanization would drive the Negro farmer, not the white, to cities in search of employment. Poe's proposals for segregated farm lands marked the most regressive part of his thinking.

The perplexed editor's ideas concerning immigration revealed additional flaws in his thinking. His belief that southeastern European and Japanese immigrants would make second rate citizens was proposterous for a man who considered himself a leading spokesman for the New South. Not only was Poe strongly opinionated in his thinking about racial issues, but he misunderstood southern farm life. Southeastern European immigrants, most of whom came from farm regions, conceivably would have adjusted to southern farm life. Poe, however, contended that only northeastern European immigrants, from cities, could have helped the agricultural South.

Poe's stand on educational reforms involved a commitment to improved educational facilities, but he made his support contingent upon white control of segregated schools. While he believed in federal aid to schools, he also feared that this would lead to intergrated schools. Therefore, he

advocated only limited federal assistance. Although this stand was typical of the beliefs affirmed by other southern leaders, nonetheless, it lessened Poe's influence as a progressive spokesman. Such shallow thinking characterized almost all of Poe's ideas concerning the problems of the South. He always presented his views as the most authoritative then current and popular in the South. His various contradictory stands never seemed to bother him; rather, he felt that opposing views were always wrong and that people would soon realize his wisdom. The editor was a great exhorter but not a great thinker. Never did he pause to reflect upon a question. Instead, he would state his position and then defend it against all logical arguments and proofs. Later in his life Poe was able to examine more critically important questions. But this characteristic was missing during the period under consideration. Again and again Poe ignored facts which disproved many of his ideas.

Poe's role as a spokesman for the southern farmer was unclear and paradoxical. He constantly waivered between strong support of progressive measures while he sought at the same time a neo-Jeffersonian society. Others interpreted his articles in national magazines and journals as representative of the political, social, and agricultural ideology of the New South. His state-wide and local appeals to bigotry, however, coupled with his unclear ideas concerning

Chapter IV

THE FARM EDITOR'S OBSERVATIONS ON SOUTHERN AGRICULTURE

The establishment of cooperatives throughout the South was never achieved. There were attempts, however, to unite the farmers into political and non-political organizations by which their demands could be voiced. One such organization was the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union, or as it was more commonly called the Farmers' Union. The Farmers' Union was founded in Texas in 1902 and expanded throughout the South and into the Mid-west. Under its auspices many cooperative grain elevators, livestock associations, and consumer stores were begun. It appealed mostly to the type of farmer who did not respond to the more conservative programs of the Farm Bureau and other similar organizations. Its program was more radical and aggressive than that of any other farm organization of the time.¹ It placed great emphasis upon educating the farmer, and in its broadest aspects was an agricultural counterpart of the Progressive Movement.²

Indicative of his belief in farm organizations, Poe

¹Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West (1951), 581, hereinafter cited as Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West.

²Theodore Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933 (1960), 212, hereinafter cited as Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South.

urged his audience of farmers as early as 1900 not to let trivial matters keep them from their county Alliance meetings. He pointed out to them the social and educational opportunities of such organizations.³ He believed that farmers of the South had never taken advantage of organizations such as the Farmers' Union and Farmer's Alliance to make known their demands. Political organizations as well as cooperative organizations were needed by the farmers. Speaking in 1900 of the need for farmers to take a more active role in the political affairs of the New South Poe remarked: "As a rule the interests of equality and justice are his own interests. As a result, the farmer is and will continue to be the great political balance wheel, the hope of the country."⁴ Although this thinking would become outdated, Poe's role as an advocate of farmer interest in politics was important.

In 1902 the North Carolina Farmer's Alliance expressed thanks to Poe and The Progressive Farmer "for the aid they are rendering the farmer of North Carolina, and we pledge ourselves to do our best to extend the circulation of their excellent paper."⁵ The Farmers' Union also noted Poe's work

³The Progressive Farmer, January 9, April 24, July 31, 1900.

⁴The Progressive Farmer, October 2, 1900.

⁵The Progressive Farmer, August 19, 1902.

in the area of southern agricultural problems. Poe attended the 1910 national convention of the Farmers' Union held in St. Louis, Missouri. There he was recognized as a leader in agricultural reforms for the South.⁶ One year later Poe remarked about the Farmers' Union: "We have urged the cooperation of farmers as a class in the great organizations like the Farmers' Union. The Farmers' Union is today one of the great forces to be reckoned with in the South. Under continued wise leadership it will have an even greater force."⁷ In 1915 The Progressive Farmer became the official newspaper of the North Carolina branch of the Farmers' Union.

The Farmers' Union contributed to the passage of some progressive farm legislation. It prided itself on securing passage of the Parcel Post Law. It helped to create the Division of Markets in the United States Department of Agriculture.⁸ The Farmers' Union, however, suffered the same fate as previous organizations established by farmers in the South -- disbandment. By 1909 only North Carolina had an active branch of the Farmers' Union; credit for this must be given to Poe. He and other Southern leaders fought hard to organize the farmers into a strong, coherent body, but

⁶Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 225.

⁷The Progressive Farmer, September 9, 1911.

⁸Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 211.

southern farmers viewed organizations with suspicion and distrust. Accordingly, the Farmers' Union could only be described as "a loose federation of state organizations."⁹ Theodore Saloutos and John Hicks' statement best reveals the character of the Farmers' Union:

The decline of the Union in the South was due in no small part to the almost hopeless backwardness of southern cotton farmers. As a class they were illiterate, suspicious, and unprogressive. The cooperative organizations that were founded in their name were badly managed and insufficiently patronized.¹⁰

Southern farmers needed to organize to successfully compete in the twentieth century. Tobacco and cotton production by the individual farmer became too expensive to be continued. Poe understood this and accordingly wrote articles and delivered speeches throughout the South in which he proposed ways in which the production of these crops could be improved.¹¹

Poe believed that the South's future was inexorably tied to cotton; this belief explained his great interest in

⁹Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 221-222.

¹⁰Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 222.

¹¹See Clarence Poe, "The Rich Kingdom of Cotton," The World's Work, IX (November, 1904), hereinafter cited as Poe, "The Rich Kingdom of Cotton"; Clarence Poe "Enormous Wastes in Our Cotton Farming," South Atlantic Quarterly, V (April, 1906), hereinafter cited as Poe, "Enormous Wastes in Our Cotton Farming"; Clarence Poe and Charles Burkett, "Is Our Cotton Monopoly Secure?," The World's Work, XII (July, 1905).

the promotion of better growing and handling methods for this product. "It is a New South that we have. The factory, the bank, the church, the school, the newspaper -- all are benefitted by the increase in prices paid for the South's great staple crop."¹² Successful, profitable cotton production could be achieved, Poe believed, through the establishment of an organization which would collectively regulate the growing, buying, and shipping of the South's cotton. He therefore became an active supporter of the Southern Cotton Association an outgrowth of the earlier Southern Cotton Growers' Protective Association. The membership of the Southern Cotton Association was broadly based, and its work in bringing about a reduction in cotton acreage in 1905 was noted by Poe.¹³

A major attempt was made by the Southern Cotton Association to hold cotton off domestic markets in hopes that higher prices could be gained and the middleman eliminated.¹⁴ This plan did not succeed. A series of blunders by the Southern Cotton Association, the biggest of which was the failure to recognize the influence of world prices upon the domestic crop, resulted in its disbandment only four years after its

¹²Poe, "The Rich Kingdom of Cotton," 5489.

¹³The Progressive Farmer, July 18, July 25, 1905.

¹⁴The Progressive Farmer, October 3, 1905.

creation.¹⁵ Although it attempted to regulate buying and selling, the Southern Cotton Association came forward with few new ideas, and some of the methods used to alleviate the ailments of cotton growers were similar to those employed by the much hated trusts.¹⁶ This organization also had to contend with two problems that no farm organization solved -- the reluctance of farmers to support actively any cooperative effort, and the inability of these organizations to fight the powerful business monopolies and trusts which controlled cotton and other farm products.

The Southern Cotton Association's failure did not deter Poe from continuing to work for improvements in the production of this crop. He co-authored with Charles Burkett a book which dealt with the problems of cotton production.¹⁷ Poe listed the following methods as ways to improve cotton production: proper cultivation, better selection of seed, adequate bailing methods, the use of machinery, and the better use of idle land.¹⁸ Poe hoped, too, that the use of more farm machinery in harvesting cotton would lead to better

¹⁵Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 166.

¹⁶Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 166.

¹⁷See Clarence Poe and Charles Burkett, Cotton: Its Cultivation, Marketing, Manufacturing, and the Problems of the Cotton World (1906).

¹⁸Poe, "Enormous Wastes in Our Cotton Farming," 131.

diversification of crops for the South "if in rooting out the evil of insufficient machinery we succeed at the same time in rooting out the old and mischievous one-crop system, a double service will have been rendered the Southern farmer."¹⁹

In 1911 Poe wrote at length concerning cotton production and how it could achieve modern standards:

Not only must the one-crop system be abandoned, suitable rotation adopted and more livestock raised, but there must be much better methods of handling the cotton crop itself. If the land is to be worked by tenants, these tenants should be furnished proper equipment, they should be compelled to farm the land, not merely work it in cotton, and the lease, whenever possible, should be for a term of years instead of for a single season.

Organizations, farmers' warehouses, cooperation of local banks and merchants with the farmers of their community will help secure profitable prices for cotton....²⁰

The inadequate financial situation of cotton farmers concerned Poe. He wrote letters to prominent leaders and politicians of North Carolina and asked their support for financial reforms. In a 1914 circular, he urged that something be done to insure adequate currency for farmers to hold their cotton until buying conditions became stable. "The

¹⁹The Progressive Farmer, March 5, 1908.

²⁰The Progressive Farmer, March 18, 1911.

solvency of Southern farmers is now in jeopardy. They ask Congress to provide sufficient currency at reasonable interest so they may borrow and carry the crop at their own risk and their own expense until conditions become normal again."²¹ Poe's concern with the South's cotton production was indicative of his role as a progressive spokesman for the farmer. The production and marketing of cotton, however, was too involved and too complex to yield to the stop-gap solutions that Poe proposed. Only with the onset of World War I and federal regulation of the cotton crop was progress made in this area.

Tobacco farmers also were depressed by low prices and their failure to organize cooperative markets and warehouses. Attempts, however, were still made to improve tobacco prices. Cooperatives were established and acreage reductions were tried. The American Society of Equity, the National Tobacco Growers' Association, and the Inter-State Tobacco Growers' Protective Association tried to break the hold of the American Tobacco Company upon the crop. In a 1905 editorial Poe remarked about this situation:

The American Tobacco Company is supreme master of the situation. The only hope of relief is in organization, and sooner or later that organization must be effective.

²¹Clarence Poe to Edwin Yates Webb, October 12, 1914, Webb Papers.

All the sporadic efforts are but the forerunners of that general and well organized movement which men must inevitably bring about in the end. The tobacco farmers must continue to agitate and educate and confer together until the final victory is won.²²

The American Tobacco Company used various means to negate attempts by farmers to form cooperative markets (such as overbidding procedures). The independence of the tobacco farmers, however, who refused to join any organization proved to be the major stumbling block in attempts at cooperation.²³ Attempts were made to force independent tobacco farmers to join cooperative organizations that resulted in numerous bloody fights, especially in Tennessee and Kentucky.²⁴

Continued attempts to organize the farmers against the American Tobacco Company resulted in varying degrees of success. In The Bright-Tobacco Industry, the definitive study of tobacco production in the South, Nannie May Tilley described attempts to organize cooperative markets in North Carolina. The tobacco farmer needed to organize to compete with the American Tobacco Company, but his failure to do this resulted in his remaining in a state of economic depression. North Carolina tobacco leaders refused to

²²The Progressive Farmer, October 7, 1905.

²³Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 175.

²⁴Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 176.

cooperate with the better led Virginia farmers although the tobacco farmers themselves favored such organizations.²⁵ Poe stated that he favored a scheme to unite Virginia and North Carolina tobacco farmers.²⁶ Tilley found, however, that the organization of North Carolina tobacco farmers was impossible:

Leadership in North Carolina was incompetent and perhaps not too greatly concerned with finding an honest solution. The rank and file of growers interested in organization listened to many speeches on cooperation, voted on many harmless resolutions, and traveled many miles to attend meetings where no definite program was presented.²⁷

With the weakening of the Inter-State Tobacco Growers' Protective Association, the Farmers' Union championed the cause of the tobacco farmer. It stressed elimination of the middleman.²⁸ Plans of the Farmers' Union also included an attack against the fertilizer-trust dealers, and a crusade for more diversified farming.²⁹ Some progress was made by the Farmers' Union in helping the tobacco farmer, and by 1911 ten redrying and storage plants were in operation in

²⁵Nannie May Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry (1948), 440, hereinafter cited as Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry.

²⁶The Progressive Farmer, May 19, 1905.

²⁷Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 444.

²⁸Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 445.

²⁹Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 446.

North Carolina and Virginia.³⁰ As with other efforts, however, the Farmers' Union cooperative markets and storage plants handled only a small proportion of the tobacco produced. Yet their continued existence indicated acceptance of a definite plan by farmers and furnished a model for the tremendous undertakings of the 1920's.³¹

While avowedly interested in problems facing tobacco and cotton farmers, Poe emphasized agrarian reforms for the farmers who grew a variety of crops, raised livestock, and did not specialize in any one product. His reforms for these people centered upon revision of existing taxation policies, the elimination of the crop-lien, an improved system of banking and credit, and the creation of a better social atmosphere.³²

Poe's ideas for reforming the chaotic financial structure of the South rested upon legislative enactments and group action by the farmers. In one of the first issues of The Progressive Farmer, he urged the creation of postal savings banks for farmers to "make times better by keeping their money in circulation and making it of service to commerce."³³

³⁰Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 447.

³¹Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 448.

³²The Progressive Farmer, October 21, 1916.

³³The Progressive Farmer, November 19, 1901.

He cited the following advantages that could be gained if postal savings banks were established: the saving of more money, increased farmer interest in business enterprises, and more easy credit for farmers.³⁴

Poe's ideas for better banking facilities for southern farmers had been bolstered by personal studies and observations. Poe, John Sprunt Hill, and Eugene C. Branson became the leading advocates of banking reforms in North Carolina. Poe's knowledge of the financial problems of North Carolina farmers was recognized by Governor Locke Craig. He appointed Poe to a committee to investigate the causes for the lack of farm credit. Poe concluded from his work with this committee that facilities for lending money to farmers were almost nonexistent. "Few banks in North Carolina lend on farm lands and the average farmer desiring to borrow money on his land is compelled to deal with the land loan shark, and is compelled to pay from 6-20% on money borrowed."³⁵

The reform minded editor therefore proposed the following financial reforms for North Carolina: the establishment of a system of land mortgage credit that would bring

³⁴The Progressive Farmer, April 29, 1902, January 6, 1903, February 16, 1904, December 9, 1911.

³⁵A Report to Governor Locke Craig, The Committee on the Needs of North Carolina Farmers with Regard to Credit, Marketing and Co-Operatives (ca. 1913), Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Committee Report on Farmer Needs.

a low rate of interest and could be repaid over a long period of years, reform of existing taxation policies to discourage speculation in lands -- a single tax, and more liberal credit policies to stimulate home ownership.³⁶ In his evaluation of banking facilities in North Carolina Poe did not blame the bankers for the shortage of farm credit. He understood that to the banker the southern farmer offered no great opportunity for investment. The fault for this condition lay not in the banker, but in the farmers themselves.³⁷

If banks were not ready to lend money to farmers, where could they receive the necessary financial capital to buy their own farms? Poe proposed the establishment of rural credit organizations to fulfill this need. A great believer in the abilities of the individual farmer, he felt that with proper guidance farmers could establish rural credit organizations from which they could borrow money at low interest rates. Yet he ignored the fact that this had been attempted by the Farmer's Alliance and Farmers' Union with little success.

Poe's ideas for the establishment of credit organizations had been influenced by his trips to Europe in 1908 and

³⁶Committee Report on Farmer Needs.

³⁷Clarence Poe, "The New South." Address delivered at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, April 2, 1908, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "The New South."

1912. During these visits he saw the results that farmers in Denmark and Ireland had achieved through credit organizations, and he determined that similar organizations were needed in the South:

Some form of rural credit society not dependent upon our present system of commercial banks must be evolved. There is great need both for short time credit and for providing money on long-time and low rates to enable worthy citizens to build houses, and buy lands.³⁸

Poe wrote to politicians in North Carolina and the South urging them to help create rural credit organizations. He used The Progressive Farmer as a lever to influence reform legislation. He also published circulars dealing with the financial problems of the southern farmer. In 1914 a circular was sent to leading North Carolina politicians, including Edwin Yates Webb, stating "the North Carolina State Farmers' Union (40,000) urges you to see that rural credits is given importance in Congress. We cannot believe the Administration is to ignore this vital matter in the coming session."³⁹ Poe's fight to establish rural credit organizations for North Carolina was successful. North Carolina became the first state to enact a rural credits law to help

³⁸Committee Report on Farmer Needs. 1912, p. 10000

³⁹Clarence Poe to Edwin Yates Webb, December 8, 1914, Webb Papers.

farmers. In 1915 the North Carolina legislature enacted a measure to allow the establishment of credit unions and cooperative organizations -- modeled after a Wisconsin statute. By 1916 the state had seven rural credit unions.⁴⁰

Poe also supported national legislation for rural credit organizations. He urged southern senators to back the Hollis-Bulkley bill creating these facilities.⁴¹ After the passage of this bill, Poe urged farmers in North Carolina to help organize credit unions. He felt, however, that nothing could be done in the state until the joint committee of the A & M College and the State Department of Agriculture met and selected a Superintendent of Credit Unions and Co-Operative Enterprises.⁴² Poe later supported other credit measures before Congress, including annual and semi-annual amortization projects, federal assistance in helping to start rural credit organizations, and credit policies which extended money to farmers but excluded absentee landlords.⁴³

Absentee landlordism in the South was of special concern to Poe. He wrote President Wilson in 1916 expressing fear that the rural credit system might be in danger

⁴⁰Public Laws of North Carolina, 1915, Chapter 116, 189-201; and The Progressive Farmer, June 10, 1916.

⁴¹The Progressive Farmer, March 6, 1915.

⁴²Clarence Poe to Eugene C. Branson, March 12, 1915, Branson Papers.

⁴³Clarence Poe to Edwin Yates Webb, March 18, May 18, 1916, Webb Papers.

of becoming a tool of special interests:

The rural credits system should be a great and supremely beneficent achievement, but now promises instead to become a mere delusion and snare - an instrument for the promotion of land speculation rather than for helping farmers.⁴⁴

Poe believed that absentee landlords should not receive federal monies. By excluding this group Poe believed that the rural credit organizations would be saved from the special interest groups. He felt that an important step was taken for southern farmers with the creation of rural credits organizations: "It is a beginning -- a recognition that our present commercial system of banking is not adapted to the farmer's need and that therefore a new system must be worked out. We regard it as a great victory for American farmers."⁴⁵

Poe believed that other financial reforms were also needed to help the farmer. He felt that new policies concerning land taxation and farm mortgages were needed to encourage farmers to buy their own lands. It was general practice in the South to lease lands only for a short period of time -- sometimes yearly. Thus tenant farmers were not sure that the land they worked would be available to them

⁴⁴Clarence Poe to Woodrow Wilson, June 3, 1916, Poe Papers.

⁴⁵The Progressive Farmer, May 20, 1916.

the following year. Why, then, improve it? Poe believed that a change was needed in this policy. He queried, why not allow leases on farm lands to be negotiated for extended periods at low rental rates, as was done in Europe? He felt that tenant farmers, with the assurance that the land they worked would be available to them, would show a greater interest in improving farms.⁴⁶

Outdated farm mortgage policies also came under attack from Poe. Because crops were always susceptible to natural disasters, short-term land mortgages were impractical. Poe proposed instead an organization similar to the one established for rural credits. He envisioned an organization with sufficient capital for insuring individual land mortgages and with the ability to issue bonds against individual land mortgages. These would be controlled exclusively by farmers.⁴⁷ He also advocated changes in the tax systems of the South and the nation. In a 1912 editorial, Poe spoke about these proposed changes:

Our present tax system is antiquated, illogical, and grossly unfair to the poor. Most vicious of all is the indirect tax in the form of unfair tariffs, because the tax is paid without the man recognizing that it is a tax.

⁴⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 9, 1908.

⁴⁷Committee Report on Farmer Needs.

The reform of this evil is the most serious political problem before the people of America. Taxes should be levied on inheritances, incomes, and the unearned increments in land, mines, and other natural resources.⁴⁸

He further insisted that the poll tax be abolished altogether. "Instead of taxing \$1,000 on \$300 worth of property he (farmer) doesn't own, we should exempt \$300 in tools, equipment, and furniture he does own."⁴⁹ Poe also proposed that a graduated inheritance tax be assessed on all incomes. He argued that the average southern state did not receive \$1,000 from the existing inheritance tax when it should collect as much as \$10,000.⁵⁰

Accompanying these changes in the financial structure of the South, Poe also proposed that land taxation policies be changed. Instead of taxing most heavily the small areas of land, Poe felt the emphasis should be placed upon large tracts of land that were not in use "a super tax should be levied on them; and instead of taxing the big estates at a lower rate per area than the small farm, we should reverse the process."⁵¹ Poe's policies regarding land taxation were based on the idea that taxes should be directed not so much

⁴⁸The Progressive Farmer, May 11, 1912.

⁴⁹The Progressive Farmer, April 7, 1906.

⁵⁰The Progressive Farmer, November 9, 1902, May 11, 1912.

⁵¹Clarence Poe, "Legislation Needed By Our Farmers." Address delivered at the South Carolina State House of Representatives, January 20, 1916, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Legislation Needed By Our Farmers."

to the gains made by thrift and industry, but to those made by chance, inheritance, and speculation.⁵² His thinking on this matter had been influenced by Henry George's writings on the single tax. This doctrine appealed to Poe and other leaders of the state who were opposed to the use of land for speculative purposes.⁵³ Poe supported the single tax idea by advocating that taxes on lands owned by resident farmers be less than those levied on lands owned by absentee owners. He also proposed a lower tax on lands that had been substantially improved by farmers.⁵⁴

Poe's proposals for new types of financial programs for southern farmers paralleled other progressive measures he advocated for the South. Accordingly, he supported the establishment of the Torrens system of registering deeds. Procedures in the South required that every time a farmer wanted to purchase or sell a section of land, the deed for this land had to be verified by lawyers. This resulted in farmers having to pay excessive legal fees to obtain a deed. Poe believed this outdated system of determining land ownership was "as foolish and uneconomic as paying a man to carry a

⁵²Poe, "Legislation Needed By Our Farmers."

⁵³The Progressive Farmer, June 8, 1912.

⁵⁴The Progressive Farmer, October 18, 1913, July 18, 1914; and Joseph F. Steelman, "The Progressive Era in North Carolina, 1884-1917." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina, 1955, hereinafter cited as Steelman, "The Progressive Era in North Carolina."

brick from one side of the street to the other and then back again...."⁵⁵ He proposed that the state examine a title once, register it, and guarantee its validity.⁵⁶ Although some problems would be encountered in the establishment of the Torrens system of registering deeds, Poe strongly supported it.⁵⁷

The State Fair and regional expositions held periodically throughout the South also won Poe's endorsement: "The State Fair should stand for education and educational progress in agriculture. It is not merely a picnic nor a homecoming of the people. It is a school for studying new things in agriculture."⁵⁸ In 1902 Poe remarked that the Charleston Exposition was "a credit to the South," and that similar programs should be held periodically.⁵⁹ He supported attempts to remove from fairs the "dancing girl" shows and gambling games.⁶⁰ In reference to the State Fair held in North Carolina Poe remarked: "To have again such a carnival of filth and vulgarity would simply cause thousands who have

⁵⁵The Progressive Farmer, July 18, 1914.

⁵⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 28, 1909.

⁵⁷Robert D. W. Connor to Clarence Poe, January 15, 1914, R. D. W. Connor Papers.

⁵⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 7, 1905.

⁵⁹The Progressive Farmer, April 22, 1902.

⁶⁰The Progressive Farmer, October 27, 1903, March 15, 1906.

accepted in good faith the promises of reform to lose all confidence and interest in the institution."⁶¹ He continued his support for the State Fair even though attempts to clean it up met with only limited success. "It is probably true that the Fair is guilty of most of the vices it is charged with, but it certainly has virtues to offset these vices, and the virtues are wholly ignored."⁶² Poe advocated that the states take charge of cleaning up the fairs, and he actively supported other newspapers and men who endorsed this policy.⁶³

Poe's support of fairs and expositions coincided with his advocacy of more livestock production in the South. Indeed, Poe considered the lack of sufficient quality and numbers of livestock as one of the major reasons that the South was economically retarded:

The greatest trouble with the Southern farmer is that he has a one-armed system of farming, whereas successful agriculture requires two arms. By this I mean that there are two great arms for agricultural wealth. One is plant production. The other is animal production. The South's present agricultural leadership realizes that no mere multiplication of crops, no matter how

⁶¹The Progressive Farmer, May 6, 1902.

⁶²Clarence Poe to Eugene C. Branson, April 13, 1916, Branson Papers.

⁶³The Progressive Farmer, October 31, 1905, October 29, 1910, November 9, 1912.

far it may go, no system of farming which depends on plant production exclusively, no matter how valid, will give us agricultural prosperity.⁶⁴

Even with the editor's advocacy of more livestock and dairy farming, this part of the South's economy never became as strong a commercial factor as crop farming.⁶⁵

The isolation of rural farm life prompted Poe to fight for improvements in public roads, mail, and telephone service. Rural farm life in the early twentieth century was characterized by its barrenness and lack of social exchange. Accordingly, Poe urged farmers to petition their congressman and demand facilities to alleviate this condition. He frequently wrote of the improvements that farmers noted when telephones were installed in their homes. He also had high praise for a recently passed parcel post bill.⁶⁶ Of greater concern to Poe was an extension of rural mail service. Many rural areas were without this service, and this deficiency prompted him to action. Early in 1900 he

⁶⁴Clarence Poe, "The Agricultural Revolution - What It Means and How It Is To Be Brought About." Address delivered at the University of Virginia, July 15, 1909, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "The Agricultural Revolution;" see also The Progressive Farmer, March 11, 1902, November 14, 1907, November 15, 1906, April 15, 1909.

⁶⁵Arthur Bining, The Rise of American Economic Life (1943).

⁶⁶The Progressive Farmer, July 30, 1901, July 29, 1902, February 24, December 28, 1912; see also Clarence Poe, "Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," The American Monthly Review of Reviews, XXX (December, 1904), 698, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth."

championed the need for rural mail delivery:

With free rural delivery our country population would be put in close touch with the business world and with markets, farming would be more profitable, farm lands would advance in price, more newspapers would be taken, more literature used, and our rural population would rapidly advance along educational lines.⁶⁷

Poe openly criticized those who felt that he overstressed the worth of rural free delivery. In 1905 he retorted: "We have no doubt in the world but that the real prestige and power of America is far more strengthened and better safeguarded by the nine million spent for rural free delivery than it would be twice that sum spent for battleships and fortifications."⁶⁸ In 1906 The Progressive Farmer became the official organ of the Rural Letter Carriers' Association, a group which fought for extension of existing rural delivery routes.⁶⁹

Paralleling his fight for rural mail deliveries was Poe's advocacy of better roads in rural areas. Prices for farm goods were adversely affected by transportation across grossly inadequate rural roads. Poe, again, became the early champion of the farmer for better roads. In 1902 he advocated

⁶⁷The Progressive Farmer, January 23, June 12, July 17, 1900.

⁶⁸The Progressive Farmer, September 26, 1905, April 15, 1902.

⁶⁹The Progressive Farmer, September 20, 1906, March 7, 1907; Clarence Poe to Furnifold M. Simmons, March 17, 1910, Simmons Papers.

that monies from a proposed larger property tax be used to support better roads. He also advocated that convicts be used in building roads and that bonds be issued for road construction.⁷⁰ He continually pointed out that the federal government spent millions to improve river transportation. He asked, why not a similar proposal for roads?⁷¹ Until federal assistance was secured, however, Poe urged farmers to undertake building roads on their own:

Wherever the people are wealthy enough, let the permanent macadam road be made. In other counties, the sand-clay system, already explained will prove the most advantageous. In other sections the King road drag ought to be tested. Other counties might well employ an engineer to lay out the roads anew.⁷²

When automobiles later became prominent Poe suggested a graduated tax be placed upon them to help in the building and upkeep of roads.⁷³ He strongly advocated federal assistance in building roads. He did not want, however, federal control to accompany this assistance. He felt that control should remain in the hands of the states,⁷⁴ and advocated that provisions be made by Congress whereby farmers would be paid

⁷⁰The Progressive Farmer, February 18, 1902.

⁷¹The Progressive Farmer, January 19, 1904, February 27, 1908.

⁷²The Progressive Farmer, March 1, 1905, June 27, 1912.

⁷³The Progressive Farmer, February 8, May 3, 1913.

⁷⁴The Progressive Farmer, May 10, 1913.

for dragging dirt roads after rainstorms.⁷⁵ Aside from the question of practicability, Poe's proposals for better roads revealed a keen interest and awareness of the needs of rural farm life.

Poe, the southern editor, was frequently asked if the agrarian reforms he advocated would result in the elimination of the small farmer and create a class of large landholders. He denied that this would happen and affirmed that large farming operations:

were a leading away from the path of true social progress as well as away from the trend of better agricultural thinking. That intensive agriculture is the trend is true; and this be especially true in a democracy, where the idea of individual independence is the central thought of social and economic life. The system that produces large farms with 'generals' for 'bosses' must be carried on for the benefit of the few at the expense of many -- at the financial, physical, and intellectual expense of the many. And such a system is opposed to the yearnings of our government and the legitimate aspirations of our people.

We do not care to produce generals. We want to see all men lifted up to their highest estate. It is the mission of agriculture beyond any other of the callings, to do this, but it is by the small farm plan that this is to be done. And when the average man has intelligence enough to direct the affairs of a small farm, we shall have an infinitely more desirable country than we could have with bonanza farms, a people groping in ignorance about their work under the 'generals'

⁷⁵Clarence Poe to Bennehan Cameron, [ca. 1917], Bennehan Cameron Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Cameron Papers.

of agriculture would be the last in whose hands to entrust the sacred responsibility of sovrenity.⁷⁶

Poe's reasoning on this subject was based on emotionalism rather than fact, but he firmly believed that the small farmer should be the benefactor of rural life. This attitude had been influenced by his trips to Europe where he saw how small farmers prospered.⁷⁷ He believed that similar small farms in the South would result in a better system of progressive farming methods.⁷⁸ His concept of small prosperous farms included the use of machinery. Machinery would enable farmers to compete better in the labor market with urban areas by cutting costs, offering higher wages, and providing shorter working hours.⁷⁹ He proposed that farmers collectively buy and use this machinery.⁸⁰ This belief reflected Poe's lack of understanding of the problems that such procedures would encompass. Co-

⁷⁶The Progressive Farmer, January 15, 1901.

⁷⁷The Progressive Farmer, August 28, 1908.

⁷⁸The Progressive Farmer, January 16, 1908, February 10, 1912; see also Clarence Poe, "Builders of an Agricultural Commonwealth," The South Atlantic Quarterly, VIII (January, 1909), 1-2, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Builders of an Agricultural Commonwealth."

⁷⁹Clarence Poe, "Why the Era of Cheap Farm Products Is Over," The American Review of Reviews, CVIII (August, 1918), 178, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Why the Era of Cheap Farm Products Is Over."

⁸⁰Poe, "Why the Era of Cheap Farm Products Is Over," 178.

operative ideas had never succeeded in the South, but Poe continued to assert that farmers could collectively purchase and use machinery.

Poe was further concerned that southern farmers, disgusted with low prices for crops, were moving to urban areas. He felt that country life offered independence while its counterpart, the city, offered bosses and servants "the town needs many servants and it needs few rulers."⁸¹ He also believed that the farm would continue to provide the great middle class for the United States, and that, when the farming population of a nation moved into the cities, a nation had lost its inner strength.⁸² As was characteristic of this framework of thought, Poe contended that the city had grown at the expense of the farm.⁸³ He therefore opposed the movement to cities and believed that better trained farmers, improved working conditions, and diversified crop planting would prevent this.⁸⁴ But the editor was mistaken in this belief. Farm mechanization was displacing farmers while the greater economic opportunities of the cities lured many away from rural areas. Reforms were needed in

⁸¹The Progressive Farmer, October 2, 1900.

⁸²The Progressive Farmer, July 15, 1902.

⁸³The Progressive Farmer, March 22, 1904.

⁸⁴The Progressive Farmer, July 29, 1902, April 24, June 7, 1903, April 11, 1907.

farm life, but Poe never understood that the city, not the farm, represented the future of the South.

Poe's views on immigration further reflected his lack of understanding concerning the future of southern farming. He felt that the needs of labor, then in great demand by southern textile mills, should be filled by incoming European immigrants and Negroes already present in the South rather than by "the sturdy stock of people we now have on our farms."⁸⁵ "Let us draw on Europe for our manufacturing population and turn our sturdy American stock into more progressive farmers."⁸⁶ Poe ignored the fact that these ideas had failed in the South. His continued advocacy of such ideas revealed his superficial thinking on this question. Although he urged European immigration for work in textile mills, Poe protested against settlers from South-eastern Europe. He believed that Congress should establish quota systems for this "human traffic." "Protect our working men from competition with degraded Hungarians and Poles. If American labor is to keep its present moral and intellectual standards it must not be forced into competition with degraded European labor."⁸⁷ He also felt that Russians should

⁸⁵The Progressive Farmer, April 25, 1905, June 26, 1900.

⁸⁶The Progressive Farmer, April 25, 1905.

⁸⁷The Progressive Farmer, January 16, 1905.

be excluded from America.⁸⁸

Poe's views concerning immigration were filled with prejudice and showed a lack of understanding concerning the attraction of new farmers to the South. He overlooked the fact that the chances that successful farmers from other regions would come to the South were nil. Why not use those people already present in the South, which Poe felt were the best type of farmers, to build up the region? The suggestion made by the North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture did not interest Poe: "There are many who entertain the opinion that our people, already the most homogeneous in the United States, are capable of intelligence and progress beyond any degree to be obtained in an influx of immigrants from elsewhere."⁸⁹

If the farm was to remain a dominant segment of the American society, Poe felt that it must be made more socially and physically appealing.⁹⁰ He cited the lack of social facilities in the South needed to keep young people on farms:

we hear much complaint of the boys and girls leaving the farm. No amount of complaint or exhortations will stop this tendency.

⁸⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 21, 1905.

⁸⁹Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of North Carolina (1904), 27.

⁹⁰The Progressive Farmer, March 22, 1904.

There are poverty, hardship and filth in the cities, but are there not also poverty, hardwork, inconveniences and lack of social pleasures in the country? As conditions exist today the social pleasures, the conveniences of life, the wealth and ease are found in the cities.⁹¹

Poe contended that the isolated existence of the farmer had to be replaced by a rural community in which he would find centers of educational, religious, social, and intellectual activities.⁹² Lectures, debates, agricultural organizations, farm clubs, farm journals and other self-help programs Poe believed would bring about this change.⁹³ Combined with these ideas Poe also envisaged for the southern farmer improvements in existing school systems and more pleasurable activities necessary to make rural life appealing.⁹⁴

As early as 1905 Poe expressed the belief that the southern farmer had begun to make strides forward. He cited the fact that mortgages were being paid off more rapidly,

⁹¹The Progressive Farmer, June 15, 1912.

⁹²Clarence Poe, "What Can the State and Nation Do to Develop Rural Communities?" Address delivered at the Sixth Annual Conference on Rural Organization, Massachusetts Agricultural College, Amherst, Massachusetts, July 30, 1915, Poe Papers; see also Poe, "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," 694.

⁹³The Progressive Farmer, April 20, 1912; see also Clarence Poe, "Agricultural Revolution a Necessity," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, XXXV (January, 1910), 49-50; and Poe, "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," 698-699.

⁹⁴Poe, "Why the Era of Cheap Farm Products Is Over," 181.

bank deposits had gained, railways were paying the farmers more for his products, and property values were rising.⁹⁵ By 1909 Poe believed that the southern farmer had developed a new agrarian consciousness which rejected the gullied, unkempt field. Farming had now become a business which required modern techniques.⁹⁶ He further contended that state and national farm organizations had begun to make significant contributions to the South's agricultural knowledge: "there can only be one result of all this activity. The next ten years and the next twenty years are to see the greatest improvement and development in Southern agriculture."⁹⁷ The organizations responsible for the extension of this agricultural knowledge included: state boards of agriculture, agricultural experiment stations, the United States Department of Agriculture, farm demonstration work projects, agricultural newspapers and bulletins -- all which advocated "practical, profitable, scientific farming."⁹⁸ Poe especially favored liberal appropriations for agricultural schools like the A & M College: "Here is where the leaders of our agricultural revolution must be inspired."⁹⁹

⁹⁵The Progressive Farmer, November 28, 1905.

⁹⁶The Progressive Farmer, April 29, May 13, 1909.

⁹⁷The Progressive Farmer, January 22, 1910.

⁹⁸See Poe "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth" for other organizations.

⁹⁹The Progressive Farmer, January 21, 1911, March 4, 1912.

Poe was a realist in that he expected many farm problems to continue to plague the southern farmer "that there will always be poor farming and poor farmers is unquestionable."¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, he continued to be an idealist in his fight to improve southern farming:

The great encouraging fact remains that all over the South there are progressive, ambitious farmers who are steadily advancing from poor farming to good farming and from poor men to men of wealth. We need the greater vision of agricultural possibilities just as we need more explicit knowledge of farming methods.¹⁰¹

Poe always remained optimistic about improvements that could be made by the southern farmer "if we judge the South not by where it stands, but by the direction in which it is going and the speed with which it is moving the South is unmistakably progressive."¹⁰²

Obviously the South's farmers and agricultural economy were rapidly becoming outdated in twentieth century America. Above all else loomed the fact that the southern farmer "failed to organize successfully to attain political, social, and economic benefits in an era that was highly

¹⁰⁰The Progressive Farmer, August 10, 1912.

¹⁰¹The Progressive Farmer, August 10, 1912.

¹⁰²Clarence Poe, "The South: Backward and Sectional or Progressive and National," The Outlook, CXIV (October, 1916), 331, hereinafter cited as Poe, "The South: Backward and Sectional or Progressive and National."

complex and in which organization was the key to progress."¹⁰³ Poe faced the same problem his contemporary reform leaders did -- he tried to bridge the gap between advocating reforms and getting them employed by farmers. At best the farmers only responded with great reluctance. Some of Poe's ideas, however, were not in step with twentieth century thinking. It is questionable whether his reforms represented proposals to move the South forward or whether his ideas represented a retreat. It would appear he tried to regain for the South some type of neo-Jeffersonian society in which the farmer was the center of life. Poe's ideas were in contrast with trends in the United States that pointed the way to a vast urban, industrial complex. His understanding of the need to reform southern agriculture was evident, but the question remains whether Poe, while advocating a scientific approach to life for the farmer, envisaged an agrarian society. A description of Theodore Roosevelt by Samuel Hayes in Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency would also characterize Clarence Poe:

His emphasis on applied science and his concept of the good society as the classless agrarian society were contradictory trends of thought. The one, a faith which looked to the future, accepted the basic elements of the new technology. The other, essentially backward-looking longed for the simple agrarian arcadia which if it ever existed, could never be revived.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Steelman, "The Progressive Era in North Carolina," 656.

¹⁰⁴ Hayes, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency, 269.

Chapter V

THE FARM EDITOR AND THE NEGRO

Clarence Poe achieved a reputation as an outstanding journalist and advocate of reform. His interest in securing equal rights for the Negro was less notable. He wavered between advocating agricultural reforms for the South and sensing that these reforms would encourage the Negro farmer to displace the small white farmer. Poe feared the Negro -- feared that some day he would dominate southern agriculture and thereby dominate the South. He questioned whether the two races could live together and proposed a constitutional amendment to establish segregated neighborhoods. The Negro's gradual economic improvement confronted Poe with the dilemma of whether to promote this progress. He asserted:

I do not know what we are going to do with the negro, we must either frame a scheme of education and training that will keep him from dragging down the whole level of life or else he must get out of the South and give way to the white immigrant. Our economic law knows no colour line.¹

If Poe had remained a farmer in the South his views concerning the Negro would have remained unknown and unnoticed. But, as editor of The Progressive Farmer, his views were published for all to read. He also expressed his views in

¹Mims, The Advancing South, 78.

many of the national journals including the North American Review, The Outlook, the South Atlantic Quarterly, and The World's Work. With this national audience, plus that of The Progressive Farmer, Poe gained much exposure on the Negro question and was considered by some to be one of the leading spokesmen for progressive reform in the South.

Few events in Poe's life had a greater influence upon his opinions concerning the Negro than the election of Charles B. Aycock as governor in 1900. Then when Poe's father was displaced from his farm by Negro farmers, he was moved to write:

my own father in his old age was forced to leave the farm simply because the place became surrounded by negroes and so provided no satisfactory social life to say nothing of the dangers from an insolent lawless goup [sic] of negroes on an adjoining tract of land.²

"Aycock believed in the right of the white man to rule as profoundly as he believed in God. He knew that the instinct of race is divinely implanted," wrote Poe in a book he co-edited with Robert D. W. Conner about Aycock's life.³ Both

²Clarence Poe, "A Great Rural Civilization in North Carolina." Address delivered at Mooresville, North Carolina, July 31, 1913, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "A Great Rural Civilization in North Carolina."

³Robert D. W. Connor and Clarence Poe, The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock (1912), 160, hereinafter cited as Connor and Poe, The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock.

of these statements revealed Poe's inner conflict as to the question of equality for the Negro. This conflict became more and more evident as the twentieth century unfolded.

In 1900 Poe wrote an editorial for The Progressive Farmer expressing his concern over the Negro issue in politics:

All know that the negro question has done more to enslave our people politically and to promote the uninterrupted control of Southern politics by one political party than any one thing. The South has not produced a Jackson, Jefferson, or a Calhoun since reconstruction days. They could not grow in our political atmosphere at this time, or among a people whose judgment and intellect were kept in subjection by the presence of a negro problem.⁴

Because of the so-called "Negro problem" Poe favored restricted suffrage. He believed that most Negroes were not intelligent, educated, or competent enough to vote. He also remarked that the fear of the Negro rising to political power in the South had restricted the region to one political party -- Democratic -- and eliminated the gains that could have been made with a two party system. "The best government is not possible where the dominant party is conscious that it has nothing to fear from the opposition."⁵ Poe felt

⁴The Progressive Farmer, July 24, 1900.

⁵Clarence Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South: Its Causes and Consequences," North American Review, CLXXV (July, 1902), 543, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South."

the South had lost political prestige in national affairs because it no longer considered questions on merit but judged them by their relation to the Negro problem.⁶

Poe firmly believed that a restricted suffrage was in the best interests of North Carolina and the South. He felt that only the South understood the political problems created by the Negro, and that "northern" or federal intervention would complicate and retard voting procedures in the South by allowing all Negroes to vote:

The South has evolved a new method of dealing with the White Man's Burden -- a method that in spite of appearance of injustice, promises better government, fairer elections, greater political freedom and more generous treatment of the negro than would be possible were the National Government to compel a return to the policy of so-called unrestricted suffrage. And its interference would add only another blunder to the long list of those already made in a spirit of misguided, long-range philanthropy.⁷

This farm spokesman felt that the South was capable of "cleaning its own house" and finding a solution to the problems of voting rights for the Negro. He actively supported laws which he felt were safeguards in preventing illiterate Negroes and also illiterate whites from obtaining the right

⁶Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South," 536.

⁷Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South," 543; see also The Progressive Farmer, February 13, 1908.

to vote. He never, however, advocated exclusive white suffrage and he felt that to deny all Negroes their political rights was wrong and would lead to mob violence: "the idea of a subject cast perpetually denied the franchise is in direct opposition to the principle upon which our Government is supposed to be based."⁸

While Poe favored restricted suffrage, he also condemned "grandfather clauses" which allowed illiterate whites to vote. "For our part we hoped to be saved from it, for it opens up many opportunities for fraud...."⁹ In addition to condemning grandfather clauses, Poe backed an amendment that would become effective in North Carolina in 1908 that required all males to be able to read and write before they could register and vote. He felt that this amendment was fair and just and would serve as an incentive to illiterate Negroes and whites to attend school.¹⁰ Poe's belief that this amendment would result in a more concerted action by Negroes to obtain an education was genuine. Yet the incentive value of this amendment was questionable. Even if a Negro could read and write the chances of his being allowed to vote were minimal. Voter irregularities took place in

⁸The Progressive Farmer, August 31, 1912.

⁹The Progressive Farmer, August 5, 1902.

¹⁰Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South," 541; see also The Progressive Farmer, August 31, 1912.

North Carolina and throughout the South. Fear of physical harm prevented Negroes from attempting to register. Poe did not overlook this: "I would not extenuate the evils of election frauds; there is probably nothing in our political life more debasing, nothing that strikes more directly at the corner-stone of our liberties."¹¹

Poe condemned attempts to prohibit by violence or voter irregularities those who were qualified. "Give run to mob violence at a time when you think such action justifiable, and you will find your reward in a popular contempt for the restraints of law, a permanent injury to public morals."¹² He repeatedly stated that such a breakdown in law and order associated with these procedures would lead to graver consequences. He actively resisted men of such caliber as Governor James Vardaman of Mississippi, who preached race prejudice:

he would have done better had he never conducted a political campaign in which violent abuse of the negro was his stock in trade. We earnestly hope that Mississippians are not ready to choose this long-haired demagogue instead of J. S. Williams as successor to Senator H. Money.¹³

¹¹Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South," 536; see also The Progressive Farmer, December 2, 1902.

¹²Poe, "Suffrage Restriction in the South," 536; see also The Progressive Farmer, 1900-1902.

¹³The Progressive Farmer, January 3, 1907.

Yet, there were progressive thinking men in the South who actively fought voter restriction laws -- Poe did not. There were also some who actively supported the federal government in its attempts to eliminate voter registration laws -- Poe did not. His views on restricted suffrage and voter regulation laws represented a provincial attitude. Many southern offices were filled by men who supported these procedures and ran on the white supremacy issue. Poe's protests against such men and such procedures were rarely heard.

The editor's emphasis upon law and order in voting procedures closely paralleled his stand against lynchings in the South. He frequently mentioned lynchings in The Progressive Farmer and he wrote an article on the subject for the Atlantic Monthly.¹⁴ Of the many reasons he used against lynchings, Poe emphasized the point of law and order. He felt that all suffered when a person, black or white, was denied his legal right to a trial: "lynchings destroy that reverence of law without which neither government nor civilization can endure."¹⁵ The causes for these lynchings, Poe felt, involved the delays in initiating court trials and he maintained "few of our Governors or other high officials have the courage

¹⁴Clarence Poe "Lynching: A Southern View," Atlantic Monthly, XCIV (July, 1904), 155-165.

¹⁵The Progressive Farmer, July 30, 1901.

to attack it [lynching]."¹⁶ He cited Governor Aycock of North Carolina as an exception to this rule and numerous letters were exchanged between them concerning this question. Aycock reported, however, that eight lynchings had taken place during the first part of his administration.¹⁷

Poe's observations on the twentieth century South encompassed the role that Booker T. Washington played in helping Negroes gain legal, social, and economic acceptance. Poe wrote often of Washington and with rare exception spoke highly of him and his work. Washington's advocacy of better educational and technical training received Poe's enthusiastic support.¹⁸ He remarked:

In him as the spokesman of industrial education for the negro we are considerably interested. We believe that Booker Washington has done more than any other negro has ever done and more than any other living negro could do, to make the black man of real service to the South. We ought to co-operate with him instead of trying to destroy his influence as the leader of his race.¹⁹

Although Poe supported Washington's ideas concerning education and training for the Negro, he felt that as a Negro Washington had a "place" in society that he should not overstep. The famous "dinner" incident between Washington and President

¹⁶The Progressive Farmer, May 21, July 30, 1901.

¹⁷The Progressive Farmer, June 24, 1902, and Charles B. Aycock to Clarence Poe, October 5, 1903, Poe Papers.

¹⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 3, 1903.

¹⁹The Progressive Farmer, September 3, 1903.

Roosevelt in the White House brought a bitter comment from Poe. He also blamed Roosevelt for this incident:

we are reminded that he [Washington] ate dinner with President Roosevelt. He did and we think less of him for it. He ought to have known better. But we regard it as a blunder, not as a crime, the President deserves nearly all of the blame.²⁰

In a similar "eating" incident in North Carolina when Washington was seated in a white dining area, Poe also felt he had overstepped his position. The Progressive Farmer duly noted: "we do not find very much in the incident to excite our wrath against the negro principal of Tuskegee. He simply took the place assigned him by the white people."²¹

Poe's support of Booker Washington paralleled in some aspects his "qualified" support of improved Negro educational facilities in the South. The editor believed that farming represented the economic future of the South and concluded that better trained Negro farmers would result in a more prosperous South.²² He envisaged Negro farmers who could "read intelligently about the principles of fertilization, crop rotation, plant breeding, seed selection, soil management,

²⁰The Progressive Farmer, September 8, 1903, December 10, 1901, November 22, 1904.

²¹The Progressive Farmer, September 8, 1903.

²²The Progressive Farmer, December 22, 1903.

and a thousand other things."²³ Poe's support of better educational facilities for the Negro, however, ran counter to movements in some southern states to segregate tax money for white and Negro schools. This would have been disastrous for Negro communities which in most cases could not begin to match the economic power of their white neighbors. Poe was convinced that the Negro had to receive a qualified education -- within his own school systems. As early as 1902 he announced after careful study that separate tax support for schools would present very serious disadvantages and positive dangers.²⁴ He agreed with Governor Aycock and ex-Governor Thomas J. Jarvis of North Carolina that if this policy were adopted it would lead to more problems between the two races:

Positively inevitable is the conclusion that the adoption of the proposed policy would mean the breaking up of the foundation of our educational system.

The negro would suffer because of his inability to choose wise leaders; the white man would suffer because of the improper training of this people whose destiny is to be somehow interwoven with that of the South, whether or not we shut our eyes to this fact.²⁵

²³Clarence Poe, "The Message of the White South to the Negro Race." Commencement address delivered at North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College, Greensboro, North Carolina, May 26, 1910, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "The Message of the White South to the Negro Race."

²⁴The Progressive Farmer, July 29, 1902.

²⁵The Progressive Farmer, September 2, 1902.

As a reform editor Poe believed that segregated tax support would conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution as well as with existing state laws. Economically, he felt such proposed laws would hinder the development of the Negro. In an article written for The Outlook, Poe explained his stand for white support of Negro schools: "When we allow one race to say to the other, build your own schools, pay your own teachers, educate your own children, we uproot the foundation of our public school system and pave the way for anarchy in educational matters."²⁶ He believed abandonment of Negro education would "widen the breach between the two races...."²⁷

The editorial support of tax money for Negro schools was both progressive and forward looking. At this time James K. Vardaman, Governor of Mississippi, advocated separate tax support for schools. Poe attacked Vardaman's position and expressed opposition to those North Carolinians who favored the Mississippi plan:

We hope that the thoughtful, conservative manhood of North Carolina will never permit it [separate tax support] to succeed. It is not a question of whether the negro

²⁶Clarence Poe, "Should Southern Whites Aid Negro Schools?" The Outlook, LXXI (August, 1902), 1011, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Should Southern Whites Aid Negro Schools?"

²⁷Poe, "Should Southern Whites Aid Negro Schools?" 1012.

shall be educated. No class of people in the United States can remain without an education. It is whether or not the Southern people shall abandon their control over negro education....²⁸

Poe's advocacy of tax support of Negro schools was based on the belief that in this way the white community could forever control the Negro community. Poe speculated, falsely, that the withdrawal of white support could turn Negro schools into centers of discontent. "For the negro schools would not be closed if the Southern white should refuse aid, they would be maintained by offended blacks. Negro schools, supported by such elements would become instruments of strife and disorder through the South."²⁹ Poe's logic broke down on the question of white control of Negro schools. He expected that the Negro community would be content with educational facilities. He did not understand that Negro participation in educational activities would lead to demands for teaching and administrative positions. He strongly opposed this, fearful that white control over the Negro would be eliminated. Yet, his advocacy of better educational facilities was inconsistent with his policy of absolute white control.

There were other flaws in Poe's views about Negro

²⁸The Progressive Farmer, September 8, 1903.

²⁹The Progressive Farmer, September 2, 1902, March 10, 1903.

education. He wanted the Negro in the South to be educated and trained, but only in industrial and agricultural occupations to support the white economy. "We must give an industrial caste to the entire system of negro education. The South needs the black man, and if he will only fit himself for the common duties, he may become an element of wealth and prosperity."³⁰ Poe supported the idea of an industrial caste system and "common duties" for the Negro through articles in The Progressive Farmer and in speeches he delivered throughout the South.³¹ However, he did not want the Negro to be given a "smattering of impossible culchah."³² Commenting upon an article by John Spencer Bassett, "Stirring Up the Fires of Racial Antipathy," that appeared in the South Atlantic Quarterly, Poe wrote:

We do not believe that the negro will ever equal the white man in intellect or ability. But even if the negro were at some time inconceivably distant to become the white man's intellectual equal, we believe that the natural God given racial antipathy would keep the races separated. In its deeper meaning there will be 'no equality.' We are

³⁰The Progressive Farmer, December 22, 1903.

³¹The Progressive Farmer, June 28, 1904, June 11, 1906; see also Clarence Poe "Is Negro Education Dangerous? A Reply to Governor Vardaman," n.p. [ca. 1906], Poe Papers, herein-after cited as Poe, "Is Negro Education Dangerous?"

³²The Progressive Farmer, January 11, 1906.

in no danger from that.³³

Poe cited California and the question of Asian immigrants to highlight his "overall study" of the South and Negro education. The unrest caused by Asian immigrants -- the Japanese in particular -- Poe felt served as a prelude to trouble that the South could have with the Negro.³⁴ His singling out of the Japanese is bewildering because it was this very nationality that he cited as the most progressive when he toured Asia. Poe cited the segregated school systems in California and possible federal intervention as an augury of what could follow in the South:

if Congress should rebuke California for providing separate schools it might open the way for rabid meddlers of the North to make trouble because of the South's refusal to admit negroes. We believe in the right of each State to give these [school] advantages in its own way, and we hope Congress will refuse to make any effort toward disciplining California for its action.³⁵

The outspoken journalist opposed any attempt by the federal government to intervene in the segregated school systems of the South and he felt that the South would solve this problem.³⁶

³³The Progressive Farmer, November 10, 1903.

³⁴The Progressive Farmer, July 11, 1905.

³⁵The Progressive Farmer, December 13, 1906.

³⁶The Progressive Farmer, May 4, 1912; see also The Progressive Farmer, May 17, June 7, 1913, October 31, 1914.

Thus Poe "supported" Negro education. Critically examined, Poe's stand was somewhat more progressive than that of the reactionaries, Vardaman of Mississippi, for example. Yet his beliefs were far short of progressive and were too inconsistent to warrant praise by other enlightened leaders. But if Poe's stand on the subject of Negro education were questionable his ideas on other racial matters were more biased.

As an advocate of reform Poe threatened to destroy all of his influence as a progressive leader by his totally illogical and fantastically confused ideas concerning Negro ownership of land. One of the basic tenets of Poe's plan to improve southern farming was to make it possible, through rural credit organizations, for farmers to buy land. Tenant farming had to be eliminated in the South in order for the agricultural revolution Poe envisaged to take place. In 1911 he suggested; "it is better for the farmer to own his own land than to work some other man's. There is nothing needed so much among our tenant classes just now as a realization of the dignity and independence that comes from the ownership of lands."³⁷ In advocating the ownership of land, however, Poe faced a problem -- what of the Negro tenant farmer? How could the South prosper unless the Negro farmer also benefitted from the economic progress that land ownership would bring? On the question of Negro land ownership and better farming

³⁷The Progressive Farmer, December 16, 1911.

techniques, Poe hesitated. He knew that the Negro, as a farmer, had to be better trained if the South were to move forward. But would this training force out the equally ill-trained white farmer? It was impossible for Poe to advocate advanced farming techniques and individual land ownership in the South for whites only.³⁸

→ Poe felt that he understood the South's agricultural economy, and that the Negro farmer would eventually drive out the white farmer. He tried to convince southern white farmers that unless they adopted a scientific approach to farm procedures they were doomed to failure in economic competition with the Negro. Was this because the Negro was a better farmer than Poe's white neighbors? The answer, Poe contended, was just the opposite. He felt that because the Negro lived in shabbier homes, existed on a cheaper food, and wore dirtier clothing than the white farmer that he possessed an unfair economic advantage and eventually would eliminate the white farmer altogether.³⁹ He also contended that the Negro by his lower living standards had contributed to the

³⁸ Clarence Poe, "The Agricultural Revolution -- What It Means and How It Is to Be Brought About." Address delivered at The University of Virginia, July 15, 1909, Poe Papers.

³⁹ Clarence Poe, "The Greater North Carolina -- How May It Be Developed." Address delivered at the Sand Hills Board of Trade, Southern Pines, North Carolina, December 18, 1914, Poe Papers; see also The Progressive Farmer, November 18, 1902, and "The Importance of Agriculture," a speech delivered at Clinton, North Carolina, July 4, 1906, Poe Papers.

development of the "poor white trash" class in the South. He concluded after traveling through Europe and seeing almost no "poor white trash," that this impoverished group could trace part of its evolution to the Negro:

I have no ill will toward our negroes, but it is impossible to escape the conclusion that their ignorance and shiftlessness have not only held back the South in a thousand ways, but their carelessness has provided a lower level for indifferent white people to fall to. No where else do you find white people content to live in such ugly homes and with such unpromising farms as often meets our vision in the South. I think it partially explained by the fact that the negro, taken fresh from Africa, has lowered our ideals and standards of living in a certain insidious fashion from which these European countries have fortunately been exempt.⁴⁰

Such statements as these were questionable and outside the realm of thought for a progressive spokesman of the South. Poe failed to understand and ignored the fact that the "poor white trash" element was numerous in areas where few Negroes lived. His statements that Negroes were content to wear dirtier clothing and live in shabbier houses were preposterous. His travels in Europe were somewhat limited and thus he did not come into contact with the masses of poor whose condition was comparable with the "poor white trash."

Not only did poorer living conditions of Negro farmers

⁴⁰Poe, A Southerner in Europe, 56.

alarm Poe, but he also feared that the social unrest of the Negro farmer would disrupt white farm life. "The negro farmers are not only subjecting the white farmer to disastrous economic competition by their lower standards of living, but in many sections the growing number of Negroes is driving the white man to the towns for social reasons."⁴¹ Again Poe ignored the fact that cities were places of social and economic opportunity and whites were voluntarily leaving isolated farm life for these greater advantages. Poe tried to "prove" to his readers that the Negro had already begun to force the white farmer from rural areas. Citing statistics for a single decade in North and South Carolina, he showed that the white farm acreage had decreased by one million acres.⁴² However, this did not prove that Negroes drove whites from the lands. Rather, it indicated that whites had more economic mobility to move to cities where jobs could be found.

The editor suggested to his readers numerous tactics to impede the increase in Negro owners in the South. He advocated that northern and western farmers emigrate to the South. "We need more white farmers in the South...men from the North and West who have been heretofore going to Canada

⁴¹Clarence Poe, "What We Must Do to Develop A Great Rural Civilization in the Carolinas?" Address delivered at Columbia, South Carolina, August 6, 1913, Poe Papers, hereinafter cited as Poe, "A Great Rural Civilization in the Carolinas."

⁴²Poe, "A Great Rural Civilization in the Carolinas."

or to the arid sections of the United States."⁴³ In a 1911 article in The World's Work Poe reported how farmers from other sections of the United States had prospered in the South. He also emphasized that these farmers had been cordially accepted by the southern people. Poe reported one farmer to have said "as for the talk that Southern people do not give a hearty welcome to Northerners or Westerners, I have found nothing of it, nor has my wife."⁴⁴ Immigrants reported to Poe that, although the soil of the South was not as rich as the areas they came from, it could be built up much faster than depleted lands in their own areas.⁴⁵ Poe overlooked the unsuccessful immigrants to the South and gave no reports of their experiences in the area.

Poe contended that a more immediate "solution" to Negro land ownership would be an increase in the number of white farm owners. If white farm owners were willing to use progressive farming techniques, then the South would be "saved."

⁴³Clarence Poe, "Business Co-Operation -- What Can We Do About It?" Address delivered at the North Carolina State Farmers' Union, Raleigh, North Carolina, December 11, 1912, Poe Papers; see also The Progressive Farmer, June 18, 1910.

⁴⁴Clarence Poe, "Little Stories of Big Successes," The World's Work, XXIII (November, 1911), 57, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Little Stories of Big Successes."

⁴⁵Poe, "Little Stories of Big Successes," 57.

The "hope of the South is in a great body of small white landholders cultivating their own farms. The interest of all classes of our people demand that general encouragement to be given the small white farmer in the purchase of land, and in fitting himself to become a prosperous and independent homeowner."⁴⁶ Poe's advocacy of restricted land ownership by Negroes was the biggest drawback to his record as a progressive and as a forward-looking southerner.

In a speech delivered at Mooresville, North Carolina in 1913 Poe outlined his plans for segregated neighborhoods for the South. "I plead for the development of a public sentiment which will require the negroes to buy land and group themselves in communities to themselves instead of breaking up white communities by the present policy of indiscriminately sandwiching white and negro farms together."⁴⁷ His idea of a South made up of separate black and white communities evolved throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. But there was no basic cause that led Poe to conceive this idea. His plan of segregated neighborhoods represented a provincial outlook and did not reflect the travels of a man who had seen much more of the world than his contemporaries.

⁴⁶The Progressive Farmer, December 19, 1911, January 13, 1912.

⁴⁷Poe, "A Great Rural Civilization in North Carolina."

Segregated neighborhoods represented a step backward, not forward, in his thinking. The idea was wrong -- legally and morally -- and was rejected by the North Carolina legislature and by the progressive leaders of the New South. On this question Poe revealed himself as a shallow thinker, out of touch with the reality of his times, and burdened by class hatred.

Passing comment was made by Poe in The Progressive Farmer concerning segregated neighborhoods prior to 1911. In 1906 Poe wrote that the "deportation theory" would remove the Negro from the South. This, however, would require federal intervention and therefore would not be supported in the North.⁴⁸ An alternative had to be found. In 1909 statements appeared in The Progressive Farmer proposing that the white race needed "saving" from the Negro in the South.⁴⁹ One of the strongest statements Poe made concerning the Negro in the South was delivered in a commencement address at North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College in Greensboro. He remarked "and if I thought your race could never advance to industrial efficiency I would start an effort tomorrow -- chimerical as the plan might seem -- for

⁴⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 22, 1906.

⁴⁹The Progressive Farmer, September 16, 1911.

the colonization of our entire negro population."⁵⁰ This plan was beyond realization; segregated neighborhoods Poe believed was not.

In 1911 Poe consolidated his views on segregated neighborhoods. He reversed an early attempt to "prove" that Negroes were forcing out white farmers by citing statistics to show that white population of the South increased almost twice as fast as Negro population: "And we are frank to say that we heartily rejoice that this is true. Prosperous small white farmers, owning their own homes will develop in the South the most splendid type of modern rural civilization. The question of 'Saving the Rural South to the White Race' seems to be solving itself."⁵¹ Not to be overlooked in 1911 were Poe's statements regarding Negro property rights. He condemned attempts to deny the Negro these rights, but contradicted himself by stating that "this does not mean that a community which needs more whites hasn't every right to use legitimate means to encourage white settlers and discourage the coming of more negroes."⁵² Poe's "legitimate means" would be the establishment of segregated neighborhoods or restricted land covenants, both of dubious legality.

⁵⁰Poe, "The Message of the White South to the Negro Race."

⁵¹The Progressive Farmer, July 15, 1911.

⁵²The Progressive Farmer, September 16, 1911.

Poe's references to the establishment of segregated neighborhoods in North Carolina and the South became more numerous. One issue of The Progressive Farmer contained a discussion between Poe and the Honorable Maurice S. Evans, a member of the Parliament of Natal, South Africa while on board ship bound for Europe. From this discussion Poe felt that the Negroes' lot in America was much better than in South Africa, or any other place in the world "whereas the negro in the South -- without a history, a literature, a civilization of his own, or an distinctive contribution to the white man's civilization, gets five to twenty times as much chance as the Chinaman has for an education and for the advantages of modern civilization."⁵³ Poe related that Evans found a parallel between South Africa and the South in that "only the separation of the whites and blacks can save us from infinite trouble." Poe concluded his article in The Progressive Farmer by suggesting how segregated neighborhoods could be established in the South.

if the people of both races once realize and consciously accept the doctrine as wise and imperatively necessary to peace and safety, it can be worked out silently, gradually and steadily, the black sections becoming blacker and the white sections whiter through the voluntary migration and

⁵³The Progressive Farmer, July 6, 1912.

segregation of each race. It is largely because the menacing specter of amalgamation haunts the white man in the South that a gradual voluntary separation of the races /is necessary/.⁵⁴

Poe's idea, however, was received with great amazement by the leaders of both parties in the state. Few committed themselves to the support of a program such as this.

Poe's greatest effort to achieve the establishment of segregated neighborhoods in North Carolina came during the years 1913 to 1915. He felt that there was sufficient support within the state at this time to achieve the proposal of a constitutional amendment by the North Carolina legislature which would allow the establishment of segregated communities. The climax of this maneuver came in 1915 when the legislature defeated by two votes the plan to allow segregated neighborhoods. The closeness of the vote revealed that Poe, mainly through the editorials he wrote in The Progressive Farmer, wielded a powerful influence.

Through articles in his newspaper Poe appealed to his readers to send him their opinions about segregated neighborhoods. He reported that "from all parts of the South, and even North and West letters piled in on us by way of endorsement for land segregation."⁵⁵

⁵⁴The Progressive Farmer, July 6, 1912.

⁵⁵The Progressive Farmer, July 5, 1913.

Poe expounded upon his plan for segregated neighborhoods.

wherever the great part of the land acreage in a given district is owned by one race, the majority of voters may say that in the future no land shall be sold to a person of a different race. Provided such action is approved by a reviewing judge or board of county commissioners.

It may be argued that such a law is unjust because it could be utilized by white people to keep their communities white, but negroes would rarely be able to use it to make a community wholly negro. All of which I admit, and yet I believe it is just.

It is not a radical measure. It would not be forced on any community which does not want it.⁵⁶

One month after this view was expressed The Progressive Farmer established "A South-Wide Campaign For Race Segregation." Poe remarked to his increasing number of supporters and critics on the establishment of this campaign "I know in my heart that I want to be just to the Negro, and I believe the average Southern white man has the same feeling."⁵⁷ He affirmed that his plan could be used by Negroes as well as whites to prohibit one race from moving in large numbers into a certain area. Poe also listed at this time the support of Julian S. Carr, a prominent industrialist in North Carolina, who was

⁵⁶See, "A Great Rural Civilization in North Carolina." This circular was sent to North Carolina newspaper editors, September 12, 1913, Poe Papers.

⁵⁷The Progressive Farmer, August 2, 1913.

said to favor this plan.⁵⁸

In an address in Columbia, South Carolina in 1913 Poe cited statistics which dealt with the rapid rise of Negro farmers in both Carolinas -- again a reversal from a previous statement in which he claimed the white race was gaining over the Negro in ownership of land. He used these figures to indicate that something should be done to help the white farmer -- segregated communities.⁵⁹ In the August 23, 1913, issue of The Progressive Farmer, Poe cited the following newspapers that favored his plan: Kinston Free Press, Charity and Children, Lenoir Topic, Oxford Orphan's Friend, Southern Pines Tourist, and the Charlotte Observer.⁶⁰ A closer examination, however, revealed that the Charlotte Observer did not endorse this plan, nor did the state's leading paper, the News and Observer. One does not find that Poe mentioned newspapers that were critical of his position.

➤ Poe invoked the emotionalism of religion to support his proposal. Using the Bible as his reference he commented "/The/ Lord hath determined the bounds of their /Negro/ habitation. Did we not cross these divine bounds when we brought these black people away from their bounds? The

⁵⁸The Progressive Farmer, August 2, 1913.

⁵⁹See, "A Great Rural Civilization in North Carolina!"

⁶⁰The Progressive Farmer, August 23, 1913.

policy of segregation would seem to be in accord with the Almighty's plan."⁶¹ The use of the Bible to support his plan marked a desperate appeal to emotionalism rather than to logic.

A circular dated September 12, 1913 was sent by Poe to many leading newspaper editors and political leaders of North Carolina, including J. Bryan Grimes, William A. Devin, and Henry Groves Connor.⁶² This circular dealt with the various reasons why Poe felt segregated communities would be beneficial to the South. He specifically cited the supposed unfair economic advantage the Negro farmer had over the white farmer, having a lower standard of living, as a prime reason why segregated communities should be established. This circular in part read: "If we are to save the rural South to the white race, something must be done. After long study and correspondence with hundreds of people in the South, I have decided that a safe and constitutional way out is the one I am proposing -- I ask for your opinion." Poe also mentioned in this circular that he had received hundreds of "earnest messages" from farmer's

⁶¹The Progressive Farmer, August 30, 1913.

⁶²A similar circular was found in the personal papers of all these men. The circular sent to Devin was located in the Augustus Washington Graham Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Graham Papers.

wives and daughters that "have opened my eyes" to the danger of the Negro. This appeal to fear had always found some support in the South.

Henry G. Connor's reply to this circular raised questions about the feasibility of forced segregation:

Of course I cordially concur with your general view -- that is, that the best interests of both races would be promoted by segregation, and that it is of especial importance that the homes of our friends in the country shall not be rendered undesirable by having Negro neighbors. In this section, land has become so valuable and the prices so high /however/ that I do not think it probable or possible that negroes buy it.

The white man will become absolutely dominant, not only politically and socially, but industrially. Certain kinds of labor have, by long usage, become associated in our minds with the negro and it will require generations to change it. I have one thought in regard to the discussion of this subject -- I fear it will irritate and discourage the Negro. While I look forward to his ultimate elimination, I also recognize the necessity of avoiding all irritating subjects with him.⁶³

Connor's statement, "I fear it will irritate and discourage the Negro," raised a poignant question. How could Poe's segregated neighborhoods improve relations between the two races when black and white would be divided by a physical barrier?

⁶³Henry Groves Connor to Clarence Poe, September 12, 1913, Henry Groves Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as H. G. Connor Papers.

The North Carolina Commission on Rural Race Problems, established in 1913, elected Poe as its president. This organization supported Poe's views on the segregated neighborhood question. Its function was to petition the North Carolina legislature to create a commission to investigate the idea of segregated neighborhoods.⁶⁴ As far as is known this legislative commission was never created. However, editorials on segregated communities were still published in The Progressive Farmer. A contest was also started with a \$25 prize offered for the best essay on segregated communities "using facts."⁶⁵ Since Poe controlled The Progressive Farmer the published articles in this contest generally were favorable to his position. Rarely did he include dissenting opinions. In November, 1913 The Progressive Farmer published an article from the Journal and Guide of Norfolk, Virginia, a Negro controlled newspaper. This article matched Poe's emotionalism with a brand of its own. "If editor Poe doesn't mind, when he gets his racial segregation law through, some of his white constituents who are too lazy to do their own work, will starve to death."⁶⁶

⁶⁴The Progressive Farmer, October 11, 1913.

⁶⁵The Progressive Farmer, November 15, 1913.

⁶⁶The Progressive Farmer, November 8, 1913.

See

The campaign for segregated neighborhoods was based upon fear, and Poe played upon this point to the fullest. He violently denounced the increase of the number of mulattoes in the South. Using the statistics of the United States Census Bureau he showed that there had been a 251 per cent increase from 1870 to 1910 in the number of mulattoes in the South, while there had been an accompanying 81 per cent increase in the total number of full blooded Negroes.⁶⁷ Poe contended from these statistics that the United States would "soon be in the predicament which Virginia now has -- a decreasing Negro population and a rapidly increasing mulatto population."⁶⁸ He also stated that he knew two mulatto girls in his neighborhood who had married white men.⁶⁹ The use of the fear of miscegenation to gain support for his campaign was inconsistent with his role as a progressive reformer and must be considered an appeal to racial bigotry.⁷⁰

Poe's plan for segregated neighborhoods received the support of the North Carolina State Farmers' Union in 1915.⁷¹ Although he had always been an active member of

⁶⁷The Progressive Farmer, February 14, 1914.

⁶⁸The Progressive Farmer, February 21, 1914.

⁶⁹The Progressive Farmer, February 21, 1914.

⁷⁰The Progressive Farmer, February 21, 1914.

⁷¹The Progressive Farmer, March 7, 1914.

the Farmers' Union, and The Progressive Farmer was its official paper, the Union's action occasioned some surprise. There is some reason to believe that the Union was fearful of losing Poe's support, hence they followed along with his plan. In 1914 plans were drafted to hold a mass meeting of progressive Democrats where certain reforms were to be discussed. Edwin Yates Webb, who attempted to get William J. Bryan to attend this meeting, wrote to Poe "I am in sympathy with practically all the proposals you set out as subjects for consideration, and I assure you of my cooperation in enacting these principles into law."⁷² This support included Poe's plan for segregated communities. But Webb remarked that he doubted that Bryan would attend the meeting "I expect he will shy at the proposal for segregating lands between the races."⁷³ Bryan, complaining of a "cold," did not attend the mass meeting.

Poe's notion of a segregated communities law prompted a written exchange with Gilbert T. Stephenson, a young North Carolina lawyer. Stephenson attacked Poe's stand on the proposed constitutional amendment as both legally and morally wrong, and explained why he felt that rural segregation would

⁷²Edwin Yates Webb to Clarence Poe, March 26, 1914, Webb Papers.

⁷³Edwin Yates Webb to Clarence Poe, March 26, 1914, Webb Papers.

have a negative effect upon the South.⁷⁴ Stephenson queried: if the Negro were forced into segregated neighborhoods, would there not then be a weakening of the moral character of the white race which would accompany the shirking of this moral task? Stephenson also contended that Negro tenants who remained in segregated neighborhoods would become less trustworthy because they would realize that they were a discredited element in the community, and, therefore, would have no inducement to raise themselves in their station in life.⁷⁵ Legally, Stephenson pointed out that there had been no previous examples of rural segregated communities to act as a guideline for the proposed constitutional amendment and that there were court cases that restricted land covenants. "What guidelines would the South follow in initiating rural segregated Stephenson asked of Poe."⁷⁶ If segregated communities were established, however, Stephenson questioned how cooperative enterprises such as rural credit unions would function. Stephenson also

⁷⁴Gilbert T. Stephenson, "The Segregation of White and Negro Races in Rural Communities," South Atlantic Quarterly, XIII (April, 1914), 109, hereinafter cited as Stephenson, "The Segregation of White and Negro Races." A letter from this writer to Stephenson concerning this exchange brought the comment that he had "only a vague recollection of his [Poe] and my having written such an article," but referred me to his book, Race Distinctions in American Law, "in which I expressed the same views about race segregation as I must have in 1914." Gilbert T. Stephenson to Joseph A. Cote, March 20, 1968.

⁷⁵Stephenson, "The Segregation of White and Negro Races," 113.

⁷⁶Stephenson, "The Segregation of White and Negro Races," 110.

felt that if the Negro were eliminated from the South that new immigrants would not be readily accepted. "The immigrants coming are more illiterate and in many cases as superstitious as the negroes themselves."⁷⁷ Stephenson concluded his argument with an appeal to the "noblesse oblige" of the South to prevent the establishment of segregated communities. If not he felt that only future generations could answer this question "if rural segregation did come would not race feeling become more bitter?"⁷⁸

Although Poe's reply in the South Atlantic Quarterly showed no outward signs of antagonism, he no doubt considered Stephenson's article a personal challenge. Poe attempted to defend his stand on rural segregated neighborhoods on economic and social grounds, but ended his rejoinder with an emotional appeal.⁷⁹ What Poe wanted in essence was the establishment of all white neighborhoods in which young persons would be willing to work as farmers. "Because ambitious young white men will then be willing to go into the all-white communities as tenants, work and save, and

⁷⁷Stephenson, "The Segregation of White and Negro Races," 111.

⁷⁸Stephenson, "The Segregation of White and Negro Races," 114.

⁷⁹Clarence Poe, "Rural Land Segregation Between Whites and Negroes: A Reply to Mr. Stephenson," South Atlantic Quarterly, XIII (July, 1914), 208, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Rural Segregation Between Whites and Negroes."

become good farmers and good citizens, whereas they are unwilling to go into mixed communities and compete with negro tenants."⁸⁰ Poe explained that in advocating segregated communities he was not being anti-Negro but rather pro-white. He contended that his main point in advocating rural segregated communities was to develop a constructive policy for the white farmer and not a destructive policy for the Negro.⁸¹ For members of his race who wished to take advantage of the Negro, Poe expressed contempt. "For the Shylocks and vultures of our race I have nothing but the utmost contempt and loathing. I believe in helping the negro and in being just to him."⁸² Poe considered himself an expert on southern agricultural problems and a spokesman for the farmer. Yet "ambitious young white men" were moving to towns and cities, away from the farm. At no time did Poe understand that the future of the South lay not in farming but in industry and other economic pursuits. This basic misinterpretation of the economic future of the South thoroughly confused and warped Poe's thinking on the land ownership question.

The perplexed editor felt the whole question of rural segregation was not understood by the majority of people who

⁸⁰Poe, "Rural Segregation Between Whites and Negroes," 208.

⁸¹Poe, "Rural Segregation Between Whites and Negroes," 209.

⁸²Poe, "Rural Segregation Between Whites and Negroes," 209.

opposed it. To Poe the rural Negro was a definite economic challenge; a direct competitor with the white farmer. If only the city and town dwellers realized this, Poe felt, they would agree with his idea. "The great trouble is that our leaders of thought, our intellectually and politically dominant white classes, themselves set at perfect ease in segregated portions of our towns and cities, and never have occasion to think of the negro other than as a servant -- never as a competitor."⁸³ Poe's ability as a writer allowed him to smooth over the weak points and illogical thinking in his plan. While Stephenson's article was legally and economically oriented, Poe responded with emotionalism, fear, and hatred.

As a form of protest against the Negro, Poe rejected his reelection as a member of the Executive Committee of the Southern Sociological Congress in 1914 unless, he said, there was a change in its policy toward the Negro. "I realize that my reasons may be misunderstood -- or denounced as prejudiced. We set [sic] still while white sentimentalists and Negroes themselves insidiously spread the sentiment that there is no logical or Christian basis for race discrimination...."⁸⁴

⁸³Poe, "Rural Segregation Between Whites and Negroes," 209.

⁸⁴The Progressive Farmer, May 30, 1914.

Poe's remarks dealt with the seating of Negro men and women with white men and women in the general meeting held by the conference in Memphis, Tennessee. Poe felt that the time had come for each race to form its own sociological organization "and if you cannot do this, then please accept my resignation." Poe also expressed alarm "over the doctrine that Negroes must break down every barrier in the way of inter-marriage" that he reported was uttered in Avery Chapel, Memphis by the Negro educator W. E. B. Du Bois, "himself two-thirds white."⁸⁵

The crucial period for Poe in his attempt to gather support for his segregated communities plan was prior to the 1915 North Carolina session of the legislature. In December, 1914 Poe published in The Progressive Farmer a series of letters received from readers all over the state concerning segregated communities, most of which were favorable toward his plan.⁸⁶ These letters reached a peak of intensity in the first months of 1915 just prior to a vote in the North Carolina legislature on the proposal for an amendment to allow segregated communities. Poe began the crucial year with this statement in The Progressive Farmer: "There's another thing that is coming men and that no power on earth can stop,

⁸⁵The Progressive Farmer, May 30, 1914.

⁸⁶The Progressive Farmer, December 5, 1914.

and that is Land Segregation Between The Races."⁸⁷ He also criticized the creation of the Commission on the Southern Land Race Question, a liberal organization headed by Dr. Charles H. Brough of the University of Arkansas, which opposed land segregation policies. Poe attacked this committee as one "made up of college professors," and organized by a gentleman employed by northern money to work for pushing Negroes forward in the South.⁸⁸ Poe also urged his readers not to support the repeal of crop-lein laws because this would check the Negro's supposedly unfair economic advantage "it would also give white farmers a fairer chance to get labor."⁸⁹ Poe's progressivism was being submerged beneath the forces of racial bigotry.

As the North Carolina legislature commenced its session in January, 1915 Poe continued his appeals in The Progressive Farmer for support of his plan and denounced those who opposed it. He condemned W. E. B. Du Bois' support of the Commission on the Southern Race Question, and also levelled written blasts against the New York Evening Post for its statement "the alarming development in the race problem in the South," and the Negro Journal and Guide which urged whites and ^{nor} northern philanthropists to support the Commission on the

⁸⁷The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1915.

⁸⁸The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1915.

⁸⁹The Progressive Farmer, January 16, January 23, 1915.

Southern Race Question. Poe also noted Booker T. Washington's remark, "Negroes have too much good sense to force themselves where they are not wanted," and used it in trying to gain support for his plan for segregated communities.⁹⁰

In a February issue of The Progressive Farmer, a petition appeared that solicited support for the proposed segregated communities law. Poe urged that this petition be filled out by his readers and sent to their state representatives and senators. He stated in the petition that the proposed constitutional amendment faced opposition from men who "want to put negroes in white communities."⁹¹ The North Carolina State Farmers' Union also lent its support to Poe's plan by written statements in support of segregated communities.⁹² Poe brought his campaign for segregated communities to its peak in February, 1915. The Progressive Farmer had served as the podium from which he sought to gain support for his plan -- and the two year battle for the establishment of segregated communities would now be determined by the North Carolina legislature in 1915.

Poe's initial response to the 1915 North Carolina legislature was negative. He commented, ironically, that the "reactionary forces" were in the saddle and were having things

⁹⁰The Progressive Farmer, January 30, 1915.

⁹¹Circular sent by Clarence Poe to readers of The Progressive Farmer, February 16, 1915, Poe Papers.

⁹²The Progressive Farmer, February 23, 1915.

their own way.⁹³ Obviously, Poe felt that the proposed constitutional amendment for segregated neighborhoods was a progressive piece of legislation and he feared that "reactionary forces" would defeat it. The long awaited amendment was introduced by State Senator Mark Majette of Columbia on February 16, 1915. Majette was the floor leader for the proposal which was referred to the Committee on Constitutional Amendments. As finally worded the amendment read as follows: "The General Assembly regulating applicable to all races, may provide that by vote of the qualified voters of any prescribed district, the lands in such district may be segregated to the ownership, use or occupancy of a particular race."⁹⁴ Senator Frank Nash from Hillsboro led the opposition to the proposed amendment. Nash was a leading progressive and one of the most active state senators; he took the lead in helping to defeat the plan for segregated communities.

On February 22, 1915, one week after the amendment was introduced, Senator H. W. Stubbs moved to have three hundred copies printed for distribution. From its initial introduction in the Senate until the vote was taken on March 5,

⁹³ Steelman, "The Progressive Era in North Carolina," 395.

⁹⁴ The Progressive Farmer, February 23, 1915; see also Journal of The Senate of The General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, Session 1915 (Raleigh, 1915), 275, hereinafter cited as Journal of The Senate of North Carolina, Session 1915.

Poe appealed for passage of the segregation scheme.⁹⁵ On February 27, 1915 the proposed amendment with an unfavorable report from the Committee on Constitutional Amendments was reported, and on March 5, 1915 voted upon and defeated by 17 to 15.⁹⁶ The defeat of the amendment indicated the East-West political cleavage which existed in North Carolina; only four of the seventeen opposition votes came from east of Greensboro.⁹⁷

Poe's proposed constitutional amendment had been defeated by a narrow margin and with it went any attempts to create legally segregated neighborhoods in North Carolina. Even in defeat, however, Poe felt that the supporters of the bill had only "to keep up the fight another two years in order to have the amendment...."⁹⁸ He condemned those senators who had opposed the bill: "Nash and his colleagues persist in their chivalrous attitude toward the Negro but let them also consider if their chivalrous spirit should not also go out to the white men and women, women of our race and blood, on all Southern farms."⁹⁹

⁹⁵See the February and March issues of The Progressive Farmer, 1915.

⁹⁶Journal of The Senate of North Carolina, Session 1915, 556, 682.

⁹⁷The Progressive Farmer, March 20, 1915.

⁹⁸The Progressive Farmer, March 20, 1915.

⁹⁹The Progressive Farmer, March 20, 1915.

Repercussions continued long after the defeat of the segregated neighborhood scheme. Some men felt the defeat of this bill indicated that North Carolina was a conservative rather than a progressive state. Poe contended, ironically, just the opposite "that North Carolina is not and never has been a reactionary or standpat state.... On the contrary, in all matters affecting human progress and popular rights her people have always been progressive."¹⁰⁰ Poe was convinced that the constitutional amendment represented a progressive measure even in defeat. In August, 1915 he commenced to realize that other attempts to secure passage of a land segregation bill would have little chance of success. This feeling was expressed in a letter to R. D. W. Connor in which Poe suggested that if compulsory land segregation could not be enacted, perhaps voluntary enforcement could be initiated. "I am not concerned as to the means but only as to the end to be attained -- the saving of the rural South to the white race.... If this could be effected without involving the law, I shall be very glad, but present tendencies do not give much reason for encouraging such hope."¹⁰¹

Poe continued to fight for passage of some law that would allow segregated communities. In October, 1915 he tried to solicit the prominent North Carolina lawyer, Josiah

¹⁰⁰The Progressive Farmer, April 3, 1915.

¹⁰¹Clarence Poe to R. D. W. Connor, August 2, 1915, R. D. W. Connor Papers.

W. Bailey, to support land segregation. Poe asked Bailey to address the North Carolina State Farmers' Union on the topic "Race Segregation in Land Ownership From A Lawyer's Standpoint." He wanted Bailey to deliver a "ringing presentation of the necessity for giving white communities the right of self protection."¹⁰² Bailey replied to Poe's request with the comment "I have not finally made up my mind about the segregation policy. I am certainly not prepared to come out for it in the absolute way that you would require...."¹⁰³ Bailey's comment that he was not ready to support Poe's plan "in the absolute way" he required indicated that Poe's position was becoming increasingly more rigid, and that only the most radical elements in the state could support his plan for land segregation. Indeed, during the previous campaign for passage of the constitutional amendment neither party in the state endorsed the plan nor did it appear in any of the campaign handbooks or literature published by these parties.

One last major attempt was made by Poe to secure passage of a bill to provide for segregated communities in North Carolina. Supported by the North Carolina State Farmers' Union and by editorials in The Progressive Farmer,

¹⁰² Clarence Poe to Josiah W. Bailey, October 7, 1915, Josiah W. Bailey Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Bailey Papers.

¹⁰³ Josiah W. Bailey to Clarence Poe, October 14, 1915, Bailey Papers.

Poe urged that the 1917 legislature pass an amendment to provide for the establishment of these communities. This attempt, however, failed to secure passage.¹⁰⁴ This defeat marked the end of formal attempts by Poe to secure segregated communities in North Carolina. Occasional mention of these communities and their possible creation continued to be made in The Progressive Farmer, but Poe's pleas for this plan were voiced less and less and gave way to his advocacy of more constructive measures for the South.

Poe's attitude toward the Negro in North Carolina and the South was unrealistic and not in step with his role as a progressive spokesman. He believed that the Negro represented a social and economic threat to the South and this attitude marked him as a shallow thinker and as a racist. There is no doubt Poe believed the Negro race inferior to the white. Because he believed this he fought to secure what he considered were justifiable restrictions upon this race. Land segregation policies, restricted suffrage, the delegation of the Negro race to an industrial caste system in the white economy were all considered as just by Poe. These attitudes reflected an unrealistic judgment concerning the future role of the Negro in society. They also lent themselves to aggravating the racial strife between the two races.

¹⁰⁴See the March issues of The Progressive Farmer, 1917 for Poe's comments upon the defeat of this bill.

Poe's greatest harm in advocating these racist policies lay, however, in the fact that he was acknowledged as one of the spokesmen for the New South. By exerting his influence in a negative manner on the question of the Negro, he both prolonged race hatred and projected falsely the image of the New South. As a spokesman for the New South he owed to his section the responsibility for qualified leadership. He failed completely in this responsibility for projecting his own race hatred. His attitude toward the Negro fell far short of what would be expected of a rational exponent of progressivism.

Chapter VI

THE FARM EDITOR AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Governor Charles B. Aycock led the way in advocating improvements in the existing public school system in North Carolina. Although he was elected on the white-supremacy issue in 1900, Aycock had a genuine concern for improving educational facilities for both races. His campaign for governor had rested on the premise that North Carolina had to provide a better education for all of its children.¹

Clarence Poe, only nineteen years of age when Aycock was elected governor, also became a leading spokesman for educational reforms in North Carolina. A better public school system coincided with Poe's plans to improve the agricultural economy of the state. The "school of a last resort for a vast majority of the future farmers of the country will be the public school," Poe commented in the first issue of The Progressive Farmer in 1900.² Improved agricultural methods and better educational facilities existed side by side in Poe's concept of the New South -- twentieth century farm methods demanded twentieth century schools. He wrote that "an agricultural revolution can be

¹For a fuller discussion of educational reforms in North Carolina see Charles W. Dabney, Universal Education in the South, Volume II (1936).

²The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1900.

brought about only by a better scheme of rural education -- better both in quantity and quality."³

Through articles in The Progressive Farmer Poe endorsed the educational program that Charles B. Aycock proposed in the gubernatorial campaign of 1900. Poe sought to arouse support for Aycock and all candidates who advocated better educational facilities for the state: "Every farmer, every citizen should work inside his own political party to bring about the legislation needed to improve our school system. For when the parents and voters take the interest they should in public schools, then and not till then, will our legislators give the schools the attention that should be given them."⁴ Poe argued that the constitutional guarantee of a three month school term was neither enforced nor sufficient for the demands of the twentieth century. He also argued, as did the educator Charles L. Coon, that school book publishers grew rich at the expense of North Carolinians who were "barely able to keep their children in schools three months in the year."⁵

Although he held no official position in Aycock's administration Poe was one of the strongest supporters of the governor's program. Even before Aycock was elected governor,

³Clarence Poe, "Agricultural Revolution," n.p. 1907, Poe Papers.

⁴The Progressive Farmer, March 20, 1900.

⁵The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1900.

Poe had begun to propose educational reforms for the state. In July, 1900 he advocated a tax on the railroad interests of the state to support public schools. Ideas for a tax to support these facilities would have to be postponed until 1907, when the North Carolina Supreme Court reversed an earlier decision and allowed counties to levy specific taxes for educational purposes.⁶ In reference to taxes paid by North Carolinians Poe believed that, as farmers contributed the largest percentage of money collected by the state, they were entitled to have agricultural courses taught in the public schools.⁷ This proposal was prompted by the lack of formal instruction in agricultural subjects. Farm cooperative demonstration programs met some of the need for instruction in agricultural topics but this was far from adequate. Realizing that something should be done to alleviate this condition, Poe worked to establish in the public schools subjects that would stress agricultural studies, using the North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College as an example of a publicly supported agricultural school.

Attempts by Poe and other leaders to improve educational facilities centered around the Conference for Southern Education. This organization was created in 1898 by

⁶ The Progressive Farmer, July 3, 1900; see also Hugh T. Lefler, History of North Carolina (1956), II, 721, hereinafter cited as Lefler, History of North Carolina.

⁷ The Progressive Farmer, August 14, 1900.

Robert Curtis Ogden, a wealthy capitalist from New York City. Other leaders in this organization included John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and William H. Baldwin, Jr.⁸ Through its General Board of Education, this organization distributed millions of dollars to promote public education in the South. The 1901 Conference for Southern Education met in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and marked the beginning of a coordinated effort to improve educational facilities in the area. Aycock followed this conference with a meeting in his office and appointed a committee to outline plans for a statewide campaign. In this meeting the point was made that North Carolina ranked second in the nation in illiteracy. Objection was made to including this statement in the upcoming state campaign for fear of dampening the public's enthusiasm for educational reforms. "What I want to know -- is it true," Governor Aycock was reported to have asked of the charge. He was told that it was. Aycock commented: "Put it in the statement and I will report it on every platform in North Carolina and thus bring about a state of affairs in which it will not be true." It was this statement by Aycock, Poe felt, that brought better educational facilities to North Carolina. "I have always regarded that as one of the turning points of

⁸Woodward, Origins of the New South, 401-402.

our educational history," Poe later reported.⁹

In 1902 North Carolina commenced a statewide campaign for better educational facilities. Under Aycock's leadership a corps of speakers was organized and this group sponsored more than 350 rallies in 78 of the state's 97 counties.¹⁰ An annual gift of \$4,000 was provided by the General Education Board for campaign purposes. In February, 1902, Aycock held a meeting in which the leaders of the state issued "A Declaration Against Illiteracy," calling for free public schools, open to all, supported by taxes.¹¹ A Central Campaign Committee for the Promotion of Public Education in North Carolina was composed of Aycock, McIver, Joyner, and Eugene Clyde Brooks, who served as executive secretary. This committee initiated the "most remarkable education campaign in the history of North Carolina."¹²

Poe supported this statewide campaign with articles in The Progressive Farmer. Typical of these articles was Poe's statement:

No appreciable progress in agriculture can be made without better public schools. Our agricultural colleges, agricultural departments, experiment stations and farm papers may work some, but it is largely

⁹Clarence Poe to D. Hiden Ramsey, November 17, 1958, D. Hiden Ramsey Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁰Connor and Poe, The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock, 122.

¹¹Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 720.

¹²Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 721.

unavailing unless people are literate.
 There is no profit in mere muscular labor.
 It is only where skill and trained
 intelligence are required that profit
 begins."¹³

Aycock wrote to Poe and thanked him for his support in promoting educational reforms and agreed to meet with him and "talk over educational matters with you as fully as you wish...."¹⁴

In conjunction with the statewide campaign for better educational facilities, Poe urged parents to make the necessary sacrifices in order for their children to attend school.¹⁵ He felt that the three month school term offered by the state was inadequate, costly, and foolish. He maintained it should be abandoned in favor of a longer term even if the assurance of state bonds for support was needed.¹⁶ Poe also urged some form of compulsory education for school age children.¹⁷ In advocating compulsory education in 1901, Poe showed much foresight. He believed "The State has a perfect right to say: 'Your child's future welfare is menaced by your own ignorance and obstinancy -- I have compelled the

¹³The Progressive Farmer, March 25, 1902.

¹⁴Charles B. Aycock to Clarence Poe, May 17, 1902, Poe Papers.

¹⁵The Progressive Farmer, January 8, May 28, 1901; see also The Progressive Farmer, March 25, 1902, January 13, June 9, 1903.

¹⁶The Progressive Farmer, February 17, 1903.

¹⁷The Progressive Farmer, August 20, 1901.

people to support the school prepared for your child's training. I must compel you to give the child the opportunity to get this training."¹⁸

Regarding the support of compulsory educational programs, Poe especially urged farm interests to back this idea. This support was slow in coming because farmers believed that their children would benefit more from farm work than from textbook instruction. Poe believed that this attitude was the result of the farmer's lack of confidence in the system of public education. But if the southern farmer were to progress this feeling had to be changed:

The prosperity of every man in the community is measured by the development and efficiency of its average man. Get this great economic truth once firmly fixed in the thought of the South and there will be such a demand for education and training...that no power can resist it. And until you do get this doctrine well understood you may get the letter of compulsory education on the statute books of your legislatures but you are never going to get it into the heart of your people.¹⁹

Poe's views about compulsory education had also been influenced by his world-wide travels in 1908 and 1910. Upon his return to the United States he pointed out how successful compulsory education was in Japan where a 98 per cent school attendance was recorded for children six to fourteen years of

¹⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 14, 1905.

¹⁹Clarence Poe, "Why Haven't We Compulsory Education in the South?" A Speech delivered at the 11th Annual Conference for Education in the South, n.p. April 24, 1908, Poe Papers.

age in schools that were open ten months of the year.²⁰ Poe felt that a similar type of compulsory attendance should also be enforced in the South where, "one pretext or another have defeated every effort for effective compulsory education laws so that if a boy's parents are indifferent to his future, the state does not compel them to give him a fighting chance in life -- for the state's own sake and for the boy's."²¹

In addition to his world-wide trips, Poe's interest in compulsory attendance laws were prompted by the suffrage amendment of 1900 which stipulated that after 1908 no man would be allowed to vote unless he could read and write. Unless compulsory education were enforced, many farmers would be denied their franchise. Poe felt that "every person must be able to read and write" and that this amendment would serve as an incentive for the farmers to support public schools.²² He noted that the North Carolina legislature in 1909 refused to extend the deadline whereby illiterate persons could register. He felt that this was a move in the right direction and that it would help spur the demand for compulsory education. "There was much excuse for the illiterate white man before, but not now, and an extension of the grand-

²⁰The Progressive Farmer, November 5, 1910.

²¹Poe, Where Half the World Is Waking Up, 18.

²²The Progressive Farmer, August 26, 1902, February 14, 1907.

father clause would only encourage inexcusable shiftlessness and ignorance," Poe remarked in 1909.²³

By 1912 Poe was advocating that the North Carolina legislature adopt a compulsory six month school term to place the state on an equal footing with other areas of the nation.²⁴ He realized, however, that some groups opposed compulsory education, especially the textile mill interests that employed a great deal of child labor. Even with this opposition Poe worked in conjunction with other leaders throughout the state to gain a law requiring compulsory attendance for at least the youngest school age children. Poe remarked that it was "idle to talk of children from six to ten years of age choosing for themselves whether or not they will grow up illiterate...is not compulsory education better than compulsory ignorance?"²⁵ Poe's thoughts reflected the growing sentiment within North Carolina to require young children to attend longer school terms and to make their attendance compulsory.

Attempts by Poe and other leaders to make education mandatory gained some headway in 1913 when the North Carolina legislature passed a conservative compulsory attendance law for children between eight and twelve years of age. It

²³The Progressive Farmer, March 4, 1909.

²⁴The Progressive Farmer, December 14, 1912.

²⁵The Progressive Farmer, February 8, 1913.

required that they attend school at least four months in the year. Expressing his views on this law in a letter to R. D. W. Connor, Poe commented: "In my opinion it is not a question of whether society has a right to say that a child shall be taken from its parents and sent to school. The question is whether the child hasn't a...right to knowledge, a...right to enter life unshackled by the chains of ignorance -- a right to be enforced even in spite of the indifference of his parents...."²⁶ Enactment of a meaningful compulsory attendance law was undertaken in 1917 when the legislature approved the submission of a constitutional amendment to establish compulsory education for a six months term to popular vote. This amendment was passed the following year in the general elections. As was the case with other educational reforms Poe heartily endorsed this amendment. He published accounts in The Progressive Farmer of those state senators and representatives who supported the amendment and constantly urged his readers to support only those men who backed these reforms. As in other areas of educational reform Poe took the lead in advocating improvement. The rapid educational advancements that the state made during the first two decades of the twentieth century were underscored and supported by Poe and The Progressive Farmer.

²⁶ Clarence Poe to R. D. W. Connor, March 29, 1913, R. D. W. Connor Papers.

As the editor of a rapidly growing North Carolina newspaper, Poe felt that it was his duty to arouse his readers with the educational spirit taking place in the state. To do anything less, he felt, would not be in line with his role as a public servant:

From the days of Reconstruction until now the North Carolina editor has regarded his vision as a political one. With changed conditions it becomes his duty to make the development of state resources -- its manhood, no less than its fields -- paramount to party considerations. And the State's greatest resource is its schoolboys and schoolgirls. The press of the State realizes this, and no class of people is doing more than the editors to hold up the hands of Governor Aycock and other leaders of the educational crusade. The enthusiasm which the Convention [Southern Educational] displayed for the cause of our public schools was good to see.²⁷

Poe's role as an editor who supported better educational facilities for North Carolina increased as the state-wide campaign gained momentum. He believed that the state legislature was responsible for the consolidation of smaller, rural school districts so that county schools would be placed on an equal footing with the city schools.²⁸ He also advocated the establishment of an organization of "volunteer teachers" who would work in the rural areas of the state to help develop better reading and writing habits for the farmers.²⁹ With

²⁷The Progressive Farmer, July 8, 1902.

²⁸The Progressive Farmer, January 13, 1903.

²⁹The Progressive Farmer, May 28, 1901.

the state supporting educational reforms and assisted by the General Education Board, Poe felt that both North Carolina and the South could bring their school systems up to levels comparable with the rest of the nation.

Because of his great interest in the farmer, Poe devoted much of his time to the promotion of the state's agricultural and mechanical institution, North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College. In 1903 Poe noted that Tuskegee Institute, the well known Negro agricultural and industrial training school, had a \$1,000,000 endowment, but he inquired "where is there an equally well-equipped school to train Southern whites as farmers and mechanics?"³⁰ He felt that the legislature and people of North Carolina should lend support to their own state college established for this purpose.³¹ Continually he fought to secure better facilities for this college by urging that better equipment and more up-to-date agricultural buildings be secured.³² Remembering Leonidas Polk's fight to establish this institution, Poe felt that he was obligated to continue the battle to make of this college an example to which farmers could point with pride.

³⁰The Progressive Farmer, May 12, 1903.

³¹For Poe's views concerning A and T College at Greensboro and his other opinions regarding Negro educational facilities see Chapter five.

³²The Progressive Farmer, June 17, 1902, January 13, March 3, 1903.

Poe's support of the A and M College was based on the idea that he could make the farmer believe that this institution was really his own. Accordingly, he "defended" the college against those interests who wanted the institution to pursue academic course work to the exclusion of "practical" knowledge. When plans were made in 1904 to consolidate A and M College into the university system, Poe commented: "The inevitable result would make industrial education a side issue. The University and classical education would be regarded as supreme, and the student yearning to take an agricultural course would feel that he was sidetracked."³³ Poe believed that the A and M. College had a duty as an institution to serve "as a promoter of industrial education, not of mere ordinary education, and...as a promoter of agricultural education primarily, not of agriculture lastly...."³⁴ He praised Governor Aycock's appointment of some "practical farmers" to the State Board of Agriculture which in turn was given control of A and M College.³⁵ Poe's support of A and M. College helped to gain for this institution new equipment and better physical facilities.³⁶ He also sought through The Progressive Farmer to increase the number of

³³The Progressive Farmer, August 30, 1904.

³⁴The Progressive Farmer, June 11, 1908.

³⁵The Progressive Farmer, March 26, 1901.

³⁶The Progressive Farmer, June 4, 1901, March 4, 1902.

farmers who attended A and M College for "short courses" offered in agricultural subjects.³⁷ His support of this college also led him to offer through The Progressive Farmer a limited number of scholarships for deserving young men.³⁸

Realizing that most southern farmers had limited reading materials, Poe supported the establishment of rural libraries in the South.³⁹ Accordingly, he backed the passage in 1901 of a law which established matching funds for rural libraries in North Carolina. For every \$10 provided by the state, a similar amount was also raised by the people of a district. So great was the demand for money to establish rural libraries that the state funds would have been exhausted by the more enlightened districts in six months. But a limitation had been imposed by the state of six libraries per county.⁴⁰ Poe also cited the exemplary work of James Yadkin Joyner who refused to allow new rural libraries to become the dumping grounds for mediocre literature. Poe observed: "We are moved to wonder why educational leaders did not perceive long ago the value of rural library work."⁴¹

³⁷The Progressive Farmer, November 3, 1903, November 15, 1906, January 28, 1909.

³⁸The Progressive Farmer, July 1, 1904.

³⁹Clarence Poe, "Rural School Libraries in North Carolina," American Monthly Review of Reviews, XXVIII (July, 1903), 338, hereinafter cited as Poe, "Rural School Libraries in North Carolina."

⁴⁰Poe, "Rural School Libraries in North Carolina," 339.

⁴¹Poe, "Rural School Libraries in North Carolina," 339.

He also urged readers who were members of the Farmer's Alliance to establish libraries in their meeting halls. He suggested that publications from the state and national departments of agriculture compose some of the reading materials.⁴² Poe continued his fight for rural libraries throughout the first seventeen years of the twentieth century. In 1915 he wrote to Bennehan Cameron, a member of the Committee on Appropriations in the North Carolina House of Representatives, and urged him to support a proposed bill to provide funds for new libraries. Poe wrote:

"Any man who has lived in the country and knows from experience, as I do, the difficulties in getting good books...will see at once the importance of this measure. The Committee on Appropriations will vote magnificent sums for higher education...but I believe it would be better to cut their appropriations to give this small sum of \$8,000 to provide educational opportunities...to the great masses of our people unreached by college or university."⁴³

The building of rural libraries paralleled the establishment of more school houses in the state. Sparked by the passage in 1903 of a school building fund, North Carolina provided an additional 676 new physical plants within a year.⁴⁴

⁴²The Progressive Farmer, May 3, 1904.

⁴³Clarence Poe to Bennehan Cameron, February 23, 1915, Bennehan Cameron Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴⁴Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 721; see also The Progressive Farmer, March 24, 1903.

The General Education Board also continued to provide money for promoting educational reforms in North Carolina, and Poe felt this committee had contributed much to helping North Carolina begin its educational crusade. He felt it necessary, however, to explain to his readers that this organization held no ill-feeling toward the South with its separate Negro school systems:

The charges that the Board desires to intervene with the South's handling of the negro -- or that it wants to put undue pressure on the schools by money gifts are groundless. Time after time the Board has officially asserted that the Southern white people know their problem...and that the Northern members of the board only wish to help.

On the question of mixed schools, the Northern members are too intelligent to think that such an object could ever be passed.⁴⁵

Although Poe fought to secure better educational facilities for both races, it was apparent that he felt that only the South could handle the problem of educating the Negro. While he favored some aid from the federal government, he felt it would be dangerous to become too dependent upon this aid lest the federal government eventually demand that segregated schools be abolished.

In reference to federally supported educational facilities, Poe also praised the good work which was being done

⁴⁵The Progressive Farmer, April 21, 1903.

by church supported schools. In speaking of Trinity College, later to become Duke University, Poe remarked: "Trinity College is a church school, controlled by a great religious donomination. There are no truer or worthier North Carolinians than those who make up its membership, and we are willing to trust the conduct of Trinity College to them and the Trustees whom they select."⁴⁶

In 1904 The Progressive Farmer began a series of articles by Superintendent Joyner on what North Carolina needed in educational improvements and how these reforms could be accomplished.⁴⁷ In this year Poe also wrote "The Remaking of a Rural Commowealth" for the American Monthly Review of Reviews. In this article Poe explained that the farm element, as a class, had not "wielded power commensurate with its members."⁴⁸ This failure could be traced to the "isolation and illiteracy which have shackled the county-dweller."⁴⁹ He believed that these twin evils which had retarded rural progress were being replaced by the coordinated movement in the South for better public schools. Within North Carolina it was pointed out that a coordinated effort

⁴⁶The Progressive Farmer, December 15, 1903.

⁴⁷The Progressive Farmer, March 29, 1904.

⁴⁸Poe, "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," 694.

⁴⁹Poe, "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," 694.

to improve educational facilities had increased the length of the school term for both races, and a \$200,000 fund for building new schoolhouses had been provided.⁵⁰ Poe believed that it would only be a matter of time before there would also be curriculum changes in public schools with more emphasis upon agricultural subjects. He also cited the impressive record made by North Carolina in its effort to improve school facilities: between 1900-1904 there had been an increase of almost 200 tax districts to support education; school attendance had increased by approximately 14,000 students; the average number of weeks of school had risen from 14 to 17; and school buildings were being erected at a pace unknown in the state's history. He cited the increase in the number of rural libraries and also stated that North Carolina's public school system needed "an interesting, accurate, well proportioned state history" to replace existing history books, that were "as dry as bones."⁵¹ He believed that the overall progress made by North Carolina could be traced to the work of men such as Aycock and Joyner.⁵²

In 1907 North Carolina received another boost in its fight for a better educational system. From 1868 to 1907 there had been no specific state law to provide for high

⁵⁰Poe, "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," 694-695.

⁵¹The Progressive Farmer, September 2, 1902.

⁵²Poe, "The Remaking of a Rural Commonwealth," 695.

school instruction. Poe had frequently made note of this fact and when South Carolina passed a bill establishing public high school instruction he urged that North Carolina also adopt a similar law.⁵³ Plans had been underway in North Carolina since 1905 to establish a public secondary educational system, and in 1907 the North Carolina legislature passed a law that provided for instruction beyond the elementary level. By articles favorable to this measure Poe offered support and praised its passage.⁵⁴ Four years later the annual appropriation for high school education in North Carolina had been increased to \$75,000.⁵⁵ With these funds Poe felt North Carolina was at last on the path to achieving quality secondary educational facilities. Educational reforms in North Carolina in 1907 also were marked by the establishment of colleges dedicated to the training of school teachers. East Carolina Teacher's Training School at Greenville was chartered in this year. Previously Appalachian Training School had been established at Boone in 1905. Cullowhee Normal and Industrial Training School was established at Cullowhee in 1905. All these schools provided the state with better teachers. Under the direction of Charles L. Coon there was also a consolidation of the seven

⁵³The Progressive Farmer, February 14, 1907.

⁵⁴The Progressive Farmer, March 14, 1907.

⁵⁵Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 722.

Negro normal schools in the state to five. Poe endorsed both the establishment of new normal schools and the consolidation of others.⁵⁶

With the establishment of a system of high schools in North Carolina, Poe emphasized that agricultural subjects be included in the curricula of these schools. Poe charged that the existing schools were "city oriented" and should be overhauled immediately:

Our educational system has been made by city people for city people, and the county school finds it second-hand, ill-fitting and unattractive. To this fact is due the backwardness of education in the agricultural states. Plants, soils, animals, insects, flowers, the weather -- from all these things it has stood apart, while it babbled of subjects unfamiliar and uninteresting to the country-bred child.⁵⁷

Poe felt that textbooks that placed less emphasis upon wars and battles and devoted more attention to the education and industrial achievements of history were needed.⁵⁸ Although his assertion was overstressed -- schoolbooks did contain some basic agricultural concepts and new books also pertained more to rural interests -- he fought to secure a greater

⁵⁶Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 723.

⁵⁷Clarence Poe, "Farm Children Need Farm Studies," The World's Work, VI (August, 1903), 3760; see also The Progressive Farmer, September 1, 1903, June 17, 1910.

⁵⁸The Progressive Farmer, June 17, 1911.

degree of agricultural courses for schools. Indeed, Poe proposed that agricultural subjects be taught in all the high schools of the South and agrued that the farmer held the key to the economic future of the area. Even with this emphasis upon agricultural subjects, Poe realized that these courses would also have to be supplemented by other areas of study. He did not want schools established exclusively for agricultural pursuits. Poe felt that members of the Farmers' Union who were trying to create "farm schools" as distinct from public schools were making a terrible mistake. "The boy must learn other things besides farming if he is to develop into a well-rounded man."⁵⁹ He urged, however, that district agricultural high schools be established.⁶⁰ His ideas on the establishment of district agricultural high schools anticipated the actual creation of vocational schools throughout the nation, and his advocacy of such schools marked him as a progressive in this area.

Poe supported coordinated attempts by the state and counties to establish "rural life schools" or "farm life schools" as they were also called. These schools were to be vocational agricultural institutions supported by the state to help boys and girls of high school age receive a background

⁵⁹The Progressive Farmer, April 23, 1910.

⁶⁰The Progressive Farmer, June 25, 1908.

in agricultural studies. In 1911 a bill to establish farm life schools was passed by the North Carolina legislature. Poe felt that this bill represented "a distinct step forward in the agricultural development of the State."⁶¹ The law made available \$25,000 annually to ten schools in the state for agricultural studies.⁶² Poe believed that the establishment of these schools would not only help farm interests, but would also help the regular schools by illustrating the more practical side of education: "They will also train teachers in the proper atmosphere. Such teachers will know how to deal with agricultural studies and domestic science."⁶³

With the North Carolina educational crusade in full swing, Poe journeyed to Europe in 1908. When he returned he brought with him the knowledge of what had been accomplished by adequate educational facilities. He believed that part of the success that European countries enjoyed could be traced directly to their excellent schools and compulsory attendance laws. "The minds of [the] people -- are trained and developed by a splendid scheme of public education, universal, industrial and even compulsory."⁶⁴ He felt that if the South developed an educational system similar to

⁶¹The Progressive Farmer, March 4, 1911.

⁶²The Progressive Farmer, March 11, May 6, 1911.

⁶³The Progressive Farmer, July 29, 1911.

⁶⁴Poe, A Southerner in Europe, 109.

that of one of the progressive nations in Europe, Germany, that it would some day lead the nation in economic development:

The hope of the South is in the educating of its people, all its people. Every ignorant, inefficient man, white or black, in a community makes it poorer, makes everybody in the community poorer: and if he cannot be educated to do good work, he ought to give way to someone who can be so trained.

Educate our people as well as the Germans educate theirs /and/ the time must soon come when the United States will stand the acknowledged leader among the countries of the world.⁶⁵

In 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life issued a report which coincided with what Poe said in regard to rural education in the South. This commission had been organized to investigate the various conditions and problems of rural life, including the inadequate educational facilities in these areas. The commission noted the backward state of rural education and proposed reforms that it felt would be beneficial in establishing better rural education systems. Poe supported the findings of this commission and believed that its report "ought to be printed by all means, as this information would be of immense service to the farmers of the country."⁶⁶ To those North Carolinians who were

⁶⁵The Progressive Farmer, October 15, 1908.

⁶⁶Clarence Poe to Furnifold M. Simmons, April 6, 1909, Simmons Papers.

critical of the commission's report and felt that it was in some ways anti-southern, Poe dismissed their arguments and fully supported the findings.

Poe found further support for his contention that the South's inadequate educational facilities were holding back the region's growth when he completed a world tour in 1911. Speaking of Asia he expressed the opinion that this region also offered ideas and solutions to some of the educational problems of the South. Poe compared the rote, memorization way of teaching in China to the backward educational facilities of some southern states. He believed that future educational facilities for both China and the South should emphasize scientific investigation, the examination of world events, and "the powers of reasoning."⁶⁷ Excluding Japan, he felt that Asia's poverty served as a prime example of what would happen to the South if it did not "thoroughly educate all of its people."⁶⁸ Yet, Poe had previously been guilty of placing too much emphasis upon the development of North Carolina to the exclusion of "world-wide" events. Thus, his trips to Europe and Asia served to broaden his thinking noticeably in

⁶⁷Clarence Poe, "China: Awake And At Work," American Monthly Review of Reviews, XLIII (February, 1911), 194-195.

⁶⁸The Progressive Farmer, April 21, 1911; see also Poe, Where Half the World Is Waking Up, 178-180, 272.

regard to subjects to be taught in the South's rapidly improving public school system.

North Carolina's educational crusade suffered a setback in 1912 when Charles B. Aycock died unexpectedly while delivering an educational address in Alabama. Prior to his death Poe wrote to him expressing the idea that if Aycock were elected to the Senate he should take an active interest in promoting educational reforms for the whole country: "I think it is also important that we urge the extension of the educational activities of the National Government."⁶⁹ Poe stated emphatically, however, that North Carolina should always retain exclusive control over its own public school system. Poe's close association with Aycock had led him to admire the educational governor and his death meant a great loss. In an editorial in The Progressive Farmer, Poe spoke of Aycock and his work in the educational crusade: "Charles B. Aycock will live long in the hearts of North Carolina and the South, not because he was Governor of the State...but because he was a really constructive statesman -- that is, a man who saw the great needs of his own people and strove to supply that need."⁷⁰

Among the many educational reforms undertaken by

⁶⁹Clarence Poe to Charles B. Aycock, March 9, 1912, Poe Papers.

⁷⁰The Progressive Farmer, April 13, 1912.

North Carolina, Poe showed great interest in the creation of an equalizing fund by the state legislature. Prompted by a strong sentiment throughout the state and after a long fight with the textile interests, the North Carolina legislature in 1913 levied a state-wide property tax of 5¢ on the \$100 valuation to create an equalizing fund. This fund was intended to lengthen the school term in the state to six months. To be eligible for any part of the equalizing fund, however, the legislature required that counties show that they had provided funds for a four month school term.⁷¹ Poe cited the passage of this bill as "the greatest achievement," but at the same time he considered it as "the greatest shame" in that "it allowed the greater part of this or other public burdens to fall upon the poor."⁷² Poe believed that the property tax levied for this equalizing fund was unjust in that it placed a greater burden upon the small farmer than it did upon large tracts of unproductive land. He suggested, instead, that taxes be increased on absentee farm owners, inheritances and incomes.

Poe also took the initiative in trying to secure a better educational background for those farmers who were too old, or could not afford to attend school. He constantly urged farmers to send for the free bulletins and pamphlets

⁷¹Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 722.

⁷²The Progressive Farmer, March 22, 1913.

made available by the state and federal governments. He offered books through The Progressive Farmer for a small cost. Most of these books dealt with subjects that would interest almost any reader, such as stories of successful men and famous American leaders, and Poe reported that they were well received.⁷³ In contrast to helping the farmer, Poe believed that some church supported schools were negating attempts made to train young men for agricultural and industrial occupations. Poe commented: "is there not danger that the churches will let their present situation lead them into the false and ruinous position of opposing industrial education and take the ground that education which looks to putting men in the professional or middleman class is the only sort that should engage the attention of the church?"⁷⁴ Poe felt that church leaders should take a more active role in promoting agricultural and industrial education.

Speaking of the need for better industrial and agricultural education, Poe had always felt that the federal government should take part in promoting this training. Accordingly, he supported the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 and the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. The Smith-Lever Act established permanently the various farm demonstration programs and

⁷³These books were made available by the A. L. Burt Company, publishers of The Home Library of the World's Best Books, July, 1913, Poe Papers.

⁷⁴Clarence Poe to Reverend T. S. Coble, August 9, 1913, Poe Papers.

boy and girl agricultural clubs that had sprung up throughout the South. Poe strongly supported the Smith-Lever Act and felt that it should be extended to all farm work in the nation.⁷⁵ He also supported the Smith-Hughes Act which appropriated funds for the instruction of various agricultural and industrial topics in high schools. He had long advocated most of the provisions of this bill, and he felt that the instruction of these courses in high schools pointed the way to a better day for all farming and industrial interests in the nation.

Poe's promotion of improved educational facilities for North Carolina included his support for the various colleges and other institutions. He had long been a strong backer of A and M College and had worked hard to improve its facilities and equipment. In recognition of his support Poe was chosen to deliver the main address at the inauguration of the school's new President, Wallace Riddick, in February, 1917. His speech, as was to be expected, dealt with the importance of agricultural education and how the future farmer would have to be better trained to compete in twentieth century economic activities.⁷⁶ Although branded as an "anti-intel-

⁷⁵The Progressive Farmer, February 21, 1914.

⁷⁶ Clarence Poe, "Farmers Started the A and M College." Address delivered at the Inauguration of President W. C. Riddick, North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College, Raleigh, February 22, 1917, Poe Papers.

lectual" in some corners because of his lukewarm support of academic subjects, he also supported the University of North Carolina, gave speeches at this institution, and tried to promote its role in North Carolina. He took a more active role in support of the University when Eugene C. Branson joined the faculty in 1914. Branson, who had taught at the State Normal School of Georgia, led the way in establishing the Department of Rural Social Economics at the University of North Carolina. Branson also helped publish The University of North Carolina News Letter, a report of the activities which took place on the campus. Poe wrote Branson to congratulate him on initiating such a report:

I have just received the first number of 'The University of North Carolina News Letter,' and most heartily do I congratulate you on it. I have for years wanted to see the University and the allied colleges of the State realize that they are to serve not merely the few hundred individuals on their campus grounds, but the millions beyond the college walls. If the University had had this idea all along, North Carolina would be a different State now.⁷⁷

Twentieth century educational reforms in North Carolina overshadowed all other legislation. Under the leadership of Governor Charles B. Aycock an educational crusade was initiated throughout the state in 1902. Poe's role in this educational crusade was to support Aycock and other leaders dedicated to achieving for the state the best possible public school system. Because he was recognized in North Carolina as the spokesman of farm interests, Poe helped influence the election of men who served in the North Carolina legislature. By publishing the

⁷⁷Clarence Poe to Eugene C. Branson, November 16, 1914, Branson Papers.

names of state senators and representatives who supported educational reforms, Poe made known to his readers which men deserved their support. But Poe did not restrict his campaign for educational reforms merely to The Progressive Farmer. He recognized the work of the Southern Educational Conference in the promotion and support of educational reforms, and he helped this organization gain acceptance in North Carolina. He delivered numerous speeches throughout the state in support of better educational facilities for both races. By writing articles in national journals and magazines favorable to educational reforms, Poe helped to promote better educational facilities not only for North Carolina but for all southern states.

In his enthusiastic support of agricultural education, Poe exaggerated agricultural topics in school curricula. Although there was a definite need to include and improve the teaching of agricultural subjects in the public schools, Poe stressed this point almost to the exclusion of academic subjects, and thereby earned an "anti-intellectual" tag. Yet Poe's influence provided an impetus for North Carolina's remarkable educational crusade. His support of educational reforms helped to assure the passage of much legislation that would lead to an education revival in North Carolina. Poe's fight for improved educational facilities for North Carolina and the South places him alongside other leaders who initiated programs to make educational goals become educational realities.

Chapter VII

THE ROLE OF A FARM EDITOR IN POLITICS AND SOCIAL REFORMS

The Progressive Farmer served as the medium by which Poe expressed his views on national and state political issues. He did not use the paper to promote any specific party. Rarely did he advocate the election of a particular candidate. Instead, he urged his readers to support those candidates who would work for the "best interests of all." Although a Democrat in his political preference, Poe's reluctance to attack or support candidates for political office was meritorious. He urged farmers, however, to participate actively in political affairs. He stated in 1900:

The farmer, as a factor in politics should be an individual, and not a class.... In so doing his power for good is unlimited, for by his number in every election he holds the balance of power. He should be a politician to the extent of having an intelligent interest in the government of our country, to serve the best interests of the governed and preserve them for the schemes of designing persons and measures, and keep politics free from corruption and jobbery of all kinds, but holds in this relation no greater right than any other citizen or class of citizen.¹

Poe felt that the main reason why farmers had not gained political recognition in proportion to their numerical voting power was "because our farmers have not the training

¹The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1900.

needed to give them influence with public assemblies."² Only by more participation in the political processes and with a better understanding of the "importance of the ballot and the responsibility of the voter," did Poe believe that the farmer would gain experience necessary to achieve a "political place" for himself in America.³

North Carolina held its first senatorial primary in 1900. This was watched with much interest as the Democratic platform of 1900 favored passage of a state-wide primary law. The results of this election were not encouraging. The primary vote was smaller than the vote cast for William Jennings Bryan and more than 37,000 short of the votes cast for Aycock in the gubernatorial election.⁴

Griminations and recriminations between friends of the rival candidates threatened a dangerous rift in the Democratic Party at a time when harmony was especially essential to party interests. As a consequence the word 'primary' was anathema to the Legislature of 1901, and fifteen years passed before the General Assembly so far forgot the experience of 1900 that it would be induced to pass a primary law.⁵

Although this primary election was not well received by the Democratic regulars of the state, Poe had supported its inception as "a step in the right direction," and he felt that

²The Progressive Farmer, September 25, 1900.

³The Progressive Farmer, July 10, 1900.

⁴Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 481.

⁵Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 481.

it marked the beginning of "direct democracy."⁶ He later supported such "direct democracy" measures as presidential primaries, the initiative, referendum, and reforms that would give the people more voice in the selection of political candidates.⁷

In connection with his support of "direct democracy" measures, as early as 1901 Poe advocated laws in North Carolina to establish a four month school term, a statute making agriculture a common school subject, a reformatory for young criminals, the prohibition of children under fifteen years of age working in a cotton mill, lower prices for school books, and a graduated tax upon the gross earnings of railroads.⁸ These proposals reflected in general the reform measures Poe would champion throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century.

In 1900 The Progressive Farmer supported neither William McKinley nor William Jennings Bryan for the presidency. There was some evidence that Poe favored Bryan's candidacy but no formal declaration was issued in support

⁶The Progressive Farmer, September 18, 1900.

⁷The Progressive Farmer, September 24, 1908, January 27, 1903; see also Poe, A Southerner in Europe, 119-122, and The Progressive Farmer, June 1, 15, 1912.

⁸The Progressive Farmer, February 6, 1900.

of either man.⁹ Poe remarked that the nomination of Theodore Roosevelt as a vice-presidential candidate on the Republican ticket was a good choice: "For our part we confess to a decided liking for the personal characteristics of Colonel Roosevelt...while he will have little influence as Vice-President it is encouraging that a clean and brave man has been nominated."¹⁰ McKinley's election on a "prosperity theme" brought this caustic remark from Poe

those gullible mortals who give McKinley all the credit for increased farm prices and believe that he can maintain the present prices are to be disappointed. We may have 'good times' in spite of unjust laws and unwise legislation, or 'hard times' in spite of wise and beneficial laws. This is a matter that calls for an unbiased study of great issues and principles, not a reckless assumption that the party in power is responsible for prosperity or its absence.¹¹

Concerning McKinley's cabinet selections Poe remarked that only one member had been born in the South "to us the fact seems significant and worthy of some thought."¹² He praised McKinley's repudiation of a third term in 1901.¹³

⁹ The Progressive Farmer, October 23, 1900. Poe believed that the "continuing colonial policies of the Republicans" was in contrast with "the fundamental principles of the country" and urged his readers to consider this fact in voting, even though they did not endorse "the silver views of the anti-expansionist candidate."

¹⁰ The Progressive Farmer, June 26, October 30, 1900.

¹¹ The Progressive Farmer, November 20, 1900.

¹² The Progressive Farmer, May 28, 1901.

¹³ The Progressive Farmer, June 11, 1901.

Upon McKinley's election to the presidency, Poe urged more federal control over the huge and powerful trusts in the United States. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century his editorials in The Progressive Farmer denounced the Standard Oil Company and the American Tobacco Trust.¹⁴ He supported all federal attempts to regulate these and other trusts. Not only did Poe feel that trusts should be regulated, but he advocated that the "doors of commerce be thrown wide open to the world" by reducing tariff rates. He believed that high tariff rates restricted trade and served as an indirect tax upon the poor "no people can be prosperous if laws are so framed as to enable privileged classes to impoverish the masses. Wipe out special privileges, and prosperity is assured."¹⁵ He believed that the defeat of proposed reciprocal trade agreements favored by such presidents as McKinley and William Howard Taft resulted in European countries "trying to get even" by imposing similar high tariff rates upon American goods -- farm products especially.¹⁶ Poe's views on the tariff question and the trusts paralleled his belief that more authority should be given to the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate the

¹⁴The Progressive Farmer, June 5, August 14, December 4, 1900.

¹⁵The Progressive Farmer, April 9, 1901, May 1, 1900.

¹⁶The Progressive Farmer, August 8, 1905, September 30, 1900.

vast and powerful railroad interests in the country.¹⁷ His support of proposals to regulate trusts, railroads, and other private industries by federal control reflected the overall battle which agrarian interests throughout the country had long waged in order to secure a more favorable economic position.

Although Poe made known his views upon national questions such as the trusts and the tariff, his interests in political affairs were centered principally upon North Carolina. The first political controversy of any consequence in North Carolina in which Poe expressed his views involved the 1901 impeachment of two Republican members of the state Supreme Court -- Chief Justice David M. Furches and Associate Justice Robert D. Douglas. The Democratic party of North Carolina, having gained control of the legislative and executive branches of government, was impatient to "redeem" the judiciary without waiting for the next election. Accordingly, in 1901 the North Carolina House of Representatives instituted impeachment charges against Furches and Douglas to make room for Democratic successors. The impeachment proceedings were opposed by the Republicans and a strong minority of Democrats led by Henry Groves Connor.¹⁸ Poe viewed the

¹⁷The Progressive Farmer, February 14, October 10, 1905, July 12, 1906.

¹⁸Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 484, and Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 706.

trial of impeachment with much skepticism and commented that "we are unable to see how this small matter...can be construed as 'a high crime or misdemeanor.' We do not plead for the Judges...but we urge our Legislature to consider well before taking this step."¹⁹ After a trial that lasted fourteen days, the Senate acquitted the judges of all five charges brought against them and Poe expressed his agreement with this decision.²⁰

Paramount to all other political controversies in North Carolina in the beginning of the twentieth century was the election of Walter Clark as Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court. Although his election was a bitterly fought political battle, the contest evolved into a fight between the railroads interests of the state and Clark, both using the newspapers to present their positions. A Democratic lawyer of Halifax County, Clark's native county, was brought out as an independent candidate against him, but the State Democratic Convention nominated Clark by an overwhelming majority. In the general election Clark defeated his Republican opponent by a majority of 60,000 votes, with the loss of only two counties.²¹ Poe presented accounts in The Progressive Farmer of Clark's battle and gave this interpretation

¹⁹The Progressive Farmer, February 12, 1901.

²⁰The Progressive Farmer, February 26, 1901.

²¹Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 718. Clark lost only Lincoln and Cabarrus counties.

of his candidacy and later election.

It does not mean that the people of North Carolina are prejudiced against corporations. It does mean that the fight on Judge Clark was so managed as to give it the appearance of an attack by certain corporations, and that the people feared its success would have a demoralizing effect on the judiciary by making the judges fearful for a long time to come of the power of those corporations that would have been regarded as responsible for Clark's humiliation. This...accounts for the fact that Clark's strength has been so little shaken.²²

Poe had long worked against the railroad interests in North Carolina and Clark's victory was considered by him to be a triumph for the people.²³

While Clark's election reflected an in-state political battle, North Carolina became involved two years later in a federal dispute with the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ordered North Carolina to pay \$27,400 to the state of South Dakota for ten railroad construction bonds which had not been turned in for settlement at 25¢ on the dollar in accordance with the debt settlement in 1879.²⁴

Republican leaders Marion Butler and Daniel L. Russell were attorneys for Schafer Brothers, New York brokers, who had 250 of the bonds and donated ten to South Dakota, which could

²²The Progressive Farmer, May 20, 1902.

²³The Progressive Farmer, October 28, November 4, 11, 1902.

²⁴For more information on this matter see, Hugh T. Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (1963), 575.

bring suit against a state. The Court ordered the sale of sufficient stock of state-owned North Carolina Railroad to satisfy the judgment. Some Democratic leaders, especially lawyers, urged resistance, insisting that the Court had no way of enforcing its decision.²⁵

Upon Aycock's recommendation, however, the General Assembly paid in full and avoided a direct conflict between the state and federal government. Poe agreed with Aycock's stand and condemned ex-Governor Daniel L. Russell of North Carolina "who be it said to his shame -- seems to have engineered this suit."²⁶

A second extraordinary political event for North Carolina in 1904 was the attempted "larceny" of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad. An effort was made by private individuals to take over the state-owned railroad which "for many years...had been a political football and many persons were convinced that it could never be properly developed under public control."²⁷ Among bids received for the road was a ninety-nine year lease filed by V. E. McBee. On February 18, 1904 Governor Aycock published the minimum terms for a lease, higher than what McBee expected, and he withdrew his bid. Later McBee applied to Thomas R. Purnell,

²⁵Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 708.

²⁶The Progressive Farmer, February 9, 1904.

²⁷Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 501.

United States Judge for the Eastern District of North Carolina, for a receivership and intended to hold out to the Governor the threat of dissolving the road unless the Governor came to his terms for a lease. Aycock, however, "was not to be had" and upset this first attempt at a receivership when he ordered Chief Justice Clark to issue a bench warrant against McBee charging him with fraud in the effort to acquire the railroad by unlawful means.²⁸ "Aycock upset the second receivership attempt by securing a writ from...the United States Supreme Court and by ousting the receiver with a threat of military force."²⁹ Poe supported Aycock's actions on this matter and believed that the attempts by McBee to acquire the road represented a "fantastic trick played before high Heaven."³⁰ Poe also lauded Josephus Daniels' News and Observer which had long opposed McBee's maneuvers.³¹

In conjunction with his editorials in The Progressive Farmer concerning the problems that confronted North Carolina, Poe played an ever increasing role in the literary activities of the state. He became a very active member of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association. Created at first to support the building of more libraries in the state,

²⁸Joseph Gregoire de Roulhac Hamilton, North Carolina Since 1860 (1919), III, 335, hereinafter cited as Hamilton, North Carolina Since 1860.

²⁹Lefler, History of North Carolina, II, 709.

³⁰The Progressive Farmer, April 5, June 7, 1904.

³¹The Progressive Farmer, June 7, 1904.

the Literary and Historical Association marked the beginning of a movement within the state to enhance interest in North Carolina literary activities. With the aid of William J. Peele, Poe compiled the proceedings of the first five years of the organization. Later Poe would perform this task alone.³² Poe helped J. Bryan Grimes and others to establish guidelines for membership in the Literary and Historical Association. He recommended that "farmers, laborer and farm owners, county ministers, teachers and doctors" be included in this membership.³³ Poe was appointed secretary-treasurer of the association from 1904 to 1912. In this capacity he arranged speakers and guests for the association among whom were Thomas Nelson Page, Walter Hines Page, and others.³⁴ Poe addressed the organization in 1908 on the subject "What Can We Do for North Carolina Literature", urging in this speech the "production and dissemination of our literature here in North Carolina and the South."³⁵ In 1909 he was awarded the association's highest honor, the Patterson Memorial Cup, for A Southerner in Europe. In 1912

³²Poe compiled the proceedings of the association from 1905 to 1912 and these were subsequently published.

³³Clarence Poe to J. Bryan Grimes, January 27, 1906, Grimes Papers.

³⁴Clarence Poe to Thomas Nelson Page, December 12, 1907, Thomas Nelson Page Papers, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

³⁵Clarence Poe, "What Can We Do for North Carolina Literature?" Address delivered at the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, Raleigh, December 18, 1908, Poe Papers.

he again received this award for Where Half the World Is Waking Up. Additional honors included his selection to the Executive Committee from 1913 to 1916 and his election as president in 1915. While serving as president Poe delivered the association's annual presidential address. He emphasized to the members of the association that they were responsible for initiating more interest within North Carolina in literary activities.³⁶ His work with the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association gained for him the friendship of some of the leading literary figures of the state. Although not as well known as some of his other activities, Poe's work to promote this association deserved recognition.

The Progressive Farmer also worked to arouse farmer interest in libraries and literary activities. This concern can be partially attributed to Poe's belief that the farmer, if better read, could play a more influential role in securing reform measures for the South.³⁷ Accordingly, Poe worked to solicit the support of farm groups for reforms he felt were needed by the state. Among some of the measures Poe urged farmers to support were the establishment of a reformatory in the state, appropriations to build insane asylums, and a

³⁶Clarence Poe, "The North Carolina of Tomorrow." Presidential Address delivered at the Sixteenth Annual North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, Raleigh, December 7, 1915, Poe Papers.

³⁷The Progressive Farmer, February 27, May 28, 1908.

salary basis for state officials in place of fees.³⁸ Poe also solicited the support of farmers for the passage of a state-wide prohibition law, although he believed that a nation-wide attempt would fail because it would be unenforceable.³⁹ Poe's work in promoting state-wide prohibition reflected a general movement throughout the South to restrict the sale of alcohol:

The temperance movement in the South was a plan of that larger movement which embraced not only race relations, but also the problem of rural life, and of universal education. Religious, moral and economic factors were of course involved, but they were not the significant factors in the movement in the South. Its full explanation must be sought in the isolation of southern rural communities and the resultant 'feeling of insecurity' against lawlessness, which 'had become a contagion among the county women'; in the presence of a rage of 'child-people' who must be 'thought for in government and protected from the perils of liberty'; in the millions of ignorant whites who had not sufficiently learned 'by education and opportunity' 'to reckon their social responsibility and to resist the elementary impulse to lawlessness, when racial antipathies are aroused.'⁴⁰

Prior to 1900 several attempts had been made in North Carolina to secure state-wide prohibition but all had failed. With the adoption of a suffrage amendment and the commencement

³⁸The Progressive Farmer, March 21, 1907, January 29, 1901, June 3, 1902.

³⁹Poe, My First 80 Years, 148.

⁴⁰Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 564.

of educational reforms the temperance movement gained new support. The North Carolina Democratic party seized prohibition as a promising political issue while Poe declared that The Progressive Farmer "was a temperance paper."⁴¹ With the formation in 1902 of the North Carolina Anti-Saloon League and the passage in 1903 of the Watts Law prohibiting the sale of liquor in unincorporated towns, the temperance movement placed most of the state's rural areas in the dry column. Poe's support of this state-wide temperance movement included articles in national magazines and editorials in The Progressive Farmer.⁴² Poe became in 1908 chairman of the state's Anti-Saloon League. In 1908 the Anti-Saloon League pressed for a state-wide prohibition law at a special session of the General Assembly. After discussing the temperance issue both political parties endorsed a prohibition referendum which was to be placed before the voters on May 26, 1908. Poe worked in earnest to secure passage of this referendum and filled the pages of The Progressive Farmer with articles that appealed to logic and emotionalism:

Let prohibition carry your vote and some
day your son at college may make you proud

⁴¹The Progressive Farmer, May 7, 1901; see also Daniel J. Whitener, Prohibition in North Carolina: 1715-1945 (1945).

⁴²The Progressive Farmer, February 3, 1903, February 7, 1905, August 8, 1907, June 23, 1908; see also Poe, "The Re-making of a Rural Commonwealth," 699.

that you were one of those who stood against the drink evil in this crisis.

Let whiskey win with your vote, and some day your own son, reeling home with his first drunk and starting on a long career of dissipation, may make you curse the day of your error and the men who led you wrong.⁴³

Although a strenuous campaign was waged by the anti-prohibitionist forces, the voters of North Carolina approved the referendum by a vote of 113,612 to 69,416.⁴⁴

Paralleling Poe's work with the temperance movement was his support of the various public health crusades in North Carolina and the South. He was especially interested in Charles W. Stiles' campaign to eliminate hookworm.⁴⁵ The state of North Carolina had shown the way in one area of public health when it prohibited in 1907 the sale of adulterated drugs. Later it required the specific labeling and handling of these products to meet state standards.⁴⁶ The hookworm menace, however, gained the most attention both in North Carolina and the South. Attempts had been made by local health organizations to control hookworm, but it remained for Dr. Charles W. Stiles and the Commission on Country Life to bring this problem to public attention. In

⁴³The Progressive Farmer, May 21, 1908; see also Clarence Poe, "The Case For Prohibition in North Carolina," Raleigh, [ca. 1908.] Poe Papers.

⁴⁴Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 568.

⁴⁵The Progressive Farmer, November 19, 1910.

⁴⁶Steelman, "The Progressive Era in North Carolina," 641.

dealing with North Carolina, Stiles charged that the school children of the state were below national health standards because they were infested with hookworms. This charge brought, led to his harassment by some leading North Carolina newspapers including for a time the News and Observer. But Stiles was not to be denied, and in 1910 he started a South-wide campaign which eventually brought this disease under control.

Poe endorsed both the Stiles campaign and the report of the Commission on Country Life. He also defended the large contributions made by John D. Rockefeller to help Stiles' campaign in face of those southern interests who felt that this was another example of "northern intervention."⁴⁷ Poe's support of Stiles also included editorials in The Progressive Farmer.⁴⁸ Poe believed that with proper medical attention and more campaigns such as conducted by Stiles that hookworm and similar diseases could be eliminated forever from the South.⁴⁹

Poe's interest in the Stiles campaign was one aspect of his concern for improving health conditions in North Carolina and the South. Poe had long advocated more county

⁴⁷The Progressive Farmer, March 12, 1910, November 11, 1911.

⁴⁸The Progressive Farmer, November 24, 1913, June 3, 1911.

⁴⁹The Progressive Farmer, June 17, July 22, July 29, 1909.

and state departments of health in the South and he argued that \$50,000 be appropriated by each state for these organizations. He also supported the creation of a national department of health with funds to be supplied by the federal government.⁵⁰ His advocacy of a national department of health was reflected in a number of letters he wrote to United States Senator Furnifold M. Simmons urging his support of President Taft's proposal for such an organization.⁵¹ Poe's interest in better health facilities on the state level led to his work in helping to establish in 1912 the North Carolina Conference for Social Service. This organization dealt with attempts to establish better health facilities and other social services. Some of the problems that this organization studied included child labor, illiteracy, prisons, temperance, orphanages, and other related social problems. In the conference's "Declaration of Purposes," written by Poe, it pledged that work would be undertaken to "insure...physical, mental and moral healthfulness...."⁵²

Poe's role in helping to establish this organization led to his election as president from 1912 to 1915. He was assisted in this capacity by other influential members of the

⁵⁰The Progressive Farmer, January 20, 1912.

⁵¹Clarence Poe to Furnifold M. Simmons, April 6, December 6, 1909, Simmons Papers.

⁵²Poe, My First 80 Years, 149.

association including James Y. Joyner and Dr. W. S. Rankin. The organization published an account of its undertakings, the Social Service Quarterly. Poe contributed the following articles: "What Legislation Did for the Improvement of Country Life" in 1913, and "What Must We Do to Develop A Great and Fruitful Civilization in North Carolina" in 1914.⁵³ Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of the Conference in North Carolina was the attention it brought to the question of public welfare. Following the organization's recommendations the North Carolina General Assembly in 1917 passed a measure which provided for the creation of a county public welfare plan with control by the state.⁵⁴ North Carolina thus became the first state to adopt such a county public welfare plan. Poe's role as organizer, president, author, and promoter of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service was indicative of his general interest in all social reforms in North Carolina and the South.

While Poe's work with social reform organizations was time consuming, he continued his role as spokesman for farm groups on state and national political questions. He commented on the 1908 presidential election that "the responsibilities of office could undoubtedly make Mr. Bryan more conservative

⁵³See the Social Service Quarterly (Raleigh), May 1913, June 1914.

⁵⁴Virginia H. Grier, "North Carolina Conference for Social Service: 1912-1962," (1962), 8.

and with an able cabinet there is little reason for thinking his administration would be 'unsafe'...."⁵⁵ The Progressive Farmer did not formally endorse any candidates in the 1908 national or state elections. One national question which Poe was concerned with at this time involved federal subsidies to shipping interests.⁵⁶ He had long opposed support by the federal government of the shipping interests, and he lauded those United States senators who had worked against subsidies.⁵⁷ In 1908 he wrote to Congressman Edwin Yates Webb urging him to resist further efforts to secure other ship subsidy bills.⁵⁸ Poe also wrote editorials in The Progressive Farmer urging southern senators that it was "peculiarly their duty...to stand against a further extension of the world-wide policy of exploiting agriculture, and the ship subsidy bill is a good place to make the stand."⁵⁹ With the passage of such a ship subsidy bill in 1909, however, Poe urged farmers to insist upon reforms which would eliminate this measure.⁶⁰

⁵⁵The Progressive Farmer, May 14, 1908.

⁵⁶This opposition was first stated in The Progressive Farmer on December 10, 1901 when Poe remarked: "Must the government offer subsidies to every industry that lags behind in the march of progress?"

⁵⁷The Progressive Farmer, March 25, May 6, June 17, 1902, March 14, 1907.

⁵⁸Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, April 20, 1908, Webb Papers.

⁵⁹The Progressive Farmer, April 23, 1908; see also The Progressive Farmer, May 28, 1908.

⁶⁰The Progressive Farmer, September 16, 1909.

His opposition to federal subsidies to shipping companies reflected the long held belief of farmers that their interests were being subjugated to those of big business.

Political events during the years 1912 to 1916 were of great significance for Poe. He was mentioned as a candidate for governor of North Carolina and recommended as Secretary of Agriculture in President Woodrow Wilson's cabinet. This period witnessed much in-fighting in the Democratic party of North Carolina highlighted by the spectacular senatorial primary battle of 1912 between William Walton Kitchin, Furnifold M. Simmons, and Walter Clark. In reference to this senatorial battle Poe had urged Charles B. Aycock to enter the race.⁶¹ It was Aycock's unexpected death that prompted Poe and R. D. W. Connor to compile in tribute The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock.⁶² The death of Aycock in 1912 was a great political blow to Poe's political hopes. Given the close friendship that these two

⁶¹Aycock replied to Poe's suggestion that he run for the Senate with the statement "there are no circumstances under which I would become a candidate for the Senate." Aycock at the same time urged Poe to consider running for public office: "May I venture to express the hope that you, yourself, may be among the number as I believe you will, who shall do a very large public service." These comments were found in a letter from Charles Aycock to Clarence Poe, January 27, 1910, Poe Papers. Aycock's decision to run for the Senate obviously changed by 1912.

⁶²Poe's work consisted chiefly of gathering materials from persons who had known Aycock, while Connor did most of the writing of the book.

men had developed over a number of years, the influence that Aycock could have added to any political race in which Poe entered was eliminated.

Following Aycock's death the road was left open for a direct confrontation between William Walton Kitchin and Furnifold M. Simmons -- a third candidate Walter Clark had only minimal support. This two man race had been in the making since 1908 when Kitchin defeated the Simmons machine candidate, Locke Craig, for the Democratic nomination for governor. Kitchin represented the radical or agrarian wing of the Democratic party in North Carolina which opposed big business, protective tariffs, and government subsidies. Simmons represented the conservative or business wing which had no hostility toward business and favored such tariff duties and subsidies as would contribute to the industrial and commercial development of the South.⁶³ After a heated primary battle in which Poe supported Simmons, Kitchin was defeated for the nomination.⁶⁴ Poe's support of Simmons was somewhat surprising in view of Simmons' position toward big business and the trusts. It appeared that Poe was not willing to break with the regularly established Democratic machine, hopeful that some day it would "engineer" him into political

⁶³Connor, Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, II, 536.

⁶⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 211.

office.

While Kitchin was losing to Simmons in the 1912 senatorial primary, Poe actively supported Woodrow Wilson's candidacy for the presidency. Contrary to his non-partisan role Poe struck out boldly for Wilson and as early as 1902 had spoken of him in glowing terms. "We speak of Woodrow Wilson, the gifted young Southerner who has recently become President of Princeton. The South is justly proud of the fact that...Dr. Wilson will execute worthy and well the duties of the high office in which he succeeds."⁶⁵ Poe later pointed out how Wilson stood against "special interests, special privileges and class legislation" and how he would work for "all interests."⁶⁶ Poe's support for Wilson rested upon the fact that he was a progressive Democrat with southern ties whom the farm editor felt would continue to move the nation forward in a spirited manner. Indeed, Poe believed that a little more "insurgency" was needed in the Democratic party, and that Wilson could provide this spark.⁶⁷ Poe frequently corresponded with Wilson and revealed to him in 1911 that "letters from North Carolina also indicate a rapid crystallization of sentiment in your favor...." Wilson thanked Poe for his kind remarks and commented that he was

⁶⁵The Progressive Farmer, July 29, 1902.

⁶⁶The Progressive Farmer, March 28, 1907.

⁶⁷The Progressive Farmer, July 1, 1911.

"a bit daunted to have been brought so much into the public eye."⁶⁸ Poe's strong support of Wilson through speeches and editorials in The Progressive Farmer revealed his belief that Wilson understood the problems of the times and that he would initiate programs to solve these problems especially those of the farmers. While Poe clearly supported Wilson he was undecided as to which Republican candidate was best qualified for the presidency:

We do not regard Mr. Taft as a great President, but we are more and more convinced that he is an honest one. And yet we are also free to say that we believe with Mr. Roosevelt as President these next four years would bring about much more progressive legislation.... Mr. Roosevelt has greater sympathy and understanding of the common people...we believe it would be better for his party if Mr. Taft were nominated and better for the country if Mr. Roosevelt were elected.⁶⁹

Poe did, however, disagree with Roosevelt's proposal for the recall of judicial decisions, commenting that it would be "a voyage of uncertainties" if this proposal were ever to be initiated.⁷⁰

With Wilson's election to the presidency in 1912 came the first nation-wide political recognition for Poe. While

⁶⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 233-234.

⁶⁹The Progressive Farmer, May 4, 1912.

⁷⁰Clarence Poe to R. D. W. Connor, March 25, 1915, R. D. W. Connor Papers.

Poe lauded Wilson's election and recalled that he had contributed some articles to The Progressive Farmer, other newspapers such as the Washington Times and the Philadelphia North American promoted his name for the post of Secretary of Agriculture.⁷¹ Poe wrote to Josephus Daniels and stated that he was in no sense a candidate for Secretary of Agriculture.⁷² Poe repeated this statement in a letter to the Charlotte Observer in December of 1912:

I should be both untruthful and ungrateful if I did not say that I appreciate what my brethren of the press and others have been generous enough to say of me in this connection: but Mr. Wilson has no office that could tempt me away from the joy of having some share in the great constructive work of building up North Carolina and the South.⁷³

Poe further stated: "I could not afford to leave my company and paper at that stage of their growth."⁷⁴ He wrote to Wilson and proposed that Walter Hines Page, formerly of the Country Life Commission, Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey, or President Henry J. Walters of the Kansas Agricultural College should be considered for the position.⁷⁵ There may have been, however, some indication that Poe protested too loudly in being

⁷¹The Progressive Farmer, November 16, December 28, 1912.

⁷²Poe, My First 80 Years, 211.

⁷³Poe, My First 80 Years, 212.

⁷⁴Poe, My First 80 Years, 235.

⁷⁵Poe, My First 80 Years, 236.

considered for this position. His coyness over a position in Wilson's cabinet may have been prompted by the fact that there was already a prominent North Carolinian mentioned for the position of Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, and two cabinet appointments from the same southern state might have been looked upon with suspicion by northern Democrats. Another possible explanation for Poe's seeming lack of interest in this position was that he was looking forward to 1916 when a new governor of North Carolina would be elected. But Poe's position in regard to the Secretary of Agriculture post restricted his role as a spokesman of farm interests to one of exhorting farm reforms rather than a political position where he could have initiated such reforms.

Poe's later criticism of David F. Houston, Wilson's appointment to the post of Secretary of Agriculture, revealed that perhaps Poe decided too late that he should have allowed himself to be considered for the position. "Wilson...completely failed to recognize his duty to agriculture. It is a startling revelation of how narrow a really broad man may be regarding things which have never interested him, or with which he is not in sympathy because of lack of knowledge. The appointment of a man as Secretary of Agriculture is the most important office, next to the President."⁷⁶ Poe accused

⁷⁶The Progressive Farmer, March 15, 1913.

Wilson of having little interest or knowledge about agricultural affairs and was angered that a man "from the agricultural world" had not been appointed to the position."⁷⁷

Poe's main political recognition within North Carolina came in 1914 when he helped initiate a political mass meeting to discuss progressive legislation. The idea for this mass meeting had originated when Poe, Dr. H. Q. Alexander the head of the Farmers' Union, Josiah W. Bailey and others met in Poe's office to discuss some proposed constitutional amendments for North Carolina. From this meeting came the plans for a mass meeting, and a call was issued throughout the state for all concerned citizens and leaders to attend.⁷⁸ Although the state delegations in Congress were somewhat skeptical of the meeting, Josephus Daniels and others approved and promised to attend.⁷⁹ President Wilson wrote Poe and endorsed the purpose of the meeting.⁸⁰ The mass meeting was held on April 8, 1914 in Raleigh with Atlee Pomerene of Ohio addressing the group.⁸¹ Poe opened the meeting with a speech in which he stated "this meeting will be undominated by prejudice or faction or any narrow ambition...[but] to

⁷⁷The Progressive Farmer, March 15, 1913.

⁷⁸Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, February 27, 1914, Webb Papers.

⁷⁹News and Observer, March 24, 1914.

⁸⁰Charlotte Daily Observer, March 25, 1914.

⁸¹News and Observer, April 8, 1914; see also Greensboro Daily News, April 5, 1914.

advance and promote a program of constructive measures for the State and people and party."⁸² Among some of the topics discussed at this meeting included: a legalized state-wide primary for all state offices, a six month school term instead of the then required four, a better rural credits system for farmers, increased support for public health, a modern penal system, fairer freight and insurance rates, advanced legislation for conservation, prohibition of employment of children in factories or women at night, more advanced temperance legislation, and the establishment of a state highway commission.⁸³ Later in October, 1914 a non-partisan conference made up of prominent leaders of North Carolina indicated their support for the amendments.⁸⁴ All of the proposed amendments, however, were later defeated by the voters.

Because of Poe's prominent role in organizing this meeting it was believed by some persons that he used it to promote his own cause for governor.⁸⁵ He violently denied that this was the case "these efforts look absolutely to the organization of no new political faction in the State, have

⁸² Clarence Poe, "Opening the North Carolina Democratic Mass Meeting." Address delivered at the North Carolina Democratic Mass Meeting, Raleigh, April 8, 1914, Poe Papers.

⁸³ Poe, My First 80 Years, 212.

⁸⁴ Clarence Poe to Josiah W. Bailey, September 24, 1914, Grimes Papers.

⁸⁵ Greensboro Daily News, March 8, 1914.

absolutely no concern with offices or 'booms' for anybody. I am not an aspirant for any office under Heaven."⁸⁶ A tentative plan, however, was later drawn up for a state-wide gubernatorial campaign by Poe with Santford Martin, editor of the Winston-Salem Journal, as a possible choice for lieutenant governor.⁸⁷ "But in the end I decided against throwing my hat in the ring.... To my friends I stated, 'If possible I should like to give a demonstration of how much a private citizen may do to advance the progress of people without asking for or accepting public office.'"⁸⁸ Again Poe did not seek a position whereby he could have influenced directly legislative enactments that would have helped farm groups. He cited the fact that he feared a political defeat would be damaging to the growth and influence of The Progressive Farmer. By not seeking political office, Poe limited himself to a role of exhortation rather than one of political action.

Poe continued in his role as a spokesman for reform measures. He supported the work of the North Carolina Geological and Economic Survey and its attempts to secure the passage of laws to conserve the woodlands of western North

⁸⁶The Progressive Farmer, April 4, 1914.

⁸⁷Poe, My First 80 Years, 213.

⁸⁸Poe, My First 80 Years, 213.

Carolina.⁸⁹ His views concerning the conservation of woodlands had been shaped by his trips to the Orient where he saw mass erosion caused by the lack of forests.⁹⁰ Accordingly, he supported the work of the Appalachian Forest Reserve Commission which under federal control purchased 49,000 acres of North Carolina timberland in 1912. He believed that the federal government could only do so much and that each state had to show more interest in conservation movements.⁹¹ His concern over the lack of interest shown by states in conservation projects was prompted by the rejection by the North Carolina legislature of 1913 of a bill which would have set aside more timberland. He commented upon this defeat in The Progressive Farmer: "The next legislature ought to appropriate \$5000 to \$500,000 to save them [trees]." ⁹² In 1916 western North Carolina suffered a serious flood brought about by a lack of sufficient timberland and grassland to hold back a prolonged period of rain.

Besides supporting conservation projects in North Carolina, Poe also continued to work for social reforms within the state and the nation. He supported the creation

⁸⁹The Progressive Farmer, March 19, 1908.

⁹⁰Clarence Poe, "What the Orient Can Teach Us," The World's Work, XXII (July, 1911), 14605-14612.

⁹¹The Progressive Farmer, January 13, 1912.

⁹²The Progressive Farmer, March 15, 1913.

of a Children's Bureau in the Department of Labor and praised Edwin Y. Webb's support of appropriations for this organization.⁹³ Poe gave most of his support and devoted most of his energies to attempts to establish child-labor laws in North Carolina. With the rapid increase of textile mills in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century North Carolina had one of the highest rates in the nation for the use of child labor. It stood out in the South for its inadequate laws in dealing with this problem. Poe supported all attempts to enact child-labor legislation and played a leading role in the establishment within North Carolina of an organization to deal with this problem. As early as January, 1900 he had condemned the use of child labor and he continued to speak out on this question throughout the early years of the twentieth century: "This is a great moral question and the people of North Carolina cannot afford to take the responsibility for this form of slavery, which threatens the welfare of the state and society, and which is dwarfing the souls, minds and bodies of more people than almost any other evil in existence."⁹⁴ He felt that the state should initiate laws to prevent child labor and

⁹³Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, April 15, 18, 1915, Webb Papers.

⁹⁴The Progressive Farmer, January 2, 1900; see also The Progressive Farmer, March 5, May 28, 1901.

proposed that an age limit of fourteen be enforced upon all workers in factories.⁹⁵ Prior to 1905, however, North Carolina had done little to enact child-labor legislation and did not even have a legislative committee to deal with this question. All proposals presented to the General Assembly prior to 1905 had to be referred to the Committee on Manufacturing.⁹⁶

Beginning in 1906 North Carolina moved against the evils of child labor. Under the leadership of Alexander J. McKelway, Secretary of the National Child Labor Committee, a North Carolina Child Labor Committee was established with Poe serving as vice-chairman. This committee attempted to secure the co-operation of manufacturers in initiating child labor legislation. First attempts to do this, however, failed. Part of this failure must be placed on the North Carolina Child Labor Committee. Its members differed as to what legislative measures were needed to deal with this problem and how much of a role the National Child Labor Committee would play within the state committee.⁹⁷ Despite these difficulties some progress was made in attempts to secure child-labor legislation. The 1907 North Carolina

⁹⁵The Progressive Farmer, August 26, 1902, January 13, February 17, 1903.

⁹⁶Elizabeth H. Davidson, Child Labor Legislation in the Southern Textile States (1939), 150, hereinafter cited as Davidson, Child Labor Legislation.

⁹⁷Davidson, Child Labor Legislation, 157.

legislature passed a law whereby school districts by a majority vote could put into effect compulsory school attendance laws for children eight to fourteen years of age. However, children over twelve "legally employed" were exempt.⁹⁸ Although Poe did not believe that this measure went far enough, he gave it his begrudging support.⁹⁹ Poe did not believe that to prohibit the interstate traffic of goods made by mills employing child labor was the solution to the question. "While no one believes more firmly than we in the heinousness of child-labor, we are not yet ready to commit ourselves to this un-American way of checking the evil."¹⁰⁰

Attempts by the North Carolina Child Labor Commission to secure child labor legislation met with stiff resistance from the manufacturers of the state. These manufacturers thought child labor was essential, that it kept many young children otherwise homeless off the streets and provided adequate if not glamorous working conditions. In many cases, however, the manufacturers knew that working conditions were deplorable. The more progressive of these manufacturers

⁹⁸Davidson, Child Labor Legislation, 158.

⁹⁹The Progressive Farmer, February 21, 1907.

¹⁰⁰The Progressive Farmer, February 7, 1907.

offered legislation to the North Carolina General Assembly to alleviate these deplorable conditions. These proposed laws, however, were usually insufficient and were regarded by the child labor forces as grossly inadequate. New attempts were made by the child labor forces in 1909 to secure passage of meaningful child labor laws. A compromise bill was proposed by the child labor forces that would have provided for factory inspectors, an age limit of sixteen for night work, and a reduction in working hours to sixty per week.¹⁰¹ This bill was opposed by the majority of manufacturers, by Governor Kitchin who felt that child labor was needed until there were enough orphanages to care for the homeless, and by the prominent North Carolinian Josiah W. Bailey.¹⁰² Poe, Charles L. Coon and other members of the North Carolina Child Labor Committee led the fight to secure passage of this bill. Poe sent a telegram to McKelway and tried to persuade him to come to Raleigh and assist in the fight for this bill. McKelway, however, was busy with national work and could not attend. Faced with stiff opposition, the compromise bill was defeated. Again, the North Carolina Child Labor Committee did not present a united front in trying to secure passage of a bill and was partly to blame for failure. "The State Child Labor Committee

¹⁰¹Davidson, Child Labor Legislation, 159.

¹⁰²Davidson, Child Labor Legislation, 160.

included men who were seriously concerned...but their activity was sporadic and rather dependent upon the National Committee for direction. Its secretary, Charles L. Coon... complained that the committee did little...."¹⁰³ Poe placed part of the blame for the defeat of child-labor legislation upon those critics who felt that the committee was anti-manufacturer:

The North Carolina Child Labor Committee has sought from the beginning to labor in a spirit of co-operation with the manufacturers in bringing about the reforms we are advocating.

We are not agitators; we are not unfriendly; we are not immoderate; but the laws for the protection of child life which all the rest of the civilized world have brought about... these laws are bound to come in North Carolina, and we go forth to urge them.¹⁰⁴

Continued efforts were made by Poe to secure child-labor legislation. He urged through editorials in The Progressive Farmer that his readers support only those candidates who would endorse child labor laws. Poe explained to his readers why he believed that child-labor laws were necessary: "(1) For the sake of childhood; (2) For the sake of racial pride; (3) For the sake of womanhood; (4) For the sake of our industrial development; (5) For the sake of

¹⁰³Davidson, Child Labor Legislation, 162.

¹⁰⁴Clarence Poe, "A Statement to the People by the North Carolina Child Labor Committee," Raleigh, January 14, 1913, Poe Papers.

justice."¹⁰⁵ In order to present a more united front against the manufacturing interests, Poe and Coon worked together to try to solve the ever present problem of how much influence the national committee should have in the North Carolina Child Labor Committee. Poe "questioned the wisdom" of having too much influence exerted by the national committee "I am inclined to think that we shall have better success here in North Carolina if we run our shebang entirely without outside interference."¹⁰⁶ Coon, however, pointed out to Poe that if North Carolina ran its own "shebang" that it would have to raise the money to support its efforts. "If the National Committee is to be told to stand aside, then we must simply recognize that we must have money for our own campaign."¹⁰⁷

No appreciable gains were made by the child labor forces of North Carolina in the 1911 legislature. A bill was proposed to establish a fourteen year age limit for work in textile mills, but this was defeated. Poe, discouraged with the lack of success in securing meaningful child-labor legislation, attempted to resign as the chairman of the state

¹⁰⁵The Progressive Farmer, February 18, 1909.

¹⁰⁶ Clarence Poe to Charles L. Coon, April 27, 1911, Charles L. Coon Papers, Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Coon Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Charles L. Coon to Clarence Poe, April 28, 1911, Coon Papers.

committee. "There is no good for the Committee, or credit to me, in leaving things go on as they are, for I am singularly too busy to do the work, and my conscience won't let me pretend to do so any longer."¹⁰⁸ After persuasion from other members of the committee, however, Poe continued to work with the organization. To help bolster the state forces working for child-labor legislation, Wiley H. Swift of the national committee was brought to North Carolina. Swift had corresponded with many of the child-labor leaders of North Carolina and asked for their united support in helping to draft a child-labor law.¹⁰⁹ Supported by Swift and the national committee the North Carolina Child Labor Committee succeeded in 1913 in obtaining a law from the North Carolina legislature which required that children from eight to twelve years of age who worked in mills should have certificates which proved that they had attended four months of school the previous year. These children, however, were exempt from the law if it were necessary for them to work to support themselves or their parents. Thus the bill could easily be circumvented.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Clarence Poe to Charles L. Coon, October 9, 1911, Coon Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Clarence Poe to Josiah W. Bailey, November 15, 1912, Bailey Papers.

¹¹⁰ Davidson, Child Labor Legislation, 167.

The defeat by the North Carolina legislature in 1915 of the Weaver Bill, which would have established a minimum age limit for factory workers and provided for factory inspectors, overshadowed some minimal gains made by the child labor forces. But the final solution to the question of child labor in North Carolina would not be given by the state legislature. Prompted by nation-wide demands the federal government initiated child labor legislation. In 1917 Congress passed the Keating Bill which provided for inspection by the United States Department of Labor of all textile mills. These inspections were to reveal the deplorable working conditions in many factories and led to the enactment of laws to improve these conditions. Although Poe welcomed the gains made by the federal government in regulating child-labor, he did not approve of this national intervention. In writing to Edwin Y. Webb concerning the federal government's role in child labor laws, Poe stated:

I should much rather have seen child labor regulated by State action, and as Chairman of the North Carolina Child Labor Committee I strove for years to get state action. But the few public spirited manufacturers were defeated by the others of wealth and influence....

Moreover, some feared a strict law in North Carolina would put it at a disadvantage with other states. Nation-wide legislation is not open to this. But...to my regret the manufacturers have irretrievably transferred this duty from the States to the Congress. I hope our North Carolina Congressman will

meet this duty to humanity rather
than to wealth.¹¹¹

Although federal legislation was finally needed to reform child labor practices, the continued work of the North Carolina Child Labor Committee, with Poe as chairman, was indicative of the concern within North Carolina to protect children from the harmfulness of child labor. The work done by Poe and this committee reflected the progressive spirit within the country concerning this question.

Poe's work and participation in the North Carolina Child Labor Committee did not deter him from remaining actively concerned with the political affairs of the state. In keeping with the traditions of non-partisanship in state political affairs, he did not endorse anyone in the 1916 gubernatorial race. However, he supported Wilson's bid for re-election to the presidency: "Every campaign is usually between men and dollars. During the last six or eight years La Follette, Theodore Roosevelt, and G. Pinchot have represented Progressive Republicans, while Bryan and Wilson have represented it in the Democratic Party, and whichever party any Progressive Farmer readers may chose, we hope he will start with the progressive element in that party."¹¹²

¹¹¹Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, January 22, 1916, Webb Papers.

¹¹²The Progressive Farmer, October 28, 1916.

With the advent of American participation in World War I, however, Poe's role in political and social activities lessened. Accordingly, he redirected his efforts to arousing North Carolinians to support the war. He believed that this war, and all wars, were unnecessary. Prior to American participation in this conflict, Poe had condemned war as the destroyer of the world's most valuable commodity -- human life. At the same time, however, he believed that the United States should not remain unprepared for such an eventuality as war "military unpreparedness...is a fool's paradise...until other great nations are brought to accept the principle of arbitration."¹¹³ Poe supported Wilson's warning against American travel on armed ships and felt that congressmen who did not support him on this question were, in effect, failing to give Wilson a vote of confidence.¹¹⁴

With America's entry into World War I in 1917 Poe made several suggestions as to how the war should be financed. He proposed that a 2 per-cent pay-as-you-go tax be placed on all incomes in excess of \$2,000 for unmarried persons, \$3,000 for married persons. He also advocated that a graduated tax be placed on all incomes above these amounts, "until all debts

¹¹³Poe, Where Half the World Is Waking Up, 267.

¹¹⁴Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, March 1, 1916, Webb Papers.

for the war are paid."¹¹⁵ Poe also believed that a committee to explain America's entry into the conflict should be organized.¹¹⁶ To support this idea Poe sent circulars to newspaper editors in North Carolina urging them to explain to their readers "why an Allied victory would mean more for the future peace of the World than a German victory."¹¹⁷ Poe explained in The Progressive Farmer why he believed the United States' entry into World War I was justified: .

(1) The conflict is between democracy and aristocracy, and a nation 'conceived in liberty' cannot look uncaring upon the triumph of aristocracy anywhere in the world.

(2) We are fighting for the same maintenance of human rights on the high seas. The sea is the 'public road' of all nations. No country has a right to make it unsafe for people to travel the high seas of water....¹¹⁸

Yet Poe believed that there should not be a general indictment of the German people by Americans. This he felt would be as wrong as the war itself. Rather than a general indictment, he believed that a League of Nations should be created after the war's end to prevent the outbreak of further

¹¹⁵Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, April 27, 1917, Webb Papers; see also The Progressive Farmer, July 21, 1917.

¹¹⁶The Progressive Farmer, July 21, 1917.

¹¹⁷Clarence Poe to Edwin Y. Webb, April 27, 1917, Webb Papers. This circular was entitled "On Woodrow Wilson" and included the remark by Poe that he was sending it throughout the state.

¹¹⁸The Progressive Farmer, April 2, 1917.

conflicts:

we hope the nations now allied against the Prussians...will not rest until they have established a 'League of Nations.' Germany stands for the doctrine that strong nations must crush weak ones. The average German does not believe this...we intend to draw no indictment of the masses of German people. We cannot afford to live in a world dominated... by the doctrine we have indicated.¹¹⁹

Poe's belief that America's entrance into World War I was justified can be traced to his strong support of Wilson's policies along with his own belief that the United States was duty bound to come to the aid of nations that were suppressed.

What then was Poe's role as a political and social reformer in North Carolina? Through The Progressive Farmer he helped shape the opinions of farmers regarding both legislative enactments and the policies of the state and national political parties. Although he rarely advocated the election or defeat of any particular candidate, he urged that "his readers" support proposals which, he believed, would be beneficial to North Carolina and the nation. In most cases Poe advocated that his readers support progressive pieces of legislation. He not only advocated that certain reforms be initiated, but he actively participated in groups and organizations which fought to achieve these changes --

¹¹⁹The Progressive Farmer, June 2, 1917.

the North Carolina Child Labor Committee, the North Carolina Anti-Saloon League, the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, and others. In recognition of his active participation in such groups he was inevitably elected or appointed to serve in some important capacity with these organizations. Only when it came to running for public office did Poe hesitate, fearful perhaps that he could not serve both The Progressive Farmer and an elective office at the same time. But his refusal to seek public office did lend some credibility to his critics who pictured him merely as an exhorter and not as a participant.

Poe possessed a genuine belief and concern in the movement in North Carolina for social and political progress. Although all measures he advocated as beneficial for the state were not enacted into law, he played an important part in the many reform groups which secured for North Carolina much progressive legislation in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Poe always believed that the political and social future of North Carolina could be symbolized by the progressivism of its past:

There are those who say the record of our North Carolina people has been marked by extreme conservatism, by a slowness of movement which will prevent them from acquiring the best in modern government and society. I do not so read their history. They have not been rash, but in all matters affecting human rights and human progress they have been progressive

rather than backward.

I regard as of the highest significance and highest promise her plain man...the great masses of her people have made a record which may indeed give us pride in her past and confidence in her future.¹²⁰

¹²⁰Clarence Poe, "Have Faith in North Carolina," Poe Papers.

Chapter VIII

THE RURAL REFORMER: PROGRESSIVE OR REACTIONARY?

Clarence Poe's formative years were greatly influenced by the political and economic vicissitudes of the southern region. (In the southern states during the late nineteenth century a struggling agrarian economy sought to maintain a place in a nation that was rapidly industrializing, urbanising, and de-emphasizing rural interests.) Throughout the South internal political struggles simultaneously produced demagogues who appealed to emotionalism and reformers who fought to secure economic and social justice for all. Poe's reform measures manifested his vacillation between these conflicting trends.

Primarily, (Poe was a leader and spokesman of the new agricultural South.) His weekly newspaper, The Progressive Farmer, advocated the most modern farming techniques in the nation. To deny that this paper was not responsive to the needs of southern agriculture would be to deny the whole spirit of the Progressive Era. By the time Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, farm demonstration work in the South had made substantial progress, state boards of agriculture had encouraged farm training, and agricultural societies and colleges had become firmly established.¹ The

¹Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 225.

national government had also responded to the movement for better living and working conditions for the farmers. With Wilson's victory came many reforms which would help the farmer in banking, credit, and a lower tariff. Ironically, only when the agrarian ranks were completely disorganized did they secure these reforms.² Poe helped to make this possible. He was in the forefront of those who fought for and secured assistance for the farmer. In this capacity he made his greatest contribution to the South.

As important as agricultural production was to the South, however, it was not in step with the movement toward industrialization in the United States. Poe never understood this trend and therefore his ideas and reforms were in many aspects outdated even before he proposed them. Indicative of this outdated thinking was his belief that all southerners wanted to become farmers. He continually emphasized the negative aspects of city life in the hope that southerners would stay on farms. By failing to understand that the future of the South was inexorably tied to industrial pursuits, Poe's philosophy concerning the New South was revealed as grossly inadequate.

While he defended old fashioned ideas concerning farm life, Poe's attitude toward the Negro was even more indicative of his befuddled thinking. His proposal for segregated farm lands revealed his lack of understanding concerning race

²Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 213.

relations and southern agriculture. Poe's proposals for improving southern agriculture centered around the creation of co-operative enterprises by farmers, but his scheme for segregated farm lands negated the very essence of this plan. Furthermore, Poe did not realize that twentieth century financial demands coupled with the trend toward mechanization would drive the Negro farmer, not the white, to cities in search of employment. Poe's proposals for segregated farm lands marked the most regressive part of his thinking.

The perplexed editor's ideas concerning immigration revealed additional flaws in his thinking. His belief that southeastern European and Japanese immigrants would make second rate citizens was proposterous for a man who considered himself a leading spokesman for the New South. Not only was Poe strongly opinionated in his thinking about racial issues, but he misunderstood southern farm life. Southeastern European immigrants, most of whom came from farm regions, conceivably would have adjusted to southern farm life. Poe, however, contended that only northeastern European immigrants, from cities, could have helped the agricultural South.

Poe's stand on educational reforms involved a commitment to improved educational facilities, but he made his support contingent upon white control of segregated schools. While he believed in federal aid to schools, he also feared that this would lead to intergrated schools. Therefore, he

advocated only limited federal assistance. Although this stand was typical of the beliefs affirmed by other southern leaders, nonetheless, it lessened Poe's influence as a progressive spokesman. Such shallow thinking characterized almost all of Poe's ideas concerning the problems of the South. He always presented his views as the most authoritative then current and popular in the South. His various contradictory stands never seemed to bother him; rather, he felt that opposing views were always wrong and that people would soon realize his wisdom. The editor was a great exhorter but not a great thinker. Never did he pause to reflect upon a question. Instead, he would state his position and then defend it against all logical arguments and proofs. Later in his life Poe was able to examine more critically important questions. But this characteristic was missing during the period under consideration. Again and again Poe ignored facts which disproved many of his ideas.

Poe's role as a spokesman for the southern farmer was unclear and paradoxical. He constantly waivered between strong support of progressive measures while he sought at the same time a neo-Jeffersonian society. Others interpreted his articles in national magazines and journals as representative of the political, social, and agricultural ideology of the New South. His state-wide and local appeals to bigotry, however, coupled with his unclear ideas concerning

agrarian problems showed through his superficial progressivism. When placed alongside other prominent progressive leaders of North Carolina and the South, Poe's contributions, while noteworthy, were of less importance than those of his contemporaries.

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