

**TALKS WITH AN IRISH FARMER.
NO. VI.**

At your committee meetings, circulars from the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society have been produced, or travellers from that society may have called for orders, so you are familiar with the name. But do you know what that Wholesale Society really is or in what way it differs from any other firm with which your society has dealings? It differs from all other firms from which co-operative societies purchase or through which they sell, in this, that it is also a co-operative society. It is owned, controlled and financed by Irish co-operators, and it stands in exactly the same relation to your society as your society does to its individual members. As the individual members regard the creamery as their own, so ought the societies to regard the Irish Wholesale Society as their own, be loyal to it, invest money in it, trade with it, sell through it and back it up in every way possible or expedient. It differs from all other bodies from which you buy in this essential particular, that it was started by societies like your own, not as a concern to make profits out of you, though it is profitable for you to deal with it, but in order to purchase for you your requirements of the best quality at the lowest possible prices. If it tried to sell at high prices its shareholders would be angry, because they want it to sell at low prices. Now, in any other concern in Ireland the shareholders would be delighted to hear that their manager had sold large quantities of goods at high profits. That is the difference between co-operative or democratic trading and private profiteering. Think over it. It is a revolutionary change in Irish practice, but you will find you approve of the idea the longer you think of it, if you have the habit of thinking straight. The Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society then is a federation of societies like your own, which they promoted, in which they have taken shares and whose policy they control, electing men like yourself as directors to work it in the interest of Irish farmers. Was there need for such a federation? Yes, just as much need as there was for your own society. There are all kinds of trade federations, rings and combines of manufacturers of and dealers in agricultural requirements, the objects of which are to keep prices up. These objected to the co-operative movement, which, in so far as it was a buying movement, wanted to buy cheaply, and it was only by starting another federation that these profiteering rings and combines could be countered. The Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society has saved the Irish farmers millions of pounds since it started. It brought down the retail prices of fertilisers by fifty per cent. in its early years, for private retailers could not keep up prices even to farmers who were not members if there was a co-operative agricultural society anywhere within seven or eight miles distance. There are few retailers of artificial fertilisers now in Ireland who make more than the mere cost of distribution out of the sale. That

is due to the co-operative movement and the Irish Agricultural Wholesale. You should as a farmer be thankful for its existence.

This federation of yours, controlled by representatives of farmers' societies, does not want to swindle the societies or sell them inferior seeds and feeding stuffs. You know or ought to know, the bad name vendors of agricultural seed have in Ireland. Two or three years ago the Department of Agriculture announced that over half the seeds it tested were unfit for use by farmers. Your federation was the first body in Ireland to give a guarantee of purity and germinating power along with the seed it sold. It tests its seeds first on its own premises. It sends samples to the famous Zurich testing station for further testing, and lastly it has them tested by the seed testing branch of the Irish Department of Agriculture. So the seeds it procures for its members are treble tested, and if all this makes them now and then a trifle dearer than seed sold by private traders they are in reality much cheaper. Mistrust cheap seed. To put it into your fields is as foolish as it would be for you to eat chopped straw instead of good bread because it cost less money. It may occupy your jaws, but you won't thrive on it. Nor will you get good crops from bad seed. With the best will in the world local societies cannot protect themselves from rings and combines. They are not powerful enough to enter the market or to purchase on a large scale. Only a federation of societies bulk-ing the orders of many thousands of farmers can buy at bed rock prices. The Wholesale benefits farmers in the following ways. It finds markets for agricultural produce of its members, for butter, eggs, poultry, honey, beef, mutton, pork, etc. It exacts a small fixed commission only, and guarantees its members against bad debts when it sells for them. It has representatives in the big towns in Great Britain, agents of yours acting for you in your interests. Consider what this means for you who in the past had to sell to or through people who were acting in their own interests. It is always on the look out for new and useful agricultural machinery and labour-saving devices, and it supplies these at lowest prices. When it began to supply creamery fittings and machinery it brought about a reduction in prices of twenty per cent. It broke up a little arrangement of dairy engineering firms not to compete with or undersell each other. It supplies its federated societies with every kind of farm and garden seeds, feeding stuffs, appliances for bee-keepers, artificial fertilisers, basic slag, spraying materials, and coal at lowest prices possible. It furnishes weekly market reports which are reliable, giving information about the rise and fall of prices, the kind of information a good business man desires, and which if he acts on in purchase or marketing saves him money. Have you studied these reports and warnings in the interest of farmers? When you are told to buy now, do you buy promptly for your members? You were told flax seed, grasses, clovers and wheat were going up. In October last flax seed could have been pur-

chased at 66s. 6d. per bag f.o.b. Rotterdam through your federation. In December last its price was 82s. 6d. Supplies are now sold out, and in flax-growing districts run to 130 or 150 shillings per bag. Grasses and clovers have increased twenty per cent. since last autumn. Wheat has advanced five shillings a barrel. When you were warned, did you buy? Did you read the reports? Good intelligence means money to you, and don't forget it.

Your federation is branching out in every direction suggested by its members as likely to be beneficial for them. It would undertake much more if the societies supported it more, gave it trade and helped to finance it. To do a big trade requires big capital. It is growing. In 1905 its turnover with its members was £54,248. Last year its turnover was £375,379, an increase of over one hundred thousand pounds in one year. So you see that its usefulness is recognised by some Irish co-operative societies. Is your society federated with the Irish Agricultural Wholesale? Do you not feel after this that it is as obligatory on you to be a member of the federation as it is for the farmer in your district to be a member of your creamery? Think of the sense of freedom and power you had when you started your creamery and escaped from the local butter merchants. Try to imagine what it would mean for the thousand or more co-operative societies in Ireland to have a powerful federation of themselves, buying for them, selling for them, banking for them, and where necessary manufacturing for them, controlled by farmers, financed by farmers and worked solely in their interests, and returning to its members the savings or profits effected by this concentration of business. It is the era of organisation. The unorganised go to the wall. Irish agriculture will never be truly prosperous until it is organised in the grand manner like the manufacture of cotton, linen, steel, ship building, and its agents are able to enter the markets powerfully and talk as equals with the big powers in the business world. How can the small farmer do this? How even can an unfederated society do it? They cannot, and if you wish as a committee man to do your best for the farmers for whose interests you are trustee, the class of which you are a representative man, you will get your society to become a member of the Irish Agricultural Wholesale and put every ounce there is in you to help to make it as powerful a protector of your interests as it ought to be. Federation is effected by your society taking shares in the Wholesale equal in number to the members in your own society. The shares are of the nominal value of £1, and only one shilling per share has to be subscribed on application. Five per cent. is paid on the share capital subscribed, so it is a good investment. But it would be better for you if you were able to pay up the whole amount, as many societies do, because they know the money is safe, that it is not only a good investment, but that the more capital their federation has the better business it can do for them and the money it has is being used in their interests as much as if they had it themselves,

and much more is it used to their interests than if it lay in a joint stock bank earning for them a miserable two per cent.

Big business requires big brains and big money. Our movement is training farmers to do big business, selecting the picked men from the societies and accustoming them to think in a big way. You farmers or your delegates will soon have to learn how to think in millions. Don't let that alarm you. You are of the same stock as the people who built up the great shipbuilding and linen industries, and the country can produce as many more men of the same sort as it requires. It was your representatives, mostly men of your class, who with little help from the societies turned a trade of fifty thousand pounds into a trade of three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds in ten years and made it the biggest business of its kind in Ireland, and made it so useful that farmers now realise they could not do without it. So get your society to back it up, to trade with it and invest money in it, where it will be safe, will be returning you twice the interest you would get if you left it on deposit in a joint stock bank, and will all the time be working for you. Why don't you keep agricultural money in the agricultural family? You farmers ought to have more common sense than to let money lie at low rates on deposit in banks when you could make it immensely more productive by using it in your own societies and in building up a strong trading federation. We hear people grumble sometimes because their federation does not do this, that or the other. We ask them what have they done to enable their federation to do these things for them? Have they invested money in it? Do they expect their horses to work for them without being fed? Agriculture could easily finance itself if farmers would learn the first principles of business. They as a class deposit agricultural money in banks at two per cent. and as a class borrow that agricultural money back again at five or six per cent, paying three pounds a hundred pounds for the privilege of using their own money. They must, as we said, try to keep agricultural money in the agricultural family, where it will earn a higher rate of interest for them, be producing more money and strengthening their position all the time. There is no better way of doing this than to invest capital in your own Agricultural Wholesale. It will take all the money you can invest for years to come and will employ it in Ireland on your behalf. Is it employed on your behalf when you lay it out in interest in other concerns? Do more straight thinking on this and your past habits, and you will come to the conclusion that half the things you complain of are the results of your own actions. You will make up your minds to support your trade federation, to hammer it if it goes wrong until it is what it should be, the backbone of your movement. Our next talk will be about the brain of the movement, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. You think you know all about it, but you don't know half what you should, and we will try to see what it has done for you and what it may yet do.

Your friend,

THE EDITOR.