

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AT PERADENIYA*

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THE School of Agriculture, more popularly known as the Farm School, Peradeniya, was opened in January, 1916. The purpose of the school was to teach the principles and practice of agriculture to the sons of landowners and to others who intended to adopt agriculture for their livelihood. Two courses of instruction were instituted, each of one year's duration, the one in English for the certificate of the school, and the other in Sinhalese. In the first year 67 students joined the English class, while six teachers from Government schools received instruction in the vernacular. In 1917 the course for the certificate of the school was extended to two years. 271 students had passed through the certificate course up to March, 1937. Of these, 67 students have entered the public service in the Department of Agriculture as agricultural instructors. Some have returned to develop their own lands, a small number have been employed by owners of estates, while a certain number seem to have made little use of their agricultural training and are employed in commercial firms or in other vocations of life.

The school has undergone considerable changes since the early years. The courses of instruction have been steadily improved. But the most far-reaching changes in the reorganization of the school date from the inception of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1931.

Soon after the first Ministry of Agriculture began to function it was decided that the Experiment Station at Peradeniya should be worked more as the practising farm of the school and less exclusively for purposes of experiment. This station had been the chief experiment station of the Department of Agriculture before the three research institutes for major crops were founded. After the organization of those institutes

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this necessity did not exist except in a modified form. This change of the character of the experiment station was an important step in the further development of the school.

In Sessional Paper III. of 1935 the purpose of the Farm School is stated to be a three-fold one ; firstly, the training of those who would eventually take charge of the management and development of their own lands ; secondly, the training of such as would seek salaried agricultural employment either under Government or under private individuals or companies ; and, thirdly, the training of a sufficient supply of students who would at the end of their course be qualified to impart in other schools the instruction they have themselves received.

I shall now proceed to state in some detail the method of training adopted at the school in order to fulfil this three-fold object.

There are at present three courses of instruction ; the two-year course for the certificate of the school, a special two-year course for the training of agricultural learners, and a one-year course for vernacular teachers who are selected by the Department of Education. Admission to the general or certificate course of the school requires a minimum standard of education which is the Junior School Certificate examination. In the past our work has suffered by admitting men of a lower standard. The agricultural learners' class was formed for the first time in 1937 in order to secure for the service of the department men of a higher standard of general education who could receive a proportionately advanced training on agriculture and the allied sciences. The present strength is 33 students in the two English courses and 12 in the Vernacular course.

Students of both first and second year classes leave their school hostel at 6.30 in the morning and devote their morning hours up to 10 o'clock entirely to practical work on the Experiment Station or School Farm, and on the Royal Botanic Gardens for horticulture. Lectures and laboratory instruction start at 11.45 A.M. and proceed till 4 P.M. with a short interval for tea.

The health of the students is well cared for, and the Union Society students has in its charge the conduct of outdoor and indoor games and literary and other activities.

The courses of instruction in the English classes are fully comprehensive and include the general principles of agriculture, crops, chemistry including soil science, botany, horticulture, climatology, agricultural engineering and surveying, animal husbandry, veterinary science, poultry, plant pathology, entomology, genetics or principles of plant breeding, farm and

estate accounts, economics, and beekeeping. During the second year a full time vacation course is provided in dairying, while practice in carpentry and smithy work is supplied.

The Experiment Station situated at an elevation of 1,600 feet fulfils in an ideal manner the requirements of a School Farm. The main station is 270 acres in extent, while a special rubber division of 62 acres is planted with Ceylon and foreign clones, 23 acres of which have now been in tapping for six months.

The main station supports the chief plantation crops, tea, rubber, coconuts, cacao, coffee, and has large areas under fodder grasses. An area of 35 acres is devoted to annual crops where crop rotation is practised while the school has its own paddy fields. The first year students work their individual plots while all classes take part in all operations on the farm from the tracing of roads, drains, and contour terraces and implemental tillage up to harvesting and the preparation of the products for the market. Farm classes are conducted and a diary of farm operations is kept. Ample practice is supplied throughout the two years in all field operations connected with tea, and in all field and factory operations on rubber, cacao, coffee, and coconuts. Tours to the dry zone areas of the Island and visits to the research institutes are arranged.

In addition to the school staff the research officers of the department at Peradeniya and the Deputy Director (Animal Husbandry) conduct regular teaching in their special subjects. The school staff has been further strengthened recently by the recruitment from India of an expert demonstrator in horticulture and plant propagation and of a cultivation officer experienced in the management of large acreages under annual crops.

This survey, necessarily brief, will indicate that it is the aim of the school to equip its students with a sound knowledge of the theory and practice of agriculture. There is one deficiency which no agricultural school can fully eliminate. The student completing the course of study has yet to gain experience under estate conditions. In European countries students at agricultural schools are enabled to work on private farms during the vacations. We hope to supply this in a very small way by arranging for the students of our final year course to work on suitable estates as 'creepers'. We hope that estate proprietors will respond to our appeal when it comes and enable our students these facilities.

The idea of a school of agriculture on its own School Farm is meanwhile rapidly nearing completion. Plans are now in preparation for two-storeyed buildings to replace the present very inadequate school buildings. The new buildings will be

situated on a prominent site at one end of the Experiment Station and will provide for well equipped laboratories, lecture theatre and class rooms, and for a hostel for 50 students complete with dormitories, study hall, and recreation rooms. The school dairy with European and Indian breeds of cattle, and the poultry farm will soon be transferred to the Experiment Station. A separate ten-acre horticultural section is being opened on the station itself. We shall then be a fully equipped agricultural college standing on its own farm where the students will live and work. We may then look forward to further expansion and development which will depend on the demand from the public for more advanced training.

In addition to the courses of instruction already mentioned we conducted last year during eight months refresher courses for the agricultural instructors of this department. This year we expect to undertake either courses of training for certain groups of men whose daily duties bring them into contact with village agriculture, or to inaugurate short courses in poultry, horticulture and in beekeeping for which we receive requests from time to time.

In conclusion I would like to refer to the future of our students and to the part which they can fulfil in the agricultural development of the country. Frequent reference is made to-day in the press and by the public to the important problem of food production, and to the necessity of attracting more of the educated classes to agricultural careers. I am glad to be able to say that in recent years a large percentage of those who have passed through the school has been from the class of landowners. In admitting students we give special consideration to those who possess land to which they can return at the conclusion of their studies. It is the gentleman farmer who has the best opportunities for contributing to the agricultural progress of the country. They have the land on which they can introduce more scientific and economical methods of cultivation, try out new crops and new systems of farming.

There are those who enter the school in the hope of employment under Government. Our experience in this respect has been the same as that of Indian schools of agriculture in their earlier years, namely, that a large number of men seek a training in agriculture for the express purpose of securing employment in the public service. Agricultural education was not sought for its own sake. The present system of recruiting into the agricultural service will greatly modify this.

Meanwhile we see to-day the excellent initiative taken by several of our secondary schools in introducing agriculture into their scheme of studies and in providing school farms. This will result in making agriculture as a career a greater

reality to the growing generation than it has been hitherto. There will be an increasing number of boys who will seek a training in agriculture for its own sake, and we at Peradeniya hope to provide for that demand. But 'back to the land' should not be a mere slogan ; we should realize its implications. As the Director of Agriculture has pointed out in his Administration Report for 1936, the producer of agricultural goods other than commercial products will remain at a marginal level of subsistence. Young men will not continue to turn to the land merely to discover that they have to eke out an existence at a low level. To make 'back to the land' in its widest sense a reality there should be more paid employment for the men who shall seek an agricultural career. The solution lies to a large extent with those who own broad acres. It is for them to employ trained men in increasing numbers and to perform a patriotic duty which will not be without its reward. For, it will not be denied that trained men can do much more to develop the land, to work with truer economy, and to introduce new ideas than the type of estate conductor who is so often to-day in sole charge of valuable properties. The higher salaries paid should be more than recovered.

At a time when schemes of rural reconstruction are being conceived and when the Ministry of Agriculture is providing practical farm schools and other incentives to rural agriculture, such trained men employed through the country will act as useful units who will take an interest in the work of rural development. Food crops can be grown on the land for the benefit of the labourers. Cattle farming, poultry, breeding of goats and pigs, and dairying especially in proximity to towns, are industries which are yet to be developed. Mixed farming in some degree is a scheme which the landowner has to adopt. We hope that our school will be able to equip young men who seek an agricultural career with a sound practical training, and we look to the public to make use of that material.