

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AMONG THE MASSES.*

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That education has been unmaking agriculturists was the complaint in many civilised countries like America. The tendency of the educated man to live in towns is not at all confined to our country. It has been seldom possible here to get the really educated man to take to agriculture and to lead a contented and happy life in a rural area. As a result of this it is also felt that in the same family the unfortunate amongst brothers who was unsuccessful in his educational career goes back to his lands as a matter of necessity. Thus in many rich families there is a sort of aversion created to farming as it is meant to be the profession of the failures. By this process of selection as a rule the least intellectual of the brothers of a rich family goes to manage or cultivate lands and the man who could not get into schools on account of his poverty also happens to be the farmer of the village. Perhaps the largest proportion of the present-day farmers belongs to the latter class. This is quite an unfortunate state of affairs which retards progress in farming.

It is not within the scope of my short paper of to-day to go into the details of the cause or causes that create this situation. I confine myself to the best way of educating the man behind the plough who is as a rule both illiterate and conservative. He is destined to follow this walk of life often quite against his own will. He has to be taught improved farming by a system of practical coaching in which the results must be made to actually pay him better. This is the work that every agricultural propagandist is doing now. I therefore propose to place the discussion before you of the all-important line of work of the agricultural officers in order to obtain more information on the subject from all practical points of view.

We all know what low percentage of farmers we come across condescend to hear an agricultural demonstrator. In how many instances a demonstrator gets the sympathetic request to go home before the sun gets hot when he would have actually wasted time over his courteous farmer friend, is all facts too well known to the worker in the field. Out of the small number of patient hearers we get a very small percentage to adopt improved methods even half-heartedly. Thus the number of actual farmers to follow improved methods of agriculture is but a few men in every ten thousand. We also know the enormous extent of work we had to do for what we have achieved hitherto. My idea is that we must be able to concentrate our energies on teaching the farmer about our methods

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in a more telling manner. The results obtained at the various Government farms far or near a farmer's home do not appeal to him strongly enough to prompt him to act up to the demonstrator's advice because the farmer generally believes that we are spending enormously on farm crops without any economic justification. The demonstration plots opened by rich farmers also share the same fate as the farm plots in their effects. In this case he attributes the better results to the good luck, also of the rich villager. It is not therefore easy to get an ordinary poor farmer, to adopt new methods in his cultivation till he gets convincing results. I therefore want that the responsibility for the apparent risk, which deters him from adopting improvements should be divided among the members of a society. Several individuals in a village should have pecuniary interest in an undertaking like this so that they may be well impressed with the results. There should also be several plots to prove one and the same item of improvement in a village so that the accidental failures of any may not for ever block the way of improvements in that locality. Such an organisation of farmers can more easily learn to grow crops according to the changing needs of the market and to effect joint sale of the produce of purchase of their needs in a really co-operative sense.

The best organisation for it may, in my opinion, be a rural co-operative producing society. The society to do this work is necessarily different from the present co-operative societies that easily give loans without increasing the capacity of the borrower to repay it and of which I had the privilege of reading a paper in this very hall last year. This society is to teach primarily the work of scientific farming for which alone it may obtain loans for individuals and never for unproductive purposes. It is as you all know such producing societies that improved the profits from all sorts of rural industries in civilised countries especially when they began with the poor farmer. Therefore there is no reason why a similar move should fail to yield the same results in this country where agriculture is the national industry of the people but remains mostly in the hands of poor farmers.

To gain this end four or five members at least of each society so formed must be prepared to try one or two cheap items of improvements repeatedly for three or four years in the same village under the immediate guidance of a demonstrator. The necessary funds for this purpose may be partly subscribed by the members as share capital in addition to what the District Bank may advance them by way of loans. Loans may also be received by the society under agricultural loans act. The plots meant for this must be selected by the demonstrator who may be made entirely responsible for the successful cultivation of these demonstration plots on the most economic lines laid down by a resolution of the society with the demonstrator and sanctioned by the Circle officer. A discussion based on the money interests of the farmer in a society on agricultural points will give the necessary theoretical information to improve the outlook of members. Thus the society in course of time will be capable of dealing with questions like small trades and industries connected with agriculture, education of villagers, sanitation and other forms of useful activities. The chief item of work of a

demonstrator should then be the work relating to these demonstration plots in order to show the farmer in his own fields the value of improvements in his own Rupees, Annas and piec. After a couple of villagers have been so dealt with by a demonstrator from a centre the work can be shifted on to new centres while older centres can deal with higher lessons involving more elaborate and costly items of improvement.

The rate of progress is expected to be indeed faster and more permanent when work is done on these lines. The demonstrator will have a more definitely settled programme to follow. He will come in closer contact with the actual ways of the farmer sooner and find the solution for the many more problems which may be peculiar to each locality. Because this system of working actually shows the money value of each item of improvements per acre the farmer will be taught to look at the economic aspect of his business in every detail. It is the want of this knowledge regarding his work that keeps him at a disadvantage and impoverishes him. If something is not done at once to teach the farmer about the faulty economics of his time-honoured ways of farming this country cannot make any material advance.

The time seems quite opportune to awaken interest in the subject among the rural population as considerable spade work has been done in the villages during the past twenty years. The villager knows now what the department is for and can surely and safely take up such work as mentioned above. —The Madras Bulletin of Co-operation, Vol XVII, No. 4.

SOME PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

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India is perhaps the poorest of all civilised countries of the world. Our average annual income per head is extremely small and it is calculated that nearly 70 per cent. of our adult people always get half as much food as is given to prisoners in jails. The average annual shortage of food-grains in India is estimated to be about 30 crores of maunds which is nearly one and half times the average total production of wheat in India and four times the average annual export of food-grains from this country. If we want that our people should be well-fed or should at least get as much food as is given to prisoners in jails we should try our best to increase the total production of wealth in India in general and the annual production of food-grains by at least 30 crores of maunds in particular. This can best be done by developing agriculture—an industry on which 72 per cent. of the people directly depend for their livelihood. It is impossible to discuss the important subject of agricultural development in all its different aspects in this small article. I shall refer here briefly to the following three problems only :—

(a) Consolidation of agricultural holdings.

(b) Diffusion of the knowledge of improved methods of agriculture amongst the cultivators.