

Education For Agriculture

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In many respects Agricultural Education in New Zealand has fallen short of the high standard hoped to be attained. Much good work has been done but it is noticeable that the community is becoming less rural minded and there is evidence of a lack of stability and permanence in rural life. On the material side we see large numbers of farms and sometimes whole sections of the countryside which are not being maintained at a satisfactory standard, while in most districts it is not hard to find numbers of "broken-spirited" looking holdings.

The reasons are many and varied and no single line of attack upon the problems presented can be expected to correct the trends in evidence. Some of the difficulties are economic or financial in character. Others are related to social problems and some are a result of a lack of technical knowledge and its diligent and intelligent application.

Much attention has been devoted to the study and improvement of soils, fertilisers, live-stock, and plants. The purpose has been to increase production, to improve the position of those engaged in the industry and indirectly, to benefit all other sections of the community. Little attention has been devoted to a study of the men and women who produce this wealth and of the conditions under which they work and live. There has been a notable lack of investigation and research relating to the economic and social conditions of the rural population and to the wider aspects of farm management. The tendency has been to concentrate attention upon things rather than on the people who use and produce those things. Our past

educational practices have also tended to encourage pupils to seek "white collar jobs." There has been a failure to impart to manual work the status and dignity it merits. Rural life in contrast to urban is not fully appreciated and is not receiving the attention it deserves.

That agriculture has experienced, and in some branches is still experiencing difficult times cannot be denied. Nevertheless it is necessary to realise that agriculture is, and is likely to remain, our basic industry and conditions within that industry must, in the long run, set the standard of the conditions enjoyed by the rest of the community.

The position indicates a need for the study of the economic, financial and social conditions involved as well as further investigation of the specifically agricultural problems. It will be a serious matter for the Dominion if a decline in our main industry is allowed to become widespread; farmers and farmers' organisations should be prominent in seeking for critical investigation into the trends at present in evidence. The problems are not party-political but national in character.

One feature causing concern for the future and calling for attention is the relatively poor standard of general education of those being recruited into the farming industry. Although education cannot be looked to as a direct remedy for the many problems confronting us it should be regarded as the only foundation on which to build. A rural community which is enlightened and actuated by high ideals can be expected to cope with its difficulties but in

one where ignorance and prejudice prevail, the problems will increase in number and complexity. The need for increased vocational training in Agriculture is also apparent.

Education for an agricultural career should have a twofold purpose. Firstly, it should aim at the development of those qualities in the individual which will make country life attractive and a permanent source of satisfaction; it should develop an appreciation of the countryside; it should engender in the farmer or the rural worker a love of the land and a pride in his vocation; it should impress upon him the fundamental importance and dignity of the work in which he is engaged. Secondly, it should aim at making him a more competent landsman than he otherwise would be; it should equip him with the technical knowledge to carry on his vocation in the most efficient and profitable manner. Expressed in other terms it may be said that agricultural education should teach him how to live and how to make a living. Education for rural life should therefore be both cultural and vocational in nature. Much energy has been wasted through a failure to distinguish between these two objectives.

In primary schools, with children of immature years, efforts have been made to teach vocational agriculture instead of using the rural environment as the background for a cultural education in which nature study and the lore of the countryside is used to engender an appreciation of the land and of country life. The teachers cannot be blamed. Their training has been of such a nature as to draw them away from rural life and its kindred activities. Recruitment to the Teachers' Training Colleges is mainly from town or city secondary schools, almost entirely from pupils who have followed an academic course, and very largely from pupils who have had no training in the Natural sciences. The training colleges are located in the larger cities and this also tends to develop an urban rather than a rural outlook. Can teachers who have been trained in such a manner be expected to be in sympathy with or have an understanding of rural life and work? Vocational training

in agriculture should not be attempted in the primary school but the development of good nature study teaching and the association of other school subjects with the child's environment, as a first stage of cultural education, would be highly beneficial. Any effective modification of the existing conditions would necessitate the special training of selected teachers for rural schools, for instance, by providing for a special agricultural course to supplement their ordinary training.

Secondary School training in Agriculture is carried out in Country District High Schools and some town and city post-primary schools. In a few schools very good and effective courses are provided but in others the agricultural course is regarded with little favour by teachers and headmasters. Sometimes the brighter pupils are encouraged to transfer to the academic from the agricultural course. The latter is often regarded as a dumping ground for the duller boys. The result is that school agricultural instruction may become discredited and parents are often not sufficiently impressed with its value to leave their boys to take such courses. Again, as indicated above, the selection and training of teachers can be improved. Suitable men who are prepared to make rural teaching their life's work should be selected and specially trained.

Most of the boys entering the agricultural industry are from country primary schools and District High Schools and consequently it is to these rather than to the city schools that we must look for a new outlook on rural life. In one or two instances Agricultural High Schools have been outstandingly successful and the further development of schools of this type may be an effective means of improving the position.

Vocational training in agriculture is carried out most effectively when students are above the school leaving age and the provision of such training is the main function of the Colleges of Agriculture. Students gain most benefit from the courses provided when they are at least eighteen years of age and

have had a year or two at farm work. The numbers taking full-time courses is deplorably low. California with 140,000 primary producers has 2,800 full-course students in its School of Agriculture. New Zealand with 70,000 producers has approximately 140 full-course students. The instruction offered at the present time is efficient and valuable, and for the future well-being of the farming industry it is desirable that ways and means should be found to ensure that more of our future farmers have the advantages of such training.

An increasing number of farmers appreciate the value of detailed knowledge in connexion with their vocation. It is being recognised that two years of preparation for thirty or forty years of practice can be a splendid financial investment. A matter which it is anticipated will receive prompt attention as soon as normal conditions return is the taking of the steps necessary to ensure that a greatly increased number of young farmers should be enabled to take a full vocational course at a College of Agriculture. For example, lads with a year or two of farming experience should take a two-year course at an agricultural college after which they could be "apprenticed" to selected farmers for a further period. If favourable reports were forthcoming from the College and from the selected farmers justification would then exist for a liberal measure of financial backing. It is also planned to develop short courses of instruction on a more extensive scale. For some years Canterbury Agricultural College, Lincoln, has offered a course of a general nature during the winter. The time is too short for a general short-course and it is considered that the interests of young men unable to take a full course would be better served by offering a choice of several short courses each year. Such courses would be more or less specialised and each would relate to one aspect of farming, e.g., grasslands, sheep management, cropping, dairying, animal diseases, etc. By attending at least one such course each year the young farmer would, in a few years, build up a very sound and useful farming knowledge.

Among certain prominent educationists it is now being recognised that a break in the educational progress of young people is desir-

able. It is believed that education should be continuous up to the adolescent period but that then a few years spent in manual work which provides an outlet for the abundant physical energy of that period is desirable. Doctor H. W. Foght, reporting upon the famous folk high schools of Denmark, states:—

"Pupils are not accepted at the above-mentioned schools before the candidate for admission has reached 18 years of age. There is then a period of four years after leaving the elementary school for which an accounting must be made. Danish thinkers are pretty well satisfied that these years of adolescence should be devoted particularly to physical development and practical tasks rather than to classroom routine."

The experience gained at Lincoln shows that students who have had a year or two of farm work after leaving school and before entering the College gain most from the courses and from College life.

Modern farming is a highly technical and skilled occupation. Its successful pursuit calls for ability, diligence, sound judgment, tenacity of purpose and specialised knowledge on the part of both the farmer and the rural worker. The problems of the primary industry are becoming increasingly complex and an ever-higher standard is required of individual farmers and of the industry as a whole. Under these conditions it is apparent that to ensure success, those entering the industry should be well trained and equipped. This is desirable, not only for the benefit of those engaged directly in agriculture, but also for all other sections of the community whose prosperity is dependent upon that of the rural industries. The ability and knowledge of those engaged in farming is therefore a matter of national concern. The existing position in New Zealand cannot be regarded as satisfactory.

In round figures, we have 140,000 males engaged in the agricultural and pastoral industry. There are 70,000 holdings. Each year, of approximately 4,000 lads who leave school to enter the primary industries, 25 per cent leave without a primary school certificate and only 20 per cent have more than one year's secondary education; 15 per cent have had one year at a secondary school. The remaining 40 per cent enter on their life's work

with a primary school certificate but without any secondary school training.

For purposes of comparison, of approximately 6,000 boys who leave school annually to take up other vocations, 17 per cent are without a primary school certificate; 70 per cent have one or more years at a secondary school and 13 per cent leave with a primary school certificate but without any secondary education. It is apparent that those entering farming have fewer educational advantages than those being recruited into other industries and the continuation of these conditions must have serious consequences. Apart from any question of farming efficiency, country people are more or less isolated and therefore, to a large extent, thrown upon their own resources for the development of the wider interests and cultural outlook which distinguish the enlightened and rational man.

It can be contended that real education begins after school days are over and it is freely admitted that the standard attained in school is often unrelated to the future development of an individual. Nevertheless, in general, and in spite of many notable exceptions, the better "schooled" lad has an advantage and is more likely to develop into a successful and estimable type of citizen than is the one who starts with fewer educational advantages.

To the person who has not been trained to think and to develop within himself the qualities and outlook which engender satisfac-

tion, country life is often dull and boring. On the other hand the person with a cultural background can find in rural life endless sources of satisfaction.

To meet the requirements of students entering upon a farming career or seeking to gain qualifications for work associated with agriculture, Canterbury Agricultural College offers three full-time courses of instruction.

The general, or Diploma Course, is of two years' duration and is designed to give a practical and theoretical training in all aspects of farming.

The Bachelor's Degree course trains students for special professional appointments as field officers, research workers, etc. Three years are spent in an Agricultural College after a preparatory course of one year in pure science at one of the city University Colleges. The Master's Degree Course takes an additional year.

A special course leading to the Diploma in Valuation and Farm Management is of one year's duration and may be taken after the completion of one of the other two courses referred to above.

The fees, inclusive of board and lodging, are approximately £55 per annum for the Diploma and Valuation Courses, and approximately £65 per annum for the Degree Course. A calendar setting out full details of the facilities available and of the instruction in the various courses is obtainable on application.

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