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Rural Development.

IN 1933 the Government of Bombay published an interesting brochure on Village Improvement, which contains a draft scheme for the betterment of the villager and the village,—drawn up by Sir Frederick Sykes. Recently the Government of India have sanctioned large grants to be utilised by provincial governments for rural uplift and last month Mr. R. S. Sathianathan's report on indebtedness in rural areas of Madras was published. At October session of the Representative Assembly of Mysore, Sir Mirza M. Ismail reviewed the progress of work in the advancement of the moral and material well-being of villages under the jurisdiction of his administration. Leaders of public opinion exhort the unemployed young graduates to go to the village and earn a living by serving its population. There are several semi-official and private agencies devoting their time and energies in the work of elevating the rural people. Bright days are ahead for the Indian villages. The universal manifestation of tender solicitude for the amelioration of the conditions of rural life is a phenomenon for which history furnishes few parallels. The general desire to serve the interests of the rural population is a recognition of the fact that this backwardness must retard the progress of the body politic and their insanitary surroundings must all at times be a source of danger to the public health of the village and of the urban areas. It is obvious that the indigence and indebtedness of rural population must react on the general revenues of Government and on the prosperity of industries. The isolation of large sections of population from the centres of administrative activities must account for their backwardness, and the forces which have contributed to the progress of other communities have not enriched the village life. The remedial measures suggested by Governments and others who have investigated rural problems offer hopes of speedy improvement in the lot of the village communities.

It seems to us that the problems presented by people who for ages have lived practically in isolation and have carried on rural occupations in unrelieved monotony will have to be investigated from the psycho-physical standpoint before schemes of reform for their uplift can profitably be discussed. We are not thinking of villages which lie within easy reach of administrative centres. The

physical and mental organisation of the people living from antiquity in the remotest recesses of the country may not easily be amenable to the influence of social and economic reform of governments and unemployed graduates, and the problem of these communities may not be identical with those of the more favoured people residing not far from towns. There is no ethnic homogeneity among the rural population and the success of measures devised for their uplift therefore must depend not on the forces exerted on them from outside, but on their sympathetic reaction to such measures. Are the village people thoroughly dissatisfied with their present condition? In what directions do they demand reforms? How far are they capable of supporting schemes of beneficence by their own unaided assistance?

These questions have been answered by Sir Mirza M. Ismail in his illuminating address. "It is barely eight years since the Village Panchayat Regulation was brought into force; yet in these eight years the number of Panchayats has risen from 8,863 to 11,390, the total revenue collected by them has exceeded Rs. 75,00,000 and they have already incurred expenditure exceeding 45 lakhs of rupees. The raising and expenditure of this money has not been an end in itself, but the means of conferring on our rural population a very large measure of village self-government. The Panchayats in Mysore have justified themselves not merely by the works they have undertaken, the roads they have opened, the drinking water and other wells they have sunk, the village parks laid out and the extension of medical and educational facilities, but also by the spirit of public and local pride which they have engendered. The people have come forward in numerous instances to provide weekly communal labour to improve their villages and it has been calculated that the labour so performed would have cost about rupees 10 lakhs if performed by a paid agency." The contribution of Government to the exertions of Panchayats is even more generous and is reflected in the numerous achievements of government departments which have given the villages more tanks for extending cultivation, cheap electric power for pumping installations, industries and lighting. All these schemes form a coherent part of the policy for the promotion of rural prosperity and their fulfilment is only a realisation of the political faith that

"governments are called upon to undertake the control in an increasing measure of the economic life of the peoples entrusted to their care".

Mr. Sathianathan's report on the indebtedness in rural areas of Madras delineates the picture of village population in a totally different colour. The agricultural debt in the province is estimated at rupees two hundred crores, an amount equivalent to 20 per cent. of the landed estates. The report throws light on the extent of the cramping influence exerted by indiscriminate and usurious borrowing, on the development of village activities. In a certain measure it must necessarily curtail the grants for reconstructional operations, since a large proportion of the funds will have to be devoted to relieving indebtedness. The worst effect of this heavy burden is that small holdings have passed into the hands of creditors who are unable to continue the agricultural operations and the larger holdings suffer from absentee landlordism capable and willing to advance credits more in the way of investment than as a means of stimulating agricultural operations. The rural problems in a presidency such as Madras must be too complex and difficult to permit of easy solution. Debt rarely fructifies in the hands of the borrower, least of all in those of the agriculturist. Debt Conciliation Boards, if instituted and worked in the spirit in which the Bill for their formation is conceived, the cultivator may find some relief but there is nothing to prevent him from raising fresh loans. The scheme of controlled debt to which reference is made in the report, the essence of which is to provide loans of money and realise them in kind by periodic and expert supervision of cultivation, may assist in keeping the ryot on his land which is undoubtedly a great step in the general movement of rural uplift. Sir Frederick Sykes points out that debts are generally contracted by habits of extravagance and by adherence to expensive customs which the ryot has no courage to withstand. The tendency to take trivial disputes in suits to law courts involves the village population in appalling waste of money, and litigation is more often a fatal enterprise to the villager. The problem of rural reconstructions in large presidencies has a multi-lateral phase and simultaneous attack on all the fronts is proposed by governments and political leaders and the fruits of victory will be

permanent only if the village population actively join the forces initiated for their improvement.

It seems to us that there are certain other ferments stirring village life which must militate against the success of the efforts of even governments to regenerate rural welfare. The people who live in villages not far from the towns come into almost daily contacts with the attraction offered by urban life. Saints and philosophers find it hard to withstand them; the Indian villager has neither the fortitude of the one nor the discipline of the other. The increasing dazzle for town life overpowers him. The expansion of industries offers him reasonable security of engagement, regulated hours of work and protection of labour unions which supervise his education, health and comforts. He welcomes relief from anxieties inherent in his profession, which control over meteorological conditions alone can remove. The large engineering works initiated by the governments, business offices and banks and expansion of places of public amusements and restaurants are slowly absorbing the rural population. As the towns expand industrially and economically the villages naturally contract. How to arrest this depletion of villages is a question now receiving anxious public consideration.

The farmer may be educated. We may provide him with modern implements, credit and expert advice. Facilities may be created for recreation and subsidiary occupations. Every inducement which may be expected to make him happy and contented to remain in his place and cultivate the land can be offered. He finds that his output is governed by new economic laws from which he suffers as acutely in the years of scarcity as in the years of plenty. Agricultural industry is individualised and it is not a syndicate. Without resources of finance and collective power such as well-organised business can always command, agricultural communities being industrialists are confronted with fluctuation of commodity prices arising from "economic depression," "exchange ratio," "tariff rules" and all other phrases and traps. However, the phenomenon of suffering in the midst of plenty is peculiar to modern economic civilisation. The remedy seems to lie in agriculture striking up a new friendship with chemistry for profitable utilisation and disposal of surplus produce. The country

which knows no waste is bound to give a new lead to civilisation. The key to rural prosperity is not external padding but research on waste. Science has created poverty amid plenty and science alone can save. It is hard to make the public realise that, but for the vested interests which have grown so immensely round our social and economic problems, science could solve practically every difficulty which confronts governments and private organisations in promoting prosperity and in improving social standard.

The process of recruiting the gifted members of the rural population and other industrial communities to public service may satisfy the principle and policy of communal representation, but it must necessarily impoverish the economic power of even the favoured families. Sir Frederick Sykes pointed out that "we must discard the idea that village betterment depends entirely on forces from without—on action independent of the will of the villager." Who is to supply this will to progress without which all schemes for the spread of material welfare and greater contentment among the agricultural population must be futile, particularly when its educated and forward members are alienated from their traditional occupations and new castes are formed having neither opportunity nor inclination for the scientific study of the development of rural occupations? When those who can revitalise the resources and energies of village life are steadily drafted for other services, the helplessness and crudity of others left behind tend to be perpetuated and the moment we withdraw external assistance, the confusion must worsen the situation. The present position in the villages is a result of the emigration of the more capable individuals of the rural population to town, attracted by inducements for bettering their prospects, held out by government service, industries and business organisations. Education has produced in all communities a thirst for soft appointments in Government Departments, but has not encouraged the spirit of service to the community and pride in family occupations.

Modernisation of Indian villages is inevitable and in order to sustain the improvements and carry it further, it is necessary that the educated young men who have been hitherto looking forward for Government service, should acquire special qualifications for rural reconstruction. An untrained

young man may turn his back on the work he has undertaken on encountering difficulties and disappointments. In several respects the problems of village improvement are technical and their satisfactory solution depends on the aptitude and training which the young men possess. It seems to us that the work of elevating the rural population will be successful if governments could organise special courses of instruction in moral sciences in the universities for the benefit of the people whose prosperity and contentment are the safest insurance of peace and progress of the country, and for the relief of unemployment among young men whose condition engages the anxious consideration of the public and Governments.

Agricultural Research in India.

THE annual report of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research for the year 1933-34 which has just been published, is a document of absorbing interest, not only because of the large number of special schemes, both scientific and economic, sanctioned by the Council and in progress, but also because of the many more important schemes which are planned or foreshadowed. The large increase in the output of scientific research in Agriculture is an outstanding feature of the progress of scientific research in the country and the Research Council can already claim credit for much of this activity; indications are, as a matter of fact, that it will soon be the greatest single factor tending to the progress of agricultural research, thanks to the liberal grants of money voted by the Central Government for this purpose. The report refers to a temporary cessation of the annual grant owing to financial stringency which has prevented the Council from going forward at the initial pace and which has necessitated the holding up of many a sanctioned scheme. It almost looks as if it was a case of "first come, first served" and that many new schemes had no chance of being considered. A special grant of Rs. 5 lakhs towards the end of the year somewhat improved the situation, though even with this further grant, schemes already approved and costing about Rs. 11 lakhs have had to be kept in abeyance. The list of the schemes already in progress and the amount set apart for each is interesting reading, if at least to show what a vast field remains untouched. Thus out of

the 41 schemes in progress, 18 relate to the sugar industry and absorb Rs. 25 lakhs out of a total of about Rs. 45 lakhs. Schemes relating to rice research absorb about Rs. 11 lakhs, and those relating to locust research cost about Rs. 4 lakhs, so that these three subjects alone take up about 90% of the total grant. One need not grudge to the sugar industry which has within the last five years undergone phenomenal development and added largely to the material prosperity of the country as a whole and of the agriculturist in particular, this large measure of help; nor to subjects like rice research and locust research, the substantial proportion they receive by reason of their great importance, but when one compares the bare 10% of the grants which remains for meeting the needs of the large variety of crops and of much-needed development in both crop and animal husbandry, the anomaly of the situation becomes rather striking, and the necessity for a substantial increase in the grants available assumes additional urgency. It is true that much water has flown under the bridge since the period covered by the report and that money has been voted for a number of new schemes, the most notable among which is the one relating to the important subject of the marketing of agricultural produce and the appointment of a chief marketing officer. Furthermore, the needs of one major crop *viz.*, cotton, are being met largely by the mill industry itself through the cotton cess fund, administered by the Indian Central Cotton Committee; a similar cess assists the lac industry; the sugar industry is also in a manner helping itself through the excise duty now being levied; the report, moreover, refers to a proposal for levying a cess on the export of oil-seeds for affording funds for research on the development of the oil-crushing and allied industries in the country. If this latter proposal should materialise, it will mean that one large group of agricultural produce will be meeting its requirements for funds from its own resources. It should, therefore, be possible for the Government of India to set apart substantial sums for research on other important branches of agriculture. As a matter of fact, some of the schemes already sanctioned, such as the marketing inquiry, will inevitably call for a much larger expenditure before long, as each survey discloses lines for suitable practical action.

The Report refers to the formation of