

EXTRACTS.

Lord Irwin and the Royal Agricultural Commission.

[His Excellency Lord Irwin made the following reference to the Royal commission on Agriculture in India in his reply on April 3rd to the address presented by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce on his assumption of the office of Viceroy].

"Gentlemen—Lady Irwin and I thank you warmly for the welcome you have extended to us in the name of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce. I am grateful for your reference to the family connection which I may claim to have with India through my grandfather, and to my own public work in England. I trust that my past association with several departments of the Government at Home and with the different parts of the Empire as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, may assist me in the duties which I am about to undertake in India.

"No Royal Road to improvement." "You have, gentlemen, in your address, touched upon one matter, in which I, though new to India, take the deepest interest. This is the appointment of a Royal Commission on Agriculture, of which I note, with satisfaction, your approval. By instinct and upbringing, I am a countryman, and, as a former Minister of Agriculture in England, I have been brought into close contact with its administrative problems. I am therefore able to appreciate, at their full worth, the wisdom and statesmanship of Lord Reading at whose instance this commission was set up; for, in a country where agriculture is the principal industry, there can be no higher object than to increase the prosperity of the cultivators who form the overwhelming majority of the population. Experience, however, elsewhere, has taught me that there is no royal road or short cut to agricultural improvement. Nature moves at her own pace, and to deal even with a single crop demands years of patient labour; and the necessary processes of research, experiment, demonstration and seed distribution, cannot be hurried. But agricultural progress is not only a question of plant or stock improvement. It depends upon the solution of a host of allied problems of which education and co-operative credit are only two of the most important.

Past Achievements. "In all this vast field, nothing has impressed me more than the results already achieved by your agricultural workers. I have only recently become acquainted with their work: and I find that since the agricultural departments, in the modern sense, were created 20 years ago by Lord Curzon, important results have

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been achieved in the case of certain groups such as wheat, sugarcane, and cotton to which you especially refer, and in jute-results which have led to a wide increase in the country's wealth. But where much has been done, much yet remains to do and it will, I presume, be the duty of the Commission to review the existing conditions and to examine how best the discoveries of modern science and modern administrative methods can be harnessed to agricultural needs. They will no doubt consider, among other matters, the most effective organisation of research work, the best means of ensuring a supply of trained workers in the laboratory and the field, and of bringing home to cultivators fully proved results, the maintenance of the purity of the selected seed and its distribution, as well as the vital question of the provision of adequate funds.

Work before the Royal Commission. "While advising measures to secure the greatest co-ordination of effort between the Governments in India, it will be their (the Agricultural Commission's) duty to keep steadily in view the preservation of the newly gained independence of the provinces in the branch of public administration. Their task therefore is difficult, but they will be supported by the good-will of all who recognise that if the commission can point the way to a wider application of the modern methods to agriculture, the benefits will not be confined to those who till the soil but must lead to a general increase of national prosperity. Their recommendations will be made during my time in India and I shall count myself fortunate if I can assist in the progressive amelioration of the conditions of the rural population.

A Parliament of Agriculture

Its importance to India.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture in India will find much of interest in the proceedings of the General Assembly of the International Institute of Agriculture recently held in Rome and will, no doubt, examine, the relation of India to that body. The Institute was founded in '05 on the initiative of David Lubin, an American citizen and of the King of Italy. A Convention for its formation was signed by 40 governments, and 71 countries, representing 95 per cent. of the world's population, are now adherent. The Institute is housed in a large office situated in the most beautiful garden in Rome. It is governed by a committee of permanent representatives of all countries which wish to make such appointments but India having made no separate nomination, the British delegate has hitherto acted on her behalf. A general assembly is held at intervals of two years, in which the work of the four departments of the institute is reviewed, and the

policy which is to guide the committee is laid down. These departments deal with (1) financial questions; (2) agricultural statistics; (3) agricultural science; (4) co-operation and other social and economic matters concerning the rural classes; and each of these branches issues, in English and other languages, a periodical review in addition to occasional monographs on subjects of importance. It was also intended to formulate and submit from time to time to the governments of the affiliated countries definite proposals tending to agricultural progress but no steps in this direction have hitherto been taken.

A World Census. It has much to gain from the activities of the Institute, though its publications are suited only to the study of educated men, the material thus collected enables them to pass on to the less educated cultivator such information as is appropriate to his business. The principal object of the founders was to defeat speculation and prevent corners in agricultural produce by publishing the figures of available stocks and the forecast of standing crops; this duty is still performed and Indian growers and merchants who examine the figures and notes published in this country can form an opinion as to the probable tendency of world prices. The statistical department is projecting an Agricultural World Census in 1930-1931, for which a list of questions will in most cases be given from records already collected by Government and it will not ordinarily be necessary to subject individuals to detailed inquiries. The principal support for the scheme is found in the United States of America, and the Rockefeller foundation in that country is defraying a large share of the expense caused to the institute by the preliminary work of the census. The hope of exact returns from certain countries is likely to be disappointed, yet a collection of data as to agricultural wealth and production throughout the world will be valuable both to Indian producers and to political students.

Council of Experts. The aim of the Institute is to centre in itself or to co-ordinate the activities of all international bodies and conferences dealing with agricultural matters. The recent Assembly consequently approved the creation of an International Scientific Council of experts, which will be convoked, or consulted by correspondence, as occasion arises. The appointments, provisionally made to this Council have yet to be submitted to the approval of the various Governments, but the Assembly undertook that India and other non-European countries should receive due representation. A similar though less technical committee has been set up, consisting of the nominees of national agricultural associations, in order to keep the Institute in touch with non-official agriculturists throughout the world.

India unfortunately has no such association at present extending over all provinces and it will be interesting to observe whether the Royal Commission offers any suggestion for filling the void as the Indian Board of Agriculture is primarily an official institution, and is fully occupied with its existing duties as such.

It can hardly be doubted that if the Institute at Rome had not been in existence before the War, an Agricultural Office corresponding to the International Labour Office, would have been created at Geneva by the League of Nations. The Treaty of Versailles, however specified the Institute as an organisation which the League did not wish to absorb, and close collaboration is now maintained between the Labour Office and the older Roman body.

Technical and scientific questions were also debated in the General Assembly. A demand was made for the institution in every country of a department of Agricultural Meteorology, which will examine the influence of weather conditions (other than the monsoon) on crops and outturn; also for the carrying out of comparative experiments in the value of these proposals was urged the expense of the staff and apparatus required, while the second involves a comparison of results which, being attained under the dissimilar conditions of remote countries, have little validity outside a limited area. International Conventions for the control of locust hordes and for the suppression of plant diseases were further drafted; but again, the action suggested would lead to expenditure which the financial position of India would, perhaps, not justify.

India's Position :—On behalf of the economic section of the Institute a project was approved for an inquiry into the trade in agricultural products, and another for an inquiry into the economic conditions of the agriculturist. The former scheme has not yet been framed in a clear form, while India has not the machinery for the latter, unless or until the recommendations made by the Economic Inquiry Committee in 1925 are accepted.

The Indian point of view, and the claim for closer attention to the agriculture of tropical and sub-tropical lands, was repeatedly urged by the representatives of India in the General Assembly. It has now been resolved to form a separate "Tropical Department" of the Institute for the study of this branch of knowledge, and the Assembly assigned to it such funds as its budget allows. There is reason to hope that better justice will hereafter be done to non-European interests, but no great progress can be made while the funds at the disposal of the organisation remain inadequate.

The crux of the situation lies in finance. The Convention under which the Institute was founded established five classes of subscribers, the number of votes which each country casts being dependent on the amount of its subscription. India, which pays eight times the minimum amount, has four votes in the second class; the minimum being fixed at 2,500 gold francs, her maximum is 20,300 gold francs or about Rs. 10,800. On this basis the total income of the Institute in 1927 and 1928 will not exceed Rs. 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ lakhs at present rates of exchange, as compared with Rs. 7 lakhs before the war the difference being due to the fall in the value of various European currencies. Meanwhile, the cost of living in Italy has risen sevenfold, and the means of the Institute are, therefore, entirely unequal to its requirements. In particular the staff of translators and technical experts, which under the Convention is to be international, i.e., recruited from all the affiliated nations, is inevitably becoming Italian, since no resident of another country can afford to live in Rome on the pay now offered. The General Secretary of this great organisation, for instance, should be a man of wide knowledge, standing in the front rank of civil administrators. But his salary is no more than Rs. 550 per mensem! Every credit is due to the present Secretary and his subordinates for their loyal service in return for a payment which may be described as ludicrous, but it is not possible to rely on securing a succession of such individuals, nor is it just or prudent to underpay competent employees. The income of the Institute must be increased, and the Assembly having recognised this imperative need, the Italian Government is addressing the other adherent powers with a view to amending the Convention and raising to 4,000 gold francs the minimum unit of subscription. The possible income of the Institute will thus be raised to Rs. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs, and the maximum subscription which may be demanded from India will be about Rs. 17,000 as compared with Rs. 10,800. If the proposed amendment is accepted by the Government's signatory of the convention, the funds of this great international organisation will still be markedly lower than its importance justifies and its opportunities demand, but it will at least be in a somewhat stronger position for serving the civilised world in a more efficient manner than at present, closer attention can be given by the new Tropical Department to Indian and tropical agriculture both by means of research and in its publications, and it may even undertake the task, specified in its constitution, of initiating proposals for the improvement of the position of agriculturists and become a true World Parliament of Agriculture.

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