

THE MADRAS AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS' UNION AND ITS JOURNAL

A RETROSPECT AND AN APPEAL

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I deem it a privilege to be asked to make this appeal to our enlightened readers, especially to our Old Boys and the officers of the Department. I have been connected with the Madras Agricultural Students' Union from its inception and with its Journal as its first editor. I have been watching the growth of the Journal as an organ of the Union from year to year until now. It is a child for whom I have the most tender affection, and I would be most proud and happy if the Journal should be even more successful than it has been so far, in its get-up and appearance, its contributions and general news, its circulation and finance.

The Saidapet College and the Saidapet Farm—the scenes of the labours of the earlier pioneers for over 30 years in the field of agriculture and agricultural education, Robertson, Benson, Subba Rao and Krishna Prabhu—to name only a few—were ordered to be closed in 1907, and the new college was opened at Coimbatore in 1908, with a broader outlook, greater facilities, better equipment and a more suitable variety of soils for farm operations. The old Saidapet men continued to man the new college and the newly opened farms. With a view to keep the old and the new in close touch, for their own good and for the cause of agricultural progress in general, and also with the object of keeping the older *Alma Mater* in affectionate memory, an Association was formed in 1909, with the name of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union, membership to which was open to the old students of Saidapet, the present and old students of Coimbatore and the officers of the Agricultural Department. There was some tussle in earlier years whether officers who were not old students should hold offices, but, in view of the substantial help received from such officers, the restriction was gradually removed, so that all those connected with the Agricultural Department were later on declared eligible to hold, and have actually held, all the offices of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union. This is as it should be.

We also had a provision that persons other than old students, interested in agriculture, like Zamindars and distinguished scientists may be invited to be Honorary Members. They were not called on to pay any subscriptions, but most of them gave donations to the Permanent Funds of the Union. A later rule provided for the admission of Patrons who contributed not less than Rs. 100 to the Union Funds. The generality of members paid, however, a sum of Rs. 5 or Rs. 10 as life subscription. The idea of the Permanent Fund was that it should not be drawn on for the annual expenses of the College Day or for meeting deficits in the running of the Journal. There were special contributions for the Building Fund, and it was in contemplation that the Permanent Fund, which was expected to expand with the admission of new students in the college and the enlistment

of additional members year after year, should be utilized for advancing loans to deserving old students to prosecute their studies abroad

The Madras Agricultural Students' Union took over from the Students' Club the duty of celebrating the College Day from 1910 and organized the Agricultural Conference from 1911. These conferences, though organized by a Students' Union, came to be recognized almost as Provincial Agricultural Conferences, both by the Heads of Departments and by the general public, including the Press. This recognition was due to two main causes:—first, they were presided over by the most distinguished persons of the time, Executive Council Members, Ministers, Zamindars, Scientific Experts, Heads of Departments, up to His Excellency the Governor of Madras; secondly, the papers contributed to the Conference and the lively discussions which followed the reading of the papers were of a high standard, based as these were on the results of patient researches, careful observations and actual experience.

To keep up communication between the Agricultural College and Research Institute on one side and the landlords and executive agricultural staff in the districts on the other, it was felt from the very beginning that a Journal was absolutely necessary as an organ of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union. The *Year Book* started in 1910 blossomed into a quarterly publication next year, which developed into a monthly in 1914 all at the ridiculously low subscription of Rupee One per annum.

The original understanding was:—(1) that every one eligible to join the Union should join it; (2) that every one, including the Editor, should be a subscriber to the Journal; (3) that the staff at Coimbatore should send contributions on the educational and research work in progress and also on all matters pertaining to the Estate, including the Officers' Club. (4) that the District Agricultural Staff should send them and there, copious notes based on the results of experiments conducted at the Agricultural Stations and also on the agricultural enquiries made by them during their constant tours and (5) that the present students should contribute notes on the activities of the Students' Club, athletics and games, including details of matches and tournaments—cricket, hockey, football and tennis,—students' excursions and observations made by themselves on the Central Farm and elsewhere.

While the original idea of the founders was that the Journal as an organ of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union should essentially be a 'College News', they laid stress at the same time on the necessity for actual experiences and personal observations being recorded in the Journal, in preference to general platitudes and to information almost gathered from lecture notes.

As time advanced, the scope of the Journal enlarged with the result that it is now not only College News but an agricultural Journal catering to the larger public interested in agricultural development. The higher cost of paper and printing prevailing in recent years necessitated the revision of subscription, and I believe that no one will complain that the present annual subscription of Rs. 4 is too high. May I mention that, with the present subscription and with the small number of subscribers, some of whom are in arrears, it is becoming more and more difficult to run the Journal as a self-supporting concern.

Time was when some heads of offices did not care to help the Union or Journal directly and probably even resented their subordinates writing

to the Journal. The present Director of Agriculture takes such a keen interest in the Journal that, as I understand, the question was seriously considered whether the Department might not take over the management of the Journal but the Working Committee seems to have decided—and, I may say, decided correctly—that the Journal should not be made quite official. So long as the Madras Agricultural Students' Union is in existence, it is essential that it should have an organ of its own. The Director appears to have promised to help the Journal so far as contributions are concerned, by asking Heads of offices and their subordinates, both scientific and executive, to send articles to the Journal in lieu of articles to the Year Book of the Madras Agricultural Department. The symposiums on particular crops to which contributions are made by the Agriculturist, the Chemist, the Plant Breeder, the Mycologist and the Entomologist, are a particular feature of recent Agricultural Conferences, and we are indebted to the Director for these symposiums. We are also glad to note that the several scientific experts and agricultural officers realize, more than ever, that a *real*, and not nominal, co-operation of all the staff is essential for agricultural progress.

It has to be borne in mind that the Editor, the Sub-Editor, the Manager of the Journal and all the members of the Managing Committee at Coimbatore are full-time Government officers and that they have to devote time, outside their office hours, to do the work connected with the Journal. It follows, therefore, that greater improvement in the Journal, both in get up and matter, will be effected, to the extent that other members of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union help the Editorial staff at Coimbatore. Fortunately, the long delays in the issue of the Journal are things of the past and we have to congratulate the staff on the punctuality of the Journal.

I claim your indulgence for making this appeal to you, as an old teacher of most of the Old Boys, as a late colleague of all the officers of the Department, as a friend of several landlords all over the Presidency and, as I said above, as one of the Founders of the Madras Agricultural Students' Union and its Editor for a time; I expect you will construe this appeal in the only spirit in which it is offered, namely, to increase the usefulness of the Union and to assure the financial success of its Journal.

Search year hearts and say whether you have done all you can to promote an *esprit de corps* amongst its members—the spirit of service and comradeship. That is what the Madras Agricultural Students' Union stands for.

Have you cherished, and are you cherishing, the grateful affection for your *Alma Mater*, for all the good she has done you and for all the success which you have had in life, as a result of your education at the College?

•Have you joined the Union as a member and have you persuaded all your friends to join, who are eligible to become members but who have kept themselves aloof so far?

Are you subscribing for the Journal? If not, why? The mere fact that you are able to read the Journal in the College library or your office is not an argument. Realize that, as an Old Boy or as an officer of the Department, you have to subscribe for a copy yourself, irrespective of how many copies have been subscribed for by your office or by other members, whose copies may be available for you to read.

Are you getting new subscribers to the Journal? Are you bringing the Journal to the notice of the landholders and other possible readers whom you meet in your constant tours? If you have not done so until now, will you please do so hereafter?

Are you contributing to the Journal? Do not say that you have no particular matter to send. You have had a good education in agriculture and the allied sciences. You are having plenty of facilities, whether you are in the scientific or agricultural line, to learn and to observe. If the officers of the Agricultural Department of all ranks are unable to send contributions to an agricultural Journal, who else can do it? No agricultural officer can plead inability or incompetence. I contend that you are all qualified, very well qualified and more qualified than any other, to contribute articles on actual experiences and actual results. What is wanted is to cast off inertia and set to work. Long, erudite articles take much time and are not even so much in demand as short, pithy notes. Do not wait for an accumulation of matter, but send on to the Editor every note, however short it may be, then and there.

I know that the talented staff on the Managing Committee and on the Editorial Board at Coimbatore can look after their work without any intermediary and that they are seeing to it that the Journal is improving in quality and is issued more regularly than ever before. I felt it, however, my duty, as one so long and so closely connected with the Union and with the Journal, to ask like Oliver Twist for more.

FARMING CALENDAR FOR THE COIMBATORE DISTRICT

January

1. This month marks the beginning of the dry weather period. Rainfall is usually below 1 inch. The days are for the most part bright and clear, and the mornings are cold and dewy.

2. Grain cholams late sown are harvested and prepared for the market along with the harvest of this crop in the previous month.

Red gram and horse gram are gathered. Black gram and green gram in the red soils near the hills are harvested and made ready for the market.

Dry cottons receive the last hoeing with mammutty. Bengal gram highly benefitted by the dewy weather of this month develops well and approaches maturity.

3. Irrigated cotton (Cambodia cotton) is in full flower and bolls, and stray pickings commence in the latter part of the month. This and tobacco receive irrigation.

Early tobacco is harvested and cured. Late tobacco-suckers and shoots are regularly removed from this crop.

Chillies-fruits are gathered and cured. Sugarcane is harvested in parts, and preparation of the land intended for planting fresh cane is hastened.