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CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
Editorial	89	Abstracts	112
ORIGINAL ARTICLES :		Gleanings	114
1. Broadcasting Versus		Agricultural Jottings	115
Transplanting of Rice	93	Crop & Trade Reports	116
2. Crop-Cutting Experiments	97	Imperial Council of Agricultural	
3. On Some Parasites Found in		Research, Annual Report for	
Association with the Stem		1934-35—A Review	119
Weevil Pest of Cotton in South		The Imperial Council of Agricultural	
India and Their Role in Its		Research—Advisory Board	
Biological Control	102	Meeting	122
4. Omum or Bishop's Weed	107	College News and Notes	122
SELECTED ARTICLE:		Mr. F. H. Butcher	124
Cramming Without A Crammer	109	Weather Review	125
Research Notes	111	Departmental Notifications	126
		Additions to the Library	L-3

Editorial.

Consolidation of Holdings. The economic disadvantages of excessive fragmentation of holdings are well recognised and need no reiteration. Such fragmentation is due both to the laws of inheritance customary among Hindus and Mohamadans and to the method by which such laws are carried into effect with regard to division of property amongst the heirs; in fact, where fields vary in fertility and in the facilities they command with regard to irrigation and drainage due to the situation, the partition will not be equitable unless each field is divided among the heirs. Where a large proportion of the agricultural lands are cultivated by tenant cultivators who have no right to the property as in Madras, such fragmentation of holdings is associated with the worse evil—fragmentation of cultivation as well. Whether prevention of fragmentation of holdings will also prevent fragmentation of cultivation is a point that can be answered only when actual data are collected, on the acreage a cultivator usually takes up, which will of course vary with the tracts. We find from the report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture that such data are not available for any province except the Punjab.

While the evil of fragmentation is recognised all over the country, only in a few of the provinces like the Punjab, the Central Province and Bombay, have any attempts been made to overcome it. In the Punjab, sub-division has been checked to some extent by imposing

restrictions on alienation and in the case of certain grants, by the limitation of succession to a single heir. A purely permissive measure has been proposed in Bombay according to which an "economic holding" after registration as such, is to become impartible and not liable for further sub-division. There are certain inherent objections to the Bombay proposal. In the first place it will not be an easy proposition to determine the size of the economic holding. It will have to vary according to the tracts and the systems of cultivation adopted. For example, what is termed an economic holding in Tanjore will be obviously different from a similar holding for the Ceded districts. Secondly, the determination of the economic holding obviously defies the existing social systems. Thirdly, the economic holding principle is likely to be more availed of by the well-to-do classes and it might even affect adversely the poorer classes. The Royal Commission examining all the evidences submitted to it, came to the conclusion that there was no other practical suggestion to prevent the evil of fragmentation than by interfering with the laws of inheritance.

The only way of overcoming the evil effects of fragmentation is to consolidate the holding (i.e. to bring together scattered fragments of land into one compact block) by mutual agreement among the parties concerned. The only two Provinces where such consolidation has been tried with a certain amount of success are the Central Province and the Punjab. In the Central Province a Consolidation of Holdings Act has been passed in one of the divisions, by which if the majority of the people in a village assent to it a scheme will first be drawn up by a special officer appointed for the purpose, and when it is confirmed it becomes binding on all the land owners in the village. In the Punjab however, the consolidation movement is entirely in the hands of the Co-operation Department. There is continuous propaganda carried on by specially trained co-operative officials to educate the ryots about the advantages of consolidation. The movement is said to have been very successful and we are told that several lakhs of acres have thus been consolidated at a nominal cost of about Rs. 2 per acre. In so far as Madras is concerned there has not been any move in the matter. It is possible that the methods found successful elsewhere may not prove equally successful in Madras. The Punjab has the special advantage of possessing vast tracts of homogeneous soil, where land tenure is simple. In Madras, in addition to big differences in the quality of soils in the different parts, the tenure is also very complicated. But the problem is, we believe, so important that it is time some attempt is made to introduce this much-needed reform. In this connection we cannot but repeat the opinion of the Royal Commission regarding the matter. "Fragmentation of holdings is in many parts of India one of the most important of the factors tending to prevent agricultural improvement. There seems to be common agreement that its evil

effects are so great that the administrations should not rest content until a remedy has been found. We strongly hold that the initiation should not be left to the spontaneous action of the right-holders but that the state should do propaganda work, should explore the whole situation and should also bear the cost at the initial stages. Progress may be slower where tenures are more complex or qualities of soil more varied, but difficulties should not be allowed to become an excuse for inactivity."

The other Provinces and states are no doubt keenly watching the progress made in the Punjab regarding consolidation. Among the native States, Mysore had recently appointed a special Committee to determine the nature and extent of sub-division and fragmentation of holdings in the state and the practicability of bringing about a consolidation of the same. The committee after examining the scheme and measures adopted in Punjab and the Central Province has put forward certain recommendations which the Government has published inviting public opinion on them.

We had an occasion to point out in this journal some time ago, that unlike Madras, several Provinces were proposing to spend a portion of the grant given to them by the Government of India towards village improvement work on some agricultural schemes such as stock breeding, distribution of improved seed of crops, well boring etc. The Punjab had programmed to spend about 2 lakhs out of a total grant of $8\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs on agricultural improvement works which included a lakh for a scheme on consolidation of holdings. But we understand that at a recent meeting of officials and non-officials convened to determine how the subvention should be spent it has been decided that all the 2 lakhs should be spent on the scheme of consolidation. It shows what great importance they are attaching to this agricultural reform.

Will it be too much to expect Madras to take some action in the matter? We now know very much more about rural indebtedness in Madras since the appointment of a special officer to make an enquiry and report about it. Cannot a similar thing be done with regard to the possibilities of consolidation of holdings?

The first question that might be considered would probably be the appointment of a special officer preferably one with revenue and co-operation experience with the object of making a special study of the question and gather information on the present state of fragmentation of holdings at least in certain parts of the Province, where the evil of fragmentation is excessive. This special officer might be later deputed to visit the Punjab, the C. P. and Bombay to study the actual conditions under which the scheme of consolidation has

worked successfully so that a beginning might be made in some part of Madras where similar conditions are known to prevail.

Agricultural Officer for the India XI. We congratulate Mr. C. Ramaswami, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Cuddalore, on his inclusion in the Indian Cricket team that is to tour England during this summer. Mr. Ramaswami has already earned his name on the tennis court as a doughty champion of Madras and his progress with the Indian cricket team in England will be watched with eagerness and interest by all his friends and well wishers.