

Land and Labour in a Deccan Village.

A Review.

To us the subject of Indian Economics is of ever engrossing interest. Anything which tends to affect the economic condition of the ryot affects us as workers in the advancement of Indian agriculture. Unfortunately though much has been said on the subject little has been written on it, and the little so written is so diffused, that the information given is not of much practical utility. We have, however, great pleasure in commending to our readers the book written by Dr. Mann, Principal, Agricultural College, Poona, and his assistants on "Land and Labour in a Deccan Village".

The outstanding feature of the work is that the enquiry is confined to a typical village in the Bombay Deccan, instead of the usual attempt to cursorily describe some of the economics of a tract or district. The obvious result of such an investigation is that it is of a high order, and is exceptionally thorough. It deals exhaustively with the physical characters of the village, the land, its divisions and holdings, the crops that are commonly grown and the grasses and weeds that abound in it. The live and dead stock of the village are not forgotten, nor the people and their economic condition. More than its being exhaustive, the enquiry goes into details. To cite one instance out of many:—writing about the trees of the village, Dr. Mann says; "the total number of trees is 1747 or slightly under two per acre.....Out of the total number no less than 1502 or 86% are babul trees." We admit that the information given, is in itself nothing very important but it only argues that nothing was considered by the investigators to be too small to come under their purview.

The soils of the village are classified according to their chemical composition and to the assessment paid and occupy a number of pages of the book. The waters of the village claim even a closer examination. The number of wells, their capacity, depth, water analyses are carefully recorded, and the report on them concludes that although

the waters are suitable for irrigation, and are sufficient for cold weather crops, they are not being used at present owing to the minute divisions of the land with the result that a well might belong to a number of cultivators, and that the cultivators have not yet considered it a paying concern to keep necessary bullocks for irrigating the small areas they possess.

Chapter III deals with the land question, and its history is traced to the modern times from as early a period as 1699 A. D. The land revenue is also included in the survey and Dr. Mann points out that it has steadily though slowly increased thus :—

In 1720-21 the nett revenue was Rs. 727	
1811-12	846
1849-50	1115
1914-15	1660

Turning their attention to the holdings of the village, the authors find that there has been a steadily growing inclination towards division of land. "In the pre-British days and in the early days of British rule, the holdings were usually of a fair size most frequently more than nine or ten acres, while individual holdings of less than two acres were hardly known. Now the number of holdings is more than doubled, and 81% of these holdings are under 10 acres in size, while no less than 60% are less than 5 acres". To show how far the fragmentation of land has proceeded, a tabular statement is made which shows that in the whole village there is only one plot which is over 20 acres in area. There are 21 plots of 5-10 acres, 164 plots of 1-2 acres and no less than 136 plots of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre. The result of such a fragmentation of land is that they are not economic holdings, and the people, therefore, turn their attention to other occupations. As a matter of fact only 64% are said to actually cultivate the land, and the rest are labourers.

The chapter which deals with crops is full of local information and a detailed plant survey is made which forms an appendix to the book. We would, in passing, mention one or two items of interest.

It is demonstrated, as it has been elsewhere, that cultivators do adapt their cropping to changing conditions. This is demonstrated in the Jowar (*Sorghum*) crop which owing to the importance of its fodder has largely replaced the Kharif Bajri (*Pennisetum typhoideum*). Again, wheat was till recently a crop which gave money into the cultivators' hands, but conditions having altered, vegetables and groundnuts have taken its place. A similar case is found in this Presidency where Cambodia cotton has largely replaced the cereals of the locality.

Dr. Mann and his co-workers have experienced the same difficulties that other agricultural enquirers have, in trying to find out the profit that a cultivator makes of his farming. "In an Indian cultivator's holding" say they, "it is very difficult to judge the profit and loss, where part or all the labour is supplied by the cultivator himself, and the materials are largely consumed by him, his family and his stock." The authors, however, estimate the cost of production of each crop firstly if all the labour had to be paid for, and secondly if all the labour is that of the cultivator or his family. On the average the cultivators seem to make about Rs. 10—15 profit per acre from cereals, Rs. 10—26 from pulses, Rs. 24 from groundnuts, and Rs. 100 from sugarcane. The authors consider that cleaner and better cultivation, introduction of more paying crops and application of green manure crops, would decidedly give better results, as such practices on the Poona Government Farm have been tried with profit. It is, however, a fact which cannot be blinked, that the effect of the Agricultural Farm on the cultivation of this village has been practically nil. Dr. Mann hopes what other district workers have hoped that when they are "once introduced by one of the leading successful cultivators of the village, they spread like wild fire." Our own point of view is that one has to count upon the less successful cultivators for taking to departmental recommendations because the more successful ones do not often feel the need to come and learn to improve their methods.

There is nothing particularly interesting or striking in the chapter which deals with the Agricultural stock of the village. They are in

fact typical of all Indian live-stock. The grazing is poor in most cases, their condition is not all that is desired and they are maintained at a high cost. It would come home to all the cultivators, that they ought to take better care of them if they only realise that the total stock consisting of 226 cattle, 58 buffaloes and 11 goats is worth to the village Rs. 10,588.

Chapter VI is most interesting because it deals with the people of the village. The authors go into great details with regard to the classification of the village population according to their sexes, castes, occupations etc. From the glimpses one has of the houses pictured to us in the photographs, we find that the villagers of Pimpla Soudagar are more comfortably housed than many villagers in South India. A good many of the labourers (89 out of 121) go out to Kirkee—a distance of 5 miles—as ammunition factory labourers, 4 are cartmen, 4 are artisans, 14 are labourers in the village itself. Besides these, there are ten people who go to Poona every day for selling milk each carrying 12 lbs. per day, and it is calculated from the wages prevalent that the transport charges come to $\frac{1}{2}$ anna for every pound of milk carried. This certainly is an alarming waste of labour!

The resources of the village are considered next and they conclude that the total income from various sources comes to Rs. 22,459 or Rs. 43--3--0 per head. Against this, is the expenditure of the village. The Government assessment, local rates and charges, food, clothing and miscellaneous items of expenditure on vessels, oil, festivals etc., make a total of Rs. 200 per family, but the actual expenses per family are Rs. 212--2--6 or Rs. 42--14--0 per head as the proportion of adults is greater actually than in the ideal family of five. In other words, in normal years the village ought to be self-supporting, but unfortunately the village has a heavy burden in the shape of a debt of Rs. 13,314 among the 103 families. It means that there is no chance of their paying the interest unless they stint themselves of the bare necessities of life. The villagers reckon that one year out of three is a year of scarcity, and one can imagine the plight of these people in such years. The authors go further to

investigate the actual number of the families whose holdings are economic, and find that there are only 8 such families. There are 28 others whose position cannot be considered economic, unless they supplement the income from their holdings by wages obtained as labourers working outside, and the remaining 67 families eke out a sort of an existence below the standard of comfort—a standard fixed by themselves. The debts as said before are no doubt a heavy item. The interest ranges from 12—24% on land security and 12—72% on personal security. But the authors state that even if this heavy item of debt is somehow wiped off, of the 67 families there are only 9 that could be said to be in comfort. It is therefore evident that the cause that keeps 56% of the villagers in this miserable condition must be due to something more than the exactions of the money lender. The authors tell their tale in these forcible words “More than half the families in the village are insolvent according to their own standard of life, and they must either have less food than they themselves think is absolutely necessary, or less clothes than they themselves feel are required, at least for self-respect—or they must increase their debt.”

The authors consider the two chief causes, among others, for such state of things are partly social and partly agricultural. The social cause is attributed to the division of land into such fragments that any improvements are absolutely impossible. Agriculturally there has been little evidence of progress. On the other hand they hold that during the last 25 years agriculture has deteriorated, and they cite as evidence the absence of new wells, of newly planted fruit and other trees, and the general decrease of double cropped land.

The result of all this enquiry tends to show that the condition of the dry land agriculturist in the Bombay Deccan, at least in the area represented by Pimpia Soudagar, is less satisfactory than has been hitherto considered, and the authors conclude in a truly scientific spirit that they must not be content with this opinion but push on with “further enquiry”.

We wish the authors had included in their exhaustive enquiry something about the bird and insect life of the village, and that they had bound the book more securely, as it is already showing signs of wear, however carefully we tried to use it.

D. Ananda Rao.

How to Improve Crops.

Chorus :—The War, the War ! What a terrible War !
How scarce is food both wide and far.

1. No goods arrive. There's hardly a train.
And ships don't ply across the main.
2. The crops have failed for want of rain.
While food and cloths are hard to obtain.
3. The kuncham yieldeth place to the seer.
All things are high-priced every where.
4. For lighting, kerosine can't be got.
We should grow the castor. Should we not ?
5. Piece goods from England don't arrive.
To grow our cotton, we should strive.
6. The rains did fail. The yield too fell.
Let's strive to make our crops grow well.
7. To get fresh land to till and sow
Is good no doubt ; but difficult now.
8. So let us well manure our own.
That richer crops thereon be grown.
9. All hope of the first crop let us drop.
Too late let's better the second crop.
10. You can easily treat the paddy field.
With castor-cake, which strength doth yield.