

**ECONOMICS**  
**OF**  
**AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS**

*( With Reference to Conditions in the Deccan )*

**BY**

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## PREFATORY NOTE

It is with considerable diffidence that I take this occasion of placing my views on Indian agriculture before the public. I have made no new discoveries nor have I any novel remedies or nostrums of my own to offer.

My object is to marshal, in a small volume like the present, some of those considerations which form the background and the foundation of agricultural prosperity, and how far that object has been gained I leave it to the reader to judge. I have the highest respect for those persons whose views, not coinciding with my own, I have taken the liberty of criticising. But it was the writings of some of these very authors which first directed my attention to the subject of Indian agriculture and I have great pleasure in acknowledging my indebtedness to them.

*Willingdon College,* }  
*Sangli.* }  
16-10-26.

B. G. S.

## AN EXHORTATION

I want the people, having regard to the vital importance of the subject, to heartily co-operate with the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture. Nothing would give due momentum to any movement for agricultural reform unless the whole people are imbued with enthusiasm for the subject. No Government Department, no Royal Commission, can galvanize into life the moribund industry of an entire nation if it have no popular support behind it. It is necessary to emphasize this point at the present moment when preoccupation with diverse political and communal questions is likely to make us forget other matters of equal, if not of more, importance. The history of Ireland well shows how the best brains of that country were carried away by the cry of "Home Rule" and few cared to enquire into the *real* economic grievances of the peasantry. Sir Horace Plunkett tells the story of a peasant in the West of Ireland who ceased planting potatoes on hearing that the Home Rule Bill of 1893 had become law. We are not much wiser than that Irish peasant, for we have neglected our main—and what has now remained to us the *sole*—industry in our perpetual talk about *Swaraj*. Not only that, but over-emphasis on the political issue has called into dangerous prominence the many fissiparous tendencies that divide castes, sects, parties, and communities in India. We shall find in agricultural improvement not only more bread, but more cement. It will as firmly bind us

as it will fully feed us. Hindus and Mahomedans, Backward Classes and Advanced Classes, Capitalists and Labourers, Exporters and Importers, Cooperators and Non-Cooperators, Swarajists and Responsists, will find in Agriculture their common Mother.

It was perhaps the intuitive perception of this identity of interests of all concerned with regard to Agriculture that taught the 'higher statesmanship' of England to send a Farmer-Viceroy to India to succeed a Lawyer and a Judge. The identity is strikingly illustrated by the willingness of the greatest Non-Cooperator of the day to place at the disposal of the Royal Commission his profound knowledge of, and sympathetic insight into, Indian rural conditions. Viceregal discourses upon Improved Implements, Fragmentation of Holdings Canal-irrigation, and Hybridization, have now taken the place of dissertations upon Responsible Government, Racial Discrimination, Communal Representation. Nor would I personally regret this change if the present Viceroy and Governor-General, alive as His Excellency seems to be to the needs of the masses, could say at the end of his term of office that he left the people of India better fed and better housed than what he found them to be when he assumed charge of his high office. The glories of feeding a population are not less worthy than those of dealing 'Justice' to them, or of holding a bayonet at them.

Our people do not yet realize what mighty efforts are being made in the West to place agriculture upon its right footing as a great national industry. The reasons for this agricultural revival are many. In the first place, there is a natural reaction against excessive

industrialization. A large part of modern manufactures are no 'wealth' at all in the sense that they do not 'avail towards life'. Let me remind the reader of the noble words of Ruskin. "Production does not consist in things laboriously made, but in things serviceably consumable; and the question for the nation is not how much labour it employs, but how much life it produces". And again, "All England may, if it so chooses, become one manufacturing town; and Englishmen, sacrificing themselves to the good of humanity, may live diminished lives in the midst of noise, of darkness, and of deadly exhalation. But the world cannot become a factory or a mine...So long as men live by bread, the far away valleys must laugh as they are covered with the gold of God, and the shouts of His happy multitudes ring round the winepress and the well."\*

Secondly, it is being realized, as Sir A. D. Hall points out, that 'a population dependent entirely upon manufactures gives rise to an unstable State, subject to comparatively violent fluctuations of employments from causes which are likely to affect all industries simultaneously; an agricultural community alongside the industrial one serves as a reservoir for labour, absorbing the fluctuations because its own variations depend upon different factors, and so equalising the demand.'†

Thirdly, many find in agriculture an escape from the conflicts of political parties, of labour and of capital. Thus the late Viscount Milner advocated

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\* *Unto This Last (Ad Valorem).*

† Page 16.

the formation of a National Party which would assign the foremost place in its programme to the fostering of agriculture. He thought that of all forms of productive capacity there was none more vital, indispensable, and steadying than the application of human industry to the cultivation of the soil. "And if there is one point at which order seems beginning to emerge from the present confusion of our political and social aims, it is precisely with regard to this fundamental necessity of making a better use of the greatest of all national resources."\*

Finally, the Great War showed that food-supply is more important than torpedos and aeroplanes.

I have devoted two chapters of the book to show that we want industries, and also agriculture. My position, in view of the present peculiar stage of our development, will not be found inconsistent with what I have stated above. To a large extent the burden of fostering our industries and agriculture must fall upon the educated class. This class is ridiculed when it presses for industrial development because it is itself not an industrial class; it must be prepared for similar opprobrium when it agitates for agricultural reform, because it is not an agricultural class. The educated minority at present is neither industrial nor agricultural. It threatens to be a serious parasite on the community, and would deserve little sympathy for its present unemployment, unless it throws itself whole-heartedly into the great work that lies before it—work of agricultural improvement, industrial development, social reconstruction, political

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\* Introduction to "Land Problems and National Reform" by Christopher Turnor. The Bodley Head.



uplift,—in which work it will find its real justification and true reward.

I plead for agriculture upon even more fundamental considerations: agricultural improvement will prove a solvent to many of our *political* and *social* problems, problems of Local Self-government, local taxation, Decentralization, Representation, Primary Education, Untouchability. These problems can never be solved unless the standard of living of the *rural* masses is raised, which improved agriculture and industries alone can do. It is the poverty—economic, intellectual, moral—of our rural life that is the greatest 'brake' upon our progress.

Finally, I would, with all humility, invite the Royal Commissioners to approach the subject of their labour with these larger considerations in mind.

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