

YOUNG FARMERS' CLUBS

Improvement of Rural Life

Provocative Report by Young Farmers' Club Committee

The following report on "The Development of Moral, Cultural, and Aesthetic Values of Rural Life" has been made by a special committee set up by the Otago-Southland Y.F.C. Council at the request of the Dominion Executive Committee. This report, which is of extreme interest and importance, is published in the hope that it will give rise to comment and criticism from both within and outside of the Y.F.C. organisation. Correspondence on this matter will be welcomed.

AFTER going fairly exhaustively into this subject of many aspects, the committee has been forced to the conclusion that any movement for the betterment of rural life must, to be successful, come largely from the farming community itself. For instance, any extension of country library services must be preceded by an evident desire, expressed through farming organisations, for more facilities because of the local demand for reading matter. The continued patronage of those facilities should remain as an obligation on the rural community.

Much public-spirited work in an endeavour to improve the lot of the country dweller has in the past been carried out by semi-urban organisations, as well as Governments, but many of these schemes have not met with the success they might have deserved, largely because of the average countryman's studied disbelief in the soundness of anything which has not emanated from his own brain or farm. As one of many examples which could be quoted, it will be remembered that the introduction of the rural mail system met with obstinate opposition over a long period, whereas motor cars, the buying of which was a question for the individual and not the community, sold like the proverbial hot cakes.

This individualistic outlook, whatever its disadvantages both to the individual and to the community, must be taken into account until it has largely disappeared through education, experience and the force of economic and social circumstances. Any district community which cannot combine to better those material

amenities which have a definite moral, cultural and aesthetic value scarcely deserves to enjoy them. Indeed, it could almost be said that in such cases the residents possessed no inherent capacity nor ambition to enjoy them—that the peasant-like individualistic inlook was more powerful than the enlightened community outlook.

Responsibility for improving the conditions of rural life should rest, therefore, upon the rural communities themselves. In the purely farming districts, as distinct from those in and around townships where a town board or borough council is operating, the spearheads for any community cultural movement should be such bodies as the local branch of the Farmers' Union and Young Farmers' Clubs, and/or the Women's Division of the Farmers' Union and the Women's Institute. Town boards and county councils can give valuable aid over wider communities where their statutory powers permit.

Greater interest in improving the local conditions of human life, as apart from the strictly economic, should be taken by all farmers' organisations for on such improvement depends the happiness of families already established, the checking of the drift to the towns, and the provision of adequate farm staffing for the future.

It is felt that the whole question of improving country life should be tackled from its base, which is that of the individual family in possession of a farm. Farms, and the economic circumstances of families and families themselves, differ so widely that only those points more or less common to all can be treated in this general report.

Aim on Unit Farm

The aim on the unit farm should be to bring about a higher appreciation of farm life by—

(a) making work more interesting by robbing it of worry, drudgery, monotony, and physical and mental weariness,

(b) reducing the hours of work and making any leisure time attractive,

(c) improving the scope for human contacts on and between farms, and

(d), by a combination of the first three objects, leaving the family mind at the end of the working day in a condition fresh enough to desire and appreciate further cultural contacts of a domestic or community nature. If this last-mentioned condition is obtained (and it is fairly obvious that it is often lacking on farms) it will lead to community planning by the people themselves.

The direction which that community planning should take would be a matter for the residents themselves to decide. So many schemes have been propounded that it would serve no purpose to repeat them here. This report concerns itself mainly with suggestions calculated to improve life on the farm and to create a greater demand for such community planning.

To what extent a life of comparative solitude and monotonous work makes for a negative type of mind is a matter for conjecture by psychologists, but an individualistic and negative state of mind is undoubtedly a feature of the older section of the farming community. A psychologist might even claim that the frequent complaints about the drudgery and long hours of farming issuing from Farmers' Union meetings and other gatherings is an inevitable result of solitude and monotony on the farm. However that may be, the most important step in bringing about more happiness on the farm is for farmers to guard against a closed mind and to concentrate on positive and even imaginative thinking.

The state of mind, concerning which a whole volume could be written, is of first importance. It should be above the urgent necessity to get rich quick or the fear of bankruptcy, both of which are negative and tend to cause the farm to own the farmer, instead of vice versa. A philosopher might with some justice claim that it were better to go bankrupt gloriously than become the cringing, fearful servant of that of which the soul of man should be master.

Suggestions

Following are a few self-explanatory suggestions which may tend to make life on the farm, in and out of working time, more endurable for the whole family and the hired man:—

(1) The right approach to farming as an interesting adventure for the observant.

(2) Have the courage to experiment. Dare to be a Daniel, though the lions may rage!

(3) The necessity to strip cows after machine-milking can be obviated without loss of yield if due care is taken.

(4) Where a hired hand is employed, milking on the shift system has possibilities for a less tiring day.