

Hopes and Fears for India

Extracts from Letters by Dr Harold H Mann

The Economic Weekly is privileged to reprint below passages from some of the last letters of Dr Harold H Mann who died in December last in his ninetieth year.

Dr Mann was perhaps the outstanding authority on the Indian countryside in the twentieth century.

For depth and precision no subsequent village enquiries have equalled the two pioneer studies of Pimpla Soudagar and Jategaon Budruk which Dr Mann directed more than forty years ago and which were published by the Bombay University Press in 1917 and 1921 under the title "Land and Labour in a Deccan Village".

Although his career in India ended when he retired in 1927 as Director of Agriculture in Bombay and returned to England, Dr Mann retained to the last the liveliest interest in Indian affairs.

The following extracts from recent letters of his to Dr Daniel Thomer indicate the quality of his insight into Indian problems. What is more, they show, as he once wrote, that his heart had never truly left India-

Agriculture and Economic Development

(July 27, 1961)

I cannot help feeling that while two-thirds of the cultivators in most Indian villages are really insolvent, it is almost irrelevant to talk about cooperation or anything else bringing about a prosperous countryside. It seems inevitable that the credit-worthy members of a cooperative, that is to say, the bigger landholders should dominate any cooperative that may be formed. And it seems almost inevitable that such people should also go into business as moneylenders or traders on their own account independent of the cooperative.

So that, at the best, cooperation would only be of any advantage to those who can do without it. It is attractive to them because it enables them to command money at a lower rate of interest than they could otherwise and to obtain other advantages which Government patronage confers. But they will naturally dominate any cooperative organisation with which they are connected. I do not see how this fairly obvious fact can be got over and how the marginal landholders and cultivators can exert any very great influence in the working or in the policy of the cooperatives whether these latter are for credit only or are multi-purpose.

Then we are faced with the fact that two-thirds of the agricultural population of a village consists of these marginal landholders who are dependent for maintaining even a very low standard of life on work for others either on the land or elsewhere or of landless labourers. The main question seems to me to be how to put this two-thirds of the rural population on a sound economic basis whether through improved agricultural production or other production in the villages themselves, or by removal to other occupations than agriculture or even to agriculture in a new area.

The same difficulty has faced both the Russians and the Chinese, though I fancy in a less intense form than in India. Both have faced it in a somewhat similar way, though the Chinese version is still very much on its trial. In Russia, however, as you well know, there have been three points of attack. The first is the collective farm which eliminated those who owned land but did not work, except for a very limited number of administrators who directed everybody else. The second was the opening out of enormous tracts of new agricultural land in Siberia or elsewhere to which the excess of village workers who were not needed under the collective farm system were removed. And the third was the extension of industry of those who were not irrevocably tied to agriculture and the land. Of these methods the second is hardly open to us in India, for the amount of area, even with the maximum extension of irrigation, to which the excess workers could be removed, is small and would hardly touch the fringe of the present problem. The third method, namely the extension of industry is agreed to by everyone. But I feel that it could only partly meet the situation even on the most optimistic forecast.

I suppose that in an economy based on peasant cultivation and of a stable character, there would be from 15 to 20 per cent of the population dependent on agriculture. This is about what is the case in

A Request

While I was still in Bombay in 1959, Dr Harold H Mann kindly authorised me to edit for publication letters he had written on India. I should be most grateful if other persons to whom he has written on Indian topics will forward his letters and similar communications to me, at one of the following addresses :

C/o National and Grindlays Bank,
Lloyd's Branch,
Dr Dadabhoy Naoroji Road,
Bombay - 1.

C/o Lloyds Bank, Foreign, Ltd.,
43, Boulevard des Capucines,
Paris - 2.

All materials will be handled carefully and, after copying, will be promptly returned to the sender.

DANIEL THORNER

France or the U S A . If we had such a percentage in India with a total population of 400 millions, this would mean that the purely agricultural areas could only support say at the most about 80 millions in agriculture. Add to this the number who must be employed in service, transport, business, etc which I calculate would be about 40 per cent of the population, or in India, say 160 millions, there would be still 160 millions to provide for in industry or by removal to new agricultural areas. I confess that I do not see the way out for I cannot picture the development of Indian industry to such an extent as to absorb anything like this number of people. And with the present rate of increase of population, the problem will become more and more difficult. And, judging by the schemes of the Indian planners I do not think that the question has been really faced.

I do feel that a more realistic vision of the possible and desirable future than that contained in the new Third Five Year Plan is needed.

Urbanisation and Food Production

(August 19, 1961)

NOW the position of Pimpla Soudagar* is peculiar but resembles what is happening in many parts of India. When we studied it originally it was almost completely an agricultural village with little connection either with a town or with industrial conditions. Roads were bad or non-existent and though the connections with Poona did exist they seemed to me to have comparatively little effect on the life of the village. A few people took milk into Poona but it was a very small matter. The whole village depended

* Pimpla soudagar is the village just outside Poona which was the subject of the study issued by Dr Mann and his associate in 1917. Four decades later it was resurveyed by Shri P D Ditekalkar, whose monograph has been published by the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics under the title. "Resurvey of a Deccan Village — Pimpla Soudagar (Bombay 1960) This volume includes; an important foreword by Dr Mana.

on its agriculture and the numerous wells were largely used for irrigation. Now, if this re-survey is correct, these conditions are changed radically. Roads have been made and communications with both Poona and Kirkee are easy, with the result that, on the one hand, the village has become a regular supplier of milk to Poona and a considerable part of the male population have become industrial workers in the Kirkee factories. If I judge Mr Diskalkar's story properly, the raising of crops, except fodder crops has become a minor industry, and in a fair measure, an agricultural village has become dependent on industrial demand for labour. As a consequence, wells for irrigation are neglected and though there are greater facilities (such as a bund across the river) for irrigation, this is not done and so the character of the village from an economic point of view has been radically changed.

Now this sort of thing must be taking place over much of India with the growth of industrialisation, and I think that in spite of the imperfections of the re-survey, the present report may have a good deal to teach us. The first thought that comes to my mind is that industrialisation has tended to depress agriculture, I wonder whether this is a phenomenon that has been noticed elsewhere. Increased urban demand will tend to raise prices of agricultural products and so would be expected to encourage agriculture, and probably does so in places far from or inaccessible from urban centres. But I am not sure whether, in other cases like the present, it may not lead to reduced agricultural production.

This is the sort of thing which I noticed a good many years ago particularly round Bombay and. I think, to a less extent, round other developing urban centres. Round Bombay, there was an intensive gardening area immediately round the town. Beyond this was an area that was almost derelict, the population having gone to work in town industries. Beyond this again was a strip which, in the Bombay case, extended to a little beyond Kalyan where the same thing appeared to be happening though less complete-

ly, before one came to an un-
ed agricultural area.

I should like a re-survey, imperfectly done, of our village Jategaon Bndruk, which lies the area affected by urban industrial developments. I doubt whether we shall get this done is far from a town and is likely inaccessible so that it is a group of enthusiasts, such as with which I was blessed five ago, who are likely to do the work that would be necessary the economic changes that taken place since 1920 have affected a village which has not touched directly by urban demands, in which irrigation has altered the economic basis of culture, and in which the relationship of large field influential landowners, small cultivator landless (or practically far labourers still exists without change.

As regards Pimpla Soudagar thing is clear. Cooperation has touched the village nor, if I interpret what Diskalkar says right there any question of its likely to do so.

Forward Look in the Countryside

(May 25.

I am worried that NO much means of increasing yield, way of increased water and increased supply of fertilisers, is used to increase the yield of crops such as sugar and cotton rather than increasing the yield of food crops which are now in a large and. I think, increasing field.

On the other hand, it would appear that on the whole the condition of the peasantry does seem to have improved, and the stress seem to have moved from the large people (cultivators, land otherwise) to other classes have to buy their sustenance their money income in a time of soaring prices. Am I right in thinking that while the richer are (chiefly commercial and industrial) are becoming richer and bu-

palaces in New Delhi and elsewhere, and the cultivating classes are certainly at least as well off as they were, there are evidences of strain among other classes? The preliminary results of the Census which show a mean increase of population of 21½ per cent in ten years makes me worry a good deal about the future unless there can be a spectacular increase in food production, which does not seem to be occurring to anything like the necessary extent.

Referring to part of your letter, where you say that you think that the ordinary Indian peasant is beginning to feel that he is entitled to a better life than that which contented his fathers, I feel that if this is true then the future is secure. My feeling after all my village experiences forty years ago was that, on the whole and in the tracts in which I worked, there was little of this feeling and that the delightful people among whom I worked were content if they could keep up the standard of life to which they were accustomed in a good season. There were exceptions, of course. But that was the general impression I got. Over forty years have passed since those days and much change of attitude may have occurred and I am very glad you feel that there is a forward look towards a better economic condition than that with which their fathers were satisfied.

The Economic Weekly

(December 31, 1961)

I get *The Economic Weekly* quite regularly and admire very much the way in which it is conducted. It is the only journal that seems intelligible and at the same time conducted without bias. The cooperative journals contain a lot of good stuff but if one was to read them only, one would think that everything in the garden was lovely, which it is not.

Around Bombay Markets

As our Market Correspondent is on leave, "Around Bombay Markets" will not appear for two weeks.

Editor

Institute of Applied Manpower Research, New Delhi

The Institute has been set up as a Society for undertaking systematic research in applied manpower problems, e.g., assessment of the requirements of trained personnel for economic development, creation of employment opportunities for new entrants to the labour market, improved utilisation and development of the employed labour force. Applications are invited from Indian Nationals or natives of Sikkim, Nepal or of former French or Portuguese possessions in India, for the following posts :

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