

What's the Matter With Farm Colleges?

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farming class. I am inclined to think the decrease in interest in agricultural colleges is a reaction to this social change, which young people sense or feel.

"The efforts now being made to better the condition of the farmer and to increase interest in agricultural college education, if they are to be successful, must, I think, be conceived of in relation to this larger social movement."

These tendencies and currents of thought represent a challenge to the colleges.

"Although I feel that the declining enrollment can be explained by changes in the economic situation, I fear that the colleges have pitched their claims too completely upon the relationship of the boy to plants, animals, soils, and so forth," stated Dean Dan T. Gray, of the Arkansas State College of Agriculture.

"That is, we have been teaching our boys just what they should do in contact with these things but not what they should do in their human contacts. For this reason I think the interest in agricultural courses has been more fluctuating than it should have been.

"Just now we are revising our agricultural courses and expect to introduce into them such subjects as history, general and agricultural economics, general and rural sociology, marketing, and the like.

"When this is done I am sure that young men will not be so likely to feel that when hogs and grain go down in price there is no use studying agriculture."

The needs and interests brought on by the changes in farming come rapidly. The curricula and service of the agricultural colleges are not adaptable to such rapidity of change—education and research are usually a matter of evolution.

But revisions in courses and policy are being effected gradually. Courses in citizenship, history and farm administration are appearing in a number of schools. There is a slackening in the rigidity of the courses compulsory upon students.

"Our courses are much less rigid than formerly and will undoubtedly tend to grow more liberal," stated Dean Alfred Vivian, of the College of Agriculture of Ohio State University. "I believe we should give a foundation of fundamentals, such as the physical sciences, practical agricultural subjects, economics and sociology, in the fewest hours possible for efficiency; then allow a wide range of

elective subjects in order to accommodate the variety of interests served by the agricultural college."

It is also Dean Vivian's view that the agricultural sciences need to be taught more from the point of view of their application to farm management and less for their abstract value as sciences. This view is all the more significant, coming from one who is himself a scientific man.

These views indicate the direction being taken in whatever recasting of agricultural college service is being done. They are not being made without opposition.

The opposition varies in degree. The dean of one large school said:

"I am afraid that I shall have to set up an entirely new course to get before the students the subjects I believe are called for. If I tried to introduce them into our established courses I'd likely have a small civil war on my hands."

It is not an easy matter to decide how much of the long-established work shall be replaced or supplemented or redirected without losing something that is valuable.

As Dean Kyle said: "This movement will come slowly, as did scientific production, and the question will naturally arise as to the best way of bringing it about. There is probably no one best way, at least for all institutions."

How far it may go was thus stated by Dean H. W. Mumford, of Illinois:

"Some day we shall look back upon the agricultural crisis following the World War as the beginning of what might be termed a new epoch in agricultural teaching and investigation. This does not mean that continued progress in the physical sciences and productive methods will be any the less needed.

"But it means that these will be supplemented by a form of service that will indicate in what direction lie more profitable production, the more efficient marketing and distribution of agricultural products and a more satisfactory farm life. Out of all this will ultimately develop a better understanding of public questions and a better public policy."

The method of service is not the only problem for the agricultural colleges. Some feel there are other and equally serious questions to be answered.

These other problems, as well as those discussed in the foregoing, concern not only the welfare of the agricultural colleges

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and the farming population but that of the nation as well.

This matter of decline in agricultural education goes deeper than the mere choice of what school a boy shall attend.

As President R. A. Pearson, of Iowa State College of Agriculture, who is optimistic regarding the situation, added, however, in warning:

"No one believes that all of the six million farmers of the country should be college graduates; but at least a few of them should be. With a very much larger number of persons in agriculture than in business it is fair to say that there should be at least as many college graduates on farms as in stores and banks and offices.

"When the farming class does not possess as much education as the class with whom they do business, then farming will have gone a long, long way toward peasantry."

That this equality in education is not now being achieved is apparent in the contrasting enrollment figures of the agricultural colleges and those which are serving other classes of the population.

EDITOR'S NOTE—This is the first of two articles by Mr. Taylor. The next will appear in the next issue.