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EDITORIAL

The Function of the Agricultural Press

The agricultural press is not an educational institution. Its function is to disseminate agricultural information. It is to the farming community what medical journals are to the medical profession, and what class journals of every description are to the classes they represent. Papers of this kind exist essentially to instruct, but they are not text-books on the branches of industry or science they deal with. The purpose of such journals, is to keep their readers informed of all that is latest in discovery or progress in the business with which they are concerned. That is the function of the agricultural press and that is its relation to the farming community.

Roughly, the matter published in farm papers may be divided into three classes. First, there is the discussion of what might be termed the fundamental principles of the farming industry. Whatever progress agriculture makes, however it may advance, there are some things essentially elementary that need to be said and re-said again, things that most of us know, or think we know. Men forget quickly much of what they read and hear, and in addition there are others always to whom primary facts even are new, men who have drifted into agriculture from other occupations, or have grown up in the business and need instruction in the ground work of the industry. The second class of matter might be termed agricultural news. The third department is the most important of all, that is where new ideas, new methods, and fresh facts are discussed and given publicity. It would be better sometimes if the men who know about things from actual experience were less backward about coming forward with their contributions to this department of agricultural papers. There is seldom any dearth in the supply of scientific contribution to the sum total of human knowledge on any subject, agricultural or otherwise, but practical men fail sometimes in their obligations to their fellows. Man's supreme aim should be to make this world a little brighter and better for his having passed through it, and he can render that service quite as well from the ranks of agriculture as he can from the most exalted position on earth. Probably a great deal better.

On Writing on Practical Things

The trouble with most men when they attempt to write down their thoughts on any subject, is that they seem to think they must needs immediately depart from the simple phraseology in which they are wont to speak, and from the simple level to which their thoughts are accustomed to ascend, and write and think differently to what they ordinarily do. Experienced writers, most of them at least,—for there are some even among professionals who seem to shape their speech more for sound than for the common sense usefulness of what they say—seldom fall into this error. With any kind of literary composition, simplicity of expression, if it can be combined with clearness,—if simplicity and clearness go together, and they generally do,—is the most desirable characteristic such writing can possess.

Writing for the agricultural press is just as easy and may be as simply done as any other kind of writing. We have met good practical farmers, some of whom could talk rings around our head on almost any agricultural subject that came up, but ask them to crystallize some of their ideas into literature, write them down on paper and let some of the rest of mankind have the benefit of them, and most of these men will excuse themselves from the task on the score of being unable to write, that is, not unable to form the letters of the alphabet and string them

into words, but unable to write in the supposedly fancy style which they imagine is requisite in good writing.

Agricultural journals are criticized occasionally because they are given over too much to scientific, rather than practical discussions of practical things. The criticism is in nowise just. Agricultural papers are merely mediums for the expression of agricultural thoughts. What they contain must come from the agricultural community, or from those who are concerning themselves with problems related to agriculture. The latter class generally are most unselfishly willing to come forward at all times with the written or spoken word, while the practical man, as a rule, is about as selfishly unwilling to appear at all. It is because of this that the criticism is made of agricultural institutions, including the farm press at times, that they are not practical enough. If they are too scientific or too theoretical, it is not because those in charge desire them to be so, but because those who could, or think they could, make them otherwise, prefer to sit outside and criticize, rather than come inside and help to construct.

Cleanliness vs Bacteria

The article by Dr. Woods Hutchinson, entitled "Crimes Against the Cow," in this issue, surely cannot be read by any dairyman without exciting a resolution to reduce the myriad colonies of bacteria with which scientists tell us that ordinary milk is swarming. The staggering fact that milk retailed in city milk wagons and stores has been found to contain more bacteria to the ounce than sewage; that a teaspoonful may contain more microscopic inhabitants than the human population of New York; that 90 per cent. of them are introduced into the milk by ordinary common dirt; that the milk existing in the udder is commonly free from germs, and that it may be kept practically free from them by strict cleanliness, together with prompt cooling and bottling, while cleanliness and cooling alone, without bottling, will keep the milk for, say, eighteen hours, sufficiently pure for ordinary cheesemaking purposes, providing the milk is placed in a pure atmosphere; these facts should make us stop and think hard to see what can be done to make our milk and other dairy products more wholesome for adults and infants, and to lessen the danger of communicating infectious diseases, such as typhoid, scarlet fever, tuberculosis and diphtheria, the germs of all of which (with a partial exception in the case of tuberculosis) are introduced into the milk after it is drawn, never being found in fresh-drawn milk. Tuberculosis germs do not exist in fresh-drawn milk, except in cases where the cow has the disease localized in the udder.

The whole secret of pure milk supply is strict cleanliness, combined with prompt cooling, and either bottling, or else some provision for keeping the milk in pure air. The primary provisions are clean cows, fed on wholesome food and pure water, housed in clean, well-lighted, well-ventilated stables, as free from dust and stench as possible; cleanly milkers, attired in clean clothes, and (if milking with wet hands) compelled to wash and dry their hands after milking each cow; prompt straining of every mess through a clean, frequently-rinsed strainer, followed by immediate separation, if intended for buttermaking, or prompt cooling, if for cheesemaking or retailing; clean milk utensils washed with pure water, and then scalded or steamed, and exposed to sunlight. These simple, easy precautions, conscientiously observed, will reduce the bacterial content of our milk from millions per cubic centimeter, down to thousands. This means, of course, that the milk will keep sweet longer, though that is an advantage of lesser importance, for the lactic-acid-producing bacteria, while they give most noticeable evidence of their presence, do not affect

the wholesomeness of the milk so much as do the disease-producing and putrefying bacteria which, in the innocent, opaque whiteness of the milk, work their injurious changes unseen, and too often unsuspected. Pure milk is the most natural and wholesome food of man, but it is, at the same time, the most susceptible to contamination and bacterial infection. Cleanliness is the watchword. Let us be cleanly and clean.

When Pure-Breds Will Become Common

We look forward to the day, still well in the future, when pure-bred stock will supplant scrubs, mongrels, and, for the most part, grades. It may never entirely supplant straight cross-breds or high-grades, for a first cross often produces a most profitable animal to feed, and doubtless a certain amount of crossing and mingling of blood will always be done, but the stockmen's missionary work must continue until no one thinks of using any but a pure-bred sire, and until the great majority of breeding females in horses, cattle, sheep and swine are either pure-bred or else first-crosses or high-grades. In swine this goal has already been attained in many districts, thanks to the fecundity of the sow; in sheep, it is within measurable approach, but among horses and cattle it will be some time yet before pure-breds are so generally disseminated as they should be.

When pure-breds become as common as grades now are, the tendency will be to reduce prices, though not the values, of the average run of pure-breds, thereby lessening the temptation to palm off inferior individuals on the strength of registration. Then, only those registered animals which combine superior individuality with rich breeding will command a premium by virtue of their pedigrees. The business of distributing seed stock will not be confined, as at present, to a few breeders, but every farmer will stand a chance of producing an animal of rare value for purposes of stock improvement. At present, with grades chiefly in vogue, no matter how superior an individual male animal may occur in a farm stud or herd, he is of little value for stock improvement because lacking the concentration of blood lines which tend to insure prepotency in the transmission of his good qualities. Even if he prove an exceptionally good sire, the breeder of pure-breds dare not use him, since his get would not be eligible for registration.

Thus, many a jewel in farm stables is passed by, which, if a registered pure-bred, and, therefore, available for the purposes of the pure-breeder, would prove an acquisition to the cause of stock improvement, and incidentally a source of profit to the farmer who raised him. The more plentiful the pure-breds in the country, the more rapidly and thoroughly the cause of live-stock improvement will advance. At present the number of pure-breds is so small, comparatively speaking, that the business of breeding them is inconvenient and expensive; and this, together with the expense of registration and selling, and the obvious need for blooded stock in almost every community, tempts the breeder to distribute for breeding purposes registered stock which never should be allowed to perpetuate its kind. Among pure-breds, as among scrubs, close culling will always be necessary to maintain, let alone to advance, the standard of merit; and the fact that this has not always been practiced accounts for the inferior showing, from a utility standpoint, which the poorer class of pure-breds often make in competition with high-class selected grades. For practical purposes, a high-class grade, is more valuable than a medium pure-bred, but a good pure-bred is better than an equally good grade, in that the descendants of the former, if pure-bred, will have the prepotency to transmit their excellencies with greater certainty. This fact of prepotency, due to concentration of blood lines and tendencies, is the sole and only reason why pure-breds are so necessary for improvement of the general stock of the country.