

Aspects of Agriculture in Kenya

In September 1929 the Governor of Kenya appointed an Agricultural Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir Daniel Hall, Chief Scientific Adviser to the British Ministry of Agriculture, to consider the agricultural progress and organisation of the colony. The report of the Commission has recently been published¹; its principal findings in so far as they relate to labour problems are summarised below.

Most of the recommendations of the Commission relate to the improvement of agriculture generally. At the same time, however, the Commission found itself obliged to consider some of the fundamental questions of race relationships due to the economic interdependence of Europeans and natives in this tropical country of European settlement, where the native population exceeds 2½ millions, the Asiatic population 40,000 and the European population 12,000.²

KENYA AND WHITE LABOUR

At the present time Kenya is a country of native labour, the so-called European estates being generally large estates under European ownership and management, worked by native labour. Schemes have been for some time under consideration, and have to a certain extent been put into effect, to attract to the colony agriculturists who, while still dependent on native labour, would settle on smaller estates in certain defined areas. The Agricultural Commission expresses its approval of the principle of Closer Settlement, as these schemes have been called. At the same time it considers that there is pressing need for the introduction of more British agricultural labour into the colony, quite apart from the immediate problem of settlement. It is thought that a considerable amount of good material can be drawn from Great Britain if better facilities for emigration are provided, and suitable prospects of employment and advancement held out. The Commission does not share the fears that have been expressed that thereby a poor white population may be created. Indeed, it considers that labour of this kind will eventually provide a valuable source of future settlers under a Closer Settlement scheme. It is necessary, however, that some organisation should be set up both to focus the openings for employment in Kenya and to institute

¹ COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA : *Report of the Agricultural Commission, October 1929*. Nairobi, Govt. Printer, 1929. 54 pp.

² In 1929 the number of European occupying owners was 2,035. This figure is an indication of, but should not be interpreted to mean, the number of Europeans on the land, since companies employing several Europeans may be registered as a single occupier.

the necessary enquiries into the credentials of the applicants in Britain. The Commission therefore recommends that the Government should institute a specific enquiry into this subject.

NATIVE LABOUR

The Agricultural Commission did not find it necessary to examine closely the question of native labour in European employment, in view of the very full report of the 1927 Labour Commission.¹ Nevertheless, it made certain comments on the possible future of native labour in the colony. It considers that the time must be anticipated when, with the increase of European cultivation and the improvement of agriculture in the native reserves, native labour will be less abundant. Economy in the employment of native labour is therefore incumbent upon all settlers. This economy can be effected by increased mechanisation and by the education of the native to greater efficiency. As long as labour is low priced, there is always a tendency to employ it wastefully, but the Commission received ample evidence that the native employed upon a European plantation can be led to become a very efficient worker.

The Commission does not hold that the employment of natives on European estates is adverse to their advancement in their reserves. Evidence was forthcoming that the native employed upon a European estate receives a practical training in improved agricultural methods which he puts to use on his return to his own land. In addition, he obtains more varied and nutritive diet, his standard of living is raised, and his physique improved.

NATIVE AGRICULTURE

An important chapter in the report is devoted to native agriculture.

By far the most important question affecting native agriculture is held to be the almost universal habit of keeping live stock, not for production or income, but as tokens of wealth. In many areas vegetation is being eaten right down to the roots, and the process of erosion encouraged, by stock kept less as a source of milk and meat than as money wherewith wives can be purchased and the owner can support his dignity. This process, it is held, will in the end deprive the native peoples of much of their means of sustenance, and it is necessary to take in hand at once the reduction in the numbers of live stock.

In one case, the Kamba reserve, the Commission considers that a compulsory reduction of live stock must be carried out if the tribe is to be preserved. Before such action can be taken, however, it will be necessary to establish a meat factory to deal with the stock destroyed. This factory would be essentially a temporary expedient, necessary as a means of effecting the rapid reduction in the number

¹ Cf. *International Labour Review*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, April 1928, pp. 565-571.

of stock now kept. The ultimate solution, however, is to be found in the education of the natives to eat meat. It is held that if the natives only consumed meat at the rate of a few ounces per head per week, their physical condition would be accordingly improved, and the overstocking problem would disappear.

At the same time it is recognised that it is difficult to deal with a native psychology so foreign to European modes of thought. The habit of raising cattle and goats as a form of social competition does in itself provide a purpose for existence, and the Commission recognises fully the danger of interfering with the customs of the native, lest such interference should destroy his interest in life, and with it his will to live. In the case under consideration, however, it is held that the risk must be taken. It is suggested that one step might be taken to meet the native psychology by the minting of a special coinage with which the meat factory would pay for the stock forcibly expropriated. This coinage might consist of large pieces, bearing the image of a bull, and smaller pieces with the image of a goat. They should be perforated with four holes, so that they could be strung together for purposes of display. It is suggested that by their means the transition from cattle as currency in the purchase of wives to cattle as saleable assets might be facilitated.

In the case of another tribe, the Kikuyu, it is evidently felt that the natives are definitely capable of considerable agricultural progress. Evidence was received that the area under cultivation by the tribe has increased of late years, and that cultivation is improving. Wheat and European vegetables are being developed. It is suggested that in this area native cultivation is in a condition to be helped by the introduction of light modern machinery. It is considered that seed distribution and the tendency to grow European vegetables should be encouraged, but that much would appear to depend upon the creation of a system of land tenure, which will in practice allow of continued individual occupation. At the same time, even with regard to the Kikuyu, the Commission is of opinion that the reduction of uneconomic stock is necessary. It especially stresses the need of an educational campaign against the useless and uneconomic goat, and thinks it probable that compulsory measures will have to be taken to reduce their numbers.

NATIVE COFFEE GROWING

The Commission examined the question whether the natives should be allowed to cultivate coffee in the reserves. It recognises that the native, seeing, and perhaps working on, European coffee plantations, thinks of growing coffee, and probably forms an exaggerated idea of the profits attaching thereto. Yet, for good reasons, the Administration has discouraged the growth of coffee, and in a few cases, where bushes have been planted, the owner has been induced to remove them. The situation is thus unsatisfactory, because the administrators have no legislative sanction to prevent the growth of coffee in the reserves, and the natives, who are in practice debarred

from growing coffee, have a grievance in that they know it is permitted to Africans in adjacent territories. The Commission recognises the force of the arguments which have been adduced against the growing of coffee by natives on account of the risks of disease and thefts, but it also appreciates the apparent injustice of regulations which would appear to set up a racial discrimination. There may or will be, it is held, natives able to find the resources required to carry on a coffee plantation on the European scale and by European methods. Discrimination, therefore, should be exercised not so much against coffee growing by natives as against coffee growing in little scattered plots, over which control is impracticable. The Commission considers that the situation might best be met by the imposition of a considerable licence fee for the growing of coffee. If a minimum fee of £10 per annum were imposed, the planting of small areas of coffee would be deterred, while at the same time no racial discrimination would have been effected. The Commission further recommends that the licence should not be automatically granted on payment of the fee, but only after the applicant has satisfied the Department of Agriculture as to his *bona fides* and has deposited a plan of the proposed plantation with details of arrangements for curing, and that sale of the produce should take place only through a specified channel.

CONCLUSIONS

The Commission expresses itself as satisfied that the improvement of native agriculture is closely bound up with the general problem of improving the physique, the health, and the education of the natives. It follows, therefore, that the advancement of the native in agriculture, as in other respects, is but a part of the work of administrative officers, on whom rests the responsibility for the well-being of the natives. The Commission considers, therefore, that unification of services is necessary, and that agricultural officers should be seconded for service in the native reserves and attached as advisers to the native commissioners.

The Commission also draws attention to the necessity of carefully training the native instructors who act as assistants to the agricultural officers. With regard to the education of the ordinary native, it expresses the hope that the Education Department will maintain its pressure for the inclusion of some manual instruction in cultivation in the curriculum of the mission schools. It considers that no schools that are not provided with land for such a purpose should receive grants from the Government.

In regard to marketing, the Commission draws attention to the advantages of co-operative marketing societies. It recommends that careful experiments be undertaken in this direction in some particular district.

Finally, the Commission draws attention to the importance for native agriculture of the extension and improvement of feeder roads to the railway, and the provision and conservation of water supplies.