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Rural Populations and Agriculture in Mission Lands

AFRICA
ASIA
&
LATIN AMERICA

By
Margaret Wilson

The International Association of
Agricultural Missions

THOMAS S. DONOHUGH, Secretary
150 Fifth Ave., New York, U. S. A.



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The Rural Populations and Agriculture in Missionary Lands*

CERTAIN universal characteristics in agriculture bind together the three great rural continents of Asia, Africa and South (or rather, Latin) America. Their contribution to world commerce is almost entirely the product of the soil, but the producer thereof is the victim of his own conservatism or ignorance, unable to prosper out of a trade which enriches some one else. Traditional or primitive in farming method, superstitious, illiterate, confined to a small piece of land in countries where Nature is foeman in the shape of heat, forest, disease, drought or flood,—the farming people of Africa, perhaps 100 million strong, of Asia numbering 700 million in equal area, of Latin America with over 50 million, are feeding the rest of the world. The present state of things is changing. Industrialism is invading these countries and bringing civilized changes and urbanization more rapidly than an education adequate to cope with them.

The lowest phase of rural life is maintained by hunting and fishing. Desert dwellers sub-

* Statistics have not been made available for these continents, in respect to their native populations. India has a true census of agricultural population, others are estimated by villages or families. Even the urban population is estimated in many cases, and the size of a city or town is a poor index of its rural or urban character. Where no rural estimate had been made by observers, this study took as the beginning of urban population the town of 5,000 people, except when it was stated to be a farming center.

sist on animal life and the nomadic herdsman in the dry savannah lands adds a garden plot, tended by the woman. The true primitive agriculturist in Africa, in aboriginal America and in Burma, Indo-China and Oceania, clears and burns the forest for his garden. Of all these farmers the greatest number, and with the largest families, are supported by ancient, intensive methods of farming, efficient but wasteful of labor.

AFRICA

AFRICA has 20 per cent of the world's area and 8 per cent of its population. Including its eastern islands, the present population is estimated at 128,521,853. The land area exclusive of uninhabitable desert is nine and a half million square miles, giving a density of 13 people per habitable square mile. The rural population is 89 per cent of the whole, or 114,460,000 people.

Civilized-country agriculture in tropical plantations and in white-immigrant ranches of East and South Africa dispossess the native of land and exact of him labor, without setting him the good example agriculturally that they sometimes profess to do. It does, however, undermine the primitive family method of agriculture and make the future of the African farmer a greater responsibility to his protecting governments than if he were left in sole productive use of the land.

Of all the native agricultures, the North African is most intensive. 62 per cent of the population of Egypt are hard-working small farmers, with a great crop on irrigated land. 75 per cent of the north- and northwestern coast population are the farming Berber tribes with some irrigation and date, fruit and barley exports.

The native of the Sudan with adverse farming conditions begins to display the attitude more typical of Africa, of indifference to foreign commerce, and the Abyssinian farmer cannot be matched in exclusiveness. Everything is grown to feed and clothe the Abyssinian, and the farmer uses a plough with effective traditional methods. Two-thirds of their people, however, the Gallo tribe, link them with the nomadic African to the south and east,—whose herds are a sign of wealth and a means of purchasing wives, but only reluctantly are their cattle sold to the trader.

The great mass of negro and negroid Africans are either herdsmen of this order or primitive farmers;—they live either on the dry open steppe in a semi-nomadic way with a temporary homestead and a garden cultivated by the women, or as forest-denizens they gather in communal villages and supplement the abundant tropical diet with a hoe-type of agriculture. Great sections are subject to cattle disease and the tsetse fly. Invasions and scourges have helped to place the present native farmer where he is, peaceful and protected by a foreign government, but subject still to slavery and chieftain rule, as well as foreign exploitation. Forced labor and emigration to the mines are de-vitalizing factors, but equally difficult is the problem of the cotton-growing native of Uganda, unused to sudden wealth, and the Bantu of South Africa, crowded out of his traditional grazing lands and squarely facing a white race prejudice. In many tribes the African warrior has associated the woman with the food-crop, and the European advisor must find him a crop which it is not beneath his dignity to raise.

West Africa relies on the native “peasant proprietors” for its export crop and is keenly

aware of the need of crop improvement by educating the farmer. The universal primitive method of clearing the land by "shifting cultivation" prevails here. The resulting deforestation is its greatest drawback, for the native cuts away all but the food tree and burns over the land, then when fertility is exhausted by continuous planting, shifts to a new or idle clearing. In Southern Nigeria, enormous villages prevail, and the native walks as much as ten miles to cultivate the plot apportioned by the chief. These people, the Yorubi, have a male-farmer tradition. Cassava, millet, maize, yams, fruits and forest products furnish the average native diet. The average of land cultivated for each family is only one acre. The native who keeps cattle has from one to five per hut. The great handicap of the native is his lack of education away from the superstitions that prevent his improvement of the farm crop, the selection and planting of which he has adapted admirably to soil and climate conditions.

ASIA

THE Continent of Asia has 30 per cent of the world's area and 52.5 per cent of its population, but if Soviet Asia is excluded, there are in 18.4 per cent of the world's area 48.7 per cent of its people. The area as thus studied is 10,525,578 sq. miles and the population thereon is 862,676,932, seven times that of Africa in a slightly greater area. The density averages 82 persons per sq. mile (for all Asia it is only 58 persons per sq. mile).

The rural population is 87.7 per cent of the whole, or 757,200,000. This includes a nomadic non-agricultural but stock-raising people of at least ten million in Arabia, Iraq, Persia and inner China (i. e., Tibet, Mongolia, and Sin-

kiang). The typical Asian country is predominantly agricultural and predominantly illiterate, with poverty, overcrowded farm land, debt and ancestral rather than primitive methods of farming.

Most rural of all Asia is the Dutch East Indies. Java in 50,000 sq. miles has 690 people per sq. mile, the densest land mass in the world, but the bulk of this population are agricultural peasants. Siam is also predominantly agricultural, all outside of Bangkok being engaged in procuring the two chief tropical foods, rice and fish, and Bangkok itself being full of absentee landowners. Rice is Siamese coinage, —with exchange value in real estate.

The most urbanized country is Japan, 51 per cent of whose 60 million people are rural, but with a steady city-ward trend for a century past, the rate being as high as 4 per cent in the last recorded five years. However, the average farm of 2.5 acres is intensively cultivated, and the farmer often supplements his income with sericulture.

The largest Asian countries studied, China and India, have practically the same number of people, 318 million, if we accept for all China the conservative estimate (Chinese estimate is 436 million), and they have the same proportion of rural, or 89 per cent of the whole. In India the farming population is 72 per cent of the whole or 230 million, and here the village life, characteristic of the Orient, is less compact or adaptable by reason of its feudal basis, than the Chinese village, which is rooted in Familism, or the economic cohesion of blood-kindred. China proper has 210 million farming population or 70 per cent of the whole. Her interior possessions are absorbing the surplus farm population, migration to Manchuria being

tripled by recent conditions and more than twice as apt to settle permanently. Urbanization in China and India is unstable, the village or family having a permanent hold on the worker temporarily forced out to supplement the farm



income (which in China averages \$25 a year). The average farm in China is 4.5 acres: in North China a grain crop is raised with plow-culture, in South China a rice-crop and horticulture, with hoe-culture. The Chinese are expert gardeners, but ignorant of extensive farm-

ing and crop improvement. The Indian farmer is less skillful in manuring, irrigating and care of his small holding, which averages 3 acres. But the rich alluvial soil survives neglect and wasteful methods of plough-culture. Both Chin-



ese and Indian suffer from lack of farm credit and obligation to the moneylender.

The most primitive agriculture, with shifting cultivation, survives in the Malay countries, Burma and Oceania. Notable among aboriginal farmers are the Philippines in the interior,

who terrace their mountainsides for an irrigated rice crop.

Land tenure is by squatter right in the Malay Peninsula,—nominally the property of the crown, who in Cambodia may take away a concession if the occupant has not tilled it. In aboriginal Asia and Oceania it has the features of Africa, tribal communism with a planter-native problem in the state of mutual adjustments. Freehold, with village and family control of titles, prevails in eastern Asia. India has 70 per cent of her farm population under zamindari tenure, which is the control of large estates or areas by individuals or brotherhoods; the rest of Indian farms are held direct from the state by petty proprietors or villages.

Tenant-farmers and surplus laborers without land are a great increasing class in this part of Asia, and are the first class to leave for the city and industry. Twenty-eight per cent of the total Japanese farmers are tenants, and 25 per cent of the Chinese farmers, but in some sections of China where industrial concerns are the great landowners producing their own raw materials, 80 to 90 per cent are tenants. Landless laborers in India number 38 million or 17 per cent of the farm population. Traditionally they formed part of the cooperative village system, paid in kind and free of the present hazard of poverty. Only 58 per cent of Korea's farmers (who with their families are 82 per cent of the whole population) own their land.

Cultivated land in Asia is a small part of the total, and not greatly increasing, for internal communications are everywhere poor. Only 2 per cent of Sinkiang is cultivated, and only a quarter of China proper, which has a million arid square miles. Twenty per cent of Korea is arable, and 71 per cent forested.

Japan has 15 per cent in crops, 9 per cent in pasture and 48 per cent of its land forested. Deforestation is greatest in China of any country in the world, one-sixth of its area needing replanting, but Arbor Day is observed in China, Japan and Korea. There is more cultivated land in South Asia,—19 per cent of Ceylon being cultivated and 30 per cent of India. Forests in southeastern Asia form much of their export wealth.

Western Asia has a lower density and civilization and soil-culture of the reclaimed desert, where orchards, cereals, dates and the fat-tailed sheep are diet and wealth, and the farmer is fewer in numbers than the nomad and the trader. Afghanistan, with an enlightened rule, is improving a crop that brings a low export price because of primitive methods. Old well-systems and canals, a primitive hand-sickle and the ox to tread the grain are the characteristic method.

The Near East agriculture is most conservative in Asian Turkey, where 93 per cent of the population are a productive agricultural people on fertile soil, but left in pristine traditionalism of method by lack of railroads, schools, or expert supervision. Only 10 per cent of Syria is cultivated, but the bulk of the population are small farmers released from the Turkish hereditary serfdoms and tithing crops; agricultural credits are being extended. In Palestine, a lack of irrigation hampers the farmer, but the movement of Jewish peoples back to the land has been a great impetus and has replaced with the farm colony the old absentee owner and his Arab serfs.

The governments of most Asian countries are promoting the agricultural school and experiment station, but until communications are developed and the general literacy raised, pov-

erty will be the accompaniment of the civilizing influences, which have banished the old self-sufficiency and made the great rice-eating and rice-growing nations import rice for their own consumption.

LATIN AMERICA

THE area of South and Central America, Mexico and a portion of the West Indies, is 14.9 per cent of the land area of the world, and holds only 5.1 per cent of its population, or 90,501,676 people. The average density on this area of 8,560,468 sq. miles, is 10.5 people per square mile, as compared with Africa's 13 and Asia's 82. However, South America has a density of less than 2 persons per square mile.

The rural population of Latin America is 72 per cent of the whole, or 65,530,000 people. The aboriginal Indian is outside the census; he is often averse to agriculture. The Indian of ancient civilizations has been absorbed into modern agricultural systems. The large one-crop plantation in tropical and fertile sections rivals in importance the great cattle-raising occupation of these sections. Certain likeness exists to Asia and Africa, as "shifting cultivation" of the forest by the Indian, which in Colombia has a civilized counterpart in the stock-farmer who destroys the hillside forest and plants grass. Poverty, illiteracy and lethargy are characteristic of the great peon class. The Indians live by collective holdings in pueblos. The primitive plough, mule-threshing floor, and the machete are characteristic tools and methods. Corn and beans are the diet, and there is a method used of fertilizing ground by rotting, burning, and burying the bean-vines.

Mexico is the great diverse agricultural country of this group, with the high agricultural

population of 11 million or 78 per cent of the total. Since 1910 the governments have made an earnest effort to supply the small farmer with land, credit and some rural and agricultural schooling. The independent farmer or ranchero has thus become a democratic wedge in two ancient systems:—the village communism which is the only system understood by the Indian, and the Spanish landlordship as a political unit of power involving the mestizo population in serfdom and perpetual indebtedness, and yet from its wasteful methods of cultivation realizing little profit to the owner. The great central plateau of Mexico with a high temperate fertility is the vital factor in her prosperity and has been owned and cultivated since before the Conquest. The same is true of the Bogota tableland in Colombia, once the seat of the Chibchan Empire.

In Central America the characteristic land features are forest and mountain and tropical heat, with a western slope of great volcanic fertility. Guatemala, Salvador and Costa Rica have prospered in coffee plantations, and Costa Rica by reason of its large number of independent white farmers, for the early invader there found few Indians for serfdom. Nicaragua and Honduras have been retarded in agriculture by civil wars. As a rule these countries produce and export soil-products and have a rural population of 70 per cent of the whole. Panama is thinly populated and little cultivated, though very fertile.

The West Indies have the densest population and are sources of labor supply on the continent. Haiti is unique among these fertile islands, with its African population, 252.8 persons per square mile, totalling 2,050,000 rural peasants who have possessed the former feudal planta-

tions by "squatter right," the land untaxed, and its resources—richest of the West Indies—barely scratched.

South America has great range of climate and civilization, from the temperate Argentine devoted to cattle-raising to the tropical Guianas, which have a primitive American agriculture in juxtaposition with the European plantation. Dutch, French and British Guiana are alike in their narrow cultivated seacoast, with high steppe and forest behind, explored only by the miner. On the seacoast East Indian labor has been used in plantation labor since the abolition of slavery, and has resulted in an Oriental small-farmer class settled on their own land. The Indian in the interior cultivates the cassava root, sometimes using an axe instead of the machete to make the forest clearing. He plants the crop, which the woman cultivates; he supplements this food by hunting and fishing.

Uruguay shares with the Argentine the leadership in prosperity on the continent. While the latter is entirely devoted to cattle ranches, now in the process of subdivision into smaller units, Uruguay, with 60 per cent of its land in ranch, wisely devotes 25 per cent of its area to mixed farming and ranching.

Brazil, with the greatest unexplored forest land in the greatest river-basin of the world, has one-fifth of its three million square miles in farms, 650,000 in number, but only 3 per cent under cultivation. Immigrants have been induced to take the place of plantation slavery. Seventy-seven per cent of Brazilians and 48 per cent of their immigrants are illiterate. Both the east and west coasts of South America have received large European peasant immigrations, in this manner, so that there is also an alien

farmer problem. Not only have state lands been thrown open, but estates have been subdivided, as they were in Chile in 1857. Chile now has few estates larger than 2,000 acres, and one-third of its farms are 12 acres or less in size.

The interior or mountainous countries are backward. Three-quarters of Bolivia is undeveloped, its tin mining alone being notable, though even for that labor is unreliable. Half its population is Indian, only 12 per cent white, the rest mixed blood. The Indian subsists on pigs and cattle, and maize or Indian corn, the great food-crop of the continent. Paraguay, a backward stock country, Peru and Venezuela in the north have "wild" Indians and little civilized agriculture.

The Argentine, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay have made legislative attempts at establishing an agriculture and an elementary rural education. Movable rural schools are being established in the cattle-raising sections and adult schools in Uruguay.

THIS is a hasty review of agriculture in the lands so primitive or so congested with uneducated masses of people that they have called the missionary to their shores. Largely tropical, they furnish food for our industrialized countries, but even when their farmers are not exploited they have not prospered.

The educated African boy who is ashamed of his "farmer" father and the Latin youth who "would rather be a clerk" will hardly form a contented and efficient farming population in the future.

The Chinese say that only the scholar exceeds the farmer in rank because the soil is holy and on the soil he is a creator. Some such dignity must imbue all agricultural education.

