

Moral rearmament on our farms

LIKE all other responsible citizens, the farmer is concerned about the great problems facing our country — he does not sit sleepily drinking his coffee on the stoep untroubled and uninformed.

Maybe he sees the problems more starkly than many others for, inevitably, the farmer is constantly in touch with real problems in his day to day adjustment to changing circumstances and weather conditions.

However much he would like to blame others or pass on the difficulty, he knows that anything which has to be done on the farm is ultimately his responsibility. Thus, no problem can long remain hazy but must become simplified and clear.

In the whirl of current and cross-current, of propaganda and politics, here are two straightforward down to the earth facts: labour is scarce and becoming difficult, and our soil is difficult and becoming scarce.

Not enough

These are two problems in urgent need of solution. Lacking a solution there is no future for farming in this country. Food, already scarce at times, will diminish at an ever-increasing rate. The industrial development now taking place on such a large scale in South Africa will find its investments on a slipping foundation. The outlook will be gloomy indeed.

Soil-erosion and rural labour have been the subject of several commissions, and have received the most earnest study by many thoughtful and capable men.

The Minister of Agriculture stressed the seriousness of the soil-erosion problem recently when he said, "Even if we spent £150,000,000 in the next five years, it would not give us stability for our soil." That is a high price to pay and still have no success.

The truth is that the willingness to spend a lot of money to solve a problem is not enough.

We have a model conservation Act and eager technicians. The law is there, but erosion continues at an ever-increasing rate. Laws are not enough. Even laws backed by money are not enough. Only a new attitude to the land and the real function of farming will bring a lasting solution.

It was because we dimly realised some of these things that we welcomed Moral Rearmament when we met it. Here for the first time we found something which went to the root of the problem with the clear and simple challenge, "if you want to build a new world, the place to start is with yourself", and, by implication, "if you are really concerned about the problems facing your industry and your country, the place to begin is right at home."

From that time farming for us was no longer simply a way of making a living between weekends. It became an adventure, and an absorbing and exciting way of life.

Revolution

There was a new kind of pioneering to be done; we had to take risks in radically reducing our stocking rate, in trying out new and unproved methods of farm management. We had to accept a lower income and basis of living. We learned to study the needs of our labourers and not only our own.

A revolution took place in our attitudes toward our neighbours and our soil. Today the grass is creeping back to once bare places, springs are improving, our staff are content.



A group of farmers from all over Africa who attended a moral rearmament conference in the Transvaal. Seated together on the right are Piet and Jack, who are mentioned in this article.

We look back with gratitude because what we took on faith has proved to be fact.

But all over Africa — and beyond — farmers have accepted the standards of MRA and found their way to better and happier farming.

In Kenya you could meet Jack. His farm is bounded on the East by Lake Victoria. His lucerne lands run right up to the shore of the lake and never need to be irrigated for they draw their moisture from the inexhaustible subterranean supply provided by the lake.

Jack says, "The way to get the farm right is to get the farmer right," and goes on to tell how before he met MRA he farmed to get as much out of the soil and put as little back as possible. When things went wrong, there was always one of three things to blame (sometimes all three) — the weather, the neighbours or the Government.

But those days are past. Recently his farm was photographed from the air to be used as a demonstration of what contouring and correct land use could do. Jack sees his farm as having a part in the great ideological battle for a new world in which all resources will be used for the benefit of all. In this battle adequate food supplies are a first essential.

Alben also farms in Kenya, on the border of a large Native reservation. He grew up with a terror in his heart — the fear of spears-in-the-dark, which was the heritage of all whose forbears lived near the borders during the turbulent days of the opening up to Africa. And because of his hidden terror he had a greater terror — that his fear would be recognised for what it was.

To hide it, he developed a harsh manner and used fear and thunder methods on his farm. Now Alben will tell you with the assurance that comes from experience, "The Natives are on my side. In the recent threatened revolt, I slept peacefully at night. You know our only security is in the respect and gratitude of our neighbours."

Ambition

Piet works a big agricultural farm in the Eastern Transvaal. A main crop is potatoes. Now it is a very boring business peeling the family's potatoes for dinner, but it is backbreaking and often heartbreaking work digging, grading, bagging and lugging sacks of potatoes from the fields. At such times tempers are liable to become frayed.

— By Roland Kingwill —

"I had one ambition," Piet says, "and that was to be a top farmer, and to reach that end I decided to keep my thumb on the African workers."

Often he was harsh, sometimes he withheld full wages due. The result was that he was often short-handed.

When MRA came to this Ermelo farm, the boss found he had much to put right between himself and his labourers. But today he has no labour shortage. Men who left the farm to work on the Rand have come back to the farm and are happy.

Mike farms on an irrigation farm under the Vaal-Hart. There have been bad times, adverse weather, infertile seed.

Sometimes bad markets. The plots are too small to justify the purchase of modern farm machinery which makes production competitive and efficient.

Disturb sabotaged efforts to form co-operative groups to buy the needed tractor, haybaler etc., until on the basis of MRA Mike found a way to co-operate with his neighbours.

In the Western Province wine-making is the traditional form of farming. When Wynand took over his farm, this was the main output. But, though working the farm successfully, deep in his heart he left dissatisfied for he felt that producing wine was not being used for producing the real needs of the country.

He began to switch from wine to dairying and fruit production. He is producing for the real needs of his country, though it is less profitable.

In spite of solemn head-shaking by his friends who prophesied that he would soon find himself with no labour, he persisted in his idea of ending the daily tot of wine. Although some of his men left, he still found himself faithfully served and others came to take the places of those who had left.

Satisfaction

Now Wynand is happy for his farming is in line with the feeling of his deepest loyalties to God and to his country, for God's plan and his country's needs come before his personal profits.

Charles is a man of powerful physique, boundless energy and wide and generous thinking. His dam, which holds 2,500,000,000 gallons of water, must be one of the biggest owner-built dams in all Southern Africa.

But after showing you his dam and the extensive lands below it which are under irrigation, Charles will tell you that though he had built the dam and done much to increase the value of this outlying Karoo farm which he bought 30 years ago, it was not until he met MRA that he found the way to link his enterprise and its vast production potential to the needs of his country and began to feel a sense of real satisfaction from his work.

This farm is run on conservation lines. The veld is getting its due periods of rest while the lands are being contoured and worked to build up fertility and reduce soil loss.

Servants' living quarters have been overhauled and improved. Co-operation is the keynote. The spirit overflows into the home; the children catch it.

Farming is no longer a business. It is what it was meant to be — a way of co-operative and creative family living.

These are a few of many farmers from here and there who have found for themselves a new meaning to life, a heart-filling meaning to their work and at the same time have found they are making a definite contribution to the final solution to some of the most stubborn and difficult problems of the land.

Each in his own way, different and separate, has found himself switching to conservation farming and better labour relationships.

Battle

This is important for it ties up with the battle which is being waged for the hearts and loyalties of men and women right across the world. The battleline is drawn sharply in Korea, less distinctly out here, but it passes through every home and every hut in the country.



THE WRITER

The choice is clearly before us all — exploitation of our land and human resources for our own ends and to our own profit, or devotion of ourselves and our resources for the benefit of all. That is what MRA is about; it is the better idea in the war of ideas.

You cannot kill an idea with legislation, or even by bullets. You can only kill it by substituting a better idea.

But MRA is more than an idea; it is a life. The men and women of MRA believe that only by restoring God to leadership in personal, national and international relations can humanity become free of the fears and tensions and constant warring between sections and races.

The thousands who went to Caux, in Switzerland, this year, where an international conference for MRA was held, testify to the fact that leaders from all walks of life, in all countries outside the Iron Curtain (and some within), are turning more and more certainly to this same conclusion.

And we on the farms who have tried it have no more doubts. Here is the answer, here is the way — thus, and only thus, can we save our soil, build internal harmony, find our true destiny.

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