

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL NEWSPAPER.

by

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In presenting this paper perhaps a few words as to its scope and the sources of information might not be out of place. The paper is in no sense meant or desired to be an historical outline of the rise and fall of the various journals, but is concerned with the causes and nature of the changes which they have undergone. As to the sources of information, most of the data and deductions have been drawn from the examinations of the files of old agricultural journals in the library at this College, and in comparing these volumes with papers of recent date. The historical matter concerning the early publications has been obtained partly from "Journalism in the United States", by Hudson; and partly from data kindly furnished by the Country Gentlemen.

The Agricultural press comes in the division known as special or class journalism. The cause of the foundation of an agricultural press is the same as with all other special publications. There is always a demand before such a journal is founded. We often hear the statement that the mission of the agricultural paper is to educate the farmers, but we may feel sure that no one has taken such a duty upon himself until the farmer has desired to be educated. Of course the first press notices pertaining to agriculture were found in journals of a general and not agricultural nature.

In truth there is some conflict of authorities as to the identity of the joint agricultural journal because of this fact. It seems

that some without thoroughly investigating the matter have given the credit of priority to the "Farmers Weekly Museum", published at Walpole, New Hampshire, in 1796. This view is probable due to the combination of three circumstances; first, the name - "Farmers Weekly Museum"; Second, the publishers, in 1803 promised publication of agricultural news and matters of agricultural interest, third the fact that Thos. Greene Fessender, who afterwards (1822) established the "New England Farmer", was a fairly constant contributor. "The Farmer Magazine" however, in point of fact was not devoted to agriculture. The first journal devoted entirely to the farmers' interests was the "American Farmer", established at Baltimore, April 2, 1818 by John S. Skinner. The second publication in reference to priority was that of Solomon Southwick. "The Plow-boy", published in Albany, in 1821. Other early publications were established as follows: The "Southern Agriculturist", Charleston, S. C., 1821; "Genesee Farmer", Rochester, N. Y., 1830; The "Maine Farmer", 1833; The "Cultivator", 1834 and the "American Agriculturist", 1842. Numerous other journals had been published prior to 1850. Many of these, however, were compelled after a few years to cease publication.

Of all the publications started prior to 1850, eleven only survive. A twelfth, the "New England Farmer", claims to have started in 1822, but the "New England Farmer" of to-day seems to have no authentic connection with the paper of that name started in 1822. The "Country Gentlemen" claims the right of being known as the oldest agricultural journal. Its first issue was January 1, 1831, under the name of the "Genesee Farmer". Since that time it has changed name and form, but has been continuously in the hands of the Luther Tucker's - father and son - and has never failed to appear on its appointed date.

The other ten journals established before 1850 and still existing are: "Maine Farmer", 1833; "American (Boston) Cultivator", 1839; "Southern Planter", 1840; "Massachusetts Plowman", 1841; "Prairie Farmer", 1841; "American Agriculturist", 1842; "Southern Cultivator", 1843; "Indiana Farmer", 1845; "Coleman's Rural World", 1848; and "Ohio Farmer", 1848. Since 1850 the number of such publications has increased to a surprising degree. It is since that date also that most of the further specialization of the agricultural press has taken place.

In type these early journals were quite similar. They as a departure from the form of papers then current, embraced the field of rural science. It was before the days of Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, and material with which to fill their columns was scarce. They even lacked to full and complete government census reports which are available to-day. Again the people of those early days were still struggling on the borderland of superstition, and in consequence, the spirit of the age was not one of an intense scientific nature as is the present. In consequence of these conditions, the editor had to fill his columns mainly with his own personal views, and with letters, often of questionable worth, from correspondents. That the editors realized and felt this lack of authentic authority on the problems of agriculture, is shown by the eagerness and liberality with which they published selections from every work of superior worth as it appeared. The "Farmers Magazine", for 1841, contained a whole series of articles upon the "Principles of Organic Chemistry" as presented by Leibig. Other papers of this time quoted whole pages from "Allens American Agriculture". The journals of the various

Agricultural societies were also used extensively as material to be submitted to the public.

One of the most characteristic factors of these early papers is shown in the nature of the queries and articles of correspondents. These contributions are very frequently upon some superstitious subject or at least a very unscientific one. In some of the early journals, hardly an issue can be found that does not contain one or more letters from correspondents arguing the pros and cons of questions such as, "whether wheat turns to cheat or not", etc. Such discussions show the lack of adequate scientific knowledge regarding even such fundamental sciences as Botany, and also the disrepute in which the common people held the scientist. From this lack of science, the problems of the times merged into absolute superstition. The "Ohio Cultivator", January 5, 1847, contains a one and one-half column article, giving statistical proof that the moon does not effect the weather. Some of the methods reported by correspondents seem ludicrous in the extreme. One writer gives the results of feeding boiled corn cobs to his hogs. Many remarkable superstitious remedies and spells are reported as a cure for diseases. Many of the articles however, are possessed of considerable merit and are invested with a true scientific spirit of progress. The skeptical attitude of the people is also realized in the essays which the editor deemed fit to insert in defence of "book learning", and the eagerness with which was printed the testimony of any correspondent regarding the utility of the agricultural paper.

These early papers were further characterized by the lack of the modern methods of making engravings, etc. Some of the cuts of these early papers appear extremely cumbersome. Again we find a

great difference in the amount of space devoted to advertisements. The early papers seldom contained more than one column of such matter, and were frequently devoid of any advertising matter whatever. With their limited circulation we are led to wonder how they managed to exist at all.

Since the Civil War the agricultural press has had a phenomenal development. It has been partly a follower and partly a leader in scientific progress. It has been the follower of the foremost scientific men; it has been the leader and educator among the great mass of people. It has been both the index and cause of progress. Perhaps no factor has entered into its progress so much as the development of the system of Experiment Stations. The agricultural newspaper and the experiment station has gone hand in hand, as educators of the farming peoples. The Experiment Stations have been imbued with a true scientific spirit. The agricultural editor has been glad enough to obtain material of careful experimental and authoritative nature with which to fill his columns. In fact, to-day, both the Station and the farm papers are both very much dependent upon one another. The Station has made the paper much more authentic, and the agricultural press has made the Station a useful factor in educating the farmer. Without such press the work of the Station would be of little avail with a great class of the farming population. Even at this day when the scientist seems so fundamental to most of us, there is still a large class who are skeptical as to the practicability of his work. This class is reached to a greater or less degree, through the farm papers, and is gradually being educated and brought to a knowledge of scientific agriculture.

The true progressive farmer secures the latest knowledge of agricultural advancement through the agricultural newspaper. He puts it into use. The skeptic neighbor will not believe the Experiment Station direct but will put into practice the methods of his scientific neighbor to some extent, and is thus indirectly reached by the Experiment Station through the agricultural press. The paper is also of much use to the Station in pointing out the needs of the farmer, and thus suggesting work for the Station. In fact in the last twenty-five years, the paper and the Station have become intimately related and the future of one is bound up in the future of the other.

The development of the agricultural journal has caused its further specialization. Some few retain nearly the type of the early journals, in that they deal with subjects of somewhat general but mostly of agricultural and stockraising nature. This journal is eminently adapted to the needs of the small farmer as it has all the general information; its fruit columns; its dairy columns; etc. From this type has sprung the more specialized paper. Thus we have the type of paper devoted to the interests of the stock raiser in general. Such papers attempt to meet the needs of the general stock farmer, and they do meet such needs, but as the specialization of farming is carried further, so must the farm journal specialize to a greater degree to meet the needs of the specialist. As an example of this we have the various swine papers which deal practically entirely with the needs and subjects with which the swine breeder is mostly interested. In such papers the great bulk of matter of general farm interest is largely eliminated. So great is the scientific progress of the age,

that even in this narrow realm the editor seems to find less of those difficulties, which beset the early editor, in filling the columns of his paper.

In all American farming there can hardly be found a department which is so phenomenously developed and of such great importance as the industry of dairying. There are a large number of papers devoted to this branch of agriculture. Perhaps the most specialized of all class journalism is found here. Papers are published, treating the special subjects of "Dairy and Creamery", "Dairy Farming" and "Dairy Products". The last named is typified by the "Elgin Dairy Report", a journal devoted to prices of dairy products only. Here also we find class journalism carried into the breed, as represented by such publications as the "Jersey Bulletin". This shows that even a stock paper on dairy cattle in general, is too broad to meet the demands of some special breeders.

Another great branch of agricultural science that has received great impetus during the last two decades, is that of poultry farming. The mails seem flooded with poultry journals, all on good paper, and usually in magazine form. The number seems exceedingly large when we consider how few people are interested in poultry as a special department. Thus may be cited a great number of special classes of farm journalism in Horticultural lines, i.e., Fruit Growing, Vegetable gardening, Beekeeping, etc.

One other special class needs special mention, and that is the general stock market journal, as typified by the "Daily Drovers Telegram". The development of this class of journalism marks a step in the development of the agricultural newspaper and the advancement of the farmer in general. It shows that the farmer has become

an intelligent business man and is ready and capable of keeping his eye on the market and of feeding and breeding to fit market demands. It also places him somewhat on the basis of a speculator in that he may watch the market for the best time to dispose of his produce. This class of market reports differ materially from the reports given in the general weekly journals. The latter is merely information without purpose; the former is data given for the purpose of supplying the farmer with data to decide his course of conduct in business.

We may well ask what is the meaning of all this specialization. Of course it is to fill a demand. The specialization of farming naturally causes the type of journal to change. But along with this is another great factor, and that is the development of the agricultural newspaper as an advertising medium. The special journal is of course a better place to insert a special advertisement, as it meets with a special class of readers. Hence, a journal which exists practically off its advertisements, would naturally specialize to better secure a certain desirable class of readers. The earliest journals were practically without advertising matter and their rates were comparatively low. For instance, the "Southern Cultivator" established 1843, although it made announcement of advertisement, insertions for one dollar per square of twelve lines, yet it secured none such matter until the middle of the first volume; when thirty lines of advertising matter was published. In the following issue one column was devoted to this purpose, but this was the maximum reached per issue the first volume. The "Ohio Cultivator", for 1847-8, never reached more than two columns of advertisements. The "American Agriculturist", Vol. I, contained very little advertising

matter, scarcely ever reaching one column in one issue. What is said of these journals holds true with all the early representatives of the agricultural press.

When we compare the advertising matter published in the early journals with the present conditions, we become impressed with the magnitude of the advertising of an agricultural notice which is published in the farm papers, to-day. A "Breeder's Gazette" selected at random, contained twenty-six pages of advertising matter, in a forty-eight page issue. An issue of the "Poultry Gazette" contained twenty-three pages of advertisements out of thirty-two pages. A comparison of journals of other nature is interesting. This one month the advertising matter in Colliers Weekly, was 39,183 lines; McClure's 33,152; Harpers 24,054; Scribners 21,908; . The advertisements in the "Reliable Poultry Journal", for the same date was ,40,855 lines. This excessive development of the agricultural press, toward advertising has developed a class of worthless, trashy, mushroom agricultural papers that subsist merely off of their advertisements. Their papers are usually general, rather than special in their nature, filled with poor reading matter and often with bogus advertisements. In general, however, the advertisements in the agricultural newspapers are of great value. The notices of breeders and implement dealers are especially valuable. In fact it is often argued that the advertisements in a standard agricultural journal is often of nearly as much importance to the farmer as is the reading matter itself. In some of the more specialized publications, perhaps this is true but it is rather an extreme statement for the general stock or agricultural journal.

The question naturally arises how far is class journalism to be carried in agriculture and what are to be the governing influences of the future. Certainly the factor of advertising matter and the specialization of farming will continue to act. Besides this there is another factor that has begun to manifest itself, that is the question of universal or sectional journal. Certainly the market press will be sectional as its function is immediate. Again there is influences which will necessarily make some of our other special papers sectional. Our country is of great dimensions and varying conditions. The journal of New England will not fit the conditions of the South. Neither will a Mississippi Valley journal be suitable for the California Horticulturist. Such broad sectionalism as this is already in operation. In the future will not the field narrow down still further? The present habit of copying a good article from one journal to another would be enough to bind the sections one to another, while in sectional journalism it would allow more time to be spent in testing local conditions and applying great principles to local problems.

But whatever may be the nature of the development in the future, the agricultural newspapers in general, have a function to fulfil in disbursing the results of scientific investigation and in emphasizing to the average farmer the great fundamental principles by presenting them to him in a thousand new ways. The agricultural press must from necessity remain the educator of the great mass of American farmers.