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OF AGRICULTURAL TOURS¹

IT was the agricultural tours of Arthur Young in England during the latter part of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century that made him the evangelist of the new agriculture in that country; and it was Albrecht Thaer's studies of English agriculture about the beginning of the nineteenth century which made him the great leader of the new agriculture of Germany. Last summer I had the great pleasure of spending three months on an agricultural tour of France and I became greatly impressed by the importance of this method of studying agriculture.

Every agricultural problem has its setting in an historical and geographic background. The man who knows this background is the one whose mind will pick up the outside relations that will save him from the danger of wrong conclusions. It will give him a setting for his problems that will enable him to guide his thinking effectively.

I would draw attention to a few of the techniques of a good agricultural tour. In the first place, one should approach a country like France with all the mental pictures that can be obtained from accumulated data. For instance, before starting last year I was able to go to the Department of Agriculture in Washington and get a series of maps showing where the principal crops and livestock are produced in France. By combining the information provided by these maps I was able to get a general view of the types of farming in the different regions. I also received suggestions from the United States Department of Agriculture and from the agricultural agencies in Paris as to the best places to settle down to study each type of farming. In Paris we received letters of introduction to key people at the different points we had selected as centres for making our studies. When we got into an area, the first thing was to get in touch with either the Director of Agricultural Service of the Ministry of Agriculture or the Director of the Chamber of Agriculture, to whom we had an introduction. From him we received introductions to the people who had in their minds the picture of what was going on in the area, and appointments were made. For example, in one area we visited the director of a beet sugar

¹ Based on a talk given to the International Conference of Agricultural Economists at Cuernavaca in August 1961.

factory, a farmer who was president of an agricultural credit bank, a farmer who was president of a co-operative winery and other farmers who were leaders in their communities. The exploration of the clear pictures that were in the minds of the farmers and in the minds of the people who ran the different agencies that served the farmers gave me a vivid picture of the life and rural economy of the area.

Now let me invite you to join me on this tour. As we walk over a farm with an individual operator and talk with him about what he is doing, we find that he has a mental picture of the whole operation of the farm from one year's end to the other. He sees exactly how all of his enterprises fit together. You get a clear idea from this farmer of the pattern which he holds in mind from day to day as he proceeds in his farm operations. Since these thinking farmers are the leaders in the community you then have a basis for understanding the agriculture of the community because the other people are following the leaders.

An important part of the technique of the farm tour is that careful notes should be prepared immediately after visiting a particular farmer and before visiting another farmer. A tape recorder can be very useful for this purpose.

Another of the things that an agricultural survey will do is to vivify your knowledge of agricultural geography and your knowledge of agricultural history. These farmers have in mind not only the picture of the activities of the year; they also have the picture for the past years and they have the aspirations for the years to come. It is exceedingly interesting, after having walked over a farm and seen what was going on, to sit down in the dining-room, where some refreshments are served, and listen to the farmer tell the story of his family and how, perhaps, they worked for four generations to expand the farm from one hectare to sixty. As you visit one farmer after another, you get a mental picture of the area which is exceedingly fresh and inspiring, and which enables you to interpret and evaluate statistical tables. I am not suggesting that this is the only method of studying agriculture. I am simply speaking of this method as one to which every student should give special attention when he goes to a foreign country. Furthermore, when he goes home, he will for the first time begin to understand the system of farming in his own area. At least, this was true of my own experience.

My first agricultural tour in Europe was in 1899, when I had the privilege of going to Europe as a student. The first thing I did was to

spend fifty days visiting farmers in the United Kingdom and making notes carefully, each day, about what I learned. Each day I visited one farmer; that was a day's work. I usually arrived at 9.00 o'clock, stayed for lunch and did not get away until after tea. I then moved on towards my next appointment. I almost always had an introduction to someone not far ahead.

Now, I wish to speak of some of the things that agricultural tours do. In the first place, the mental pictures that one gains as a result of exploring the minds of the people who are the leaders in the agriculture of a given region make one less likely to form over-simplified theories. Another grave weakness on the part of many students is provincialism. However, travelling in foreign countries and comparing them with your own country goes a long way towards removing this provincialism. Another difficulty often met with among economists arises from the fact that they tend to express themselves in language too abstract to be understood by those whom they are trying to educate. I believe that the person who has a good supply of mental pictures finds plenty of concrete illustrations, so that he need not indulge in abstractions.

In my lifetime, brief in terms of anthropology, I have had the privilege of visiting farmers in most of the European countries, in India, China and Japan, and, of course, in every part of the United States. I want to tell you of two particular parts of the work that went into my first book on agricultural economics, which were fundamentally influenced by my first agricultural tours. I do not minimize the importance of the lectures I attended, given by Prof. A. Conrad in Halle and Prof. Max Sering at the University of Berlin; but I will say, that when I got home and commenced to give some courses in agricultural economics and to write a small book on agricultural economics, I found that I had a new understanding of the agriculture of the United States as a result of my agricultural tours in Britain and Germany.

When I went to Europe, one of the first problems that I wanted to solve was that of land tenure. Tenancy had been increasing rather rapidly in the United States and there were many writers who thought that this meant a degradation of the rural population. I knew that Britain had become a land of tenant farmers. Therefore I wanted to find out why nearly all the farmers in Britain leased the land they operated. I wanted to understand this so as to help build fences against a similar movement in the United States. My fifty-day tour

changed my mind with regard to this problem, which I expected to use as the subject for my Ph.D. thesis. I found the tenant farmers of Britain living better, many of them making more money, than the American farmers who owned their farms; and, as I talked to them, I found that they preferred to be tenants because they did not want to carry the load of the big investment in land, particularly when land was capitalized on the basis of about 2 per cent.

The first publication that I prepared after I became a member of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Wisconsin, was on land tenure, on methods of renting land in Wisconsin, and it was an entirely different bulletin from what it would have been had I not studied land tenure in Britain and found that tenant-farming could be gloriously successful if the landlords were brought under proper control by the government.

In the neighbourhood of Halle where I spent the spring semester of 1900, I was surrounded by farms where sugar-beet was one of the principal crops in the rotation. James Wilson, who was Secretary of Agriculture in the United States at that time, was putting forward great efforts to develop a sugar-beet industry in the United States. He gave me an honorary commission to study agriculture in Europe and told me that he wanted me to look into the sugar-beet industry. I looked into it and began to understand why Wilson was having so much difficulty to promote a sugar-beet industry in the Corn Belt. In the Corn Belt the sugar-beet had to compete with corn whereas in Germany it had to compete only with potatoes and fodder root crops. And so, this thinking led me to the conclusion that if we were going to introduce sugar-beet in the Corn Belt, it would have to be more profitable than corn. This led me on to the study of competing crops and non-competing crops. As a result I formulated the theory of combining competing and non-competing enterprises on the farm in such a manner as to keep the labour busy with the most profitable enterprise in each season of the year.

These are two things in my first book on agricultural economics that had their roots in my agricultural tours and gave form to the material I got from other sources. Many other methods are useful, but the thing I want to emphasize today is that the exploring of the minds of farmers gives you a living historical and geographic background which adds vigour, life and safety to your thinking.

It has been my desire, in speaking to you of the importance of the Agricultural Tour, that many of you may give increased attention to

this method of studying agricultural economics and that you will write up the results of your tours. I hope, moreover, that these reports may be published in the *International Journal of Agrarian Affairs* under the aegis of the Oxford University Institute of Agrarian Affairs on behalf of the International Association of Agricultural Economists. This would enable *all* of us to benefit from the tours made by each one of us. It would enable all of us to put new life into our vision of the agricultural geography of the world. It would broaden our vision and deepen our insights into the economic problems of agriculture.