

**THE FOUNDATION OF
THE AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE
OF BEAUVAIS
(2/4)**

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**II- What was the educational practice
in the Agricultural Teacher Training Institute
of Beauvais between 1855 and 1875?**

In terms of education, the guiding principles which inspired the first teachers, Brothers or lay teachers, of the agricultural Institute of Beauvais are to be found in the official documents at our disposal, and which come from the «Regime Council» or from the Brother Director of the Institute (Brother Menée until 1864, then Brother Eugène-Marie). Alongside these documents, there are the different reports to read, which were made at the end of a few years of existence of the agricultural Institute, different texts from the public authorities, the minutes of annual meetings of the Old Boys' Association (from 1867 on), the biographies of the Brothers, etc... This second series of texts allows us to judge the continuity and changes in the putting into practice of the educational and pedagogical guidelines.

The foundation of the agricultural Teacher Training Institute of Beauvais was authorised by ministerial decree of 20th December, 1854. The deliberation of the Regime Council on 25th January, 1855, authorised Brother Menée to «be headmaster of this school», but added five «reservations» (1). The first was of an economic nature: it forbade the Brothers to provide an «advance of funds» to the new establishment; the four others directly concern the educational and pedagogical project. First of all, the Brothers «would not be expected to teach»; it would devolve on the Brother Director «to organise a teaching staff». This second point is very interesting since the appeal for lay teachers was, up to that time, unusual in the Congregation. Bavencove gives the list of teachers in those first years: Brother Menée was the Headmaster, «M. Louis Gossin taught agriculture and rural economics, M. Dubois, the departmental veterinarian, was in charge of animal studies; M. Le Père, chief engineer of the Department, was in charge of rural engineering. M. Auger, an imperial prosecutor, gave the course on law; Brother Eugène (...) took maths, general zoology, physics, chemistry and botany. Other devoted teachers, notably M. Louis Doyat, who took charge of horticultural teaching and cultivation for more than half a century, accepted the other courses» (2). Yet this list still left out Brother Milhau, who was already a teacher in the boarding school and an expert entomologist, (3) and other Brothers doing essential work either in the boarding school, or, as Brother Laurentius from 1859, on the farm. Two characteristics should be noted from this text (which is taken

from the text of Brother Antonis on the life of Brother Eugène): -1- The new Institution was the place of an unusual experiment, that of the association between Brothers, teaching mainly basic subjects and accompanying the pupils to the practical work on the farm, and lay teachers giving specialised teaching, which was the fruit of their professional work. -2- The unequalled scientific competence of Brother Eugène-Marie allowed him to guarantee all the basic scientific teaching, even though «his leaning was to the natural sciences» (4).

So, throughout the history of the I.A.B., we can see among the human causes of its success, both the complementarity and the cohesion of a professional staff of quality and the emergence of some great figures (among who is Brother Eugène) who stand out.

Let us go back to the discussion of 25th January, 1855. The Regime imposed three conditions concerning the entry and the possible dismissal of pupils, as well as the regulation of studies. The Brothers Assistants and the Superior General insisted «that a regulation be drawn up to which all the pupils will be bound», that «the pupils will be admitted only if they had excellent certificates, and after confidential enquiries have first been made about them from people who knew them particularly well» (5), that «the Brother Headmaster will be able to dismiss any pupil whose conduct or principles are bad, even if not dangerous». Further, the Council decided the boarding fees (600 Fr) and the conditions of the boarding department: «the pupils will work in a common room and each will have a cell for sleeping». These passages show an uneasiness concerning a new requirement which the Brothers had no or little experience of: the education of young men aged twenty and over. From this arose the tension over the choosing of subjects deemed suitable, and also the conditions adequate for this age group. The buildings newly constructed in rue Nully d'Hécourt by Brother Menée, included some individual rooms (counting as cells). Though the discussion did not envisage the pupils sleeping in dormitories as those in the boarding school, the regulation, nevertheless, foresaw the two possibilities (art. 25) (6).

We will look at the regulation of studies in place in 1858. We will not dwell on the nature of the programme of courses, which has already been analysed in the text of Quéméré et al. (1999) (7), except to pinpoint the formation intention of the founders. What conditions did the pupils have to fulfil in order to be admitted to the Institute? They had to be aged 16 or under, wanting «to follow an agricultural career» or preparing to teach agriculture (article 1). An entrance exam safeguarded the admission: preparation could be made for it by following a preparatory course (articles 6 and 7). This exam would allow the mastery of French (French dictation and composition) and arithmetic to be assessed. It seems, in some respects only, to have been modelled on the brevet élémentaire (8); the required level seems to have been lower. In fact there was no reason to insist on greater scientific knowledge: the scientific knowledge necessary for agriculture were part of the course with a view to a practical application. All the documents of this time suggest a teaching which was «both theoretical and practical». Besides, the school probably wanted to remain open to young men whose level of studies was not very high (9). What kind of pupil entered the IAB, around 1860? We have already spoken of the founder's intention with regard to this, but the prospectus of 1858 clearly distinguishes between those who were preparing to teach agriculture and those who stopped at the basic level of agricultural ability. Brother Menée wrote «So the pupils of the Institute are in two categories. The future teachers are aged between 18 and 25, and are destined to teach in the

lycées, colleges, seminaries, Teacher Training Schools, according to the statute of departmental teacher of agriculture» in conformity with the decree of 1848. These details are not to be found in the later versions of the presentation document (1871, 1882) (10).

The programme of studies insisted on the fundamental formation, especially in the first year (French, mathematics, agriculture, zoology, rural law, physics, drawing). In the second year, the approach to the scientific subjects was mainly with regard to their application to agriculture (Chemistry applied to agriculture, agricultural entomology, botany); more technical teaching was introduced (arboriculture, rural accountability, animal studies); in the third year lessons on rural economics appeared. The application of pedagogical principles based on an important insistence on personal work was noticeable. «All the pupils write an essay or an analysis of each lesson» (art. 13); they write a report on the « agriculture outings» (art. 33). All the pupils follow a course of religious instruction (art. 3). The contents of this course in the 1860s is not available. At the end of the century, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost Fathers, it was decidedly apologetic in slant, and concentrated on the defence of the institutional Church. We will not detail the exam procedure (Cf. Quéméré et al., 1999). It is interesting though to see that up to 1881, a commission appointed by the Prefect of the Oise delivered the certificate of agricultural capability and the diploma of agricultural teaching, after the exam. In 1858, the pupils finishing their second year sat the certificate of agricultural capability, and the pupils finishing their third year sat the diploma of agricultural teaching. According to the prospectus of 1871, Brother Eugène-Marie seems to have raised the level and made the procedure more complicated than under Brother Menée as Head. The two diplomas were sat in the third year in two successive exams. Furthermore, the pupils who were aiming to be agricultural teachers had «to defend an agricultural thesis and give an oral lesson». The thesis had been obligatory since 1864. In addition, there were termly exams (art. 20), whereas in 1858, only an Easter exam was mentioned (1858, art. 21). The prospectus of 1882 is interesting, since it is the first year that the Prefect would no longer appoint a commission and would not sign the diplomas. He thus refused to involve the responsibility and support of the State. In that year, France began the change of policy of public and lay Instruction, under the impetus given by Jules Ferry. The framing of the Falloux law (1851), however, spared the Institute from being affected by the laws of laicisation of public establishments. However, since he did not expect this suppression, Brother Eugène-Marie still wrote on 1st January, 1882, that the studies, the transition from one year to the next, and the giving of the certificate of agricultural capability and the diploma of agricultural teaching depended on «the commission appointed by the Prefect». We know what happened to this commission: it was placed under the authority of the French Farmers' Society (S.A.F.). Paul Blanchemain (11), who was President of the Old Boys' Society and vice-president of the French Farmers' Society reported that, on 29th May, 1884, «the Farmers' Society decided to accord its patronage to the agricultural Institute of Beauvais and every year since then it has appointed a certain number of its council to supervise the sitting of exams at the school». The delegation's mission became more captivating each year. It often had to give up two or three whole days to examine 20 or 25 pupils of the 3rd year who presented their theses, and deliberated the certificates of ability and the diplomas».

(1) BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS, 1824-1855, Register containing the Regime's discussions, Council of the Regime, general government of the Institute, EG430, Archives FSC, Rome, pp.200-201.

(2) BAVENCOVE J., 1921, The agricultural Institute of Beauvais (Oise), Section on higher education of Agriculture of the Catholic Institute of Paris, Beauvais, p. 33.

(3) RIGAUD G., 1945, General History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, vol. V, Plon, Paris, p. 407.

(4) BROTHER ANTONIS, 1894, In memory of Brother Eugène, Père et Cartier, Beauvais, p.14.

(5) On the presentation sheet entitled «The agricultural Teacher Training Institute of Beauvais (Oise)» 1858, the pupil, upon entering, had to produce «a certificate of morality» given by the Mayor of the Commune or by the Head of the institution which the candidate was leaving. BROTHER MENEÉ, 1858, Agricultural Teacher Training Institute of Beauvais (Oise), 4pp., Moisand, Beauvais, Archives FSC, NC 423-1, Rome. (As an appendix, extracts from the minutes of the General Council of the Oise, 29th August 1857 and 27th August 1859)

The insistence seems to be less than the Regime Council had asked for. In later version of the regulation (1871; 1882) the said certificate had to be delivered only by the «Head of the institution where he has finished his studies», and would have to attest «that his conduct has been correct». It was no longer the Second Empire: was the Mayor of the Commune possibly a republican and morally suspect?

(6) BROTHER MENEÉ, 1858, Regulation of the agricultural Teacher Training Institute, approved by the Prefect of the Oise, 4pp., Desjardins, Beauvais, Archives FSC, NC 423-2, Rome.

(7) QUEMERE P., TAILLEFER A., PERRU O., The teaching evolutions at the Agricultural Institute of Beauvais from 1855 to 1945, Colloquium, E.N.E.S.A.D., Dijon, 1999, to appear.

(8) On the presentation sheet entitled «Agricultural Teacher Training Institute of Beauvais (Oise)», there was a distinction made among the pupils who sat the entrance examination: the pupils of the first category and those of the second category. Those in the first category were asked to write «in French: an essay which determined the ability of the candidate from the double angle of spelling and composition. In Mathematics: the four fundamental rules, fractions, the metric system, proportions and some notion of geometry; some notion of physics and chemistry». In the second category, they were asked for «1st) an essay determining whether the candidate would be able to profit by the course; 2nd) the four fundamental rules, the legal system of weights and measures and ordinary fractions». In the later versions (1871, 1882), no mention is made of this distinction, and the requirements of the examination hinged on the five fundamental elements: metric system, fractions, proportions, dictation, French composition.

(9) The elementary certificate showed a good level of general scientific knowledge for the time and often marked the end of the boarding school studies. At this time the baccalaureat demanded an extensive general knowledge, especially in literary subjects: Latin was compulsory, and the Brothers, because of the Rules and Constitutions, did not teach this language in their establishments. The baccalaureat also prepared for University studies, often with teaching in mind.

(10) BROTHER EUGENE-MARIE, 1871, Regulations of the agricultural Institute, approved by the Prefect of the Oise, 2pp., Père, Beauvais, Archives FSC, NC 423-1, Rome.

BROTHER EUGENE-MARIE, 1882, Regulations of the agricultural Institute, approved by the Prefect of the Oise, 2pp., Père, Beauvais, Archives FSC, NC 423-1, Rome.

(11) BLANCHEMAIN P., 1901, Report on the free teaching of agriculture in France, Committee for the participation of Catholic undertakings in France at the Universal Exhibition of 1900, Poussielgue, Paris, pp. 28-29.