

53-16-B-221

**THE FOUNDATION OF  
THE AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE  
OF BEAUVAIS  
(3/4)**

**Brother Olivier Perru**

**II. What was the educational practice in the  
Agricultural Teacher Training Institute of Beauvais  
between 1855 and 1875? (continued)**

From our point of view, it is interesting to examine the regulations which concerned the daily routine, order and discipline. From the beginning of the Institute, the day had been divided into two: the morning was devoted to study, in the afternoon «the pupils are taken to the agricultural workplace and there receive practical teaching, share in the different aspects of farming and gardening, and are occupied also in the care of the animals» (1858, art. 24) (1). These tasks lasted three hours in winter and four hours in summer. In the regulations for 1882, the work on the farm was no longer daily but took place «on the days indicated by the daily timetable» (art. 22) (2). In 1858, the pupils «sleep in common dormitories, or at the request of the parents, in private, furnished rooms» (art. 25). With regard to this, the general Council of the Oise at a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1859, mentioned «the important building being done at present at the Teacher Training School and which are due to ensure accommodation for the pupils, where they will have all the most favourable conditions» (3). In 1871 (4) and 1882, the dormitories had been removed. The pupils were accommodated in rooms. From this arises the reasoning of Brother Eugène-Marie when writing to Brother Superior General Irlide on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1881, to ask to be allowed to add to the buildings of the «Boarding School- Agricultural Institute»: «The dormitories have become insufficient for the pupils and our Brothers, who have been forced to give up their room to the pupils of the Institute who have become too numerous» (5). According to this text, the Brothers who had separate rooms, seem to have given them over to the students and to have accepted an alcove in a dormitory of the boarding school.

The three succeeding regulations were quite immutable on the general routine. From 1859, the pupils of the Institute had various opportunities, whether for study and formation (library, scientific outings, collections) or for leisure (games rooms, visits, days off «the first Sunday of the month» or «as a privilege»). In 1871, Brother Eugène-Marie announced that «billiards and a reading room are at the disposal of the pupils for Sunday and Thursday evenings». The text of 1882 envisaged «complementary lessons», particularly in sport (gymnastics, fencing, swimming), for those whose parents requested them. Attendance at certain religious services was obligatory (art.28): morning and evening prayer, Sunday and feast-day offices, Mass every Thursday. From 1871, the chaplain gave a talk on morals and religion every week.

The pupils got up at five o'clock in the morning and went to bed at nine o'clock in the evening. Account must be taken of the fact that bedtime was dictated by and linked to the unpredictability of the lighting system (the electricity from the «La Mie au Roy» dam did not reach the Institute until the last decade of the century. So the pupils had 8 hours sleep (which is more than many have today!). Some regulations concern the life of the educational community: «respect for and submission to the teachers are rigorously enforced» (1859, art.35; 1871, art.33). «Relationships between pupils must be honest, religious and kindly» (1859, art. 36; 1871, art. 34). So from the beginnings of the Institute we see a balance between the time for intellectual and manual work, relaxation and community life, spiritual life, even if it appears rather too exacting and formal today. These texts give an impression of varied activities.

In the prospectus of 1882 (6), which is more complete but very similar to its predecessors, Brother Eugène-Marie summarises the educational and pedagogical aims of the Institute: «The agricultural Institute aims to initiate young men who intend taking up agriculture, to the scientific and practical notions necessary for the working and running of a farm or country estate». This takes a position in the initial objective of the founders. «To give as a basis to education, the knowledge and observance of the laws of the Gospel, to clarify and strengthen the faith in the souls of their pupils. It is to develop there the love of God, of duty, of the family and country, to form men of knowledge and conscience, able to uphold the cause of religion and agriculture and to defend their interests, which are so intimately united. This is the Christian and social work to which the Brothers of the Christian Schools established in Beauvais are vowed» (7). Note should be taken of the importance in this text of the Christian faith and the practice of the Gospel as the basis of the future action of pupils in the world of the countryside. This was the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century. It was important to form social Christians, but also to react against increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, suspected of being unfavourable to

the practice of religion. So we find in all the talks of Brother Eugène-Marie between 1880 and 1890 (Old Boys' Association of the agricultural Institute of Beauvais) the theme of union of religion and agriculture, whether through the promotion of the rural way of life or the actions of those with diplomas from the Institute. We must also stress that from the 1860s, the religious character of the school was further reinforced by the consecration to St Joseph of the boarding school chapel, and by the thriving archconfraternity which the Holy Ghost Fathers established there. So in 1882, Brother Eugène-Marie again wrote: «The reverend missionary Fathers of the Holy Ghost Congregation have the responsibility, as chaplains, for the spiritual guidance of the pupils of the Institute. They celebrate the religious offices in the boarding school chapel dedicated to Saint Joseph, and which has become the centre of the archconfraternity established in honour of the glorious patriarch of Nazareth».

In his report, on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1867, to the Most Honourable Brother Philippe on the plan for setting up a new farm (8), Brother Eugène-Marie evaluates all that the Institute had done since 1855. From what we know of Brother Eugène-Marie's strong personality and temperament, the report was not at all neutral! The document forms a pompous «satisfecit» about «the internal organisation», the «scientific courses», the «pupils». It is interesting to note that «the pupils appear very satisfied with the plan and progress of our «theoretical studies». So the challenge to interest and form young men from the rural world with both theoretical and technical support had been met. In addition to this statement, it should be noticed that the Association of Old Boys' was founded in that same year (1867). It consistently supported the Institute, including during those very difficult years when political authority was hostile. Scientific teaching was worthwhile at this time, only if it was possible to apply it on the ground. From which arose the necessity of the farm.

Following on from this, the report is particularly revealing in highlighting and evaluating the application of the founders' educational intention. Besides the professional usefulness of the spread of what, at the time, was called «agricultural progress», another aim was envisaged by an agricultural Institute directed by the Brothers: «Great benefit for youth will evidently result from it. Christian instruction and especially education which the young men will receive will contribute enormously to the glory of God and the general good of society. This will be in an Institute whose teaching is based on religion, by strengthening the principles of the faith in their souls at this difficult age in life. In fact there is a lot to hope for in the

religious future of a young man who leaves us aged 20 to 22, when he has been maintained up to then in a fear of God and the observance of his duties of Christian piety». What is striking in this text is the unity between what went before (scientific and technical teaching) and the religious education of the young. What is even more astonishing is that in 1867, Brother Eugène-Marie intuitively foresaw the result of this Christian formation: the union of the glory of God and the common good would come about by the action of young men who would evangelise the rural community by their social and professional activity. It was an almost prophetic view of what Catholic action wanted to bring about 80 years later. «Later on, these pupils will be called upon to fill high positions, to govern and manage a big staff in their work. It is evident that the fruit of their education will be spread around them and will exert a salutary influence. Surely these considerations deserve to have our most serious attention». Brother Eugène-Marie could further state in this same report: «More than 200 young men have followed their agricultural studies in our school». They were formed «in agricultural knowledge and Christian spirit», which permitted them «through this initiative to spread afar the love of rural life». So the experiment was positive, but what was expected, was both the Christian and social action, in the long term, of the former pupils.

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(1) 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.

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

(3) BROTHER MENEÉ, 1858, Regulation of the agricultural Teacher Training Institute, 4pp., Moisand, Beauvais, Archives FS, NC 423-1, Rome. (As an appendix, extracts from the minutes of the general council of the Oise, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1857 and 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1859).

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

(5) BROTHER EUGENE-MARIE, 1881, Letter to Brother Superior General Irlide, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1881, 3pp., Archives FSC, NC 423-1, Rome.

(6) BROTHER EUGENE-MARIE, 1882, agricultural Institute founded in 1855 directed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Beauvais (Oise), 2pp., Père, Beauvais, Archives FSC, NC 423-1, Rome.

(7) This sentence written in 1882 by Brother Eugène-Marie was repeated verbatim in 1901 by Paul Blanchemain in his «Report on free agricultural education in France», Poussielgue, Paris, p.57.

(8) BROTHER EUGENE-MARIE, 1867, Report on the agricultural Teacher Training Institute of Beauvais, Archives FSC, NC 423-2, Rome.