

53-17-B-222

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

Brother Olivier Perru

**III – Practical agricultural formation
in the educational aim**

From the time of its foundation, the Saint Lucien farm was let out for the pupils' practical work and experimentation in new varieties, which was to be a characteristic of the agricultural Institute for the second half of the XIXth century. In the session of 9th August, 1857, the general council of the Oise reported on the improvement efforts at the farm, the techniques which were used there, the experiments taking place in the formation of the pupils and the spread of new techniques or new varieties in the area (1). This report enabled the vote for grants for the good progress of the Institute and the farm.

In 1859, in a letter to the Brother Assistant (probably Brother Baudime), Brother Menée asked for the creation of a community of Brothers at the Saint Lucien farm (2). This community was to be near the church (almost certainly O.L of Thil). It was in fact created on 24th December, 1859, and was later to be transferred to the farm in the wood, after 1868, after the location of the latter. It is interesting to see the motives for it: Brother Menée first lists the financial or technical reasons in favour of Brothers on the farm. «Only a community can offer sufficient guarantee of disinterestedness, good will, devotion which are necessary to fulfil useful improvements on our farm while offering a source of revenue». So in Brother Menée's opinion the community offered guarantees, which a «lay manager» would not, regarding the general progress of the enterprise as well as the finances, the work, and the supervision. The paragraph on supervision concerned the presence of Brothers with the young men when these were doing practical work. He gave the main reason for putting a community on the farm and underlined the great

difference with the behaviour of a lay manager. «Supervision must be active, discreet and paternal. In this way it becomes the guarantee of order and good spirit among the pupils. It will be totally effective only when it is confided exclusively to the Brothers.» So behind the term «supervision», it is the conduct which the Brothers exercise over their pupils and the relationships they have with them, as well as the spirit they impart, that are involved. According to this text, which is very much in the lasallian tradition, it meant considering the different aspects of activity of the pupils and their personality so that this rural work might be the occasion of a true education and not simply a country outing or a completely technical apprenticeship. Brother Menée wrote: «There is a host of precautions which a lay manager would not think of., and which must nevertheless be considered in the interests of the morality or the health of the young men. There are some pupils who must not do certain work. There are some that one must avoid having together, etc. A layman does not understand that at all.» Then follow the precise economic reasons by which the «conscientious supervision» of the Brothers and their way of life allowed them to work better for a better return and less waste. The most marked economy, however, would evidently be one of time: after 4 school years, the Brothers understood the pointlessness of time spent in going between the town centre and the Saint Lucien farm every day. Brother Menée estimated the time spent in these movements for the three Brothers at 1200 hours every school year. He wrote: «1200 hours represent a loss of at least 300 francs, half the upkeep of a Brother». Here we have the foreshadowing of inclusion in the budget of work time and an evaluation of non-productive hours! On 13th September, 1859, the Council Regime met in Paris, and Brother Baudime, Assistant, presented the plan to the members and the Most Honourable Brother Philippe, Superior General. He backed up the arguments of the Head of Beauvais: the presence of a lay manager on the farm afforded «no guarantee for the work material nor for the morality of the workers» (3). Brother Baudime, therefore, recommended the setting up of a community of three Brothers, whose Director would have the title of «pro-Director» and a certain freedom in managing operations on the farm, the domestic staff, the accounts. He would, however, have to render an account of his management once a month to Brother Menée, Head of the boarding school and the Institute. Brother Laurentius was appointed to this post which he kept until 1868, then from 1871 to 1886. The aims of this new community are given in the penultimate paragraph: «Through this organisation, order and economy could reign on this farm, the morality of the workers would be guaranteed, the public and the young men of the agricultural Institute would be edified, and this is a very important point». So the Council approved this creation which began on 24th December of the same year, but with only two Brothers. From 1863, four Brothers would be the norm. It is noticeable that the text of the Council of the Regime centred on the order and organisation of

affairs, while Brother Menée's report concerned educational questions. In his report of 1867, Brother Eugène-Marie considered that the removal and extension of the farm were «urgently required» by «the teaching of agriculture and the prosperity of the agricultural Institute» (4). It is the «vital affair of the undertaking»; it is the «necessary complement to the establishment». «To ensure the prosperity of the undertaking, a minimum increase in growing» was necessary «which would allow studies and practical experience to be raised to the level of scientific courses». One particularly important point at the time and one which had already been mentioned in the session of 29th August, 1857, of the General Council of the Oise, was the formation of the pupils in the practice of crop rotation. Brother Eugène-Marie (1867) spoke of the necessity of «combining a system of profitable crop rotation to the teaching of the pupils and sufficiently lucrative». The farm envisaged for that comprised 45 hectares of arable land and was situated in «Marais», another locality on the outskirts of Beauvais. We know the outcome of that: the Council of the Regime refused the new location because, among other reasons, the two farms were too far apart and supervision would therefore be too difficult. On 6th November, 1867, Brother Facile, Assistant, gave a negative answer to Brother Eugène (5). But Brother

Facile did report to Brother Eugène that the Council expressed the hope that a farm might be found later on, which would «have everything that an establishment of this kind required». This hope came to fruition with the location of the farm in the woods in 1868. So, on the Institute farm in those early years there was a harmonious integration of agricultural, experimental activities and education. •

=====

(1) 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).

(2) BROTHER MENEÉ, 1859, Letter to Brother Assistant Baudime, Archives FSC, NC 423-2, Rome.

(3) BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS, 1855-1898, Register containing the Regime's discussions, Council of the Regime, general government of the Institute, EG430, Archives FSC, Rome p. 80.

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

(5) BROTHER FACILE, 1881, Letter (Answer to Brother Eugène-Marie), Archives FSC, NC 423-2, Rome.