INDIA'S DOUBLE-YOUR-INCOME MAN

In the torrid, dusty state of Travancore, down at the southern tip of India, far off the tourist paths, Spencer Hatch, an American reared on a rocky farm near Saratoga, New York, for eighteen years has headed a mighty movement that is inspiring hundreds of thousands to work their way out of hideous poverty.

He is a Y.M.C.A. leader, the only white man in his group, and with more than a thousand Indian men and women trained by him, and spread throughout India, he is making self-respecting citizens out of hordes of people of the depressed classes who for generations have been regarded—not only by the more fortunate but by themselves—as hopeless trash.

Emily Gilchriest Hatch, his wife and first assistant, is the only white woman in the work. She gave up a theatrical career to marry Hatch and go to India. A Syracuse University graduate, once an actress, a teacher of dramatics and dancing, now she works with backward and dirty women and children, showing them how to weave and sew and play games and to take a bath.

For a long time a few Indian leaders and British officials realized that India would remain mired in the muck as long as its 100,000,000 half-starved villagers were given no aid. Financing, irrigation and re-settlement projects were planned, temporary charity was offered, there were speeches and prayers and the poor were told that they really ought to do something about their condition. Nobody was quite sure what. It was all big stuff, so big that most of it never got under way because of the expense, some of it stopped with the landowners and never trickled down to the millions who work for them for ten or
fifteen cents a day and who, on their few square yards of rocky land around their mud huts, couldn't get much out of advice about dairy herds and rotation of crops.

Instead of thinking in terms of million-dollar projects, Hatch started at the other end with the single family. In demonstration centers and with traveling instructors he taught the practically landless how to double their pitiful income, with such things as bees and poultry and goats, by making salable palmyra palm sugar and baskets and cloth. And he taught them to keep well, to read, to write and to bore a latrine. Not stopping at showing the poor how to produce good stuff, he taught them to organize co-operative markets, and to get the highest prices for their wares.

If you increase the income of a half-starved, down-by-the-tracks American family by ten or fifteen cents a day, that won't put it into the Country Club set. But in India's rural villages that gives the family twice as many clothes and vitamins, they can add a new room to their mud hut, rent a tiny piece of land for a kitchen garden and become important folks in their community. They are glad they are living, instead of wondering why they were born.

Hatch is no proselytizer. "Whether you are Christian, Hindu, Mohammedan or Buddhist," he tells them, "live and practice the best you find in your religion." Instead of preaching that if they bear their burdens cheerfully they will find happiness in Heaven, he shows them how to get happiness right now. Natives of all religions forget their differences in giving him solid support. One of his best helpers in teaching the depressed to produce and market better eggs is a good Brahmin whose religion forbids him to eat eggs or to associate with the Untouchables whom he now is aiding.

Hatch's work has inspired and influenced much of the rural reconstruction work in India today. For thirteen years he has conducted a school with six-week and four-month courses, and his students, representing all religions, are teaching his methods in 10,000 villages, some on salary, some as Y.M.C.A. volunteers. Although he is buried in an out-of-the-way state,
men in China, Japan and Egypt have come to study with him. One of his books about rural reconstruction has been translated into Chinese and two Indian languages. The late Gaekwar of Baroda borrowed Hatch to train young government officers to install the plan in Baroda. The Nizam of Hyderabad had him establish a rural demonstration center that was directed by one of Hatch’s men until local officials could carry on. In Pudukkottai, Mysore, Burma, Ceylon, Cochin, in many of the great estates, rulers and big landowners have invited him to make surveys of their poor and are employing his men or using his methods. They like his ideas because they don’t cost much.

In 1916, the late K. T. Paul, an Indian farmer and Y.M.C.A. leader, started a rural reconstruction center at Martandam, a village 25 miles from Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore. With others he worked for five years on a great idea but with small practical results. Following the practice of the people of foreign nations when they can’t do a job themselves, the Indians asked America to help and the Y.M.C.A. sent Hatch to Travancore.

Hatch is 51 years old; he’s left-handed, sturdy, and full of fire. In white topee, shorts and white shirt he drives lickety-split over winding dusty roads, tramps miles over the hills to roadless villages, pepping up his leaders in 156 village Y.M.C.A.s, installing new projects, encouraging the depressed by becoming as excited over a brood of chickens as Columbus was when he discovered America.

He has agricultural degrees of Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Philosophy from Cornell, and a degree of Master of Science in Agriculture from Yale. Many a time he has proved that if you keep trying, everything will come out all right. When he was 15 he contracted rheumatic fever after cutting wood all day in snow and slush. Doctors said he would be in a wheelchair all his life but he didn’t believe it and after four years was well and entered Cornell. He had done all his high school work at home, without a tutor. He had to work his way through college and took the course in agriculture because it was the only one for which there was no tuition charge.
When the war started Hatch joined the Y.M.C.A. and worked among the British in India and Mesopotamia for three years. He contracted another kind of rheumatism, muscular, and unable to move without intense pain was sent home. It took him a year of constant, torturing exercise to cure that. A few years ago a landslide rolled his car over a precipice and when it hit bottom Hatch, well broken up, was under it. He was told he never could walk again but that wasn’t so. When he walks 25 miles at a stretch, which is often, he gets a pain in one ankle but he doesn’t mind it.

The only thing that gives him real pain is the squandering of money. He was brought up to be thrifty and he makes every nickel do a dollar’s worth of work. He lives in Trivandrum with Mrs. Hatch and their two daughters in a modest house—rent $30 a month—and drives a ratty old touring car. The buildings of his Martandam demonstration center are barely adequate. In the middle of a talk I heard him give to students on “The Poor Man’s Cow” he had to stop and tie up his exhibits—goats. They were eating up the walls of the palm leaf lecture room. He runs the whole amazing project for about $5,000 a year, including $3,000 for his salary and traveling expenses. Most of his assistants, fired by his leadership, work part time for nothing.

He gives away nothing but advice. The native earns every anna of additional income that he receives. When a penniless man, for instance, gets a setting of White Leghorn eggs, he is charged fifty cents for them, and given six months’ credit. He is taught how to raise good chickens and six months later one of Hatch’s men collects—by buying one of the native’s Leghorn chickens for a dollar, cancelling the debt and giving him fifty cents.

Remembering how his mother made pin money with bees, one of Hatch’s first ideas was to teach the natives to produce good, clean honey, strained and bottled, that would sell for a comparatively high price. Travancore has plenty of swarms of wild bees. The general practice was to hang an old pot in a tree and if a swarm moved in, after a while the native would break the
pot and eat or sell the honey, if there was any, and the swarm moved on.

Hatch built hives, captured swarms and started to demonstrate, he thought, how a family could make two or three dollars a year out of each hive. But Hatch didn't know the Indian bee, who was no working fool.

In most parts of America, bees store honey against cold weather. In India, flowers grow all the year and the bees know it and when they have about half a comb of honey, with good common sense they have a party and eat it all up. Which Hatch learned only after he had launched his campaign with high hopes and many promises. The few natives who had started hives under Hatch's urging were pretty mad when they found that the white man's magic failed, he couldn't make bees fill a comb. If you took the combs out before they were filled, the bees spent so much time making others that you couldn't get a dime's worth of honey a year.

Hatch brought 150,000 bees from Italy and the Indian bees promptly stung the scabs to death. It was a crisis. Hatch's prestige began to fall. Perhaps, the natives decided, his ideas about chickens and goats and sugar weren't so good, either.

Hatch spent days reading bee books and trying to think up a way to do the Indian bees out of their periodic orgies. Finally he got it. He made a small centrifugal extractor. He took the combs out before they were half full, extracting the honey and returning the combs. Just when the bees were all set for a banquet, they'd discover the cupboard was bare—and would have to go to work to fill it up again. It was a shameful thing for a good Christian to do to a happy, loafing little bee, but it saved Hatch's program.

He has done well in installing vegetable gardens—except that the Irish potato won't perform as he expected. Most of the land available for the poor is fine for making indestructible mud bricks but it is so hard that, unless each plant is tended like an orchid, the potato struggling to expand dies of over-exertion. Hatch still hopes to find a variety that has so much Irish fighting
spirit that British India won't be able to keep it from throwing out its chest.

The hen problem was a tough one, too. Authorities say all our poultry was developed from the wild jungle hen of India. That fowl as domesticated by Indians still is a little brown, lazy creature who, following the habits of wild fowl, lays only to raise families, not to produce eggs for market. About 25 tiny eggs a year is her limit.

To import thousands of pure White Leghorns—which Hatch found to be the best breed for India—would be too expensive. To hatch enough would take too long. So he tricked the Indian hen as he did the bee. In his hatcheries he saved the cocks and paid premiums when he bought them from natives who hatched them from pure eggs. Then he distributed the cocks among village families, one for every ten hens, insisting that the family kill all its jungle cocks.

The jungle hens acted like American village girls when a city boy has come to town. Such excitement you never saw! The formerly lazy flibbertygibbets began laying not only more eggs but much larger ones, clucking proudly over each one and making eyes all day at the big, strutting white rooster. The rooster remains with a flock for two months, until good settings of the half-breed eggs are obtained, then is moved to another family. About 200 of these traveling roosters are working in Travancore now and thousands of half-breeds, hard workers, are taking the place of the jungle hen. All over India Hatch's students are following the same tactics.

He was to learn that even though you have agricultural degrees from big colleges, there are things that an ignorant Indian farmer can tell you. When Hatch first arrived he found that if a calf died the natives would stuff its hide and stand it beside the mother at milking time. Otherwise, they said, the cow would dry up.

It was a silly superstition, Hatch pointed out. Calves died on his father's farm in America and the cows didn't dry up. So he persuaded a native to sell the calf's hide, instead of stuffing it, and the cow promptly dried up. And so did every other one
with which he experimented. So now he teaches his students to do the Indian way and stuff the calf.

The immensity and importance of Hatch’s work grows on you like an approaching fast express. It is a lesson in the importance of trivialities.

When I first visited his school and main demonstration center in Martandam, alongside a road filled with ragged natives, bullock carts and donkeys, I felt distinctly let down. “Rural reconstruction”—particularly under the leadership of a man who had three important degrees in agriculture and who, I knew, had been offered jobs at high salaries to direct big projects in America—suggested million-dollar dams and huge irrigation ditches, thousands of cattle and waving grain as far as the eye could see.

Here, instead, was a dried out country. Except in the rich landowners’ rice fields, the little that grew was brittle and brown. And Hatch’s exhibits here were a dozen hives of bees, two bulls, some goats, chickens and a little store selling eggs, sugar, honey, nuts, mats, cloth and other home products!

There were a few ancient mud-wall, thatched-roofed buildings, a score of Indians attending classes, sitting on mats on dirt floors, because Hatch believed it was better to spend money for new breeding stock than for benches. The tuition fees are just enough for expenses. There was a one-room barn-like structure that served as a dormitory. The half-dozen eager young men who taught and helped out, I learned, worked for from $2 to $10 a month.

My eyes began to widen as I asked about the students who had come to learn about bees and goats and kitchen gardens. There were a landowner from Burma, who wanted to help his workers, and two sons of a rich Buddhist in Ceylon who was establishing centers there. The Assistant Prime Minister of the State of Baudh had just completed a course, as had the head master of a Government Training School for Teachers in Upper India. Many were Christians who would go into extension work in Y.M.C.A.s. Others were missionaries who carried the work to their districts. One man had returned to a school for the
deaf and dumb in Cochin and was getting results there. The alumni numbered more than a thousand. They extended from Egypt to China, from Rangoon to Colombo.

Those few hens and bees and blocks of sugar were like bags of wheat in a grain exchange that represent thousands upon thousands of bushels in elevators throughout the country.

In Travancore alone egg markets started by Hatch, now conducted entirely by the natives, sell about $31,500 worth of eggs a year for 3,500 families. Children bring the eggs to market where they are weighed and tested; only the large, fresh ones are accepted and shipped to cities where good eggs are scarce and sell for about 35 cents a dozen. The jungle hen’s small and often bad eggs bring the native about half a cent each. Until Hatch started his egg business many upper class Indian families would not touch eggs, it was so hard to get good ones.

At one egg market I saw children who had walked five and six miles to bring three or four eggs. They’d go back with a few annas, a lot of money to their parents, and with any eggs that didn’t pass the test. Good eggs are worth too much to be eaten by poor families. They eat the bad ones.

As a result of the bee demonstration, 2,000 families in Travancore make an average of $6.60 a year from honey. The Travancore government is so impressed that it is making twelve-month loans to natives so they can buy good teak wood hives which cost 55 cents each. A government loan of $1.10 to a depressed-class Indian is as important as one of $1,100 to an American farmer.

Those little blocks of clean, pure sugar, made from sap from the palmyra palm tree, represented a more-than-doubled income for hundreds of families that depend upon a few trees for their livelihood. I talked with one housewife who was making the day’s sugar from sap gathered by her husband. When she produced the dirty, black stuff common in the markets the family income averaged about 30 cents a day. After Hatch’s assistants taught her to prepare it like American maple sugar, some of it with cashew nuts in it, the income leaped to 70 cents a day. At the request of the government of Baroda, Hatch has sent a
man to teach its housewives how to make good sugar, and one to show their husbands how to climb the palm trees and tap them more skillfully, to get more sap.

What Hatch calls his "working staff of billy goats," pure bred, in six stations has produced in the last six years about 5,400 good half-breed goats that give about two quarts of milk a day—an income of ten cents a day in addition to money made by sale of kids. He has four breeding bulls and would like to add more but they are too expensive to buy and to feed and anyway few of the people with whom he works can afford a cow.

With Mrs. Hatch's help, Hatch produces money-making ideas to fit individual families. Some make greeting cards out of palm leaves, specially designed baskets and mats. Those near the sea are taught to gather fine sea shells and to decorate them for sale as souvenirs. Some make umbrellas and fans and paddles for paddle tennis, and thread and rope and clean crisp pappadams, that thin bread that you eat with curry. Few can afford a loom, so in some of the Y.M.C.A.s looms are set up and natives are taught to weave the kinds of cloth that bring the best prices and use the looms on a profit sharing basis.

For nearly a week I drove and walked through Travancore with Hatch. There are thousands of poor still untouched by his work, disgusting, cringing and dirty people. Go among the worst and the smell of them and the fear that you have caught some loathsome disease clings to you for days. But visit villages where Hatch's influence has been felt and you find a different breed. Their chins are up, their clothes may be rags but they are clean rags, there are flowering vines over their huts and proudly they lead you to see their children exhibit the English they have learned in Y.M.C.A. night schools. After they are seven or eight years old most children have to work all day in the fields, for four cents a day. These children, thanks to Hatch's leadership, will have much to do in the imminent and essential social revolution in India. And there aren't just dozens of them, but thousands and thousands.

Hatch's expansion has been purposely moderate. "Agricultural extension should be like a suction pump, rather than a force
pump," he told me. "You can't squirt information out at people and expect them to absorb and use it. They must first realize their need, that they can be helped and must ask for it. Then they'll get results." Hatch and his workers show, in demonstration centers, or working with one or two intelligent families in a village, just what can be done. Then they wait until the others have digested the new double-your-income idea and, convinced that it's no bunk, come on the run to adopt it themselves.

The most astonishing example of how a little idea gets to be a big one is found 100 miles north of Martandam in a village with the beautiful name of Oollannore. The name is its only beauty. In 456 mud huts live 2,348 people; the average family income, when a survey was made in 1937, was $3.57 a month. It steadily is rising. The majority are of high caste. Not all the poor in India are Untouchables. Here, united for the common good, the low and high castes work together.

In Oollannore is being conducted a ten-year plan, with a school as a center, to take as a unit the village, instead of the family, and to lift it out of ignorance and poverty—a plan of importance to sociologists the world over.

It was started four years ago by a far-seeing rich villager who gave money and land and asked the Y.M.C.A. to help. ("What do you mean by a rich villager?" I asked one of the Indians. He replied with awe, "He has ten or twelve people in his family and some days he spends as much as two rupees [80 cents] for food!") Because most of the fourteen teachers have been trained by Hatch and he inspired the whole project the school is called "The Spencer Hatch Rural Reconstruction Institute." The teachers are practically volunteers—paid only five or ten dollars a month over their living expenses. They are all Christians but the school is non-sectarian. The week before I visited there they had an evening program which nearly every villager attended—lectures by a Christian, a Mohammedan, and a Buddhist on Christ, Mohammed, and Buddha, and there wasn't one fist fight, not even an argument. Tolerance can be fostered by education, even in India.

The idea is to give intensive training to the village boys and
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girls between 12 and 16—"teaching them to earn more and live happier at home, not to go to the city." The school fee is about 25 cents a month for boys, 18 cents for girls. Tuition is free to many whose families can't afford to pay but after a few months most children learn to earn their school fees through home industries. There are 230 students from 190 families. They study reading and writing in their own language and in English, arithmetic (pointed practically so the money lenders and produce buyers no longer can cheat them), weaving, agriculture, bee keeping, cattle, goat and poultry raising, carpentry, domestic science, and hygiene.

The school is the center of village life. Here is the only doctor within seven miles, and the only timepiece. There are entertainments, lectures on farming for the men, on housekeeping for the women. There are an arbitration court to settle village quarrels, a co-operative market and a co-operative buying society which lowers the cost of such necessities as rice and fertilizer. Of villagers over the age of eight, 68 percent are literate—a very high average for India. In ten years the figure will be 100 percent. Few students ever have been outside their village. When Hatch and I visited them he brought a vacuum bottle filled with ice cubes. Not one of the students ever had seen ice and they were as excited as if he had brought Barnum and Bailey's Circus.

Already Oollannore is a new village, with bees and White Leghorns and goats and vegetable gardens and new banana plants and 33 busy looms. Parents and children alike are carrying out the new ideas. At the end of the ten-year plan every young man and woman in the village will have had a practical education and most boys will be earning three or four times as much as their fathers. The influence already is spreading and a recent survey showed that more than 1,500 families in the vicinity had substantially increased their incomes. Hundreds, with no help from charity, have lifted themselves out of horrible poverty.

The Oollannore plan, when successfully completed, perfected by severe self-criticism and careful surveys, will be an inspiration and example for thousands of Indian villages.
A new India is on its way. Much of the impetus of the movement is due to Mahatma Gandhi, who is up in front leading it. But when the backward classes, through practical education, are backward no longer, some of the credit for the advance will have to be given to Spencer Hatch, an American, who was behind them, his feet planted in the dirt, pushing.

Spencer Hatch, in a village in Travancore, examines two kids that a native Y.W.C.A. worker rounded up with great pride. These are progeny of Hatch's "working staff of billy goats" who produce good half-breed goats, "the poor man's cow," to add to the income of the depressed classes. The girl is one of many Indians who carry on in remote sections the work of rural reconstruction started by this New Yorker.

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