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# THE FARMER AT THE EXHIBITION

THERE is no prize bull at the Exhibition, no smell of pigs or of the byre, no stallions on parade. Yet no farmer who sees it will be able to forget his farm.

He may forget his worries for a while. The Exhibition is like hoeing turnips. There is no chance for any other worries. But almost every inch of it will bring home to him the vast and complex industrial organisation which serves him in return for his service.

On the farm he develops an appraising eye and it is he, more perhaps than any other visitor, who will see most clearly the exact dimensions of everything there, and feel more sensitively its impact upon his own existence.

The Exhibition is supposed to commemorate the work of the pioneers and illustrate the progress built upon their work. The farmer is still a pioneer and still knows the sensation of pioneering. He will not be able to look at the great modern machines without realising he is still breaking in new soil, still taking new risks, with the unvarying hazards of his occupation minimised but by no means removed by the wonders displayed before him. To the townsmen most of the exhibits are only indirectly connected with his office routine. He only keeps the world's books. It is the farmer who supplies the figures for the entries. He still works the ground that pioneers first ploughed, it is his wife who knows best the difference between the open hearth and the electric range, his cows that feel the change from ancient godliness to modern cleanliness, and it is he who wonders most just where all these changes have carried him, or where they'll lead him in the future. Everything at the Exhibition will come home to him so very much more closely than to the townsman.

## Much Has Changed

Within his memory mails came in when they could. He finds the Post and Telegraph Department telling him how messages speed across the world in seconds. He knows most intimately how

difficult it is to persuade soil and sunshine and rain to combine to feed his crops as they should be fed; and he finds here someone growing the same things in water without any more trouble than may be involved in going to town to buy synthetic soil for the solution.

He may be dismayed, or disillusioned, or just impressed. Whatever his sensations, he will come away with at least one conviction: that there is still much to be done; that the world becomes ever more insistent in its demands upon him for food and clothing; that each new thing he has seen is meant to press him into more and more efficiency, more and

in describing as the fittest land for colonisation, with the most productive soil, and best climate—I mean New Zealand.

The exhibit covers the first difficulties of the pioneers; scrub burnt, seeds broadcast by hand, the refusal of prosperity to mitigate adversity. Then gold is discovered, the population is trebled, and in the eighteen 'sixties the squatters have their heyday. Then comes the Vogel boom, and the slump, with New Zealand again anxiously facing great problems while its huge estates produce more than can be sent overseas. Circumstances save them again. Refrigeration is discovered, the smaller farm becomes profitable, export trade booms, public works are extended, overseas marketing develops into a chaos of booms and slumps, gluts and shortages, until the State takes it over. It records the ever greater increases in production. Over the last years it tactfully skips politics and ends:

"Now, from fire and fern, tussock and scrub, our people have wrought a smiling farm, a proud nation in the southern seas."

## The First Sod

Other departments have co-operated with the Agricultural Department to illustrate this history. One feature of the exhibit is the plough which turned the first sod in New Zealand in 1823, and beside it the diary of Butler, the missionary open at the page where this is recorded. The part surveying

has played is shown in a fine collection of old instruments. The Agriculture Department itself caps off the story with a graphic illustration of modern husbandry. In sequence the story is told of soil, and the growth of crops and pastures; of feed, and the breeding of fine livestock; of food, and its marketing.

## Food For Thought

There is food for thought here more than anywhere else in the whole Exhibition.

Here the farmer can see what he has done in 100 short years. His story is here in pictures and figures. But there are no astrologers in the Agriculture Department. They do not tell him what he will be doing in 2040, or even 10 years from now, or one year.

He will leave it all in a daze of speculation, and possibly return to the safety of his rows of turnips, and other simple things.



THE PIONEERS: A statuary group at the Exhibition, by W. T. Trethewey and associates

more production, more and more responsibility. He may feel a little lost in a world of technologists and scientists, but he will be confident, as all farmers are confident beneath their veneer of worry and complaining, that he can meet all their thrusts at him so long as they leave him with good acres to watch over. He has the good earth and the elements, and sooner or later all these things must be worked into the equation for which only he has the real answer.

## What Wakefield Said

The Department of Agriculture's exhibit is typical of this suggested train of thought.

It begins with the words of Edward Gibbon Wakefield to the Emigration Committee of the House of Commons in 1836:

*Very near to Australia there is a country which all testimony concurs*