



# THE MAN ON THE LAND

## WAR-TIME FARMING AND AFTER

*Have you ever lost 2/6 a head on your sheep because the yards that day you sent them forward were filled to overflowing? Or lost 5/- because you did not know that the yards were nearly empty?*

*If you have suffered either of these misfortunes you will be interested in this account (by L. F. Easterbrook in the "New Statesman") of changes in British farming brought about, or threatened, by the war.*

IT is not surprising that agriculture, which must continue the same essential function in war as in peace, has as good hope as any large industry of preserving some gain from the wreckage. The main thing now is to feed as many people as possible from our soil as economically as possible. Already considerable clearings have been made in the jungle of extravagant waste that had grown round our food system. We have, for instance, established by the stroke of a Government Order the principle of only one delivery of milk a day, although this was one of the principles of the discarded Milk Bill that made some M.P.'s shake in their political seats. It is to be hoped that never again will the ordinary milk consumer be compelled to subsidise an unnecessarily and absurdly elaborate milk service.

### Middlemen in the Markets

Very shortly, when we market our fat stock, the owner will arrange by letter or telephone for their transmission to the market, and, if too many beasts are likely to be offered, he will be requested to retain them for a day or two until the market can absorb them. On arrival the animals will be examined by independent graders, paid for by grade and sent for slaughter. The method avoids middlemen's commissions and profits, renders the presence at market of the sender superfluous, makes a buyers' ring impossible, rewards quality, and eliminates the chanciness of marketing when the sender is completely in the dark regarding other supplies to the market. Exactly the same system may not be applicable in time of peace, but at least it gives an opportunity to consider marketing principles that may have considerable possibilities for the farmer. Lord Addison has assessed these possibilities, in terms of money wasted in inefficient cattle marketing, at £2 per beast or say £3,000,000 a year. It is difficult to believe that the farmers will learn nothing from this more direct method of converting livestock into meat.

These are merely two examples of experiments in reducing the spread, which is admittedly too wide, between the price the producer receives and that which the public pay.

### Making Farmers out of "Processers"

But we are also doing things that affect the land itself in a way that Governments have not dared attempt in peacetime. Committees have been set up

in every county to see that the land is properly farmed and used. The State can now banish from the soil the occupier who wilfully neglects it, and even if neglect is not wilful but springs from force of circumstances, it is doubtful if such an occupier would be allowed to plead hard luck indefinitely. We must now use the soil to feed ourselves and to feed the stock we keep on it, and the whole artificial system of maintaining a large livestock population on feeding stuffs grown on foreign lands—a system that turns the farmer into a mere processer—is challenged to its very foundation by the exigencies of war and hampered trade routes.

No one can doubt that the effect of this on the health of the soil, health of the stock and the security of the farm in times of economic distress is highly beneficial. "I only recognise as a farmer," ran a notice on the wall behind the desk of Herr Darré, German Minister of Agriculture, "the man who grows his own feeding stuffs." We need not disdain to learn from our enemies, and our system of cramming hundreds of pigs into huts, thousands of hens into boxes like wire chests of drawers, and using our worn out pastures as mere exercising grounds for cattle while we cram tons of imported fodder down their throats, has resulted in neglected land, disease-ridden stock, and a farming population exposed to every economic blast that affects the price of grain in any part of the world. So ignorant of the arts of farming have many of our farmers become through this lazy, mass production system that some are actually wondering now whether they should not kill off their pigs and hens because they can no longer be spoon-fed with foreign fodder. They forget that we used to maintain our own livestock quite successfully before oil cake, concentrates, and imported meals were known.

### Pickling Grass

Here is an interesting passage from a recent broadcast in Scotland by Professor J. A. Scott Watson:—

"Perhaps you grumbled because the weather spoiled your holiday. Did you stop to think how much more serious that bad weather was for the farmer—and for the country? This season about £10,000,000 worth of nutriment—in the form of hay—has been rained away. Farmers have experimented with various ways of making hay when the sun doesn't shine: artificial drying (which is expensive) and freezing bales of green grass or packing them in air-tight steel drums (which would probably be even more expensive).

"The only practical alternative to drying, natural or artificial, is ensilage. Ensilage is, in principle, the same process as pickling. If you want to pickle beet-root or onions you put your stuff in a jar, add vinegar and put on a close-fitting lid. If you keep out the air, moulds won't grow because they need free oxygen; and if you get the medium acid enough your bacteria cease to function.

"Now, some plant materials pickle themselves. Green maize has a high sugar content. If you chop the maize and put it in a silo, leaving just a small amount of air space, the sugar is fermented into lactic acid. You may, in fact, get some alcohol, but that in turn is mostly fermented to acetic acid. This mixture of lactic and acetic acid is a very good

preservative. (It's the acetic acid in vinegar that makes it useful for pickling.) This ordinary ensilage process is widely used in America for crops like maize and millet. Unfortunately if you take an ordinary mixture of grass and clover you find that things may go all wrong if you just bung the stuff into the silo and trust to luck. This kind of stuff contains too much protein and too little sugar for the self-pickling to go ahead properly.

"Now it happens that there is an agriculturist in Finland, Virtanen by name, who is a man of infinite resource and sagacity. Vinegar being too costly for making cow-pickles, he tried various substitutes and finally his choice fell upon a particular mixture of ordinary hydrochloric and sulphuric acids. The preservation was excellent. Virtanen's silage comes out of store, after many months, almost as bright a green as when it went in. Of course massive doses of hydrochloric and sulphuric acids are not good for cows, but you can get over this by feeding chalk along with the silage. Well, we have given this process a good trial, and it is quite good. Only our men don't enjoy paddling about in acid, and the doling out of chalk is rather a bothersome business. So our people and the Dutch, and various others, decided to get the necessary acidity by other means. The most successful of them is to spray the green stuff, as it goes into the silo, with a mixture of cane molasses and water. This supplies an easily fermentable sugar, lactic acid is quickly procured, and all is well."

### A Word For Stone Walls

*In many parts of the South Island, and some of the North, surface stones make a problem for farmers. Here is a suggestion from England:*

One of Derbyshire's annual events is a competition of dry stone-walling—that is of building a wall of loose, unmortared material so soundly that it will last well-nigh for ever. The trick of it is in the deft assortment, arranging, and handling of the stones so that they overlap to the best advantage; there must be unfilled crannies between them, but as long as these do not unite there is no weakness. In shepherd's country there have to be at intervals large removable stones on the ground level of the wall, big enough to admit the passage of a flock of sheep, one by one, when the stone is pulled out; naturally some art is needed to fit this kind of doorway, which saves the need of a wooden gate, into the loose structure of stone-walling. A dry wall can take the eye by its cunning texture, while it especially suits the farmer because of the speed and economy with which a clever hand can raise it.

Stone walls are the very bones of some English shires, of Derbyshire not least. The grey hillsides, whether of woldy Gloucester or of millstone-gritty Pennine, are unthinkable without them, just as the countries of the plain are not to be imagined without the sprawling hedgerows that betoken lushness of ground and lazy, spendthrift farming.

### Take a Note of This Talk

2YA: *The production of Clean Milk and Cream, by the Johnsonville Young Farmers' Club. Tuesday, December 12, 7.40 p.m.*