

HOW EUROPE FEEDS ITSELF

New Zealand Soldier on an Italian Farm

THE most urgent of the problems facing Europe at the present moment is bread. How much can be shipped, how much can the nations themselves supply? Here is an account by a New Zealand soldier of a visit to a better-than-ordinary farm in Italy. If this is the rate and scale of production in a grain-growing area, it is difficult to see how existing systems of tenure and cultivation can survive. The author is Pte. D. G. Edwards, a member of the staff of Rongotai College.

IN a narrow gorge running out of the Alburni mountains is a tiny village called Galdo del Alburni. Troops of any kind are rare since the Germans left nearly a year ago. A chance meeting with an old farmer who spoke some English was the beginning. We liked him and decided to return and stay a few days to find out at first hand how he lived and to have a rest holiday.

Nicolo is a reasonably well-to-do farmer. He owns two houses in a village of 30 or 40, and 13 separate pieces of land in the valley, all of them freehold, making a total of 120 acres, much larger than most of the farms in the district. The pieces vary from the main farm of 28 acres, with a large, old stone house, to small stony strips on the hillside with olive trees and a single crop. The main farm grows and stores most of the small crops. In this district the land tenure is very mixed. There is a relic of old feudal ownership in large tracts, more particularly olive and chestnut groves on the mountain slopes, still owned by the Conte de Guisso, who lives in Salerno. A hundred years ago these aristocratic families owned and operated huge estates, but to-day gain only incidental revenue from the residue, usually single crop areas. Other absentee landlords, including the Church, own land which is rented, usually in small pieces, to the villagers.

Very Few Landowners

The members of the village live almost solely off the land. A few services such as barbers and three or four shops serve the large number who work in the fields. Of these, a very few, like Nicolo, own their own land, the remainder renting it from the few landlords. The rent is often paid with the products by a simple system of half into the owner's barn and half to the farmer's house as it is harvested. It seems certain that a family working a rented farm would never be able to own one. The sale of land is rare and values are almost impossible to assess in terms of money at present, but it is plain that a farmer working rented land makes no more than a bare living at a low standard for very long hours of work.

The freehold land is owned by men who have inherited it or, by no means uncommon in this province, by men returned from America with a few hundred dollars. Land when inherited tends to be split into pieces and this possibly accounts for the scattered nature of many farms, though it may be a relic of old feudal "strip" farming. Nicolo one day pointed out a piece of land the size of a football field which he had inherited from his father, together with one room of an old stone house used as a storehouse. Money wages are paid, of course, usually by the large landowners, for day labour, for harvesting, pressing grapes or olives, carting or building work. An ordinary labourer

earns 45-50 lire a day (2/3-2/6), but it is very difficult to assess its value at present rates, as prices are so inflated. For instance, matches are very scarce and, when available, fetch 40 lire for a small box.

Community Spirit

An interesting feature of the labour problem in the village is the willingness to help each other without thought of money wages. Francesco, the eldest son, is a bootmaker of sorts and one day a nearby farmer called to have some clogs mended. While Francesco did this, the owner of the clogs continued the scything of some hay, this being the only way he had of paying for the work. Similarly the tobacco picking required the assistance of girls and it was found that Nicolo and Francesco had helped a man with his grain and so his daughters helped Nicolo with the tobacco. The question of balancing the work did not seem to arise and, if work had to be done, someone would help.

One girl had a widowed mother and during the winter Nicolo gave her some food and the girl always helped him when he was busy. Many examples could be quoted of this attitude of co-operation and good community spirit.

The 20-acre patch with the old house is the principal part of Nicolo's farm. The remainder is mainly single crop fields requiring little attention. On the main farm all the small specialised crops are grown and practically all the storage and work is done there. On this small area we saw crops of wheat, barley, maize, tobacco, grapes, potatoes, tomatoes, peppercorn, sunflowers, broad beans, cabbage, silver beet, melons, pumpkins, carrots, onions, gherkins. This was in fact a large family garden. The trees included olives, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, apples, walnuts, almonds, chestnuts, figs, mulberries. The family lives fairly well off these crops, while windfalls and defectives feed the poultry and pigs.

The "Pool" System

The surplus products are sold. Previously they were disposed of in nearby markets, but now they are commandeered under the "pool" system. Quantities of grain, potatoes and nuts are kept, while figs, pears, peaches and apricots are very crudely sun-dried and, with suitable vegetables, are all stored for the winter. According to Nicolo there will be a surplus this year, estimated roughly at 400 kilos of wheat, 200 kilos of barley, 80 kilos of maize, 400 kilos of tobacco, 100 kilos of olive oil and 200 kilos of wine. There would not be the usual potato surplus. A guess at the total income of these crops was 14,000-15,000 lire (£37/10/-); out of this the commodities to be bought, if available, would be clothes, boots, salt, sugar, coffee, farm tools, lime, etc. There will be little opportunity of buying these things, particularly clothing. The stock on the farm at present is one

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