

FARMER WITH A MISSION

THE Department of Agriculture, the NBS and "The Listener" all wanted J. D. F. Green when he arrived in Auckland on the Empire Paragon from Vancouver the other day. The Department of Agriculture wanted to find out just what he plans to see in New Zealand when he comes back here from Australia; the NBS wanted to arrange his passage by the first available flying-boat to Sydney; and "The Listener" wanted to know, among other things, what the BBC liaison officer was doing in these parts. Our representative interviewed Mr. Green when he was clear of the passport office and the booking offices.

"ARE you here as a representative of the BBC or of the Government?" I asked Mr. Green when I met him at his hotel.

"Let's put it this way: I'm travelling as a representative of the BBC under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture," he said. "During the war years my BBC work has all been very closely connected with the Ministry of Agriculture and whatever I do on this tour will be of use to both."

Twelve years ago Mr. Green was a barrister but left the Bar to join the BBC and build up the agricultural and domestic livestock service (including the gardening conducted by the late C. H. Middleton) and backyard talks. His title, agricultural liaison officer, means director of the farm services. The BBC national programme is the weekly "Farming To-day" but each region has its own programme as well.

From Nothing to Millions

"During the last six years radio has played an enormously important part in the life of the British farmer," Mr. Green said. "To build up that war production of ours from practically nothing to millions in a short time called for an endless stream of instructions and appeals and orders and prohibitions, all issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and largely communicated to the farmers by radio. Then came our own particular part—to explain those orders and instructions, to educate the farmer, to tell him why he was required to grow wheat now instead of potatoes, why he must feed this and this and not that and that to his livestock, why he was to breed this type of pig and not that. Explaining why became one of the most important jobs in our agricultural service."

"There was surely a good deal of explaining how, too, for farmers who were required to make quick and serious changes in their methods. Did your service deal with this?"

"Oh, yes. That was very important—Farm News, the session was called. An exchange of experiments and discoveries and experiences with commentaries on technical developments. Through the BBC we have organised groups of farmers to listen to such series as 'Cattle at the Crossroads' (dairy industry), 'Green Pastures' (grassland management) and 'This is My Farm' (farm management). The British Government is now building up a National advisory service for the first time. Until now all instructors and advisers—such as your field instructors in the different branches—have been maintained by individual counties; where the county was an agricultural one there would be an agent with advice and help available, but in a largely industrial

county the luckless farmer would have to go without. With the new national scheme there will be help, expert help, available for everyone."

"And your observations on this tour will be used in this scheme I suppose?"

"Well, my tour is largely to observe for the BBC farm service the farming backgrounds in the temperate regions," Mr. Green said. "I believe that in radio we have a perfect medium of communication among English-speaking farmers everywhere and I think and hope the time will soon come when we can have discussion groups and radio debates and so on to pool ideas and exchange views; generally, in fact, to keep all farmers abreast of the latest technical and economic developments and research work. Up till now we've had a few professors or research workers in different parts of the Empire writing in their observations. I see no reason why the farmers themselves should not take part in a radio pool of information. Here's radio, the ideal communication to break down the isolation that has always put agriculture at a political and economic disadvantage. Let's use it."

Mr. Green has just spent three months in the United States and Canada visiting agricultural colleges and research stations as he intends to do during the next few months in Australia, and later when he returns to New Zealand. I asked him if he had been tempted to take up land in America. He said he had found American farming methods too impatient, too impetuous, for his own liking; but he added an admiring comment on the bluegrass country of Kentucky where, he said, he found the people so pleasant. In other States he came across wealthy owners who sowed their crops and went away to Florida or California holiday-making until it was time to go back to get the harvest in.

Their farms, he said, never had a chance to become inhabited, lived-in homes.

I asked him if he had heard much of Faulkner's "Ploughman's Folly" idea.

"Yes; but I don't think his idea is the whole truth. We have misused the plough, but that's not our worst fault as farmers."

"Would you say it was greed?"

"Yes, perhaps. Greed and haste."

"Farm-born"

Near Cheltenham in Gloucestershire, Mr. Green has a farm of 300 acres—before the war this was 600 acres. "But there's an aerodrome in the middle of it now," he said. He is what he said the Americans call farm-born and his particular personal interest is in livestock.

"Is your farm typical for its size?" I asked and he said that it is. Furthermore 300 acres is regarded as big in

mixed farming. The usual family farm, he said, is about 150 acres, and a really big grain-growing farm, probably run

by a combine, would be up to 2,000 acres."

"Well, on your 300 acres what stock do you carry?"

"We milk 30 shorthorns and keep a small flock of pedigree Oxford Down ewes for ram-breeding, selling the rams each year. Then we have a few pigs and keep about 200 acres in crops—corn, potatoes, beet and so on."

"Do you milk 30 cows all the year round?"

"Yes, all the year round."

"And what is a small flock?"

"Oh, fifty, say fifty to sixty. The Oxford Down is the most popular of the short-woolled sheep in England to-day."

"And the corn—oats, barley or wheat?"

"Oh, wheat. In America I had to say grain or they thought I meant maize."

"How much to the acre?"

"What's four nines?" he asked mysteriously.

"Thirty-six," I said.

"Well, thirty-six bushels, that's about the average."

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It was about 3 o'clock on Saturday afternoon and Mr. Green was to leave for Sydney on Monday. So after I had discovered by careful sounding that he merely had to fill in time by collecting his luggage from the Empire Paragon, I said:

"Now's the time they start milking at a small mixed farm I know. Would you care for a walk round 100 acres? It's not the type of farm you'll see when you visit the agricultural colleges."

"Yes, I'd be most interested. It's all wasted time when I'm not seeing anything." We caught a bus and in 20 minutes we were walking across a pitted paddock and I was being asked more questions about the names of trees and grasses and weeds and hedge-plants than I've ever been asked by anyone else—and more, by half, than I could answer. Mr. Green was interested in the shelter, the position of the water troughs, the working of the milking machines, and the refrigerating system. He asked the farmer minutely how the circulating brine worked through the cooler and then asked what power he used for the machines and the refrigerator.

In a surprised tone the farmer answered "electric power."

Mr. Green shrugged. "There you are, you see," he said. "In England we'd milk in buildings made of stone and fit for a church but we might not have electric light or a refrigerator. But a wooden building is all that's necessary—that's what I'm, always telling these people in England. They tell me they need expensive buildings, paved yards, elaborate fences and so on and they can't start without enormous capital; but of course, it's all nonsense."

Paspalum and Blackberries

We walked on up the valley talking about the feeding of stock (winter-housed) in England compared with feeding in New Zealand. Mr. Green interrupted his tale of root crops, green maize and huge quantities of hay with questions about one weed after another—flannel plant, mock mint, pennyroyal and so on—said yes, buttercup was a serious weed in English pastures too, indeed the whole of this paddock looked familiar, could be along the Cornwall coast, for instance. He bent to look at strange grasses—he took a special interest in paspalum—and picked bits of leaves and flower heads to smell. We ate the first blackberries of the season and muttered about the curse it had become. He noticed the clumps of rush and the deep holes left by the cows in the last heavy rain. After being unable to answer several questions on end I found



Grassland that went under the plough in wartime England to build up production. In a Yorkshire field, 1940