AGRICULTURE

Post-Napoleonic Period Had Agricultural Adjustment Woes

GOVERNMENT control of agriculture, which agitates Great Britain no less than it does the United States, is no new thing under the sun. There is a striking parallelism between present efforts to straighten out the agricultural-economic tangle and efforts that were made after the last preceding great war, the Napoleonic struggle that ended just 99 years before the World War began.

At the Norwich meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Dr. J. A. Venn, president of Queens' College, Cambridge University, pointed out a whole series of striking similarities, and even more striking differences, between the two historic periods.

Poor Bore the Brunt

There is a modern tone, in spite of a superficial quaintness of expression, in the thunderings of a "leader," or editorial, quoted by Dr. Venn from an 1826 issue of the *London Times*:

"What the nation pants for, is a sensible fall of prices. Bread must be had cheap. Rents must be sacrificed to the lives of the people. It is monstrous impudence to talk about the ruin of the farmers from a lowering in the price of produce. The farmers want nothing better than low prices, if they can but get their lands at proportionate rents . . . Leave the loaf of bread to find its own value."

Yet despite the Times' demand for the sacrifice of the wealthy landowners for the benefit of the poor tenant farmers and the ultimate cheapening of the city workingman's bread, the poorer classes had to bear the brunt of economic maladjustment in the post-Napoleonic period.

"When summarizing the results of the policy followed during the post-Napoleonic war era, it is significant to observe that its cost to the Exchequer was negligible," Dr. Venn observed; "for, rocklike, it rested on the axioms that consumers should pay to the utmost . . . and that workers must, for the sins and omissions of statement, unavoidably suffer in full the blasts of an economic hurricane."

Times change. Dr. Venn mentioned some striking contrasts between the laws of then and now:

"Then, penalties faced the worker, who, with two or three of his fellows, 'combined' for the purpose of seeking an increase in his rate of remuneration; now punishment awaits the employer who fails to pay an independently determined minimum wage . . . Then, landlords were omnipotent; now, the tenant can virtually dictate his terms to a subservient owner."

Concluding, Dr. Venn offered a modest word of prophecy:

"Looking back on the past history of British agriculture, I am confident of one thing—whether that time be far distant or near at hand, the industry will resume its prosperity—its importance it has never lost—and unborn generations will regard the present epoch as affording one of those many trials through which, during countless generations, it has emerged unscathed but remodelled, this time not despite a policy of *laissez faire,* but as a result of considered action and preferential treatment of an all-embracing character."

Science News Letter, September 14, 1935

PSYCHOLOGY

New-Born Kittens Have Taste Discrimination

THE NEW-born kitten comes into the world with his eyes closed, but he is not taste-blind. He likes his milk. But he refuses water unless it is made more attractive by the addition of sugar. And he can tell the difference between plain milk and a drink to which sweet, sour, salt and bitter tastes have been added.

The ingenious method by which newborn kittens were enabled to make known to scientists what they are able to taste was described at the meeting of the American Psychological Association by Carl Pfaffmann, of Brown University.

An artificial "mother" consisting of a small nursing bottle was fitted with a rubber nipple to which a pressure-recording instrument was attached. As the kitten sucked the milk out of the bottle the negative pressures developed were recorded by the instrument. If the kitten sucked hard he liked his food, it was assumed.

With plain milk in the bottle, the record showed a regular sucking, but when salt, acid or bitter substance was added the record betrayed that the kitten knew the difference. The sucking record then was "distorted."

Science News Letter, September 14, 1935

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture In Britain Faces Serious Problems

BRITISH agricultural interests have problems of their own to face, no less than agriculture in America. The traditional "crusted conservatism" of the British farmer tends to aggravate the problems in spots, yet at the same time serves as a restraining influence on immature political and economic schemes, the British science journal (*Nature,* Aug. 10), points out editorially in commenting on opinions expressed by Sir John Russell, noted agricultural scientist.

One basic fact to be counted on, in the opinion of *Nature,* is the ingrained individualism of the British dweller on the land. He will cling to his own acres, and refuse to be swept into any collectivist scheme for large-scale management.

"That is all to the good," is the comment, "because state supervision failed during the late War; it failed in France in the Revolution, and it is proving a failure in Russia now."

However, that same individualism is proving an obstacle to present much-needed improvement in the general agricultural development in Britain. The land needs capital, especially for drainage. The small farm owner has none; neither has the landowner who rents his farms on a partnership basis. He is unable to keep up his end of the partnership.

Sir John, according to the report, looks upon proposals for "state farming" with considerable apprehension, yet cannot escape the fact that the only practicable source for farm-improving capital may be state financing, with a corresponding degree, at least potentially, of state control.

Whatever may be the way out that is finally chosen by British agriculture, both Sir John and the commentator on his opinions are agreed that changes are on the way.