



Book Review



THE TRANSITION IN AGRICULTURE. By Edwin A. Pratt, author of "Railways and their Influence on the Organization of Agriculture," etc. Published by John Murray, Albemarle street, London, W. 1. 15s. Illustrated by H. M. Bennett. Price five shillings.

"Someone, many years ago, said that there is nothing new under the sun," and the whole world looked wise and believed. He that as it may, during the past decade a new truth has been borne into the minds that have studied changes in modern methods of doing all things. There is really nothing old in the world.

There is nothing so old that it has reached perfection. Years ago our forebears thought that our manner of existing had reached at least very near a perfect state. But developments have not substantiated their belief. Within a comparatively short period of years we have been given the telephone, the phonograph, the automobile, the modern threshing and binder, the gasoline engine, and other utilities too numerous to mention. So the world goes, it is old going on to the new.

And what is older than the English method of agriculture? For hundreds and hundreds of years the Norman, Saxon and Dane, all consolidated into the great English nation, have gone on cultivating their lands. True there have been many improvements in the matter of machinery, fertilizers, etc., but in the fundamental principles there has been, until the last few decades, but very little change.

The English husbandman has gone on raising the same crops, observing the same crop rotations and marketing the crop, in the way of his fathers, and considered the way good. And their methods of cultivation were good. In fact, the crops of English farms are the envy and admiration of the whole agricultural world. But during the last twenty-five or thirty years they have seen the necessity of a change in the manner of their crop and the manner of its marketing. And with characteristic English shrewdness but sureness they have set to work to remedy conditions.

This change is the subject of Edwin A. Pratt's book, "The Transition in Agriculture." In this work the whole working of the new system, of which co-operation is the basis, and the events leading to the change, are covered.

Mr. Pratt does not intend that his work be taken as a complete treatise on British agriculture, but concerns himself with facts and figures that indicate so forcibly the changes that have been going on, and the magnitude of the developments that have already taken place, hoping thereby to promote a greater degree of public confidence in the continued vitality and the widened possibilities of British agriculture (using that word in its broadest sense), notwithstanding the period of depression of which the effects have certainly not yet entirely disappeared. He regards the restoration of a feeling of confidence of greater importance in view of the general attention now being attracted in Great Britain to questions concerning the land.

The necessity of a change in agricultural activities was brought about during the past comparatively few years by the opening up of large areas of virgin soil in Canada, the United States, Argentina and Australia, and the production of wheat on a scale that could not be approached in the British Isles. The improvement of transportation facilities gave a rapid means for the carrying the grain to English and continental markets in a volume that threatened to put the farmers there out of business.

A great many of them were driven from the soil, but the balance set themselves to work out a new system that would return them a livelihood. And this they have done, the very fact of the foreign supply of grain and meat lowering prices, proving their salvation.

With bread and meat cheaper the working class had a larger amount to spend for supplementary diet. So it is to quote the author, "...that the popular consumption in Great Britain during the last two or three decades of milk, cream, butter, vegetables, fruit, preserves, poultry, eggs, etc., as supplementary to bread and meat, has been greater than ever before in our history; that there is a continued demand on that part of large sections of the community for the best qualities of English and Scotch meats,

implements, and other farm requisites, as may be required.

"9. And generally, by promoting the interests of farmers in every way that may from time to time be considered desirable.

The association has now 1,499 members, who dispose of 12,500,000 gallons of milk per annum. Their net return on this quantity, after allowing for railway carriage, is £269,000, or approximately \$1,845,000, and it is calculated that the financial gain they have secured through co-operation is from \$150,000 to \$200,000 per annum, or an average annual gain per member of from \$150 to \$200. "One may judge from these figures," says Mr. Pratt, "what the milk industry is worth to the British farmer, and one sees also how its condition may be improved."

The farmer's greatest problem is the loss can he secure larger returns from his business? The writer points out that this may be done in either of two ways: by selling his produce at a higher figure, accomplished by improving marketing conditions; or by lessening the cost of production and transportation; or accomplishing both by combination with his fellow agriculturists.

Mr. Pratt's remarks on the necessity of co-operation apply not only to Great Britain but to every agricultural nation of the world. "When we come to look at the possible economies," he says, "what we find is that the British producer stands between two vast armies, each of which not only expects to live upon him, but to prosper at his expense. On the one hand there is a vast army of manufacturers, agents and traders, who sell him the various things he requires for the purposes of production, too often exploiting his ignorance, his simplicity, or his isolation to their own advantage. On the other, there is an army of salesmen, traders and middlemen of various ranks and grades, through whose hands his produce will pass before it reaches the consumer, each wanting to get out of it a profit for himself, without much consideration for the one on whom they seek to impose. But so long as the British farmer is an individual unit he must expect to be thus exploited, and to have to pay retail while he sells wholesale."

Isn't that just about the condition that the Western Canadian grain grower has fought against for years? On the one hand the implement manufacturer and dealer, their stock-in-trade protected by a high tariff; the purveyors of binder twine, fencing stuffs and household supplies, each one of which pass through a number of hands at a profit to each; on the other the elevator combine who makes something out of the hauling of his grain, the stockholder who pounds down prices at every opportunity; and the miller who makes a profit off practically every bushel of vegetables, pounds of butter and dozen of eggs that are supplied. The Canadian farmer supports a veritable army of these men, not only supporting them but aids them in accumulating fortunes.

We are awakening to the necessity of bringing the producer and consumer nearer together. The British farmer recognized the necessity of this long ago and in most cases has shortened the route from the farm to the table to the last desirable notch. This was not done in a day, nor a year; it took a great many years, but its accomplishment has been the outstanding feature of the transition in British agriculture.

The great step in the organization of British farmers into co-operative societies was taken in April, 1901, when the Agricultural Organization Society, the headquarters of which are at Dacre House, Dacre Street, Westminster, S.W., was formed.

Of this society Mr. Pratt says, "The society has since had a very sturdy fight in endeavoring to overcome the prejudices of generations, in seeking to convert to new ideas and new methods a class of men notoriously averse to change, and in trying to place British agriculture itself so far as circumstances permit, on a more thoroughly commercial and practical basis. It required courage to attempt such things as these, especially when others had failed before; but the society has had excellent leaders."

The progress made in a short time after the formation of the society is indicated by the fact that the number of local organizations affiliated with the central body in the autumn of 1905 was 110." (Note—this book was published

in 1906 and the total now probably reaches much higher figures). "This total was made up as follows: Societies established for the supply of requirements and sale of produce, 76; dairy, bottled milk and cheese-making, 9; rural industries, credit societies, 11; action market, 1; fruit-grading, 1; motor service societies, 2; County Pig Insurance Association (which already includes forty-four branches), 1; Agricultural Co-operative Federation, Ltd., 1."

The space available for this review precludes any discussion of the functions of these various component parts of the central association, but they have all worked for the betterment of the conditions surrounding British agriculture; have lessened the cost of production and brought the producer closer to the consumer, lengthening the profit at both ends. The close personal of the means used to arrive at this end will benefit every Western Canadian farmer and the book should be well studied by every Agricultural Society and Grain Growers' Association.

The Agricultural Co-operative Federation now gets wholesale merchants' prices and discounts, representing much more favorable terms than those on which the largest of the individual farmers could purchase—even if such farmers were able to deal with the manufacturers at all. Thus feeding-stuffs are purchased at most advantageous terms, arrangements have been made with trustworthy firms to supply seeds of guaranteed quality and germinating power at rates substantially lower than those at which they could be purchased before; while in the case of farm machinery and implements it secures discounts ranging from 13 to 30 per cent. Everything, in fact, that a farmer may want is obtained through the federation and the result is a great saving in the cost of production.

In addition to purchasing for its members, the society also sells for them, disposing of his produce direct to retailers without recourse to other middlemen. Their plans have worked out well and might well be emulated by the farmers of the West.

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A Cincinnati dispatch of May 20 said: "Speaking of his coming hunting trip to the far north, Harry Whitney, of this city, who spent a year hunting in the polar regions, has declared to friends here that Capt. Robert Bartlett will head an expedition to the south pole. Capt. Bartlett commanded Peary's ship, the Roosevelt, and will be in command of the Boethic, the ship which Whitney will use."

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Ex-president Roosevelt was given an enthusiastic reception at Cambridge Thursday when he was the recipient of an honorary degree.

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A survey of the forests along the line of the proposed Hudson Bay railway will be made this summer. Three parties will soon be in the field.

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An arbitration board of engineers has arrived from the east to classify the work of the contractors on the National Transcontinental.

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Three officers and twenty-four men of a French submarine lost their lives in a disaster in the English channel.

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A branch of the International Free Trade league has been formed in Winnipeg.

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Queen Mary's birthday was celebrated quietly throughout the empire Thursday.



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