

CHAPTER X

DENMARK: AN EXPERIMENT STATION IN AGRICULTURE

SOME years ago I visited the little state of Denmark, which protrudes up into the North Sea at the western corner of Europe. As I crossed the low-lying moors I was impressed with the snug little villages, the neat and attractive farmhouses, and the buildings in the towns. But most of all I was attracted by the appearance of the country, the intensive cultivation of the soil, the use of every waste place, of a new kind of agriculture that I had not seen anywhere else in Europe with the exception of Belgium and Holland.

The land was not naturally fertile. That was apparent from the car window. Nature had been none too generous with this little corner of Europe, about twice the size of Massachusetts, and with a population of 2,861,000, about half the population of New York City, of which about 40 per cent. live in towns or cities and 60 per cent. in the country.

Copenhagen, the capital city of 500,000, partook of the prosperity, good order, and cleanliness of the agricultural towns and country districts. The slums were almost negligible. There was little evidence of

poverty. All classes of people seemed to have leisure. They frequented the restaurants and cafés, they went to the Tivoli—the city's pleasure resort—in the evening by thousands, where rich and poor enjoyed themselves in a simple, democratic way. Everything suggested personal and political freedom, democracy in politics as well as in life.

Denmark has a king, it is true, but he exercises little power, while the parliament, I learned, was ruled by the peasants, or small farmers, working in co-operation with the radicals and socialists. Women have recently been granted the ballot. And the upper house of parliament, which is the obstacle to progressive legislation in most of the countries of the world, has been shorn of its power.

But Denmark is particularly interesting at the present time because of what she has done for agriculture, for keeping her people upon the land, for the many experiments which she offers to the world. For Denmark is an experiment station whose achievements must be copied, in part at least, if the United States is to save agriculture from decay and keep her people on the soil. Denmark has done this in the face of natural obstacles far greater than those which confront any other country unless it be Holland. And she has done it *by law*, by the use of legislation and the control of politics in the interest of the farmers.

Fifty years ago Denmark lost her choicest posses-

sions, Schleswig and Holstein, to Germany. Cheap agricultural produce from the American West threatened her home as well as her foreign market. Political and industrial depression settled upon the people. There was little to justify hope under these conditions. Yet to-day Denmark is one of the wealthiest countries in Europe in proportion to its population. The average deposits in the savings-banks are \$77.88. In England they are only \$20.62 and in the United States \$31.22. The number of depositors in the banks is higher than in any other country, being 51 out of every 100. And 78 per cent. of the savings are in the rural districts. There is a telephone in nearly every fair-sized farm, while Danish cattle, Danish bacon, and Danish eggs are recognized for their superiority all over the world. Before the war Denmark supplied Germany with a considerable part of her cattle; the Danish dairies supplied England with butter and the British people with bacon and eggs. There were no high-cost-of-living investigations in Denmark; there are no monopolies or trusts, and, while the country has few persons of great wealth and relatively little industry, more has been done for education, and intelligent education, than in almost any country in the world.

How was this brought about in the face of a niggardly nature, a chilly, inhospitable climate, in a relatively poor state surrounded by greater powers?

The movement began with education—a strange

kind of education that has no exact counterpart in the world. The nearest approach to it in this country is the Gary system, with this important difference, that the Gary system is primarily designed for the cities while the schools of Denmark are for farmers. They were conceived by an insurgent bishop, Grundvig by name, who insisted that the schools of the country should be shaped to the needs of the country. He saw that education should be agricultural and the culture of the country should be the culture of the farmer. He spent his life, as most agitators do, without seeing the results of his efforts come true. But to-day there are eighty-two of these people's high schools in Denmark, each one of which is independent in its administration and each of which is a centre of politics, of discussion, of propaganda, of agricultural training. The years of attendance are from 16 to 35; the boys attend in the winter and the girls in the summer. The cost to the pupil, including board and lodging, is about forty dollars a year. Text-books are but little used. Classroom work of the ordinary kind is of secondary importance. The schools idealize country life and the nobility of manual toil. To attend one of these schools is the ambition of the peasant. He is taught the history of his country. He learns the songs of Denmark. He acquires a strong body. In addition, the curriculum includes farm accounting, natural science, drawing and surveying, bookkeeping,

and agricultural economics of all kinds. Round about the schools are experimental farms. The student learns about agriculture and the conduct of the thousands of co-operative societies which are to be found all over Denmark. He acquires a love for farming and a scientific appreciation of its possibilities and its joys. About 10,000 pupils attend these schools every year.

The Danish farmer is the most intelligent farmer in the world. And he has a culture of his own, gained from the emphasis which has been put upon farming by the nation. For not only education but legislation and the politics of the state are concentrated on agriculture as the predominant interest of the people. And as a result of education, a widely read press, and endless political organizations the farmer has become the ruling class in the state. He dominates parliament. Members of the ministry are chosen almost exclusively from among the peasants, and the railroads, taxation, and social legislation are directed to the intelligent upbuilding of agriculture.

And back of everything else, and in a sense explaining it, is the relation of the people to the land. Fifty years ago Denmark was divided into great estates as still is a great part of Europe. The feudal system had survived. The great landowners, the titled nobility of the country, ruled parliament in their own interests. They shifted the taxes

onto the peasants. They kept them in ignorance. They refused to ameliorate the condition of the agricultural worker, who was little better than a serf. Denmark was a landed oligarchy, the upper house of parliament being a kind of House of Lords.

All this has been changed. The Danish farmer is no longer a tenant. He owns his own farm. And being an owning farmer, he has every stimulus and ambition to improve his farm. In this he is like the French, Swiss, and Dutch peasant. To-day 90 per cent. of the farmers of Denmark own their own farms as compared with 63 per cent. in the United States. In the South and West the percentage of farm ownership in this country is very much lower. In the new State of Oklahoma farm ownership amounts to only 45 per cent., in Alabama to 40 per cent., and in Texas to 48 per cent. And in many counties throughout the West farm ownership has dwindled to 30 per cent. of the farming population.

The Dane appreciated that the first necessity of successful agriculture was ownership. For the history of every country shows that tenant farming is wasteful and indifferent. It leads to the exhaustion of the soil. The tenant has no ambition; he makes no effort to improve his farm; he has little political and social interest whether it is in Ireland or America. And home ownership has changed the entire psychology of Denmark. It has changed

agriculture and politics as well. For as soon as the Dane acquired a farm he began to have many other interests. He protested against the rulership of the landed aristocracy and, being in the majority, he sought a more democratic form of government. Year by year his control of parliament has been strengthened, until to-day the peasant, with the more radical groups from the towns, controls the government of the country.

And being a home-owning farmer and realizing its advantages, the peasant worked out a constructive plan for breaking up the remaining feudal estates and for distributing the land among his sons and the workers of the city. An appropriation of \$10,000,000 was first made, to be allotted by an agricultural commission to persons who desired to acquire farms costing in the neighborhood of \$1,200. The applicant needs only provide 10 per cent. of the cost; the state provides 90 per cent. The would-be farmer must be indorsed by other farmers and have had some experience in agriculture. He pays interest at the rate of 3 per cent. upon the loan advanced by the state and is given from thirty to forty years in which to repay the capital loan in annual instalments of from 1 to 2 per cent. The new farmer is aided by his neighbors. The state itself sends agents, who instruct him in planting, in dairying, in the rotation of crops and the care of the soil. Under this law the number of peasant

owners have increased year by year, until to-day nine out of ten farmers own their own farms.

These farmers of Denmark are distributed as follows:

SIZE OF FARMS— ACRES	NUMBER OF FARMS IN THIS CLASS	TOTAL NUMBER OF ACRES IN CLASS	AVERAGE SIZE OF FARMS
Less than 1½ . . .	68,000	25,000	.37 acres
1½-13½	65,000	450,000	7.00 "
13½-40	46,000	1,150,000	25.00 "
40-150	61,000	5,900,000	97.00 "
150-650	8,000	2,100,000	263.00 "
More than 650 . .	822	1,150,000	1,400.00 "

The average size of the 248,000 farms of the first five classes, which comprise nine-tenths of the land, is but 39 acres. Of these, 68,000 farms average less than one-half an acre each. The very large farms of the old feudal nobility comprise only about one-tenth of the total agricultural area.

The people's high schools form the educational, and farm ownership the economic, foundation of agriculture in Denmark. And each reacts upon the other. The peasant is willing to pay for education because he realizes that it increases his efficiency and the output of his farm. And education, in turn, trains the farmer to self-reliance, to a knowledge of politics and of co-operative group action as well.

As a result of these two agencies, Denmark has become an agricultural state par excellence. One

middleman after another has been eliminated, until to-day the peasants form a producing, distributing, and banking organization, handling through their thousands of co-operative organizations every line of business which affects their life. The railroads are owned by the state and are run for the farmers. Freight rates are adjusted so as to place Danish produce in Germany and England at the lowest possible cost. Before the war steamships plied from Danish ports to England with the regularity of express service, so that Danish butter and eggs could be laid fresh in the British market. Earnings of the railroads are kept low in order to encourage agriculture. The express, telephones, and telegraph business are also under state management.

But the Danish peasant is not a socialist although he works in harmony with the radical parties. The Dane thinks in terms of self-help. He relies upon himself rather than upon the state. He is a co-operative. Co-operation began in the early eighties with dairying. Prior to 1881 each farmer made his own butter. In that year a few farmers got together and organized a co-operative dairy. The venture proved so successful that other farmers organized similar dairies. To-day there are 1,087 co-operative dairies with a total membership of 158,000 farmers, who own three-fourths of the cows of the country. Nearly 95 per cent. of the farmers are members of these dairies, which shipped nearly

\$1,000,000 worth of butter a week to England before the war.

The success of co-operation in dairying induced the farmers to build co-operative slaughter-houses. To-day there are nearly 40 of these farmer-owned abattoirs, which slaughter 1,500,000 hogs annually and have a membership of 101,000. The raising of hogs was greatly stimulated by the co-operative movement, and the business has grown from 23,400 hogs to over 1,500,000. Even the egg business, which in many ways is the most interesting of all, has been organized along co-operative lines. Almost every farmer is a member of an egg-collecting society. The farmer does not take his eggs to the near-by store and sell them for whatever he can get. He sells them himself. The country is divided into circles or districts. The egg association collects the eggs from the individual farmers and takes them to the near-by warehouses. Each egg is stamped with the name of the producer and the date of its delivery, so that any complaint may be traced. The eggs are then sent to Copenhagen, where they are packed and classified for export. In 1896 the egg-export business amounted to about \$2,000,000. By 1908 it had grown to \$6,600,000. Danish eggs have a reputation of their own. They are always fresh and they bring high prices.

The peasant has pushed his co-operative activities into other fields. Some years ago the middlemen

controlled the English market. They controlled the bacon industry. So the farmers organized a selling agency of their own known as the Danish Bacon Company of London. It immediately destroyed the meat trust and in addition it assured the farmer a sure market for his produce. Banking is also a co-operative undertaking. There are 536 co-operative savings-banks in the country whose deposits amounted to \$208,500,000 in 1906. The farmer also buys at cost. He buys through central agencies in Copenhagen, which then distribute the commodities to the various co-operative selling societies scattered all over the state. The farmer buys food for his cattle in this way. He buys his machinery as well as his own household supplies. A co-operative store is to be found in every village. The turn-over of the purchasing societies alone in 1907 amounted to \$17,500,000. The farmer also buys and now manufactures his own fertilizer by co-operation. There are peasant canning factories, creamery supply companies, as well as co-operative organizations for the insurance of live stock against hail and other storms. As a matter of fact, there is scarcely an activity or a need that is not covered by one or more co-operative associations. And there is scarcely a line of agricultural economy that is not promoted by the state or by an organization designed for this purpose.

Co-operation is another expression of home-

ownership. For the tenant is rarely a co-operator. He has no permanent interest in his farm. He moves from place to place and is interested only in getting as much out of the soil as he can before he moves to another farm.

The Danish peasant has realized dividends from his education, from home-ownership, from co-operation and the control of the state in his own interest. In thirty years' time the export trade in farm products has increased 600 per cent., while the standard of living and the education and culture of the people has been raised to a higher general average than that of any country in Europe. The annual exports to England amount to nearly \$90,000,000, of which \$51,000,000 is in butter, \$30,000,000 is in bacon, and the balance is in eggs. The total export trade of the country is approximately \$380 for every farm, of which 133,000 of the 250,000 in the country are of less than $13\frac{1}{2}$ acres in extent, the average of all the farms of Denmark being but 43 acres. The export business alone amounts to \$9 per acre in addition to the domestic consumption as well as the support of the farmer himself.

The peasant uses the state in many other ways. Commissions are sent abroad to study foreign markets and foreign needs. Stock is bred from the best animals. Chickens are selected for their qualities as egg producers. The soil is studied and reports are made upon it. Nothing is left to chance. Ma-

chinery, too, has been universally introduced. The government grants \$100,000 a year to six experiment stations in breeding. There are, in addition, over 100 co-operative local experiment stations founded by the farmers. Cattle, horses, and hogs are studied with as much care as is industry in other countries. There are breeding societies and other agencies for ascertaining the best kind of live stock. And the animals are cared for with all of the skill of veterinary science. Drastic measures are taken against the foot-and-mouth disease, and tuberculosis is guarded against often by giving each cow her own drinking-vessel.

Democracy is a very loose term. It means different things in different countries. But, taking all of the elements into consideration, Denmark is possibly the most democratic country in the world. It is democratic industrially as well as politically. Special privileges have been eliminated. There is no parasitical class. The government is run by the producers. And Denmark and Australia are almost the only countries in the world where this is true. Ordinarily the privileged classes are in control. And they legislate in their own interest for the protection of monopoly, special privilege, and the advantage of their class. In Denmark, government, education, and the machinery of distribution and exchange are in the hands of the farmer, who has educated himself in statesmanship, in agricultural

science, and in co-operative business, until this little state is almost as self-contained in its activities as was the market of a small town in New England a hundred years ago.