

CHAPTER XXIII

A NEW AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMME

REFERENCE has been made in previous chapters to the experiments of Denmark and Australia on the control of the food supply and the development of agriculture along new lines. These countries have worked out a comprehensive programme for the ending of tenancy, for easy credit, for placing men upon the farm, and for aiding them in many ways in the marketing of their produce. Germany has adopted a similar policy, and several hundred thousand persons have been placed on the land as home-owning farmers. Even Russia had a big programme in process of development before the coming of the war, while Great Britain has spent hundreds of millions in the conversion of the Irish tenant into a contented home-owner.

As a result of these efforts tenancy has all but disappeared in Denmark, while in Ireland home-owning will soon be the rule. Denmark has become the world's agricultural experiment station. There is little emigration from that country. The people are too prosperous at home. To such an extent has education been carried, and so fully protected

is the farmer in the marketing of his produce through the thousands of co-operative societies that are found in that country, that a man is able to make a comfortable living from a few acres of land.

Since the war broke out nearly all of the warring nations of Europe have worked out more or less comprehensive agricultural policies, all following substantially the same lines and all looking to financial and other support from the state. And all of these projects include cheap credit, long-term loans, and the purchase and sale of land for farming purposes by the state.

As long ago as 1903, Great Britain undertook a solution of the Irish question by the subdivision of the great estates owned by the English gentry. In thirteen years the government has expended \$550,000,000 in the purchase, subdivision, and settlement of 9,000,000 acres of land, or about one-third of the total area of Ireland. An unhappy, poverty-stricken country is being converted into a nation of home-owning farmers. It is expected that by 1920 tenancy will have almost ceased to exist, at virtually no cost to the empire. The money appropriated for the purpose is being repaid by the purchasers in instalments, with interest. A royal commission for England and Scotland is now engaged in making a census of estates and is framing a law under which land will be subdivided and sold to returning soldiers at the close of the war.

In the five years prior to the war Germany appropriated over \$200,000,000 in buying and preparing farms for settlers. Waste land was reclaimed. In the years prior to 1907 the number of holdings under 5 acres in extent increased by 316,678, while in the same period holdings over 100 acres decreased by 20,744. It is said that in the neighborhood of three-quarters of the agricultural land in the empire is now in small holdings. This work is carried on under a settlement commission. Even the great estates in East Prussia, Posen, and Pomerania are being parcelled out, much as was done by Stein and Hardenberg a hundred years ago. Speaking of this policy, the official report on land settlement says:

“The existence of such large landed estates [as those of East Prussia] not only hinders the national progress of the peasant class, but, greatest evil of all, it is the principal cause of the diminishing population of agricultural territories, because the working classes, finding no chances of moral or economic improvement, are driven to emigrate to the great cities and manufacturing districts. Scientific researches also prove that small farms nowadays are more profitable than large, above all, small live-stock improved farms, the importance of which for the nutriment of the people is constantly increasing.

“In 1913 the German Government provided for the compulsory purchase of 70,000 acres of land. Speaking of the areas which were subdivided, it was stated: ‘Where formerly there had been at one end

of the social scale a few rich landowners, often non-residents and exercising an undue political influence, and at the other end a large number of poverty-stricken and discontented peasants and farm-laborers, there is now a great middle class of society, devoted to the empire for what it has done for its members.”

In the last ten years the Russian Government improved and equipped farms for 3,000,000 settlers. It contracted in the United States for millions of dollars' worth of farm machinery to be delivered after the war, so that homes could be provided for the returning soldiers. As long ago as 1893 New Zealand realized the evils of land monopoly and farm tenancy. The first experiment was very successful, in three years' time the number of people on a single estate having been increased from 40 to 1,000. During the twenty years from 1893 to 1913 New Zealand appropriated \$65,000,000 for buying, subdividing, and settling large estates. During these years the agricultural population grew more rapidly than that of the cities, and in twenty years' time it doubled. When the present war began New Zealand led the world in the per-capita value of its agricultural exports.

The same policy has been followed by other Australian states. Since 1909 over 3,000,000 acres of land have been bought, subdivided, and sold to settlers, and over \$40,000,000 has been loaned to

the colonists by the state. Speaking of these results of this settlement policy, the premier of Victoria, in his budget speech in 1914, said:

“The settlement policy is a demonstrated success. Over large areas in widely separated districts more than ten times as many families are settled comfortably under attractive social conditions as were there five years ago, and they are obtaining returns from their holdings that even less than five years ago were regarded as impossible. The demonstration that families can be fully employed and obtain a comfortable living on from 20 to 40 acres of irrigable land not only insures the financial success of our investment in irrigation works but gives a new conception of the ultimate population which this state will support and the agricultural wealth it will produce.”

The land-settlement policies of all these countries are substantially alike. They provide for the purchase of land by the government or the use of the public domain. The land is divided into holdings which can be cultivated without the aid of other labor. The size of the holdings depends upon the nature of the soil and the kinds of crops produced. Applicants for farm ownership are examined to ascertain their fitness and general moral worth. The would-be farmer is required to make an initial deposit of possibly 10 per cent. of the total capital outlay as an assurance of good faith. The farm, when sold, is equipped with a dwelling and out-

buildings, with such cattle as may be necessary, and sufficient working capital for one year's operation. Usually the farmer is not required to pay interest on the capital cost for several years. Then from 3 to 4 per cent. interest is charged and 1 per cent. additional for the ultimate extinguishment of the debt in thirty or forty years.

Usually the state co-operates with the farmer by providing advice and supervision from experts or from the agricultural colleges. Efforts are made to locate the farmers in a colony or village so that the settlers will have some social intercourse. Schools are provided, and recreation as well. Farmers are aided to organize co-operative buying and selling societies so that they can acquire goods at cost and sell in the best markets.

The state-aided settlements in all these countries have been a success. They have not proved a burden to the taxpayers in any country where the plan has been carried out. In some instances they have earned a profit. Under the stimulus of ownership the farmers have built better homes. Owning only sufficient land for a single man to cultivate, they have brought a larger acreage under cultivation. They have improved their live stock and purchased more labor-saving machinery. They have piped water to the dwellings and developed irrigation projects. The number of live stock has been so largely increased in New Zealand—and the same

is true of other countries—that the farmers amortize their loans in a shorter time than that provided by the state. The Canadian commission says of the New Zealand experiment:

“Throughout the country a higher and better civilization is gradually being evolved. The young men and women who are growing up are happy and contented to remain at home on the farm and find ample time and opportunity for recreation and entertainment of a kind more wholesome and elevating than can be obtained in the city.”

When the war is over, it is safe to assume that most of the countries of Europe will turn their attention to the intensive cultivation of the land. England will endeavor to feed herself instead of being dependent upon America and Denmark. The Russian revolution will open up hundreds of millions of acres of land to the peasants of that country. Germany will undoubtedly extend farm colonization projects successfully started before the war. Canada was already experimenting with this policy as well as with the taxation of land values to break up large estates, and will seek to lure settlers not only from Europe but from the United States. Even Mexico has worked out an agricultural programme in some of her states patterned upon the experiments in Europe. All the world will compete for able-bodied men in order to meet the burdens of this war and to re-establish their in-

dustry and life. And partly in anticipation of these conditions, the State of California has created a State colonization commission which is projecting a big programme for the colonization of home-owning farmers in that State. Legislation has been enacted, and an appropriation of \$250,000 has been made with which to buy a large tract of land. The federal farm-loan board is to be asked to co-operate in the development of a colony as described above. It is planned to purchase 10,000 acres of land, and with the aid of experts to determine the size of farms, the kind of agriculture to be adopted, the character and grouping of houses and farm buildings, and the educational, recreational, and co-operative agencies that can be developed in connection with it. The State university is co-operating in the project. It is planned to limit the right of settlers to speculate by restricting the right to sell their purchases. The individual farms, fully equipped, are estimated to cost about \$5,000, to be paid for by the owners within fifty years' time, with interest at the rate of 4 per cent. A minimum capital of about \$1,500 is to be required from each applicant, a large part of which is to be used as working capital.

A similar measure, known as the Crosser bill, is now before Congress. It looks to the creation of a rotary fund of \$10,000,000 for the purpose of developing farm colonies, the farms to be either sold or leased to settlers under terms similar to those

provided in the California measure. Public lands and reclamation projects will be used for the purpose. It has been suggested that the money deposited in the postal savings-banks should be used, and as the payments by settlers come in from year to year, that the fund be rotated, and that new colonies be opened in different parts of the country to serve as experiment stations for States or private persons that are willing to carry out similar projects.

The State-aided farm colony plan does not fully meet the agricultural problem. It does not solve the difficulties of marketing or of transportation. It does not provide cold-storage warehouses or terminals. Nor does it insure cheap land, which is essential to successful agriculture. It does, however, lend the aid of science to agriculture. It does provide education and direction by experts. It offers very cheap credit. Most important of all, ownership awakens ambition and hope. It insures permanency of tenure. It aims to re-establish conditions similar to those which peopled America with immigrants in the days when land was to be had for the asking, and places agriculture on a firmer foundation of security than that which now prevails.