

"THE VOICE OF JACOB"

Mr Jakob E. Lange's Reply to "The Times"

(Published in "The Times," 5th November.)

SIR,—One of my friends has sent me a copy of *The Times* of 24th October with an editorial, "The Voice of Jacob," in which you deal rather severely with my little book* about the outlook for English farming. From your editorial the reader will undoubtedly get the impression that the author must be either a knave or a fool, a very conceited personage, who in a bombastic way takes the English farmers to task for their shortcomings, and advocates radical reforms without having even the most elementary knowledge of what he talks about, and lacking even the most elementary courtesy, contrasting in this way most unfavourably with other visitors from Denmark whom you have found full of laudatory words concerning the high status of English farming. Fortunately, if your editorial induces the readers of *The Times* to read my little book—thus lending an ear to the true voice of Jacob—they will get an altogether different impression. Any defensory or controversial remarks from me in so far should be superfluous. But, although it is rather difficult to carry on a discussion across the North Sea, I naturally take so much interest in the problem that you will excuse me for giving a few of my points.

Although your editorial is rather long, it hardly gives any quotations from my book. You generally simply assert that I "criticize—or even more prescribe for—English agriculture"; that I hold that "we (the English public) are blind to the advantages of peasant proprietorship," that I "indulge in a fanatical optimism on the subject of small-holdings," etc. The somewhat personal turn you give to your criticism of my book necessitates my entering—rather unwillingly—on personalities: Would any reader deem it likely that a man at the head of the small-holders' agricultural school and in charge of the school's dairy-farm (which has to be self-supporting!) should be inclined to take a romantic, fantastic, rose-coloured view of the outlook for small-holding farmers? My situation evidently brings me to look at the whole movement from the inside and to grapple with the practical difficulties in a very realistic manner. You will find ample evidence of this on almost every page of my book. I never disguise that the way ahead—which even in Denmark is not too smooth—in England is full of pitfalls and rocks, that what can be brought about in Denmark, where a strong tradition turns the tide our way, must needs be far more difficult to attain in England. Still, it is not my sake to discourage those ardent workers (of diverse political views) who, in spite of severe difficulties, have done such admirable work to re-create a really independent and progressive small-holder population. A failure of 15 per cent of your new small-holders (as mentioned by you) seems to me not really discouraging when it is taken into consideration that many of these new small-holders were War invalids and townspeople, not skilled agriculturists. Even here in Denmark, to ensure the success of our small-holding policy we find it very important to pick our men with the greatest care.

You take me rather severely to task for not being sufficiently complimentary to English farming. But although I find truth a better form for courtesy than compliments, and may use a little more sparingly such

laudatory words as visitors from abroad generally use for smoothing their path, you will nevertheless find on the very first pages of my booklet the most open and unbounded acknowledgment of what English energy and progressiveness have done towards raising the standard of farming, an energy which at an epoch not too remote made the English farmer the tutor of half Europe, including Denmark. And my visit convinced me by overwhelming proofs that this energy and professional insight was still to be found in full vigour. But even if you be right in your assertion that the ability of English farmers in general is far above my estimate (which I most gladly would believe), this only strengthens my case, which is this, that all the facts tend to show that the main reasons for the slow decline and rapid depopulation of the English farming world cannot be sought in the want of professional insight or energy, but are of a politico-economic nature. And when you turn your eye that way the main wrongs are not difficult to detect, cannot, in fact, be obscured to any unbiased mind.

That the way to real and lasting progress for English farming is beset with great obstacles cannot be denied (in fact to a large extent the same ills are besetting the farming population all over the world, the difference being more of degree than of kind). But no man who through lifelong intimate contact with England has come to admire the enduring and active qualities of the English race can give up the hope that the obstacles can be removed by a political evolution brought about by a combination of wariness and undaunted strength.

Because of a vicious undercurrent, the big and splendidly outfitted agrarian ship of England is at present lagging somewhat behind the small flotilla of Danish yawls, manned with farmer-boys, that have managed by hard pulling at the oars to escape into somewhat clearer waters. Some of the mates on the big ship through their spyglasses have observed the flotilla and have called one of the rowers on board. Will you listen to the voice of Jacob? This is my case.

* *A Danish View of British Farming*, John Lane.
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