

CAN DENMARK EXIST?

D. W. BUCHANAN.

AS a result of the Ottawa Economic Conference, the United Kingdom extended preferences on most agricultural commodities to the nations of the British Commonwealth. Little Denmark, the supplier of so much butter, bacon and eggs to the English and Scotch market, has thus been forced to fight for its economic life.

Of all the attributes of Denmark, the best known certainly are butter and pigs. As to the former, the English have an untrue saying, which sounds suspiciously like protectionist propaganda from the British Farmers' Union:—"Those dirty Danes, they export their butter, and eat margarine at home." This is correct only in the sense that margarine is made in Denmark and used somewhat in cooking; for the Danes, in truth, are consummate lovers of a good table and, in practice, gorge themselves with slabs of butter on rye bread, covered with dainty meats and salads. This they call "smorrebrod", which we, in our English language borrowed from French, would term a variety of *hors d'oeuvres*.

Different in status are the pigs. The Danes, of course, eat plenty of bacon and ham; but their whole production of hogs, on principle, is standardized for export, and they could never raise so many of them so cheaply if it were not for the well-watered meadows, the grass, the cows, and the surplus of skimmed milk. Thus there exists a fundamental connection between Danish butter and Danish bacon.

Red cows on the islands, black and white cows in the peninsula of Jutland, graze in the fields, drink in the little brooks and countless ponds of a land that teems with moisture, feed on the plentiful green fodder and hay, grown in the summer, stored in the winter for their use. These herds produce immense quantities of whole milk. This goes mainly to the co-operative dairies, where butter and cheese are made. The skimmed milk and buttermilk come back to the farmers for fattening the pigs. Much grain is also raised and, by adding it to the milk diet of the hogs, the Danes are able to finish an excellent quality of bacon. So there you have, with the standardization of quality and marketing which their highly developed co-operative system has been built up to ensure, the secret of the daily appearance of Danish bacon on the British breakfast plate.

In England, the farmers have the surplus neither of milk nor of cereals to provide cheap feed, while Canadian farmers, rich in cereals, lack somewhat the flowing streams of milk. The Danes, moreover, have specialized; they have co-operated to achieve marketing success, and only a suicidal policy of agricultural nationalism on the part of the United Kingdom, expressed in prohibitive tariffs, could ever to-day drive Denmark from its position of world's largest exporter of bacon.

Some 60 per cent. of the international trade in that product is held by this little country, and, while it has lost somewhat, since the Ottawa Conference, in the British market, yet its hold there is still pre-eminent. After all, the Danes have remained closely on a sterling money standard, have had a "Buy British" campaign at home, did bring in the Prince of Wales to open a British Industrial Exhibition in Copenhagen, and on the whole have done surprisingly more than any of the mother country's own daughter nations in the Commonwealth to encourage mutual trade between the United Kingdom and themselves. Although a high proportion of their exports have thus been retained, it has only, however, been at the expense of lowered prices and curtailed production. The farmers are not happy, some of them are suffering.

The co-operatives have been forced to plan and restrict hog-raising rigidly. To so many acres of land, one pig, they rule; and the annual quota once set, they issue to each farmer a number of tickets in proportion to his acreage. Each ticket allows him to sell one pig to the marketing board. For each permit, one pig and no more, and to misplace or lose a hog ticket is, one imagines, something in the way of the same misfortune as losing a bank-note. The larger land-owners and many of the smaller ones grow restless under these limitations of income. In Copenhagen they see a worker's Socialist Government in power, supported, it is true, by the small majority of agricultural small-holders, who form a radical liberal party, which opposes the traditionally conservative wealthier countryfolk, but still, a Socialist Government, which in ensuring a fair standard of living among industrial workers in the city and the labourers in the country has made many of the farmers jealous. A few even toy with the idea of Fascist movement against the workers.

Yet what does this mean? Not so very much, after all. There are about 206,000 farms, and fewer than 5,400 are larger than 150 acres. The majority of these farmers, that is some 135,000, work very small holdings of from one and one-third acres to 37 acres. They, therefore, in everything except education and co-operative

effort, in which they are immensely superior to similar farmers elsewhere in Europe, constitute an agricultural lower class which sympathizes with many of the aims of the urban proletariat. The largest cultivated area, on the other hand, is occupied by farms of over 37 acres; but in the elections it is heads not acres that are counted. One may then say that, barring German invasion of the province of North Slesvig, which was returned to Denmark by plebiscite after the war, but to which the Nazis still cast longing eyes, Danish politics should remain relatively quiet. For the present, the country lives secure enough, although always in the background there is that lurking dread of further economic losses in the British market.

The exponents of economic nationalism, to whose philosophy the world appears bound to-day, seem sometimes either in ignorance or in intentional selfishness to forget that, in practice, universal economic warfare will mean the destruction of the less powerful nations. "In these circumstances", said one of the speakers at the concluding session of the World Economic Conference in London, "it is the small countries which will suffer most, because it is precisely at their expense, in the general clash of economic interests, that the more powerful States will attempt to improve their affairs". That is what Denmark fears. Already Germany has closed her markets. What if Britain persists also in her agricultural nationalism? Not that Denmark might not manage to live through a general economic conflict, in which the principle *saue qui peut* might rule. The foundation of the nation is her export trade in butter, eggs and bacon. Yet, even under free trade, as if in refutation of protectionist theory, her urban industries have developed in surprising fashion. For a country of clay and sand, of limited forests and almost non-existent metallic wealth, she has yet through specialization and the ingenuity of her scientists been able to build up many manufactures.

Her total population to-day is about 3,600,000, and of gainful workers only 475,000 out of 1,330,000 are employed in agriculture, forestry, or fishing. The Diesel marine motors come from Denmark, much cement-making machinery is exported, and her breweries are famous throughout northern Europe. Copenhagen, with about 800,000 inhabitants, is a great international trading centre and a free port. All these urban industries, or more properly, semi-urban industries, for her manufacturing plants, with characteristic wisdom, have not been concentrated in smoky cities, but have been scattered throughout the smaller towns and rural centres of the country, are suffering to-day from the general constriction of

trade. Yet, while England has been jeopardizing the prosperity of her tool and machine works by interference with one of their mainstays of livelihood, their sales of machinery to the Soviet Government, Denmark, the "butter and bacon" country, has seen her machine and shipping trades pick up hundreds of those Soviet orders that Britain has been letting fall by the wayside.

Soviet orders, alone, would not go far in keeping Denmark alive if her agricultural markets were to fail. But the spirit of her people might, the ingenuity of the best educated rural folk in Europe might still be strong enough to discover ways and means to live through economic chaos. Examination of such possibilities brings one back necessarily to that story of Danish schools and Danish education which explains the country, its future hopes and achievements, as nothing else either in its history or in its resources could possibly do.

How is it that a poor nation, undeveloped, relatively impoverished in soil, forest and mineral wealth, defeated and reduced in territory by German and Austrian aggression, was still able, after the opening of Russian and American wheat lands had taken her cereal export trade from her about the end of the 80's of the last century, to reorganize completely her agriculture, her commerce and her internal life, so as to become, within less than fifty years, the second richest country *per capita* in Europe? In the same time she was, moreover, able to establish an average standard of living under which most of the extremes of poverty and riches were abolished. How, one asks again and again, as one looks at those rolling fields, those forest patches of beech and those wide plantations of pine that have been grown to keep back the encroaching sand dunes from the North Sea?

The whitewashed houses in Jutland, the pink and yellow tinted homes on the islands, the red roofs and the brick churches, painted white inside and out, bespeak a happy countryside; but rarely do they present that rich grace of centuries of bourgeois spending and building and endowment in stone and sculpture which marks the prosperous old villages of Burgundy and Bavaria. One feels that this country, in the past, no matter what it may possess in the present, could never have been very wealthy, that it could never have, in each parish, for example, supported the art and glory of a stone church and ivy-covered rectory, a spacious living for the curate, and the high-life of a fox-hunting squire, as each English hamlet managed well enough to do from Elizabethan times down to the industrial revolution. What, then, is the spirit and the purpose that has given the Dane his modern comfort and well-being?

The word "cooperation" touches only the fringe of the story. Certainly, there has been co-operation in many things. About ninety per cent. of all the milk produced is handled in the dairies owned by the farmers themselves. But, on the other hand, consumers' co-operatives are not nearly so intensively developed as in England, and in Ireland there have been many recent attempts, both successful and otherwise, towards establishing co-operatives. There must be something, then, more basic than this, that rural Denmark possesses and rural England and Ireland do not. That something is an average level of sound, creative education, acquired not only in elementary schools but, by adults also, in folk high and agricultural schools.

Thus the Danish farmer is able to follow, in fact is anxious to acquire, advice about crop rotation, hog breeding, milk production and land fertilization. Irish and English experts come, one after the other, to this little country to study its agricultural methods, but in the end they throw up their hands. "It is no use", they say; "we can't apply this science at home, until our people are prepared also to receive and understand it". They then turn to study the Danish educational system. This summer, for example, there were six Canadian educational experts in attendance at the International Folk School at Elsinore, north of Copenhagen. They came from as far west as Alberta, and from as far east as Prince Edward Island.

In the life of Denmark in the nineteenth century there was one man who had vision. That vision was "the school for life". Instead of examinations by rote, bookish lore and clerical dullness, he saw in education another ideal. That was "a school for the life of the people and of citizens, in which we all can and must share". His schools were to be neither primary nor elementary institutions under standardized direction. They were rather to be individual units, run by endowment or community subscription, governed by inspired teachers and attended during the winter months by young men and women from the farms. History, the Danish language and literature would be discussed, mostly in talk and lectures, while folk singing, gymnastics, and recreation would complete the curriculum of the schools. The ideal was not book knowledge, but to stir the youth to knowledge of themselves, and to make them consciously aware of the unity and demands of community and social life. The name of the man who had that inspiration and carried it out to fulfilment was Grundtvig.

He and his followers, gradually, from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, established these folk or adult high

schools. To-day there are some sixty of them recognized by the State in Denmark. They proceed in practical independence of the regular elementary and secondary schools, and they serve the needs of those youths who have left school early to work on farms or in town industries. Most of these rapidly maturing boys and girls and men and women take back from their winter's course a new orientation towards life and learning. The majority, of course, remain on the farms or in manual trades, but a large proportion go on to professional or agricultural schools.

By way of illustration, here is the career of a young woman who followed the normal years of elementary education; then, as an adolescent girl, took up the healthy open air life of a gardener's apprentice. Gardening, you must understand, is not a menial trade, but a skilled profession in Denmark. After some years, the desire for knowledge spurred her on to attend a folk school for the winter. Finding, through its wholesome educational atmosphere, a hope for further expression of her talents, she had at the age of twenty entered an engineering school. In Scandinavia, all professions are open and equal to women as well as men.

That example, then, shows the ideal as it is often expressed in practice. Of course, there are imperfections, even in Danish schooling, and the ideal can only show the guide to action.

The ideal is, in the first place, that the public primary schools should not be unduly standardized, and that they should allow the child to develop freely and naturally, instead of being prematurely forced ahead. To-day, in Denmark, among other things, you will find that foreign language teaching, usually of English, is introduced early and in natural living form, so that the children tend to learn and speak a second tongue much in the same simple manner as they acquire their own. As for the secondary schools, Grundtvig was persuaded that the period of puberty was not the right school time. During adolescence, he would have had youth away from desk and books, and in apprenticeship to farming or some other trade. This practice often occurs in Denmark to-day, although it has in no way been formulated into a system; for ordinary high secondary schools, similar to the Canadian, but with, perhaps more allowance for technical work and physical recreation, are the rule in the cities and towns.

"Scholarship is one thing", wrote Grundtvig, "and education and fitness for life another; they may well be united, but not in the case of the majority".

This glowing tale of achievement does not mean that all is perfect in Danish education, even in their folk high schools to-day.

Industrial development has brought new problems, not many of which, in schooling practice, have yet been solved. But, under the aegis of the trade unions, some urban folk-schools for workers have been established. The original schools of Grundtvig's ideal, however, were country schools, where "that quietness of mind which must be created" was easily achieved. Urban, manufacturing conditions for this generation demand new approaches. Yet the fundamental conceptions remain the same.

What have been the community influences of the folk-schools? A Welsh observer declares: "It is to be seen not only in the rise of village halls, libraries, lecture and debating societies and gymnastic unions, and in the spread of an increased interest in singing, folk dancing, and art in the rural districts, but also in healthier home life, and a new spirit infused in the routine of daily work". The movement, moreover, has spread widely throughout Scandinavia. In 1931 there were 29 such schools in Norway, 54 in Sweden, and, in Finland, fifty-seven.

"Education for life" certainly has been worthwhile, socially, morally, and materially, for Denmark. Without it, this could never have become "the self-reliant democracy, whose rural civilization and genuine folk culture are rivalled by few, if any, of the bigger nations, and whose agricultural institutions draw students and admirers from every quarter of the world".