

# WHAT IS WRONG WITH OUR INDUSTRIES?

## IS INITIATIVE LACKING?

### New Zealand's Example May Be Followed With Benefit.

(By S. Sutchkoff.)

**IT** is well known that an initiative in private enterprise is the foundation stone of prosperity. Somehow we are loth to connect the same principle with the industries and enterprises of a whole State. Nevertheless, there is no essential difference.

**G**OD endowed Tasmania and half of New Zealand with very much the same climate and natural wealth, and once upon a time New Zealand was no better off than Tasmania. Then the difference appeared, and began widening. New Zealand was lucky in her governments. Farsseeing statesmen realised that the rural production for local markets was unwise and ruinous for agricultural industry and for the State. The establishment of fat lamb export industry was a great initiative. It brought prosperity to New Zealand directly and indirectly. I can imagine our narrow-minded statesmen of that time sniggering at the attempt of the New Zealanders. Well, and here we are. On one hand, a wealthy and one of the most progressive States in the world; on the other a struggling-for-existence State, unable to pay her own way, and losing continuously her scanty population. On one hand land value in twenty years' time jumped from £2 or £4 an acre to £20, £50 and more; on the other the land that was once paid £10 and £20 an acre, for can not be sold now for a fraction of this sum.

#### Modern Methods Needed.

Certainly, we have not progressed. But things are much worse than that. We are subject to the universal law; we could not remain stationary, and must have retrogressed considerably. One doesn't want to philosophise on this point. It is evident that we cannot expect to grow the same crops on exhausted land as we used to grow on virgin soil; and every year increasing competition of mainland States, situated nearer to markets, makes Tasmanian farming on old lines not only

some it looks, it is true that the Tasmanian farmer can live only on the mainland's misfortune. Drought or other natural phenomenon by ruining mainland crops gives a chance to the Tasmanian farmer. This sort of farming is not only sheer gambling; it is humiliating as well. It never will bring prosperity to the Tasmanian farming industry, but it is certain to complete its destruction, and the sooner we are out of it the luckier we will be.

What sort of farming, then, do we want? Anything that is not gambling. Anything that brings a steady and certain income. Dairying is one. A dairyman can't make a fortune, but he can make a good living, and he is certain not to lose. Probably flax growing can be included in the same order, as there is an absence of gambling, and we can estimate before growing what we can make on it.

Then comes the much-talked-of fat lamb industry. Personally, I don't think much of it. We have missed the initiative in this industry. The countries like New Zealand that have made a well-established name in the world market, who are spending tens of thousands of pounds every year on advertising, and who are capable of meeting the demand for fat lamb, always will enjoy preference on the market. And if a new and very-little-known country like Tasmania appears on the market, and if she wants to sell her article at all, though it might be as good as her neighbor's, she must be prepared to undersell it. And we never will get as much proportionately from the lamb industry as New Zealand gets. All the same, I would welcome the industry, as it would bring a certain small profit and eliminate gambling.

#### Initiative Essential.

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Is there any other farming industry that would suit the Tasmanian farmer? There is, and there might be, but that is where initiative and thinking come in. One is tempted to believe that it is the direct duty of our Agricultural Department, but experience shows that initiative and thinking are un-congenial to that body, and it confines its duty to signing official papers and making occasional speeches!

Take this report from New York that appeared in papers some time ago:—“Dr. C. J. Headley Thornton, of London, the chairman of the English Artificial Cotton Corporation, has arrived here with specimens of the new artificial cotton. The plant of this cotton could be grown in almost any climate or soil at one-fifth the cost of growing cotton. In its final form it has more lustre and strength than real cotton. He said that the amount of artificial cotton grown in Britain was not sufficient to meet the demand, and he went to America to introduce the plant to American cotton-growers. He added that in warm climates the plant would yield two crops a year, and the return was from 500 lb. an acre in England to 1800 lb. in warmer climates.”

I read this report with absorbing interest. I admitted that there might be some exaggeration, but again there might not be. Who knows? And whose duty is it to find out and benefit Tasmania by introducing it here? Evidently the Department of Agriculture's. But I am certain that the Department of Agriculture has never noticed it, and even if it has it wouldn't take any interest in it, for the simple reason that it is outside Ministerial placidity of signing papers!

Take another item. It has been several times reported from Scotland that a fungoid disease appeared on bracken ferns and wiped out bracken from the whole districts. Is it of no interest to Tasmania? Very few things would benefit the Tasmanian farmer as much as eradication of bracken fern. Has the Department of Agriculture taken any steps to conduct inquiries in this direction? Oh, well, that requires initiative and thinking, and the Department of Agriculture is not accustomed to it.

#### Fur Industry Possibilities.

Then there is one of the biggest problems in Tasmania—the rabbit. Despised, branded as the worst pest and vermin, persecuted by all imaginable means, degenerated, it brings to Tasmania from the outside world as much as the total wool clip—one of the most cherished, encouraged and stable industries of the State! The most natural and enormous industry is knocking at our door, but we would not admit it. We have not learned yet that the best way to combat a pest is to make it useful, if only possible. In this case the possibility is beyond every doubt. It is not a mere chance that during the last few years rabbit skins have

It is not a mere chance that during the last few years rabbit skins have had a good and ever-increasing demand, and this demand is not likely to slacken. It is the matter not of fashion, but of necessity.

The world wants furs, and the furs of wild animals have decreased to such an extent that they don't meet even a negligible fraction of the demand. Meantime, the value of rabbit furs was recognised only in post-war time. The manufacture of furs from rabbit skins is a new industry, but in these few years it attained a wonderful development. The value is not only in the intrinsic merit of rabbit fur, but just as much in the facility to manufacture from it the imitation almost of any fur. And there is every reason to think that the demand for rabbit skins will keep on increasing indefinitely, and that the rabbit industry has before it an unlimited world market.

So far one must use the word “industry” in regard to rabbits in Tasmania almost surreptitiously. It is something hardly decent! Yet the product of this industry is the only one product for which we don't have to look for a market; the market will come here for it.

#### Conditions Suitable for Rabbit Farming.

The natural question might be asked in this connection: If these statements

are correct, will not every country go for rabbit farming? They might, they will, and they are doing it already. But not many countries have the same facilities as Tasmania has. It is evident that in densely populated countries rabbits cannot be bred as cheaply as in Tasmania, with her empty spaces. Then there are climatic and other natural factors. The climate of a country might be too severe, with heavy snow-fall, where the rabbit doesn't survive the winter if left uncaared for; or too hot where the rabbit skins must be inferior; or there may be an abundance of carnivorous wild animals that give a defenceless rabbit no chance. There are none of these hindrances in Tasmania. It is the natural home for the rabbit. It existed and spread over all the country in spite of all our efforts to destroy it. Is it not the time to revise our point of view and see if we can make a friend of the rabbit? It seems so difficult, even ridiculous, to adopt this point of view. Yet there is all the logic for it. If a potato-grower spent only a portion of the money he loses on potato gambling on rabbit-proof fences to fence rabbits in, he would secure a steady and good income from his farm for all his life, with no hard work attached to it.

What I have said is only about our ordinary degenerated rabbit. But if rabbit farming ever comes (and it is bound to come), it will be a vastly different rabbit from our present rodent.

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Here what France is doing in this way: Fortunes are being made in France by the scientific breeding of all the latest fur-bearing types of rabbits. The Government is taking a keen interest in the development of this latest branch of activity, which in 1926 brought in a total revenue of £22,000,000, and, it is estimated, has increased to-day to almost double that amount. The most valuable of the new fur-bearing rabbits is the Castor-Rex, whose delicate fur so strongly resembles that of the beaver that few experts can distinguish between the two. The Chinchilla-Rex and other derivatives of the Rex rabbit are in great demand throughout the world. A standards commission, superintended by the Ministry of Agriculture, maintains a complete record of the stud animals.

Think of it! £22,000,000 revenue for rabbits in one year. All the Tasmanian debts could be wiped out in one year. And it is hardly a joke. Though small, but empty, Tasmania might well try to breed as many rabbits as big, but thickly-populated France.

#### Even Australia Moves.

There is no country in the world that has not gone for rabbit farming. Even slow-in-initiative Australia at the last inter-State conference of Ministers of Agriculture adopted the view of desirability of introducing rabbit farming. Our Tasmanian Minister of Agriculture was in opposition. Having respect for the Ministerial post, I abstain from comment, but not many years will go by when his act will be remembered.

My contention is that our country is so full of rabbits, that introduction of few new ones would make absolutely no difference; at least, no harmful difference, even if they were set at large, and it might do some good by improving the quality of existing breed. But it is understood that when they are introduced, they will be bred under the strictest control.

It is useful to us at every doubtful juncture to turn to our prosperous and progressive neighbor New Zealand and see what she is doing. One might be sure that she would not be slow to adopt any new useful idea.

#### New Zealand's Example.

And rabbit farming is already an adopted industry in ~~New Zealand~~ New Zealand. In its infancy yet, but rapidly spreading. "Stud rabbits—buck £5, brood does and young stock from £2/10/ each." It is a common advertisement in present day New Zealand paper.

The widespread adoption of the cultivated rabbit as a New Zealand farm animal is one of the most remarkable events of the past year. So far, only two breeds are permitted—the Angora, which is shorn for its long, soft fleece, and the Chinchilla, which is killed for its pelt. For some years Angora wool has been fetching 34/ per lb., and ten ounces per rabbit is an average year's yield. The Chinchilla skins have been

yield. The Chinchilla skins have been selling in Great Britain for a long time past at 10/6 each. It is contended that an acre of rich land will maintain 300 rabbits.

A New Zealand writer on the subject states that "if one writes down the probable wool returns heavily—say, to less than 15/ per rabbit—the £200 is still good revenue from one acre of crop." In Chinchillas the practice is to maintain, say, 100 breeding does and market their 2000 young annually in stages, when about six or eight months old.

There are already efforts being made to establish spinning mills for Angora wool in the Dominion. And syndicates are already "in the air" for Chinchilla farming in enormous numbers, and they will look to the breeders for supplies.

I can only repeat again that New Zealand is lucky in her Government. The far-seeing Government of New Zealand boldly introduced a new industry, just as earlier it introduced the fat lamb industry that brought prosperity to New Zealand. And our Government is probably sniggering at New Zealand enterprise much in the same fashion, as it did once at the New Zealand fat lamb industry.

But times are changing. The Tasmanian farmer is becoming articulate. There are already heard voices through our Agricultural Bureau, demanding introduction of this highly profitable industry. And it is hoped that the Government will not be permitted this time to go asleep, but will be forced to act.

I know an energetic and clever farmer who always seems to do the right thing, and naturally, he is a prosperous farmer. A neighbor of his is lacking in ability, but he has enough common-sense to imitate his clever neighbor in everything, almost in detail, and in consequence, he is prosperous, too!

New Zealand is our energetic, enterprising, clever, and consequently prosperous, neighbor. We can't fail to see it. We lack in many respects qualities of New Zealanders or, rather, their Governments, that made New Zealand prosperous. I suppose we can't help it. But God grant us enough common-sense to acknowledge humbly our limitations, and to follow New Zealanders' example, and we will not fail to attain the standard of their prosperity.