

all the divergent opinions about the origin of human life, it has to be agreed that whatever the amount of divine authority by which men were created to be men, they were commissioned to be farmers by exactly the same amount of authority. Farming is all the time a fight against Nature, which itself does not provide human food, and it is in pursuing this life more than in any other way that the high qualities of human character have been developed.

Coming to the application of science to farming, Prof. Comber stresses that farming must always be fundamentally an art and a craft. It has worked for untold centuries, with no scientific knowledge of it until a little more than a century ago, and how it works is still only very partially understood. Agricultural science is still only young and immature compared with the industry of farming itself, and taking the long view it is a good thing that the introduction of science into farming has had to contend with criticism and opposition.

It is in the nature of things that the successful teaching of agriculture is dependent upon the teacher's personal experience in the industry, and no one reading a text-book of agriculture can be unaware of the fact that farming cannot be taught by book. Because of this the association of advisory work (with its personal experience of farming problems) with teaching institutions was invaluable, and the separation of this advisory work from teaching centres in 1946 is to be deplored more than anything in the history of agricultural science in Britain.

A little more than a century ago scientific knowledge and understanding of crop and animal husbandry were almost non-existent. At that time the need for new knowledge was paramount. That, however, is not the position to-day. The limiting factor now is the education of people going into the farming industry. This need differs from the need of education in almost every other industry because of the fundamental character of farming. There are people who are manifestly born farmers who could not easily make a success of any of the existing types of courses, and there is need for special informal and, some may say, unorthodox types of courses for those people with a strong practical aptitude with no conventional appreciation of science. Educationists cannot prescribe the qualifications of farmers as they can those of other industrialists.

Finally, Prof. Comber urges that there is too much confusion and blurred overlap between college courses leading to diplomas and university courses leading to degrees. It is high time that the existing subject-matter be used with a full realization that in twenty years a lot of it will be out of date and subject-matter hitherto unknown will have arisen: it is time that it was realized that education is the training of personal qualities and that in the agricultural degree courses a large amount of what is supposed to be utilitarian matter is suppressed to make place for philosophical and cultural subjects (along with agriculture), and to make place, too, for time in which undergraduates can engage in university life.

THE PRESERVATION OF NATURE

SO great has been the advance made recently in Great Britain and abroad in the recognition of the need for the preservation of Nature that it is opportune to look back on the course of events. Dr. G. P. Herbert Smith points out in his presidential

address to the Conference of Delegates of Corresponding Societies that it needed a tragic war to make urban dwellers realize that food did not automatically arrive in the shops. The problem of the best use of the land in a small and crowded island like Great Britain is difficult. Care should be taken to assure that in new schemes nothing of scientific importance is destroyed; in this respect local societies can render valuable assistance.

Although we know that species of plants and animals have come and gone, it is only during recent centuries that their extermination has been due to man. Until he acquired weapons and machinery, he did little harm and fitted in with his environment. The earliest loss to attract general attention was the large and clumsy bird, the dodo. The bison in America and in Europe was only just saved, almost at the last moment. National parks, which safeguard scenery and wild life, while providing ample opportunities for recreation, originated in the United States and have spread all over the world, and they have been accompanied by the smaller areas known as Nature reserves. Even in Britain, thanks to the activities of various societies, Nature reserves have been established, and a welcome feature has been the development of local naturalists' trusts. In 1941 a conference met to consider Nature preservation in post-war reconstruction, and from it the Nature Reserves Investigation Committee arose and made a careful natural history survey of England and Wales. Its two reports appeared in 1945, just in time for the use of the Wild Life Committee appointed by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. The report of the latter was published in 1947, together with a similar, but less complete, one for Scotland. As the result, the Government established the Biological Service, with the Nature Conservancy to supervise it. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill now before Parliament has a section dealing with Nature conservation.

International co-operation to any general extent began with whales, and various regulations have been agreed to, but are not completely successful in the absence of policing. A flourishing International Committee for Bird Preservation has been established by private effort, and has sections in thirty-five countries. The general movement to encourage the protection of Nature began about 1905, and progressed as far as the establishment of an International Advisory Commission in 1914; but the outbreak of war prevented it from functioning, and it was never revived owing to the political difficulties after the War. Following upon the International Congress at Paris in 1923, an attempt was made to form an international committee; but the time was not ripe, and only the International Office for documentary purposes resulted. After the Second World War, the Swiss League for the Protection of Nature convened in 1947 an international conference with the object of reviving the International Advisory Commission of 1914. It was, however, decided to ask Unesco to summon an official conference in 1948 with the object of establishing an International Union for the Protection of Nature. The Union was duly established, with its seat at Brussels. It may be anticipated that its attention will be devoted mainly to the preservation of Nature and not merely to the safeguarding of species threatened with extermination. The relation of the size of the population to food supplies may present a difficult problem.