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The Future of Farming

The Farm in the Fen. By Alan Bloom. (Faber. 10s. 6d.)
This Farming Business. By Frank Sykes. (Faber. 8s. 6d.)

By H. E. BATES

TWO interesting books: the first a personal chronicle of land reclamation in the Cambridgeshire fens, in which the evil and constant protagonists in the drama are wind, dust, and water; the second, a sober and exceedingly hard-headed treatise based on mixed farming in Wiltshire, preached largely on the Stapledon text of "the system that takes the plough round the farm," in other words, the system of temporary grass leys coupled with mechanised efficiency, by which the fertility of the whole farm is renewed, exploited, but

in a book which, though slender in the best skimmed contemporary pattern, is beefy with experience. This experience is not dramatised nor used to tell a story; it is given out, sometimes perhaps a trifle dogmatically, sometimes a little dryly, but always with pungency and sense, solely as guidance and advice to those who farm the land, who love it, and are jealous of its future. It is an experience utterly opposed, I am glad to say, to that "school of thought which wishes to put the clock back and re-establish a large peasant population in this country," than which "nothing could be more disastrous to the welfare of the nation." It is the experience of a man who does not see a fiery devil in every tractor or scent a heresy in every artificial manure; who wants to see the best brains and character, both of labourer and master, brought to the countryside; and who believes, as Professor Stapledon himself does, that any revolution on the land must come not from politicians, theorists, or hairy historians, but from the farmers themselves.

"This Farming Business" is therefore very much a book that points to and thinks of the future of our agriculture, and has the prosperity of that agriculture very much at heart; it has considerable practical virtue, and I should recommend it as a valuable and admirable guide for any returning soldier who in the next year or so wants to beat the anti-tank gun into a ploughshare.

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In the Fens Mr. Bloom's difficulty was not to take the plough round the farm, but to get the ploughshare into the soil at all. Miles of uncleared dykes, acres of wild buckthorn, whole fields of submerged bog-oak in lengths of up to a hundred feet, subterranean peat fires, and the consistent menace of dust, wind and water already mentioned: this is the sort of thing that lay between Mr. Bloom, formerly a grower of herbaceous plants, and the reclamation of large tracts of fenland bordering on the National Trust's bird sanctuary, Wicken Fen. The account of this struggle to make a wilderness fertile is entirely simple, homely, unpretentious, and, to my way of thinking, very attractive. There is something about the Fens—the lofty sky-spaces, the remote and pallid distances, the green of leaves on the black land, a certain sense of insecurity among the intricate pattern of many waters—that is not easily definable, but which has found its way, through sheer saturation, into this dogged and likable little book.



and White Spode," reviewed below.

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never sold away. Of this system Aberystwyth is the living memorial and the correspondence columns of the Press the continual battle ground. Mr. Sykes, who farms, of course, within the western rain belt, sees it as the main opportunity of our agricultural renaissance—a renaissance he describes as comparable with "that pioneered by Coke of Holkham and Turnip Townshend a hundred years ago."

There will be farmers of the East Anglian drought areas who will be disposed to contest this, and who may also point out that the second Viscount Townshend was born in 1674 and that Coke began his experiments in Norfolk in 1776. On the same point it may also be noted that Sir Richard Weston (1591-1652) appears to have practised some time before Townshend a rotation in which clover and turnips were used, and that he was also a pioneer advocate of long leys.

This is one of the few defects