101- A TEXT-BOOK FOR AGRICULTURAL ECONOMISTS

Farm Management

By Prof. John D. Black, Marion Clawson, Charles R. Sayre and Walter W. Wilcox. Pp. xii + 1073 + 62 plates. (New York: The Macmillan Company; London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1947.) 27s. 6d. net.

FARM management as a subject of serious economic study has derived a great deal of stimulus from the United States, especially since the 'country-life movement' was set on foot there some forty years ago. The early workers in that field set out to study the whole social structure of the countryside; but a large part of their attention was necessarily directed to the purely business aspect of farming, and indeed the study of farm management has been in danger all too often of being regarded merely as a means of helping the individual farmer to make more profit. Anyone who is at all familiar with Prof. John D. Black's work on production economics, however, has learnt to expect a more comprehensive outlook, and in this imposing volume that expectation is not disappointed.

Apart from the four main parts of the book which deal, in no fewer than nine hundred pages, with systems of farming, principles and methods of analysis, problems of management, and management of types of farming, there are an introduction and a finale with chapters on such topics as the ends of farming, farming in a changing world, and agriculture in the national economy. These bear on the broader problems concerned with reconciling the interests of farmers with those of society as a whole, and embody much of the practical wisdom accumulated over many years by Prof. Black and his distinguished collaborators.

The student is made to see that modern agriculture does not stand in isolation, and that the management of a farm, if it is to be successful in the long run, should look beyond the immediate profit-and-loss account. This emphasis is to be welcomed in general, though some readers may consider, in this instance, that breadth has been secured at some sacrifice of depth. Certainly the British student, dependent as he largely is on American texts for the application of economic principles to farm management, will find the mass of descriptive material a little distracting, the more so as it relates almost entirely to American conditions. It is also unfortunate that some references to conditions in Great Britain are inconsistent and inaccurate. For example, it appears that if leasing arrangements such as prevail in England and Wales could be developed in the United States, there would be no serious objection to a large increase in tenancy in that country (p. 654); but this is a conclusion scarcely to be expected, perhaps, in view of the statement that in England 'the landlord does practically nothing except to receive his rent and occasionally give his consent to having some new buildings or other improvements put on his farm, or possibly to having some timber cut' (p. 13).

Blemishes of this kind—there are a few others—are relatively unimportant against the authors' competent handling of their main project, which is to provide and expound methods for analysing the problems that develop on farms of varying complexity, and the principles which may be evoked for

their solution. It is this aspect of the book, rather than the illustrative material, which will be found helpful and which deserves most attention, at any rate in Great Britain.

R. N. DIXEY

THOMAS ALVA EDISON

The Diary and Sundry Observations of Thomas Alva Edison

Edited by Dagobert D. Runes. Pp. xii + 247 + 5 plates. (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1948.) 4.75 dollars.

DRIVEN by his deafness to read his way through the Dewey Public Library, Edison wrote long afterwards that he had found that almost any book would supply entertainment or instruction. This book, which contains selected excerpts from his writings, supplies the first in good measure and, for those who reflect on reading, more than a modicum of the second.

The pages from the diary which form the opening section of the book are full of whimsical humour which one would not have expected from a prodding experimenter who died with more than a thousand inventions to his credit. There is little reference in the book to Edison's experimental work, except for a short account of his early struggles to make a motion picture machine, carried out in a studio irreverently called the 'Black Maria'. But the background is there, revealed in the words that experiments in a laboratory consist mostly in finding out that something will not work. A realization of this, and of the fact that his own education was self-directed, gives added value to the pages on 'Education and Work'. In these pages he betrays a little impatience with the many for whom, with the passing of childhood, there comes the paralysis of curiosity and atrophy of the power to observe. They are so unlike himself. He remained curious and observant to the end. If a man more than seventy years of age cannot keep occupied, it is because there was lack of interest in a sufficient number of things when he was younger. He announced his intention of having a sign put up all over his plant reading, 'There is no expedient to which a man will not resort to avoid the real labour of thinking'.

With Edison, thinking led to an intense desire to work and to experiment. 'No human being can live long without work', he writes in one of his sundry observations—the pleasure of idleness is one of the great superstitions of the human race.

Edison's observations on the possibilities of atomic energy, his somewhat casual remarks on the influences that make for peace or war and his comments on disarranged economic systems—all these make reading which is the more interesting because of all that has happened since the last of these lines was written. Reading the pages of this book, we feel that here was no recluse, no experimenter shut away in his laboratory from the rest of the world; here was one who was of the people, working for the people. 'I consider,' he writes, 'that the first mission of the motion picture is to make people happy, the second—to educate, elevate and inspire.'

This is a book to have on one's shelves and to dip into for five minutes when one feels depressed.

W. G. R.