

BACKGROUND TO BRITISH WAR-TIME RATIONING

Food

Vol. 1: *The Growth of Policy*. By R. J. Hammond. (History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Civil Series.) Pp. xii+436. (London: H.M. Stationery Office; Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1951.) 25s. net.

HISTORIANS of times now remote may often regret the lack of detail available to them, making it impossible to distinguish with any certainty the deciding factors in policy formation or even the exact order in which important events occurred. The group of authors at present essaying an official "History of the Second World War" while its influences are still very much with us must, on the other hand, feel somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of material they have to sift through to pick out the main lines of the story. Inevitably an author's own outlook determines, to a large extent, the details which seem to him significant, and another writer might easily make a slightly different choice. The degree of success achieved by any one of them can only be judged by the extent to which it enables a reader to obtain a clear and convincing picture of the events described.

By this criterion, the present book is not entirely successful; it remains necessary for the reader to repeat (albeit on a totally different scale) Mr. R. J. Hammond's labour of selecting and comparing, going back over ground already read to pick up the story of some particular aspect developed further in a later section. However, anyone acquainted with government files is bound to be impressed by Mr. Hammond's ability to keep his head above water at all while searching through them for the scattered bits of evidence that, together, build up his story. It must have been exceedingly difficult to decide on the order in which the material was to be presented, and it is by no means certain that any other order would have been more successful. The main stumbling-block is the fact that the subject-matter has both width and depth. It is necessary to deal with imports, home production, price-fixing, rationing schemes, transport, warehousing, legal aspects, and several other matters, all of which had their effect on the development of 'food policy'. Most of these influences were themselves influenced by the changing conditions of the War; their stories cannot be told in isolation one from another. It might, perhaps, have helped if a 'time-table of events' had been included in the appendix, by means of which one could follow more clearly the development in time of the various aspects of policy described in detail in different sections of the text.

The work of the Ministry of Food, as it affected the public, is still sufficiently fresh in people's minds to need no re-telling yet; but from this book one can learn the reasons for the decisions that were taken. Few of the Ministry's critics could have had any conception of the difficulties involved; yet one of the unexpected facts that emerges from this study is that these difficulties were far more due to the complexities of our civilization than to conditions directly connected with the War.

We are, for example, accustomed to buy our food in a semi-prepared state. In less sophisticated communities wheat could be issued as wheat, but we must have it milled and (most of it) baked into bread;

oil would be issued as oil, but we must have it hardened, coloured and flavoured and so turned into margarine; sugar must be refined, pigs must be turned into bacon, and many other foods must be tinned or packaged before being issued. Warehousing and transport were problems at least equal to the problem of ensuring adequate bulk supplies. But other Ministries also wanted shipping space, storage space, railway trucks and road lorries, and to each of them their own needs seemed so much greater than anyone else's. Competition for these services led to exaggeration in the estimates of requirements; considerations of 'prestige' sometimes took precedence over strict honesty; local authorities proved unwilling to learn from one another's experiences; and there was endless trouble over the wording of the Orders that had to be issued.

It seems fantastic that, in a country involved in a major war several years in duration, time should have to be devoted to a careful selection of 'the right word'. That this was nevertheless necessary was shown by the avidity with which any loophole in the regulations was exploited, and by recourse to law over trivialities—often a means of delaying or even reversing quite important regulations framed for the public good. The right to challenge authority is, of course, an essential safeguard of democracy; but abuse of such rights for selfish ends added to the difficulties of war-time administration. Time and again this history provides evidence of the narrowly individualistic outlook of our society. Had food supplies ever become really inadequate or transport hopelessly dislocated (as happened in many other countries), these luxuries of behaviour would have had to be forgone. That we were able to retain them throughout is a measure of how little the main essentials of our normal existence were really upset.

The food policy which Britain followed throughout the War has won her praise from many parts of the world; it is often cited as an example of the way a community can help itself by the application of scientific knowledge. It is therefore disappointing to find how often it was 'scientific' only from necessity and not from conviction. On the whole, however, the Ministry of Food emerges with credit from this very searching analysis of its war-time record.

M. W. GRANT

VETERINARY PARASITOLOGY

The Parasites of Domestic Animals

A Manual for Veterinary Students and Surgeons. By Prof. Thomas W. M. Cameron. Second edition, revised and enlarged. Pp. xvi+420+16 plates. (London: Adam and Charles Black, Ltd., 1951.) 38s. net.

THIS text-book first appeared in 1934 under the title "The Internal Parasites of Domestic Animals" and, apart from a thirty-page section devoted to the Protozoa, dealt very largely with the helminths of veterinary importance. During the past eighteen years there has been a continuous increase in our knowledge about parasites. The importance of providing food of animal origin for human consumption and animal products for industry—for example, leather—during and since the Second World War has given an added fillip to the efforts of workers in the field of parasitology. Prof. T. W. M. Cameron has, therefore, deemed it expedient