

BRITISH AGRICULTURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

THE British Agricultural History Society held its annual winter conference, in co-operation with the Association of Agriculture, at the Institute of Education, University of London, on December 5, under the chairmanship of its newly elected president, Sir Keith Murray, who was welcomed with acclaim. Sir James Scott Watson retired this year after having been president of the Society since its inception in 1953.

Unfortunately, sudden illness prevented Mr. W. B. Mercer from attending to give his proposed lecture on the "Development of Agricultural Education and Advisory Services". This hiatus in the programme was ably filled by Mr. T. W. Fletcher, of the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Manchester, with a paper on "Lancashire Livestock Farming in the Great Depression".

Mr. Fletcher, whose views on the farming history, especially of Lancashire, in the past three decades of the nineteenth century are somewhat revolutionary, showed that the livestock farmers of Lancashire did not, in fact, suffer in the depression. On the contrary, their standards of output, purchase of imported concentrates and other feeding stuffs, as well as their incomes, improved. The reasons for this were not far to seek. The local demand, both number of urban mouths and size of urban incomes, was growing. Consequently, the livestock farmers had a market, so to speak, on their doorstep for all the milk, butter, cheese, beef, mutton and pork that they could produce. On the east side of the county, too, there was a large demand from the West Riding industrial district. In such circumstances, it is not surprising to learn that rents were well paid and stable, and that relations between landowners and tenants were amicable.

The afternoon session was opened by Mr. O. R. McGregor, reader in social institutions, University of London, with a paper, "Free Trade in Land in

the Victorian Period". Mr. McGregor argued, in a way that would certainly have pleased Maitland and Vinogradoff, that in any event for the nineteenth century the study of the social institutions surrounding farming was more important than the study of the development of technical changes. With wide reference to contemporary dialectic he emphasized the conflict between the rising class of urban industrialists and of the small number of great landowners (not more than about a thousand) who were striving by all means to retain their dominance of the political scene, and the prestige and patronage, for example, in Army and Church, that derived from it. He emphasized that the landowners, who used every possible device to prevent the break-up of estates—primogeniture, entail and settlements—regarded the land not so much as a rent- or food-producing commodity, but as a possession of social value. This outlook coloured their relation with their tenants, whom they wished to keep in mercy as tenants-at-will, and their attitude towards the increasingly wealthy and pugnacious middle classes who demanded 'free trade in land'. It was significant that so many members of the House of Commons before 1870 were landowners and land agents, not to speak of the House of Lords. This lecture certainly provided a new approach to the problems of farming history in the nineteenth century.

Finally, Miss Edith Whetham, Gilbey lecturer in the history and economics of agriculture, University of Cambridge, discussed "Cambridgeshire Tithe Maps, 1836-1890". She said that the county was backward in 1836 and that the tithe maps therefore gave a fine illustration of the change from open to enclosed fields in many parishes. She did not develop the subject at length, preferring to allow the documents exhibited, and the photostats passed around, to confirm it for her.

G. E. FUSSELL

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA

STRESS has been laid on a recent report on the support given to postgraduate research in the universities of Canada, for which some 34 million dollars have been provided by the National Research Council of Canada since 1917*. In the current year, 5.9 million dollars were provided for this purpose by way of 681 grants and 435 scholarships, fellowships and associatships, and expenditure is expected to reach 8.2 million dollars in 1959-60. The Council itself employs a scientific research staff of 613 (including 149 postdoctorate Fellows), 883 technicians and 887 general service and administrative staff. Much of the work of the Division of Applied Biology is in the applied field, and its statistical studies of short-term protein variability in cargoes of Northern wheat exported from Vancouver were expanded (in

co-operation with the Grain Research Laboratory Board of Grain Commissioners) to permit accounting for this variability as the resultant of random differences between successive car loads from the same shipping point, of weekly variations in the geographical pattern of car-loads, and of mixing incidental to terminal limeing, handling and loading. A study of the effect of exposure on new-born caribou indicated that caribou calves are quite sensitive to cold and wind, to which they respond by a marked increase in metabolism. Investigations are also in progress on the fundamental properties of the hemicelluloses of common pulping woods, designed to assist pulp-makers in the production and use of semi-chemical pulp, but the report emphasizes that the biological sciences occupy an unfavourable position in the overall Canadian scientific effort.

At the Atlantic Regional Laboratory, Halifax, a chelating chemical as a dip before frying was found to

* Forty-Second Annual Report of the National Research Council of Canada, 1958-59, including the Annual Report of Canadian Patents and Development Limited. Pp. 26. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1959.)