

The Prosperous Farmer in Holland

By Dirk P. De Young, American vice consul at Amsterdam: The Holland government has always maintained the policy of constructing great dykes to keep the sea out of the low country, but it has erected no high tariff walls on its frontiers to keep out foreign competition. On the contrary, all agricultural products are on the free-list, and a duty of about 5 per cent ad valorem, is levied on only a few manufactures of import. In fact, the Netherlands can be said to have almost unrestricted free-trade.

Up to about 30 or 40 years ago Holland had a protective tariff on products of the soil, since when it can be conservatively stated its great ascendancy as an agricultural country began. Higher duties, and protection for certain industries, have been industriously advocated from time to time, usually by special interests with sinister motives, but the farmer, the small tradesmen, and the independent manufacturing element, have persistently adhered to the principles of free-trade. To say nothing of the flourishing manufacturing industry that this small nation has built up without a protective tariff, its agricultural prosperity equals, if indeed it does not surpass, in quality and intensity, if not in volume, that of any other country in the world.

The Dutch farmer does not want a high tariff. And the farmer of Holland is frequently a manufacturer, too. He has shares in the co-operative potato-flour, cheese, and straw-board factories of his community. He makes butter to sell and exports large quantities of beef. He argues that the farmer and the manufacturer have a very common interest and would be alike affected by a high tariff, because a higher cost of living results which is not offset by higher wages and higher prices, and that the interests generally of the one are akin to those of the other. He contends that raising import duties is merely a process of taking money from Peter to pay Paul. It may raise wages, but as it raises the cost of living perforce accordingly the effects of the operation are lost. Moreover, tariff legislation can scarcely be enacted without favoritism to certain classes. Summing it all up, he prefers the natural consequences as it is to doubtful artificial remedies; though formerly a protectionist.

From a purely hypothetical viewpoint, Holland is in a perfectly natural economic state. Competition is allowed to run its own free course. Only such manufacturing exists as can thrive; other manufactured articles are imported. The theory prevails, and the practice proves, that there are enough industries native to the country, and able to compete with the world, to employ all the surplus labor. Why should a great portion of the population be unduly taxed to bolster up the manufacture of articles that can be more cheaply imported? Besides, the importation of such wares gives employment and means to a large number of tradesmen, so that all benefits of not manufacturing everything at home are not lost. The country seems to prefer unrestricted trade, leaving such matters to adjust themselves. This dispenses with legislative assistance and its resultant doubtful operation, periodical discussion of tariff changes, and other economic disturbances, which upset business and require constant readjustment of industries.

Disregarding the manufacturing class for the present, the farmer of Holland has certainly prospered in this free-trade state. Since farm products were put on the free-list, the land has gone up in value, and the cultivated area has steadily increased, most of the increased area being reclaimed swamp lands. The country is producing 750,000 more cattle, 20,000 more horses, and 1,000,000 more pigs annually. In the last five years the annual output of butter has been swelled by 7,000 tons and the export of bulbs has increased three-fold. Besides, it is an universally accepted fact that food is cheaper, that more of it is eaten, that wages are higher, labor more plentiful, and that working people are better housed in Holland than in any other European country.

To encourage agriculture, Holland kept a protective duty on agricultural products until about 1870. It thought to do so by shutting out foreign competition, particularly American. As a result, the farmer became inactive and depended on this advantage rather than on his own efforts and initiative. Farming remained backward, food-products were high, and the country suffered from this lack of inertia in the rural sections. Scientific cultivation of the soil was ridiculed by the farmer. He preferred the

easy way of producing a few bushels from an acre which brought him a big price to the more complex method of producing larger yields for less. In short, the agriculturists became indolent and trifling under the protective system, and the rich soil of the fertile lowlands was scarcely tapped.

The first step toward helping out the farmer in Holland was therefore taken by letting in competition. He did not do well under protection; certainly he could not do much worse under free-trade. At any rate, it was thought that it was time to make him show his metal, whether he survived or perished. The experiment proved successful, however, and the way he gouged the soil after decades of gouging the public with a high protection is one of the marvels of the age. The country is now a large model farm.

After the bars of protection were let down in Holland, the farmer took his farm into the laboratory and put it under a microscope. He began to analyze the different properties of the soil; he began to select seeds, to breed a finer breed of stocks, and in general to work his brains as well as his heels. The result of this modern effort is an object lesson to the world. It reproves the old philosophy that rivalry and competition are the great sustaining forces of nature in any path of human endeavor. What has Holland not done in this short period of free-trade along agricultural lines?

When the government refused longer to allow the farmer this lower hold on competition in the form of protection, he began to catch as catch can in the tussle for existence. Instead of giving him an unfair advantage, the policy of teaching him to fight his own battles was adopted. Government aid was also forthcoming in the nature of appropriations for schools and commissions to help get at the real cause of rural backwardness. When once left to his own fortunes, the farmer soon became initiative and began to perceive certain natural advantages which his foreign competitor had not, that he had. His was a good geographical situation in Europe; and he had a system of cheap water carriage; and the soil of the lowlands was the most productive in the world. Behold, these were advantages that had not occurred to him before. Perhaps he could even produce products and sell them in a foreign market, and thus by selling more even at a lower price make more money. He began putting his ears to the ground, and before a decade had passed he himself was selling in the principal markets of the old world. He wanted no tariff then; it would have created foreign antagonism. He wanted free-trade with all countries. Today, the agriculture of Holland has become so flourishing that the farmer has ceased grumbling, and as a writer says, casting his eyes down in a shamefaced chuckle, admits that he is doing very well.

Free-trade did two great things for the Dutch farmer. It forced him to intensify agriculture and it insured him a friendly foreign market. When he got out his glass and began to look for microbes in the soil the dawn of the present era of agricultural prosperity began. Nowhere outside of China have greater miracles of soil transformation been wrought than in Holland. The wonder of bulb-growing, for example, is not the kaleidoscopic miles of garish bloom about which tourists and guide-books prattle, but the patient and foresighted way in which the sand dunes have been excavated in order that bulb-fields might be made on the peat below. All else of Holland's present prosperous state is the result of skillful and patient plodding, as well.

Alsmeer, Holland, where there are 5,000 nurserymen, consists like that other Dutch village, Boskop, of extraordinary looking little squares and oblongs of gardens, divided by little canals of water. Those gardens have been made either by draining off water or by laying canal-boat load after canal-boat load of earth on top of the bog. The front door of almost every grower's house and office at Alsmeer, the same as at Boskop, is reached by a draw-bridge.

The essence of successful culture of plants for transplanting is that they shall have well-balled roots, and in order that these may be produced, there is mixed with the soil at Boskop peat brought from the north of Holland. As trees are sold out of the gardens the precious soil is naturally reduced by the amount of clinging to the roots of the plants that are dug up. That must be replaced by bringing grass sods to the garden from some other section of the country. Large companies in Holland have fleets of

barges that do nothing but transport soil from one part of the country to another. Likewise, great barges of fertilizer are shipped down to the bulb-fields near Haarlem from the cattle raising districts in Friesland. This sort of fertilizer often sells as high as 25 cents per wheelbarrow load.

Scientific fertilization of the soil alone has done more for Dutch agriculture than protection ever did. It made earth yield forth larger crops, which in the aggregate brought greater returns, and gave abundant labor for every man, woman, and child. The tide of emigration from Holland ceased some 40 years ago; all farm hands are needed now. Indeed, the Dutch farmer knows his soil like a lawyer should know his Blackstone. Sometimes 30 hundred-weight of super-phosphate, 30 hundred-weight of Kainit and 6 hundred-weight of nitrate are used on one acre of ground in a year. Such ground would naturally produce enormous yields then—perhaps 1,000 bushels of potatoes or 150 bushels of oats per acre. Land in the best sections of Holland sells at more than \$1,000 and rents at \$35 per acre, and higher. Twenty dollars per acre annually for fertilizers is not out of the ordinary.

Intense agriculture in Holland has brought into use many labor-saving devices. One would have a very erroneous picture of the Netherlands today, if he imagined that the whole country is worked with a spade and that the cultivation is more horticultural than agricultural. A characteristic mode of fast travel in the rural districts of the Netherlands is on bicycle. The country has the largest number of bicycles per capita of any country in the world. In a town of 5,000 inhabitants, there will be probably 1,500 to 2,000 bicycles. In many of the villages, the spectacle of so large a proportion of the population on wheels is really comical. This is characteristic of what they do in other lines.

As a further illustration of the nimbleness of mind and adaptability of Holland farmers, in the period from 1880-90 they grew 225,000 acres of wheat, while by 1907 it was reduced to 125,000, because they realized that this crop was being grown in competition with more advantageously situated areas oversea, and other products would bring them greater financial returns on the same ground. So they chose to buy wheat and produce something else in its stead. The production of buckwheat was even more restricted. On the other hand, in response to new opportunities, sugar-beets, carrots, and a great variety of other staples, increased in production.

The prosperity of the Dutch farmer can scarcely be told except in figures, or similes. When you get into certain sections of Holland you actually see lakes of milk and mountains of yellow cheeses. Really, near Alkmeer, the great cheese market of North Holland, you see such stacks of cheese as in the early days of Nebraska you saw huge yellow corn-piles on the prairie in the autumn months. What was once swamps is now drained land, pasturing fine herds of milch-cows, which produce great vats of milk. If all the milk produced in Holland were put into one stream it would make a great river like the Mississippi. If you go to the different farm-houses and dairies of the country you will hear such estimates as "a ton of butter made here daily;" "2,000 cheeses made here every day;" "3,600 cheeses manufactured in this factory weekly;" "ten million gallons of milk used in this factory yearly;" et cetera ad infinitum.

The production of butter rose from 60,000 tons in 1906 to 64,000 in 1910. Here are some figures of the working of a dairy in 1908, in which 77 farmers had shares, with an aggregate of 1,676 cows, making both butter and cheese from milk: Milk received, 1,424,723 gallons; value about \$140,000; percentage of fat in the milk 3.14; average supply per cow, 850 gallons (though much higher records are common.) Each cow paid about \$85. The total quantity of cheese made in Holland in 1910 was 84,000 tons. It was exported largely to England, Germany, and Belgium, the United States also taking considerable. The establishment of model dairy schools all over the country did much to help this cause along.

Another flourishing branch of agriculture in Holland is truck gardening, especially cabbage raising. Cabbage growing land rents as high as \$40 per acre annually. The farmers who began this had 60 to 70 acre farms, but they soon found that 10 acres was the profitable area because so much depends on personal attention. One can not help being impressed in one of these cabbage patches with the intelligence and prosperity of the people. The large, green, bushy cabbage-heads projecting from the rich