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Book Reviews

Freedom From Want. A Survey of the Possibilities of Meeting the World's Food Needs. A Symposium edited by E. E. DeTurk for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, with a foreword by Norris E. Dodd. Chronica Botanica Co., Waltham, Mass. 1948. 72 pages, illus.

SINCE the setting up of Food and Agriculture Organization, the world's food problems, particularly the expansion of food production and the improvement of the diet in underdeveloped countries, has been a popular item of concern. Many leading scientists have devoted considerable time to collecting information to measure the seriousness and extent of the problem and to studying possible solutions. In "Freedom from Want," Dr. DeTurk has presented a series of papers, prepared by some of the leading scientists of the United States, on the possibilities of meeting the world's food needs.

The paper by H. R. Tolley, Director of the Economics and Statistics Division of the FAO, is a concise presentation of the level of food production in the world and the relationship between the trend in food production and population growth, and includes a discussion of the difficulties of expanding food production more rapidly than the population expands in order to improve the level of food consumption. He concludes that although some temporary relief from the food shortage may be gained by the widespread use of current technical knowledge, better tools, improved seeds, and more fertilizers, more concerted action is necessary if permanent improvement is to be attained.

Robert M. Salter gives the results of a survey on the possibilities of expanding food production by better management on the acreage now in cultivation and by bringing new areas into cultivation. He believes that by 1960 food production on the presently cultivated areas could be expanded about 20 percent above prewar, and this would about keep pace with the increase in population. But he points out that there are about 1.3 billion acres of uncultivated land, mostly in the tropics and on the northern limits of crop growth, which could be brought into cultivation, thus making it possible for the people of the world to improve their food supply.

K. S. Quisenberry and M. A. McCall, of the BPISAE, discuss the question of expanding food production through new varieties and improved methods of production. New varieties have made it possible to extend production to less favorable areas and to increase yields in present cultivated areas; but it is much more difficult to get farmers to adopt new methods of cultivation, especially if these require radical changes in farm organization. Even in the more highly developed countries, this has been done successfully only through practical demonstrations.

Problems of expanding the production of livestock products and their place in the world's food supply are well presented by F. B. Morrison, of Cornell University.

One of the most interesting papers is that by John D. Black, of Harvard University, in which he presents some principles of the economics of freedom from want. These principles should be given careful consideration by all who are interested in the development of agricultural technology in underdeveloped areas. He recognizes that the problem of increasing food production is largely one of the natural sciences, but that economic principles must also be considered if we are to obtain the highest level of well-being for all mankind. His general conclusions are that any assistance should be confined to those programs which raise the output per worker, that each country can progress only if it relies on those lines of production for which nature has endowed it most abundantly, and that progress from agricultural technology and industrialization, even under the most favorable conditions, must necessarily be slow.

Although the authors of "Freedom from Want" do not present any rosy picture of the possibilities in the near future, they do indicate that, through hard work, careful planning, and the use of resources that are available to mankind, the general well-being of humanity can be gradually improved.

C. M. Purves