An Agronomist in Britain, 1948

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It was my privilege this summer to spend 11 weeks in Great Britain as a member of the recently established Scientific Office in the London Embassy of the United States Department of State. This Office was established late in 1947. The Chief Scientific Officer, Dr. Earl A. Evans, Jr., a biochemist from the University of Chicago, went to London in December 1947.

This office is an “opposite number” to the Commonwealth Scientific Office in Washington, which has been useful in promoting scientific cooperation between the United States and the British Commonwealth since early in World War II. The nominal function of our London Office was to gather as much scientific information of value to the United States as possible. However, scientific cooperation cannot be a one-way street, and we thought of our job more as one of building British-American scientific cooperation than of obtaining specific advantages for ourselves.

The advantage, not to say the necessity, of such cooperation should be evident. The chance for “peace in our time” is slender enough, but if we cannot or do not work closely with the British Commonwealth, we have no chance for peace. Cooperation for peace, working together for peace and at peaceful pursuits, is fundamental to world understanding.

I visited most institutions in Great Britain doing significant agronomic research—a total of over 20 different organizations. It is obviously not in point at this time to attempt a review of British soils and crops research. They are tackling much the same problems that we are, with reference to their conditions, and by much the same general methods. Research is done by men, not by countries or institutions, and the group of men I visited this summer are as fine a group of workers as you will find anywhere. I was given every courtesy and every facility for seeing the work they had in progress, and I wish to express my appreciation of the very fine treatment I received.

An outstanding characteristic of British research is its worldwide outlook. Britain has trained men for service in the far corners of the world for so long that her leaders naturally think in world terms and of world problems.

We in this country have had to solve the problems of an outlook bounded largely by our own area, almost entirely by the United States as naturally as British science has had a world outlook. There are a multitude of exceptions. Data from India, China, and Russia are applicable in both areas.

Nevertheless, it is much worthwhile for us to know the work and findings of our “opposite number” in the United Kingdom. Even the very different “practical” recommendations will give us suggestions that will help us in solving our own problems.

The future will take much greater thought for our world view—our new position in the world (not of our seeking) will compel it. It is interesting to note in the program of this meeting at Fort Collins the number of titles and reports involving a world outlook.

It is unfair to compare agronomic research in Great Britain with that in the United States as a whole. If we in the United States did research for our 350 million acres of cropland, England does for 15 million acres, we would indeed. But almost my first observation in England was that per crop acre, per farmer, or per family carries out far more agricultural research and teaching than we do.

I cannot claim familiarity with the total research of the United States, but I am familiar with that in Ohio. Ohio, with 22 cities, is over 2/3 as large as England and has 30 million acres in farms, and very comparable with them in many ways. Consequently, I have compared somewhat the agriculture and research and extension activities of Ohio with those in England and Wales.

The population of Ohio in 1940 was about 8 million, and in England and Wales about 41,000,000. The general outlook is not as different as the figures might suggest. Both areas are dominated by big cities and have an urban outlook. Of the 92 cities having over 100,000 population in the United States in 1940, 8 are in Ohio. Like England, Ohio is an agricultural area, with an urban outlook.