GALSWORTHY

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A PLEA BY

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I

IF once more through ingenuity, courage, and good luck we find the submarine menace "well in hand," and go to sleep again—if we reach the end of the war without having experienced any sharp starvation, and go our ways to trade, to eat, and forget—What then? It is about twenty years since the first submarine could navigate—and about seventeen since flying became practicable. There are a good many years yet before the world, and numberless developments in front of these new accomplishments. Hundreds of miles are going to be what tens are now; thousands of machines will take the place of hundreds.

We have ceased to live on an island in any save a technically geographical sense, and the sooner we make up our minds to the fact, the better. If in the future we act as we have in the past—rather the habit of this country—I can imagine that in fifteen years' time or so we shall be well enough prepared against war of the same magnitude and nature as this war, and that the country which attacks us will launch an assault against defences as many years out of date.

I can imagine a war starting and well-nigh ending at once, by a quiet and simultaneous sinking, from under water and from the air, of most British ships, in port or at sea. I can imagine little standardized submarines surreptitiously prepared by the thousand, and tens of thousands of the enemy population equipped with flying machines, instructed in flying, as part of their ordinary civil life, and ready to serve their country at a moment's notice, by taking a little flight and dropping a little charge of an explosive many times more destructive than any in use now. The agility of submarines and flying machines will grow almost

indefinitely. And even if we carry our commerce under the sea instead of on the surface, we shall not be guaranteed against attack by air. The air menace is, in fact, infinitely greater than that from under water. I can imagine all shipping in port, the Houses of Parliament, the Bank of England, most commercial buildings of importance, and every national granary wrecked or fired in a single night, on a declaration of war springing out of the blue. The only things I can't imagine wrecked or fired are the British character, and the good soil of Britain.

These are sinister suggestions, but there is really no end to what might now be done to us by any country which deliberately set its own interests and safety above all considerations of international right, especially if such country were moved to the soul by longing for revenge, and believed success certain. After this world-tragedy let us hope nations may have a little sense, less of that ghastly provincialism whence this war sprang; that no nation may teach in its schools that it is God's own people, entitled to hack through, without consideration of others; that professors may be no longer blind to all sense of proportion; Emperors things of the past; diplomacy open and responsible; a real Court of Nations at work; Military Chiefs unable to stampede a situation; journalists obliged to sign their names and held accountable for inflammatory writings. Let us hope, and let us by every means endeavour to bring about this better state of the world. But there is many a slip between cup and lip; there is also such a thing as hatred. And to rely blindly on a peace which, at the best, must take a long time to prove its reality, is to put our heads again under our wings. Once bit, twice shy. We shall make a better world the quicker if we try realism for a little.

THE WEAKNESS OF OUR POSITION

Britain's situation is now absurdly weak, without and within. And its weakness is due to one main cause—*the fact that we don't grow our own food.* To get the better of submarines in this war will make no difference to our future situation. A little peaceful study and development of submarines and aircraft will antiquate our present antidotes. You cannot chain air and the deeps to war uses and think you have done with their devilish possibilities a score of

years afterwards, because for the moment the submarine menace or the air menace is " well in hand."

At the end of the war I suppose the Channel Tunnel will be made. And quite time too ! But even that won't help us. We get no food from Europe, and never shall again. Not even by linking ourselves to Europe can we place ourselves in security from Europe. Faith may remove mountains, but it will not remove Britain to the centre of the Atlantic. Here we shall remain, every year nearer and more accessible to secret and deadly attack.

The next war, if there be one—which Man forbid—may be fought without the use of a single big ship or a single infantryman. It may begin, instead of ending, by being a war of starvation ; it may start, as it were, where it leaves off this time. And the only way of making even reasonably safe is to grow our own food. If for years to come we have to supplement by State granaries, they must be placed underground ; not even there will they be too secure. Unless we grow our own food after this war we shall be the only great country which does not, and a constant temptation to any foe. To be self-sufficing will be the first precaution taken by our present enemies, in order that blockade may no longer be a weapon in our hands, so far as *their* necessary food is concerned.

Whatever arrangements the world makes after the war to control the conduct of nations in the future, the internal activities of those nations will remain unfettered, capable of deadly shaping and plausible disguise in the hands of able and coherent schemers.

The submarine menace of the present is merely awkward, and no doubt surmountable—it is nothing to the submarine-cum-air menace of peace time a few years hence. *It will be impossible to guard against surprise under the new conditions.* If we do not grow our own food, we could be knocked out of time in the first round.

INLAND DANGER

But besides the danger from overseas, we have an inland danger to our future just as formidable—the desertion of our countryside and the town-blight which is its corollary.

Despair seizes on one reading that we should cope with the danger of the future by new cottages, better instruction

to farmers, better kinds of manure and seed, encouragement to co-operative societies, a cheerful spirit, and the storage of two to three years' supply of grain. Excellent and necessary, in their small ways—they are a mere stone to the bread we need.

In that programme and the speech which put it forward I see insufficient grasp of the outer peril and hardly any of the gradual destruction with which our overwhelming town life threatens us ; not one allusion to the physical and moral welfare of our race, except this : " That boys should be in touch with country life and country tastes is of first importance, and that their elementary education should be given in terms of country things is also of enormous importance." That's all, and it shows how far we have got from reality, and how difficult it will be to get back ; for the speaker was once Minister for Agriculture.

Our justifications for not continuing to feed ourselves were : Pursuit of wealth, command of the sea, island position. Whatever happens in this war, we have lost the last two in all but a superficial sense. Let us see whether the first is sufficient justification for perseverance in a mode of life which has brought us to an ugly pass.

OUT OF GOOD—EVIL

Our wonderful industrialism began about 1766, and changed us from the position of exporting between the years 1732 and 1766 11,250,000 quarters of wheat, to the position of importing 7,500,000 quarters between the years 1767 and 1801. In one hundred and fifty years it has brought us to the state of importing more than three-quarters of our wheat, and more than half our total food. Whereas in 1688 (figures of Gregory and Davenant) about four-fifths of the population of England was rural, in 1911 only about two-ninths was rural. This transformation has given us great wealth, extremely ill-distributed ; plastered our country with scores of busy, populous, and hideous towns ; given us a merchant fleet which before the war had a gross tonnage of over 20,000,000, or not far short of half the world's shipping. It has, or had, fixed in us the genteel habit of eating very doubtfully nutritious white bread made entirely of the flour of wheat ; reduced the acreage of arable land in the United Kingdom from its

already insufficient maximum of 23,000,000 acres to its 1914 figure of 19,000,000 acres; made England, all but its towns, look very like a pleasure garden; and driven two shibboleths deep into our minds, "All for wealth" and "Hands off the food of the people."

All these "good" results have had certain complementary disadvantages, some of which we have just seen, some of which have long been seen.

SHEKELS AND SENTIMENT

Of these last, let me first take a small sentimental disadvantage. We have become more parasitic by far than any other nation. To eat we have to buy with our manufactures an overwhelming proportion of our vital foods. The blood in our veins is sucked from foreign bodies, in return for the clothing we give them—not a very self-respecting thought. We have a green and fertile country, and round it a prolific sea. If our country does not grow wheat to perfection, it can nevertheless produce, with its seas, all the food we need to eat. We know that quite well, but we elect to be nourished on foreign stuff, because we are a practical people and prefer shekels to sentiment. It's not a great point, but worth considering, because if we take no interest nationally in the growth of food, we take no interest nationally in the cooking of it; the two accomplishments subtly hang together. Pride in the food capacity, the corn and wine and oil, of their country has made the cooking of the French the most appetizing and nourishing in the world. The French do cook: we open tins. The French preserve the juices of their home-grown food: we have no juices to preserve. The life of our poorer classes is miserably stunted of essential salts and savours. They throw away skins, refuse husks, make no soups, prefer pickle to genuine flavour. But home-grown produce really is more nourishing than tinned and pickled and frozen foods. If we honestly feed ourselves we shall not again demand the old genteel flavourless white bread without husk or body in it; we shall eat wholemeal bread, and take to that salutary substance, oatmeal, which, if I mistake not, has much to say in making the Scots the tallest and boniest race in Europe. The shibboleth that we must eat pure white wheaten bread is now spiflicated; if we go back to worship of it we shall be fools.

TOWN-BLIGHT

Now for a far more poignant disadvantage. We have become tied-up in teeming congeries, to which we have grown so used that we are no longer able to see the blight they have brought on us. Our great industrial towns, sixty odd in England alone, with a population of 15,000,000 to 16,000,000, are our glory, our pride, and the main source of our wealth. They are the growth, roughly speaking, of five generations. They began at a time when social science was unknown, spread and grew in unchecked riot of individual moneymaking, till they are the nightmare of social reformers, and the despair of all lovers of beauty. They have mastered us so utterly, morally and physically, that we regard them and their results as matter of course. They *are* public opinion, so that for the battle against town-blight there is no driving force. They paralyze the imaginations of our politicians because their voting power is so enormous, their commercial interests are so huge, and the food necessities of their populations seem so paramount.

I once bewailed the physique of our towns to one of our most cultivated and prominent Conservative statesmen. He did not agree. He thought that probably physique was on the up-grade. This commonly held belief is based on statistics of longevity and sanitation. But the same superior sanitation and science applied to a rural population would have lengthened the lives of a much finer and better-looking stock. Here are some figures: Out of sixteen hundred and fifty passers-by, women and men (including soldiers), observed in perhaps the "best" district of London—St. James's Park, Trafalgar Square, Westminster Bridge, and Piccadilly—in May of this year, only three hundred and ten had any pretensions to not being very plain or definitely ugly—not one in five. And out of the three hundred and ten who passed this quite low standard of looks, perhaps one in thirty had what might be called beauty—say, one out of each hundred and fifty in all; not a great average. Out of one hundred and twenty British soldiers observed round Charing Cross, sixty—just one-half—passed the same standard. But out of seventy-two Australian soldiers fifty-four, or three-quarters, passed, and several had real beauty. Out of one hundred

and twenty men, women, and children taken at random in a remote country village (five miles from any town, and eleven miles from any town of ten thousand inhabitants) ninety—or just three-quarters also—passed this same standard of looks. It is significant that the average here is the same as the average among Australian soldiers, who, though of British stock, come from a country as yet unaffected by town life. You ask, of course, what standard is this? A standard which covers just the very rudiments of proportion and comeliness. People in small country towns, I admit, have little or no more beauty than people in large towns. This is curious, but may be due to too much inbreeding.

The first counter to conclusions drawn from such figures is obviously: "The English are an ugly people." I said that to a learned and æsthetic friend when I came back from France last spring. He started, and then remarked: "Oh, well; not as ugly as the French, anyway." A great error; much plainer if you take *the bulk, and not the pick*, of the population in both countries. It may not be fair to attribute French superiority in looks entirely to the facts that they grow nearly all their own food (and cook it well), and had in 1906 four-sevenths of their population in the country, as against our own two-ninths in 1911, because there is the considerable matter of climate. But when you get so high a proportion of comeliness in *remote* country districts in England, it *is* fair to assume that climate does not account for anything like all the difference. I do not believe that the English are naturally an ugly people. The best English type is perhaps the handsomest in the world. The physique and looks of the richer classes are as notoriously better than those of the poorer classes as the physique and looks of the remote country are superior to those of crowded towns. Where conditions are free from cramp, poor air, poor food, and *herd-life*, English physique quite holds its own with that of other nations.

We do not realize the great deterioration of our stock, the squashed-in, stunted, disproportionate, commonized look of the bulk of our people, because, as we take our walks abroad, we note only faces and figures which strike us as good-looking; the rest pass unremarked. Ugliness has become a matter of course. There is no reason, save town

life, why this should be so. But what does it matter if we *have* become ugly ? We work well, make money, and have lots of moral qualities. A fair inside is better than a fair outside. I do think that we are in many ways a very wonderful people ; and our townsfolk not the least wonderful. But that is all the more reason for trying to preserve our physique.

Granted that an expressive face with interest in life stamped on it is better than " chocolate box " or " barber's block " good looks, that agility and strength are better than symmetry without agility and strength ; the trouble is that there is no interest stamped on so many of our faces, no agility or strength in so many of our limbs. If there were, those faces and limbs would pass my standard. The old Greek cult of the body was not to be despised. I defy even the most rigid Puritans to prove that a satisfactory moral condition can go on within an exterior which exhibits no signs of a live, able, and serene existence. By living on its nerves, overworking its body, starving its normal aspirations for fresh air, good food, sunlight, and a modicum of solitude, a country can get a great deal out of itself, a terrific lot of wealth, in three or four generations ; but it is living on its capital, physically speaking. This is precisely what we show every sign of doing ; and partly what I mean by " town-blight."

II

The impression I get, in our big towns, is most peculiar—considering that we are a free people. The faces and forms have a look of being possessed. To express my meaning exactly is difficult. There is a dulled and driven look, and yet a general expression of " Keep smiling—Are we down-hearted ? No." It is as if people were all being forced along by a huge invisible hand at the back of their necks, whose pressure they resent yet are trying to make the best of, because they can't tell whence it comes. To understand, you must watch the grip from its very beginnings. The small children who swarm in the little grey playground streets of our big towns pass their years in utter abandonment. They roll and play and chatter in conditions of amazing unrestraint and devil-may-care-dom in the midst of amazing dirt and ugliness. The younger they are, as

a rule, the chubbier and prettier they are. Gradually you can see herd-life getting hold of them, the impact of ugly sights and sounds commonizing the essential grace and individuality of their little features. On the lack of any standard or restraint, any real glimpse of Nature, any knowledge of a future worth striving for, or indeed of any future at all, they thrive forward into that hand-to-mouth mood from which they are mostly destined never to emerge. Quick and scattery as monkeys, and never alone, they become, at a rake's progress, little fragments of the herd. On poor food, poor air and habits of least resistance, they wilt and grow distorted, acquiring withal the sort of pathetic hardihood which a Dartmoor pony will draw out of moor life in a frozen winter. All round them, by day, by night, stretches the huge, grey, grimy waste of streets, factory walls, chimneys, murky canals, chapels, public-houses, hoardings, posters, butchers' shops—a waste where nothing beautiful exists save a pretty cat or pigeon, a blue sky, perhaps, and a few trees and open spaces. The children of the class above, too, of the small shop-people, the artisans—do they escape? Not really. The same herd-life and the same sights and sounds pursue them from birth; they also are soon divested of the grace and free look which you see in country children walking to and from school or roaming the hedges. Whether true slum children, or from streets a little better off, quickly they all pass out of youth into the iron drive of commerce and manufacture, into the clang and clatter, the swish and whirr of wheels, the strange, dragging, saw-like hubbub of industry, or the clicking and pigeon-holes of commerce; perch on a devil's see-saw from monotonous work to cheap sensation and back. Considering the conditions it's wonderful that they stand it as well as they do; and I should be the last to deny that they possess remarkable qualities. But the modern industrial English town is a sort of inferno where people dwell with a marvellous philosophy. What would you have? They have never seen any way out of it. And this, perhaps, would not be so pitiful if for each bond-servant of our town-tyranny there was in store a prize—some portion of that national wealth in pursuit of which the tyrant drives us; if each worker had before him the chance of emergence at, say, fifty. But, Lord God!

for five that emerge, ninety-and-five stay bond, less free and wealthy at the end of the chapter than they were at the beginning. And the quaint thing is—they know it; know that they will spend their lives in smoky, noisy, crowded drudgery, and in crowded drudgery die. Wealth goes to wealth, and all they can hope for is a few extra shillings a week, with a corresponding rise in prices. They know it, but it does not disturb them, for they were born of the towns, have never glimpsed at other possibilities. Imprisoned in town life from birth, they contentedly perpetutate the species of a folk with an ebbing future. Yes, ebbing! For if it be not, why is there now so much conscious effort to arrest the decay of town workers' nerves and sinews? Why do we bother to impede a process which is denied? If there be no town-blight on us, why a million indications of uneasiness and a thousand little fights against the march of a degeneration so natural, vast, and methodical, that it brings them all to naught? Our physique is slowly rotting, and that is the plain truth of it.

TOWN-LIFE AND VULGARITY

But it does not stop with deteriorated physique. Students of faces in the remoter country are struck by the absence of what, for want of a better word, we may call vulgarity. That insidious defacement is seen to be a thing of towns, and not at all a matter of "class." The simplest country cottager, shepherd, fisherman, has as much, often a deal more, dignity than numbers of our upper classes, who, in spite of the desire to keep themselves unspotted, are still, from the nature of their existence, touched by the herd-life of modern times. For vulgarity is the natural product of herd-life; an amalgam of second-hand thought, cheap and rapid sensation, defensive and offensive self-consciousness, gradually plastered over the faces, manners, voices, whole beings, of those whose elbows are too tightly squeezed to their sides by the pressure of their fellows, whose natures are cut off from Nature, whose senses are rendered imitative by the too insistent impact of certain sights and sounds. Without doubt the rapid increase of town-life is responsible for our acknowledged vulgarity. The same process is going on in America and in Northern Germany; but we unfortunately had the lead,

and seem to be doing our best to keep it. Cheap newspapers, on the sensational tip-and-run system, perpetual shows of some kind or other, work in association, every kind of thing in association, at a speed too great for individual digestion, and in the presence of every device for removing the need for individual thought; the thronged streets, the football match with its crowd emotions; beyond all, the cinema—a compendium of all these other influences—make town-life a veritable forcing-pit of vulgarity. We are all so deeply in it that we don't see the process going on; or, if we admit it, hasten to add: "But what does it matter?—there's no harm in vulgarity; besides, it's inevitable; you can't set the tide back." Obviously, the vulgarity of town-life cannot be exorcized by Act of Parliament; there is not indeed the faintest chance that Parliament will recognize such a side to the question at all, since there is naturally no public opinion on this matter.

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Everybody must recognize and admire certain qualities specially fostered by town-life; the extraordinary patience, cheerful courage, philosophic irony, and unselfishness of our townspeople—qualities which in this war, both at the front and at home, have been of the greatest value. They are worth much of the price paid. But in this life, all is a question of balance; and my contention is, not so much that town-life in itself is bad, as that we have pushed it to a point of excess terribly dangerous to our physique, to our dignity, and to our sense of beauty. Must our future have no serene and simple quality, not even a spice of the influence of Nature, with her air, her trees, her fields, and wide skies? Say what you like, it is elbow-room for limbs and mind and lungs that keeps the countryman free from that dulled and driven look, and gives him individuality. I know all about the "dullness" and "monotony" of rural life, bad housing and the rest of it. All true enough, but the cure is not exodus, it is improvement in rural-life conditions, more co-operation, better cottages, a fuller, freer social life. What we in England now want more than anything is air—for lungs and mind. We have overdone herd-life. We *are* dimly conscious of this, feel vaguely that there is something "rattling" and wrong about our progress, for we

have had many little spasmodic " movements " back to the land these last few years. But what do they amount to ? Whereas in 1901 the proportion of town to country population in England and Wales was $3\frac{10}{17}$—1, in 1911 it was $3\frac{17}{20}$—1 ; very distinctly greater ! At this crab's march we shall be some time getting " back to the land." Our effort, so far, has been something like our revival of Morris dancing, very pleasant and æsthetic, but without real economic basis or strength to stand up against the lure of the towns. And how queer, ironical, and pitiful is that lure, when you consider that in towns one-third of the population are just on or a little below the line of bare subsistence ; that the great majority of town workers have hopelessly monotonous work, stuffy housing, poor air, and little leisure. But there it is—the charm of the lighted-up unknown, of company, and the streets at night ! The countryman goes to the town in search of adventure. Honestly—does he really find it ? He thinks he is going to improve his prospects and his mind. His prospects seldom brighten. He sharpens his mind, only to lose it and acquire instead that of the herd.

THE ONLY WEALTH WORTH HAVING

To compete with this lure of the towns, there must first be *national* consciousness of its danger ; then coherent *national* effort to fight it. We must destroy the shibboleth : " All for wealth ! " and re-write it : " All for health ! "—the only wealth worth having. Wealth is not an end, surely. Then, to what is it the means, if not to health ? Once we admit that in spite of our wealth our national health is going downhill through town-blight, we assert the failure of our country's ideals and life. And if, having got into a vicious state of congested town existence, we refuse to make an effort to get out again, because it is necessary to " hold our own commercially," and feed " the people " cheaply, we are in effect saying : " We certainly are going to hell, but look—how successfully ! " I suggest rather that we try to pull ourselves up again out of the pit of destruction, even if to do so involves us in a certain amount of monetary loss and inconvenience. Yielding to no one in desire that " the people " should be well, nay better, fed, I decline utterly to accept the doctrine that there is no

way of doing this compatible with an increased country population and the growth of our own food. In national matters, where there is a general and not a mere Party will, there is a way, and the way is not to be recoiled from because the first years of the change may necessitate Governmental regulation. Many people hold that our salvation will come through education. Education on right lines underlies everything, of course; but unless we grow our own food and hark back to the land in substantial measure, education can't save us.

It may be natural to want to go to hell; it is certainly easy; we have gone so far in that direction that we cannot hope to be haloed in our time. For good or evil, the great towns are here, and we can but mitigate. The indicated policy of mitigation is fivefold :—

(1) Such solid economic basis to the growth of our food as will give us again national security, more arable land than we have ever had, and on it a full complement of well-paid workers, with better cottages, and a livened village life.

(2) A vast number of small holdings, State created, with co-operative working.

(3) A wide belt-system of garden allotments round every town, industrial or not.

(4) Drastic improvements in housing, feeding, and sanitation in the towns themselves.

(5) Education that shall raise not only the standard of knowledge but the standard of taste in town and country.

All these ideals are already well in the public eye—on paper. But they are incoherently viewed and urged; they do not as yet form a national creed. Until welded and supported by all parties in the State, they will not have driving power enough to counteract the terrific momentum with which towns are drawing us down into the pit. One section pins its faith to town improvement; another to the development of small holdings; a third to cottage building; a fourth to education; a fifth to support of the price of wheat; a sixth to the destruction of landlords and other game. Comprehensive vision of the danger is still lacking, and comprehensive grasp of the means to fight against it.

We are by a long way the most townridden country in the world; our towns by a long way the smokiest and worst built, with the most inbred town populations. We have

practically come to an end of our country-stock reserves. Unless we are prepared to say: "This is a desirable state of things; let the inbreeding of town stocks go on—we shall evolve in time a new type immune to town life; a little ratty fellow all nerves and assurance, much better than any country clod!"—which, by the way, is exactly what some of us do say! Unless we mean as a nation to adopt this view, and rattle on, light-heartedly, careless of menace from without and within, assuring ourselves that health and beauty, freedom and independence, as hitherto understood, have always been misnomers, and that nothing whatever matters so long as we are rich—unless all this, we must give check to the present state of things, restore a decent balance between town and country stock, grow our own food, and establish a permanent tendency away from towns.

All this is fearfully unorthodox and provocative of sneers, and—goodness knows—I don't enjoy saying it. But needs must when the devil drives. It may be foolish to rave against the past and those factors and conditions which have put us so utterly in bond to towns—especially since this past and these towns have brought us such great wealth and so dominating a position in the world. It cannot be foolish, now that we have the wealth and the position, to resolve with all our might to free ourselves from bondage, to be masters, not servants, of our fate, to get back to firm ground, and make Health and Safety what they ever should be—the true keystones of our policy.

III

In the midst of a war like this the first efforts of any Government have to be directed to immediate ends. But under the pressure of the war the Government has a unique chance to initiate the comprehensive, far-reaching policy which alone can save us. Foundations to safety will only be laid if our representatives can be induced now to see this question of the land as *the* question of the future, no matter what happens in the war; to see that whatever success we attain we cannot remove the two real dangers of the future, sudden strangulation through swift attack by air and under sea—unless we grow our own food; and slow strangulation by town-life—unless we restore the Land. Our imaginations are stirred, the driving force is here,

swift action possible, and certain extraordinary opportunities are open which presently must close again.

On demobilization we have the chance of our lives to put men on the land. Because this is still a Party question, to be sagaciously debated up hill and down dale three or four years hence, we shall very likely grasp the mere shadow and miss the substance of that opportunity. If the Government had a mandate " Full steam ahead " we could add at the end of the war perhaps a million men (potentially four million people) to our food-growing country population ; as it is, we may add thereto a hundred thousand, lose half a million to the Colonies, and discourage the rest —patting our own backs the while. To put men on the land we must have the land ready in terms of earth, not of paper ; and have it in the right places, within easy reach of town or village. Things *can* be done just now. We know, for instance, that in a few months half a million allotment-gardens have been created in urban areas, and far more progress made with small holdings than in previous years. I repeat, we have a chance which will not recur to scotch the food danger, and to restore a healthier balance between town and country stocks. Shall we be penny-wise and lose this chance for the luxury of " free and full discussion of a controversial matter at a time when men's minds are not full of the country's danger " ? This *is* the country's danger—there is no other. And this is the moment for full and free discussion of it, for full and free action too. Who doubts that a Government which brought this question of the land in its widest aspects to the touchstone of full debate at once, would get its mandate, would get the power it wanted—not to gerrymander, but to build.

OUR FUTURE AT STAKE

Consider the Corn Production Bill. I will quote Mr. Prothero : " National security is not an impracticable dream. It is within our reach, within the course of a few years, and it involves no great dislocation of other industries." (Note that.) " For all practical purposes, if we could grow at home here 82 per cent. of all the food that we require for five years, we should be safe, and that amount of independence of sea-borne supplies we can secure, and

secure within a few years. . . . We could obtain that result if we could add 8,000,000 acres of arable land to our existing area—that is to say, if we increased it from 19,000,000 acres to 27,000,000 acres. If you once got that extension of your arable area, the nation would be safe from the nightmare of a submarine menace, and the number of additional men who would be required on the land would be something about a quarter of a million." (Note that.) " The present Bill is much less ambitious." It is. And it is introduced by one who knows and dreads, as much as any of us, the dangerous and unballasted condition into which we have drifted ; introduced with, as it were, apology, as if he feared that, unambitious though it be, it will startle the nerves of Parliament. On a question so vast and vital you are bound to startle by any little measure. Nothing but an heroic measure would arouse debate on a scale adequate to reach and stir the depths of our national condition, and wake us all, politicians and public, to appreciate the fact that our whole future is in this matter, and that it must be tackled.

If we are not capable now of grasping the vital nature of this issue we assuredly never shall be. Only five generations have brought us to the parasitic, town-ridden condition we are in. The rate of progress in deterioration will increase rapidly with each coming generation. We have, as it were, turned seven-ninths of our population out into poor paddocks, to breed promiscuously among themselves. We have the chance now to make our English and Welsh figures read: Twenty-four millions of town-dwellers to twelve of country, instead of, as now, twenty-eight millions to eight. Consider what that would mean to the breeding of the next generation. In such extra millions of country stock our national hope lies. What we should never dream of permitting with our domestic animals, we are not only permitting but encouraging among ourselves ; we are doing all we can to perpetuate and increase poor stock ; stock without either quality or bone, run-down, and ill-shaped. And, just as the progress in the " stock " danger is accelerated with each generation, so does the danger from outside increase with every year which sees flying and submarining improve, and our food-capacity standing still.

"VITAL INDUSTRIES"

The great argument against a united effort to regain our ballast is: We must not take away too many from our vital industries. Why, even the Minister of Agriculture, who really knows and dreads the danger, almost apologizes for taking two hundred and fifty thousand from those vital industries, to carry out, not his immediate, but his ideal, programme. Vital industries! Ah! vital to Britain's destruction within the next few generations unless we mend our ways! The great impediment is the force of things as they are, the huge vested interests, the iron network of vast enterprises frightened of losing profit. If we pass this moment, when men of every class and occupation, even those who most thrive on our town-ridden state, are a little frightened; if we let slip this chance for a real reversal—can we hope that anything considerable will be done, with the dice loaded as they are, the scales weighted so hopelessly in favour of the towns? Representatives of seven-ninths will always see that representatives of two-ninths do not outvote them. This is a crude way of putting it, but it serves; because, after all, an elector is only a little bundle of the immediate needs of his locality and mode of life, outside of which he cannot see, and which he does not want prejudiced. He isn't a fool, like me, looking into the future. And his representatives have got to serve him. The only chance, in a question so huge, vital, and *long* as this, is that greatly distrusted agent—Panic Legislation. When panic makes men, for a brief space, open their eyes and see truth, then it is valuable. Before our eyes close again and see nothing but the darkness of the daily struggle for existence, let us take advantage, and lay foundations which will be difficult, at least, to overturn.

THE BOUNTY ON CORN

What has been done so far, and what more can be done? A bounty on corn has been introduced. I suppose nobody, certainly not its promoter, is enamoured of this. But it does not seem to have occurred to every one that you cannot eat nuts without breaking their shells, or get out of evil courses without a transition period of extreme annoyance to yourself. "Bounty" is, in many quarters, looked on as a piece of petting to an interest already pampered. Well—

while we look on the Land as an " interest " in competition with other " interests " and not as *the* vital interest of the country, underlying every other, so long shall we continue to be " in the soup." The Land needs fostering, and again fostering, because the whole vicious tendency of the country's life has brought farming to its present pass, and farmers to their attitude of mistrust. Doctrinaire objections are now ridiculous. An economic basis must be re-established, or we may as well cry " Kamerad " at once, and hold up our hands to Fate. The greater the arable acreage in this country, the less will be the necessity for a bounty on corn. Unlike most stimulants, it is one which gradually stimulates away the need for it. With every year and every million acres broken up, not only will the need for bounty diminish, but the present mistrustful breed of farmer will be a step nearer to extinction. Shrewd, naturally conservative, and somewhat intolerant of anything so dreamy as a national point of view, they will not live for ever. The up-growing farmer will not be like them, and about the time the need for bounty is vanishing, the new farmer will be in possession. But in the meantime land must be broken up until 8,000,000 acres at least are conquered; and bounty is the only lever. It will not be lever enough, without constant local urging. In Mr. Prothero's history of English farming occur these words: " A Norfolk farmer migrated to Devonshire in 1780, where he drilled and hoed his roots; though his crops were far superior to those of other farmers in the district, yet at the close of the century no neighbour had followed his example."

TITHE REDEMPTION

But even the break-up of 8,000,000 acres, though it may make us safe for food, will only increase our country population by 250,000 labourers and their families (a million souls)—a mere beginning towards the satisfaction of our need. We want in operation, before demobilization begins, a great national plan for the creation of good small holdings run on co-operative lines. And to this end, why should not the suggestion of tithe redemption, thrown out by Mr. Prothero, on pages 399 and 400 of " English Farming: Past and Present," be adopted? The annual value of tithes is about £5,000,000. Their extinction should

provide the Government with about 2,500,000 acres, enough at one stroke to put five hundred thousand soldiers on the land. The tithe-holders would get their money, landlords would not be prejudiced; the Government, by virtue of judicious choice and discretionary compulsion, would obtain the sort of land it wanted, and the land would be for ever free of a teasing and vexatious charge. The cost to the Government would be £100,000,000 (perhaps more) on the best security it could have. "Present conditions," I quote from the book, "are favourable to such a transaction. The price of land enables owners to extinguish the rent charge by the surrender of a reasonable acreage, and the low price of Consols enables investors to obtain a larger interest for their money." For those not familiar with this notion, the process, in brief, is this: The Government pays the tithe-holder the capitalized value of his tithe, and takes over from the landlord as much land as produces in net annual rent the amount of the tithe-rent charge, leaving the rest of his land tithe-free for ever. There are doubtless difficulties and objections, but so there must be to any comprehensive plan for obtaining an amount of land at all adequate. Time is of desperate importance in this matter. It is already dangerously late, but if the Government would turn-to now with a will, the situation could still be saved, and this unique chance for re-stocking our countryside would not be thrown away.

THE ALLOTMENT MOVEMENT

I alluded to the formation within a few months of half a million garden-allotments—plots of ground averaging about ten poles each, taken under the Defence of the Realm Act from building and other land in urban areas, and given to cultivators, under a guarantee lasting till January, 1919, for the growth of vegetables. This most valuable effort, for which the Board of Agriculture deserves the thanks of all, is surely capable of very great extension. Every town, no matter how quickly it may be developing, is always surrounded by a belt of dubious land—not quite town and not quite country. When town development mops up plots in cultivation, a hole can be let out in an elastic belt which is capable of almost indefinite expansion. But this most useful and health-giving work has only been

possible under powers which will cease when the immediate danger to the State has passed. If a movement, which greatly augments our home-grown food supply and can give quiet, healthy, open-air, interesting work for several hours a week to perhaps a million out of our congested town populations—if such a movement be allowed to collapse at the coming of peace, it will be nothing less than criminal. I plead here that the real danger to the State will not pass, but rather begin, with the signing of peace, that the powers to acquire and grant these garden-allotments should be continued, and every effort made to foster and *extend* the movement. Considering that, whatever we do to recolonize our land, we must still have in this country a dangerously huge town population, this kitchen-garden movement can be of incalculable value in combating town-blight, in securing just that air to lungs and mind, and just that spice of earth reality which all town-dwellers need so much.

Extension of arable land by at least 8,000,000 acres; creation of hundreds of thousands of small-holdings by tithe redemption, or another scheme still in the blue; increase and perpetuation of garden allotments—besides all these we want, of course, agricultural schools and facilities for training; *co-operatively organized finance, transport, and marketing of produce*; and, until we are fairly on our legs, granaries which will guarantee us for a couple of years at least. We now have the labourer's minimum wage, which, I think, will want increasing; but we want good rural housing on an economically sound basis, an enlivened village life, and all that can be done to give the worker on the land a feeling that he can rise, the sense that he is not a mere herd, at the beck and call of what has been dubbed the " tyranny of the countryside." The land gives work which is varied, alive, and interesting beyond all town industries, save those perhaps of art and the highly skilled crafts and professions. If we can once get land-life back on to a wide and solid basis, it should hold its own.

THE GREAT CHOICE

Dare any say that this whole vast question of the land, with its throbbing importance, yea—seeing that demobilizations do not come every year—its desperately immediate

importance, is not fit matter for instant debate and action; dare any say that we ought to relegate it to that limbo "After the war"? In grim reality it takes precedence of every other question. It is infinitely more vital to our safety and our health than consideration of our future commercial arrangements. In our present Parliament—practically, if not sentimentally speaking—all shades of opinion are as well represented as they are likely to be in future Parliaments—even the interests of our women and our soldiers; to put off the good day when this question is threshed out, is to crane at an imagined hedge.

Let us know now at what we are aiming, let us admit and record in the black and white of legislation that we intend to trim our course once more for the port of health and safety. If this Britain of ours is going to pin her whole future to a blind pursuit of wealth, without considering whether that wealth is making us all healthier and happier, many of us, like Sancho, would rather retire at once, and be made "governors of islands." For who can want part or lot on a ship which goes yawing with every sail set into the dark, without rudder, compass, or lighted star?

I, for one, want a Britain who refuses to take the mere immediate line of least resistance, who knows and sets her course, and that a worthy one. So do we all, I believe, at heart—only, the current is so mighty and strong, and we are so used to it!

By the parasitic and town-ridden condition we are in now, and in which without great and immediate effort we are likely to remain, we degrade our patriotism. That we should have to tremble lest we be starved is a miserable, a humiliating thought. To have had so little pride and independence of spirit as to have come to this, to have been such gobblers at wealth—who dare defend it? We have made our bed; let us, now, refuse to lie thereon. Better the floor than this dingy feather couch of suffocation.

Our country is dear to us, and many are dying for Her. There can be no consecration of their memory so deep or so true as this regeneration of The Land.

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