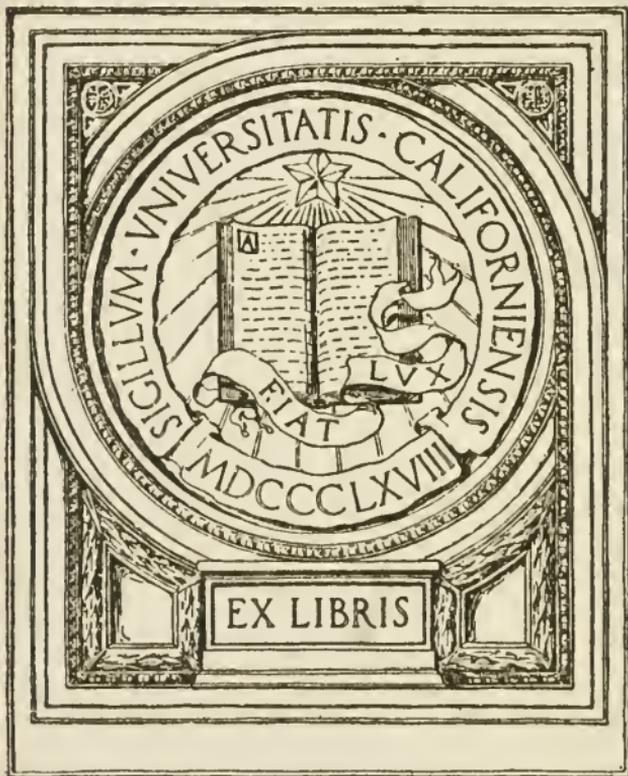




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# A NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY

BY

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# A NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY

## CHAPTER I

### THE FAILURE OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

**T**HE difference between conducting an industry under the shelter of a roof—where every worker, every particle of machinery or material can be supervised—and one in which work is very often carried on by isolated manual and horse labour, and which is always subject to the climatic changes of burning suns, of fierce gales and floods, of frost and snow, is, I think, obvious.

The divergence between the factory and the farm is even more extended. The factory owner has almost absolute control, subject to laws which his competitors have also to obey, over the conditions obtaining inside his factory, and the inefficiency of his competitor next door is a matter for rejoicing rather than for complaint. Not so on the farm, where the forces of Nature should induce all agriculturists to

take collective action. When the wind blows across the hills and the open plains it blows across the ill-cultivated field of the bad farmer, and with ruthless impartiality wafts argosies of thistledown on to the well-tilled fields of the good farmer. The wind is no respecter of persons, nor is the rain, which may cause the well-drained fields to become water-logged, should the adjoining farmer or landowner refuse to clean out his ditches and water-courses, or because the river banks are not repaired. With a callous disregard for the virtues of a good husbandman insect pests and fungi will, if they are left to flourish and multiply in the lichen, moss-covered orchards and fields of the careless cultivator, attack clean fruit trees and growing crops which have been sprayed by the diligent farmer. Warble flies, disliking the smell of sheep-dip on the backs of well-groomed cattle in one field, have an exasperating way of depositing their eggs in the bodies of the untreated beasts that graze in the next; and the national loss in punctured hides amounts to a very considerable sum. An epidemic of fluke amongst sheep in a wet season reckes little of the futile efforts of a few isolated farmers patiently using scientific preventatives. Swine fever will spread from the ill-regulated sty to the model piggery without any respect for the feelings of the sanitary enthusiast. Calves dropped by tubercular cows,

which we make no attempt to put through the tuberculin test, may be purchased unwittingly by careful dairymen, and the milk from such cows will be consumed by infants without even the cowkeeper's knowledge.

If there is one industry, surely, which cannot be left to the tender mercies of private enterprise, it is agriculture. Yet, even when the cataclysm of war swept over us, it was the one industry in which private enterprise was allowed to remain almost unchecked or unguided—I might say unprotected, if that word did not give rise to so much misunderstanding. Protection is needed against the foe within our gates, rather than against the enemy without—not only protection from weeds, pests, diseases, bad drainage, and bad cultivation, but also from game. In spite of Agricultural Holdings Acts, the lust for the big bag goes on to-day unchecked, to the detriment of agriculture. Whilst one man, be he landowner or sporting tenant-farmer, is allowed to rear pheasants and harbour rabbits without let or hindrance, and the farmer on the other side of the hedge has no other remedy than a shadowy compensation (with no right to kill game or ferret his neighbour's banks, which are the breeding-ground of the invading army of rabbits), it is useless for the good farmer to attempt to grow corn or even good herbage.

. . . . .

Before the War we took little heed of these things. Wheat produced on distant prairies poured into our granaries at the docks from the holds of great ships filled with the staff of life, and it came across the oceans at less freightage costs from San Francisco to Barrow-in-Furness than it did from Melton Constable in Norfolk to London. Derelict fields in English counties, which once grew abundant wheat, became grazing ground for cattle. A slight recovery in farming prospects took place before the War, through the increasing demand for milk; but this did not mean more work for the plough, or the settlement of a larger rural population. On the contrary, the rural exodus went on with fatal facility enfeebling the heart of Old England. In many districts more and more farms were engrossed and became ranches for cows and store cattle, and the labourer, who remained on the land, had become even more dependent upon the goodwill of his master than when Gray wrote his immortal *Elegy* or Crabbe his *Poems*, for he was now, through the operations of century-old Acts of Enclosure, entirely divorced from the soil.

It is recorded that in one parish alone a single owner absorbed over thirty small freeholds, and Sir Daniel Hall, in his *Agriculture after the War*, cites an instance of a man who, partly by purchase and partly by hiring, obtained the control of some 8600 acres which

have ever since been worked as a vast sheep farm. On the portion owned the whole of the land has been laid down to grass; the cottages, and in many cases the farmhouses and buildings, have been allowed to fall into ruin, and two hamlets have been completely depopulated. Just prior to the War, on one property consisting formerly of five farms and totalling 1360 acres, two men only were regularly employed. On another group of 1500 acres four men were regularly employed where about seventy once found work.

The labourer's average wage, including all extras, was then about 17s. 9d. a week, and one out of every two or three labourers lived in a farm-tied cottage, where, if he possessed a family, he remained manacled like a serf. There was the open road, it was true, which many young men speedily took, but that road led to no security of employment, and debt held the father of a family like a bondman until harvest came round; and after harvest the lean days of winter stared him in the face.

The landowner and the farmer passed their lives untroubled, for the most part, by Acts of Parliament. Each in his own way lived the life of a feudal chief. Here it might be an owner, there a large tenant-farmer, who had become the lord of the soil, and whose word was law in the employment of labour, stereotyping a low standard for wages in the letting

of cottages, or in the dispensing of the loaves and fishes. Nothing disturbed the even tenor of their ways in the realm of private enterprise. No Labour Union dared to dictate the rate of wages, nor complain of insanitary cottages, nor hint that the land was not being properly cultivated, nor, if he wanted a roof over his head, dared a man suggest the reduction of game. Indeed, the labourer was not averse to game-preserving for, as meat was not plentiful in his larder, and wages were exceedingly low, an occasional rabbit, short or "long-tailed," caught in a surreptitiously placed snare, did not come amiss. The Small Holdings Act of 1908 might, it is true, have become a thorn in the flesh of the prosperous farmer, but there were many ways of making it inoperative, and after all, not 1 per cent. of the total number of holdings was taken as small holdings in the first seven years under this Act.

The landowner bred as many head of pheasants as he chose, the farmer grew what crops he chose—even docks and thistles—let the land down to grass as he chose, paid what wages he chose, worked his men the long customary hours, often without overtime payment, on the strength of an additional gallon of cider or beer, or on the promise of a harvest supper. Viewed from a national standpoint of production we can no longer remain indifferent to the failure or success of the farming industry.

It is of small moment to most of us as citizens if a boot manufacturer, owing to the lack of modern machinery, or through mismanagement of any kind, fails in his business. Other boot manufacturers will soon supply the demand for boots. A manufacturer cannot afford to be unenterprising.

In farming the case is different. An indolent farmer who rents under a landlord who is indifferent to good cultivation somehow manages to carry on for a great number of years in a slovenly manner, so long as he can make a margin of profit which will provide him with the necessities of life. But the worst of it is that while he remains in possession the nation suffers. The adjoining farmer, if he is already farming "high," cannot make up the loss accruing to the nation by the want of enterprise on the part of the indolent. Very often it is not indolence, nor being overrun by game, but the lack of capital, the lack of labour power; but loss to the nation inevitably follows.

There is also the farmer who "farms to leave"—who corrodes the potential capital in land. The loss to the nation does not even stop here. The owner of a large estate may also be short of capital, and with the best will in the world is unable to supply his tenants with adequate buildings, and through this kind of "private enterprise" probably the nation

suffers far more than through habitual laziness and ignorance on the part of the farmer. Thus many an indolent, unenterprising landowner or farmer, protected by the barbed wire of private enterprise, has squatted upon acres and acres of our diminishing cultivated areas, and has remained undisturbed, a menace to Britain within her encircling seas.

Then came the War; and in less than two years we were threatened with imminent starvation as incoming food-ship after food-ship was sent to the bottom of the sea by German submarines. It took us nearly three years to discover, in our slow, blundering way, that private enterprise on English acres was not delivering the goods. England was producing only £4 to the acre to Belgium's £20. Whilst Germany was producing enough food from every 100 acres to feed seventy-five persons, the United Kingdom only fed forty persons from 100 acres. Private enterprise was discovered to be—I was going to say a man of straw, but that simile is too good, for if we had possessed the straw we should have had the grain—private enterprise was discovered to be a man of sawdust. It was not until the end of 1916 that we passed the Defence of the Realm (Acquisition of Land) Act, and it was not until 1917 that County Agricultural Executive Committees were set up, under the Cultivation

of Lands Order, 1917, armed with the drastic powers of Regulation 2 M, which could determine the lease of any person who by reason of incompetency or persistent neglect did not make proper use of his land.

In spite of the spirit of brotherhood which leapt like a flame to the hearts of most men, while facing the common danger of starvation and invasion, stimulating the squire to grasp the hand in fellowship of the poacher (he might turn out to be a useful sniper), inspiring the farmer to drive his man to the nearest tribunal in order to extol his labours as essential to the conduct of the farm (oh, what wonderfully short memories now have we that victory is ours!); in spite of duchesses who became dairymaids, the goods were not being delivered, and private enterprise began to bear an aspect of fear when confronted with a multitude of islanders demanding bread. Suddenly agriculture as a cult became fashionable. Indeed, it stood in some danger of being suffocated by aristocratic patronage. "Let us," I heard Lord Ernle, when President of the Board of Agriculture, say in the drawing-room of the Countess of Sandwich, "let us have a sense of proportion. Do not let us talk about bees. Marie Antoinette became a dairymaid when the people of France clamoured for bread. But she was too late. Let us not be too late."

We were very nearly too late in insisting upon the invasion of private property and setting the plough to work—very nearly. It was not until the winter of 1917-18 that we managed to plough up 1,806,601 acres of grass land. The Corn Production Act was passed in August 1917, but what was more efficacious in the enforcement of good cultivation was the formation of County Agricultural Committees with plenary powers. D.O.R.A. (2 M) speedily became the community's Diana in the hunting of big and little game. She, with shameless effrontery, shot her shafts in the private deer parks and the game preserve. Venison and pheasant, strangely enough, appeared on tables other than those of the rich. Landowners regarded this invasion of the rights of private property with mixed feelings. Those who had lost something far more precious than private property resigned themselves to the will of the nation; others, who posed as patriots and sat in the highest places of the realm, put up a stubborn fight against this invasion by the public, "For they had many possessions." But they, too, had to succumb as the tractor remorselessly ploughed its way through the well-groomed turf of many an ancestral park. Farmers, who had waited so long for a tariff to give them high prices without the exertion of producing more corn, now found themselves harnessed to a machine which was driven by

fellow-farmers, who shouted directions as they ruthlessly tore up their unproductive acres, whilst others sent out with the drill were told what seed to sow according to the needs of the nation.

A six years' charter had been drawn up, which guaranteed farmers against serious loss for sowing wheat and oats, by the fixing of minimum prices. That was the carrot held in front of them as they toiled across the furrows; but the size of the carrot was not to their liking, and the longer they ploughed the smaller became the carrot. County Agricultural Executive Committees would see that game should not eat up their crops; rents would not be raised if the guaranteed prices came into effect; and the labourer should have what Mr. Lloyd George was pleased to call a living wage of 25s. a week, including all allowances, which sum could be further increased should the newly-set-up Agricultural Wages Boards so decide.

When this Act was passing through its difficult birth, in August 1917, an attempt was made by the Labour Party to raise the minimum wage to 30s. instead of 25s. But Mr. Prothero, with the plaintive wail of a plover passing over derelict fields scarred with cattle hoofs, said that the Corn Production Act would, if 30s. was fixed as a minimum, soon become a Grass Production Act. In spite of this pessimistic

prediction, in a few months' time the minimum for England and Wales became 30s., and in 1920 it had risen to 46s.

This interference with the rights of an employer, who had been accustomed to give almost any wage he chose, was naturally resented, but it soon became evident to all that as men daily slipped away from the land to shoulder a rifle or to make ammunition, corn would never be produced unless labourers were ensured, not only a reasonable wage, but also a status far different from that which they had held in the past. In effect the Act said, "You farmers must give up individual bargaining with men, and join a union to discuss the payment of wages over wide areas; and you workers must be organised as well, in order to elect your representatives to sit on the Agricultural Wages Board and your District Wages Committees, in equal numbers with the farmers, in order to arrive at decisions and make the Act operative."

The result was magical. To-day, in many counties, 90 per cent. of the farmers are enrolled in the National Farmers' Union, and 300,000 farm workers are members of either the National Union of Agricultural Workers or of the Workers' Union. Nor did interference with private enterprise stop at this. The hours for which labourers should work without payment of overtime were to be fixed by mutual agreement between employers and

employed. No farmer could charge more than 3s. for a farm-tied cottage in lieu of wages ; and milk, potatoes, board and lodging were to be supplied at prices the Board should determine. Orders were issued as to the prices at which milk, beef, mutton, wool, pork, bacon, eggs, veal, potatoes, and fruit were to be sold. Heifer calves were not allowed to be slaughtered to make dainty lunches for profiteers.

Thus out of the welter of war we see the emergence of Hodge from the lowly position of a farm hand, dictated to and dragooned by farmer, policeman, parson, and squire, to a status as a citizen whose advice and experience were sought, not only by Boards fixing wages and hours, by Food Control Committees, but even by County Agricultural Executive Committees, where he began to appear, though often a lonely figure, seated side by side with wealthy farmers, and adjudicating with them as to whether farms were properly cultivated or not, and in many cases deciding upon the determination of the leases of ill-cultivated lands.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES TRIED TO SAVE THE SITUATION

SINCE Arthur Young published his famous Travels, Sir Rider Haggard his Survey, Sir Daniel Hall his *Pilgrimage of British Farming*, we have not had so illuminating a report of the condition of British farming as is to be found in the extracts issued from time to time by the Ministry of Agriculture in their *Journal* of the work of the County Agricultural Committees. Those who care to plod through the pages of the *Minutes of Evidence of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1919 to 1920*, on which I sat as a member, will find much upon which to reflect. For the moment these Reports will suffice and, though it is unfortunate that there is no complete published Report, we can glean from the pages of the *Journal* a sufficient revelation of the nakedness of our land.

It must not be supposed that these Reports were intended to reveal to us the nakedness of the land; they were published to show what splendid work County Executive Committees

have done, as indeed they have. In studying this display of energy we learn what we have lost and *are* losing in food production by leaving our most vital industry to the tender mercies of private enterprise, and allowing it to get adrift as a ship without a rudder.

Let me say first of all that England and Scotland — and especially Scotland — contain some of the finest farmers that are to be found in the whole world. As breeders of shorthorn cattle and of sheep the reputation of individual British farmers is world-wide and needs no defence; but the virtues of these individuals are not extensive enough to cloak the incompetence of many of those who occupy the land not only as tenant-farmers, but also as owners. Indeed, in examining these Reports, I find that the worst husbandmen are those who are occupying-owners, which is in itself a damaging criticism of the argument that all would be well with British farming if every one could own the little patch of land he occupies as tenant!

We have, it is true, some excellent landowners who take their profession as seriously as does a doctor of medicine or of divinity, and I am prepared to take off my hat to landowners such as Lord Rayleigh, Lord Bledisloe, Lord Selborne, Mr. Acland, Mr. Buchanan, or Mr. Christopher Turnor, but their unco-ordinated efforts are but backwaters in the turgid stream of our national agricultural life. From a

national standpoint the efforts of one or two civil servants had a more far-reaching effect than the individual efforts of our best farmers and best landowners. The nation owes its debt of gratitude to men like Sir Daniel Hall, and Mr. F. C. L. Floud, C.B. (who was the chief official of the Food Production Department), and those other much maligned "bureaucrats," with their subordinate associates, who constituted the driving force behind the Cultivation Orders, rather than to the Ministers of State who gesticulate so grandiosely before the public.

Now let us see what a few extracts from these Reports reveal to us as to the condition of the land in many an agricultural district of England, even at the time when the nation's food supply was in peril.

"Baynard's Estate, Cranleigh, is an estate situated on the Surrey and Sussex borders, distant 3 miles from Cranleigh, and comprising some 1362 acres, of which 405 acres were arable, 457 acres pasture, and 500 acres were occupied by woods, buildings, roads, etc.

"The estate was purchased by its present owner some sixteen years ago; some 250 acres had been allowed to go out of cultivation, and were covered with briars, seedling birch trees, rough grass, and weeds. The extensive farm buildings were unused, and the cottages stood empty; except for a few horses there was no

stock kept, and the land was overrun with game and rabbits, of which the extensive woods held a large stock. The woods mainly served as game covert, though there was some fair timber, but the single trees in the arable land offered considerable difficulties to cultivation. The soil is of a heavy character, sub-soil clay and gravel, and in some places is of a brashy nature, while much of it lies very wet."

As the owner was unable to comply with the Committee's wishes to bring the arable land again under the plough, and to convert some of the pasture to arable, the estate was entered upon and possession taken by the Committee. Three good neighbouring farmers, Messrs. Johnston, Sadler, and Fortune, agreed to cultivate the land in accordance with a scheme framed by the Committee through their Executive Officer, and this resulted in 447 acres of corn being added to the supply of the nation, and in the grass land carrying twice the head of stock it carried previously. It is interesting to note that 17 acres of oats grown by the owner yielded only 20 quarters, weighing 28 lb. per bushel!

Nevertheless, the last act of this comedy has not yet been played. It is possible for the ground landlord, after the community has immensely improved the fertility of the soil, to present a claim for damages! Thus we see, under laws provided with loopholes for

vested interests, how a landlord can gaily drive a four-in-hand through an Act of Parliament, and can smilingly, at the end of his adventure, hold out his hand for pence!

“Case No. 4 (Essex).—This farm is typical of some 12,000 acres of heavy grass land in the county. About twenty years ago the farm was acquired as a building estate, and sold out in small plots. A few tin shanties were erected, and one or two plots were pegged out; otherwise nothing was done. The land became overgrown with scrub, and barely sufficed to maintain a few cattle and sheep in store condition. Hedges grew wild, ditches filled up, and drains became blocked. The farm was taken over by the Committee in the summer of 1917, and cultivation began in the early autumn under the direction of an experienced local farmer. An inspection was made on the 7th May 1918.” I will not detail the cultural methods employed, as I am afraid these might weary the general reader, but I will merely state that of the total area of 166 acres, 82 acres were under crop, 35 acres were bare fallow in preparation for wheat the following autumn, whilst 49 acres were left in grass. The Report goes on to say that the “transformation effected on this land reflects the greatest credit on the management.”

“Case No. 5 (Hampshire).—This is a compact farm of 600 acres in extent, mostly arable,

and situated on clay or red loam, of good quality, underlying the chalk. For about twenty years before the War it had been occupied by successive owners, but previously its rental value would probably have been 10s. or 12s. an acre. In 1916, when the farm was brought to the notice of the Board, the owner and occupier of the farm was a wealthy business man who only occasionally visited his property, which was managed by his bailiff. A Report made to the Board in February 1917, showed that the farm was then in a deplorable condition, due to an utter lack of business management. There were 17 corn ricks on the farm of the harvests of 1914, 1915, 1916, all infested with vermin and rapidly wasting. The stock comprised 13 horses, 100 ill-conditioned sheep, and 16 young cattle. There was an indifferent equipment of implements, including two serviceable grass-cutters and two binders, but much of the machinery lying about was broken down or out of order. The arable land had been allowed to get extremely foul, and nearly 200 acres were stated to be in such a condition that only a summer fallow and a most thorough cleaning could possibly restore it to a condition in which it could grow crops. The labour on the farm, though scanty, was sufficient, properly directed, to have produced far better results."

This last remark is interesting, because it illustrates the point that, however efficient farm

workers may be themselves, if their labour is ill-directed by an incompetent farmer or bailiff it is more or less wasted ; and farm labourers feel this more bitterly, perhaps, than any other form of injustice. The landlord's responsibility cannot be shifted on to the shoulders of a bailiff or foreman. The nation rightly holds the landlord to account, for whilst he remains in possession he prevents the good husbandman from cultivating the land, and the nation suffers.

“The farm was taken over by the Agricultural Executive Committee in March 1917, and a bailiff installed who worked under the direct supervision of the Committee's Executive Officer. An inspection was made in June 1918. Of the ploughed area, 400 acres were then under grain crops, and 100 acres under fallow. . . . Owing to the extremely neglected condition of this farm when taken over by the Committee it was not expected that a model farm would materialise in a short time. There is no doubt, however, that the condition of the farm is being rapidly improved, and the work is a useful object-lesson to the district.”

The condition of this farm reminds me of a tract of country I once walked over in 1910 in North Hampshire, and I wonder if any great improvement is visible. As I walked across a field where the withered unharvested grasses and the tall, seed-bearing wild parsley and

thistles were shoulder-high, rabbits scurried away at almost every step I took, while pheasants and partridges filled the air with the whir of wings. The first cottage I stumbled across was literally falling down. The thatch had long since disappeared, leaving the rafters and beams as bare as bones to the open sky. As I entered the village I came to a row of four cottages under one roof. Only one of these was occupied; the other three, with their doors and windows battered in, had been left as desolations in which rats might play havoc, and through which the moaning wind might fitfully wander. From the occupied cottage issued a slatternly young wife with a sporting dog at her heels. It was probably the gamekeeper's. The villagers told me that when a cottage became unoccupied no attempt was ever made by the owner to keep it in repair. Where pheasants are wanted the peasant is not.

On one side of the valley which runs from Inkpen Beacon to Hurstbourne Tarrant, where fields given over to the thistle, the wild carrot, and the burdock form a vast rabbit warren, I could detect that the plough had at one time been at work.

Though this was the high road from Hungerford to Andover, innumerable rabbits crossed and recrossed it in the broad daylight, and the feeling of isolation grew upon me until I began to wonder if I were really in over-populated

England. No hedges flanked the road, nor ditches either; for on each side was a broad stretch of green grass divided by this white ribbon of a road, and beyond the grass, tier upon tier, rose oaks and beeches. It might have been a valley in some distant, uninhabited country, and the tropical, flaming patches of herb-willow served but to heighten the illusion. I lay down upon the grass by the roadside to rest and to drink in the beauty of the valley. Save for the flapping of the wings of the pigeons, and the poignant cry of the plover, not a sound was to be heard. . . . When I rose, greensward and roadway were speckled with the white tufts of the bobbing tails of countless rabbits, and as I walked forward companies of them kept retreating like an army at the sound of the bugle. The sight was enough to stir the blood of the most indifferent of poachers!

Grass grew avidly in the middle of the road. It had time to grow, apparently, between the going of one cart and the coming of the next. I was not surprised to find when I reached Hurstbourne Tarrant (which Cobbett used to call Uphusband) that all the available accommodation had been taken by "the shooters from London."<sup>1</sup>

It is generally assumed by townsmen that the occupier of a farm must necessarily be a practical man having some knowledge of farm-

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Awakening of England*, by F. E. Green.

ing, but it is apparent from several instances cited in these Reports that this by no means follows. They give two instances in the county of Kent. One was of a farm of 216 acres, "in a deplorable condition, having been occupied by a tenant with no knowledge of farming." Yet, curiously enough, this tenant was allowed to remain on the farm as foreman (!) under the instructions of a supervisor appointed by the Committee, and the Board's technical expert reported in August 1918, that a "marvellous transformation" had taken place in the cultivation in spite of the handicap of an inefficient foreman. The tenancy was subsequently determined, and the farm is still in the hands of the Committee. The other, Case No. 6 (Kent), was a farm of 230 acres which "had been occupied for four years by a man who had formerly been a coachman, and who possessed neither the capital, experience, nor ability to make a successful foreman. He seemed to have kept few stock of any kind, and to have regarded much of the land as uncultivable. About half the Down land affords useful grazing, but no use whatever was made of it. Hedges were overgrown and neglected, and fences and gates were allowed to fall to pieces. Some idea of the neglected state of the farm may be gathered from the fact that a well-known valuer, appointed by the Committee to make an inspection, reported that it was not worth cultivating. Two

members of the Committee—both local farmers—had, however, known the farm under better conditions, and on their recommendation the Committee decided to take it over. The tenant was allowed to remain in occupation of the farmhouse and to act as *foreman* under the instructions of a member of the Committee.

“The farm was inspected in August 1918. The cropping of the arable land which had been cleaned and well cultivated was as follows: Wheat (47 acres) looking well and promising, 5 quarters per acre; Oats (15 acres) a good crop, expected to yield 6 quarters per acre; etc.” Here, again, the inspector’s Report spoke of the “marvellous transformation” which had taken place.

Case No. 7 (Leicestershire) gives an interesting instance of a field of 20 acres which was mostly under gorse when the Committee took possession, yet was made to yield a crop estimated at 7 quarters per acre.

Another instance of an owner-occupier found guilty of bad farming is cited in Case No. 8 (Norfolk). This was a farm of 350 acres, which seems to have been given over chiefly to the cultivation of weeds. As requests to clean the land and grow corn were ignored, the Committee stepped in and took possession; and as the owner-occupier was not short of capital it was arranged that the Committee should farm the land with his money. Essential

repairs were made to the farm buildings, which were in a very dilapidated condition. Of the five cottages on the farm only one was habitable, two were past repair, and the other two were made habitable by the Committee. It was estimated that over £3000 was added to the value of the grain grown in 1918 through the efforts of the Committee.

Case No. 9 (Rutland) is another interesting illustration of the unenterprising occupying-owner. This was a park of about 900 acres, about half of which was taken over by deer and rabbits. Some 300 acres of this park were ploughed."

The next case, No. 10 (Somerset), is also an illustration of mismanagement by an occupying-owner. This farm "comprises 286 acres, of which about 164 acres are occupied by the owner and the remainder (all grass) let out for grazing. The land was in an absolutely derelict condition when taken over; the arable land (upwards of 40 acres) was full of weeds, and it had not been cropped for from two to five years; the fences in bad repair and overgrown with docks, brambles, and thistles; the buildings needed repairing. With the Board's approval, possession of the greater part (164 acres) was taken in August 1917, and the remainder a few weeks later; and it was decided to make use of the farm as a training centre for soldiers."

After describing how the Committee cultivated the land, the Report adds: "The decision to use the farm as a training centre for soldiers was fully justified by the results. Accommodation had been found for 30-40 men at a time. During the six months previous to the inspection between 70 and 80 men had been trained and sent out. The Inspector reported that in his opinion great credit was due to the management for the way in which, with quite unskilled labour, the condition of the farm had been so greatly improved since the Committee's occupation.

Case No. 11 (Staffordshire).—This farm of 113 acres was reported to be the most derelict farm the Committee's Executive Officer had ever seen. Ninety acres, which should have been arable, were overrun with twitch grass, and the only stock on the farm was 8 or 10 cattle, and about the same number of horses. The Committee took possession in March 1918.

Case No. 12 (E. Suffolk) is again an instance of the mismanagement of an occupying-owner. When he purchased the farm in 1912 it "was in fair order, but had since been allowed to fall into a deplorable condition. . . . There is an absence of any regular system of cropping. There were 4 horses on the farm (148 acres) one of which was a fair, useful animal, the other three very inferior. There is a good house empty and a good cottage empty.

Buildings generally are out of repair and very dilapidated."

The production of wheat in 1917 amounted to only 2 to  $2\frac{1}{4}$  qrs. per acre. After the Committee took it over, the wheat crop (50 acres) was estimated to yield 5 to 7 qrs. per acre.

Case No. 13 (Warwickshire) presents an amazing picture. "This land was brought to the notice of the Board in the summer of 1917. The area consisted of a farm of about 160 acres, which had been in the tenant's occupation for twenty-seven years, and was entirely in grass, except for a neglected field of about 9 acres; and of an adjoining farm of about 305 acres over which the same tenant had shooting rights, but which, except for this, was unlet and unoccupied and had not been farmed for thirty years. In a Report to the Agricultural Executive Committee the latter farm was described as generally overgrown with thorn bushes, and infested with rabbits, while the ground was covered with worthless herbage. The stock on the tenanted farm comprised 9 cows (7 in milk), 12 calves, 2 ponies, and 1 cart-horse, all being in very poor condition. The tenant worked the farm without any outside labour. The farm buildings and cottages were either in bad repair or derelict. The whole area (465 acres) was stated to have been previously let at a rental of £500 a year, and the late tenant had grown 60 bushels per acre on

part of the land. With the Board's approval the Committee took possession of the entire area, and immediately set about the work of reclamation and cultivation. The work was done entirely by means of prisoner labour, for which a camp with accommodation for about 100 prisoners was found on the farm.

“The first operation the Committee had to undertake was to clear the land ; this they did by cutting down the bush in the first instance, and then systematically uprooting the stumps with steam tackle. In this way they cleared close upon 100 acres in 1917, and cropped it with beans (27 acres), oats and barley (60 acres), and potatoes (9 acres). The Inspector's Report runs thus: ‘The hedges, which had run wild and could hardly be distinguished from the “bush,” have all been cut down to the ground, and many hundred yards of ditches have been opened and cleared. The work has been carried out under the direction of a member of the Executive Committee, with the assistance of a resident bailiff. The clearing of the farm and bringing it back to cultivation was a very big undertaking indeed, and the Committee deserve the greatest credit for what they have been able to accomplish.’”

Previous to taking over this land its letting value was just its sporting or shooting value, about 5s. per acre ; to-day the Committee consider that its letting value is 20s. per acre.

The *Journal* (August 1920) informs us of cases where legal proceedings have been taken to enforce the Cultivation Orders since Armistice Day. It should be borne in mind that after the Armistice the compulsory breaking up of grass land ceased, and the work of the Agricultural Committees consisted, or should have consisted, in improving the general standard of farming in their respective counties. There was, unfortunately, a general slackening all round. Cultivation Orders were only served where the rules of good husbandry were not being observed, or where, in other respects, land was being neglected. The cases cited illustrate, as much as the preceding ones, how bad farmers will not even study their own financial interest in the cultivation of the land, and how they cannot be trusted to carry out Cultivation Orders, which have only been issued, since the Armistice, where ill-cultivation is of too scandalous a nature to be overlooked.

“(I) In East Suffolk 33 acres of good corn-growing land were bought in 1918, and the purchaser turned out the tenant, a good farmer, after asking a rent which was more than the land was worth. The land was then allowed to lie idle and become derelict, in spite of the service of Cultivation Orders by the Agricultural Executive Committee. The owner was, therefore, prosecuted for failure to comply with the Orders, and fined £20,

or, in default of payment, six weeks' imprisonment.

“(II) A notice to plough 6 acres of land was served on a farmer in Worcestershire in August 1919, *but no action had been taken by him up to February 1920*. It was shown that the land had lain derelict since the 1918 harvest, and about £80 worth of food was lost to the nation. The defaulter was prosecuted and fined £10 and £2, 2s. costs.

“(IV) A prosecution for a disregard of Cultivation Orders issued by the Surrey Committee resulted in the occupying-owner of the land being fined £50, and his agent £10. The Orders in question were issued in October and November 1918, and required that certain arable fields should be cleaned and cultivated in preparation for food crops for the harvest of 1919. Practically nothing was done, however, to carry out these Orders up to 1919.

“(V) An occupier of a field of 23 acres in Kent was recently prosecuted to comply with a Cultivation Order. The field contained a large quantity of thistles, brambles, gorse, and ant-hills, which the occupier was instructed to remove and destroy. The thistles were dealt with, but very little action was taken to remove the other rubbish, which encumbered a large proportion of the field. The defendant was fined £20 and £5, 5s. costs, and has been

served with a further Order to carry out the necessary work."

These instances are sufficient to show the waste of time and the loss of crops to the nation involved in this system of farming by inspectorship, even when the inspectors were still armed with Orders under D.O.R.A., which cease to operate as soon as the Agriculture Act comes into force. Indeed D.O.R.A. had already fallen into disuetude. This is unfortunate, for "2 M" got land cultivated without the tedious tergiversation of Part IV. of the Corn Production Act. Under Article (I) (f) of Regulation 2 M, to quote the Ministry's own words, "the Ministry may determine the tenancy of an occupier of land who by reason of incompetence or persistent neglect shows that he cannot make proper use of his land. This drastic step was only taken after repeated warnings, and usually after several Cultivation Notices had been served without effect. The notice may be nullified if on appeal by the tenant to arbitration, on the question whether the holding has been properly cultivated, the arbitrator takes the view that it has been. It is of interest that out of twenty cases where the tenant exercised his right of appeal the decision was against the tenant in every case. The total number of Determination Notices issued since January 1917, is 809, relating to an area of 61,000 acres."

So long have occupiers of land, whether they be tenants or owners, been left monarchs of all they survey, even from the top of a weather-beaten manure heap or a field of couch-grass, that it is only natural they should, as a class, resent interference from any one. The pill carried no sugar with it when the Cultivation Order came from a Committee comprised of fellow-farmers, instead of from bureaucrats in Whitehall. On the contrary, it made the dose all the more nauseous. I knew that a farmer of a certain type would cut off his nose to spite his face in his obstinate determination to farm as badly as he chose. I knew, for instance, a farmer who, in war-time, refused to cut his grass rather than pay soldiers 4s. 6d. a day at a time labour was scarce. But it is from the sober pages of the *Journal* that I learn of a small farmer in Buckinghamshire who refused to have his oats cut because part of his farm had been ploughed up by horses and men supplied by the Agricultural Executive Committee! Rather than harvest a magnificent crop of oats, such as he could never hope to grow himself, he allowed his cattle to stray in the field while the crop was still standing, and he was convicted and fined under the Growing Corn (Crops) Order, 1917. The Ministry finally determined the tenancy of the farm in February 1920.

It seems incredible that a Northamptonshire

farmer of 242 acres should not only ill-cultivate his farm, but that he should not take the trouble, when hay stood at famine prices, to thatch even one of his four stacks of hay. Nor does it seem credible that a tenant of a farm of 262 acres in Glamorganshire, which was described as "thoroughly foul," should allow his stock to wander at their own sweet will from field to field damaging growing crops. Yet we have it on the word of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The northern farmer apparently is a more stubborn monarch to deal with than his negligent and incompetent brother of the South. "This farm," reports the *Journal*, "was in a notoriously dilapidated condition, neither the owner nor the occupier (both of whom resided in the farmhouse) being capable of farming it properly. The service of Cultivation Notices had not the slightest effect, although the tenant was prosecuted and fined for negligence. The Committee also made unsuccessful efforts to persuade the owner to let the farm to a capable tenant, and finally, with the approval of the Ministry, took possession of the land and began to cultivate it, the owner and occupier being left in possession of the farmhouse. The owner and occupier obstructed the Committee and threatened violence, and for this they were summoned and each fined £25 and £10 costs. The land has now been let by the Committee

to a tenant who has made good progress with the cultivation."

Now that the Durham County Council has, I believe, a majority of miners upon it, I do not think it is very likely that this class of owner or occupier would be treated with such tender solicitude; but, unfortunately, the power of compelling good cultivation has been rendered almost innocuous now that we are blessed with an Agriculture Act which reduces those responsible for enforcing good farming by inspectorship to a state of impotence.

## CHAPTER III

### NOBLESSE OBLIGE

I HAVE quoted somewhat lengthily from the official Reports of the County Agricultural Executive Committees, 1917-20, because they give us a penetrating insight into the condition of English farming, and at the same time because I wanted to give them every credit for what they have done when they went forth on to the untilled fields to use that powerful weapon, D.O.R.A. 2 M.

It is through the operations of these Committees we have now a survey made by *farmers themselves* of practically all the cultivated area of Great Britain. True, it has taken a European War to produce such a survey. Nevertheless, we now have enduring documentary proof which neither landowners nor farmers can refute, for it has been graven by their own hands. What they have done to rectify matters, even in a small way, is an earnest of the things they might do if they would act in co-operation with the whole community.

These Reports show us how it is possible for occupiers and owners to remain in business

undisturbed by competition for a number of years, and to treat the raw material over which they work or slumber as though it were a rabbit warren, a pheasant preserve, or a wilderness for the grazing of rough cattle—and even to do this at a time when the nation was on short rations for food. In no other industry, even under capitalism, is this possible.

One would have thought that at a time of national stress, when our food supply was imperilled by the acts of ruthless and daring submarine commanders, that the old English nobility would have risen to the sublimity of the appeal to patriotism and thrown open the gates of their spacious parks to the tractor and the seed-drill, in order that the nation should not suffer from the want of bread or milk. One would have thought that whilst many men were giving all they had to give—their lives—our nobility would have gladly turned over a few acres of their parks to produce food. Unfortunately for them as a class—with notable exceptions—not only did they fail to lead, but they failed to follow. There were nobles who actually impeded the race between the plough and the submarine.

In some counties, where the feudal spirit had infected farmers with its poison of servility, the County Agricultural Executive Committee showed the white feather when approaching the domains of those great landowners who

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kept a pack of hounds, or held vast shooting rights, or were known to be liberal landlords "if you kept on the right side of them." On the other hand, in counties where landowners were unpopular as a class, Executive Committees entered their parks and did their duty. It was in districts in which farms were mostly let at uneconomic rents that we saw the weakness of Committees, composed almost entirely of tenant-farmers.

Most of us expected in war-time, surely, that great landowners who bore historic names, instead of waiting for the issue of Cultivation Orders, would themselves be taking the field astride the tractor. Yet opposition was shown, not only in districts which might be described as "dukeries," but also inside the Cabinet. Indeed, two great landowners, who were Cabinet Ministers, put up so stubborn a fight against the right of the nation to enter their parks that the Prime Minister, I am told, kindled with a spark of Celtic fire, frightened them into submission by warning them that a half-starved population might come and burn down their stately country mansions.

To illustrate the extraordinary lack of public spirit on the part of great landowners, I will present some of my own personal investigations made in February and March 1918.

West Sussex is a county which is largely owned by three historic families—the Duke of

Richmond, the Duke of Norfolk, Lord Leconfield, and one family which may become historic, but which is at present classed as parvenu—Earl Cowdray. I made this tour, it must be remembered, at a time when our valuable, recreative city parks were turned into kitchen gardens, and when the Food Production Department had informed us that we were seriously behindhand with our plough programme, and that “wherever there is willingness to raise more food a plot shall be found if undeveloped land exists.”

“I believe,” said Mr. Prothero (now Lord Ernle), on 9th February 1918, “that the War will be terminated by the test of endurance, and that the country which commands the last sack of wheat is going to win. Those who oppose the ploughing up of grass land have not a leg to stand on. Every additional sack of corn, every ton of potatoes grown in this country, brings us a step nearer victory.”

Well, I wanted to see what these great landowners were doing on that part of their vast estates which is not let to tenant-farmers, but is under their own direct supervision. I made straight for Chichester, the seat of Government for West Sussex, where I was fortunate to meet the Sussex farmers sitting at their Agricultural Executive Committee. I should like to say that no body of men could have treated me with greater courtesy or frankness than these gentlemen, some of whom farmed thousands of

acres of the richest as well as of the poorest corn-growing land in England. They not only gave me all the information at their disposal, but, after a general discussion round the table, deputed two of their members to discuss the subject of ploughing the parks with me for a couple of hours.

One of these farmers was the famous Mr. Passmore, who was the first farmer in England to try the experiment of distributing basic slag on the chalk Downs. This resulted not only in a surprisingly increased herbage, but also in a larger head of stock being kept and in lambs being fattened without cake on the slagged downland grass. He it was who took derelict farm after derelict farm, and managed to grow, with the aid of artificial manures, 60 bushels of wheat to the acre on the top of the Downs, extending his holdings to 3500 acres.

It must not be imagined, however, that the land covered by the large parks I surveyed lies only on the chalk. From Petworth to the sea you get a great variety of soil. Petworth and Cowdray Park are chiefly on the greensand; West Lavington on the heavy gault clay; Burton on very poor greensand; whilst West Dean and Goodwood, though they lie mainly on the chalk, touch also the rich valley deposits of brick earth, which, stretching out to the sea, form the finest corn-growing land in England. Then there are strips of chalk, of marl, and of

upper greensand, lying along the lower slopes of the Downs—strips fruitful of many a bumper crop.

To know what you can do with the soil, even with chalk soil, you must summer it and winter it, as farmers say. A farmer told me that on one side of a certain road, unkindly called "Starvelot," he could grow wheat; but on the other side of the road of apparently identical soil, expressively called "Stonecrop," he could not recover the cost of the seed.

Progressive as some of these farmers are, they gave me the feeling that a deep-seated veneration for feudalism still biased their decisions. They seemed very loath to intrude upon the Duke of Richmond's park at Goodwood, or the Duchess of Norfolk's at Arundel, or Lord Leconfield's at Petworth. These were the old aristocratic families who generally made the easiest landlords.

In spite of their protestations that they did not care "tuppence who people were" they invariably excused these owners of old titles on the score that they kept up a good number of sheep, like the Duke of Richmond; or that the land at Petworth Park was not worth ploughing. It was the new squirearchy who, they reckoned, "were the curse of the country and bred trouble": those city people who bought large country estates for the sake of sport, and added field to field to increase their

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parkland, engrossing farm after farm—a state of things which became worse when you entered the county of Surrey.

They were proud of the fact that they had ploughed up the trotting track at Southwick, sowing the 24 acres with wheat, and the golf links of Horsham and Chichester, covering 34 acres; and 90 acres of West Grinstead Park, where deer were kept, and 100 acres at Shermanbury Park. But in the five large parks which I walked over after I left Chichester—Goodwood, West Dean, Cowdray, Petworth, and Arundel—very little had been done.

In these five huge parks no fresh land had been ploughed up, excepting a few acres where the remounts had been stationed in Petworth Park. One would imagine that *noblesse oblige* would have spurred these owners of old titles to be the first to move, following the example of the Duke of Marlborough, instead of suffering the humiliation of being ordered to plough, when their country was threatened by semi-starvation, and their estates by invasion.

The Duke of Richmond had not then received any orders to break up land. It is true that he kept a good number of sheep—from 1000 to 1100—but as deer should give way to sheep, so sheep should have been made to give way to wheat. Outside the park gates a meadow, where ewes were brought in at lambing-time, had been ploughed up, and the sheep

moved to a fold inside the park gates under the shelter of the wonderful evergreen oaks. Yet inside the park I actually found some fields which, although ploughed in 1917, had been allowed to go back to grass.

There was some land at Hat Hill which might have come under the plough with advantage to the nation, especially as there was land adjoining, practically of the same texture, which had been cultivated for years. Sheep could no longer be used as an excuse. Too long had England suffered from the sheep-eating men, as Mr. Chesterton says in his delightful, though erratic "History." Now men should eat the sheep and win bread in abundance.

Striding across Goodwood racecourse the woods of West Dean Park become visible, and beyond lies a valley of beautiful alluvial soil. This estate runs, I believe, for 9 miles through the valley, and is some of the finest corn-growing land in England. This was pointed out by Cobbett in his *Rural Rides*: "And here am I on the turnpike road from Midhurst to Chichester. The land goes along through some of the finest farms in the world. It is impossible for corn land and agriculture to be finer than these." And to-day we have the authority of Hall and Russell that "wheat is most extensively grown in the maritime districts of Sussex, and again on the chalk, and lower and

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upper greensand in West Sussex," King Edward VII., who had an eye for pretty soil as well as for pretty ladies, used frequently to stay at West Dean; but this park now belongs to the new aristocracy of commerce, and the Committee had ordered the breaking up of 107 acres.

Coming to Cowdray, I found the Mogul tractor at work breaking up a part called "The Lawns," and here the Agricultural Committee had selected some 70 acres of undoubtedly good turf, which had never been ploughed before, and which looked capable of growing bumper crops. But *inside* the park not a single sod of grass had been turned over. Yet an old man told me his grandfather had spoken to him of the days when this land was ploughed. Possibly an ex-Air Minister did not understand what tightening the belt meant to those who had to live laborious days to keep England from starvation.

I was told by farmers at Chichester that Petworth Park was not worth ploughing, but when I reached Petworth, and talked to estate men who had worked in the park for a great number of years, I found quite a different opinion prevailing. Take, for instance, the level ground fronting the Midhurst road, between the first and second gates in the wall which, by the way, extends for 14 miles. Here I found one man who actually remem-

bered corn being grown on that land forty-five years ago ; and another who had helped to grub up the hedges when it was converted into parkland. "This is the cream of England, sir," exclaimed one man in his enthusiasm for the rich fertility of the soil there. Certainly if the allotments just outside the park walls were any guide to its productivity, it should yield some very fine crops. But here, again, I heard it was either sheep or deer which stood in the way of the plough.

Yet even shepherds—and most of the men I talked with were shepherds or stockmen—realised the importance of bread before mutton. They did not eat the mutton they helped to raise. "This parkland," asserted one shepherd to me, "would produce better crops than the land broken up on the top of Bury Hill." Certainly the land to the north of the park is poor, but this park is so large that something more than 47 acres should have been scheduled for ploughing.

Arundel Park, which consists of 1425 acres, was a more difficult problem than any of the other parks I visited. Here, again, deer formed the chief difficulty. (This obstacle, by the way, to improved cultivation had been unnecessarily strengthened by a stupid letter sent out by the Food Control Department. The Duke of Beaufort produced this letter as the counter-stroke when he was asked to break up more land

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in his deer park simultaneously with the Food Control Department's request that he would keep up his head of deer !)

It is true that deer had been killed in every one of these parks. Indeed, on the morning that I walked over Arundel, twelve had been shot ; but the herds might very well have been considerably reduced in size, killing off more of the bucks. Deer should only have been kept where the land was too poor for sheep.

For the most part there is but a thin layer of soil on the chalk of Arundel Park ; but even here I found indications of certain fields inside the park having been ploughed many years ago. On a treeless slope stretching to the south, and known as Copy Hold Brow, and in Rutting Hill Bottom, the "bores"—infallible evidence left by the plough—are still visible. This slope may not be suitable for the tractor, and I do not say that even if ploughed by horse teams, impoverished as it has been by deer, the land would produce great crops. It has been shown, however, that by the application of artificials, the herbage, at any rate on chalk, can be improved. Better land for tractor ploughing could be found adjoining the Wood Barn, and the old fattening paddocks for bucks.

The powerful arm of feudalism was not by any means confined to keeping the parks of the old aristocracy inviolate from the desecrating touch of the plough. Parks at the foot of

the Downs, such as that at Lavington (which is railed in by a fence painted black and white, as a tribute, no doubt, by the owner to his famous whisky), were allowed also to remain undisturbed.

A few weeks after my visit to West Sussex, at a time when every cottager was exhorted to grow vegetables, and every town dweller to grow mustard and cress in his window-boxes, I received an S.O.S. message from an old naval officer who resided close to the gates of Lord Pirrie's magnificent park at Witley, in Surrey. "The men want allotments," this message ran; "but I cannot get them. Can you help?"

My friend had, with characteristic bulldog pertinacity, appealed to the Food Production Department; to the County Agricultural Committee; he had bearded the officials at the Board of Agriculture; he had even button-holed his friend, Lord Rhondda, the Food Controller, after lunch at the Reform Club. His lordship urged him to "stick to his guns," for he had a strong case. But though he held on tight, not a rod of land would Lord Pirrie cede inside his spacious park.

The village of Brook lies in a sleepy hollow on the edge of the great park. On the hill dominating it stands the agent's house, placed, no doubt, so that from this coign of vantage the wants of the villagers should immediately

come under the agent's notice and be immediately communicated to his lord. Unfortunately, however, through some oversight, or through the wrong filling in of forms by uneducated men, or through not memorialising the authorities and the Tite Barnacles in the proper way, the eager desire for allotments, expressed as far back as the previous October, had not been granted. This was all the more extraordinary, for immediately one left the village and took the road to Thursley nothing but acres and acres of undulating grass land and woods were visible.

On one side of the narrow lane, over-arched by a bridge, which supports a private four-mile motor track that takes Lord Pirrie into Haslemere without having to touch the vulgar high road, the grass land was occupied by deer, pheasants, and rabbits, and on the other side by picturesque West Highland cattle, and again by pheasants and rabbits. A small piece of cultivated land was visible which, during our tragic struggle for bread, had been cropped with buckwheat and lupin, for pheasants must have grain, though peasants may lack bread. This park consisted of about 2500 acres interspersed with woods.

Seven men, who did not live in Lord Pirrie's cottages, were bold enough to ask to be allowed to cultivate a quarter of an acre of this uncultivated land each. Two of these

men had no gardens ; and the others, who had, found them periodically flooded, in consequence of a defective culvert, by a brook. The men patriotically proposed to dig the land after labouring all day for employers. They said they would dig it by moonlight if they were given access to it, and they had the effrontery to select for their labours a very suitable piece of under-grazed land which was inside the park fence close to their cottages. So enraged were they with the rebuffs they received that they actually proposed to take the land by force under the leadership of the naval officer. But the land, he said, was not his fighting element, and he was getting too old for that sort of thing. The men were eager to put up pigsties, for millions of acorns are shed from the oaks in the park in the autumn, and they could get manure from the army camps near by at 3s. 7d. a load. But the agent stated that he did not like the site these men had selected, because of the number of pheasants from the park which would consume the smallholders' crops! A strange objection to advance in war-time, when agricultural committees had the power to appoint warreners to enter any private property and destroy the pests. And this objection was, to my amazement, upheld by the Land Commissioner. Lord Pirrie was a great man. Was he not confidential adviser to the Cabinet? Had he not built a house for

the curate? Though no unsightly pigsties disfigured the cottage gardens of lodge-keepers and carters on this tidy feudal estate, did not my lord keep a model piggery, in which pigs with high pedigrees had the satisfaction of looking out of glazed windows over an extensive estate unspoiled by the sight of plebeian pigsties? Although no unsightly fowl-house disfigured the cottage gardens of lodge-keepers and gardeners, did not my lord show how hens should be kept on a model poultry farm?—and, on the estates of big game preservers, poultry runs in war-time *had* to be extended.

It is true that in the days of Mr. Whittaker Wright the park contained 5 farms, and 19 plough-teams used to be employed in producing corn at Winkford, Wareham, Grayswood, Blowhead Green, and Birtly Farms. But farm buildings are apt to become an eyesore on a tidied-up feudal estate. When they do, they should be levelled to the ground!

It is true that some of this land once grew 6 quarters of wheat to the acre; but the County Agricultural Committee had reported that it was not worth ploughing. Therefore, was his lordship to blame?

However, after a long struggle, the men did get a few rods for allotments, though they were on a patch of land subject to periodical floodings and outside the park fence. Nevertheless, they valiantly dug up their little patches

by moonlight, and the County Agricultural Committee did eventually order 230 acres to be ploughed; but you cannot expect patriotic plutocrats busy building ships to have time to attend to Cultivation Orders; and what is a fine of £50, which he had to pay for neglecting to carry out the Orders, to a man of Lord Pirrie's wealth? He still remains in possession of an estate from which he has erased 5 farms. After all, was he not a benefactor to his poorer brethren? Did he not build a house for the curate?

Those who care to plough through the minutes and evidence of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, evidence given entirely by farmers, will find sufficient proof, without my stressing the point, that a great deal of the land of England and Scotland, even at a time when Agricultural Executive Committees were in full swing, and Inspectors and Land Commissioners were swarming over the countryside, was being ill-cultivated. The reason given naturally varied. Some alleged that it was due to the sporting proclivities of the owners; some that it was owing to the impoverishment of the landowners, who could no longer repair buildings, gates, fences; some put it down to the defective arterial drainage; and so on, and so forth. Whatever the reason adduced, the fact remains that private enterprise working under inspectorship, as when working uncon-

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trolled, failed to cultivate the land as it should be cultivated.

A manager of a farm of 3000 acres in the heart of Northamptonshire, a farm which is described as a rabbit warren when he took it over, with trees growing through the roofs of cottages, was bold enough to state in his evidence in chief that one of the reasons for ill-cultivation was "the ultra-conservatism and lack of adaptability of the majority of the farming community." This evidence was presented by one who had some hard things to say about "Labour," which, after examination, he generously retracted. We had evidence that good farmers refused to take farms in parts of certain counties where the owners were known to be great sportsmen.

Not all farmers are averse to game. It is not the game-preserving landowner who is the enemy of good cultivation only, or he who hires the shooting. The sporting tenant-farmer can make himself as great a nuisance, if he holds the sporting rights, and Ground Game Acts, and Agricultural Holdings Acts, though they read very nicely in print, are in actual practice no aids to good cultivation. Compensation for damage done by pheasants is very rarely insisted upon, and to be at liberty to shoot ground game is no protection for the farmer. The good farmer will not spend his time with his hand upon the trigger. The

only effectual remedy is to have the legal power to destroy the rabbits in their warren, which often lies just outside the reach of his hand. There are farmers—not good farmers, for the true craftsmen of the fields have too much pride in their work to take farms overrun with rabbits—who are not averse to rabbits running over their ground, and spoiling their meagre crops. I heard a farmer who rented under a duke, boasting, even in war-time, that he could pay his rent out of the rabbits he snared and shot. Why should he trouble to put his hand to the plough?

Perhaps the most damaging indictment against sporting landowners came from the Scottish farmers, than whom there is no finer class of farmers in the world. Before the War we had watched with apprehension the growth of the deer forests spreading over the farm areas with its sinister swelling as of a dark cloud. Before the Selborne Committee, Sir Robert Wright reported: "In 1883 there were 1,710,000 acres of land devoted exclusively to deer forests and sport apart from grazing in the crofting counties of Scotland. In 1912 this area had increased to 2,932,000 acres. Outside the crofting counties there are 668,000 acres, making a total in 1912 of 3,600,000 acres." The witness gave an instance of a small settlement of 1500 acres in the centre of the deer forest area, where some of the lower

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ground is used for arable farming, and a sheep stock is kept on the higher ground. The annual sale from the produce of stock and crops give about £250 at normal prices, while on the same area under deer (4 stags and 2 hinds) the food value is estimated at only £20.

Following this evidence, given in 1916, we get some remarkable testimony from Mr. R. MacDiarmid, Corries, Loch Awe, Argyllshire, tendered before the Royal Commission in January 1920. Mr. MacDiarmid wrote, in a letter presented by the chairman of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland: "A very large area of land within the surrounding district in which I live is taken up with deer forests. It includes the Blackmount Deer Forest, extending to at least 50,000 acres. Confining my remarks to land which has been cleared of sheep within the last twenty-five years, I find that in one parish alone 8 farms lying adjacent have been cleared of sheep. These 8 farms collectively carried a mixed black-faced stock of 20,000 sheep. Some years ago a portion of one farm was restocked with 2000 sheep, while in 1917 the District Agricultural Committee insisted on the shooting tenant restocking with 1000 sheep a farm he had *two years* previously cleared, so that the number of sheep displaced by deer is now reduced to 18,000. The bulk of all this land is sound sheep-grazing, does not

readily storm in winter, and very rarely, if ever, have sheep been hand-fed there. . . . I have further a wide knowledge of similar lands cleared of stock in Argyllshire, Perthshire, and Inverness-shire, a great part of which is adapted to sheep-farming. . . . It is very unfair that sheep are fenced off from deer forests while the deer range all over the sheep land, destroying and eating up the best of the grass. I know deer forests where, in a storm, not one deer remains in the forest ; they are all down on the sheep land, where every knoll cleared of snow is covered with them. I challenge issue with parties who maintain that deer will live on high land where sheep are unable to make a living. If deer were strictly confined to the Highlands there would soon be an end of them."

It appears from the above that an owner, even in war-time, would displace sheep for deer, and an Agricultural Committee could effect but very little change in the displacement.

We have on record that whereas during the few years prior to the War our agricultural population decreased by 16 per cent., game-keepers increased by 25 per cent., and although during the War a certain number of game-keepers were turned into soldiers, whilst others joined the volunteers, or looked after poultry, it seems, judging by the amount of game preserving going on to-day, by the size of

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shooting parties, by the eviction of small farmers from their holdings to make room for gamekeepers, or for sporting farmers subservient to game preservers, that we are rapidly slipping back, in spite of County Agricultural Committees, to pre-war conditions.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE POLICY OF GUARANTEED PRICES

**I**N spite of the earthworks thrown up by the lords of the soil, the defenders of private property, great and small, against the demands of the nation for food, a revolution (spell it with a small r, please Mr. Printer, or people may see Red) was working its way into the heart of rural England in the years 1917-19. But if any one thinks this was due to the guaranteed prices being assured for wheat and oats, he will make a very great mistake. Farmers with wheat guaranteed at 60s. in 1917, dropping to 45s. a quarter in 1920, displayed as much heart in ploughing grass land as might be found in a bolting cabbage. It was under the crack of the carter's whip of that forward person, Mistress D.O.R.A., that farmers pulled at the plough as they never pulled before. Examining witness after witness at the Royal Commission on Agriculture we found that few farmers could honestly reply that the guaranteed prices had had any effect in stimulating wheat production. The whip, indeed, was far more stimulating. As Sir Daniel Hall

graphically said in answer to a question I put to him, "They have not been in the picture at all."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, owing to the rapidly diminishing wheat average since 1918, I should say that the guaranteed prices have had a contrary effect, causing farmers to fear a low price. And if any one thinks that the guaranteed price of 68s. per qr. (rising and falling according to costs), as incorporated in the Agriculture Act, 1920, is going to turn a single furrow lying dormant, hidden from the fructifying touch of the sun, the frost, the rain, and the wind, to form seed pasturage for corn, he thinks with his head in the clouds, where it should be, but his feet do not, as they should, make contact with Mother Earth. The price embodied in the Act does not profess to leave a profit, but only to ensure the farmer against serious loss. Is any one therefore going to believe

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Green* (Q. 20): "Do you think that the guaranteed prices as a policy have really stimulated corn production in this country?" Ans.: "Certainly not. . . ." Q. 221: "Therefore they have been quite ineffective?" Ans.: "They have not been in the picture at all."

*Mr. J. M. Henderson* (Q. 128): "The result of the Corn Production Act has been to increase the cereal area of how much?" Ans.: "I do not think the Corn Production Act has had any effect in that direction." And, again, Ans. to Q. 223: "The area under the plough has been increased by nearly 2,000,000 acres; but I would not put that down to the Corn Production Act, but to the much more drastic action of the War Executive Committee." (*Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1919.*)

that a single farmer filled with the desire for gain will sow more wheat because he is ensured against either a serious loss, or even against a little loss? He will withhold his hand from sowing any particular crop if he sees nothing but loss in front of him, however trifling the loss may be. Farming may be a healthy way of earning his living, but the farmer is not out for the sake of his health. The world's prices may stimulate farmers to bring second-rate land under the plough for wheat, but the Act certainly will not.

“Individually, I do not want a guarantee,” said Mr. J. M. Gardiner, M.P., a Scotch tenant-farmer, to the House of Commons, when the Agriculture Bill was under discussion. “I am going to say to this House that if there is a farmer, who knows his business, who does not admit that during the past few years he has been making a profit, then either his veracity is not altogether accurate, or he is a very poor farmer.”

“In my firm opinion,” said Mr. Cautley, K.C., M.P., “not a single acre of land will be brought under cultivation as it (the Bill) now stands. On the contrary, it will not even stop the diminution of arable land that is now going on in this country.” Such was the considered opinion of an ardent advocate of guaranteed prices.

Why, then, did the farmers sign the Majority

Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, recommending these guaranteed prices? They signed, not because they cared two pins about the costing figures presented to them, for which no one had a tittle of respect, but because "guarantees" stood as the declared policy of the Prime Minister, and they saw a prospect now of the bigger carrot of the world's market being held in front of them. Thus guaranteed prices were inserted in the Bill with compensation for the disturbance of good tenants, together with the assurance of the world's market prices for all corn grown in 1921. Furthermore, and this is a point I want my readers to note, farmers knew that if they behaved themselves with that political subservience which our country's dictators have exacted from their supporters, *they would no longer feel the crack of D.O.R.A.'s whip across their bent shoulders.*

Since 1919, our wheat area in England and Wales alone has diminished by 347,561 acres, the yield by 1,300,000 qrs.—the smallest yield per acre since 1904—and *since 1918 the yield has dropped by 3,853,000 qrs.*

It has been proclaimed from many a barn roof that the diminution was due to the pressure of high wages. Now the wages of farm labourers in Great Britain have never had any relation to the price of corn; neither in the Golden Era of the Sixties, when wages were very low, nor in the depression of the Eighties

and Nineties, when wheat dropped in 1896 to its lowest recorded price of 22s. 10d. per qr. Indeed, in that year, wages were higher than they were in the glorious Sixties! Ours is largely a milk and meat producing country, and the producers of milk and meat, as well as the producers of barley, poultry, eggs, fruit, and vegetables have had to pay the same wages as the producers of wheat and oats.

So little has been the connection between a statutory minimum wage and guaranteed prices, that in the Agricultural Bills presented by both Conservative and Labour members, in the House of Commons in 1913, there is no mention of guaranteed prices; nor are there any prices guaranteed to-day to those manufacturers in some forty different industries who have to pay the legal minimum wage under the Trade Boards Act.

Wages rose, it is true, but so did the prices of farm produce.

Let us look at a few figures.

The spurt in wheat production took place in the winter of 1917-18. It was in the autumn of 1918 when many a stubble field began to go back to grass.

The average wage, including all allowances, in England, in 1913, was 17s. 9d. The minimum wage, including all allowances, in October 1918, in twenty-four counties of England and Wales, was only 30s. Hours certainly were

shorter than in 1913, but as we have no authentic figures as to hours worked in that year, I cannot make any accurate comparisons. We can, however, deduce from the foregoing figures that wages had barely doubled. Now let us compare the rise in value of farm produce, taking June 1913 to May 1914 as one period, and June 1918 to October 1918 as the other.

Fat cattle rose from 8s. 2d. per stone to 16s. 7d. ; fat sheep from 8½d. per lb. to 1s. 3¼d. ; fat pigs from 8s. 1d. per stone to 19s. 7d. ; wheat from 31s. 9d. per qr. to £3, 13s. 6d. ; barley from £1, 6s. 7d. to £2, 19s. 7d. ; oats from 18s. 8d. to £2, 9s. 5d. ; beans from £1, 14s. 5d. per 532 lb. to £10, 0s. 10d. ; peas from £1, 16s. 9d. per 504 lb. to £9, 8s. 5d. ; potatoes from £3, 4s. per ton to £6, 13s. ; milk rose from 9d. per gallon to 1s. 8¼d. The General Index number of vegetables rose from 100 to 284, and of fruit from 100 to 383. We see from these figures that during this period prices were not only doubled, but even trebled.

What, then, made the farmers take their hand off the plough for the production of wheat? They did not take their hand off the plough which prepared the ground for barley. That crop has increased in one year (1919-20) by 127,450 acres. Why? Because for barley they had a free and uncontrolled market. They were out for profit and, uncertain as to

the price to be fixed for wheat, they naturally produced what paid them best.

After the Armistice, resting from their patriotic labours, they farmed, not to meet national needs, but, like most business men, for private gain. As Cultivation Orders ceased to be issued to plough up grass land, many a field which might have grown wheat was ploughed for barley, for which brewers were offering 100s. per qr., or was sown with grass seed.

A cleverly written paper presented before the Royal Commission on Agriculture, by the National Farmers' Union—which was probably written in the office of the Institute for Research in Agricultural Economics in Oxford—spoke learnedly of the Law of Diminishing Returns. The Law of Diminishing Returns, forsooth! when we were steadily losing our place as the premier country in the world for wheat production per acre; when Denmark was yielding 47·5 bushels per acre; the Netherlands 37·2 bushels; and Great Britain only 28·5 bushels per acre; and when in a county familiar to me the production to-day is only 3 qrs. per acre, exactly the same as Arthur Young reported it to be 140 years ago! And as to wages, how was it that in 1919 enterprising Scotch farmers in Forfar could pay their ploughmen £3 a week, plus allowances—equivalent in all to £190 a year—and yet stand the pressure of £3 an acre for rent, whilst English farm workers

were grudgingly paid 36s. 6d. a week, including all allowances?

I do not wish to stress the fact of barley having a free market; barley, relatively speaking, was a small matter. The reasons were psychological rather than physical. After the signing of the Armistice the farmers sulked, and not only sulked, but were possessed by the feeling of insecurity, both as to the tenuous hold they had on the land with their annual leases, and as to the fear of falling prices. They naturally resented American farmers being paid any price from 100s. to 150s. per qr., whilst English farmers were only allowed 75s. per qr. Farms were being sold over the heads of the tenants—and, in spite of Mr. Cautley's little Bill, continued to be sold—until in some counties, in 1919, half the land was said to have changed owners. There was the fear, too, fanned by official prophets like Sir James Wilson, that the price of wheat would fall to a low figure. Not realising the militarist ambitions of the Government bent on adventures in Russia and Mesopotamia, and with imaginations fed by stories of granaries bursting with grain on the seaboard of the Argentine prairies, on the quays of Odessa, waiting for the opening of the golden gates of Constantinople, and of the luxuriant crops growing on the fertile plains watered by the Euphrates and the Tigris, farmers undoubtedly

feared that the figure of 45s. was put into the Corn Production Act not without some sound prophetic reckoning.

The farmers pursued a policy of which they have often accused trade unionists. They pursued a policy of "ca' canny." They took concerted action, and their Union carried out a very successful campaign. They were determined to get their price, to get a free, uncontrolled market for all farm produce. They *were* the County Agricultural Executive Committees. Except in a few very flagrant cases, they no longer feared the frown of D.O.R.A. She had been packed off to Ireland to find out if peasants were cultivating the political policies pleasing to the Government, and farmers henceforth decided to be very kind to one another. Eventually, but too late, the Government offered to raise the maximum price for wheat from 75s. to 95s. per qr. It should have made this known in October 1918, instead of late in the summer of 1919. It was a blunder which lost the nation many a quarter of wheat, although Mr. Lloyd George had told the farmers that they had been the most patriotic class.

There were physical reasons, too, why some of the land which had been ploughed for wheat had returned to grass. Many acres of grass land were torn up which should have been left in grass, and the herbage improved by the application of basic slag and other fertilisers.

In many instances this would have paid us better nationally, for it is better to leave good pasture ground untouched by the plough than to get a crop of docks, thistles, and couch-grass following wheat ; and this is what happened on many a small farm where the occupier had neither the implements nor the horses for carrying on cultivation after the Government tractor had vanished from the scene. Far better would it have been to have concentrated upon arable farms where there were available tackle and horses, making the land which had produced but 3 qrs. to the acre produce 4 or 5 qrs. On certain arable farms, especially in Scotland, which will not yield more than 3 qrs. of wheat to the acre, but will yield 9 qrs. of oats, and 10 tons of potatoes, it was folly to grow wheat instead of oats or potatoes.

I have known small farmers, on stiff, four-horse land, who had Cultivation Orders served on them when they have been destitute of a single carthorse on their small grass farms. To-day some of these fields are a pathetic sight. The cows have gone because there was no hay for winter fodder, and milk has become a scarcer commodity than ever. It is true that a greater herd of cattle can be kept on ploughed land than on grass, but it requires strength—horse and manual—to carry out a programme of continuous cropping, and where capital and labour are lacking, that admirable

policy is not possible. Ploughed grass fields, which lay open between coverts to the depredations of game and rabbits, soon lapsed back to grass when pheasants and rabbits were left to multiply in their preserves or warrens.

Another reason, supported by eminent authorities examined before the Royal Commission, was that some County Committees followed too much on the lines of every man being made "to do his bit," regardless of whether that bit was of any use to us nationally or not. In some districts it would have been far better to have pursued a policy of improving the pasture, as at Poverty Bottom, in Sussex, and adding to the meat reserves of the nation rather than of increasing the acreage of badly cultivated arable fields.

On many a pasture ploughed for wheat or oats, the much-dreaded wireworm, instead of being conquered by a succession of cultivations, unfortunately has been left in possession of the field. Nevertheless, these ill-cultivated fields have revealed to us many of the seams to be found in the patched-up garment of private enterprise, a garment which is very little improved by being "inspected," and is turning a seedy green.

Now I want to turn to the production of milk, which, to us, in times of peace at any rate, is of more importance even than the

production of corn. I do not wish to set up a discussion as to the rival merits of wheat and milk policies, for it is more or less common knowledge that under tillage we could keep—as they do in Denmark—a greater number of cows than we can on grass. There was, however, a tendency to reduce herds of cows during war-time under our plough-policy, and this was due to one or two reasons.

The cow-keeping, grass farmer had, to a large extent, lost the skill which may have been possessed by his father or grandfather in tillage operations. He often had neither the implements nor the horses necessary for continuous cultivation. He looked upon the plough-policy as a kind of panic legislation which would cease when the War ceased. He had an eye always on sowing grass across the upspringing corn. Farm buildings were often insufficient or unsuitable for the keeping of horned cattle and horses at one and the same time, and certainly to *increase* the number of his cows was an impracticable proposition where buildings were altogether inadequate.

We have known what it is to suffer from a shortage of milk, due amongst other causes to a curtailment of imported linseed and cotton, and we may suffer again. In fact, the poor are suffering from an insufficient supply of milk at a price within their means. There is not

only a question of insufficiency, but there is, in addition, the question of cleanliness. It has been stated that 10 per cent. of our cows are tubercular. I should put the proportion much higher, and it should be borne in mind that the milk from tubercular udders gets mixed with other milk, thereby increasing the quantity that is tainted. It is not only milk from tubercular cows which endangers the health of the community, but also milk which is tainted by the unclean hands of milkmen, and by the hairs and worse solid substances which drop from the hides of cows, into milk pails. Those of us who have bent our necks under the dirty flanks of cows, and have had our faces lashed by the ends of tails saturated in urine, can speak from unpleasant personal experiences.

It is here where farming by inspectorship breaks down most completely, and if we have a case for nationalisation of agriculture in the matter of the production of corn, we have an overwhelming case in the production and distribution of milk. Cowsheds are supposed to be inspected; but I wonder how many ever receive even an occasional visit from an inspector? In my limited experience I have known several that have never been inspected at all. And what is more, how many inspectors visit the cowsheds at milking-time? Milking processes on farms are enough to make the most hide-bound

individualist who consumes milk demand immediate public control over the production as well as over the distribution of milk.

Private enterprise does not safeguard us against the delivery at our homes of filthy milk, nor does it safeguard us against a milk famine. There is no law at the present day to prevent the loss of some of our finest young cows owing to the practice of dairymen in urban areas drying off their cows, and fattening them for the butcher. It is the practice of some town dairymen never to send their cows to the bull; and one may depend upon it that they only buy the very finest freshly calved cows they can get at the market.

Private enterprise thinks naturally only of personal gain, and some dairymen seem to find this the most profitable way of managing their business. It was not, I think, until 1912, when I had a long conversation with Mr. Runciman, that England began to think of emulating Austria-Hungary and Ireland by supplying first-class sires to farmers. As late as 1917 it was pointed out before the Selborne Committee "that the number of bulls subsidised under the Scheme—*i.e.* 675—was very small compared with the very large number of bulls in the country," and, further, "the experience gained by the Board in the administration of Calf Orders clearly proved that the use of unsuitable bulls was very common among

milk-selling dairy farmers, and the result was that calves sired by such bulls were difficult to dispose of, or were quite unfit for rearing."

It is the practice of milk-selling farmers to sell their calves soon after they are born, at the nearest market. If we nationalised milk production, it is evident that we should keep all calves fit for rearing for two or three weeks, until they could stand long journeys with impunity on their way to rearing farms.

Much milk under private enterprise is wasted every year, especially in the summer, owing to the difficulties of transport, the absence of cooling stations, clean churns, and efficient organisation. Much milk is returned as sour, and some is thrown to the pigs. New milk, which should be reserved for human consumption, is often used for fattening and rearing calves (when these after three or four weeks might very well be reared on cream equivalents). A properly organised system of collection and delivery, and the establishment of cooling stations where water is laid on, would save us nationally many thousands of gallons of milk. Moreover, there is many a remote, fertile valley in this country, divided by undergrazed hills, which might be exploited for milk production had we a national scheme of production, transport, and marketing. The recently issued

Report stating that heifers and cows have during last year decreased by 200,000 shows that if milk production is left to private enterprise we might easily be faced with something approaching a famine in milk.

## CHAPTER V

### THE AGRICULTURE ACT AND ITS FUTILITIES

**S**UPPORTERS of the present Government will no doubt argue that provision has recently been made, by the setting up of County Agricultural Committees under the Ministry of Agriculture Act, 1919, and by the extension of powers granted these newly formed bodies under the Agriculture Act, 1920, to close up the gaps left in our national agricultural policy by uncontrolled private enterprise. They will argue that most of the abuses from which we now suffer will surely be eradicated by these Committees, which have the enormous powers of administering the Small Holdings and Allotments Acts, the Diseases of Animals Acts, the Destructive Insects and Pests Acts, the Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs Act, Part I. of the Land Drainage Act, 1918, the Rats and Mice (Destruction) Act, Part IV. of the Corn Production Act, 1917, as eviscerated by the Agriculture Act, 1920, and Part II. of the Land Drainage Act, 1918. In addition, these Committees are charged with fostering rural industries—whatever these may be. They will

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also become responsible for the work of the existing County Live Stock and Horse-Breeding Committees. If directed by the County Council, and subject to approval by the Board of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, they may take over the provision and administration of Agricultural Education.

Formidable as that list reads on paper, a review of it evokes feelings similar to those expressed by Frederick the Great, when, having surveyed the serried ranks of a raw army, he exclaimed, "I don't know what effect they will have on the enemy, but they terrify me!" The grounds for this pessimistic outlook are twofold: the composition of the Committees and the vague, non-compulsory, and timorous nature of the legislation enumerated above.

Firstly, then, let us examine the statutory composition of the Agricultural Committees. They are established under Section 7 of the Ministry of Agriculture Act, 1919. This clause instructs County Councils to appoint an Agricultural Committee, and directs that a majority of the Committee shall consist of persons appointed by the Council, although such persons need not of necessity be members of the Council. The Ministry of Agriculture may appoint not more than one-third of the members, and also appoints a similar proportion of members of any Sub-Committee enjoying

the exercise of delegated powers. Women must be included in the membership. An extremely important subsection is worded thus: "Every scheme shall provide . . . for the appointment . . . of such persons only as have practical, commercial, technical, or scientific knowledge of Agriculture or an interest in Agricultural Land."

In practice the County Councils have elected a majority of the Committees from their own membership, and have added a sufficient number of outsiders to bring this nucleus up to two-thirds of the total membership. The Ministry has then added the full third to which they are entitled as a maximum under the Act.

One county, that may be taken as typical, framed its scheme to give a Committee consisting of nineteen members of the County Council (of whom three had to be the chairman and vice-chairman of the County Council, and the chairman of that august body's still more august Finance Committee), five members nominated to the County Council by interests for appointment, and twelve nominated by the Ministry. The scheme for this particular county boldly embodies the above-quoted clause of the Act requiring all these members to have practical or other active knowledge of agriculture; but it does not need a very vivid imagination to conjure up circumstances under which that County Council of ninety members

might be unable to furnish nineteen trained agriculturists. Are we to understand that only truly rural minds will henceforth be eligible to fill the chairmanship, the vice-chairmanship, and the chairmanship of the Finance Committee, of that particular County Council? If one could be sure that even County Councils always observed the laws they administer, the affirmative would be the only possible answer. As a matter of fact, the enforcement of this particular regulation has already brought the Ministry into conflict with some of the County Councils, and it is not always the agricultural interest that has emerged successfully from the contest. It would be interesting to examine the agricultural credentials of some of the members of the Committee on which I serve, especially the claims to a seat of a war-time knight, who at the first meeting tried to stultify the work of the new organisation by describing a county that has more agricultural land than either Huntingdonshire or the County of Holland in Lincolnshire as "non-agricultural."

Inasmuch as these Agricultural Committees are Committees of County Councils, they become subject to the financial control of the County Council Finance Committee, although very little of their cost is chargeable to County Funds. The services administered by the Agricultural Committees can be divided into three groups financially.

In the first place are certain minor services coming under the Diseases of Animals Acts, the Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs Act, and the Rats and Mice (Destruction) Act, which have to be defrayed, without subvention from Government funds, from the County General Purposes Rate.

Then comes the administration of the Small Holdings and Allotments Acts, the whole cost of which until 31st March 1926 will be borne by the Treasury. After that date the small holdings estate will revert at a valuation to the County Council. Thirdly, there are the powers hitherto exercised by the Agricultural Executive Committees and the Land Drainage Committees. The whole cost of these services will fall on the Ministry, and, even after the mystic septennial period beyond which imperial responsibility for small holdings expenditure is not to go, taxes and not county rates will bear these burdens.

The proportion of the total expenditure of the Agricultural Committees on each of these three groups will roughly be 3 per cent. on the first or purely County Council charges, 42 per cent. on the second group, for which the Ministry will remain entirely responsible until 1926, and 55 per cent. on the third group, for which the Ministry are responsible for all time. This analysis (which, while it may differ slightly in different areas, is, within

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very narrow limits of variation, accurate for the whole country) shows that even if after 1926 the Ministry succeeds in pushing financial responsibility for small holdings back on to the shoulders of the county ratepayers, more money will have to be found from imperial than local sources for the financing of Agricultural Committees.

Although for the present the County Council has to find only about 3 per cent. of the Agricultural Committee's total expenditure, the whole of the Agricultural Committee's accounts have to be included in the County Budget. This brings them within the control established by Section 80 of the Local Government Act of 1888, which enacts that no expenditure of over £50 shall be incurred except upon a resolution of the Council passed on an estimate submitted by the Finance Committee. A more flagrant example of the tail wagging the dog it would be hard to conceive. Although the county rates will find one-thirtieth of the expenditure, the County Finance Committee will have absolute control over the policy of the Agricultural Committee. I understand that some obstinate County Councils have flouted the Ministry of Agriculture Act in its demand for Agricultural Committees composed only of agriculturists; but the most perfectly constituted Committee will be under the control of the dominating and

close-fisted Finance Committee, without whose express recommendation not even the most sympathetic of County Councils can come to the assistance of a vigorous Agricultural Committee.

Even where an Agricultural Committee consists only of *bona-fide* agriculturists it by no means follows that even a reasonably strong minority of the Finance Committee will have practical knowledge of the land. The ruling spirits of the County Councils have carefully preserved, in their own hands, the great power Section 80 of the Act of 1888 gives them, so that the temporary aberration of a Committee desiring to follow an enlightened policy may be checked without the inconvenience of a public discussion.

In England, though not in Scotland, the County Councils are thoroughly reactionary in outlook. The great majority of the seats are never contested. Few men with active, progressive, enthusiastic minds can afford the time or the money entailed in attendance at meetings held in the daytime at a distant county town. The effect of the legislation of the twentieth century has been to overload the County Councils with important social work with which the members have no sympathy. It is difficult to imagine a body less fitted to deal with the present parlous condition of farming under private enterprise

than the County Councils controlled by the secret juntas of their Finance Committees, upon which any one but the up-to-date agriculturist is invested with power. As for the farm worker, why, the mere suggestion that he should be considered in connection with either finance or policy would bring down the grey hairs of the county aldermen in terror to the grave.

While this wonderful Act was in its birth-throes we were assured that ample provision would be made for the inclusion of farm workers in the personnel of the Committees. If the County Councils failed to appoint them they would be nominated by the Ministry. In reply to the perfectly obvious argument that no labourer would be able regularly to attend at his own expense a Committee meeting many miles from his home, with frequently long and circuitous journeys to be undertaken, the Act of 1919 declared that :

“Any scheme under this section may provide for the payment as part of the expenses of the Agricultural Committee of travelling expenses and subsistence allowance of members of the Committee or of any Sub-Committee of the Committee.”

“There, you see,” I was assured, “how really democratic the Government is at heart.” What, however, is the practical effect of this? The Ministry appointed me to an Agricultural Committee. At its first meeting I looked

round for the one skilled farm worker whom I knew had been appointed. He was not there; he has not yet put in an appearance! The reason can be discovered without putting a Sherlock Holmes upon the track. The County Council, consisting mainly of rich men, considered it gross extravagance to pay "subsistence allowance." This was coolly cut out of the scheme, *which the Ministry of Agriculture, without demur on this point, approved.* When I protested to the Ministry, the official answer was that the clause was "permissive." On another County Agricultural Committee the one farm worker who was appointed, and who managed to attend because his Union paid his expenses, was immediately discharged by his employer!

It would be interesting to probe the strength of this contention that the use of the word "may" limits the compulsion of the Act, for in another connection the Solicitor-General told the House of Commons during 1920 that the Government regarded "may" in such measures as being equivalent to "shall." The attitude of that little-known but very powerful body, the County Councils Association, is deserving of note. It shows the attitude of mind adopted towards this crucial matter by those who set the pace for the County Councils. The Gloucestershire County Council passed a resolution in the following terms:

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“That the Ministry of Agriculture be asked to take the necessary steps to enable payment to be made, when claimed, to members of the Agricultural Committee of compensation for loss of remunerative time, as in the opinion of the Council the absence of such payment may prevent the acceptance of office by certain persons who would be useful members, or may cause hardship to those who accept and undertake the work.”

This was a highly sensible resolution if the County Councils desired to bring into their deliberations the best available agricultural talents. The Association decided that no action should be taken. When, however, the Ministry in February 1920 wrote to the authorities outlining the place the Agricultural Committees should hold in County Government, and the status to be given to the staff, the Association, in the sacred cause of autonomy for reaction, resolved “to protest against any unnecessary interference with the prerogatives of County Councils in regard to the appointment and duties of their own officials.” This claim of independence from Ministerial advice and control was doubtless meant to be impressively dignified; in view of the fact that it is another statement of the claim of the 3 per cent. tail to wag the 97 per cent. dog, it must come near to holding the record for impudence.

It will be seen from these criticisms that the Agricultural Committees are constituted and controlled in a manner not likely to give grounds for hope to those who desire a progressive national policy in agriculture. When, however, we come to our second point, the powers with which they are invested, it is doubtful if the best imaginable committees could justify their existences. The Agriculture Act has been called the Farmers' Charter. Ostensibly it was designed to stimulate food production, as it carries with it such of the miserable remnants of the Corn Production Act (Part IV.) as could be rescued from the destructive hands of the Lords. For the life of me, I cannot see that it will produce any other crop than lawyers' fees. Whilst the stinging whip of Madam D.O.R.A., 2 M., is broken, it is not replaced even by that lady's hatpin as a goad in the Committees' hands. The guarantees will certainly not stimulate the production of a single additional quarter of wheat. Even the good cultivation clauses of Part IV. have been eviscerated. Although private enterprise has failed to deliver the goods, and although farming by inspectorship can make little better claim, all that an Agricultural Committee can insist on, in a vague sort of way, is a standard of good husbandry, which I am afraid will probably consist of cutting down docks and thistles and cleaning out ditches.

The supporters of the Agriculture Bill, anxious to persuade the truculent Lords that this miserable measure was not really as black as it had been painted, prefaced the copy submitted to the Upper House with a memorandum containing the following paragraph :

“The provisions of S. 9 of the Act of 1917, which deal with the enforcement of proper cultivation, are re-enacted with substantial modifications and amendments by Clause 4. The principal amendments are as follows :

“(a) It is proposed that orders for a change of cultivation shall only be made when the production of food can, in the national interest, be thereby maintained or increased *without injuriously affecting the persons interested in the land*, and a right of appeal to an arbitrator is provided to determine whether the order is properly made. *Such an order may not interfere with the discretion of the occupier as to the crops to be grown.*”

What fertile fields for litigation are prepared by those passages that I have taken the liberty of italicising! For the next generation the lawyers will arise and call this Act blessed, for the Lords were not appeased. Even the weak proposals of the Government were still further robbed of strength.

The ordinary citizen may not care whether the farmer or the labourer has security of tenure or not. He may care less whether the workers' minimum wages are to have permanent statutory sanction; but what he *must* care about is the enforcement of the rules of good husbandry on the limited soil of his island home.

The official spokesmen for the Government had one powerful argument in defence of the Bill. They said that if the community guaranteed prices, the community then had the right to compel good cultivation. That argument has now been destroyed. The Lords saw to it that the community did not come into the picture at all, unless dressed as a scarecrow; and the Commons humbly bowed their acquiescence.

As far as the farmers are concerned it is not security of tenure they get, but compensation for disturbance, and even this has been modified by the House of Landlords leaving the gate wide open for lawyers to enter. Few legislators cared publicly (though some of them have been fined as transgressors under the 1917 Act) to deny the labourer a statutory living wage. The Agricultural Wages Board is to remain; but the Lords seized the opportunity in an attempt to keep the farm-tied labourer a serf. Not that the Government had shown any eagerness to free him, for there

would have been no security for him at all had it not been for the intervention of the Labour Party; and the security is not worthy of the name. Indeed, to keep a roof over his head he is likely to be involved in much litigation.

If a farmer or landowner takes the precaution to give his workman, as a mere matter of form, notice to quit, though he may have no intention of executing it, during the first six weeks of his occupancy, the labourer gets no compensation. Nor does he if the District Wages Committee consider that the cottage is needed in the interest of food production. He does not get any compensation if he occupies a cottage (as most hinds and shepherds do in the North of England, and practically all ploughmen in Scotland) taken with the usual six-monthly or yearly agreement.

One would have thought that these provisions left the labourer in a position of insecurity to satisfy even the most feudal-minded person. But no! On the birthday of Him who was born in a manger, and had not where to lay His head, the Lords, on going home to their stately mansions for the Christmas festivities, decided, by a destructive amendment, to make it almost as difficult for the son of man who watches over his flocks in the twentieth century to keep a roof over his head. However, I am glad to learn that the Labour Members in the House of Commons fought

so hard that the Lords, weakened by fatigue from an all-night sitting, graciously allowed the measure to pass.

A landowner like Captain Fitzroy, M.P., need not fear that the beneficent beams of land nationalisation are to be discovered in the barren pages of this Act. Whilst money is to be spent on agriculture, and land values are to be improved, the nation is to have no permanent hold over the land. The farmer who does not practise good husbandry may have his lease determined, though he occupies no other house and no other land; but the mansion, the park, and even the home farm of the great landowner who ill-cultivates his land, are to be inviolate from invasion. The War was not fought in vain; the private parks are to be made safe from democracy.

The great landowners in the Cabinet have been victorious. So carefully has the Act been drafted to safeguard their sacred rights that, even where the County Agricultural Committee finds an estate mismanaged, after it has brought the land into good heart, it is to hand back as quickly as possible the estate to the original owner. The Committee cannot sell it without his sanction, nor can it, apparently, acquire it on any terms for the nation. And, mark you this, sporting rights are to be particularly protected in the interests of the owner!

Hunting is in vogue once more. Foxes

are daily being bred to be killed. Those who follow the hounds are covering nearly the entire map of England with a network of hunting areas, leaving few gaps between them. At the sound of the hunter's horn, at any moment, forty horsemen may come plunging across your fields, churning up the sodden pastures, crushing the tender-leaved clover under their ruthless hoofs, charging into the upspringing winter oats, and trampling into rain-holes the seedling wheat. And the Hunt pays the damage, say you? What if it does: the nation suffers in loss of production.

In spite of all the evidence brought forward by farmers at the Royal Commission on Agriculture, not a single provision is made in the interest of good cultivation to abolish, or even to reform, the Game Laws.

To promote food production, the Agriculture Act, 1920, is the most fatuous Act ever recorded in our statute books.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEES SHOULD BE FORMED

CERTAIN conclusions might, I think, fairly be arrived at from the foregoing chapters: That a great deal of the land of Great Britain is mismanaged and ill-cultivated; that as dwellers in a thickly-populated island, living within a very limited area of agricultural land, we cannot afford to leave the land ill-cultivated; that War revealed to us that private enterprise could not be trusted to meet the national needs; and that farming by inspectorship has failed, and will fail, to get the land properly cultivated. Private enterprise has broken down, and private enterprise supervised by inspectors is also breaking down. I go further and say, as the majority of the farmers say, that farming by inspectorship is intolerable, and is bound to break down. The Welsh member who declared in the House of Commons that he would rather have the whole hog of nationalisation than farming by inspectorship, spoke sound common sense; and if any

one doubts whether farmers have a liking for any form of control, either in prices or by inspectorship, a visit to an assembly of farmers discussing their own affairs will soon cure him of any illusions on this subject. When the Prime Minister made his famous speech to farmers at the Caxton Hall in 1919, the statements which evoked the highest enthusiasm were those which hinted at decontrol and the desire on the part of farmers to be let alone to manage their own affairs. Yet it is into the hands of these very farmers who are clamouring for decontrol, who are letting land go back to grass, who are avowedly treating the land not in a way to ensure its greatest productivity, but to reap the greatest profit—to these very men, aided by colleagues who are non-agriculturists sitting on County Councils, that the Government has entrusted the enforcement of the rules of good husbandry and the provision of small holdings for both ex-soldiers and civilians.

No one was more conscious than Mr. Lloyd George himself that he was playing to the gallery—his gallery at his Caxton Hall *matinée* being packed with landowners and farmers—when he said that landowners and farmers had displayed a splendid patriotism in the War; just as Mr. Lloyd George was conscious of playing to the gallery—his gallery then consisting of labourers—at the entertaining nights at Bedford and elsewhere during the great

land campaign in favour of a minimum wage for labourers.

If any one thinks I show bias in my strictures on farmers, as a class unaccustomed to think of the commonweal in the pursuit of their trade, I would refer him to other authorities. Sir Daniel Hall, who has been accustomed to mix with farmers, to hear their views, and to inspect their holdings, wrote in his book, *Agriculture after the War*: "His (the farmer's) personal profit does not coincide with the national interest, either in the direction of the production of food, or in the maintenance of men upon the land." They are no worse in this respect than any other class of business men, and one should not expect from them a higher standard of patriotism than that maintained by any other class of men engaged in prosecuting their business for personal gain.

Nor should we blame them, for Burke, the great British opponent of the French Revolution and the Defender of Profiteers, when we were at war with France and food was scarce, said: "But if the farmer is excessively avaricious? Why, so much the better—the more he desires to increase his prices, the more interested is he in the good condition of those upon whose labour his gains must principally depend." The farmer at that time of war prices was so interested in the good "of those upon whose labour his gain must principally depend," that

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he paid them 6s. or 8s. a week. Ever since then farmers have been brought up on the gospel of Burke. As Cobbett pungently put it: "It was only for the sake of the poor naked devils of labourers. . . . This was the *only* reason for their wanting corn to sell at a high price!"

That which farmers might do in 1919, if they did not get their price, was very frankly displayed in the most important document which the National Farmers' Union officially presented to the Royal Commission on Agriculture. I will quote from this document two illuminating paragraphs.

"That which some men did in England during the depression, that which men have always done in the new countries, can be done by men generally in this country if the market drives them to it. They can cut down their fences and lay fields together for mechanical cultivation in large areas; they can reduce their labour bill while paying high wages at the same time to the men retained; they can cut down their expenditure on manures applied and cultivations done to increase the fertility of the soil, and at the end of it all, with reduced productivity, and costs even more reduced, they can make their farming (or ranching) pay. Going a stage further, they can lay large areas of the less fertile arable lands down to grass, and in the last resort they can, if necessary, lay

the whole country down to grass, and English agriculture can become once more a primitive pastoral industry.

“All this can be done, step by step, as necessity dictates, but it is important to remember that it will not bring disaster either to the farmer or to the worker. Farming can be carried on profitably even under the extreme conditions imagined above, and labour can be paid high wages at the same time. But it must be borne very seriously in mind that in proportion as market conditions force this policy upon the controllers of the industry, so will production and employment be reduced. Every successive change in the downward direction will reduce the output of wealth from the soil, and will reduce the number of the rural population. Some of them, both farmers and workers, will be crowded out, but it will not bring ruin to the farmers nor destitution to the farm workers that remain.”<sup>1</sup>

It must be borne in mind that this manifesto was presented to us as late as the 23rd September 1919, and the gentleman who had to defend it was a member of a County Council, and the chairman of its Small Holdings Committee. I state this without casting the slightest reflection upon him individually, or impugning his public spirit. The document only shows

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on Agriculture*, vol. iii.

what farmers feel they still *can do, if they choose, in spite of the existence of Agricultural Committees.*

To put into practice any kind of agricultural policy it is quite obvious you must have agriculturists working the machinery. However much they may dislike Cultivation Orders imposed upon them, we must have some farmers to direct the administrative machine; but the initial error which the Government made was to set up County Agricultural Committees, the majority on which are elected by the County Councils who may possibly not contain a single agriculturist, and of appointing the remaining third chiefly from a class requiring supervision as to the management of their own farms. As a class farmers are incorrigible law-breakers. During the War it was impossible to impose upon them, or to expect them to abide by, any kind of ration scheme with regard to meat, milk, butter, or even bread. To live in a farmhouse meant, comparatively speaking, to live well; and since the fixing of statutory minimum wages for farm workers every County Court and bench of Magistrates has had to try innumerable cases of non-payment of the legal wage, to say nothing of the greater number of offences in this respect which have never come into Court, but which have been settled between farmers and the officials of the farm workers' unions.

Nevertheless, there are good farmers and public-spirited farmers, and it is essential that these should take part in the control of this industry in shaping any national agricultural policy. But they should only form a section. From the national standpoint, the most important class to hold the reins to speed the plough are the farm workers. These, and the farmers, should sit in equal numbers both on County Agricultural Committees and on the National Council of Agriculture, whilst the remaining third should consist of agricultural economists, agricultural chemists, accountants, engineers, and transport officers.

The most important class to hold the reins are the farm workers, for there are three farm workers to one farmer. I have roughly sketched the emergence of Hodge from the humble position of a private soldier in the army of agriculturists, often enlisted by the recruiting sergeant Hunger, living merely to obey orders and to have no voice in the conduct of his industry. War, the debating societies of the trenches, the appraisalment of his value at tribunals, education in trade unionism, have entirely altered the mentality of the submissive labourer. He demands a higher standard of life; he asks that the treasure houses of the earth shall be thrown open to him and to his children. He is, in fact, beginning to demand the land which he has

defended with his life, and a control of the industry in which he invests his life.

Those who sow the grain are demanding more of life than bread, and sleep, and the grave of a pauper. Scorched by the fiery furnace of War they have glimpsed a Vision, and now they are laboriously putting together and applying to life the letters they learned at the village school. On the tiny shelf which holds the cottager's library, other books begin to appear besides those the children bring home from Sunday school, and in one of them is written, "They have leisure and fine houses; we have pain and labour, the wind and rain in the fields, and yet it is of our toil that these men hold their estates."

They who cut down the willow and shape it demand the leisure to swing the bat and smite the flying ball. They who strip the skin from off the backs of dead beasts demand the leisure to kick the inflated leathern ball. And she who has had to live her life confined within walls, as she watches the clean serenity of the sky, demands something more than hideously stained paper to cover her damp walls, and something more attuned to the singing of the nightingale than the howl of the wind through the crack which blows out the light of the candle.

You cannot pour the new wine of 1920 into the old bottle of 1914. That bottle has been

badly cracked in the five years of warfare, and some other vessel will have to be devised to take the strong new vintage crushed out of the tragic winepresses of Europe. The hierarchy of landlord and farmer over the labourer has been broken, and if the relationship has not been openly disavowed it is not because love has held together the sleeping partner, the managing director, and the servant; it is because the new deed of settlement has not yet been drawn up. Whilst there are three landless men to one man with land, there is sure to be a fermentation which will leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

The landlord, tempted by high prices, and driven by the fear of a war-legacy of high taxes, has been slipping out of the partnership quickly. On many estates he refuses to function even as repairing builder, and has become a mere rent-receiver. The farmer has jumped into his saddle. *He* is now the booted and spurred, whilst the ploughman still "homeward plods his weary way." Taking his chances of a new heaven, thinking his lean person will squeeze through the needle's eye with greater ease than his employer whose wider girth is adorned with an embarrassment of riches, he is looking for the new earth.

The Government, with its bandage partly drawn aside from its eyes, has, it is true, an inkling of this, and triumphantly points to a

corner of Yorkshire, a spot in Lincolnshire, one or two other Arcadias, as well as to the County Council small holdings. Yet these self-governing little colonies are but backwaters in the great stream of agricultural life. This glimpse is as if one were looking at life through the leper's squint.

It will be noticed that I am giving no place to the landowner, *qua* landowner, on either the County Committee or the National Council. This is not due to any prejudice I may be supposed to possess against landowners. As a fellow-citizen, I prefer landowners to farmers, for they are better educated, have wider culture, and are more catholic in their tastes. They are broader minded with regard both to religion and politics; but, unfortunately, as Mr. F. D. Acland, a landowner himself, says, there are very few of his own class who put in eight, or even six hours a day, at the business of managing an estate in the same way as a manufacturer has to do in supervising his works.

At first I was inclined to imitate the constitution of Lord Selborne's short-lived National Agricultural Council, on which I sat as a member, and make the controllers of the agricultural industry consist of landowners, farmers, and farm workers, but drastic changes in land ownership have taken place since 1918, and the farmer in many counties is indistinguishable from

the owner. Besides, in any national scheme of reconstruction, eventually the public ownership of all land is inevitable. Thus the State will become the owner, and the two classes that we shall have to deal with in large numbers on the land in the immediate future will be farmers who are still tenants, or bailiffs, managing for Committees, or the State, and workers who will be copartners.

For, after all, there is no reason why agriculture should not adopt the principle laid down by Lord Robert Cecil when he spoke about the present industrial unrest. "The real solution," he said, "is to give every one concerned a direct share in the profits, in the management, and in the capital of each business." Indeed, we have already begun to make a start in this direction by the farm settlements at Patrington and elsewhere. But I am running too far forward in my subject.

We must get our Board of Management clearly defined, and give reasons for the constitution and for the personnel of the administrative bodies.

Under the Corn Production Act farmers and workers were allowed to choose their own representatives to sit on the Agricultural Wages Board, whilst the Board of Agriculture appointed the remainder. A similar method, with modifications, might be followed in forming Agricultural County Committees. The third

consisting of farmers should be left to a selection in England by the National Farmers' Union, and by one or two cognate bodies of employers, such as nurserymen and dairymen; and the workers' representatives should be chosen by the National Union of Agricultural Workers and the Workers' Union. The National Farmers' Union is entirely representative of the farmers of England, for I believe that nearly 90 per cent. are now members of the Union, and the two workers' unions are representative of the majority of the labourers.

In Scotland the National Farmers' Union of Scotland should select the farmers, and the Scottish Farm Servants' Union the workers. The remaining third, in both England and Scotland, should be chosen by the public, that is, by a House of Commons' Committee on Agriculture. A reasonable payment should be made in equal sums to all members in these Committees. The ridiculous variations in payment made to workers, farmers, and appointed members sitting upon the Agricultural Boards and the District Wages Committees should not be tolerated. Every member should be paid equally for services rendered to the community.

Though I would exclude landowners as landowners, there would be nothing to prevent those possessing sufficient brains from playing an important part in the control of the agri-

cultural industry, as farm managers, or agricultural economists, or accountants, or in any other expert capacity, if either the farmers, the farm workers, or the Minister of Agriculture chose to appoint them. Personally, I should be very sorry to see the County Executive Committees of Devon, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Staffordshire, Somersetshire, Hampshire, and Essex without the services, for instance, of landowners who are serious agriculturists, such as Mr. Acland, Mr. Christopher Turnor, Sir Ailwyn Fellowes, Mr. Buchanan, Lord Bledisloe, Lord Selborne, and the Hon. E. H. Strutt.

That a third of County Agricultural Committees should consist of farmers I think will be agreed by all classes. The real innovation is the proposal that a third should consist of farm workers. The argument that there are farm workers already appointed to those agricultural committees may be brushed on one side by pointing to the fact that it is only in one county—Norfolk—where there is the amazing number of six or seven agricultural labourers sitting on the Committee. This has been due largely to the fact that the well-organised union there, the National Union of Agricultural Workers, has had the common-sense to finance the County Council candidature of several of its members.

Though the Minister of Agriculture, under Section 7 of the Ministry of Agriculture and

Fisheries Act, 1919, can appoint quite a number of farm workers as persons who "have practical, commercial, technical, or scientific knowledge of agriculture," as members of County Committees, in actual practice he does not do so. Nor has he, in certain counties, even insisted upon, as I have already said, the payment of subsistence allowance. To wait for the process of getting a large number of skilled farm workers elected to County Councils, and thereby on to Agricultural Committees, is much too slow to contemplate, while election expenses have to be paid for by poor men, and loss of time attending County Councils to be suffered.

NUMBER OF LABOUR COUNTY COUNCILLORS.

Bedfordshire . . . . .	7	Nottinghamshire . . . . .	1
Bucks . . . . .	2	Oxon . . . . .	1
Cornwall . . . . .	2	Salop . . . . .	1
Cumberland . . . . .	8	Soke of Peterborough . . . . .	6
Derbyshire . . . . .	6	Somerset . . . . .	3
Dorsetshire . . . . .	2	Suffolk (East) . . . . .	4
Durham . . . . .	57	Surrey . . . . .	1
Essex . . . . .	4	Sussex (West) . . . . .	1
Gloucestershire . . . . .	10	Warwickshire . . . . .	1
Hants . . . . .	5	Wilts . . . . .	2
Hertfordshire . . . . .	1	Worcestershire . . . . .	1
Isle of Ely . . . . .	9	Yorkshire (North Riding) . . . . .	9
Isle of Wight . . . . .	2	Yorkshire (West Riding) . . . . .	30
Kent . . . . .	1	Anglesey . . . . .	3
Lancashire . . . . .	6	Brecknockshire . . . . .	7
Lincs . . . . .	3	Carmarthen . . . . .	2
Middlesex . . . . .	2	Carnarvon . . . . .	1
Monmouth . . . . .	38	Flintshire . . . . .	10
Norfolk . . . . .	6	Glamorgan . . . . .	8
Northants . . . . .	7	Montgomery . . . . .	3
Northumberland . . . . .	8	Pembrokeshire . . . . .	6

If any one doubt this, let him glance at a list of Labour County Councillors completed on the 1st January 1921. (See p. 109.)

The only Councils which show anything like an adequate representation of Labour, outside the West Riding of Yorkshire, are the mining counties of Durham and Monmouth. It is impossible to say how many of these Labour Councillors are farm workers; but outside of Norfolk I believe there are extremely few. Labour does not yet seem awake to the importance of capturing seats in the County Councils, in spite of the fact that County Councils are playing an ever-increasing part in the life of the nation.

Before the happy consummation of farm workers, sitting as County Council members, can be reached, I am afraid hundreds of thousands of acres of arable land will be drifting back to grass, and rabbit warrens and pheasantries will be on the increase.

It is of paramount importance to the community, from the point of view of stimulating food production, to get skilled farm workers appointed on the County Committees. It is in the interest both of those who invest their lives in agriculture as well as in the interests of those who eat the bread they produce. Farmers are said to be discharging many of their men during this winter, and no exhortations, even such as Lord Lee delivered at Leicester in

October, will prevent them from doing so. What he said then was rather a sinister portent of the times. "There is," he remarked, "a certain amount of unrest amongst agricultural labourers at the present time, owing to rumours of discharges on a large scale, due to the reduction of the arable area. I am not willing to believe that there is very much in that, although in some cases there may be. There are some farmers who are affected by panic, and who think, on account of the higher wages, their only safety is to put more of their land down to grass. If there is any deliberate movement of that kind, there could be nothing more dangerous or fatal to the agricultural industry. It would create an army of landless men, men who understand work on the land, and who would make an irresistible demand, with justice behind them, to have that land broken up and given to them to deal with as small holders. If farmers were led into that mistake, they would be simply cutting their own throats and destroying their own position. I trust the new County Agricultural Committees will exercise a very firm hand in the matter. . . . The great danger to-day is that there is so much mutual distrust and misunderstanding that rash steps are taken which are very often irrevocable. After all, all sections of the agricultural community must work and stick together, because no one can settle their differences except them-

selves. The Government cannot do it; certainly the Ministry of Agriculture cannot do it."

And yet Lord Lee expects a Committee largely representative of a class that is letting the land down to grass, to prevent this process of deterioration in agriculture and the increase of unemployment!

While the workers themselves do not control the means of production, in spite of an Agricultural Wages Board, they cannot ensure employment, and farmers have the whip hand of them, as they frankly pointed out in the manifesto I quoted, issued by their Union. The only real remedy for unemployment, and for the under-cultivation of the land, is to make the farm labourers themselves copartners in their own industry, and the initial step in this direction is to give them proportionate representation on County Agricultural Committees. The most acute critics of bad farming are not to be found within the superb masonry which graces Whitehall, but inside the tap-room of the Pig and Whistle, or the village institute where the trade union branch meets.

Many of these men are unknown beyond the adjoining parishes. Their names never appear in the printed sheet. They never step out into the limelight. Their lives are spent in lonely watches, on the slopes of the Downs with their dog and sheep as companions, or in tending

bullocks in yards, and yet many an English flock master has earned an international reputation through the skill of his head shepherd, and many an English breeder of Shorthorns owes his fame to the patience and the eye for points of some stockman whose genius has benefited the whole nation. They are often men of few words—

“For words are but under-agents in their soul;  
 When they are grasping with their greatest strength  
 They do not breathe among them.”

Nationally we make poor use of the skill of these men. I have known farm labourers of great intelligence who have married young, and becoming fettered by a large family, reared on low wages, have had to remain wage-slaves all their lives in positions which have never given them scope for their striking abilities. The first rung on the ladder—the small holding—has been denied them through the lack of capital—the poverty that has always dogged their heels. And these are the men we ought to be utilising nationally.

If we only had a system of measuring intelligence, such as the Americans instituted when they passed men into their army, I wonder what we should discover? We suffer the squire to remain in power as a destructive economic force if he chooses to be a bad landlord or employs a bad agent. Even if he be an

absentee landlord spending in riotous living, in foreign cities, the money earned by the sweat of other men's brows, he has still the power to reduce the fertility of *our* land and to increase unemployment. If the farmer be stupid or lethargic, so long as he pays his way, he can still remain squatting on ill-cultivated acres. But if the labourer proves his inefficiency he instantly gets a week's notice, and loses, often enough, not only his job but his home. A great deal of weeding out has been performed by employers since the minimum wage became statutory. It should not be very difficult, now that workers have come to know one another's capacities better through the formation of trade unions, to select men of exceptional ability.

As I look out of the window my glance falls upon a cottage roof which shelters a farm worker who, to my knowledge, has not only ploughed, sowed, and reaped corn for his employer, thatched the farm ricks, painted wagons which have won prizes, and broken in the colts, but has killed his neighbours pigs for them, doctored their sick cows, clipped their horses, cleaned out and repaired their wells, mowed their orchard grass with a scythe, planted fruit trees, and driven bees into empty skeps. He has a knowledge of wild life which would make many a sportsman envious ; and with his strong, deft hand he has led to market many an untamed heifer which had never been haltered. I have

watched him fell with an axe a tree as thick as a stout farmer, and split it into roughly hewn posts. He even repairs the roof of the cottage he rents, as I am afraid many a labourer has to do if he wishes to sleep in a dry bed.

I remember one day in war-time pointing out to him some uncultivated fields on the Weald clay overrun with rabbits. I asked him if he thought a certain field worth cultivating. "Why not?" he answered quickly. "There is no bad land, if you treat it properly, and that land used to grow five quarters of wheat an acre."

I have heard of there being no bad beer—except one summer when a farmer was mean enough to water his harvest beer—but never before have I heard there is no bad land. Yet allowing for poetical licence there is a good deal in what my friend said. Astonishing results have been achieved, not only by the Belgians in reclaiming the sand, but also by Dr. Edwards at Methwold in reclaiming heathland; and no one, perhaps, would have dreamed what could have been done on the chalk Downs until Mr. Passmore waved his magic wand.

Yet there is no opportunity, as things stand at present, for the skilled worker I have described above to exercise his wide experience, knowledge, and skill beyond the few acres over which he drives his plough.

I am fully aware of the defects in the training

and outlook of the farm worker. Twenty years ago the idea that farm workers might become bailiffs on estates, or become partners in a guild of agriculture, would have been scouted, not without reason, as visionary. I am not one of those who considers that all the virtues of mankind are contained in corduroys, nor all its weaknesses in broadcloth. The average farm worker, intellectually, labours under the same difficulties as the small farmer. He is individualistic. Like the small farmer, he is a dealer by instinct, which militates against his working for the common good. His geography is bounded by the environs of the nearest market town. He is intolerant of innovation. He is suspicious of any one devoting himself to social service, outside the narrow circle of charitable works. His education is deficient, and he is just as conservative as the small farmer in experimenting with artificial manures unless the fertiliser has an offensive smell.

But the cataclysm of war has effected great changes in the mentality of the younger farm labourers. The bicycle did something to widen their horizon, but, unfortunately, the bicycle tended to take the young men away from the country. War brought the young farm worker into touch with the mentally alert workers of the towns; and taught him to see the effectiveness of scientific organisation of machinery and labour. It brought the tractor on to the

untilled fields, and the motor lorry into the lanes. More important still, it converted the farm worker to trade unionism. Attendance at trade union branches and Wages Committees has trained him to express himself in speech in a manner which would have been impossible in the days of Joseph Arch. Then the labourer's vocabulary was said to be limited to five hundred words, and over 80 per cent. of farm workers were unable to read.

Across the table at District Wages Committees Hodge has had to look at farming from a wider point of view than that of wages and hours. On Agricultural Committees he has had to consider national interests as paramount, and although he owns scarcely a rood of it there is no greater lover of the land than the farm labourer, and no one who resents more it being butchered and made waste. His knowledge of the fields would be more intimate than that of the farmers, his criticisms more searching, and he would be less susceptible than the farmer to the subtle influence of social pressure. The tractor-ploughman, the man who is engineer as well as husbandman, has now made his appearance in the countryside, and it is from men of this type we may expect to see an increase of administrative ability amongst the farm workers. What I have said of the young farm worker who has seen during the War different methods of cultivation in foreign

lands, and the advantages of collective organisation, is true also of the young farmer, who has worn khaki, and been overseas. His mind should be more elastic than his father's. With the labourer he will know what it is to render social service without thought of private gain.

## CHAPTER VII

### A NATIONAL COUNCIL OF AGRICULTURE

**I**N planning an agricultural policy for Great Britain I have started, as we have seen, from the farm itself, enlisting the services of the farmer, and the farm worker, with the agricultural economist, accountant, educationist, engineer, or transport officer as copartner. The unit of administration may be a county or part of a county or counties, according to physical difficulties or facilities. In certain districts which may embody several counties we may find it more convenient to take an extensive drainage area, following the course of a river from its source to its estuary. That is a matter of administrative detail. The composition of the Committee is the most important factor in production.

The work of these Committees must be coordinated, and a National Council of Agriculture formed, largely of representatives of County Committees, somewhat similar to the one already instituted under the Ministry of Agriculture Act, 1919.

A National Council is necessary to direct on

national lines those services for the efficient conduct of which the county as a unit is too small, such as agricultural education, transport, afforestation, the reclamation of waste land, electric power, the distribution of coal and oil, as well as of farm produce, the provision of market places, the importation and milling of wheat, the manufacture and purchase of machinery, feeding stuffs and fertilisers, which may become not only national, but international, services. There are also the discovery and selection of new seeds, of new methods of dealing with diseases, and of new implements, to be taken into account, for undoubtedly we shall in time have our national agricultural laboratories and engineering works. Prices will have to be fixed nationally.

Such an agricultural super-body would be essential in order to be in close touch with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not only to exercise control over services fundamentally national, but also to direct the cultural policy. For instance, whilst a vigorous plough policy is absolutely essential, both for the production of more milk and meat, as well as for bread, it may be wise, on information received at headquarters on the estimated yield of the world's harvests and the demand of other nations, to grow less wheat, and more oats and barley, or *vice versa*. It may be, too, a more economic policy at times to extend arable dairying at the

expense of the wheat acreage. That is to say, it may be advisable, on national grounds, for the production of more milk, to grow more green crops, peas, beans, cabbage, mangolds, swedes, tares, annual leas of grass and clover, and so lessen the importation of expensive linseed and cotton cake. Oats, too, form an important crop in arable dairying, but the policy of continuous cropping for milk and meat will be largely dictated by climatic conditions—Scotland, Wales, and Ireland being climatically more favourable than the eastern counties of England to this method of cultivation. It may, too, be sound national policy to encourage the cultivation of sugar-beet. In any case we should keep land under the plough, and, being permanently equipped with better buildings, implements, and horses for arable cultivation, we should be ready for any emergency. Personally, I am convinced that arable dairying would be more economical—in the best sense—than an indiscriminate plough policy for wheat. I am sure it is so for Scotland, where magnificent crops of oats can be grown in places where wheat cannot thrive.

To deal with these, and with other matters cognate to them, it will be necessary to have a National Council of Agriculture, but this must be a live body, an assembly not merely meeting twice a year, with an Advisory Committee only permitted to make recommendations.

It must have real powers, and become in fact the Ministry of Agriculture in place of that present bureaucratic body, and it should consist of representatives in equal numbers of the three classes of agriculturists—the farmer or bailiff, managing for the community, making one class, the farm worker another, and the finest of our agricultural chemists, engineers, and accountants forming the remaining class.

Now it is necessary to outline the policy to be pursued in acquiring land, the size of the holdings, and the method to be adopted to see that the worker obtains the full fruits of his labour. In the acquisition of land at prices which have not been inflated since the War, the Land Settlement Facilities Act does not help us much. For every acre of land we purchased, to let to ex-soldiers or others, we have had to purchase at the market value, increased by war prices. The Agriculture Act does not help us in the least, not even in the State having the power to take over land where the owner has glaringly neglected his stewardship. And if the community has to drain land, to improve it by better cultivation, to put up new buildings, etc., it is obvious that the community will not tolerate doing this in order to hand it back, in an improved condition, to owners who have either wilfully neglected the land or have been unable, through the stress of circumstances, to do their duty by it.

Furthermore, as every acre of land we purchase for the settlement of ex-soldiers increases the value of the agricultural land surrounding it, if we pursue this policy of purchasing land at inflated prices we shall be placing a huge burthen, not only on the backs of the whole community, but also on that of those who have fought for the land, when, in March 1926, the latter are compelled to pay the full market value of their holdings.

The question of the ownership of the land is vital, and surely there can be no other eventuality than that of land nationalisation. Until that consummation is reached, how are we to proceed financially? In a national measure it would be quite fair, I think, to take over land at assessment value, plus, perhaps, an additional 5 per cent. for disturbance. But it would be obviously unfair to acquire an estate to-morrow at assessment value from a man who has perhaps put his whole savings into the land, whilst the owner of an adjoining estate is left in full possession of his land and the income he derives from it. It seems to me that the only fair way, in the transitional state—the bridge between *now* and *then*—is to institute a land tax, so that the landowners who are still left in possession should make the entire contribution for compensating the difference between the assessment value and the market value of land to the owner whose property has been acquired

by the community. If landowners object to this plan, which is entirely my own proposition, there seems to be nothing for it but to bring in land nationalisation as a universal measure as speedily as possible.

The purchase of land by annuities is an alternative policy to the acquisition of land by means of Land Bonds, and this is being done to-day by County Agricultural Committees, with the difference that these annuities are based on market values. In any national policy of acquiring land, annuities must be based on the assessment value. This subject is fully discussed in Mr. Emil Davies' book, *Land Nationalisation*, and is really outside the scope of my job, which is to outline an agricultural policy. Land nationalisation, of course, is an urban as much as a rural problem, and must embrace the acquisition of the more valuable golden soil which is paved with asphalt. Nevertheless, as we are concerned in this short study with the acquisition as well as the use of agricultural land, we should know that the value of this is estimated by Dr. J. C. Stamp, in his *British Incomes and Property* (1916), at £1,155,000,000, with a further £250,000,000 to cover the value of houses and buildings.

Whether we issue Land Bonds or grant annuities there is no question of raising the money. Taxpayers will not be called upon to

find money for land purchase. The interest on Land Bonds would be paid out of the rents received from tenant-farmers, occupiers of country houses, and from rents paid to the nation by Guilds of Agriculturists working under County Committees.

At so great a rate would production increase if land were to be properly cultivated by collective effort, possessing advantages of superior machinery, brains, and skilled manual labour, that the interest payable to the holders of Land Bonds would soon become a mere bagatelle compared to the wealth obtained from the soil. A great deal of the agricultural land in England, owing to bad equipment, to the gratification of the lust for game, or to other social reasons, has been let below its economic value. When nationalised, that land will become productive of its real economic value.

Assuming that we have full powers to dispossess immediately both landowners and farmers who are not cultivating their land properly, and to acquire such land at the assessment value, then we could with a light heart begin putting the buildings in order, and such farms would naturally be managed by County Agricultural Committees, and would be placed under the care of farm managers selected for their capacity *to farm*, whether they have been farmers or agricultural labourers.

All farmers who are maintaining a high standard of cultivation, and all small holders who cultivate their holdings properly, should remain in occupation as tenants. Even when all land is nationalised, it may be in the interest of the nation to leave such farmers in occupation as tenants.

Yet as private enterprise has failed us so lamentably, and as private enterprise, even when spurred to extra activity in the national interest under the inspectorship of the friendly eye of the farming brotherhood, has failed to keep land from falling out of cultivation, it is evident that we must pursue a forward policy of acquiring as much land as possible to be worked in the interests of the farm workers and of the community. The community is not going to be content to take over and cultivate the worst cultivated land as it did in war-time. If it can farm with advantage estates which have been badly managed, it can farm good land to better advantage.

What we want to do is to make every worker in the agricultural industry happy, and to contrive a method of copartnership which will make him feel a pride in his work so that he puts his very best self into it. It is quite natural that under a competitive system, a system which only develops in man a cunning of an anti-social kind, that farmers should resent any form of inspectorship. If a cow is

tubercular, let us get rid of it as a magnificent milker! If a horse kicks like the devil, let us hide this fact and send it to a sale! If the gooseberries are affected with mildew, let us hope no inspector will visit us! If a plum-tree has silver-leaf, let us cut it down and say nothing about it, and so on.

On the other hand, on a large farm where all are copartners working in the interest of the whole community, every effort will be made to keep up a high standard of production; for it will be in the interest of everybody to eliminate all the sorry cattle and the unclean stocks of fruit, to rear the finest live stock possible, and to possess the cleanest trees. Just as the workers would be keen to detect a "rogue" or a "sport" and weed it out, so they would anticipate with pleasure the visit of an expert, who came to tell them the good news of some discovery made in subduing diseases, of experiments made with better seed, and to introduce the strain of a higher class of stock, or some new fertiliser, or leisure-giving machinery, or to suggest better methods of transport.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SMALL HOLDINGS OR LARGE FARMS?

**I**N outlining any national agricultural policy it is essential to consider the sizes of holdings which can best be worked as economic units. Most politicians, be they Conservative, Liberal, or Labour, have advocated, or, at any rate, paid lip-service to, the small holding. The Conservative, with shrewd political foresight, has advocated small ownership, for will not the "magic of property" enthuse every owner of a cabbage patch to fight to the last ditch in defence of the rights of private property? The Liberal has encouraged, by legislation, the creation of a class of tenant small holders. This policy the Labour man has generally supported, with a vision of land nationalisation. I have written on the subject myself, but, from the point of view of a craftsman engaged in cultivating a small holding, and not as the advocate of the creation of a network of small holdings as a national agricultural policy. The Labour Party, being in the past an urban party, has never seriously committed itself to the work of drafting—apart from land

nationalisation—an agricultural policy declaring definitely in favour of the creation of innumerable small holdings, or of large, State-controlled farms, or of farms worked by guilds of craftsmen. It is high time that a definite policy should be outlined by somebody, and I have had the temerity to attempt to do so in this little book.

Before discussing small holdings as a national policy it would be well to present a few facts at this stage to show how ineffective have been the attempts of the Coalition Government to fulfil their election pledges. Every fighting man, it will be remembered, was promised, if he proved himself a suitable applicant, a few acres of the land which he had been defending with his life. The first provision made was a ludicrously meagre one of 6000 acres in England and Wales, and 2000 acres in Scotland. These figures were afterwards increased by the facile method of adding on an o.

Estates purchased under these schemes were to be managed by the Ministry of Agriculture as State farms, worked either as small holdings or as copartnership concerns. It was obvious that these farms could not settle very many men. Indeed, in answer to a question put in the House of Commons on the 20th October 1920, the settlers at that date, after three years of preparation, were stated to number only 706. The duty of finding land for ex-soldiers was

eventually given to the County Councils, the Ministry allocating the sum of £16,000,000 for the settlement of ex-soldiers by these local authorities in England and Wales, and £2,750,000 in Scotland. During the years 1918-19 this work was undertaken by the Small Holding Committees of County Councils, instructions being given to them by the Government that small holdings must be found first of all for ex-soldiers before civilians were considered at all. Now this work has been transferred to County Agricultural Committees.

But many of these Small Holding Committees have suddenly discovered that not only are they unable to provide civilians with small holdings, but they are not able to fulfil their promises to ex-soldiers who have already been approved as applicants. I know of one county, for instance, which has spent its quota of £298,000 after making provision for settling only 187 men, while it had approved of 488 ex-soldiers. The Government finding itself in a quandary with regard to its election pledges, and the County Small Holding Committees being at the end of their financial resources, the Cabinet Committee on the subject sanctioned in November a further £4,000,000 to be placed at the disposal of county authorities for the settlement of *disabled* ex-service men only who have completed a course of agricultural training and have shown themselves able to cultivate a

holding properly. In spite of this additional sum we find that, in answer to a question put by Captain Terrell, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister stated on the 15th November that the total number of ex-service men who had applied was 44,229; that 25,038 had been approved, and about 7700 were awaiting interviews as to their qualifications. But the number of men actually settled was 10,487 only, though it was estimated that the land required and not yet let would provide holdings for a further 8000 men. That is to say, in spite of the extra £4,000,000 allocated, County Councils would have to turn down nearly 7000 ex-service men who had been promised land, to say nothing of the 7700 awaiting interview!

In working out the figures I find that it is costing (apart from training) about £60 an acre, or at the rate of £882 to settle each man. Despite compulsory clauses of the Land Settlement Facilities Act, 1919, landowners seem to be doing fairly well out of ex-soldiers and the taxpayers in the country, for in 1914 the average price of the land purchase was £32 17s. 4d. an acre, and the average rent of the land leased £1 5s. an acre.<sup>1</sup>

Now, costly as this work has been, owing to the sums exacted by landowners and building contractors, let us see what it all amounts to when we compare the total acreage occupied by

<sup>1</sup> Cd. 7851.

statutory small holders with the total area of cultivated land in England and Wales.

At the outbreak of war the Treasury refused to sanction any money being spent by County Councils for providing small holdings. By the end of 1914—after the Small Holdings Act had been in force seven years—the area acquired, or agreed to be acquired, for small holdings only amounted to 195,498 acres, that is, less than 1 per cent. of the whole cultivated area. If you add to this the total number of acres acquired for, or promised to, ex-soldiers—that is, 260,553 acres—you get a total acreage of 456,051, which is even now less than 2 per cent. of the total cultivated area of 26,507,000 of England and Wales.

It is curious that the man who had the audacity to apply for small holdings was, and is still, subject to a close examination as to his fitness to cultivate a few acres of land and the capital he possessed. (Imagine the extent of the savings of the agricultural labourer who earned on an average before the war 17s. 9d. a week, including all allowances, and the ex-soldier who had, at the close of the War, his 1s. 6d. a day!) And yet the farmer who applies for the tenancy of many broad acres has rarely been asked to prove his fitness. On the best-managed estates, it is true, inquiries are made, but on how many is the only question put whether the applicant is a good sportsman or

not? Yet it is more important to the nation, judging by the untilled fields that lie around us, that large farmers, rather than small holders, should undergo some acid test of examination.

I am quite aware of the fact that in the statistics presented to us by the Board of Agriculture in 1915, there were more small holdings in England than large holdings. That is to say, the figures showed that out of the total number of agricultural holdings, 66·33 per cent. were held in holdings not exceeding 50 acres in extent, whilst 33·67 per cent. were held in holdings of above 50 acres in extent. But the small holdings in total acreage only amounted to 14·68 per cent. of the whole cultivated area of England, whilst the larger holdings took up 85·32 per cent. of the whole cultivated area.

These figures relating to small holdings, whilst useful, are misleading. They do not enlighten us in the least as to the number of holdings held purely as accommodation ground, or of the number which provide an entire living to the occupiers. In 1914 only 1101 were described as agricultural labourers, which was 32 per cent. of the total number, and of the 3415 persons and seven associations who applied, only 61 applicants expressed the desire for the magic of property, or, in other words, to own their holdings.

The advocates of small ownership are not very happy in their illustrations. Their favourite

example is Catshill; in Worcestershire. I visited this after it had been established nearly twenty years, and I could not help feeling that somehow or other the occupying owners felt overburthened. In a report issued by a Small Holding Commissioner we learn that "only fourteen out of the twenty-seven original purchasers remained in occupation of their holdings, that at least five holdings had been the subject of speculative sale, and that, speaking generally, the cultivation of the holdings is poor, and in many cases bad." It is only fair to state that the accuracy of this report has been gravely questioned by the Rural League.

Nevertheless, this is the best the advocates of small ownership have to show, and whether the cultivation is good or bad one cannot set on one side the knowledge that should these holdings become the centre of a thriving town the descendants of the present owners might degenerate into an idle class, living upon unearned increment—persons who might not have the slightest interest in agriculture.

Another favourite example of small ownership is in the Isle of Axholme, Lincolnshire. There is nothing new, as at Catshill, about these holdings. They are as old as English history. In the "selions" of the Isle is revealed their ancestry. There in lines graven by the plough one can trace history back to the days of the Heptarchy. We seem immediately to step

back into an old manor, with its unfenced common fields divided into strips, but the community of interests, which welded together the tillers of the soil in the days before the conquest, is lacking in this year of grace, 1921.

The selions, or strips of land, are still owned individually, and these vary from a quarter of an acre to two acres each. The small holders cultivate one or more of these selions, and some of them manage as many as twenty acres in widely separated strips. It is, of course, a very uneconomic way of working land, and as far as I could make out on the occasion of my visit, despite the success of several small holders, and the advantages derived from rich alluvial deposits, the Isle of Axholme was a paradise for the money-lender, the lawyer, and the auctioneer.

The descent from these Arcadias of small owners to the Sweet Auburns of Shipham in Somersetshire is steep. I do not wish to describe Shipham as typical, but only to show how easily under a competitive form of society a congerie of peasant proprietors can sink into a rural slum.

Many years ago a lead mine was worked here by squatters who built their cottages on what appears to be no-man's-land. It would be difficult to find a fairer spot in England than this, where between the escarpments of the Mendip Hills can be seen the Bristol Channel

glittering in the sun, and beyond, the shadowy form of the Welsh hills; and it is here small ownership has been carried out to an extent rare in the annals of rural England. In 1841 the population was 707; in 1911 it was 359. When I visited the village in 1912, though the population had dwindled to one-half, the cottages were not only legally overcrowded, but, according to the Medical Officer of Health for the County, "grossly and immorally overcrowded." Thirty-three of the sixty cottages inspected that year were occupied by their owners. In one cottage three boys and one girl slept in one room, while the mother and three children slept in the other. In the bedroom of another cottage slept two youths aged sixteen and nineteen, and two girls aged fourteen and nineteen. And it should be remembered that most of these bedrooms were so small that the cubic space allowed for each person was often far less than that permitted in a common lodging-house. In one bedroom, with an area of not more than 700 cubic feet, slept three persons of two sexes, aged fifteen, twenty, and twenty-one. In two very small bedrooms of a capacity of 660 and 480 cubic feet respectively, slept a mother and eight children. The Clerk to this Council admitted that no systematic inspection had been made of this grossly insanitary village for at least *seventeen years*.

One can hardly have two more striking

instances of the evils arising from leaving land in the hands of either large or small owners—the Scylla and Charybdis of British agriculture—than the parish of Shipham, and the adjoining parish of Rowberrow, which is entirely owned by its squire. Here the population in 1831 was 392. It has now dwindled to one-fourth of that number.

The village lies in a beautiful gorge, and the wrecked roofs and dismantled walls of the stone cottages give it the appearance of some Alpine village which has suffered from an avalanche. Nothing worthy of the name of farming was to be seen on the land, all being laid down to grass. Sport alone seemed to absorb the energies of the governing classes. The vicarage was an empty house, and the church was served by the vicar of Shipham. The school had also been closed, and on the death of the present generation of squatters every bit of land reverts to the squire, which means that in time this beautiful little gorge will be emptied of life.<sup>1</sup>

There are some who would make a patchwork quilt of England with peasant proprietors wearing the tricolour of landlord, farmer, and labourer. Under their scheme the nation or the State would stand outside as an alien intruder, as something always to be regarded with cold-

<sup>1</sup>Vide *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, 1870-1920*, by F. E. Green, p. 188.

ness if not with hostility. But I have too much love for my fellow-countrymen to let them be tempted by the magic of property to cut so mean a figure in the eyes of the world. Under the black magic of property thrift degenerates into a vice, and the jolly English ploughman would be lost for ever in the painfully respectable and petty-minded peasant-proprietor who has no thought outside of his patch of land and the hoarding of mean savings.

I have yet to learn that even the English labourer when turned tenant-farmer is more desirable either as a citizen or as an agriculturist, than those who derive from farming stock for many generations; and rather than a nation of peasant-proprietors I would fain see England converted to one large joint-stock farm.

I would rather, I say, have England as a large joint-stock farm with Lord Chaplin as chief carter, Mr. Overman as chief bullock tender, Mr. Rea, C.B.E., as chief shepherd, Mr. Langford as chief cowman, Sir J. L. Green as chief swineherd; and, when Covent Garden salesmen have as good Zionists gone home to Jerusalem and builded their palaces and tabernacles out of the money taken from our market gardeners, Mr. Robbins, O.B.E., as chief salesman of fruit and vegetables. He may hanker after the flesh-pots of publicists

so that he could write long letters to the papers to explain how, as a paid servant, the labourer was worthy of his hire; but he would, I opine, make a better salesman.

Speaking generally, small holdings are more successful where the occupiers have not had to sink the bulk of their capital in purchasing land. As tenants they have achieved a large measure of success in favoured spots such as the vale of Evesham, and the fenlands of South Lincolnshire. The vale of Evesham presents a picture of smiling prosperity due partly to the soil, climatic conditions, the nearness to markets, and to the "Evesham custom" in tenant rights which the Government has now adopted as a national custom. Yet if one examines an estate map and detects the number of times the same name appears on different one or two acre strips, one instantly realises the appalling waste of time there must be in cultivating land divided up in this manner. Nearly every small holder in Evesham possesses a bicycle. There is not only the waste of time in cycling to your holding and back, but when you find you are able to cultivate more than one acre, there is the waste of time in cycling from one strip to another, and your various strips may be divided by many other strips, rented by individuals who are put to the same inconvenience as you are. Then imagine the economic waste in the pur-

chase, delivery, and distribution of manures, in the picking and marketing of fruit, to say nothing of the impossibility in these circumscribed areas of using the plough, the cultivator, or the horse-hoe.

Profitable as these strips of land are, cultivated with skill and assiduity, how much more profitable, one cannot help thinking—how much more productive, how much energy would be saved, and anxiety, too, if the whole area were divided into one or two large farms or market gardens, and then cultivated co-operatively.

To do justice to Small Holdings Committees of County Councils, I must say that since the War they have adopted a policy of acquiring farms instead of fields for approved applicants; that is to say, they have bought larger estates or portions of estates, so that the small holders can practise co-operation more effectively, and supervision is easier. At the same time, each individual small holder cultivates in his own way, and co-operation, such as it is, is purely voluntary.

The small holder very often, even in the vale of Evesham, exchanges his servitude to a master for a servitude to the land; and, perhaps, what is worse, his family become overworked. The discoveries of science, new inventions in labour-saving machinery, often leave the small holder cold, because his acreage

is too small for their application. It is true that he can show a greater production to the acre than the large farmer in vegetables, fruit, and poultry, but he cannot compete with the large farmer in the production of meat and corn, nor in the production of milk, though many successful small holders are dairy farmers.

It is obvious that an extensive farm is required for the keeping of a fine flock of sheep or a herd of cattle, where first-class bulls are kept, and although there are a number of successful small holders who keep a few cows, I am sure that the production of milk would be greater, its quality cleaner, the labour extended in its production lessened, if the cows were kept on well-regulated large dairy farms. Not much attention is paid to cleanliness in small cow-sheds, and on small grass farms few up-to-date labour-saving machines are to be found for the cleaning out of cow-sheds, or for the distribution of manure, and it is on these small farms where there is an enormous waste of time in the delivery of milk, even if it is only to a railway station.

But there are even stronger objections to the small farm as an economic unit. Small fields may be convenient to the individual holder, but the ground taken up by hedges and banks, the weeds and pests they harbour, are a national waste. It is said that in one estate in Nottinghamshire, on which the tractor was used at the

beginning of the War, not less than 200 acres were recovered by grubbing up the hedges and filling up the ditches.

When it comes to the use made of machinery, the advantages in favour of the large farm are overwhelming. Consider how little an expensive machine like a self-binder, or a mowing machine is used on an ordinary mixed holding. It might be worked for a week or two, and then put aside probably to rust until harvest comes round again. The advantage is still greater when you come to compare the use which can be made of machinery on thousands of acres under collective control and the individual use of a machine on an ordinary farm of only 300 acres. Climatically, of course, the seasons are the same for both, but on the farm extending over a thousand acres the period of use would be greater, beginning with an early cut of "seeds," extending to harvesting clover for seed, or hay growing in fields on a northern slope, late to mature, or to the reaping of spring-sown corn left to ripen until the hunter's moon is riding to the full.

The large farm, too, has the enormous advantage over the small farm in the effective organisation of labour, and in finding a greater scope for winter employment. The large farm equipped with great barns and sheds, in which an engine can be worked for grinding corn into meal, for cutting chaff, for pulping roots, for

sawing wood, can keep its whole staff going on wet days, especially if wagons and implements, which have to be cleaned and repaired, are under cover, and there is a smithy or forge, as well as a carpenter's shop, attached to the farm.

On the other hand, the small farmer, especially on heavy clay land, with very limited out-buildings is often at his wit's end in wet weather to keep his men employed. The same applies to the small market gardener, who has no glass-houses, and the tendency is, as wages rise, together with the cost of farm implements, repairs, fertilisers, and feeding stuffs, for the small farmer on a holding, say, from twenty to eighty acres insufficiently equipped, to dispense with hired labour altogether and to rely entirely upon the labour of his family.

This is no matter for surprise. In industries other than farming can be seen the same tendency, which leads me to the conclusion that for the next year or two we shall see an extension of large farms either managed by one individual or by joint-stock companies. We must remember that the tractor has come to stay.

## CHAPTER IX

### FARMING BY COLLECTIVE EFFORT

WITH the extended use of the tractor and the provisions for the employment of labour under cover in winter, the advantage lies all on the side of broad acres. Yet holdings cannot be stereotyped like buildings, put up for the manufacture of articles. We must be guided by the physical geography which surrounds us. The hill and the plain, the chalk, the heavy clay, the light sandy loam, the precipitous downland, and the flat fenland, must, as Nature demands, have different types of farming applied, according to the quality of the soil and to the contours of the land. In some districts intensive cultivation on small holdings might still, with advantage to the nation, be carried out. But in most districts it would be more economic to combine many holdings of an inconvenient size and to work them under one management, or under a guild of craftsmen.

Agriculture is the one industry under capitalistic competition in which we can repeat that boomerang cry, "More production," without fearing that the returning blow will strike some-

body's stomach. Instead of seeking concessions in Siberia or Mesopotamia, we should be applying British capital to our wasted acres, reclaiming the heath, the low-lying moor and bog, the salt marsh, and the upland sheep walk, of which we have lost from cultivation some 800,000 acres, since 1892.

The demand for timber during the War has left terrible gaps in our beautiful woods. Reafforestation is needed not only in these, but in wide open spaces such as Exmoor and Ashdown Forest, and on hills, such as the Cotswolds, where there is little water, planting might be profitably carried out, as well as in other parts of England where the altitude is not greater than 1200 feet. Ever since the creative elements of feudalism have languished under an unpatriotic industrialism, private enterprise has entirely neglected forestry. Owners, naturally enough, say they cannot plant for posterity. That is obviously the duty of the State. Let us therefore display some noble patriotism and no longer defer the date of planting. If our land was properly cultivated, reclaimed, and reafforested, there would be no unemployed person in our villages and far fewer in our cities. Under nationalisation no idler will be enriched, and yet the whole community will become wealthier.

And here let me say that many of our farm workers are following a will-o'-the-wisp in their

clamour for the employment of so many men to the hundred acres. That will not help them in the least. It is a perfectly natural cry, but one which is productive not of bread but of wind. Apart altogether from the great physical differences between the texture of hillside grazing land and rich fenland there are the variations to be found between arable field and arable field in poverty and richness of soil. There is also the marked difference to be seen between the capital and the organising capacity possessed by one farmer and another. There is many a good farmer who, with up-to-date machinery, strong horses, and a capacity for organising labour, will produce far more corn from a hundred acres with three men, than an inefficient farmer will with six men. Farm workers should clamour for a high standard of husbandry, and insist upon it being carried out. They should, above all, demand the right to be partners in their own industry. If that were done there would be no unemployed in their ranks.

Imagine for a moment what splendid flocks and herds and crops could be raised under skilful management on the capital contributed by the whole community, by utilising every discovery of science, every newly-invented leisure-giving implement, and harnessing electric power to make *that* do all the donkey work! Every worker would have a direct interest and pride in keeping up the standard

of production and keeping down its cost. Such farms, worked by Guilds in which the workers have as much interest relatively as the managerial staff, would give an enormous impetus to production.

The spirit of men working as comrades, each helping the others to lighten the labour of all, on a large farm where fertile suggestions are encouraged, where a sporting emulation impels them to see that their horses, cattle, and sheep shall be the finest in the country, and urges them to increase the yield from each acre, and to improve the speed with which the harvested crops are carried, would surely be far different from the mean and envious spirit often displayed by small holders or farmers, or even labourers, secretive with their little bit of extra knowledge. We shall thus stimulate the growth of a regional as well as a national patriotism, founded not on the hatred of other countries, but on the love of one's own country.

There would be no more hay left in windrows on a fine afternoon with clouds overhead, or corn left to stand in stooks when it should be carried, to spoil after a night of rain, such as one has witnessed again and again during the last two years because the farmer grudges paying overtime rates.

The lonely figure working with leaden heart in the middle of a wide field will no longer be a familiar feature of our deserted countryside.

Instead, we shall have a gay company of comrades working in unison. The nightmare of Luddite riots will become as ludicrous a vision as scarecrows. Those cunning bits of iron and steel, endowed as it were with life as they traverse the fields or revolve in the yard, so feared by men in the past, will henceforth become the lively servants and not the masters of those who feed them with oil and petrol.

On large farms of, say, from 2000 to 10,000 acres worked under one management or guild there should be scope for the employment of men and women of scientific attainments who have not only theoretical knowledge but practical experience. Thus we should get what British agriculture has lacked for a hundred years, not only capital, but brains of the highest order.

It is common knowledge that the cleverest of our young men, whether they be the sons of landowners, farmers, or labourers, leave the land because there seems to be little scope for them if they lack capital. Owing to this want, the best of our young men when they leave agricultural colleges, do not become farmers, but take up posts on rubber and tea plantations abroad, or become land agents or lecturers at home.

The large farm, communally owned and administered, will give the man whose capital consists of his brains and personality an

opportunity now denied. It is essential to the proper working of these large farms that our educational system should be drastically improved and democratised. Agricultural technical schools must be established which shall be open to all capable of profiting from their courses. In preparation for these schools the rural children's elementary education should be conducted with at least as much belief in its value as is evinced in the most enlightened urban centres. No longer must the years devoted to school be regarded as years filched from the profit-making routine of a calling in which the child of the cottage is always doomed to the subordinate positions.

The rural teachers must be as well qualified as he, and especially as she, who teach in urban schools. We must secure the abolition of the supplementary teacher from the country school. It is no longer possible to engage her in urban areas. Why, then, should the children of the agricultural worker be left to the tender mercies of the woman, who, having attained the mature age of eighteen, qualifies to teach in the school by alleging that she has been successfully *vaccinated*? I never yet heard of an Education Authority insisting on seeing the outward visible signs of that peculiar method of proving the existence of the inward spiritual graces of the fully equipped educationist.

The teacher of the rural school should be in

a position that will make him regard the rural school as an end in itself, and not merely the lowest rung in a ladder of promotion whose top is always in a large town school. The establishment of efficient rural Central Schools under the Act of 1918 will help in this direction as well as in bringing together children from neighbouring villages. It is no small educational gain to bring the child-mind of one village into contact with other minds in a similar stage of development from other villages.

Without the large farm and communal management, improved education will be of little value to the village itself. The life of the adult in the country must be one that an ordinarily cultured mind can live with self-respect before the advantages of sound general education will do other than urge the scholar to seek more congenial surroundings in the town, or in the more democratic atmosphere of the Colonies.

The increase of the rural population that would come with the more economic management of farming, the establishment of many industries now unknown in the villages,—both these factors would co-operate with the improvement of education to provide an outlet in agriculture for personal aptitudes that are now unwanted by those who control the rural life of England. The early technical training

of the agriculturist should be on properly run farms under the management of the Agricultural Committee. There the pupil should be taught all that science can bring to the aid of the farmer.

The lad and the girl who have proved themselves to possess aptitude for the land, no matter whether they have been born in the village or the town, should be as carefully trained for their future career as are entrants to the Navy. The latter are trained on board a ship; the former must be trained on a farm. The general education of the youthful naval officer is not neglected, and both the general and technical education of our farm workers would benefit if, on the pupil reaching an age—certainly not younger than fifteen—the two branches of learning were developed simultaneously. At the same time, the boy at a farm school who evinces a dislike to agriculture should be given the opportunity to continue his education at an urban secondary school. The idea that all that is wanted from the schools is a constant supply of cheap, servile labour must be ruthlessly eradicated.

In my opinion there should be winter schools established as well for the extended education of those who desire further instruction. Here the fast vanishing crafts of hedging, thatching, hurdle-making, etc., should be taught. The intricacies of constructing and repairing modern

agricultural machinery might also be practically explained in these institutions, to which repairing workshops should be attached. Every county should have a number of demonstration and experimental plots for the enlightenment of both the young and the middle-aged. In short, the communal farm will need, *and will demand*, the very utmost assistance learning can bring to agriculture. Peripatetic teachers are all very well as a makeshift, but convincing demonstrations in scientific agriculture cannot be performed by a series of conjuring tricks in a lecture room.

The entire cost of education should be borne by the nation, and none of it raised by County Councils. Similarly, the repairing of county roads scored by the wheels of heavy motor lorries, travelling from one great town to another, should be borne by the Exchequer.

Much has been written about agricultural education, co-operation, and credit banks, and I do not propose to add to the tonnage of those ponderous tomes. But I must say a few words about marketing and transport, for men will work with no heart at farming if the fruits of their labour are robbed from them by those who control the market stalls and the cattle rings.

As far as joint-stock banks are concerned, though they may have been helpful in the past to distressed agriculturists, the last thing in the world that we should do is to ask bankers

to finance any new agricultural schemes. In a policy such as I have outlined, the State alone should be the banker. Any attempt to increase the sphere of the joint-stock banks would be to increase the difficulties of land nationalisation. The banks are to-day obtaining a powerful grip on the land, as most of the money that farmers have raised in order to buy their holdings has been advanced by banks. It is notorious that many of these farmers have paid much too high a price to landowners, and when the crash comes, banks will become owners of much of the land of Great Britain.

In the control of markets and transport, that is to say, in the conveyance, distribution, and selling of all farm produce, in sending cattle, sheep, and pigs to districts where they could be reared with the greatest economy and success, and in sending fodder and food where they are most needed, the National Council of Agriculture, or Ministry of Agriculture, would come into effective play. Nothing could be more ludicrous or disheartening than the present method of sending goods to salesmen who are in close alliance with one another, and who reap fortunes out of the charming trustfulness of the producers. Nothing could be worse than the vested interest in markets with the congestion of their mean streets. When it comes to selling live stock the price often

depends, not so much on the value of the beasts, as on the rings of dealers who may or may not be present. Indeed, prices may depend on whether these gentlemen have had their lunch or whether they have a train to catch. In any case, the consumer does not benefit by the losses incurred by the producer.

Transport service must be linked up from John o' Groat's to Land's End by a national system, and particular attention should be paid to the utilisation of canals and the short transport distances in which motor lorries should be employed in the collection and delivery of goods from and to the nearest railway station or market town. It is in these short distances that the greatest waste takes place. A tremendous saving might be effected in the repeated handling of heavy material like fertilisers.

Municipal markets should be immediately established, where goods should be sold by salaried auctioneers who are neither farmers nor market gardeners, nor have shops of their own to supply. When agricultural organisation becomes complete, these salaried salesmen will naturally evolve into distributing agents for the whole community. As things stand to-day, there should be no difficulty in the Government being supplied with farm produce from county farms in order to feed the Army and Navy.

But before the land can be properly culti-

vated we shall have to house a very much larger rural population. Between 1872 and 1914,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million acres of land were lost to the plough. We recovered some of this in 1917-18, yet I suppose to-day we have still 2 million acres to plough to bring ourselves up to the level of 1872. This would mean cottages for at least an additional 50,000 workers, without taking into consideration the greater number which would be required for intensive cultivation, or for men employed at reclaiming the waste, or indeed for housing adequately the people already living in villages, for whom alone it is estimated another 200,000 houses are needed.

In making any attempt at village-planning we should immediately "re-enclose" the land which lies close to village streets, not only to provide for the growth of the village and to forestall the creation of a huddled rural slum, but also to provide villagers with allotments and pastures handy for the keeping of a cow, a pony, ducks, or hens. Our moribund Parish Councils would have some new life infused into them if they had the control over these small areas of common land. If they were also made the watchdogs of bad cultivation, becoming the advisory sub-committees, reporting to County Agricultural Committees, farm labourers would take a greater interest in Parish Council elections.

In planning villages, foresight is needed in selecting sites for those factories of the future, which, in a well-organised State, should be in the country and not in the congested cities. Unnecessarily costly freighting and deterioration in quality is experienced in the sending of soft fruit from the orchard to the town factory. In transport, this sometimes assumes a ludicrous proportion, such as when large quantities of raspberries are sent from Perthshire to London, or of strawberries from Kent to Aberdeen. Fruit and vegetables are often forwarded from Evesham to London and back to Birmingham or Cardiff.

Fresh, soft fruit should not be pulped in the Whitechapel Road, but where it is grown, amid the Kentish orchards or the strawberry fields of South Hants. Vegetables should be dried in factories in the districts where vegetables are grown, and sugar extracted in beet-growing districts. Bacon factories should be erected where herds of swine are kept; and butter redolent of dewy pastures should not be made in the odorous purlieus of Limehouse, but where the air is sweet with the fragrance of vernal grass. Sites, too, must be sought for the foundry where farm implements are to be wrought, and for the sawmill where planks for building and posts for fencing can be ripped.

The jam and vegetable drying factories and creameries should provide work for women who

wish to gain their economic independence, and each factory should be worked as a Guild, co-operating with the farm workers, all forming a rural civilisation in an interchange of goods and social life, such as is almost unknown in the present day.

More houses are the only real solution to the intolerable restrictions imposed upon those whose fate it is to live in farm-tied cottages, and it is in supplying this urgent need that County Agricultural Committees would, if constituted on the lines I have advocated, in a large measure bring about the redemption of the empty countryside.

Men whose duty it is to look after live stock should, to be in attendance when animals are born or are sick, live somewhere close to the stockyard and the lambing fold. Cottages, whether they are on the farms of private landlords, or in State-owned farms, must, in that sense, be farm-tied. Nevertheless, as long as it is within the power of the landlord, as it is even under the "protection" of the Agriculture Act, to turn the worker out, giving him only a week or two's notice, or on the recommendation of the District Wages Committee, we cannot truly make it a boast that the Englishman's home is his castle. It is reasonable to assume that a farmer's stockman's cottage should be occupied by one of his stockmen, but it is an intolerable state of tyranny if, when the farmer and worker

fall out, the worker is liable to have his goods and chattels pitched out on to the roadside. Every tenant should be subject to six months' notice, especially in view of the fact that he has probably put much labour into his cottage garden. And if the farmer must have a man while he is waiting for the discharged employee to leave, he should lodge him in his own farmhouse, which is generally contiguous to the stockyard, and board and lodge him as was the custom in the old days.

But there is the general housing problem to be solved ; and here let me clear up a popular misconception as to housing administration in rural districts. We have the Housing of the Working Classes Act, and we have the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, but in spite of its powers and provisions to build, it has closed eleven times more houses than it has built. Although the Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908 was in no way designed to be a housing act, yet under its provisions many more cottages have been built than under the Housing Acts, and since the War, in the administration of the Small Holdings and Land Settlement Acts, the building of country cottages on the larger estates now being broken up has proceeded at a far more rapid rate.

There is no administrative body which has failed more disastrously in England in the administration of local government than our

Rural District Councils, composed for the most part of reactionary farmers. And this has been the housing authority for rural districts.

Although it was resolved two years ago to build six cottages in my own parish, not a single brick has yet been laid. Why six was the figure decided upon I cannot tell, for I am sure that if an inquiry were made amongst those who live in overcrowded cottages, and of the engaged young people waiting to get married, probably we should find not six, but thirty or forty, cottages were required. What is wanted to-day is a new inquiry held all over the country and the publication of up-to-date reports of Medical Officers of Health; though I very much doubt if respectable libraries like Mudie's would handle these reports, so staggering to the sensitive mind would be the revelations of Zolaesque obscenities due to overcrowding.

I see no reason why the Rural District Council should not cease altogether to be the housing authority, and the County Agricultural Committee be made responsible for the building of cottages, for under the Land Settlement Act they now have power to build a cottage on half an acre of land.

County Agricultural Committees would have enormous economic advantages over Rural District Councils, both in being able to acquire large estates and to use the raw material contained therein. They would have the chalk,

the clay, the sand, and some of the wood and slate required. Guilds of brickmakers, and building operatives, might easily act in co-operation with Guilds of farm workers, and the saving to the community in the cost of building materials would be great. The presence of blacksmiths, engineers, carpenters, and bricklayers on large farms would be most helpful to agriculturists in effecting repairs to building and machinery. Houses, however, would have to be provided for those who build houses. Accommodation might in some measure be found in the empty rooms of large country houses. We had to house soldiers thus in war-time; why not house the soldiers of industry in this period of reconstruction? Large country houses with about thirty bedrooms, and affording accommodation for two old ladies and a lap-dog might be usefully converted into country inns. Incidentally, in supplying food to the operative builders and other industrial workers direct from the farm, not only would there be a ready market for a portion of the produce but a saving in transport expenses would be effected.

And the swarm of officials? Incidentally farmers should be the last persons to complain about hordes of officials. Their failure to deliver the goods in war-time, their incorrigible law-breaking habits expressed by refusing to pay the minimum wage, created a horde of

officials who, unfortunately, had to be kept by the taxpayers. Such officials should not be necessary in a well-organised State, for they are non-producers. Farmers appear to have a particular tenderness for officials if they are privately employed, judging by the number of men with something to sell, who swarm into every town and village, overlapping one another like a football scrimmage. Travellers, manufacturers' agents, brokers, wholesale and retail salesmen, they and their motor-cars are all welcomed with open arms by farmers, and sustained in affluence by the farming community. Well might Sir Leo Chiozza Money say in his book, *The Triumph of Nationalisation*: "If all the State offices (in war-time) had been ranged in two straight lines they would have formed one fairly large street. A much larger street would be formed by putting together the offices of a single commercial business, that of insurance—a business which would be obsolete in a properly organised society. This illustration may help some critics of nationalisation to that useful gift—a sense of proportion."

I wonder how many of us who ate our daily bread in 1917 realised that "officials" had bought £19,216,000 worth of wheat in that year from the available world's supplies, at the nominal cost of £18,000 for salaries and establishment charges; or how many of us

who wore wool, bought at a reasonable price, realised that it was due to the world's clippings being bought by a civil servant named Mr. U. F. Wintour?

Instead of having to pay a horde of inspectors, which farming by inspectorship means—visiting, at great cost of administration to the community, segregated units where only a few men are employed in order to see that other men are doing their duty—we should get officials engaged in helping to produce food for the nation. If farming under private enterprise has been a ship adrift without a rudder, farming under inspectors is merely shouting directions from the shore to the storm-tossed vessel.

No longer will men be appointed bailiffs or foremen because they have shown a capacity to be mean, to spy, or to bully, but because they have shown skill at creative work, and know how to inspire their fellow-workers with lofty ideals.

It will be interesting to watch the difference between the selfish spirit displayed by men labouring on small holdings, and that displayed by the Comrades of the Great Farm.

The work of the small holder, and of the small holder's wife, is never finished. He and she are always busy, and, despite all their labours, there is always something more to be done. And for the children, when they come

home from school, or, indeed, before they leave home for school, there is often milk to be delivered, cows to be got in, poultry to be fed, and messages to be run. As for attending a dance, or playing in a village game, that is almost out of the question. It is as difficult to tear a small holder away from his work to attend a concert, let alone a political meeting, as it would be to get him to write Greek verse.

If there happens to be a village library—a rare occurrence—it is not visited by the industrious small holder. If there is a public improvement proposed which will add to the rates, it is promptly vetoed by the parsimonious small holder, especially if he is an owner. No wonder the children learn to hate the land, and early come to look upon the ribbon of road which leads to a town as the road to freedom, to some El Dorado, where they can revive their dying capacity for laughter. As they gaze out of their bedroom windows at night, and see the bright glow of the distant town on the ebon-hued sky, they dream of some “Arabian Nights’ Entertainment” which will bring relief to their life of ceaseless drudgery.

On the other hand, where the large farm is organised with its company of working co-partners, there surely shall we see the revival of sports, of dancing, and of music. There the village institute will become a live centre for social thought and jollity. Politics will not

be excluded from the discussions, and the library will consist of other books besides the immortal works of Tupper, or of the excellent Mrs. Henry Wood. Possibly we shall see companies of pastoral players evolved, bringing colour and merriment into our sombre surroundings, in which black bowler hats and dark clothes have been the outward and visible sign of respectability. As I write I recall a scene I was fortunate enough to witness last May, which makes one hopeful that the divine gift of laughter and the love of beauty is not dead even in those who, with little to encourage them, follow the plough to-day. . . .

The sunlight broke into a green radiance as it shot its rays against the noble canopy of beech leaves. Below the hanger lay the small downland village where the rustics were reveling in a dramatic gesture which seemed to come as naturally to these stolid southern Englishmen as that of casting seed across a ploughed field.

With few exceptions all were sons and daughters of the soil, and the soil was that of Sussex. Behind the beech woods, across the spacious upland deer park a many-turreted castle stood in all its splendour to remind us that feudalism could still hold sway in southern England. Its walls were hung with ancient armour, with tapestry, and the pillage of monasteries. Its robing rooms were full of

the richest brocades ; but these riches gave little joy, for nobody made use of them. They who sustained the titled occupant by the sweat of their brow would as little think of laughing within its lofty walls as in a cathedral.

In the hamlet, a few miles away, men and women and little children were decked in colours as gay as any oriental city, and all wore their bravery with the ease of trained actors. I saw a young worker having his toga (a curtain) pinned over his shirt, and his brow crowned with bay leaves, with the unconcern of a Roman born to the purple. Even the village blacksmith, who swaggered about in a scarlet coat (probably a bed-quilt), and the old respectable Methodist, robed in a blue dressing-gown, who led the May Queen's white palfrey, looked as if they were playing parts in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Yet it was the old ladies in this motley pastoral pageant, in which history seemed indivisible from fairy tales, who struck me as having the day of their lives.

It was with dramatic fitness that Roman gentlemen in gold coloured togas, and Roman matrons in green, with sandalled Vestal Virgins in white, should march along the road which led to a Roman village (Bignor), and that Saxons, and folk of Shakespeare's England, with elves, fairies, and witches should follow until the Maypole was reached. It was,

however, the old ladies who wore wonderful creations of a Georgian and early Victorian age who sensed the drama of Life with the keenest perceptions. When they brought again to the light of a May morn the dresses stored away in old oak chests, what memories they unfolded! With what ardency of youth, what sentiments, passionate, regretful, or clingingly sentimental had they been folded away! Grandmothers brought out bridal dresses of taffeta silk as blue as the sky overhead, which *their* mothers had worn, and now they saw with pride their slim granddaughters decked in all the coloured bravery of a bygone day.

Those who had seen better days recalled once more the triumphs of their youth. What stories some of these dresses could have told! There was the family, whose children fluttered out like green and red butterflies, that had come from yeoman stock and are now labourers.

Yet complete dresses were the exception and not the rule, for most costumes were made up of odds and ends. The rape of many a bedroom had been carried out with ruthlessness. Two yards of calico was all that these villagers purchased, and yet how gay they looked in their greens and pinks, their flaming scarlets, and their orange as brilliant as the setting sun!

Nobody came to see them from the towns—no cinema operators, thank Heaven, and but

few motor-cars. It was a village community pleasing itself and not the public.

When they halted to praise the Giver of all good things, under the shade of trees at the cross-roads, the two charming elves in green hose and winged green hats bowed their sleepy little heads across the cushion of moss which held the May Queen's crown of flowers they carried. Tiny white-winged fairies—babes two or three years old—poised themselves for flight from buttercup to buttercup, on the green grass of the roadside, whilst doves of Peace carved on ash-staves symbolised the universal desire of goodwill towards all men.

No rehearsal had taken place, and it was the first time that the village had held high revel in old English fashion. As the violet shadows deepened across the Downs, and the quaint old folk song, "Summer is y-comen in," was being sung, and the boy herald, gaily dressed in blue, headed the procession which wound back to the village, one surely could hear the horns of elf-land faintly blowing from the fairy beech woods! Was he heralding a new avenue of life opening out for our English youths and maidens who were so gaily dressed as Dresden shepherdesses, milkmaids, pedlars, and Jacks in the Green?

No one had to ask permission for a half holiday in order to make merry. That battle had been won. The young unmarried plough-

men wore white flannels now with the artist's son as in fellowship they danced the sword-dance with graceful agility. Yes; the jocund youth of rural England meant to create a new era for those who lived by the land. . . . Down the lane where the overarching trees formed a bower a new pattern was woven. Narrow bands of white flannel now girdled the pink and green of shepherdesses and milkmaids.

Whilst penning the last pages of this book the fate of the Agriculture Act blown hither by Lords and Commons hung in the balance. It would require the bracing wind which sweeps over the wold to sweeten the decaying leaves of this Act, and even then I doubt if they are worth preserving, for they are mostly autumn leaves. None of them, however, litter the carriage drives of parks, and I doubt if farmers will ever gather them up even in order to fertilise the land. They will probably be swept up into a heap and burnt. Let us, therefore, start afresh with something which has a touch of spring in it. Glancing eastward toward the Dawn the horizon looks Red. The pious, conservative-minded Russian peasants have driven the Russian noble from off his vast estate, and have become themselves lord of the soil, dividing the spoil between them, setting at defiance, we are told, the famished Bolshevik workers of the towns, and slaughter-

ing the unguarded emissaries who demand a share of the peasants' produce for the city dwellers. There, the avenues to Arcadia are closed by armed hordes of selfish peasant proprietors. Here, in England's green and pleasant land, let us take the right road while it is still open to us. Let us, as Lord Ernle said, have a sense of proportion; let us take the open road to Arcadia before it is too late!

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