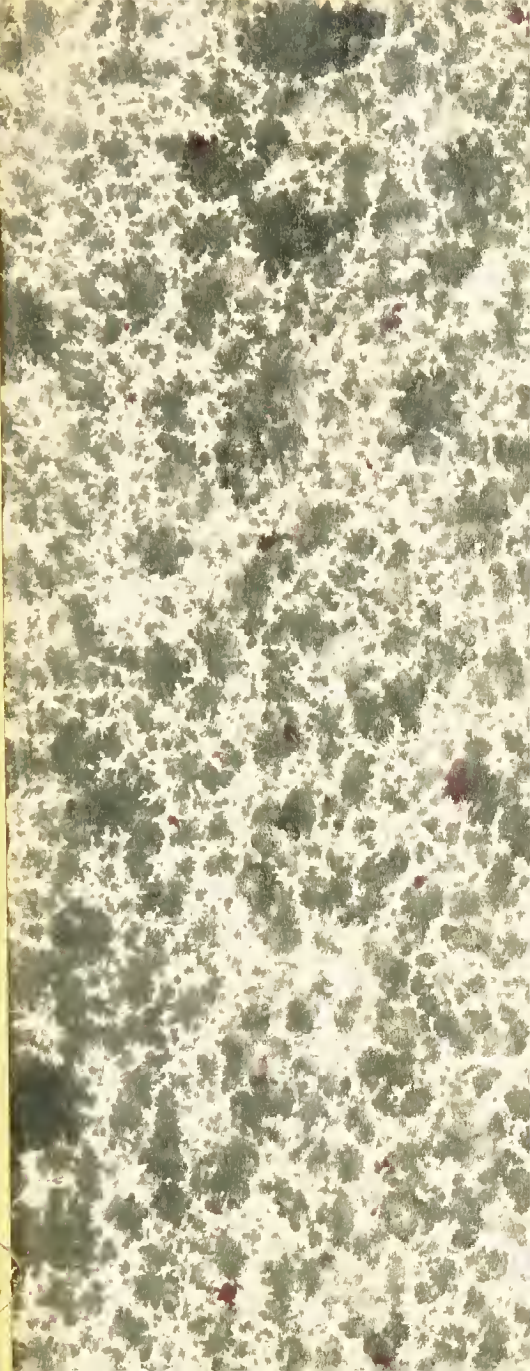


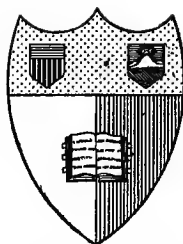
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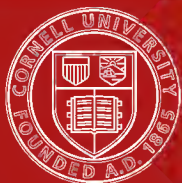
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# FOOD PRODUCTION IN FRANCE IN TIME OF WAR

*Supplementary Report to the Trustees of the  
Albert Kahn Travelling Fellowship*

BY

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*Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, Albert Kahn Travelling  
Fellow. November, 1914—September, 1915,  
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## FOOD PRODUCTION IN FRANCE IN TIME OF WAR

IF the original plan of my tour had been carried out, France would have been the first foreign country to come under my observation. Unfortunately, the Kaiser decided otherwise, and after thirty-six hours at Dieppe, during which not much study of the kind contemplated by the distinguished founder of this Fellowship was possible, I was very glad to find a place for myself and my luggage in a very crowded boat that brought me back to the shores of England.

About two years later, after the unravelling of a prodigious amount of red tape in Foreign Office formalities, I was enabled to complete my Albert Kahn trip by a tour of nearly two months' duration in the country, which, next to my own country (Ireland), I have learnt to esteem most highly, and to admire above all other countries, my own included. Fate was kind to me in this particular; as it was I came to France with my powers of observation, I trust, quickened by ten months' experience of other countries, and with a greater knowledge, so to speak, of what I wanted to know. I had reached certain definite conclusions as a result of my former travels and studies, but while the experience I have gained in France may lead me to modify the expression of the reasons on which they are based, the conclusions themselves have been essentially confirmed, and the evidence in favour of them, in my opinion, corroborated. Consequently, on reading over the main body of my report, all of which was written prior to my visit to France, I have not found it necessary to alter scarcely a comma as a result of the information I have since acquired.

I knew in a general way that France was almost a self-supporting country in the matter of food produc-

tion. I also knew that military necessities had denuded the fields of practically every male person of military age, and yet I gathered that the volume of food production had been well maintained. I was anxious to find by what miracle of organisation the French people and their Government had been enabled to secure this result, especially as in the United Kingdom, and in particular Ireland, the State had shown a fatuous incapacity to organise the agricultural aspect of the national endeavour, and it was a matter of common knowledge that any considerable drain on the agricultural man-power of the country, which under the voluntary system had contributed few recruits to the army, would involve a diminution in food production far outweighing the military advantage obtained. This was my dominant motive for braving the terrors of passport formalities and undertaking to complete my tour when I did. I need scarcely say that, once in France, I found far more of interest than I had gone to see. I also managed to interest one or two leading papers in the United Kingdom in the object of my investigations. A few articles from my pen appeared in their columns, and, now that the Lloyd George Government is in office, some of the suggestions made therein seem likely to be carried out, at least as far as Great Britain is concerned. That, however, is in no sense due to me, but because action along the lines indicated was what any, except the late incompetent Administration, would have spontaneously taken.

As soon as I had arrived in Paris I took an early opportunity of making the acquaintance of the library of the Société des Agriculteurs de France. The librarian was politeness itself, and with his assistance I was able to study the history of the efforts made by the State and voluntary agencies to preserve French agriculture since the war began. I found the task more formidable than I had anticipated, as the activities of all concerned had been prodigious. However, though the amount of reading to be done was great, the process of assimilating the data at my disposal was easy, because the nature and importance of the problem to be solved had been grasped by those responsible



for its solution from the first day of the war, and the remedies proposed were of such a kind as one would naturally expect to commend themselves to a clear-thinking, intelligent, and practical nation like the French.

The importance of maintaining the nation's food supply as a necessary condition of victory was realised at once. The problem itself—the scarcity of agricultural labour—was the natural outcome of the even more imperious necessity of mobilising the manhood of the country to repel the invader. As the State did not have to waste its energy in "touting" for recruits under a so-called "voluntary system" it was free to concentrate a considerable portion of it on the reconciliation of these two apparently conflicting claims in the general interests of the nation. The necessity of subordinating all else to the general interest—a phrase with which I was constantly meeting—explains and accompanies all the measures taken in the task of organising victory; this necessity was consciously realised by the French nation individually and collectively to a much greater extent, as it seemed to me, than it was at the corresponding time by the people of Great Britain.

The whole machinery of Government in France enables the general interest to be secured much more easily and certainly than in England. This is accounted for by the different way in which the institutions of liberty were acquired, and the historical conditions of its growth, in the two countries respectively. Where the Frenchman talks of the "State" or the "Republic" we use a more concrete term the "Crown." The apparent vagueness of the former terms is really a stimulus to thought. The apparent definiteness of the latter term has the contrary effect. And yet if the phrase, the "Crown," means anything it means the State, and the Crown typifies and symbolises the general interests as opposed to those of individuals. Unfortunately, in comparatively recent times, the Crown suggested rather the individual who wore it, and the latter was sometimes a grasping tyrant. The whole effort of the English people was directed for over a

century to asserting the liberty of the subject against the pretensions of the sovereign. But the liberty thus asserted and won was essentially of an individualistic character. The prerogative of the Crown—that is to say, the discretionary power of the executive—was reduced to the smallest possible dimensions, the principle of the rule of law was established, and law itself gradually extended over nearly all the field of the State's activities, with the result that most of the functions of public administration are carefully regulated, defined, and limited by legal enactments of one kind or another.

In the abstract law is admirably adapted to prevent the oppression of the individual by the individual. But as a means of preventing the oppression of the individual by the social order it is relatively powerless, while owing to the expense that accompanies recourse to this "guarantee of English liberty" it has itself become a most potent instrument of oppression. The limitation and regulation of the powers of the Crown, though justified by the historical conditions in which they were imposed, have left a permanent legacy of weakness no longer justified now that the Crown has ceased to be associated with the ambitions of the ruler and stands for the central authority of the State. In other words, individual liberty has been secured at the expense of the general well-being, and the ability of the State to safeguard the interests of the community as against those of the individual or class has been seriously compromised.

The process has proceeded so gradually and unostentatiously that this incidental consequence of it has scarcely been noticed. Yet any careful student of a work like Dicey's "Law of the Constitution" will, I feel sure, agree that my contention is in the main justified.

The French people have accomplished in a few hours at the barricades what it took their more conservative island neighbours generations to achieve. The power of the State as typified by the French King at the time of the Revolution could scarcely have been greater. A short struggle enabled the champions of liberty to put

an end to the monarchy and secure for themselves the machinery of Government. Now, however objectionable arbitrary power may be when wielded by the nerveless or tyrannical hands of an hereditary monarch, there is much to be said for it from the point of view of the popular leader with ideas to carry out and reforms to accomplish, when he finds himself suddenly in the position of the tyrant he has supplanted. In other words, the former tyrant disappears, the tyranny remains, though the ideals by which it is animated and the objects it seeks to accomplish are materially changed. Owing to this combination of circumstances the triumph of popular ideas did not take place at the expense of the authority of the State, but on the contrary popular ideas, when their exponents were in power, found the State's authority a most useful ally of their cause. Of course, executive power, in so far as it was excessive and involved a danger to individual liberty that was not justified by a consideration of the general interests, has long since been reduced to proper limits, but whereas in England law and the judiciary have spread their tentacles over nearly all the State's activities, in France a just balance is preserved between the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive; the latter represents the general interests in a pre-eminent degree and in the nature of the case is admirably adapted to securing it. The insidious process by which in undermining the authority of the Crown former generations of Englishmen unconsciously undermined the authority of the State has been avoided and individual liberty has been secured, but not at the expense of the general well-being.

Before leaving Paris for the country I was fortunate in being enabled to make the acquaintance of certain members of the Albert Kahn Club, including its distinguished founder and patron, Monsieur Albert Kahn, and Monsieur Garnier, its secretary, and one of the most active spirits of the organisation.

Through the co-operation of the latter and that of another member of the Club who held an important position in the Ministry of the Interior, I was enabled to procure letters of introduction to a number of Préfets

of typical departments, recommending me to their "benevolent welcome," and charging them to facilitate my researches into agricultural conditions in the provinces in every possible way. I may say here, by way of anticipation, that all to whom I was thus introduced discharged their obligation in a most courteous, obliging, and satisfactory manner, and that, too, in spite of the serious preoccupations which their heavy responsibilities must have caused them.

I take it that all readers of this report will have a general knowledge of the principles on which French administration is organised. The Central Government consists of about a dozen departments, the political heads of which form the Cabinet or Council of Ministers. The country is divided up into 87 departments and at the head of the administration in each stands a *Préfet*, representing *departmentally* (in the English sense) the Ministry of the Interior, and *generally* the whole National Government in so far as its activities or those of any of its departments concern the territory within his jurisdiction.

The local officials of specialised Ministries like that of Agriculture are "attached" to the Prefectures of the different departments. The different ministries in Paris normally communicate with their respective provincial officials through the *Préfet*, who is thus enabled to keep in touch with all the work of administration in his department, and secure effective co-ordination between its different branches. The occupations of a French *Préfet* are almost as multifarious as those of a Collector-Magistrate in India, and the positions they respectively occupy are essentially similar. The *Préfet* is called upon to carry out decrees of the Minister of War as well as those of the Minister of the Interior. He has to do with the Ministry of Public Works as well as with the Ministry of Agriculture. The war had scarcely been declared before the *Préfets* were found acting as an extemporised labour exchange for the distribution and the most effective utilisation of a body of 20,000 sailors placed at the disposal of the Ministry of Agriculture to assist in saving the harvest of August, 1914. Could any system of admin-

istration have shown a greater degree of flexibility, or a greater capacity to secure the general interest in a sudden national emergency?

Ever since August 4, 1914, mobilised men have been periodically placed at the disposal of the Agricultural Services at busy seasons, and the *Préfets*, representing as they do all the different Ministries concerned, have played a prominent part in the organisation of the labour thus made available. Under the oriental régime we are familiar with in the United Kingdom what was effected in France with the utmost ease almost by a stroke of the pen before a single shot was fired has scarcely yet been made possible.\* I am more than ever convinced that if we want to secure effective co-ordination between different public services there is only one way of doing it, and that is to divide the country up into different territorial units and place over each a single official responsible for carrying out the requirements of all the departments of the Central Government which in any way concern the district over which he is placed.

Administration in the United Kingdom has been specialised and departmentalised to a degree. The only possibility of co-ordination—and it is usually a mere possibility—is between heads of different departments in London or Dublin. The inspectors and other officials of different departments, whose business is to go about through the country, have no official relations with one another as such, owing to the absence of provincial centres of administration and the non-existence of a provincial focus for their respective administrative activities. Each such official acquires a very limited knowledge of social and economic problems from the very specialised point of view of his own particular department, and he usually prides himself on his ignorance of the work of all others. Society is supposed to be an organism and so is the human body. We would laugh at the pretensions of a doctor to be a specialist on the liver if he had not even a general knowledge of the functions of the heart. But the system of administration that has

\* The Defence of the Realm Act is, in effect, a 40 h.p. petrol engine propelling a stage coach.

been allowed to grow up in the United Kingdom produces just such specialists—and the well-being of the body politic is even more important than that of the individual.

The extent to which the military authorities have co-operated with the agricultural services in the task of victory may be realised from the following instance. In the department of La Sarthe (which I visited), from October 1, 1915, to August 10, 1916, 303,890 days' work (*journées de travail*) on the part of the military were given to agriculture. The wealth thus produced may be reckoned at about 4s. per day, and there are nearly eighty such departments where a similar state of affairs may be taken to have existed. Nor can it be maintained, in view of the military effort of our gallant ally, that this result was achieved at the expense of military efficiency. On the contrary, it is a tribute to the practical commonsense and organising ability of the country to which English people were formerly not wont to ascribe such qualities.

The Ministry of Agriculture is represented in each department by an expert in agricultural production and organisation, known as Director of Agricultural Services. Each of the three or more *arrondissements* into which a department is divided usually has a Professor of Agriculture performing similar functions under his supervision. Steps were early taken to make up for the deficiency of labour by encouraging the introduction of labour-saving machinery. The more expensive implements and machines could not be bought or economically used by the individual small farmer (and the average French farmer is a small farmer), consequently it was necessary to adopt some form of co-operative organisation for the collective purchase and use of machines of this kind, particularly tractors for ploughing. The State now reaped the benefit of its wisdom in fostering the growth of agricultural co-operation in the past. Co-operative societies, where they existed, were used and found invaluable as a means of spreading the use of labour-saving machines. But even in the absence of such societies the traditional Communal organisation of local government proved itself easily adaptable

to this task. Next to the department the commune or parish is the only unit of local administration that matters. Its elected municipal council has deliberative functions, and the Mayor is the municipal executive. The latter is also the instrument by which certain orders of the Government, descending through the Préfet, are ultimately carried out.

On the 8th September, 1915, by a decree of the Minister of Agriculture, subsidies to the amount of one-third the cost of the outfit purchased were offered to co-operative societies or communes that bought expensive labour-saving machinery for collective use. Thanks to the courtesy of Monsieur Vézin, Director of Agricultural Services of Loir et Cher, and of the Préfet of that department, who placed his motor car at our disposal, I was able to see the concrete results of this policy. At a place called Oucques we found a communal tractor ploughing, driven by a "mutilé de la guerre" (he had lost a foot), and with the assistance of the machine he was doing as much work as four men and eight horses could have done in the ordinary way. The commune paid for labour and running expenses and hired the use of the tractor for ploughing at the rate of about £1 per acre. Elsewhere I found a co-operative society which had obtained a tractor on similar terms. In the case of this department the movement was further helped by the Council General (deliberative assembly) of the department which, following the good example of the State, had voted 50,000 francs to be used in loans for this purpose. After leaving Blois I heard that many other communes and co-operative societies had responded to this very practical policy not only in Loir et Cher but elsewhere, wherever conditions were suitable. In the words of a member of the Council General of La Sarthe the opening meeting of which I was enabled to witness (Monsieur Caillaux was elected to its presidency on that day), "L'avenir est à la machine."

At Pithiviers, near Orléans, accompanied by Monsieur Moisson, Secrétaire Général of the Loiret, and Monsieur Donon, Director of Agricultural Services of that department, I saw a demonstration of the capa-

bilities of different kinds of tractors. I have the most pleasant recollection of that occasion (I regret to say it was Sunday), of the lunch at the hotel where a prominent local farmer entertained us hospitably, of the visit to the field of operations, where several hundreds from far and near had gathered, of the good-natured chaff of Monsieur le Sous-Préfet of Pithiviers about the "dévergondage" that goes on in certain British colonies (he had travelled a good deal), and of the playful bantering to which I was subjected on the part of Monsieur Moisson when the "Bull" tractor, the only English make that competed, did not behave itself satisfactorily.

Two American tractors took part in the demonstration. I went up to the conductor of one of them (obviously an American) and unthinkingly spoke to him in French. He replied: "No comprene pas frongsais." However, as I understood American and he English, we were able to carry on quite an interesting conversation.

The railway companies in this case, and similarly in other cases, carried tractors and personnel to the scene of the demonstration free. Some of them give reduced rates on the carriage of tractors bought for collective use. Naturally they hope for an ultimate return in the shape of increased traffic receipts for carrying a greater quantity of agricultural produce, but I wish the self-interest of the railways of the United Kingdom (or rather of the Government that controls them) was half as enlightened.

The French have thus been carrying out in an intelligent and practical manner ever since the autumn of 1915 a policy the need for which has only just dawned on the national consciousness of the people of these islands. But unfortunately, at any rate so far as Ireland is concerned, the machinery by which such a policy should be carried out is a matter of dispute. The French commune or parish is an ideal unit for purposes of agricultural organisation. It was also a fortunate circumstance that the commune was already the traditional unit of local government and administration. Yet even under these conditions the State in France has



given the preference to voluntary co-operative associations of farmers wherever found, and has taken measures to turn every agricultural commune into what practically amounts to a co-operative society by associating with the Mayor a committee of agricultural action consisting of the most prominent co-operators—or in their absence the most enterprising farmers—that have been left in the commune; the whole agricultural policy of the commune—the only aspect of the municipal activities that matters now in rural France—is determined and dominated by these committees, acting through the Mayor under the supervision of the Préfet and the Director of Agricultural Services.

In Ireland the County Council Committees of Agriculture are quite incapable of doing anything except award premiums for prize bulls. The area of their activities, or rather inactivities, is too large, and so also are the areas which are supposed to be administered by rural district councils. In any case the machinery of “democratic” election has failed to secure in them an adequate representation of agriculturists, and if past experience is any guide the shopkeepers and publicans who dominate their counsels are more likely to show a tender susceptibility for “special methods of trading” than an energetic determination to secure an increase of food production by any and every means. Ireland, like France, is a country of small farmers, and it is obvious that if one of the most hopeful methods of increasing food production is to be adopted—the more extensive use of labour-saving machinery—it can only be done along co-operative lines. But, unfortunately, anything co-operative is anathema to these guardians of the public weal.

On the other hand, the co-operative organisation of farmers in agricultural societies of various kinds has developed in Ireland to an extent even greater than in France. The obvious thing for the Irish Government to do is to ignore the county councils and their co-called committees of agriculture altogether, and compel the Department of Agriculture to work through the existing co-operative societies. An energetic administration would do this, and in

addition call into existence the machinery of such a society in every agricultural parish in Ireland. Thus and thus only can the desired end be achieved, and I prophecy that if this is not done the mountains of officialdom that are at present "in labour" will produce a very "ridiculous mouse" indeed. As far as one can see at present, rather than do anything that would offend powerful political and economic, but essentially parasitic, interests, the State in Ireland appears to prefer the risk of famine.\*

A consideration of this subject reveals both the incompetence of our administrators and the futility of our system of administration when a sudden national emergency, requiring energetic measures of a novel character, has presented itself. Both local elected administrative bodies and central departments of Government are characterised by the same vice—a lack of initiative and an overwhelming tendency to follow a routine. This is rather a symptom of the disease than its fundamental cause. The latter must be sought elsewhere, and in the two cases is not altogether the same. I have referred elsewhere to the way in which law and the spirit of legalism have swallowed up almost the whole of the body politic. Most departments of public administration owe their existence to legal enactments of one kind or another. They have no powers except within the meaning of the Act or Acts they were constituted to administer. The latter have been passed piecemeal, and no attempt has ever yet been made to face the whole problem of public administration and codify, from the point of view of administrative efficiency and economy, the Acts which each department is supposed to administer, thus defining its functions while regulating and simplifying its powers. The result is that in the case of a single department serious gaps, militating against efficiency, exist between its different powers, while as between different departments overlapping takes place, the same power and thus the same function being capable of exercise by more than one; in the absence of a clear definition of function, unity of responsibility is de-

\* Recently the State in Ireland has shown a greater disposition to use the machinery of the Co-operative Societies.

stroyed, and what is everybody's business becomes nobody's business. Another consequence of the way in which our lawyer-politicians, for their own interests, have wrapped the body politic in a Nessus robe of legal complications, is that those concerned with administration have to walk warily, with a legal mentor constantly at their elbow, for fear of overstepping their powers. The latter is absolutely necessary in view of that fundamental principle of the British Constitution, the personal responsibility of everyone, including the servants of the Crown, for any breach of law with which he is in any way concerned, whether as principal or as the instrument that obediently carries out the will of an official superior. Moreover, a servant of the Crown who with the best intentions possible is guilty of a breach of law is tried by exactly the same courts, and his case is decided on exactly the same principles as if he was a private individual. From the French or any other commonsense point of view a civil servant represents the State in its collective aspect, and any legal disputes in which he is officially concerned have a fundamentally different character for that reason, are tried by different courts, and decided on different principles. The survival in English law of a principle no longer justified now that the Crown represents the State is disastrous to the general interests, since it makes administrative enterprise dangerous, and puts a premium on official inertia. In short, if this is one of the main pillars of English liberty, its consequences are the *reductio ad absurdum* of English ideals of liberty.

Under the British system of administration it is much more dangerous to break the law than to be incompetent or inefficient. Mere obedience to the law is no guarantee of administrative efficiency. On the contrary, the constant preoccupation about the necessity of keeping the law, in view of the very complicated character of the latter, is a very potent cause of administrative inefficiency. Human nature being what it is, the mental habit grew up, on the part of our bureaucracy, of never doing to-day anything of a kind different from what had been done before. In other

words, the only safe policy was to follow a routine. Even two and a half years of war have not availed to shake our officials out of the pre-war traditions in which they have become fossilised, but however regrettable in the general interests that may be, in addition to fulminating at those unfortunate individuals themselves, we ought for the sake of future well-being to go to the root of the matter and remove the fundamental cause of the disease which makes administrative efficiency in these islands impossible.

In the case of certain departments in Ireland responsibility for administration is vested in Boards of Commissioners of one kind or another. As most of the members are unpaid amateurs they have not much to lose by losing their positions, and it is hard to see how this responsibility can be enforced or to whom they are supposed to be responsible. Collective responsibility means individual irresponsibility, but that is the least of the vices of this wretched principle of administration. Anyone familiar with the working of a committee knows how hard it is for such a body to give a concentrated and continuous attention to any matter with which it has to do. A corporate entity of that description only lives at intervals for an hour or two at a time. Its proper function is deliberation and the decision of general principles of policy, but if such a body is responsible for actual administration as well its paid officials are condemned to follow a routine in the intervals when it is not alive, and important questions, however urgent, have to be kept over till the "next ordinary meeting." The members themselves, not being experts and being preoccupied by their own private affairs, are also likely to follow a routine and to shrink from taking any decision not sanctified by precedent however desirable in the public interest. The tendencies to routine, already sufficiently marked, are thus reinforced in the case of those departments, like the Congested Districts Board, where the principle of collective responsibility for administration applies.

Of course the late Cabinet provides the supreme, and I wish it were likely to be the last, instance of the utter incompetence of anything in the nature of a committee

when the business it undertakes to administer is at all difficult. The mere fact that the British public allowed the supreme direction of its affairs to remain in the hands of a Debating Society and its Chairman during over two years of a struggle for national existence, is to my mind a standing proof of the political incapacity of the Anglo-Saxon race, and of their utter inability to govern themselves much less Ireland. But for the destruction of Rumania I doubt whether the change to the present system of practically one-man rule would have been agreed to, but I trust the lesson will be learnt now once for all, as there are very few small nations left whose sacrifice might teach the British people other much-needed lessons in the elements of political wisdom.

The committee principle of administration is enthroned in county councils and the other local elected bodies who are supposed to manage our local affairs. In some cases they do actually manage them efficiently, when they are of a purely routine nature and they have got competent paid officials to do it for them! All that was said about administration by boards applies *mutatis mutandis* to those bodies also. They exercise functions and wield powers given to them under various Acts of Parliament. No man can plead ignorance of the law, but the theory that all men know the law is the greatest of all legal fictions. When I tried to investigate the legal powers of the various local administrative bodies I was referred to a very expensive work in two volumes, the author of which is probably the only man in Ireland who knows this branch of law thoroughly. I am quite certain that the actual men who are supposed to exercise these powers do not read this book, nor even the other smaller manuals which the enterprise of a barrister writer has endeavoured to place in their hands. For ordinary everyday affairs this ignorance of the law makes little practical difference, but responsibility for breach of law remains all the same, and a council is only safe if it keeps to the beaten track. In any case why base our administration of local affairs on a myth? Lack of initiative and the spirit of routine are thus just as characteristic of local administrative bodies as they are of

central boards and for substantially the same reasons. On the other hand, if a council shows an enterprising spirit and attempts anything unusual it is morally certain to run up against some legal obstacle or other, as a certain council in the South of Ireland discovered recently when it attempted to devise a means by which its workers, who were otherwise provided for, might avoid the very narrow meshes of the Insurance Commissioners' net.

The legal responsibility of councillors, such as it is, is enforced by a cumbrous method, and in this instance again obedience to the law may in certain cases result in a sacrifice of the general interests. The fact is that no law, however carefully drafted, can possibly cover all the individual cases that may arise, and, in matters of public administration, law being of a cast-iron nature, is ill-adapted to secure the public good in these constantly changing requirements of human society. To promote the well-being of the social organism some flexible principle ought to be introduced, a greater degree of discretionary powers being left in the hands of the administrative experts who supervise and control the actions of the local bodies. The Local Government Board only fulfils this function very imperfectly, and its attempts to instil a sense of public duty into local administrative authorities are sometimes really pathetic.

Neither legal responsibility nor the persuasiveness of the Local Government Board is adequate to secure administrative efficiency. The latter is supposed to result from the responsibility of the local authority to the people who have elected its members. But it is difficult if not impossible to fix responsibility in the case of such a corporate body, and the amount of public interest that is taken in its proceedings, except on the part of those who have tenders to send in, is not usually very great or very intelligent.

The remedy, of course, is to separate the functions of deliberation and administration. The former is eminently the function of a committee or a council, the latter can only be adequately performed by individuals in their individual capacity. That principle already

holds good in business organisation. The board of directors meets at intervals and settles general policy, the managing director or manager, a paid expert, is not interfered with in his purely administrative capacity. His responsibility is great, but his power, and he has much discretionary power, is commensurate with his responsibility. On the other hand, the secretary or the paid official of a county council is simply the human instrument for recording or carrying out its decisions, and the corporate body retains full responsibility for administration.

Local administration in the United Kingdom is decentralised, but in France all the advantages of decentralisation have been obtained without any of its characteristic disadvantages. In the former case central departments of administration are responsible (in theory at least) to Parliament, local administrative bodies are responsible to the local electorate. The *Préfets* and *Mayors* in France are the executive of their respective deliberate councils, but they also represent and carry out the will of the Central Government. In the United Kingdom co-ordination between the activities of local administrative bodies and central departments of administration in their respective spheres is difficult if not impossible to secure. In France it takes place as a matter of course because of the common executive bond that unites them. This provides a further illustration of the principle that co-ordination between different authorities can most easily be secured if the same person is charged with the duty of carrying out the will of the different authorities concerned, if indeed it can be secured in any other way. The Birkenhead Council would never have been allowed to advertise for men of military age to join its police force, and it would not have required a Press campaign to stop it, if French principles of administration had applied to England.

Such is the essential nature of the institutions of local government which are likely to be charged with the duty of carrying out the agricultural policy of a seriously alarmed Government. Is it any wonder that I am not hopeful of the result? We hear a good deal

about compulsory tillage in these days, but there is little evidence that those who advocate this apparently simple solution have a clear grasp of the elements of the problem involved. Let us see what our French friends have done in the matter.

When I was in France in September, 1916, a law was about to come into force authorising the Municipalities—*i.e.*, the Communes—to requisition uncultivated lands whose owners could not or would not cultivate them. It is not the French way to adopt a policy until they have created the conditions which make it possible to carry it out. The elements of the problem involved were briefly expert supervision, labour, and capital (including agricultural implements, seeds and fertilisers). The members of the Committees of Agricultural Action were appointed on account of their knowledge and experience as practical farmers. The idea is that one or other of these men will personally supervise any efforts at municipal cultivation that may be undertaken. Scarcity of labour was the chief difficulty, and if the experiment is a failure it will be entirely due to this cause. We have no such excuse in Ireland, as nine-tenths of the agriculturists of military age are not, as in France, absent on military duty. However, some tens of thousands of prisoners of war have been made available for agricultural work in a manner to be described subsequently, and doubtless the Government looks to this source mainly for the extra labour required.

As regards capital, the ordinary sources of agricultural credit will probably prove adequate. Nearly every commune in rural France has its agricultural bank (worked on co-operative lines), and nearly every chief town of a department has its "regional" bank. In the ordinary way the farmer borrows from his communal bank, which discounts his note of hand with the regional bank to which it belongs. The latter rediscounts this agricultural paper with the Bank of France if it is in need of fluid capital. The State in renewing the Charter of the Bank of France by a law of the 17th November, 1897, procured a loan from it of 40 million francs without interest "pour la durée de son privilège" (not bad business), and the money thus



acquired was lent free of interest to the regional banks. In addition, the State bargained with the Bank of France that one-eighth of the profits made by it in discounting agricultural paper should be paid to the State to be devoted to the same purpose, also free of interest. Up till 1910 the total amount thus placed at the disposal of agriculture was 103 million francs (about four millions sterling).

Since the war the activities of communal banks have diminished, partly because their personnel is in many cases mobilised, and partly because their members are often mobilised too, and their wives are reluctant to borrow. But the machinery still exists and the regional banks are capable of functioning actively. The capital required for the compulsory cultivation of disused lands will be borrowed by the Municipality direct from the regional banks. In addition, as readers will remember, capital for specific purposes has been forthcoming in the form of free grants from the State and, in at least one case, by way of a loan voted by the Council General of a department. In this way seeds and fertilisers will be bought (probably through the very large societies of farmers which exist in many places to provide themselves co-operatively with these requirements). Agricultural implements left on the abandoned farm will be requisitioned, and if more up-to-date machines are required these will be bought and used by the commune in the manner already described. After deducting the cost of raw materials, labour, &c., the net returns will be handed over to the owner of the farm or his representative. The main object is to increase the volume of food production in the general interest, and nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of this overwhelming necessity.

One of the things that first made me realise the very great organising abilities of our French friends was the fact that they were already employing prisoners of war wholesale in agriculture and other works of national importance before we had even thought of such a possibility. They have been employed in large numbers on expensive but productive public works which might otherwise have had to wait indefinitely

before being undertaken, and also in small numbers in the ordinary operations of agriculture. The east coast of Corsica is a notoriously unhealthy and barren region owing to the marshy character of the soil. Before the war the French had undertaken to drain this region, but the war came on, the labour employed was mobilised, and the work came to a standstill. In a very few months it was resumed once more, 3,000 prisoners being set to this, let us hope, uncongenial task. Elsewhere prisoners have been and are employed on works of a similar character.

The main difficulty at first about employing prisoners of war in ordinary agriculture was the natural prejudice that existed in the minds of agriculturists against them. But by the spring of 1915, more practical considerations dominated. I found an average of about 600 prisoners at work in each of the five departments I visited.

France is divided into regions for the purpose of military administration. A region is usually a group of a few departments, and the regional military headquarters is the chief town of one of these departments. A *depôt* for prisoners of war is maintained at this chief town under the control of the general commanding the region. The latter is given discretionary power by the Ministry of War to dispose of the labour of the prisoners under his control; those destined for agriculture are arranged for between the general and the *Préfets* of the departments concerned.

In the department itself the Mayors, after consulting the Committees of Agricultural Action, estimate the minimum amount of labour of this kind required and advise the Director of Agricultural Services. The latter is thus enabled to estimate the requirements of the whole department. The *Préfet* then prefers a request to the regional military authority for whatever number is agreed on, and the latter gives not possibly the number asked for, but as many as he can spare.

The prisoners are then distributed among the communes in varying proportions. The municipal authority arranges for their housing and maintenance (the latter at any rate during idle days) and that of their

guard. They work in batches of about five on the different farms of the commune and the Mayor is responsible for the organisation and distribution of their work. The Committee of Agricultural Action keeps the Mayor informed of the agricultural requirements of different portions of the commune, and if he shows a disposition unduly to favour his own friends in the distribution of this form of labour their business is to check it. Prisoners of war are in such cases the employees, not of the farmer on whose farm they happen to be working, but of the municipality, and the Mayor, as its representative, enters into a contract with the Préfet, as representing the State, that he will observe all the conditions under which the latter has placed this form of labour at his disposal. The fact that the main object of these measures is to promote the general interest, and not merely the private convenience of individual farmers, is constantly emphasised. The latter pay a rate of wages determined by the ordinary wages standard of the district, allowance being made for a difference in efficiency, but only 2d. per day is obtained by the prisoner. The balance is kept and will be accounted for by the public authorities.

I have seen German prisoners filling farmyard manure into a cart, Austrian prisoners attending a threshing machine, other prisoners elsewhere gaining a little land for France by removing a hedge that had become a shrubbery, yet another prisoner—a Prussian—ploughing, but it is unnecessary to overload the report with these details.

At Le Mans I heard of a case that redounds to the credit of the sex (almost every French woman on a farm now is a heroine ten times over), the particulars of which are interesting. Madame C., a widow, has an estate of about 600 acres. Most of it was let to tenants, but when the war came on the tenants were mobilised and apparently left no one to carry on the work. Madame C. thereupon, like a patriotic Frenchwoman, took the management of the whole estate into her hands and runs it as one huge farm. The authorities have given her 10 prisoners of war, and with these the bulk of the labour is performed.

That the women of France have done magnificently is one of the few things known in this country about French agriculture during the war. Consequently it is unnecessary to elaborate this point.\*

The stirring appeal to the women of France, made by Monsieur Viviani (the then Premier) in the first few days of the war, deserves to live in history, not only on account of the noble sentiments it expresses but also because of the noble response it called forth. "In the name of the Government of the Republic, in the name of the nation whole and complete which stands behind it, I appeal to your valour, to that of the children whom their age alone and not their courage prevents them taking part in the combat. I call upon you to maintain the work in the fields, to complete the harvest of the year, to prepare that of next year. You cannot render a greater service to your country. It is not for you, it is for her that I make this appeal to your hearts. You must safeguard your means of livelihood, provide food for the urban populations, and above all secure adequate supplies for those who at the frontier defend civilisation and law in defending the independence of the country."

The French are not a sentimental or hysterical nation like some nations; the women and others thus appealed to have undertaken the duties imposed on them as a matter of course and not from any hope of praise or reward. The latter has, however, been forthcoming in a manner worthy of the dignity of the country and calculated to emphasise the national importance of the services rendered. Last year the Council General of Loir et Cher voted 2,000 francs to provide medals for those in the department who have thus shown their courage and patriotism in the tasks of field and farm. Even if other departments do not follow this example, France can never forget the debt she owes to the women who have served her so faithfully and well "in the trench which is the furrow."

The management of separation allowances in France has a certain bearing on the work of women in agri-

\* I have dealt with this subject in an article which appeared in *The Times* of January 10, 1917.

culture; the system adopted is in any case worthy of examination because it shows how exceedingly human in its working is the so-called "bureaucratic" French administrative system. A law of the 5th August, 1914, established the general principle that neither the wife nor dependants of a soldier of France should want for the means of subsistence by reason of his military service. In accordance with this law the *Préfets* proceeded to the nomination of a Commission for each Canton and an appeal Commission for each *Arrondissement*. A French Canton is about the size of a rural district in this country, and the *Arrondissement* corresponds in point of area to our counties. The main qualification for nomination to these Commissions was to be good personal character, but local knowledge and representative position (in the wide sense) were also to be taken into account. A superior Commission, which is the ultimate court of appeal, was at the same time constituted at the Ministry of the Interior.

Any person who thinks he or she has a claim to an allowance applies to the Mayor of the local *Commune*. Practically every town and village in France is the headquarters of a *Commune*. The Mayor sends the application to the Cantonal Commission. If the latter approves, the woman gets her allowance immediately, and receives payment from the revenue official who visits the villages once a month for that purpose. Separation allowances are paid fortnightly in the towns. If the Cantonal Commission refuses, an appeal as a matter of course takes place to the *Arrondissement* Commission, and in the same way if necessary to the Superior Commission in Paris. The two lower Commissions function independently of the *Préfet*, but the latter is represented at their deliberations by a delegate who has a purely consultative capacity. On the other hand, the *Préfet* receives from time to time a report on the way in which the various applications have been dealt with. If he is dissatisfied with any particular decision he can cause an appeal to the next higher tribunal.

Under this system a woman cannot well mis-spend her allowance without it coming to the ears of the local

Mayor, who is in a position to exercise a moral influence over her; if that fails he can report her conduct to the Cantonal Commission, which is in a position to withdraw her allowance. It can also make other arrangements, with the consent of her husband, for the maintenance of her children if their interests are in question. Needless to say, this power does not frequently require to be exercised, but its existence is salutary nevertheless.

In the stress of the first few weeks of war practically every application was granted, but when the Commissions had more time to examine individual cases many allowances were withdrawn. The principle followed was that it is better to do too much good than not enough.

On general principles one would expect the local Commissions to be more liberal with the country's purse than the Commissions at Paris would be inclined to be, but I have been told that, at any rate as regards certain departments, the former proved themselves more sparing of public funds than the latter.

In the French villages the Mayor represents the State as well as the Municipality, and the applicant for an allowance has not far to go to find him. In England the War Office undertook to manage separation allowances itself, and it is a matter of history that numbers of women, whose husbands were mobilised, were starving, or living on private charity, owing to the difficulty they experienced in getting their just claims attended to. The institutions of local government in the United Kingdom are a kind of excrescence on the body politic, and have no very close organic unity with the central authority. Probably this was why it was considered impossible or undesirable to utilise their services in the matter. In the end, the question was settled somehow; that maid-of-all-work, the Post Office, was given important functions in this connection for the simple reason that it is the only branch of the national administration which is found in every town and village of the United Kingdom. It may well be questioned whether a department, whose primary function is best fulfilled the more nearly it approaches

the qualities of an automatic machine, is eminently qualified for dealing with a delicate matter like separation allowances. In any case, supervision and the treatment of individual cases on their merits, which is easily possible in France, is impossible in the United Kingdom.

The extent to which the functions of the Post Office have grown, since the recent epidemic of social reform legislation, ought to give rise to serious concern. In our horror of the supposed bureaucratic spirit of French methods of administration we are likely to become a people administered by the soulless mechanism of the Post Office. The remedy is sufficiently obvious from what has been said in the foregoing pages.

In their administration of separation allowances the French have taken account of the agricultural necessities of the country. It was necessary to deal sympathetically with the claims of women who had a little land and tried to work it; women who sought to supplement their allowances by working for themselves or others were encouraged to do so, and were not penalised by having their allowances harshly withdrawn. On the other hand, if they showed a disposition to desert their farms without due cause, in order to go and live in the town on the national bounty, the Commissioners could bring pressure to bear on them by a threat to withdraw their allowances. This phenomenon seems to have been of rare occurrence, and the power to prevent it has consequently lain practically dormant.

In admiring the patriotic devotion which the women of France have displayed in agricultural production, one cannot repress a tribute of admiration also to the wise administration which, when financial assistance was necessary, has known how to help without demoralising.\*

I have dwelt intentionally on the many excellent points of which the war has revealed the existence in the French national character and in their institutions, and possibly have conveyed the impression that I can find nothing good in the institutions of our own

\* The above is adapted from the article referred to in the note on p. 22.

country. English people are so prone to a smug self-complacency where their own country is concerned that a contrast of this possibly one-sided character is perfectly justified in the circumstances. Lest, however, by appearing to be a blind admirer of everything French, I should detract from the value of what I have already written, I desire here to call attention briefly to certain matters in which the French might usefully learn a lesson from their island neighbour.

The principles of taxation, national and local, with which we are familiar at home, are not perfect, but, as far as I could ascertain, they bear favourable comparison with those of France. The "octroi" system which surrounds French towns with what practically amounts to a Customs barrier is indefensible on any principle since it involves a minimum return at a maximum of public inconvenience, and with a maximum employment of "functionaries" of one kind or another. Incidentally the latter characteristic and the conditions of pre-war French politics (which I believe were far from ideal) probably account for its continued existence.

The influence of the Chamber of Deputies over the course and ultimate form of legislation (in other respects a salutary principle as compared with conditions in Westminster) has worked badly in the case of taxation where the more autocratic methods of our Chancellor of the Exchequer have led to results more in the public interest. The income-tax, which is such a painfully prominent feature of our national budget, and which, from a disinterested point of view, I must admit is based on a thoroughly sound principle, if not the only sound principle, of taxation, is, I understand, still in its infancy in France. The tax on moveable property (*e.g.*, furniture) does not impress one favourably, and the still existing tax on doors and windows is an anachronism that reminds us of the Napoleonic era, though we still see evidences of some of its fatal results in farmhouses and cottages in this country.

In England prior to the war the nominally supreme control of Parliament over legislation had in effect passed to the Government, or rather to the wire-pullers of the party system. Parliament had practically com-



mitted *felo de se*, and in my opinion was technically guilty of sedition since it had brought itself and all its works into the most complete and absolute contempt. At any rate that was the only feeling with which any sensible individual could watch from the strangers' gallery our wage-earning legislators coming in from the smoking-room and elsewhere to vote in obedience to the crack of the party whip on questions they had never heard discussed. The private member with his little unobtrusive private member's Bill was indeed a pathetic figure in English politics. A conversation with Monsieur Vézin, Director of Agricultural Services of Loir et Cher, and another with Monsieur Régnier, who held the same office in La Sarthe (may their shadows never grow less!), seems to indicate a different state of affairs in France.

The power of the Cabinet at Westminster to dissolve Parliament at a moment's notice, which practically amounts to the infliction of a heavy fine on all its members, has been the most potent means by which the independence of the legislature has been undermined. The rigid discipline of the party system (which is essentially a two-party system) has similarly reduced the member in his private capacity to impotence.

In France the Chamber of Deputies once elected holds office for four years, and it is practically impossible to dissolve it within that period. New elections are automatically held every four years, but on the single occasion (since the inception of the Third Republic) when the Parliament was dissolved a revolution nearly took place. The result is that Ministries may come and Ministries may go, but the Chamber of Deputies has fixity of tenure for four years. By that means it is secured that the Ministry for the time being in power represents the policy approved of by a majority of the Deputies. The House of Commons has nominally the same power, but feels powerless to exercise it. The relatively short tenure of office by French Ministries gives to French political institutions, in the eyes of a superficial English observer, an appearance of instability. Their real stability must be sought elsewhere, notably in the hierarchy of the permanent

officials connected with administration, culminating in the Council of State, an influential body of administrative experts to which I have not yet referred.

The party system as we know it in England is non-existent in France. There, what is called the group system prevails. Numerous groups exist, corresponding to the actual degrees of difference of opinion among ordinary men, and from the extreme right or ultramontane group to the extreme left or socialist group, parties shade into one another by almost imperceptible degrees. The process is helped by the structure of the actual building in which they meet, which is arranged like an amphitheatre, whereas at Westminster opposing parties sit facing one another (when there is room) on either side of a gangway leading up the centre of the hall. In order to obtain a majority, Ministries must usually contain members of more than one group. When a Ministry falls what actually takes place is a re-grouping of parties in the house which is naturally reflected in the constitution of the new Ministry. But the change of personnel is rarely complete, and the new Ministry usually contains Ministers who have served in the one which has just fallen.

Owing to the existence of the group system the aspiring politician in France can usually find a group with whose policy his own views are practically identical. But some deputies prefer to retain a complete independence of any group. In Westminster the influence of such members would be nil. In the course of the present war Monsieur Briand was, I am told, raised from some such position to be Prime Minister of France, and he seems to have justified the trust reposed in him.

Not only does the reality of legislative power still rest with the Chamber, but its individual members in their private capacity can and do (apparently not infrequently) propose bills which commend themselves to a majority of the house, and finally pass into law without any special assistance on the part of the Government. Laws in France, whether they emanate from the Government or the individual deputy, merely state general principles. Once they have been passed it is

the duty of some Minister in his executive capacity to develop and interpret the principles therein laid down in such a way as to make them applicable to the concrete conditions in which they have to be administered, and this is done by way of decree. This subordinate law-making authority is exercised by a Minister under the supervision of an impartial and independent body, the Council of State, which can modify such decrees in order to bring them within the four corners of the law as interpreted by it, but decrees thus modified or approved have themselves the force of law.

An Act of the British Parliament which merely stated general principles would remain simply a dead letter if it required any administration at all, and this would be equally true of private members' and of Government Acts. The reason is that owing to the way in which law and the spirit of legalism have monopolised (and paralysed) the action of the State, a law merely containing general principles could not legally be enforced, since every single step necessary to carry out the terms of a law must be authorised and provided for in clauses of the law itself. As we have not a clearly thought out and well-devised administrative system, every new administrative power that becomes necessary must be called into existence as portion of a new law. These "administrative" clauses, if we may so call them, are usually most intricate and difficult to deal with, afford an opportunity for factious and disingenuous opposition, and involve a tremendous waste of Parliamentary time. I came across an instance where the administrative arrangements necessary for providing sanitary accommodation for workmen engaged in a public work near Belfast, for which Parliamentary powers were being sought, had actually to be legalised by a clause in the Bill which was being promoted. Parliament, by insisting on retaining this branch of law under its control, has condemned itself to futility and impotence where the questions that ought properly to occupy the bulk of its attention are concerned. But perhaps Parliament is not really to blame, but rather the law courts which, in defiance of the general interest, have gradually and persistently built up a jurisprudence that compels Par-

liament to occupy itself with such trivialities. The machinery of Orders in Council and Provisional Orders is an effort to escape from the disastrous consequences of this necessity, but the escape is more apparent than real, since these exceptional administrative powers are carefully defined in particular laws and owe their authority to law itself as interpreted by judges who have no administrative experience and are often, I am told, profoundly ignorant of that branch of law which governs administrative matters.

The administrative clauses of a Bill which requires any administration worth speaking of, are a matter of difficulty to draft. Government has consequently a monopoly of such legislation since only Government can command the expert assistance which is necessary. The private member being an ignoramus on these matters, apart altogether from the rigours of the party system, would be most unlikely to be able to draft a Bill which, even if it were passed, would have any chance of becoming other than a dead letter. The two causes taken together have made the private member what we all know he is to-day.

By retaining in its hands the subordinate law-making power which renders administrative clauses unnecessary in French laws the executive authority has, paradoxical as it may seem, really added to the power of the legislature and helped to preserve the independence of the private member as an influence in legislation.

The Council of State consists of certain paid and certain other unpaid experts in different branches of administration. Its organisation is rather complicated, but that need not concern us here. It is the highest Court of Appeal in cases tried under administrative law—that is to say, the branch of law, non-existent in England, which governs cases in which officials, as servants of the State, are concerned with one another, or with private individuals. It is said by a British authority on the subject to exercise this function with a truly judicial impartiality, and without any regard to the political convenience of the Ministry of the day.

In addition it is also a kind of Royal Commission of

administrative experts in constant session, and among other things, about which the Government is bound to consult it, proposed Government Bills must be submitted to it for criticism and investigation; in exercising this function it is influenced by a consideration of the general interests as opposed to those of political parties, while at the same time the administrative experience of its members enables it to introduce modifications which facilitate administration. After passing through this ordeal a Bill may be more desirable, even from the point of view of its original promoters, but of course its final form is determined by the Government in co-operation with a majority of the deputies. Though the advice of the Council of State must be asked for in this way it need not necessarily be taken, but such is the prestige of its members; and so sensible is the advice that is given, that apparently much of it is usually taken.

The Council of State is thus as it were the balance wheel of the constitution, and is one of the chief institutions to which it owes its stability. We have no institution of the kind in the United Kingdom, and it ought to be one of our tasks when the war is over to develop the Privy Council in this direction.

For some curious reason a private member's Bill in France does not have to submit to the ordeal of examination by the Council of State. Possibly this accounts for the relative frequency of private members' Bills, the latter really acting in a private capacity as agents for the Government. I am not sufficiently conversant with the state of French politics before the war to speak with authority on these matters. All I know is that, according to my friend Monsieur Vézin, a Government Act is usually easily administered, while a private member's Act (not having passed under expert examination) is more difficult to administer, and requires a good deal of licking into shape by way of judicial interpretation. The law courts in England are said to use their powers in the opposite direction, and to be past-masters in the art of licking even a good Act out of shape.

In the United Kingdom the soundest principles of ad-

ministration are sometimes contained in those institutions which we have allowed to become atrophied and merely ornamental, while all the more recent machinery of administration is hopelessly antiquated (in another sense). The use that might be made of the Privy Council I have already indicated. The Lieutenants of Counties represent the Crown—that is to say, the State—in different territorial units, but the position is purely ornamental. A real representative of the State, like a French Préfet, ought to be in general charge of the administration of each county or province, and fulfil substantially the same functions whose value in the case of France I hope I have demonstrated. After the war the need for a sound administration will be just as urgent as it is now. With regard to France I share the sentiments of my friend Monsieur Garnier: “Après la guerre nous aurons forcément des dissensions politiques. Espérons que notre vielle administration tiendra bon et *une fois de plus nous sauvera.*” In the even more acute political and other problems that are likely to distract this country we shall look in vain to our ramshackle administrative structure for safety.\*

\* During my visit to France I acquired a lot of miscellaneous information in the form of pamphlets and documents of various kinds. These are now in the Co-operative Reference Library, 84 Merrion Square, Dublin, where they may be consulted by those interested in the subject.



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