

FORTUNES *for* FARMERS



Bernard Gilbert.

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FORTUNES
FOR FARMERS

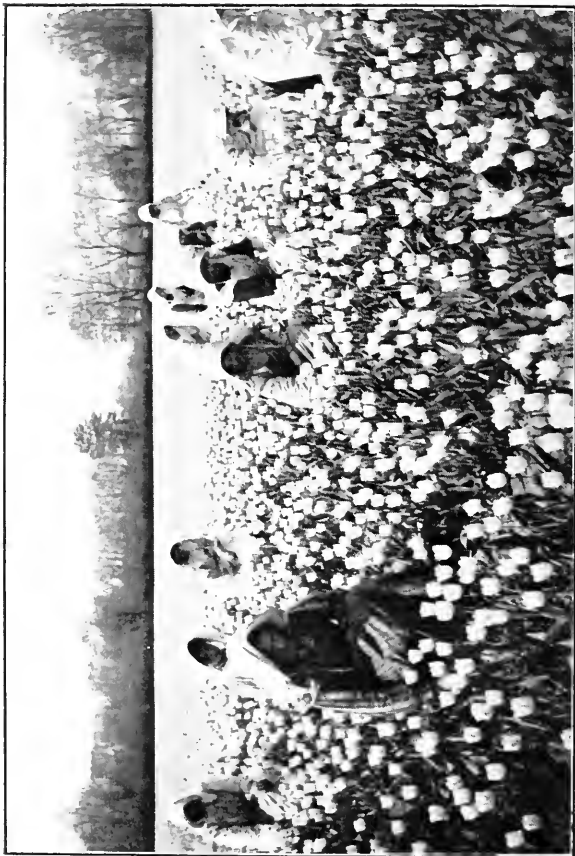
DEDICATED
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL
FARMERS' UNION.

NOTE.

A word or two in explanation of the title of this book is perhaps necessary. Farmers who are lamenting the losses and ruined crops of the present disastrous year will perhaps smile bitterly at a book dealing with *Fortunes for Farmers*. The volume was, however, in the press before the abnormal character of the 1912 summer had become apparent, and alteration was impossible. In any case, the book deals with the prospects of farmers over a period of years, and neither a year of disasters nor one of exceptional prosperity can modify the opinion of the author on the profession of farming as a whole. The English farmer has a reputation for grumbling; but no one in the country knows better than he does how to accept the vagaries of our English climate, or can face a season's adversity with more equanimity.



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[S. Jepson, Spalding.

A FIELD OF THREE MILLION TULIPS IN THE FENS.

W. H. & A. Co.

FORTUNES FOR FARMERS

BY BERNARD GILBERT



LONDON :
FRANK PALMER
RED LION COURT

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FIRST PUBLISHED 1912

ANNUAL TO THE
SILVER JUBILEE
YEAR

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PREFATORY NOTE

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This book does not aim at being a Farmer's Compendium or a Guide to Prospective Small-holders, but an urgent plea for farmers to go out and dig up some of the hidden treasure in their fields. Of course, farmers have really been trying to do that ever since the remotest days of antiquity. The trouble is that there is a good deal too much of this antiquity evident in farming to-day.

Mr Gilbert says all this is not good enough. If farmers are to make a decent living they have got to take their nightcaps off and hunt round for a better way. Plenty of farmers have already discovered that better way and are making money fast. Mr Gilbert, who is a practical farmer, tells here of the methods by which farmers in Lincolnshire are making fortunes. He pictures a countryside flowing with motor-cars and money, full of straight-backed independent farmers with good bank balances and a very keen interest in politics. He tells us of prosperous farmers who were ten years ago poor labourers, and who instead of emigrating to Canada, turned round and discovered England as a place in which to grow a fortune.

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And Mr Gilbert insists that this sort of thing is going to increase. England is one big mouth, he says, and it is our everlasting shame that foreigners are feeding it. That is work for English farmers and he urges them to be up and about it. It can be done. You rise from this book feeling that undoubtedly it can be done. It requires a judicious mixture of intelligence, attention and trades-unionism and the business methods which make the city ironmonger or grocer successful. Finally, Mr Gilbert wants to see the agricultural scientist talking things over with the practical farmer. Why should it not be done here as well as in Canada ?

HARGREAVES

The book cannot fail to inspire a new hope in our agricultural assets. Its author looks over things with a far-reaching eye. He has a good deal to say of the farm of the future. That is as it should be, for it helps us to shape the farm of to-day. And he points out, too, in no uncertain way, the advantages of the well-placed farmer. No other citizen is so well able to face national adversities as the man whose daily food grows in his own fields, and whose capital is buried in the safe vaults of mother earth.

For, as Mr Gilbert says, The Land Remains.

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Noa, let me keep my farmin',
My 'orses an' my dogs;
I'd allers be contented
Wi'out your shops and fogs.
I doan't care for grand houses,
An' trams wean't make me shout,
Like I does on frosty mornin's,
Afore the sun is out.

I loves to stand among the sheep,
Or watch my good owd bull,
Or see the cows about asleep,
Lie down coz they are full.
I loves to see the cornfields,
When they are nearly fit,
They look just like a bit of Heaven,
When on the fence I sit.

B. G.

FORTUNES FOR FARMERS

CHAPTER I

THE FORTUNE

THE usual verdict is that, although farming may be a good steady living, you can never get rich at it. But this is a mistake, for it is being done. I can lay my hands on a hundred men in Lincolnshire, who began with the proverbial farthing, and are now wealthy citizens, heads of agricultural businesses or large farmers, owning their broad acres. There is no need to go abroad to farm. One is astonished at the young men with a "bit of capital" who go to Canada, Australia, or South America to grow wheat; Ceylon to raise tea, or Borneo to produce rubber. Why on earth cannot they stay at home? Though the streets of London may not be paved with gold, as we were once told, the soil of England is full of money; at least that portion which lies around the Wash, and it can be extracted, not

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by mining machinery, but by Meredith's "spade virtues" of honesty, industry, and perseverance, "which," says he, "never fail to raise a crop."

These are no moral maxims for young men, but hard facts, and may be proved. In my immediate locality are a number of young farmers, between 25 and 35 years, who are progressing rapidly, taking more and more land, up-to-date, enterprising, and ever ready to try new methods. Some were labourers ten years ago, saved a little money, took a small holding, and never looked back; others were started by their fathers, mostly in a small way, and have gone forward.

It is as remarkably true in agriculture as in Lancashire commerce, that "there are three generations from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves," and the grandson of a successful farmer is seldom a great one himself. Newcomers are always springing from the soil to displace the slothful, and doubtless it is for the better.

A marvellous change has overcome farming during the last generation. Intensive culture is spreading, and farmers are abandoning the old methods, to experiment with potatoes, peas, fruit, vegetables, flowers, and market garden produce, leaving beef, mutton and wheat to the foreigner. Everywhere the shrewdest are calculating that it costs more to produce a pound of

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beef than it fetches home, that there is not enough margin on corn growing, that it takes a sovereign's worth of straw to produce a crown's worth of manure when trodden down, that sheep are more nuisance than profit, and generally the times are changing. The result may be seen in such districts as that around Wisbech. Not many years ago the land was considered poor and little thought of until some genius, who surely deserves a statue, tried fruit growing, and the farms have doubled and trebled in value! This means money in somebody's pocket.

A generation ago the district around Boston was in the same position, but is now one of the most prosperous localities. I visited one of its extensive fruit orchards last summer, and was astounded at the developments. Gangs of men were packing apples, plums, gooseberries, and strawberries for the great towns, and the whole neighbourhood seemed alive and thriving. Celery and potatoes have transformed thousands of acres, and filled as many purses. One hears of anything from £30 to £100 being cleared from one acre, and such places as the Warp lands of Yorkshire, with its celery, or the Blairgowrie district of Scotland, with its raspberry gardens, are straws in the wind. Of course the new culture is intensive, and demands more capital per acre,

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more labour, horseflesh, and manure. The old style of drilling corn and then reaping it will not do, yet the old farmer objects that he has not the money to do more. The same man will stock his grass land with perhaps £20 worth of beef to the acre, and get a very poor return! But he is more than conservative, he is stubborn. For every one that is persuaded to grow such things as potatoes or peas or mustard, a hundred have said, "my land is not suitable," and refuse to discuss it further. The only thing that will move them is a neighbour's example.

We are only just beginning. England is one enormous mouth, a huge market, and the amount of eggs, butter, fruit, vegetables, beet-sugar, poultry, and bacon imported, paying freight from the other side of the world, should make us blush. We ought to be supplying our own market, not crying for Protection. The only protection of any use is the armour of our wits and the shield of our enterprise.

Wherever land is fit for agriculture (some is not) if the farmer cannot succeed it is his own fault, and he must alter or disappear. This summer I made a partial survey of mid-Lincolnshire, and saw remarkable sights. A farmer near Horncastle showed me his books. He had recently purchased some land, esteemed poor and worth-

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less, but his shrewd eye saw its probabilities. He imported early potato seed from Scotland, chitted it in boxes, gave the land several pounds' worth of manure (not shillings, but pounds), dug them in the early summer, and cleared a profit amounting to more than the freehold of the land had cost him. Let this be noted.

Wherever the new culture has reached, the character of farmers has changed; they become wide-awake business men, earnest to seek anything that may increase their profits, and ready to lay out their money freely for that end. It was lately discovered that potato seed from Scotland gives better results than home-grown seed, being more vigorous and productive, and a trade has been built up to the east coast ports, amounting to many thousand tons annually, the heavy freight being cheerfully borne by the users. It was found that potato seed keeps better and is more profitable when exposed to the light, and to-day nearly every grower packs them in chitting boxes at considerable outlay. Further, the most energetic build greenhouses on their farms on a gigantic scale to store them. This is enterprise! It extends from the Boston district down to Ely, to Peterborough, into Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire, up to Yorkshire, it crops up in the Scilly and Channel Islands, in Cheshire, in parts

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of Scotland, and many others where the soil is suitable and some one is keen enough to begin. May these parts flourish and multiply until the foreigner ceases to insult us with his imports, until the rural population is re-established, and the countryside smiling as it was in olden times. Here is the future, and the fortune, for all farmers who will accept it.

CHAPTER II

FARMS OF THE FUTURE

It is said that the plough is, at once, the oldest tool known to man, and the only one that has never been improved, and the statement, substantially true, was a measure, until a few generations ago, of farming at large. Our grandfathers accomplished their annual task with much the same appliances as were in use two thousand years ago, for though metal was supplanting wood the forms were alike, and the routine substantially the same.

Misfortune, however, has sharpened our wits and driven us to the engineer for help. He with his servant, steam, has so revolutionized us that the last three generations of farmers have seen more changes than the preceding thirty. This movement will not cease—competition grows ever keener, and we shall never more lack that spur that aroused us so sharply from sloth. Labour will become increasingly scarcer, for although there is a current from the city slums countryward, a tendency which will increase, it will never be

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available for the old-fashioned farmer, who was accustomed to a reserve of skilled workmen ready at hand in the villages. The old supply has run dry, and the source has failed: Education and the rise in status of labour generally has killed it, and thus we shall be urged ever onward from machine to machine: a glittering mechanical vista.

The greatest immediate change will be the vanishing of the horse. He is slipping from the roads now; already we motor to market or to the horse fair; already around London the motor-van and lorry are busily gathering the produce for each market, whilst in the cities the horse is a back number entirely. He has been tried (against the motor) and found wanting. He is clumsy and feeble; he only works a few hours at a stretch, one man cannot manage more than two horse-power of him, and in a word, he is uneconomical. The motor-lorry of the large farmer will slay him, and in those closely populated districts that are springing up where the soil is rich, light railways, co-operative motor services, and the rural electric tram service (of America) will abolish him.

So far the road! The attack of steam on the horse was mainly a failure on the land. Save for threshing tackle, and very occasionally the clumsy

Farms of the Future

steam plough, the engine is not heard. It is more cumbersome and expensive even than the horse! Internal combustion is another matter; already the oil engine is doing our yard work—chaff-cutting and corn grinding, and its still lighter and more adaptable brother the petrol (or paraffin) motor will clear the horse from his last refuge, the soil. This process has commenced, the mechanical farm horse is already at work, and we only want the Yankee to take it up, make it light, handy, and cheap, turn it out by swarms, and the trick is done.

But we shall not cease there—we are only now glancing a generation ahead, and the adoption of mechanical power for agriculture on the lines laid out will prepare the way for the coming of electricity. This is the farm agent of the future which will oust all competitors, and in a century or so, reign supreme. Perhaps sooner than we dream, for it only requires a practical method of harnessing a wind-wheel to a dynamo, and the campaign will begin. Picture the farm of the twenty-first century—its telephone, power trolleys, vans, and drays, its stables dried, brilliantly alight, and turned into workshops and garage, its electrical machines for yard purposes, its elevators and stack hoists, and finally its fields surrounded by the magic wire. There will be

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posts carrying a cable around every field, and a pair of trolleys on the end cables will bear between them a wire that may be moved at will to reach every part. From this moving wire the various implements will draw their power through a connecting wire or pole as our tramcars do, either to a portable tractor like the present agricultural motor, or more probably the implement itself will contain a motor.

These implements of the future will be immense with great spider bodies and wheels, gigantic and frail to our imagination, machine tools constructed scientifically, not lumber boxes of wood and cast iron that must be stout enough to withstand the horses' efforts and kicks, the labourer's clumsy handling, and the combined attacks of rust and rot as they lie exposed to the weather. They will run their curiously formed finger-like tentacles through the soil, turning it here and there, probing around the crop roots, hunting for hidden weeds, and carrying manure where requisite. In time of drought, water from the nearest dyke (hedges, those abominable weed beds, gone) will be sprayed from a pipe passing regularly and automatically all day. Indeed most of the work might be automatic, the wires checking and reversing at the field's end, so that one sees a blue-coated engineer in the corner,

Farms of the Future

switch in hand, watching a score of machines at their various work, replacing a hundred bent-backed peasants. Diseases will be grappled, powders, insecticides, washes, and sprays delivered in the same way as water, exactly where wanted, and the primeval curse of weeds at last seriously tackled. Mechanical fingers, working at imperceptible cost, will make their existence impossible.

After the first outlay current will be a negligible matter, and the land will be really tilled, as at present is only faintly attempted in French gardens and Belgian small holdings. There is no known limit to the productiveness of well-tilled soil; all that we give it is returned tenfold, as far as we can see, and where there is reasonable depth of soil the yield will be many times greater than to-day.

This is no vain dream. Already in Bavaria an electrical farm exists, for experimental purposes, power being drawn from a neighbouring waterfall, and all the machinery in the buildings, all the lorries, drays, and vans, the lighting, etc., being electrical. Already the petrol motor is abroad in our fields. In France and Scotland suggestive experiments on the stimulating of plants by current are being carried on, there being no supply, only metal rods planted in the soil,

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going a little deeper than the roots and a little higher than the stalk, to tap the various strata, the results being striking.

Our present methods of feeding crops are rule of three in its last stage of clumsiness. Irrespective of the season and the chemical or mechanical condition of the soil, we deposit lumps of crude manure somewhere near our plant, leaving the rest to chance, with horrid waste. Electricity is life, stored up sunlight—and we can picture the farmer of the future, administering each day to his crops and soil their current demands. Perhaps in dull wet years he will be able to compensate for the absence of sunlight to some extent; certainly he will farm scientifically, and will obtain his reward. How great, the future will show.

CHAPTER III

THE FARMERS' UNION

THE best thing that has happened for a long time to agriculturists in England was the forming of the Farmers' Union. It needs no eulogy, for the combination of farmers is to-day a sheer necessity, and feeling this, the writer recently became a member. It may be of interest therefore to record his opinion as representative in some measure of the outside world, at any rate, that of the merchant in contradistinction to the farmer, an opinion that, although favourable, may yet be critical. Nothing needs criticism so much as a movement of this nature at its commencement—criticism from within—so that it may realize itself and its object.

With my official receipt there came a couple of leaflets giving the constitution and objects of the Union. They are respectively Parliamentary and local. I agree with some and disagree immensely with others; but let us take them in turn, First and foremost, occupying a prominent place, stands insurance. The saving of a few shillings

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a year is beneficial, but I hardly think it as important as is made out. We are not concerned with tariff rates and rings, although those who keep them protest that they cannot cut prices and maintain their reserve intact, but I do think on the whole that the various companies are fair to farmers, and are not overreaching in their charges. In this locality they behave well to clients, and often go beyond their legal requirements. Life is uncertain, insurance policies are pitfalls for the unwary, so that it seems best for every one to deal with those whom he knows well, and whom he feels, from experience, will treat him in a friendly manner.

Legal aid, which comes next, is highly important. Small farmers are defenceless against a large concern, who are dealing perhaps with disputed points daily, taking in the course of routine such precautions as keep them in the right, and who have a long purse for a shield. But agricultural merchants, by which I mean all those who have business relations with a farmer, must be divided into two classes. There are those who sell the farmer goods, and those who buy from him. The selling-merchant depends upon the goodwill of the farmer for his livelihood, and if this be lost he is undone. If it becomes known, that he treats his customers unfairly, if his integrity is impeached, he is surely

The Farmers' Union

undone, and so certain is this, that all businesses of repute are maintained alone by strictly proper and scrupulous methods. Further, when a dispute arises, these (selling) firms are almost universally anxious to satisfy the farmer at all costs, so that they will make sacrifices, and give way beyond their just dues for the sake of peace. They consider this their best policy, for a lawsuit with a customer harms a merchant, and he avoids it save as a last resource.

It is not against these, therefore, that combination is necessary, or, as a rule, advisable. As a merchant, I have been twice threatened, during disputes, by a member with the Union's wrath, but each time, feeling strongly in the right, persisted, and the farmer has retired. Of course, these threats were unofficial, but members should not entertain the idea that the Union will back them up, right or wrong. A merchant is no better than a farmer—they are both human—but the farmer is often handicapped by a lack of business training, and takes false steps.

On the other hand, the merchant who buys goods from the farmer is on different ground. He does not care particularly about any one client; they come to him, not he to them, and once his organization is in order, he does not mind where the supplies come from. I do not im-

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peach these firms. Some of them are my friends, and many are upright in their business, carrying the confidence of farmers, but in case of dispute, the conditions are changed, and the more unscrupulous are unfair and even tyrannical. I have known some behave in an outrageously high-handed manner to the small farmers who sell them goods, who are helpless, and must submit to what may amount to extortion. These are they against whom combination is necessary, for in disputes their interest is to obtain what they can, and they retire only before a show of force. I have heard in a decade a dismal list of frauds, of potatoes and vegetables refused when the market sinks—simply thrown on the sender's hands—of corn taken to distant towns, then re-consigned for the same reason, and tales of what sometimes amounts to sheer robbery.

There are firms who combine the functions of buying and selling, and these may be relied upon for fair treatment, as they have both their branches to consider. Perhaps the worst foe is the shady commission agent, a shark who sets up his stall in some market, and by advertising or touting, persuades farmers to let him have their goods. Sometimes the unlucky farmer gets a portion of his money, and sometimes nothing—but it is his own fault, for he should never sell

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to an unknown man. The stranger may be safe, but why run the risk? Large farmers have no trouble in selling their produce to reputable maltsters or merchants, and are quite able to take care of themselves, but the small holders are often in a poor plight, for if a merchant disputes their deliveries, they cannot afford the delay and risk of re-sale, so they do the best they can—and suffer. If they have the least rudiment of sagacity they will join the Union to a man.

I must say again here that I do not attack buying firms as a whole. Many are above suspicion, and, by their upright dealing, gain the confidence of farmers. On the other hand, there are unscrupulous farmers. Every merchant can tell his tale of woe, for some men seem incapable of selling by an honest sample. Of course, in wheat, oats, or barley, small variations in quality do not greatly affect the price, and a discrepancy may be remedied by a small allowance, but, in certain classes of produce, such as peas, beans, mustard, clover seed, or hay, there is a great difference. Peas may vary as much as £1 per sack, according to the amount of bad or worm-eaten corns, and the farmer who picks some of these out on his way to market to “improve the sample” may consider it an easy way of earning money, but it entails serious trouble for some one, like all

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dishonest actions. Possibly before the deception is found out, the goods have passed through several hands, and too often the loss is divided amongst all, instead of falling on the thief.

There is difficulty in sampling corn, especially in a bad season, for crops vary greatly, but the honest farmer takes his sample from many sacks, and sees that no tailings or screenings creep into the bulk, and his deliveries go unchallenged. The rogue is known—at least locally—and watched. His corn is nearly always refused, so that as he is found out, he roams from place to place, preying on the unwary, and unfortunately it is impossible to set the criminal law in operation against him. It is hard enough to penalize him in the civil courts. I once received a “doctored” sack of peas from a farmer, about four-fifths damp refuse with one-fifth sound peas carefully laid on the top to mask them!

Suggestions have been made as to official sampling, whereby the sample would be divided into two parts, one for the buyer, and one deposited with some caretaker for reference. A decision would then be easy in case of dispute, either before an arbitrator or a judge. This scheme seems to have lapsed for lack of support, a lamentable affair, and the Union should make it one of their chief points. Until they do, rascally

The Farmers' Union

farmers and merchants score at the expense of honest men.

There should also be some system of arbitration evolved for disputes between farmers or farmers and merchants. For the latter, there might be a mixed tribunal of members and outside merchants appointed, and if this were done, most merchants would submit to them. Further, if these were efficiently organized, I believe judges would refer to them either for decisions or to assess damage and settle technical details. They must be carefully chosen, and well paid, or it would be impossible to get the best men. However highly-paid this method would be less costly than the law.

On a large scale the Union should decide questions of importance and fight test cases against railways or other corporations. The various motor associations do this, greatly to their members' benefit, and even where the case is lost the money is well spent in deciding the actual position. Railways who are unfortunately more or less the common enemy, might serve as a model. Suave, but unflinching, once they decide, they fight to the bitter end, regardless of cost, by which method they overawe many opponents. When our purse is long, we too shall overawe our enemies, but not before.

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Returning to our leaflet, I find several clauses relating to useful reforms, the incidence of rating, reform of railway rates, etc. Those touching on pure beer and foreign meat are, I fear, hopeless, for they would be evaded anyway. Clause 9, which would feed our army on home-reared instead of home-killed (foreign) meat, seems to enter upon the tariff contest. Protection or Free Trade apart (the Union is non-committal—rightly), this question is always cropping up in the guise of Norwegian granite, Belgian rails, Austrian chairs, or American implements. I cannot see how the Union expects our War Office to concur until Free Trade is abolished officially.

I do most utterly object to the wording of clause 11: "That a bill is urgently needed for the better control of motors on the highway to secure the bodily safety of the public."

This savours of the ancient and obnoxious prejudice which farmers have too often betrayed against progress, especially locomotive, recalling the bad old days when those in traps tried to drive cyclists off the road. It is high time that such fossil ideas were abandoned; we are in the twentieth century, with telephones coming down the road, and airships afloat, and our Union surely is progressive. If not, we are better without it, for a retrograde organization is a positive evil.

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Motors are now most useful adjuncts to the farm; in a few years every farmer who can afford one (and they will be cheap), will have one. The invasion of the cheap light motors that Americans are making on a gigantic scale for their farmers (one firm is turning out, I believe, as many this year as all the British factories put together) will revolutionize our market, and already there are a great number of farmers who have them. They go to market, attend sales or fairs, visit outlying farms, roam afield in search of keeping or other requirements, and unconsciously gain a breadth of outlook that was impossible whilst they stuck in a narrow rut. The motor has come to stay, it will be an enormous boon to the farmer, and we must abandon the bad habit of opposition.

If the sleepy and drunken carter is disappearing, if we no longer see unattended horses standing by a public-house, if there are fewer drunken farmers galloping home from market, we have the motor to thank in a large measure. Perhaps some think it hard that they can no longer send out a small boy in charge of three or four horses, or that one man may no more conduct several carts to a station, but this is a matter of opinion. So also is the question of lights on vehicles. Our leaflet speaks exultantly of having excluded certain farm carts from the compulsory use of

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lights at night, but I think that they should at least have reflectors. Farmers must not be selfish or obsolete. In a few years the state of our roads will be entirely changed, owing to the spread of motors, and they must realize that a vehicle on a road at night without some warning light is not only a danger, but a scandal. Only the other day a local farmer was killed by a ladder projecting from a waggon which he was unable to see in time (one hardly ever can see them), and, which, stabbing through his glass screen, broke his neck. Too often when questions concerning progressive legislation for the roads, etc., come up in rural or parish councils, one reads the report, "loud laughter." But we don't want loud laughter, we want lights on vehicles, and consideration for the safety of others.

The road question will shortly come up, and if our Union is active it must press for the only fair solution—that the nation maintain the national roads. Overtures should be made to the motor associations, who are equally anxious, but the farmer must reform before he can appear as champion of the roads. He must fit scrapers on the wheels of his carts and wagons, and cease plastering mud an inch thick on the highways from his fields on wet days, a deleterious practice; and he must adopt in such matters a wider view.

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I have dealt elsewhere with problems that await the farmer, with the coming campaign against weeds, with the establishment of experimental farms, etc., but one cloud looms darker than others in the near future. If—as many think—Protection is coming, we must indeed gird our loins. Farmers too vaguely imagine that tariffs will enrich them, but it should be understood that only the best organized and most powerful combinations will benefit. Experience shows that those alone profit who are strong enough to command attention in the political world.

The payment of Members of Parliament has made easier our path, and we must see that there are practical farmers in the next House of Commons, irrespective of politics, who will agree not to vote with either party on party questions, but sit alone, or with the Labour members. Their influence would be felt, and their expert opinion demanded. Of course, we cannot expect to attain the cohesion of the trade unions, because their interests are undivided: what affects one miner, one bricklayer—affects all miners and bricklayers, but the interests of farmers are immensely divergent. One wants cheap feeding stuffs, another cheap implements, another calls for a tariff on wheat or hops or barley, whilst I have heard the same man ask for a tariff on German potatoes one year,

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and another year want the American tax on our potatoes removing. We must proceed with caution, and handle as far as possible only those points on which we are united.

Finally, we want money, then more money, and then still more money. Cash counts, and without large funds we are futile for propaganda or progress in any form. We want well-paid officials, expert advisers, and a first-rate staff. Without these our efforts are of no account. The present rates of subscription must be trebled at once—any trade union carpenter puts us to shame. Our union is a great idea, and if handled by the right men in a large spirit must advance. The rank and file should be kept abreast of things by a column or more in every local paper—not merely reports of meetings, but members' queries and letters, or suggestions, and anything that may interest them. Lastly, let every member during the current year persuade three of his neighbours to join, and if he has also paid his subscription he will have done his duty.

CHAPTER IV

PROTECTION

FIRST and foremost I write as a farmer, having no bias for Free Trade or Tariff Reform. Judging from other countries, it seems that Protection benefits those who are strong enough to turn it to their advantage. So far, we can deduce, but not much further, for who shall say which of the great nations is the more prosperous or lay his finger on the exact reason? But some matters are obvious if we look with an unprejudiced eye. If an English boot manufacturer can have his goods protected from foreign competition by a tariff, so much the better for him; and if the farmer can obtain protection for himself, then his industry will flourish. This is certain. Every one would like to be shielded from foreign competition. I am doubtful, however, as to its effect on the country at large. The question is complex, and such gigantic interests are involved that I do not think anyone realizes what would be the effect of tariffs.

At any rate, we can make some forecast of its effect on agriculture, looking at it as farmers who

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have no politics, but wish to ascertain what would be advantageous for themselves first and then for their country. Our difficulty is that the independent man has no current source of information. Every one is biased, every paper has its mind made up and thunders forth arguments for its own side, but is blind to the enemy's point of view. Every good Liberal is an ardent Free Trader, who thinks Protectionists foredoomed for wishing to batten on the food of the poor, whilst the Conservatives have spent the last year or so hunting out of their camp those who do not think Free Trade dead as a door-nail.

These people do not bother their minds about what may happen; they don't care a carrot about weighing evidence or deducing trends, for they are certain that they are right, and that their course, if followed, would be the best. But if we are unbiased, if we are citizens (or farmers) before politicians, if we have that curious twist of mind that will not allow us to think every Liberal (or Conservative) idea idiotic because our party leaders decide for the opposite; if we belong to that small but growing class who desire to think for themselves, these rabid speeches and foaming papers leave us cold, and we do not turn a hair at their tirades, none of which make the slightest attempt to inform the man who wants to know;

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but only talk to the man who is quite sure already that he does know.

Well, then, we must thrash it out for ourselves.

In Germany the "Agrarian" party seem to have things pretty much their own way with thumping taxes on food, and this is said to account for the phenomenal rise of Socialism. Certainly the Socialist battle-cry is "Taxes off our food," and that, as we found at home recently, is a provocative alarm. In America, on the other hand, the farmers do not seem so powerful and have not the lion's share in the tariff-fostered prosperity; in fact, so far from it, that they are agitating for Free Trade. They are not afraid of food imports, producing themselves all that they require, so that Free Trade could not seriously lower their prices, whilst what they purchase, all implements, harness, furniture, clothes, hire of labour, cost of freights, and railway charges, in short, all outgoings, are very much higher under Protection. They argue that under Free Trade their products would make practically the same whilst their expenditure would be (say) halved. It seems, therefore, that in these countries the value of tariffs to a farmer varies directly with his political influence. The American farmers have no show at all against the commercial kings and money interests which control the political strings.

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Canada has recently been agitated by a similar question. Farmers, we take it, are predominant there, for they are practically the whole population, and they do not seem prepared to buy a market for their produce at the expense of a flood of imported manufactures. This seems opposite to the other instances, and I do not think it possible for England to draw comparisons from other countries. Conditions vary enormously, and every case must be considered on its merits.

Before leaving this we must remark that, as far as Colonial Preference is concerned, it does not recompense the English farmer to be ruined by New Zealand mutton instead of Argentine beef, or by Canadian rather than Yankee wheat. It may be possible to foster our Empire by Preference, but we ought to consider the British rather than the Colonial farmer. It is no use saying that this is "Little Englandism," because it is simply the commonsense of self-preservation.

We have peculiar difficulty also in comparing our own case with that of other countries, because we produce so small a proportion of our food. Under Protection, manufactured articles are taxed with an eye to keeping them out altogether (rather than to produce revenue), and providing work for home factories, to the benefit of our labour and capital, and this seems a cogent argument. But

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however highly food were taxed, we should not be able to feed ourselves, and 10s. per quarter on wheat would only benefit our farmers to a small extent, compared with the amount of foreign wheat that would pay tax. A tariff on food bears hardly on the poorer classes, for food represents the bulk of their expenditure.

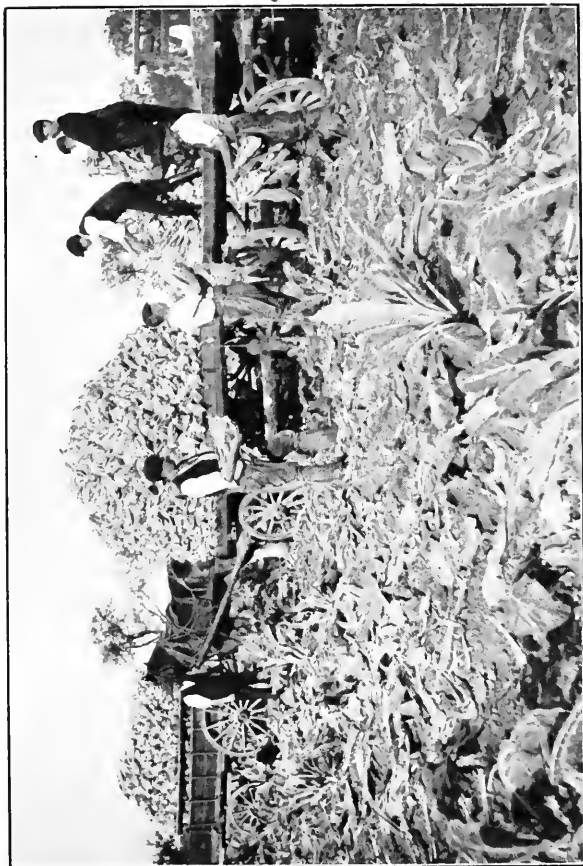
If, when Protection comes, farmers are not powerful enough to impress their terms upon the various governments, they will be in a worse condition than to-day, falling into the plight of American farmers. The steel, iron, and allied trades, which are so powerful, would demand a crushing tax on Yankee farm implements, say £10 for every self-binder, when instantly they would raise their own prices from £6 to £8 more, and we should have to pay it, because they would still be cheaper than the Yankee. This is what happened in America on the appearance of the McKinley Tariff, and the farmer, as a consumer, would find everything costing him much more. There can be no doubt about this, I think. If we are to have Protection, but at the same time food is to be no dearer, as some of the leading papers reiterate—if, in short, the farmer is to be the “under dog”—then I for one should abandon agriculture in favour of boot-making or some well organized industry.

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If our farmers should gird up their loins, and join the Farmers' Union by scores of thousands, developing some rudiment of political sagacity, and swaying elections here and there? I discussed the question recently with a Lancashire cotton spinner, who explained why he and his party were dead for Free Trade all the time. He pointed out that, although America has the keenest men and best machinery in the world, yet she allows us to buy her cotton, bring it across the Atlantic, make it up, and then undersell her in neutral markets, indeed, if it were not for her own tariff we should sell her the made-up goods back again. "This extraordinary thing is possible," said he, "because Free Trade makes all our expenses, machinery, freight charges, and labour so cheap that we can simply knock their heads off in a fair field."

Certainly, to a lay mind, this seems astonishing! Further, he explained that the same holds good in shipbuilding, so that we have practically the whole show to ourselves. "We simply own the sea," said he, "and practically all America's vaunted trade is carried in ships built by us."

For these reasons he said that, although one of the most ardent Conservatives that ever breathed, he could never vote for Protection, which must, in his opinion, entail a rise in cost prices, a rise, however slight, which would be ruinous, when down



S. Jepson. Spalding.

CAULIFLOWERS READY FOR MARKET.

Photo.

Protection

would come our pyramid with a crash. His arguments were cogent, and I have never heard them efficiently answered, but the welfare of the manufacturing classes is only incidental to our discussion. In some senses our interests are antagonistic. They have had the best of it for more than half a century. Free Trade and cheap imported food played sad havoc with farmers and landowners for their benefit, and it is time that we had a turn.

It is evident that to place a tax on foodstuffs that should recompense us for the rise in our expenditure to be incurred under a general tariff—to put 10s. or 15s. per quarter on wheat as the German agrarians have done—would entail a life and death struggle with the cotton spinners, shipbuilders, and our vast financial interests. Either we or they must go to the wall in such a struggle.

Apart from our coal and iron (fast being superseded by newly discovered deposits) we have not a tithe of the natural advantages of some rising nations, and we have a greater share of the world's trade and wealth than our natural resources or business ability warrants. We have raised a colossal structure upon the foundation of Free Trade; London with its myriad offices, warehouses, and incessant streams of shipping is the financial centre of the world, and further it is the banking and transshipping centre, because there are no tariff

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restrictions. The only reason why New York does not receive the lion's share of Canada's and South America's trade and traffic are these same restrictions. London thrives thereby incredibly.

These enormous financial and commercial interests will fight for their lives against Protection, and then, under Protection, against the farmer. They may not win the first battle, but I see no reason to believe that they will lose the second. I do not think that the farmer has the slightest chance in a political struggle with the manufacturer and the Labour Party. Rather we should compromise and look around before committing ourselves blindfold to Protection. Meanwhile let us get ready, sharpen our swords and count our numbers before we rush into battle. Let us be prudent first.

It seems that farmers ought to consider alternatives. For instance, it would suit us much better if the nation would retain Free Trade and allow us a slight preference on a sliding scale. This has been suggested, and would not raise the price of food-stuffs, on the average.

But if Protection comes, we might still try for some such sliding scale (which I shall presently explain), because there is a fair chance that the other interests might agree, and it would ensure a continuous profit on our operations. The sliding

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scale preference means a tariff on imported food-stuffs of such a figure as will allow our farmers to grow these articles at a living profit, but no more. When potatoes make from 40s. to 50s. per ton they pay the grower a reasonable profit year by year. If this price could be assured, then both farmer and consumer would benefit, the farmer by an assurance of a steady living profit, and the consumer by the provision of potatoes at a reasonable price. We do not wish the consumer to pay more, we simply prefer a regular figure. Sometimes the consumer pays £5 a ton, sometimes 30s. (I refer throughout to the prices received by the grower on the farm). On the average the price is what we wish, without these fluctuations. But Germany is a gigantic grower of potatoes, and when she has a great yield her surplus (which, being perishable, must be used) comes here at cut-throat prices, when our growers cannot make a profit at all. The loss to the farmer and the nation is not compensated by potatoes 5s. a ton too cheap.

“On the other hand,” says the Free Trader, “free imports prevent our potatoes going up to £10 per ton at times, and that counter-balances for the nation.” But if there was a sliding tariff on foreign potatoes sufficient to always bring them up to, say, 45s., that would ensure a reasonable profit for us and would cost the consumer nothing. (I

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take 45s. as representing a ten years' average.) This would prevent potatoes falling to 20s. per ton, and the consequent loss to farmers and labourers and the disorganization of a great industry. After such a spell of low prices potatoes go down in acreage and then up go the prices; indeed, as it is, ours sometimes reach £5 or £6 a ton. This example will serve for all our food products.

It will be realized that both farmer and consumer must benefit by regular prices and fair living profits. Agriculture must be carried on, and it is to the national interest that it is done at a profit, and be enabled to pay its labourers a fair living wage and maintain a thriving healthy rural population. Therefore there is a reasonable probability of some such scheme being carried into force when we as a party are strong enough to see to it. No one would fight to the death to prevent it, for we should not necessarily raise prices at all over an average of a few years. We ask for the well-recognized principle of "fair wages," and must see that we get it. With this assurance intensive culture would spread, more capital would be invested, we should be less dependent upon foreign supplies, and this could be done without any one's food "costing him more."

This is the Protection that we want—this, and

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no other. To dream of wheat artificially raised to £5 per quarter once more is impossible; no nation like England producing so little foodstuff will ever dream of allowing it, nor do I think that any leader of the Conservative party expects it. The alternative is feasible, and, moreover, we should not feel that women or children were starving in city slums to put money in our pockets. Agriculture is different from other industries. The Free Trader may say (possibly with truth) that it does not pay the people to protect watch-makers, and that there is no reason why they should flourish at the general expense, but he cannot think that we can dispense with our rural population or agriculture.

Let farmers of all politics prepare for the struggle. We must not rest until every farmer is a member of the Farmers' Union, and until that approximates more nearly to the trade union ideal of "Each for all, and all for each." Yes, we must take them for our pattern, with their unswerving purpose and astonishing self-sacrifice. If we gave on their scale our subscriptions would be 5s. an acre instead of a halfpenny. Although we are far from them, yet I am hopeful. I believe in the Farmers' Union, I think there is a great future before it, and am assured that it will expand beyond our anticipation. There is a new spirit

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abroad in agriculture. Once it was said that farmers could never work together, but adversity changes people, and necessity works wonders. The urgency is here, and I believe we shall rise to the occasion. There will be scope for our greatest efforts.

CHAPTER V

LABOUR

PART I

THE position of an agricultural labourer at the present time in Lincolnshire compares favourably with that of the town workmen and shines in contrast to his own plight of a few generations ago. Including extra pay for hay, corn and root harvests, the low rent of his cottage, the fact that he has a garden, a pig, and often poultry, and the occasional earnings of his wife and children, he may be reckoned to receive the equivalent of 18s. per week, on which it is possible to make ends meet. Certainly the agricultural labourer's life is not exciting; he has not the company and stimulus of the townsmen, but he has extraordinary health and lives a natural life on the soil, so that who can say which has the better position?

Not only is the rural labourer better off than he was, but it is evident that his condition will be improved in the immediate future, to the benefit of all concerned. The object of this article is to

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prevent the farmer looking on his men in the way too prevalent in our cities—as his mortal enemies.

It must be understood that I speak only of the conditions in the locality mentioned. In some parts of Southern England the daily wage is still 2s., with 6d. for strong boys, the balance of their livelihood coming—when it does come—from charity. The result is poverty, indolence, and loafing habits, with complete absence of independence, reminiscent of the bad old days of a century ago.

We have begun lately to take a larger view of national affairs, to realize that it will not do to have a considerable part of the population below a subsistence line; that poor relief and workhouses are an abomination. Somehow or other, every one has to be maintained, and to keep criminals, drunkards, wastrels, and paupers in prisons, asylums, and workhouses is vastly more expensive and wasteful than it ought to be if a sane system were adopted. We are indeed moving in that direction. Old age pensions, accident and sickness insurance, and labour bureaux are attempts towards a saner life.

However we may differ as to the method, most of us agree that the idea is right—at least, those who try to look ahead at all. “But that’s all very well,” says a paper I was reading lately, “it pampers the workmen, makes them too independent

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and socialistic, and leads to strikes, or, worst of all, abolishes thrift." I wonder if those who talk of discouraging thrift have the faintest idea what a workman's life is like? Let them try to rear a family on 18s. per week, and they would discover that unless every day they performed a miracle of thrift they would soon go wanting.

Seebohm Rowntree has devoted much time to these questions, and his results are accepted as a standard by sociologists. He asserts that in an ordinary town, such as York, a workman to bring up an average family in decency and reasonable comfort, providing sufficient clothing to protect them from cold, enough food to keep them efficient, a decent roof over their heads, but without any extras such as attendance when sick, all this he says cannot be done under 21s. 8d. per week. This he calls the subsistence line, and draws our attention to the appalling fact that several millions in Great Britain are below the standard, that something like one-third of our countrymen never have decently enough—a hard nut for us to crack. The rural labourer lives more cheaply than the urban, and taking everything into consideration I think that 17s. a week, together with a garden or allotment, represents the 21s. 8d. in the city. It is true the countrymen have larger families,

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but that is another problem—one that will doubtless be attacked on another side shortly.

Standard allowances like old age pensions are worth more in the country than in the town, but the Insurance (1911) Act may bear harshly on agricultural labourers. A man receiving 15s. a week is charged as much as a miner or bricklayer who may be earning 10s. or 15s. a day, whilst the agricultural labourer is much healthier than the town-worker. The Act is unjust to country dwellers.

The average family in England is five souls—man, wife, and three children—and the least on which they can efficiently be maintained in a city, says Rowntree, is 21s. 8d. Food for adults, 3s., for children 2s. 3d.—12s. 9d.; clothing for adults 6d., for children 5d.—2s. 3d.; rent, 4s.; fuel, 1s. 10d.; all else, 2d. each—10d. Total: Food, 12s. 9d., clothes, 2s. 3d., rent 4s., fuel 1s. 10d., all else 10d.—21s. 8d.

In our cities ten per cent of the population have less than this sum, and eighteen per cent more come below it for some reason—either they spend money on tobacco or amusements, or more on clothes or drink—at any rate, they sink below, and there are twenty-eight per cent, or nearly a third of the people of our cities, living in poverty! The cost of living in a city comes out as below:

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Man or woman, 7s. per week; man and wife, 11s. 8d.; man, wife, and one child, 14s. 6d.; ditto and two children, 18s. 10d.; three children, 21s. 8d.; four children, 26s.; five children, 28s. 10d.; six children, 31s. 8d.; seven children, 34s. 6d.; eight children, 37s. 4d. The average family of the agricultural labourer is higher than the city worker, and may be taken as five children. We can deduct for him from the town budget of 21s. 8d. the following items: 2s. rent, 1s. clothes, 8d. fuel, and 1s. for food, leaving the minimum 17s. below which I do not see how he can live. I allow in his 17s. an allotment or garden and pig and therefore deduct 1s. from the food, although there are more children.

I have gathered a number of budgets in the village of Billingham, and deduced therefrom an ideal average budget of 17s. a week for a man and wife and four children.

Rent 2s., fresh meat 1s. 7d., pig feeding (or bacon) 2s. 3d., coal 10½d., butter 3½d., bread 2s. 11d., sugar 5d., milk 1d., tea 4½d., potatoes 7½d., paraffin 2d., matches ½d., boot repairs 1½d., clubs and doctor 1s., new boots 6d., candles ½d., dripping 10d., flour 6d., rice 1d., jam 3d., treacle 2d., salt ½d., soap 2½d., soda and starch 2½d., clothier 1s. 6d., total 17s. This represents, as far as I can learn, an absolute minimum, below which

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six people cannot be maintained. It allows nothing for the man's tobacco or beer. If he indulges in them, or if there is the slightest exceeding of the allowance he is in debt at once. As a matter of fact he does not spend his money in an ideal manner. When the children are all young he falls into debt every week from three to four shillings, so that the packman, the landlord, or the grocer must go short. It must be understood that these figures represent nothing but a rough average. The family receive charity, especially clothes, and too often they spend more on clothes and less on food than their income demands—like those of higher station. The item of pig feeding (or bacon) is an attempt to average between what it would cost him to buy his bacon, and the expense of feeding a pig from birth to slaughter. When some of the children are old enough to work at odd times, in harvest, or potato planting and picking up, or at any of the jobs so numerous in these days of intensive culture, and the wife released from her care, works with them, or perhaps picks peas or turns washerwoman, then the family income swells over 20s., and quite good times befall them. I hope to publish further statistics later.

On the average a labourer is below the poverty line the first ten years of his life. Then he begins

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to earn money and gradually to save until just before he marries he is at the highest financial point attainable, for he can live on a minimum of 7s. per week. Of course, he does not do that because it is not necessary, but never again has he so great a margin for luxuries. After he marries and children come, he sinks again below the line, and remains there for probably another eight or ten years until his children begin to earn. After that he should be able to keep above the line until old age at sixty-five or seventy lessens his earning powers, but as this decline is met by the old age pension the greatest horror of his existence is removed. He no longer looks with certainty to poor relief or the workhouse.

There is one astonishing fact to record (but to prevent misconception I must state that I am not a total abstainer nor an advocate thereof), that the expenditure of the average working-class family in England on drink is 6s. per week. This is so well authenticated that there is no denying it, and one can only stare in amazement. What the agricultural labourer spends is not accurately known, but as his average earnings are not equal in my opinion to more than 18s. per week, and as 17s. is the absolute limit below which he cannot rear a family, it is evident that there is only 1s. a week for beer, tobacco, sweets, entertainments,

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accidents, extra clothes or any of the innumerable details that arise in family life. It is certain that the average labourer spends more than that in beer and tobacco. Not that he is any worse than other classes. They spend more on their pleasures and luxuries very often than they can afford, but the margin is so slight in the labourer's case that every penny tells.

CHAPTER VI

LABOUR

PART II

SEEBOHM ROWNTREE in his work on Unemployment offers as a possible specific the planting of urban workmen out in the country with a patch of land each so that in those times of unemployment which arise (possibly through no fault of theirs) they can fall back upon it, when it will serve to maintain them. The land should be worked regularly, in evenings or Saturday afternoons, and altogether in slack times so that it would be a sort of fly-wheel to store reserve power. This is a remarkable suggestion. Land is the most elastic and generous thing in creation. It stretches endlessly, and the more you put into it the more you receive, whilst it will, if required, suddenly absorb any amount of surplus labour. You get a range from the large farmer with one man for every thirty acres to the small holder with one for every five acres, and lastly the market (or French) gardener with several men to one acre.

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This is the more interesting as it bears out our ideas on the rural labourer. He is the best small holder, and the more easily he can obtain a few acres, the better all round. The ideal system was the ancient one when the land of England belonged to the people, and each villager cultivated a share. This is not a Socialist's dream, it is history of olden times and incidentally what happens in parts of Russia to-day. Later when England became more settled there was a large area of common land left around every village which belonged to the people, so that they had a free small holding or free pasturage for their poultry, or geese, or pigs. This was their mainstay and salvation, and during that period England was at her happiest—in fact she was known as Merry England.

In those days the villagers had regular sports on the village greens, mostly on Sundays, when they met for games, archery competitions, bowling, wrestling, fencing, racing, dog fighting, and dancing. They danced and sang and played, old as well as young, and if you look at a picture of that period such as a Maypole or Morris Dance you see that the artist has shown them all merry and jolly. But you do not see the labourers and their wives dancing nowadays; there are no more general festivities of the common people; the grown ups do not laugh and sing at their work

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any longer—in short it is “Sad England” instead of “Merry England.” They are light-hearted perhaps whilst young, but once married and a family on their shoulders the cares of life bear upon them; the women’s faces become lined, and the men’s recreation is the public house.

What was the cause of this change? After the Golden Times we have mentioned there came very bad times indeed when the landowners who had the power passed a series of Enclosure Acts, and gradually *stole* these common lands from the people. There is no other word for their action, indeed it is not half strong enough for one of the most dastardly affairs in our history. It turned Merry England into Mournful England—how mournful, you must read in the books that have been written. I give below a quotation from a work by Hammond on the *Village Labourer from 1760-1830*.

“Those were lean and dark years when the country was governed by its magistracy and the House of Commons echoed from a distance its voice. The country poor—robbed of their land by Enclosure Acts (which for bare-faced brigandage outdo in boldness the schemes of the wildest Socialists of to-day)—barred from escape from their parish by the Law of Settlement; subject to imprisonment for collective bargaining for

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higher wages by the repressive Combination Laws, to transportation for life for entering a wood in search of food or fuel; demoralised by a system of rate-aided wages which made a pauper of nearly every labourer, were starved at last into the revolt of 1830, when large gangs driven to desperation marched about the Southern counties smashing threshing machines, and demanding a minimum wage of two shillings a day—a wage which is still the reward of those who labour in Wilts, Hants, and Norfolk. We get a vivid picture of bands of ragged and half-starved peasants seeking work or maintenance as roundsmen. We are reminded, too, of a forgotten page of history, when in 1795 the labourers' wives broke into open revolt, and, like the women of France, commandeered the contents of mills and butchers' shops, not stealing, but selling food at fair prices, giving back to the owners the sums realized. We see, too, how side by side with rising prices, with the leap into grandeur of the large farmers with their liveried servants, and with the erection of the princely palaces of the landowners enriched by Enclosure Acts and high rents, quickly rose those Bastilles of the poor—the workhouses—one or two of which were levelled to the ground in 1830. Silhouetted against the blazing ricks beside the figures of a

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starving peasantry, flit the figures of great statesmen: Pitt, Bolingbroke, Ellenborough, Wellington, Peel, Melbourne, and even Grey, stand out with ugly emphasis. The amiable Melbourne emerges the most brutal Home Secretary that England has ever known, when judged by his own records at the Home Office. Evidently in the opinion of the authors the French peasant before the Revolution was better off than the English peasant of this period. One M.P. remarked that if the poor had lost the means of obtaining their fuel, they should keep themselves warm by sleeping in the stables with the cattle."

You notice that the landowner and large farmer were growing fat all the time, the one by enclosing commons, the other by the price of taxed wheat which reached £5 per quarter, but the gold was tarnished, it was blood money, the blood of women and children, and there came a day of retribution, such as is certain to overtake Lancashire presently because of the thousands of children worked to death in her factories. The labourers were deprived of the allotments and commons lest they should be "too independent," they were squeezed into towns to spread commerce (and help to abolish Corn Laws), and squeezed into other countries to cultivate them and bring about the day of retribution—

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the disastrous third quarter of the last century.

But we are looking up again now. Farmers no longer strive for wheat at £5, and labourers at 10s. a week—they realize that it will not do; a population of small holders is again rising and flourishing, and during the last twenty years labour has made greater strides than in the previous hundred. If labour can get the plot of land easily it will stay in the country rather than flock into the towns. This is the crux of the matter and our business must be to make it easier for them. We cannot take away from the descendants of those robbers the land they stole, it has changed hands too often, but we can make it possible for it to be easily split up again with France as our ideal. Also we can make it easier for them to obtain credit, which is necessary, and do our best for the return of Merry England.

Let us have anything rather than the Bad Old Times. If you want to know what they were, ask any old labourer how he was brought up. I asked one of eleven children some time ago. "Well," he said, "we lived on sop." Sop!—bread and water!—think of it! They sometimes tasted meat, he said, on Sundays, and his first suit was an old sack. Their father was an industrious labourer, and the children all went to work

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before they were six. He said it was bitterly cold on winter mornings, and that he often ate the turnips for the sheep—with wheat £5 per quarter and farmers making fortunes. But not the sort of fortunes to last one thinks.

Why on earth there wasn't an English Revolution as well as a French Revolution one cannot imagine, save that the ancient spirit of the English people had been crushed out. There was a rising against the Corn Laws, but compared with old times how tame it was! The future seems more promising, for we are moving in the right direction. Allotments and small holdings will increase in spite of alarms and cries that they don't always pay, and we shall see a great extension of piece work. The latter follows the former, for once a man has worked for himself, he gets the taste for hard work and good pay, and never loses it. You find the extremes side by side, one man working regularly for 15s. or 16s. on a farm, the other takes to special work, navying (cleaning waterways), hay and straw pressing and so on, earning from 30s. to £3 per week. He works twice as hard as the first man and twice as intelligently, and gets from two to four times his pay—a fair return for both master and man. It always pays a master to have intelligent men who are anxious to get on—and farmers should more and more let their

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work to their men by the piece. It will pay them.

Finally there will be a complete revolution achieved by the extension of agricultural machinery. The large farmer is going to use more machines, for labourers will become more expensive (good times will make them unfit for the old dull slavery), and as in America machines will increasingly take their place. There has been a great change in the last 20 years. More work is done to-day per acre with less labour than ever before, and the process will continue. The farmer of to-morrow will own complicated machines that will abolish hand work, whilst steam, petrol, or electricity will displace the horse, and instead of the bent-backed plodding spiritless peasant we shall have an alert blue-smocked engineer who will receive good wages and earn them. He will do the work of ten of our men and be worth a hundred.

England is a democracy, universal suffrage is coming, and if the common people (by their numbers) are to be our masters they must not be slaves, as they were two or three generations ago—they must be free men of spirit and understanding. A democracy of slaves is doomed to failure. . . This, is America's trouble: she imports illiterates from all over the world, gives

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them votes, and groans under an organized system of bribery, Tammany Halls, and political corruption. Our labourers are the backbone of England. The cities are simply kept going by rural recruits, and unless the backbone is sound woe betide the remainder.

Antagonism between farmers and labourers must cease, or we cannot thrive. The farmer is the more intelligent, and the first move must be his; he must not oppose small holdings or allotments or any means by which the labourer can become independent. If there is scope for ambition the young men will not flock to the towns; they would remain, and our rural population increase, not decrease. But conditions must be made agreeable, if they are to remain, and then the intelligent able ones will remain, not, as at present, only the very young or the very old or the unambitious plodders. A little understanding, a little broad-mindedness, a little looking ahead, and a very decided and wholesale abandonment of the old selfish attitude, and the "Bad Old Times" will be forgotten in the "Happy Present."

CHAPTER VII

SMALL HOLDINGS

A CONCERTED attack has been made lately upon certain peers who own miles of country, and refuse to hand it out to labourers or allotment holders. Taking the flourishing Fen-holders as a text, writers inveigh against such tyrannous obstruction to the prosperity of a country-side, and preach compulsory sale or nationalization. They look on the landowner as an arbitrary despot, a mysterious and inhuman tyrant, a casting back to feudal days in all its worst features. But, curiously enough, when the landlord is examined, he turns out to be an ordinary mortal with but common feelings, and, with a few exceptions, anxious to dispose of his land to the best advantage. Where he can let it profitably in small parcels, it is already done; where it pays better to let in large farms, he will do so. In the latter case small holdings are economically impossible: except on good soil they cannot exist, and whilst the prosperous small holder is honest and industrious, on poor soil he has to struggle

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desperately for a living, fights a losing battle, and is an unsatisfactory tenant.

Anyone who has experience of allotments on poor soil will tell a woeful story of spoiled land, of tenants too poor to pay rent, too poor to farm decently for themselves or their landlord, and finally giving up the ghost altogether. The landlord should be at liberty to treat his property to the best advantage. "But," says the critic, "to dispose of it in large farms and refuse the small holder is against the public weal"; oblivious to the facts and heedless of explanation. Much good might be done if attention were confined to those parts where small holdings are economically possible and a proved success.

The few remaining estates might be bought out and cut up. It is true there are not many, for the richest soil is not favourable to the large landowner. A hundred thousand pounds will buy a mansion and miles of wooded country in some counties, but where land is worth fifty or a hundred pounds an acre it would not go far, whilst generally in such parts it is bleak and treeless, and mansions conspicuous by their absence. One would expect the owner of a large estate in such a part to sell out and buy a county in Scotland, or a province in South America, where he could be as feudal as he pleased, and see

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better sport than fishing in Fen dykes. As a matter of fact, this has happened, there are only a few large estates left in rich soil, and the State might buy them out. When we consider the immense sums advanced to Irish farmers to buy their land, it seems remarkable that more is not done at home. On the other hand, we must not be carried away by enthusiasm. There is a limit to the spread of the small holder; one does not picture the whole of England, for instance, a beehive of ten-acre farms, but that limit is not yet in sight, and we may safely go forward.

Small holders are an industrious and prosperous class, healthy, and contented, comparing favourably with any section of the community. There is nothing decadent about them. They are of the ascendant type (beloved of Nietzsche), and fiercely independent. When the weaklings of our large towns peter out—and they are decaying rapidly—it is to the country that we turn for fresh stock, and amongst the small farmers and small holders we find a worthy backbone to the race. They are largely Nonconformist, for chapels are scattered in every hamlet, and their independence, together with the absence of a squire, weighs against an Established Church; but, on the other hand, they are mainly Conservative. Farmers are naturally Conservative; the land implants it,

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the seasons impress it, and the general order implies it. A man cannot easily watch crops growing and be a Socialist; environment beats him; he becomes a believer in the established order of things, the rights of "him that hath," whether tenant to be undisturbed or landlord to be unalarmed, he finds that whatever may be said or done, Nature takes about the same course, and he turns Tory.

The startling fact about small holdings is that they succeed against all probability. Running counter to modern ideas they should be impossible, yet they apparently set economics at naught. The trend of the present time is towards the growth of large concerns at the expense of small ones, stores squeezing the shopkeeper, trusts crushing the manufacturer, whilst all over the world commercial undertakings run together in monstrous combinations.

Other things being equal, the man who tills one acre of ground gets more from it pro rata than a man who has twenty acres, the man with forty gets more than the man with two hundred. If the soil be good no plot of ground seems too small from which a man may earn his living. Putting aside the host who market garden around great cities, the most flourishing small holders are the Channel Islanders, whose farms

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are no bigger than ordinary fields, and who pay as much as £20 per acre for rent, and sometimes clear £100 an acre in produce.

In "Rural England," Rider Haggard made a survey of agriculture, returning with a lamentable tale of ruin. Farmers everywhere, he found, were struggling against hard fate, the shrewdest only holding their own. But in his journey he unfortunately missed the part he should have visited first—the Fens. Here, if he had known, lay the key to the problem, and if only he had settled amongst the Fens, instead of the Broads, he would have been a happier farmer than his "Year Book" portrays.

It seems wholly a question of soil, for given good land small holdings flourish and agriculture smiles. In the Scilly and Channel Islands, around Evesham, in some parts of Kent and Bedfordshire, and in that stretch of country which runs from Lincoln to Ely, the small man holds his own against the rich neighbour. The industrious man can get on with little capital, and from the Socialistic point of view it is a near approach to Paradise.

A man may start here with a few pounds on as many acres, and make his way to any height. Some of the most prominent farmers in Lincolnshire began with nothing. One was a labourer,

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another a labourer's son, and so on, to a remarkable extent. Providing they can obtain a few acres to begin with they feel secure, for if a man is industrious and honest he can get credit for any reasonable amount. He must find cash for labour, but the seed merchant, the potato merchant, and the manure merchant will trust him until his harvest is gathered. As a class he justifies their trust, he is admittedly honest, and if he is reasonably industrious he is sure to get on and pay his way.

In these fertile Fens may be seen the process whereby England prospered in the second and third decades of the last century, when everywhere men began business with small capital, rising to prosperity. Commerce has now entered upon another phase. The man with little capital, however honest, however industrious, cannot thrive, to the dismay of our thinkers, who deplore the vanishing independence of the nation. Let them come to the Fens, and they will discover a nest of prosperous conservative individuals, fiercely independent, bowing to none, calling no man master, thinking and saying what they please. This is because the soil is good, and will respond infinitely to the demands made upon it. Where the soil is poor the small man is in difficulty. He must either enrich his plot, a laborious

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matter requiring time and capital, extend his holding to an economically possible size (when he ceases to be a small holder) or perish. Mostly he perishes, and the poor neighbourhoods can tell tales of abandoned small holdings, of forlorn hopes subsidized perhaps by an enthusiastic landowner, maintained for a time, and then vanishing.

Bounding the Fens is the Lincoln Heath, an expanse of country with only a few inches of soil above the limestone. Some farmers have land on both soils, and the contrast is astonishing. A small holder of 50 acres on this Heath has applied for an old age pension, proving by a balance sheet that he cannot make ten shillings a week. His rent is below ten shillings per acre, while only a few miles away other small holders are paying six or seven times more, and when one considers the incredible rents of the Channel Islanders, one is inclined to say that high rent means good profit.

Some people imagine that small holdings can be established at any place; that it is only necessary to forcibly cut large farms into small ones, and we shall at once have a countryside smiling with independent holders—a sturdy race of yeomen as of old.

This is not so. Only on the better soil is it

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possible, and here already it is being done. But why can the small holder do the best? Why does one acre produce proportionately more than ten, or ten more than a hundred? Why cannot the wealthy farmer give the same attention as his small neighbour? He can afford more labour, more outlay in manure and machinery, and economize enormously in every direction. Why does he not swallow up these small fish, as the business men and manufacturers are doing? Why, in short, are small holdings possible?

Because the attention that is necessary is that of a proprietor, the thoughtful care of the owner. No hireling can do this, no machine replace it, no organization copy it. On the best soil few men can farm more than two hundred acres really well. The most successful holders are those of forty to eighty acres. When a man has much land he puts a foreman in each place, but the foreman who could farm as well as a small holder would cease to be a foreman, and farm for himself. There are exceptions, but the best managed farm known to the author is one of 70 acres.

The great handicap on the small holder is want of capital. He can obtain reasonable credit for one year, but if the season is bad he is in an uncomfortable position, and if there should be two bad seasons together, he feels the pinch more

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severely than his large neighbour. On a large, well-managed place economy is possible to the tenant. He can buy and sell on a large scale to advantage; he will save labour in all directions, buying threshing machines, drills, or steam ploughs. The really shrewd man will specialize and become a potato or seed merchant, a cattle, sheep, or horse breeder, or an exporter of pedigree rams; whilst his farm and business will grow with his organizing ability; but such men are rare. Not many can farm more than 200 acres of good land to the greatest advantage.

A promising field open to our small holders is co-operation. In Belgium and Denmark, small men form societies to buy their seeds and manures, to hire or purchase costly machinery, and market their produce. The strides of this movement abroad in recent years are enormous, and as a nation we are sadly behind.

The least promising feature about small holdings is the insecurity of their base. They were called into being by the population of our cities, who demand an ever-growing supply of potatoes, cabbages, celery, and fruit, but some unforeseen cause may disarrange the system at any moment. The steamship nearly ruined our farmers, the refrigerator dealt a grievous blow at sheep breeding, and at each advance in communication

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the fabric of English agriculture shivers to its base. A Channel tunnel would destroy the most flourishing of all small holders, the Channel Islanders, and would seriously threaten those who look to London for a market. Whilst the cry for cheap food is blindly adhered to, the greatest British industry must suffer, and farmers, whether great or small, must remain at the mercy of chance.

This, however, is a fiscal question, and will be dealt with in the future. The small holder must co-operate, he must join the Farmers' Union and some day may make himself felt in the political world.

To sum up: the small holder should seek good land, regardless of high rents, he should never be enticed to poor soil by low rent, he should rather cultivate a small plot well than a large one badly, and finally, as he prospers, instead of seeking more land—which he will not have enough capital to farm so thoroughly, nor time enough to give it the proper attention—should devote himself more keenly to his original holding. However much he cultivates the soil, Nature will return him not three, but a hundred fold.

CHAPTER VIII

GREAT ESTATES

A RURAL revolution is in progress. During the last five years, under the stimulus of agricultural prosperity, our great landowners have begun to sell their property, making excellent prices, and this process is viewed in two ways. The Liberal calls it beneficial, saying that the land grabber is being forced to disgorge to the benefit of farmers and the nation; and the Conservative says that landowners, shaken by Socialistic legislation, are investing their capital abroad, whilst their tenants and the country are much worse off than before.

The great landlord is neither despot nor octopus, as his tenants can testify, but on the other hand he has not been affected, as an owner of agricultural land, by recent taxation. He is disposing of his estates because they are making remarkably good prices. Of course there is an undercurrent—but that is mainly political.

England is the last refuge of the aristocracy. Everywhere else they have lost their power,

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their social eminence, and their political significance. The process began with the French Revolution, and its last phase was the Veto Bill (1911). For good or ill, our great estates are breaking up, they are going and will go with accelerating force. If we wish to know how rapidly the process will continue, we must look abroad where it has been in force a longer time. On the Continent great estates have gone, apparently never to return, for once the people obtain possession of the soil they become tenacious. In Germany and France the tenants own 86 and 88 per cent respectively of their farms, in comparison to our 12 per cent. Exclusive of allotments and holdings under one acre, the average farm in Belgium is $14\frac{1}{2}$ acres, in France 24 acres, in England 70 acres. Belgium, only twice the size of Yorkshire, has 719,986 landowners, three-quarters of whom have less than five acres, and 95 per cent less than 25 acres each. This is small holding with a vengeance! A striking contrast between this and England, where many hundreds own more than 20,000 acres, several over 200,000 and one man nearly a million and a half, and where 26 peers own a larger tract than the whole of Belgium, with its three-quarters of a million proprietors.

We may take it then, that the present movement in England has only just begun, and will

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continue. What will the result be for farmers and the nation at large? Our landowners choose to invest or retain their capital in land at a low rate of interest, often not more than one or two per cent per annum, preferring rather social prestige and eminent position. When an estate is hereditary, as so many are, they wish also to do what they consider their duty to their ancient tenantry and dependants. Lord Lansdowne voiced this sentiment in the House of Lords in 1907. "Surely," said he, "what gives reality to ownership, what makes it so valuable is that we have hitherto associated it with the power of guiding the destinies of the estate, of superintending its development and improvement, and above all things the right to select the persons to be associated with the proprietor in the cultivation of the soil."

There is no doubt that numbers of them have nobly carried out their duties and spent their lives in working for the benefits of their tenants, in short, "guiding the destinies of the estate." These tenants will certainly suffer if the present system vanishes. They are well protected in comparison with others—they pay lower rents, and their position is in every way enviable. Under the advance of small holdings prices are bound to rise all round. The soil of Belgium is poorer than that

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of England (on the average considerably poorer), and yet the price of land is taken as £63 per acre against ours of £25. The difference is even greater than at first appears, as land in Belgium is valued apart from buildings, so that if we reckon them in, each Belgian acre fetches nearly three times more than ours.

Again, the average rent in England is counted as a pound an acre, whilst in Belgium it is 35s.; 42s. for pasture and 34s. 4d. arable land. Their prices, like ours, have undergone great changes since 1830, the earliest date for which figures are available. Up to 1880 it rose steadily, doubling in the fifty years. But then a serious drop occurred, the price of arable land declining by no less than thirty-three per cent, and that of pasture land by twenty-three per cent, between 1880 and 1895. This decline was due to the reduction in the price of corn owing to the opening up of the corn fields of America. This factor hit us in the same manner in England, and it is interesting to observe how the Belgians adjusted themselves to the new conditions. Their cultivation became intensive, they made use of co-operation, and devoted themselves to new branches of agriculture, especially breeding of live stock and raising garden produce. These factors, with the increasing use of artificial manure, brought back prosperity, and the prices and rents

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of land have risen nearly to the level of 1880. They are still rising, and before long will have passed that high-water mark. In England we have not nearly recovered ourselves, a not very creditable comparison. In Belgium at the present time, the returns show that land only brings in three and a quarter per cent income on the average, so that considered as an investment their landowner is no better off than ours.

This astonishing rise in price of land in Belgium is accounted for by the division of the country into small holdings, the fact that nearly every one can obtain a plot, and the consequent keen demand and competition for them. They are able to pay higher prices and rents, because the labour applied to the land is more efficient than in England, most of the labourers having a direct interest in their work, agricultural education is better, cultivation is more intensive, there are more light railways, agricultural co-operation is more fully developed, and, last of all, certain products are protected by a tariff. It is important to notice the enormous effect which these factors have produced upon land values, and Englishmen should realize that the price and rent of land will rise as methods of farming become more intelligent and successful. On the other hand farmers will have to pay a higher rent than they do at present to

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their future landlords, or a higher price for the freehold, and the ultimate result to them is doubtful. But of the nation's benefit there can be no doubt. Consider what it would mean if agricultural values in England were multiplied by three! The national wealth would be incredibly swollen.

Again, under the division of land, we find that in Belgium the holdings are mostly farmed by the tenant and his family, and although the rural population is greatly increased the labourer tends to vanish. There are not half the number per acre in Belgium as here.

The large farms in England are worked by labourers who have no interest in the success or failure of their work beyond the payment of their wage. As they are not in any way bound to the soil they are exposed to the full attractive force of town life, to which the enterprising ones yield. In Belgium if not already possessed of a small holding they have a good chance of getting one, and consequently stay on the land. The proportion of the total population engaged in agriculture is fourteen per cent, as against our five and a quarter per cent. Further, the number of agriculturists in Belgium is *increasing*, whilst in Britain it decreases at a rate which alarms all who are concerned with their country's welfare. The reason for this dis-

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crepancy is that whilst one country has encouraged subdivision of the soil the other has not. It is maintained in England that the attraction of high wages in towns is the cause of rural depopulation, but the demand for small holdings is always stronger than the supply. The relative desirability of the life of a small holder and an industrial workman cannot be measured solely by wages, for there is always a class who, if possible, gravitate to the soil, and land hunger seem inbred in the human spirit.

Small holdings appeal not only to the Englishman's love of country, but to his independence and desire to improve his position. His outlook is more hopeful, he has more scope for his own initiative, and less readily becomes the victim of circumstances upon his plot of land than in the cast-iron industrial system of our towns. The proportion of the total population living in rural districts is two and a half times as great in Belgium as in England and Wales.

This result is certainly advantageous to a state, for there is no better class than a thriving peasantry, and the fact that Belgium has fewer people in the city slums and more on the soil is her gain. If we could produce three times the food we do now, we should nearly feed ourselves, and cease to be dependent upon foreign supplies. Our

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national health and physique would also improve—a much-to-be-desired event.

When we consider that England imports nearly £3,000,000 worth of vegetables *alone* (not including fruit) more than she exports, whilst Belgium exports a quarter of a million pounds worth *more* than she imports, something seems wrong. Further, Belgium exports about half a million pounds worth more fruit than she imports, notwithstanding that her population is 589 to the square mile, against our 342. When the cultivation of the soil becomes so intensive that individual care is given to every plant, it is no longer farming or small holding, but market gardening, and this is what the Belgians are fast doing. Gradually their farmers allot a part of their soil to market garden crops, then, finding them pay better than ordinary farm produce, they little by little relinquish the former, and become full-fledged market gardeners.

A lecturer of the Horticultural College at Liège gives some remarkable figures of the yield obtained by him from his market garden at Liège. He got two and sometimes three crops a year, ranging from £62 per acre for cauliflowers and spinach, up to £175 for lettuce and celery. For such land, up to £8 per acre rent will be paid, and the value will be perhaps £200 per acre. The same thing is

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beginning now in certain areas of Lincolnshire, and will no doubt go on faster in the future.

It cannot be denied that a state of affairs in a country where labourers can become small holders, and small holders increase to farmers; where, in fact, every one can rise, is for the national welfare. It brings ability everywhere to the top—as in America to-day—or as in the armies of the great Napoleon.

It was the abolition of primogeniture under the Code Napoleon that split up France and Belgium and kept them divided. The law is now that subject to a man's right to make a provision for his widow the greater part of his property, both real and personal, must, notwithstanding any testamentary disposition to the contrary, pass on his death to his children in equal shares. A man cannot leave his estate to his eldest child—all must be equal, and any considerable gift to any one child made in lifetime is taken into account.

It is not to be wondered at, then, that France and Belgium are the countries of the small holder, as opposed to England, the country of the great owner. If we turn to Australia and New Zealand, we find men of our own blood engaged in passing laws to the same end. Not content with leaving the matter until death, they prevent a man, under certain circumstances, from owning more than a

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certain amount of land, deeming large estates bad for the people. Also they endeavour to split up estates by land taxation and by laws for "closer settlement." Probably the absence of the feudal system of great estates and their environment marks the greatest difference between the Englishman and his Colonial cousin. Which is the better the future will show. The old system is dying hard, but it has received its death-blow, and the end is hastened by the numbers of newly rich people, Jews and financiers, who buy out impoverished aristocratic families, and replace them. This process strengthens our upper families, recruiting them with vigorous blood and shrewd brains, but where it touches on land-owning it is another matter. This new stock cannot in a few years acquire manners that have taken centuries to ripen; they cannot "sit" with these old customs, and they no more suit the feudal system than they would the armour of its ancient knights. This feudal system, with its great estates, its hereditary lords, tenants, and unchanging customs, is vanishing, and all hopes to the contrary are doomed to disappointment.

At its best it was one of the finest ever seen, and it lasted longer in England than one would have imagined possible, but its day is done, and our grandchildren will know it no more.

CHAPTER IX

WEEDS

THE following quotation was clipped from a local newspaper and relates to an agricultural county council:

“DISREGARDED

“A request by the Local Government Board inspector to join another county in appointing an inspector under the Destructive Insects and Pests Act was disregarded.”

This raises one's hands in amazement. These councillors are returned to consider the interests of their neighbours, practically all of whom live on or by the land, yet when a motion is brought forward to do something really useful for agriculture the fear of spending a small sum makes them “disregard” the idea without a moment's hesitation. They should be pilloried, and would lose their posts if their constituents did not belong to the most apathetic class in the world. Most of these gentlemen are farmers themselves, but what of that? The motion was disregarded!

The incident is of evil omen. There was never

Weeds

graver need of foresight amongst those who till the soil. If we look abroad we find our competitors active, and their Governments assiduous in helping them, so that they flourish faster than we, getting in some cases an average yield two or three times greater per acre than is obtained in England. But here the State is slow to act, and when it moves (tardily enough) is met by such obtuseness as the sample given.

The State should do for agriculture what it cannot do for itself. The great aid is Protection, denied our farmers. Next ranks the nationalization of railways, for they press more heavily upon him than the manufacturer, his goods being so cheap and heavy that freight bears a large share of the final cost. What is already accomplished, as the various Cake and Fertilizers Adulteration, and the Diseases of Animals, Acts, is excellent, and it is on these lines that we must look for an advance. There must be a general attack on insect pests and crop diseases, especially potato blight, which should come at once under the Infectious Diseases Act, instead of being left to farmers to either spray or let spread as they will.

But of all troubles—low prices, bad weather, poor yields—weeds are the most irritating and alarming. Others vary, but these are always with us, so that we consider them a natural and neces-

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sary condition. Natural they may be, but necessary they are not. Their cost is incalculable. There is the labour of weeding, the indirect loss of fallowing, the nourishment they steal from rightful crops, the sometimes choking and always weakening of the crop (peas, for instance), and the expense of the seedsmen machining farm seeds. This is but a tithe. They take a rent from the land, and should be abolished.

The object in offering these suggestions is to stimulate thoughtful agriculturists. They are of the sketchiest nature, and practical details are left to valuers, botanists, experts, farmers' unions, to anyone, in short, who knows land intimately. There is no reason why a campaign against weeds, properly conducted, should not be successful; even in a generation the primeval curse would be greatly abated.

Weeds come chiefly from four sources: (1) They already exist in the ground; (2) they are sown with seed; (3) they come from neighbouring farms; and, (4) they ambush in dykes and hedges. There are clean farms already, practically weedless, the fruit of ceaseless energy. I have seen them with admiration, and it is certainly possible to suppress (if not eradicate) one's native weeds, but the other causes are ever present, and one cannot relax, nor can one's efforts ever be completely successful.

Weeds

There is a Noxious Weeds Act in Ireland, under which farmers have to keep their more dangerous weeds down, but I understand it is largely a failure, nor may a campaign be successful unless it attacks at all points. It is far easier to sow weeds than to hoe weeds. They are active, never tiring, and mostly win the race, so that prevention, not cure, must be attempted, and scattered attacks are doomed to failure.

(1) First we must penalize the merchant who sells weeds in his seed, for it is possible to remove them, although a costly process, so that at present there is a difficulty in getting farmers to pay the extra price. But if all seed was sold under an enforced guarantee of cleanliness an enormous step would be gained without detriment to either farmer or merchant. Recently I saw an analysis of a sample of clover seed sown by a neighbour, showing 22 per cent impurity; thus he paid the price of 100 lb. of seed for 78 lb. and had sown 22 lb. weeds, for which he had paid the price of good clover seed. It would have been better and cheaper to have sown three quarters of the quantity of pure seed at a higher price and done without the weeds.

(2) We should either make it an offence for farmers to sell one another seeds or seed corn with weeds in, or instead trust to Clause 3 on the one

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hand and the common sense of the people on the other. Our object would be to drive all seeds into the cleaning machinery, for which, no doubt, co-operative warehouses would be established. One cannot conceive any sane farmer sowing his own unclean seed if he could send it to such a plant simply to have the weeds removed; so that, although this clause presents difficulty, in practice it might solve itself.

(3) For this we must look to our cattle inspector (to be an inspector under the "Weeds Abolition Act"), who will roam the country looking for thistles and docks, notifying the offender that unless he keeps them down, it will be done for him, at his expense, and he fined in addition.

(4) Clause 4 will compel the authorities to stop the roadside weeds from spreading, and the farmer to keep all hedgerows and dykes free. Lying there in ambush, they annually infest the land in terrible swarms, but must be scotched.

Were these ideas materialized every one would be in their favour—well, nearly all. In each locality there are a few farmers whose fields are ablaze with poppies, thistles, docks, and a splendid abundance of all the weeds that blow, ready, at an appropriate time, to swarm in the breeze to neighbouring farms. These will object strongly! They will be passive resisters, perhaps. . . .

Weeds

There is no new principle involved. We have the machinery already for diseases of cattle, and I understand that in the southern states of America stringent measures are taken against insect pests, farmers being penalized who do not keep them down.

Of course, the rules must be flexible at first. A period would elapse before the farming clauses were enforced, but the merchants might be immediately brought into line with the cake and manure manufacturers. It would protect them from unscrupulous competitors. After a generation under the "New Act" weeds would be, at any rate, scarcer, and it would be easier to suppress them. What, then, abolition would mean I do not attempt to describe. After reading this, let each consider what it would be worth to him, then work towards such a desirable end.

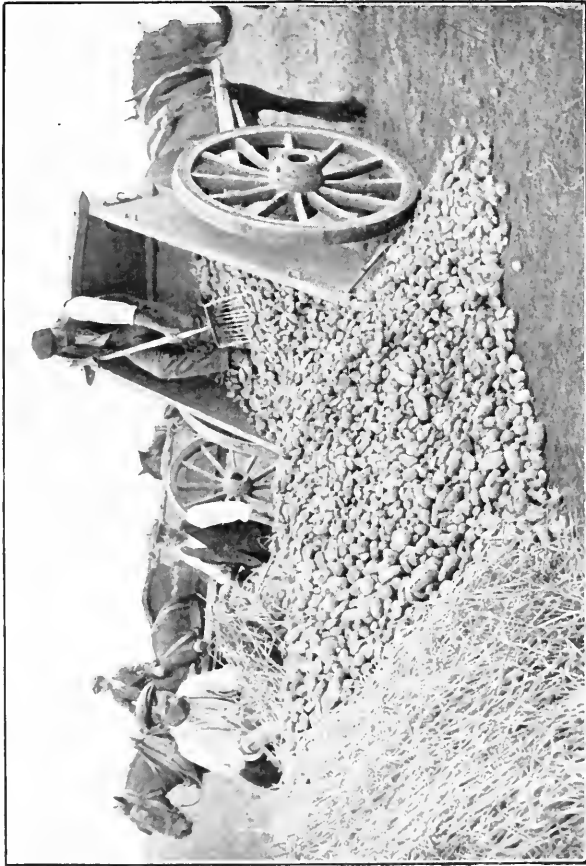
This campaign may be opposed by short-sighted men, on account of its expense! The results obtained would be greater compared with the outlay than possible in any other way, yet there would still be the objectors as exemplified in the beginning of this chapter. If they predominate, if the farmers of England have no more gumption than to be represented by such men, then they deserve whatever fate befalls them.

CHAPTER X

THE POTATO BOOM

SOMETIMES an industry, after centuries of smooth sailing, will burst forth volcanically in a night and amaze every one. There was the tulip craze in Holland, when fabulous sums were made; but this was not a mystery, tulips being the pets of wealthy men. Potatoes, on the other hand, are plebeian things, articles of the kitchen, the most ordinary vegetable in domestic use; and how could a hundred pounds change hands for a single tuber? This was the question asked by one cityling of another in 1904, and no one answered the question intelligibly.

New varieties of potatoes are obtained by cross-fertilization, and when a promising variety appears it soon spreads across the country. Fashions change in vegetables, as in dresses, and different nations have different tastes. In England a large white floury potato is demanded; in Germany it must be hard and waxy; in some countries it must be sweet; and so on. A new variety runs a certain course when established and found to suit both



Photo

[S. Jepson, Spalding

A FINE CLAMP OF TUBERS — "BRITISH QUEENS."

The Potato Boom

the growers' pockets and the public's taste, until it loses its vigour, or the taste alters, and it is supplanted by a newcomer. A generation ago, the Ashleaf, Skerry, and Magnum Bonum were favourites, but to-day they are almost extinct as a field potato. Perhaps the most notable potato ever introduced was the Up-to-date, which paid its first growers handsomely. In fact, any variety that becomes in demand must pay the first growers, because, instead of selling their produce at current rates in the markets, they dispose of them for seed purposes at much higher prices, and it was this that formed the foundation of the Boom.

The Great Boom was the most astonishing incident of British agriculture. It arose mysteriously, reached an astounding height, and collapsed suddenly. Those involved were drawn blindly onward, awaking later as from an ugly dream, rubbing their eyes. Farmers, of course, are accustomed to high prices for pedigree animals, and £1,000 has been made before now of a ram, a bull, or a stallion, so that a similar price for pedigree potatoes to breed improved and profitable stocks was but another step in the same direction. This partly explains why the most conservative body of men in our country fell victims to a frenzy without parallel in agricultural history.

At the close of the nineteenth century and

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the commencement of the twentieth, there were several unfavourable potato seasons, when the current varieties like Up-to-date and British Queen became diseased, and seemed worn out, so that there was an insistent call for new sorts that should resist wet weather. The raiser of Up-to-date—Archibald Findlay—introduced two varieties to meet this demand—Evergood and Royal Kidney—and these met with immediate favour, for they performed as much as they promised, and every one was anxious to try them. The first growers made £50 or more an acre, prices which then seemed gigantic, and these fortunate people boasted everywhere not only of the enormous profits but of their foresight in obtaining these varieties first, and announced their intention to try anything else of the same sort that came out.

The time was ripe for something bold. Findlay brought out a potato heralded far and wide as “the best yet”—the famous Northern Star, which, he said, was an extraordinary cropper and disease resister. Having but a small quantity, he only allowed a few to any one customer at £1 per lb. Suttons announced also a “marvellous new early,” the Discovery, at the same price, and these were eagerly snapped up. The boom was well under way now, farmers rushed for potatoes at a sovereign a pound, and what followed was but natural.

The Potato Boom

Evergood and Royal Kidney were flourishing still, spreading everywhere and producing enormous crops, outdistancing the older sorts and well repaying those who had been bold enough to seize them first. This encouraged growers to rush for the "latest out," which were advertised to be far ahead of Evergood and Royal Kidney, and the buyers of Northern Star resold at a high premium.

A small gardener in Lincolnshire obtained 15 lb. of Discovery, which he propagated after the nursery fashion, placing each tuber in a forcing bed, potting off sprouts, hardening in a cool house and finally planting in a garden, so that he obtained nearly 5 cwt. in the autumn. As the boom was still rising, he sold them at 15s. a pound—a profit of between three and four hundred pounds. This was enough to madden the most sober, of course. Northern Star paid its growers a thousand per cent, and as every one wished to be in the movement the supply was too small for the demand. Prices rose continually. Discovery went from ten to thirty shillings a pound in a few months, and every one who touched them handled gold. Small holders, allotment and garden owners, found their modest sovereigns turned into hundreds, and the most cautious were drawn into the whirlpool.

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During the summer of 1903 excitement was intense, and no one could talk of anything but the boom throughout the potato districts of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Every market ordinary, every train, and every public-house knew but one theme—the fortunes accruing from bold speculation and the methods by which money could be minted wholesale. At this time it was whispered that Findlay had a potato that was to eclipse all forerunners in vitality, in productiveness, in disease resistance, and that was to prove so rich a gold mine to its happy possessors that he had named it “Eldorado!” Mr Findlay would not sell any at that time, stating that he had not sufficiently tested it, but he had allowed the previous year a few friends to try some, and the produce of these came into the market. A determined onslaught was made on them, fabulous prices were offered, and a pound of them was sold for £20! There were only a few available, and every one was determined to have them, so that the price per pound went rapidly to £30, £50, £80—and at last a stone (14 lb.) changed hands for £1,400—a hundred pounds a pound! This cheque was shown in a shop window in Spalding Market, and proved a centre of the most exciting scenes.

Unheard of prices were realized. Not only were values inflated, but they seemed capable of infinite

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extension. Ridiculous reports circulated. It was said that Findlay's next would cost £1,000 a pound, and make its possessors millionaires. The boom had become a bubble, frantic and self-doomed; single tubers were sold by public auction to excited bidders, and a world's record was made by the sale of one single Eldorado for £100. The purchasers of Eldorados forced them in greenhouses, and sold off the potted plants at one and two guineas each. Many thousand plants were sold in pots in this manner, the buyers planting them out like geraniums, but few of them came to anything. Such super-cultivation killed them, their constitution could not stand it, and Eldorado was ruined by its too anxious holders.

After the original holders had parted from all the Eldorados that they held, those who had been unable to get any began to buy the future crop for forward delivery, and the most novel and penultimate phase was entered.

Eldorados were sold for delivery in the following autumn—1904—at about £200 per cwt., £4,000 per ton; and many tons, perhaps thirty, certainly over twenty, were sold at these figures! Every one speculated. Small men bought a few stones, merchants bought a ton or two, contracts were signed, deposits paid, and all was done in the most approved Stock Exchange fashion. The

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affair was a preposterous gamble. New varieties came forth every day, syndicates were formed to deal in them, and all the wild enthusiasm, desperate scheming and sheer lunacy of the South Sea Bubble came to the surface. The climax was reached at the Smithfield Cattle Show, in London, in 1903, which became an "exchange" for potato gamblers. Outsiders took a hand—grocers, drapers, chemists, and furniture dealers—people who did not know a potato from a turnip—rushed in, to rush out again shortly—without their money.

But the summer of 1904 was fine and favourable for the potato crop. There was a huge yield, and the prices were low, which checked the demand for seed potatoes, as is usual. It is the same with all booms—a period of scarcity raises prices, speculation follows inflation, until the thing is overdone, and a period of depression sets in, when shares—or potatoes, or whatever is being gambled in—become suddenly unsaleable. All are sellers, none buyers; there is a sickening scene of panic, and the boom falls like a pack of cards. Thus it was here. To make matters worse, the Eldorado had grown but feebly, for the reason aforementioned, a crushing blow to those who had bought them for future delivery at £4,000 per ton. Just as matters were wavering, and none knew what might hap-

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pen, a prominent merchant of the potato world declared that Eldorado was not a new variety, and that he had any amount in his possession. One kick will demolish a rotten structure, and this proclamation came like a thunderclap when the boom was trembling. The whole affair collapsed with dramatic suddenness, and in a few weeks fancy varieties were unsaleable.

Those unfortunates who had purchased Eldorados for forward delivery did not want them, and the boom vanished in a whirlpool of lawsuits over the contracts.

The next two years were depressed, but things gradually recovered, and the record season of 1907 put them right again. The best of the "boom" varieties—King Edward, Evergood, and Royal Kidney—have become favourites and spread everywhere, but most of those bought at enormous prices were given to the pigs. The ill-fated Eldorado (sinister name) failed to fulfil its golden promise, and has been since unheard of. Since 1907 there have been excellent times for potato growers, not from speculation, but honest and steady farming. The boom was but an incident in the development of the potato industry, and its collapse left much soreness, but no lasting wound. It could not be called fraudulent, though swindlers there might be in its midst. Every one more or less believed in

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it, and suffered alike at its collapse, rubbing bewildered eyes afterwards to think *how* they could have done so—a common conclusion to such affairs.

But it will be long before another potato is sold for a hundred pounds!

CHAPTER XI

BOOK-KEEPING

THE average British farmer has little inclination towards all that he includes as "book-learning," and this is at once a strong characteristic and serious fault. He thinks nothing, as a rule, of farming "by the book," of theory, of calculations, of book-keeping, and of experiments. The only way in which he can be induced to try a new scheme or article is by seeing a neighbour do it first with successful results, so that one enterprising man will presently leaven a whole neighbourhood with some improved manure or implement or method of culture.

The fact is that farmers do not read enough. In America the Government Department of Agriculture spends huge sums on experiments, and issues countless leaflets and bulletins to its farmers, who read them intelligently, and take advantage thereby. Their agricultural papers have an immense circulation, and everywhere the Yankee farmer is an alert proposition with the latest implements and labour-saving devices, with tele-

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phones (their farming telephones outnumber all others), motor cars, and anything new and good that offers.

But English farmers are conservative. They pride themselves on it, and the last thing to be seen in their houses are books or magazines or reports, even as the last thing to be thought of on their farms would be experiments or trials of new processes. I know one farmer who takes the *Spectator* and one labourer who can repeat sections of *Paradise Lost*, but they are rare, and so is the farmer who follows out the various trials and experiment reports and attempts to utilize them. In no other class of life is it possible to meet men of influence, of good financial position, and of sterling common sense, men to take perhaps a keen interest in public affairs, who are so ignorant of the world outside agriculture, reading neither papers, magazines, nor books. They are out of touch with matters common to the ordinary inhabitants of the town. (This applies, of course, to England only, for I am told in Scotland the ploughboys read Greek, so the farmers must be a mass of erudition.)

The average farmer will rebut this forcibly, saying that he manages very well, that his fields are his books, and that an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory. From the very nature of farming it is true, as a rule, that practical men are

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most successful, whilst attempts by book-fed outsiders to farm theoretically are doomed to failure, but this does not prove that theory is no good. It only means that practice comes first. Theory, after all, is only the collected results of the practice of others beyond our reach.

Where the farmer suffers most is in his lack of proper accounts. Because of the neglect of education, the contempt of figures, and the love of rule of thumb and "doing as my neighbours or my father did," not ten per cent of our farmers keep accounts at all, and not one per cent keep really comprehensive ones. Providing their bank account is in about the same state from year to year, their bills not noticeably higher than usual, and their stock about what they consider it should be, they are satisfied.

The Government, so relentless in other cases, has given up hope of figures from farmers, and accepts one-third of the rent as profit. But the farmer has no idea of his profits and losses, nor has he at any time a clue to his financial position, and is, to the business man, in an unenviable state.

Every man who conducts a business on proper lines is careful in this matter. He makes out a profit and loss account, checks it with his balance-sheet, and knows not only how much he has made, but how much he is worth. At any moment he

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can prepare a set of figures that bears some resemblance to his actual position, but the farmer is unable to do likewise. Even if the latter is sure from his calculations that he has made a profit on the year's working, he does not know how he has made it, nor if he is losing can he locate the leak. From a business point of view, farming is a hazardous adventure, and this prevents farmers from obtaining credit as reasonably as they otherwise might, for the creditor is compelled to rely more on the man's character than on any figures that may be placed before him. When a business man is losing money and is unable to tell where and why, he calls in an auditor who examines and analyses the figures for years back, and as a rule succeeds in finding the weak spot. He can do this because his raw material of figures is available. But the farmer has no figures. He can only guess.

An ideal system of book-keeping on a farm would, as in a business, take account of every payment and receipt, and resolve each transaction to its proper place or divide it into its components, so that a profit and loss statement could be made at the end of a year. The farmer would be able to tell how the money was spent and know exactly what went for labour, railway carriage, rates, insurance, repairs, renewals, tradesmen's accounts, and the usual items. These could come under re-

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view each year and be compared with those of previous seasons. If they were less, so much the better; if more, he must see how that comes about and find if they can be reasonably accounted for. This annual checking and comparison of expenses, when analysed, is vital to the proper conduct of a business, for expenditure has the knack of quietly and persistently increasing, and needs unceasing scrutiny.

I purposely said "ideal" in suggesting a profit and loss account with the careful book-keeping that this involves, because it is for the farmer a counsel of perfection, but the nearer he approximates to this the more completely he keeps his accounts, and the more accurately he analyses his outgoings the better for him. The farmer may urge that even had he the time or inclination he has not the ability. But he might have his sons taught book-keeping to their mutual benefit. The result is always useful. There is the money spent in cakes, feeding stuffs, and artificial manures, for instance, and the question as to how much more, if any, could be used with advantage. Then there is the hiring of drills, thrashing machinery, steam cultivators, chaff cutters, cost of grinding, etc., and the problem as to whether it would pay to buy one's own machinery or hire it. This can only be settled by studying the figures of several years.

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Again, practically every farmer suffers from ignorance of railway matters, and the charges that he pays directly (or more often indirectly) can only be checked by careful examination. If they knew how much they over-pay they would be more than startled. A friend, farming some 800 acres, first pointed this out to me. He obtained a book—I think from the Board of Trade—giving every rule, bye-law, and legal charge that the railways are entitled to make, and studied this until he became acquainted with the facts as to demurrage, responsibility, sheeting, technical charges, drawbacks, etc. Since then he has continuously challenged their bills with most successful results.

Interwoven with the matter of book-keeping is that of checking goods. The business man checks every article that enters his place; counts, weighs and measures them, compares them with the bought sample, notes their condition, and enters all details in his books, with which the bill must tally before it is paid. But how many farmers check their imports, and how many leave it to chance?

The average farm weighing-machine looks as if it came out of the Ark, and if checked at all is only done about once in ten years! As for measures, he simply has none—I speak from personal knowledge—so that he cannot check those articles sold by the gallon or the bushel. Nor has he, as a rule,

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a yard-stick, and goods like stack cloths, wagon covers, staddle cloths, canvas, hessian, or wagon ropes pass unmeasured. It is a common knowledge in the trade that cheap rick covers are short in measure, yet they seem to pass undetected.

One of the most vexatious things about farming is the goods lent to neighbours and not returned. They *will borrow*, and the farmer cannot refuse, partly because of his proverbial good nature and partly because he *may* want to borrow himself some day. The greater articles, such as ploughs and carts, come back, but the ladders, wagon ropes, riddles, rakes, forks, hoes, sacks, and pulse cloths do not always return; in fact, as often as not you never hear of them again. A large farmer gave me his estimate of his yearly loss from this cause, but I could not hope to be believed if I repeated it.

Yet how many farmers trouble to organize a simple system of only allowing one person—themselves or their foremen—to lend goods and that person to keep a loan book? The loan book has on one side the article, date, and person by whom fetched, and on the other side the date returned. Then, if examined once a week or month, the missing articles may be fetched back. After keeping such a book for a time the writer found he was effecting a considerable saving. It is true he

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had to fetch home many things, but gradually he discovered the offenders, and refused to lend to them, when the trouble ceased. There is pleasure in loaning to a man who really wants an article, takes care of it, and promptly returns it. If there is an accident such a one is careful to repair or replace the article. But there are renegades who have hardly anything of their own and live by borrowing, and it is these who abuse kindness, for they never dream of taking care of other people's goods nor of returning them, and there is no hope except in refusing to lend them anything. The writer once found an implement in the corner of one of these men's fields buried in a rubbish heap, the woodwork rotted off, and the ironwork rusted through in places by three years' burial!

Before leaving this, one wonders why farmers so neglect their sacks and covers. They should be branded with the owner's name on both sides when purchased—it costs only a trifle—and an account should be kept of bags loaned or sent with goods “to be returned empty.” A great many go out this way, but few return. The loss is heavy, and might be stopped by elementary book-keeping.

When studying accounts sack demurrage should receive strict attention. The amount spent in this

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is stupendous and might as well be thrown into the street. If spent in purchasing sacks, how much better off the farmer would be! Good sacks, taken care of, are an excellent investment, but they are seldom cared for. Regardless of the fact that they cost from 1s. to 2s. each, they are used on the farm, too often, as waste material, to stop up any gap or cover any hole. The farmer at the year's end wonders where his new sacks have gone, so that it has come to be looked on as one of the standard mysteries of agriculture. As a matter of fact, some are borrowed—and are kept—some have gone away with goods to be returned, some left out in the rain to rot, some left in a corner for rats and mice to gnaw, and the remainder have either been nailed to the dog kennel, the hen coop, or the chaffhouse window.

There seems a difficulty always, when the farmer, in the course of his attempts at keeping general accounts, tries to estimate the cost of living taken from the farm, but it is not an insoluble problem. There is the cost of the horses used for driving and hunting, and their upkeep. The groom's or gardener's wages, the amount the shooting (if he has it) would let for, and the same with the fishing and game rights, the foodstuffs, and milk consumed, and his house rent.

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The keeping of really close and detailed accounts with particulars of every transaction, and the result thereof, is beyond the ordinary farmer, for the labour involved would not be warranted by the result. There have been cases—one on a great estate in Norfolk—when figures were kept of every field, so that it was known just what had been made or lost in each one of them, and the course of every animal was traced from start to finish. The figures were most interesting, but it took a whole army of clerks. In special cases, however, where milking herds are kept, it is impossible to keep the accounts of the yield and quality of the milk, or the food given, too closely, for only by such means can the right food, and the right breed of cows be selected. The same applies to pig or bullock breeding, and I must remark here that a weighbridge is a most profitable investment on a large farm.

The feeding of stock is a vital point, and deserves much closer attention. Every farmer ought to have an acre or two of lucerne growing close to his buildings to use green. It will pay him better than anything else, yet how rare it is to find a plot. Again, we are informed on good authority that if cows are allowed free access to a supply of rock salt they will give an increased supply of milk, amounting in tested cases to as

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much as 16 per cent. There are hundreds of such points always turning up, all over the world, if our farmers would only read, learn, and take advantage of them.

The farmer should spend his life in studying his own soil, field by field, no two of which are alike. Every field should be divided into two or more plots by marks on the fence and manured differently, the treatment varying as he gradually gains experience. No one can tell him beforehand what will suit any field. He must find out for himself, and the more ardently he applies himself to that task the better. He must carefully weigh and check the results, not for one, but many years, noting the different results from the same manure in different seasons, and the *after* results of manuring on various crops. Every one can do this, and they may be assured that nothing will be more profitable. A tabulated chart kept over a series of, say, ten or fifteen years, and the crop results of every field, the amount and sort of manure, the year's weather, and incidental remarks would be the most valuable thing a farmer could have.

The Board of Agriculture issues a journal every month for 4d., post paid, which is a mine of information, experiment, discovery, and invention. Every one ought to take it; it is unbiased,

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non-partisan, unpolitical, and has something good for all, from the most economical way of feeding a pig to the best way to fix a windmill. This magazine, offered at so small a price and worth a guinea, is almost unknown, and if it were given away it might have no greater circulation. Our farmers are backward. One owns it with regret and ignores it if possible, but there it is! They do not believe in education. There are really successful men making their hundreds—and sometimes thousands a year—whose sons go to the village school, and not very long either. They managed, and so may their sons, they say.

But the farmer of to-morrow must be better educated, or he will go under before the attack of the enterprising State-aided farmers of France, Germany, Denmark, Holland, and Belgium. These are studying, improving their methods, co-operating, using more manures, and seizing every opportunity that intensive culture allows to increase the product of each acre. It is they whom we have to fear—we cannot escape them, and if we hope to avoid a repetition of the disasters of the 1880's, we must be well prepared. It is only by education that we can expect to cope with them.

CHAPTER XII

THE OUTLOOK

AGRICULTURE is booming, foodstuffs are yearly dearer, land is a marketable commodity, and farmers are smiling after forty years' rest. The question that confronts all who are thriving by agriculture is: Will it last?

Improved communications gave the first blow to agriculture fifty years ago and nearly ruined it. We have only just recovered and still yearn for Protection, but not until the Millennium, or the formation of a powerful Agrarian party, shall we receive such attention from an ungrateful nation, and preparing, therefore, to meet the continual attacks of a whole world, we must consider what we have to fear.

There are alternate alarms of impending wheat famines and world wide over-production. The millions of China are to eat bread, America to consume her own corn, and we are to go hungry. Another day, South America and Canada are to produce food so abundantly that Europe is to have its meals almost for nothing. As far as we

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can now see, supply will keep pace with demand. It was not so fifty years ago, when the wave of emigration swept America and settled its fertile prairies. Thousands became free landowners, and farmed so cheaply on that wonderful soil that nothing could withstand them, but nowadays new land is not so readily obtainable. Settlers are assisted, but capitalists and railways hold the reins, and the accretion of value brought by the opening of new land goes into their pockets. The pioneer thrives, but not so greatly that he can dump our markets. For this reason there will be no recurrence of the American bogey for Farmer Bull.

The world trend is for new countries to be farmed on a large scale, with mammoth fields, buildings, and machinery; raising in huge quantities standard commodities as wheat, oats, barley, tobacco, sugar, tea, rubber, and rice, and sending them over the whole planet. Western Europe cannot hope to compete here, and England's prosperity depends on how swiftly we follow the lead of Denmark and France, split up our large farms and take to intensive culture. Wherever the land is suitable there must be a numerous population, producing potatoes, cabbages, carrots, fruit, flowers, honey, poultry, eggs, and butter as to-day in a large part of

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Lincolnshire, Kent, and the Channel Islands, or in certain districts of Bedfordshire and others. Those on poorer soils must adjust themselves and take to milk raising and kindred industries, as far as possible. They can specialize in the raising of pedigree cattle or seeds, for which England is already famous. We do not know the limits of soil improvement by proper working and manuring. . . .

Small holdings will thrive, becoming more like French gardens (the Channel Islands are practically nothing else), and furnish such food-stuffs as are only required in small quantities, are perishable, or best when fresh gathered, or whatever is adapted to their climate and soil. There is an enormous market at their door, and they should flourish, for there are signs that the criminal apathy with which our cities and rulers have treated agriculture is passing. The stamina of the race wanes so alarmingly that something must be done to check the rush to the city, whence it only needs sympathy and timely help to return. Perhaps some of the millions poured into Irish pockets will come our way. County councils are making a start, and who knows—agriculture may come into its own, and the pallid millions of the cities cease to absorb our yeoman stock.

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It is impossible to say how far the present movement may reach. If our farmers specialize, the countryside will approximate to that of France and Belgium, and if more capital and scientific knowledge were applied there is no reason why agriculture should not flourish increasingly. It is a question of how quickly we can adapt ourselves to changing conditions.

There is no better life than a farmer's despite croakers, no finer opening for a young man, and no more agreeable existence for his declining years. Professional and business men can train one son up in their own following, to succeed, them, but rarely more, and the others must be placed in something unknown and troublesome, where the father's experience is of little avail. The farmer, however, can in his own lifetime float all his sons in separate farms, and leave them with a good chance of success. He can place them in farms, lend them stock and implements, extend over them the wing of his credit and experience, giving them, one by one, an opportunity unrivalled in a city, in similar financial circumstances.

How many professional or business men can look on three or four sons, all married, all independent of his (the father's) death, and all perhaps under thirty years of age. Yet numberless farmers

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have achieved this, for their following lends itself peculiarly to that end, which is perhaps not the least of its advantages.

On the whole, the outlook is favourable. I think the bad times are past, and, for at least a generation, good times ahead. The shadow of Tariff Reform looms in the unknown, but apart from that there seems no reason why the glass should not read "Set fair."

Three dangers lie ahead. The aeroplane, the Channel tunnel, and the advance of chemistry. Airships may abolish latitude, and bring those delicacies of the sunny South that we only rear with difficulty. They may swoop down with cargoes of peaches, apricots, and grapes all the year round. "Oranges from Smyrna, pulled this morning," may figure in the Strand; grapes, strawberries, melons, and asparagus may be as cheap at Christmas as they are now in the summer. It is a matter of development, and the cost at which freight can be borne through the air.

The Channel tunnel looms threateningly, and if the men of Kent were true descendants of those who opposed Cæsar they would die to a man ere they allowed it. The cost, delay, and uncertainty of sea transit keeps perishable articles away which would then pour into London from France, but this can be remedied by some patriotic farmer

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or landowner with a submarine and timely bomb in mid-Channel.

The worst danger is the chemical protection of perishable articles for transit. Already New Zealand or Argentine frozen mutton and Australian chilled beef make inroads on our graziers' purses, and as these processes improve and cheapen so we must suffer. Chicago horrors or Chinese pork are but a foretaste. Some day we may eat, unknowingly, worse than these.

The most crushing tax is that of the railways. It is unnecessary to give the time-worn details, and there is hope that with the growth of small holdings and market gardens we may obviate this, for road transit has begun and will not cease. Either the railways must revise their parcel system, cease to preferentially favour the foreigner and foster home trade, or we must become independent. The Post Office might solve the difficulty. Farmers' telephones will help, and even more the marketing by farmers or their representatives of their produce, an outcome of the Co-operative movement. It is not realized by the public what a grievous toll is taken by the railways, the markets, and the middleman, or there would be a revolt. But we must alter that.

Already we are co-operating; the Farmers' Union has sprung into existence, and is marching

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forward. Most certainly "United we stand, divided we fall," there is no doubt about that. All depends on the success of our attempts at organization, and every farmer should do his utmost for the Farmers' Union; not so much for his own sake as that of his children. They will reap the harvest of our endeavours. If we struggle on in the bad old way, scattered, helpless, and selfish, the prospect would be poor. It is the faith one has in our better sense that gives ultimate hopes. Union is the standard to which we must rally, for the next decade will decide much. Before that is over there will be a revolution in our fiscal arrangements, and the fate of agriculture will be fixed for a generation. If farmers work for the common good, one can foresee a better state of affairs, and our vision of the future will be correspondingly optimistic.

With a motor service at his door, a telephone, and a balance at his Co-operative bank, Farmer Bull of the Twentieth Century would be a wide-awake proposition, an enterprising, business man, a pride to himself, and a boon to his country. As the Spaniards say, "God grant it."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FINEST LIFE

TAKING everything into consideration, the farmer's life is the finest possible. There is no other where similar results can be obtained—the same pleasure, comfort, and happiness—for the same outlay. Take for instance a class, common to rural districts, of farmers working three or four hundred acres. These men, with a capital of one or two thousand pounds would, in a town, be engaged in some business, their daily round of work, pleasures, friends, home, and surroundings, those of countless myriads, and none, I think, would particularly envy them.

Our farmer, on the other hand, lives in a roomy house, well built, with ample accommodation for stables and outbuildings, standing in its own grounds, and garden. He puts up with paraffin lamps, unless he is very up to date, but generally the sanitary arrangements are good. He is surrounded with animal life, has a horse to drive to market, another to ride about the farm or go hunting on, and in the background lurks a groom,

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who is also gardener and is fast turning into a motor cleaner and driver. Our farmer has all the country sports and pastimes at his door, hunting, fishing, shooting, coursing, and most villages have a cricket club where respectable citizens may be seen skimming across the green. The life is healthy and delightful; up with the lark and out all the day in the open air, the farmer's cheeks are tanned, his carriage erect, and he has the priceless gift of independence.

Professional men toady to their clients in their earlier days; they can't do this, they daren't do that, and their religion, politics, and customs must be those prevalent. As for the business man, whether shopkeeper or merchant, his steps are hedged incredibly, the burden of his life is never to offend a customer (actual or potential), to which he is a slave. Politicians, artists, and authors must have the favour of the populace, or starve, lacking independent means, whilst soldiers, sailors, and civil servants are discipline implicit. Only they who live by the land are free.

They care for nobody, whilst everybody cares for them. There are labourers to do their bidding without interference of Trades Unions, Government officials do not bother them, save in their own interest, merchants and travellers swarm around to buy or sell what they want, and a

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farmer on a market day is a sight of pride. With measured tread and warm hand-shake he roams the streets like a proprietor, transacts his business in a leisurely manner, and sits down to a dinner that would strike terror into the heart of the cityling. The beef he can eat and the beer he can drink deserve an epic.

There are, of course, other sides to the picture, wet harvests, diseases among the cattle, default of neighbours or merchants, unaccountable losses and a thousand misfortunes—but these are also of the town. The would-be farmer must shun low rents and poor soil like the devil, just as a merchant flees a bankrupt community. He cannot pay too much rent, and should choose fifty acres at £3 an acre rather than 1,000 acres at 5s. One means potential prosperity, the other a stern struggle with perhaps failure at the finish. I write of those who live in the more fortunate districts, such as Lincolnshire, and, more broadly, of wherever the soil is good.

Our farmer lives in that manner which is the Briton's ideal, for when the cityling has made his fortune, does he not the same? He hastens to procure a country seat, surrounds himself with horses, grooms, and gardeners, and spends money on his stables, garden, and parks, or hunting, shooting, and fishing. The farmer has all these

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as far as is comfortable, without ostentation, but it costs our cityling a fortune, and he can only obtain it after a life's labour. The farmer counts them as naught, and grumbles because he never grows rich. Rich! good gracious! when he lives like a sporting millionaire on a small scale!

I have a number of friends of this class, living in charming houses (one has a trout stream and lakelet in its terraced garden), all with hunting horses, most with motors, all having shooting galore, their own milk supply, eggs, honey, fruit, butter, bread, beer, poultry, and bacon; they have the best of health, are thoroughly occupied, and therefore (sure result) are happy. They are rarely bored, for there is something fresh on a farm every hour of the day and day of the year, and no two years or fields are alike. Yes, they are happy. If you ask them they deny it with grumbings, but that is because they lack introspection and without being aware of it are the luckiest class in England.

Of course all is not plain sailing; there are various currents and fortunes. The old-fashioned gentleman farmer, the cream of the race, is departing, for he was not business-like, and his place is taken by those who have the aptitude to change with the times—enterprising men who mean money and go in for getting it. The old-

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fashioned well-to-do farmer was the type from which "John Bull" was drawn, with top boots, flap pockets, bull dog, russet cheeks, and the most clearly defined vices and virtues. He can still be seen with his ruddy face and cheerful corporation, looking very like a bull indeed, bucolic and rubicund, the type that Dickens immortalized in old Wardle, with his jolly farm house, his retainers, and his abundance of eatables and drinkables. But he becomes yearly rarer, and is no longer typical. Just now we are passing through a crisis, and no one can point to a distinct farming type, but order will presently resolve itself, and the farmer of the future appear.

If we look to America we usually see what is going to happen, and already, there, farmers by thousands are buying motors and installing telephones. These will revolutionize rural life and no one realizes what they will accomplish. Already we see the coming of a cheap light motor for farmers, from America, and when the telephone is obtainable at a nominal rate, every one will have it. In America the farming subscribers outnumber all the others put together. The great drawback of isolation that has driven so many into the towns will be overcome, and every one will be in immediate touch, a priceless boon. There will be the accompanying develop-

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ment with the telephone, of the electrophone, by which subscribers can hear concerts, sermons, speeches, or lectures. Later when we can see by wire—and it will soon come—we shall enjoy the society of friends or see theatres, processions, and races without leaving the farm fireside, and if there is not a bioscope theatre in every village the telephone user will be laid on to one in the nearest town. These things—and more—are the promise of science for rural dwellers.

The farmer of the future will be well educated, thoroughly in touch with affairs, supplied with papers and magazines, a member of political or co-operative societies, a close follower of trials and experiments, whilst the extending use of machinery will convert him willy-nilly into an engineer.

Concurrently with this development of the countryside there will be an influx of people from the cities, who have been deterred from the health of the open by the desolation of a country winter for the womenkind, and rural districts will receive a social impetus. Even now people are buying for a mere song beautiful old farmhouses, and rendering them sanitary and habitable according to modern ideas. They are absurdly cheap, for the working farmer does not want large rooms; he lives in the kitchen as a

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rule, and when such a man buys a farm he counts the value of the house as nothing. The old gentlemen farmers have left them, and until the last decade of motors no one wanted them at any price.

I visited one recently which a retired officer bought for three hundred pounds, a stone building whose steep roof covered with red tiles, carved stone windows and ancient creeper, gave a most charming effect, borne out by the oak panelling inside. Further there was the old garden with its lawn, recently grazed by the farmer's sheep, the stable cleaned and turned into a garage, a miniature drive with its trees and all the outbuildings. No one could desire a better home. Those who have read Kipling's *Habitation Enforced*, can know how delightful such places may be, and guess how, presently, they will be sought.

Whether such a trend will spoil this charm is doubtful, but I think not; the environment is stronger than the invader and conquers him.

There are other theories about the future of Rural England. H. G. Wells puts forth the idea that the gravitation of the city would drain our villages and smaller towns, and the countryside, bare of houses, would be worked by labourers living in the cities. He pictures them coming and

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going in swift motors, but the trend of population is tangential, and even now our cities are dissolving. Every year London spreads farther into the home counties, and this exodus is the most noticeable change of the present day.

The coming of the telephone and motor, the spread of small holdings, more and better cottages for labourers, and the boom of intensive culture are drawing people back to the land, and I see no likelihood of a cessation. The future will show, but one cannot imagine the saner England of the next generation tolerating rabbit hutch tenements or city slums with the people who infest them. Man's proper sphere is the country. There is something about open air life which affects his nature so that the country dweller becomes kindlier, more genuine, and a truer friend than the cityling.

Close intimacy with farmers has impressed me with their honesty. I would trust the average countryman with my last shilling, where I would not trust the average cityling with my first copper. The last two generations of city life have brought competition to such a keen pitch that in the words of a thoughtful man "Honesty and business success are a rare combination," and again "Conscientiousness to-day is a luxury of the rich." But the farmer has no incentive to

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dishonesty, for it will not produce better crops, and if he cheats his merchant or neighbour he is a marked man, so that for him "Honesty is still the best policy." The cityling repeats this as a Sunday school maxim to his children, tongue in cheek, for all around the wicked are prospering, gamblers, cheats, adulterating merchants, unscrupulous financiers, ruthless managers, and lying employees thrive, and the robbers of the poor and needy live in detached mansions, whilst honesty means a bare subsistence—if that. This is why the atmosphere of the country is so sweet—for honest industry still comes to the top—an ideal environment.

The average farmer makes no fortune. Money is the scarcest thing in his house, except the doctor, but he doesn't miss it, for there is no need of constant spending. He lives by the primitive system of barter, consumes his own produce, kills his own dinner, and finds his chief pleasures without cost, so that if his balance sheet shows little cash profit, why should he care? He has all that money can buy, worth having, and much that it can never purchase.

CHAPTER XIV

POLITICS FOR FARMERS

IN another chapter some forms of possible State Assistance have been outlined. It is clear that agriculture in England is more neglected than in certain countries, and unless she is aided considerably is likely to fall behind in the race. In our examination of the possibilities we find that in the long run we are compelled to turn to politics. Combinations who seek complex ends affecting all grades, find this sooner or later, and we have two great examples in the Labour and Suffragist parties. The "Women" after a century of spade work found they were likely to remain impotent unless they gained political influence, and in the few years that have elapsed since they realized this they have not only come to the forefront, but have made more progress than in the preceding century.

The Labour Party is our prototype, for by dogged persistence and truly astonishing self-sacrifice it has become a power in the land. No one is weaker than the single workman, dependent on

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his weekly wage to keep off starvation, but no one is more powerful to-day than the combined workers of England. Farmers are as giants to common workers and if united for political ends ought to overshadow them altogether. No doubt they would, if actuated by a like spirit, a like sagacity, and persistence. But let us make no mistake—any combination of farmers, as the Farmers' Union, must not waste its time and money on minor objects, but must concentrate on the great aim to which all else must be subordinate. It will be a difficult achievement, for of all classes farmers are notorious for their individualism, preferring to stand or fall alone. The chief obstacle is the existing political leaning of each farmer. There is no doubt about it, they will have to put these inclinations to one side, unless one or other of the great parties is prepared to act as our champion. They cannot be said to do this now, in fact they have both cynically disregarded our needs—nor perhaps can we blame them. Cabinets yield where the pressure is greatest—where there is a resolute block of votes, and when we farmers have the block of votes, united, acting as one, in our *own* interests, then we shall obtain some of our requirements.

This, then is the position. The Farmers'

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Union must state their policies, each member must bind himself to vote as the Union directs, and use his whole influence in that manner. Unless he does this nothing avails.

The recent success of the Labour party in England, with the promise of greater achievement in the immediate future—when the balance of our two great parties is more evenly held—throws a lurid light on the political impotence of the farmer. Landowners hold their own in both Houses of Parliament, Labour is pushing forward, but the farmer is unrepresented, and bids fair to be ground with others of the middle class between the millstones.

There is no working farmer in Parliament. The nearest approach to agricultural representation is a landlord, who, however altruistic, does not touch the question. Bricklayers send a bricklayer; not a master builder; they have more sense. Miners send one of themselves, not a mineowner. But farmers send landlords.

There is no need to depreciate landlords. They, like other people are human, and some of them, especially the greatest, are feudally protectors of their tenants, so that it is good to be under them. Still, that does not make them ideal representatives for farmers. They must send one of themselves, one who knows where the shoe

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pinches; and above all a man of moderate means. The Trade Unions by a forethought and self-sacrifice unknown to farmers, subscribe their hard-won shillings to maintain their members, knowing that no rich man can speak for the poor; and this astonishing sagacity is bearing such fruit as workmen's compensation and old age pensions. Without agreeing with the Labour party, farmers should admire them and follow their example.

The thoughtful Liberal farmer tells you that he is ready to vote Tory when he thinks how little his party has done for him, whilst the Conservative farmer is equally disgusted at being neglected. Agricultural representation is now a sheer necessity. Protection looms at hand, it is almost certain that the next generation—whether for good or bad—will have Tariff Reform, and certainly those alone will gain who are organized to demand its benefits. This is one of the clearest lessons we learn from Protectionist countries. Again the Labour Party will make ever-increasing demands on the national exchequer for more pensions and a thousand schemes; whilst armaments grow by leaps and bounds. Unless, therefore, farmers are organized, not only will their just demands be ignored, but they will be called upon more and more to bear the cost, and, like

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the ass crouching beneath two burdens, will deserve their fate.

“Granted, then, the necessity for agricultural members, how shall we get to work?” asks the farmer, “for if we put up a man, the labourers will vote solidly against him, or the Radical shopkeepers in the village will oppose him, or the old-fashioned Tory farmers will not hear of him”; and they point to cases where a farmer has stood and failed. He has failed for a good reason. A farmer’s member must consider only the interests of the land. He must give pledges to neither the brewer, teetotaller, Protestant, Home Ruler, or Socialist. He must abstain from speaking or voting on any subject other than agriculture, confining his attention strictly to the interests he represents, so that all those who live by or on the land can support him. In rural districts probably 90 per cent of the people live directly by the land as farmers or labourers; or indirectly as merchants or professional men. If these had the political sagacity of bricklayers or engine-drivers the agricultural candidate would sweep the board. He may fail at first from sheer novelty, but success must follow. When once the city worker finds what an unspeakable idiot he is to vote for a rich master, instead of a fellow worker, he cannot revert; and a purely Labour seat (apart

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from those won by a split vote) is safer than any other.

The essential factor, then, is a man of neutral principles, who can appeal to all voters. There is plenty of work for such. When a law that may affect joiners is proposed, a joiner tells the House just how it touches his brethren, whilst the hundreds who know less than a plank how a joiner sees life, listen with attention. In all councils, the man who knows demands the greatest respect. Where is the farmer who can talk in Parliament from the underside, who can bring detailed knowledge to bear on the thousand-and-one matters that affect his livelihood? The landlord speaks from above—a different aspect.

In the present Cabinet John Burns has earned the respect of many political opponents. He knows what he is talking about. Before we have a working farmer as Minister of Agriculture, the farmer must awake from the sloth that renders him at present insignificant, and girding up his loins for the fray must declare himself neither Conservative nor Liberal, but Agriculturist.

Finally farmers must learn to think politically. As a party they must fight for the farmers of Britain, not for those of Canada, South Africa or Australia. Never mind being called "Insular" or "Little Englander," for these are only the

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empty epithets of unthinking people. If we can achieve our ends, if we can become a power in the State, the Government in being will deal intelligently with agriculture to our exceeding benefit, and that of the nation. The lot of the English farmer might be much happier than at present. I have outlined in another chapter what might be done by State Aid but only the fringe of the subject is touched. Every farmer must realize this, here and now. The time has come for us to throw off the old attitude of helpless complaining of fate. We must take matters into our own hands. The future lies in our exertions.

CHAPTER XV

EDUCATION

THE training of farmers is much discussed, grants are being made, books written and the matter aired, but chiefly it seems for the small men. The sons of large farmers are still, one gathers, to be trained in their own homes, and the sons of large estates in Agricultural Colleges.

I have little faith in either. The Agricultural College teaches theory, but of all failures, farming by theory is the most appalling, for farming is all detail, a thousand trifles a day, each of which may earn or lose a penny and only the practical man gets the penny. In each district farmers have their own times for working the land, sowing, reaping, and thrashing; their own ideas on manuring, crop rotation, and a myriad points. These customs seem antiquated and arbitrary, but after observation are found to be based on the experience of previous generations and mostly right; so that they who farm according to the custom of the county may not make fortunes, but they keep steadily going. The theorist who comes

Education

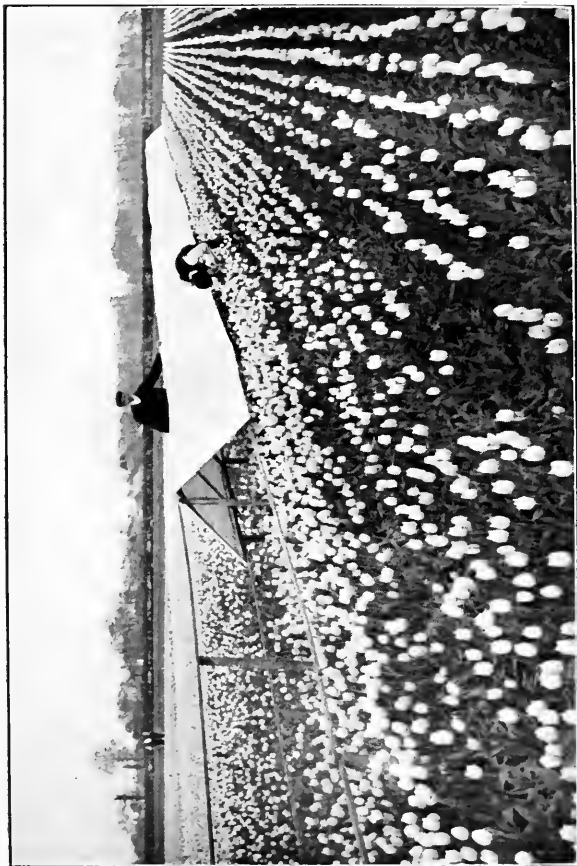
along to teach them, raises no comment but a smile—when his money is exhausted. Successful farmers are empirical, working their way from a modest start, often from small holdings, testing their brains against the hard facts of everyday life, learning where they are wrong, and consequently surefooted all the way. In Lincolnshire one could name a dozen great men who began as labourers, and many more following their footsteps. This is the best method of learning, but we are dealing with the education of the sons of these successful men, who pass, as a rule, meekly beneath the shadow of their self-made and often masterful parents. It is true that the more sensible start their sons early to fight their own battles, and gain experience, but mostly; when a great farmer dies suddenly, the son is incapable of taking the reins. Surely there are methods of avoiding this?

The large farmer should have a smattering of a hundred things. He should know something of law, accountancy and animal doctoring; he should be, in some measure, a seedsman, corn merchant, pea trader, a hay, straw, offal, manure, cake, coal, and feeding stuff expert. He must know something of these and a score of others, or, however shrewd, he will lose money at every turn. A considerable portion of the manure

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applied to land is wasted by wrong application, but how many seek expert advice? How many know what the Superphosphate Ring is? The Kainit Monopoly? The Nitrate Syndicate? Yet they affect every farmer. How many analyse their special manures to see if they are getting value for cost? Many get less than half, and yet the figures are there, and it is easy to reckon them. Who goes into the comparative worth of feeding stuffs or cakes? They take what the merchant pushes. There are a thousand details they ought to know if they are to protect themselves from unscrupulous traders; for instance, that they should buy rye-grass by weight per bushel, or that they should *weigh* their stack covers (rick sheets) as well as measure them. It is quite easy to reckon the weight per square yard. Again, how many sow handpicked peas? Just consider the question: if you let your labourers' wives and children pick your peas the waste being a valuable pig-food is worth at least the cost of the labour. You only sow the same amount of good peas as anyone else, but you get a much more even crop; so, probably, a better yield. It must always pay to pick them, and one is unable to understand why thousands of sacks of good pig food (and rotten seed) are so carefully put into the ground.

What is the remedy? The youthful farmer



Photo

ERECTING SHELTER OVER VALUABLE TULIPS TO
PROTECT FROM STORMS.

[S. Jepson, Spalding.

Education

should serve some apprenticeship to the trades mentioned; he should spend three or four years with the various agricultural businesses, not working for a salary, but paying a premium and learning all he can. It would be expensive, but profitable. He would be sure of his practical farming; he takes that in with his earliest breath, and is almost a complete farmer before he leaves the cradle. Let him then have a decent training. But the successful farmer may urge that he is satisfied; that his profits are comfortable, and why should he be bothered with training his sons when the good old ways are enough for him?

There are several reasons.

The increasing cheapness of sea freight and improved systems of cold storage will continue to tell against him. The threatened Channel tunnel would cost British agriculturists a thousand times more than it cost its builders, for France would become an acute competitor to our market gardeners, potato growers, raisers of fruit, flowers, and all those perishable goods at present handicapped by sea passage, and there are other dangers. We must not depend on present prosperity.

Let the successful farmer read Rider Haggard's *Rural Denmark* or Seebohm Rowntree's work on Belgium, and hide his head. Better educated than

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our farmers, these Continentals achieve astonishing results. Their soil is poorer, their labour as costly, their produce fetches no more than ours, rents are higher, but the profits per acre are much greater. Mr Haggard instances farms where he has been into the accounts and found them paying a net profit of £3 per acre, and this on enormous holdings—one farmer making £20,000 a year, whilst the average yield in Belgium is more than twice ours.

So long as Britain withholds the shield of Protection from her farmers, we are open any moment to danger from the whole world, and may be again—as a generation ago—ruined by the Argentine, Canada, Siberia, Brazil, Australia or China. We stand exposed to every chance, so it behoves to prepare for the worst and educate our sons to hold their own with any farmers in the world.

If we are to meet them on common ground in fair fight we must be as well armed as they, and the only armour of avail is that of education.

CHAPTER XVI

CREDIT

THE most pressing and continuous problem confronting the farmer is that of credit. The essence of his position is that he must exist on credit three-fourths of the year, and except in a few cases it is impossible that he should avoid it. Take an average farmer whose assets are greater than his liabilities. Practically all his year's expenditure is made in about two months of the spring, when his land is "sown up," and he must live through the summer until his harvest is realized before he can secure any money; he must pay his labour and rent, and unless his capital is unusually great, he cannot pay the seed, manure or cake merchant until the autumn. Banks in England will not advance much money for farming operations, and consequently the agricultural merchant allows each customer as much credit as he thinks safe, the customer paying for this accommodation indirectly through his account. Thus the merchant becomes banker, and his business is largely a matter of knowing

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how far he can trust anyone, which demands not only a close knowledge of each case, but continual watchfulness. Further, it demands a heavy capital.

The merchant finds his customers fall into three classes. The first and smallest are the most prosperous. They buy closely, pay promptly, and demand value for money to the last farthing. The second and largest are regular clients, who form the backbone of his business, being conservative, and loath to leave a firm so long as they receive what they consider fair treatment. They must have credit, but are safe, and pay regularly after harvest. It is this class that the banks should cater for. The last division are the reprobates who never ask the price of an article, and seldom pay unless compelled. There are shady customers and bad payers in every business, but I think these men carry credit-cadging to the highest point. They order lavishly, but when the day of payment arrives are nowhere to be found. Their excuses are fertile, and the credit they succeed in getting year after year is amazing, for they range from firm to firm, subsisting on borrowed capital.

Some of these old hands can farm without money at all. Given a few sheep and horses and implements, they will take a farm anywhere. They delay paying the inventory until they can

Credit

borrow on the hay crop. For any sheep or implements they buy at sales they omit to pay the auctioneer, and this long-suffering body is often foolish enough to trust them for months. Finally, all their seed corn, peas, clover seed, potatoes, manure, cake, horse-corn, etc., are purchased on credit, if they have the right carriage and enough assurance. Just before harvest they borrow from some local corn-factor, who will advance on the crop nearly ripe, and this pays the expenses of harvesting. Everything that can be booked goes down, from the harvest beer to the hire of the thrashing machine and the very coal that it uses. The harvest receipts pay the October rent, and the balance—pays the bills? Oh no! It goes to buy live stock, which they hope to make profitable. As soon as the Christmas bills fall due they betray a masterly inactivity, and become as unapproachable as the wildest Boer.

The merchant is in a difficult position: he knows that a farmer is generally stable, although a slow payer, and does not wish to offend a new customer. Besides, the spring is coming, and he will want another order, so he is chary of pressing forward and being obnoxious. Our reprobates know this, and if, despite their agility, they are cornered, play their trump card. It is an extraordinary thing that if a debtor, pressed to pay,

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ignores the request, but gives another order, the creditor is mollified, and goes away without a word, apparently not realizing that instead of getting his money he is allowing the outstander to get further into debt. This is mysterious, but I suppose that as long as the merchant gets new orders he feels that his business is flourishing, the glow of satisfaction swamps his determination to secure the debt, and he forgets the debtor in the customer. This trump card nearly always wins. There are a few merchants of course who will not be put off, and these the credit-cadgers pay, under pressure, determining to shun them in future. The remainder of their bills are evaded throughout the spring, and when in the summer the merchant finds time to see them personally they smile blandly, pointing out that they have had a bad year, but will always be regular customers. If that does not suffice they say they would be delighted to pay, but have no money, nor are likely to have till after harvest. This is so true that the merchant is reduced to silence, and beats a retreat. Then after harvest the more insistent are paid, and the same routine is followed, so that some accounts will not be paid until they are three years old.

There are farmers who stand permanently in a merchant's books for two years and some-

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times three, paying by instalments, but always in arrears. Numbers exist simply by the leniency (or foolishness) of local merchants, and it is they who ruin any widespread co-operative schemes. Even if they become wealthier, procrastination is in their blood, and they delay payment as long as possible from habit, or innate perverseness.

Another side of this question is that of the deserving beginner. Small holdings are the nursery of farming. Every one must have a beginning, and the small men, of from five to fifty acres, are nearly always short of capital. They are honest, capable, and industrious, and can as a rule be depended upon to pay their debts to the last copper so that they can get a fair credit on the strength of such an average performance.

The merchant takes this into account, and trusts them as far as his knowledge of each case prompts him, rarely losing save by negligence, for signs of coming default are visible in the lower walks of agriculture. A business man can proceed gaily with all appearance of solvency, even affluence, and suddenly let his creditors down, but nearly all the neighbours of a farmer can see from afar impending disaster. Cattle and horses get poorer, the soil is badly worked and receives less manure; hedges, fences, and gates fall into disrepair, weeds spread apace;

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and at last, he takes to drink as a climax. This is so usual that it is nearly always the more distant farmers who deceive the merchant.

Our merchant, therefore, feeling fairly safe, assists the small holders with credit, and takes his profit as a trading moneylender. But the local banks are remiss, for they lose legitimate business, and if their directors were wiser they would look at the Continent where land banks do an enormous trade, to their own benefit and that of agriculture. There are schemes afoot for the foundation of such institutions in England. The Government, it is believed, are considering the matter, but such schemes would need careful handling unless they were to be wrecked. They must be managed as the rural banks were run half-a-century ago, when local managers had a free hand, studied their clients, and knew how far to trust them. Owing to the growth of large banking concerns and their gradual absorption of the old-fashioned local ones, these latter institutions are almost extinct, and now we find huge concerns with branches everywhere, whose managers are without power, so that character no longer obtains credit. There are a few of the old standards left but they are rare.

The greatest risk that a farmer presents to a merchant or whoever may be his creditor con-

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tinously, is that he may suddenly die and leave his affairs in chaos. Neighbours are neighbourly, and trustees may do their best, but too often a man who seems flourishing, and who would flourish whilst he kept the helm, leaves a deficit simply because though sailing near the wind he was trustworthy enough in the eyes of others to obtain sufficient credit to keep himself afloat. The farmer, therefore, who seeks credit should insure his life for a sum commensurate with his financial operations, and if this policy were deposited with his land bank or credit club, or co-operative society, it would go a long way towards solidifying their position.

Interwoven with this is the matter of agricultural book-keeping. I have dealt with it in a separate chapter, and can only say here that if farmers kept their accounts, took stock and balanced their books once a year, they would find the obtaining of credit much easier, for they would at any moment be able to offer their prospective creditors figures that would bear some reasonable relation to the facts—a relation that at present is too often absent.

The surest sign of agricultural prosperity is a thriving population of small-holders like that around Boston, Spalding, Wisbech, March, Ely and other centres. Where these exist the com-

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munity is enriched, the population is recruited by a growing healthy stock, and the nation benefits by the increase of wealth and those desirable citizens, the yeoman class. But all these men want financial help, to ensure a foothold, and at present they cannot get it nearly fast enough. Abroad the advantage of such a sturdy class is recognized; in Canada they are encouraged, Australia and New Zealand angle for them, and nearly everywhere—but at home—they are aided by those who have the foresight to know that they are the real backbone of a country. It is impossible to find better citizens, go where you will, for they are honest, industrious, healthy, and prolific. And yet—whilst there are scores of millions of money to aid Irish peasantry—there is none for our own!

The farmer, however he may prosper, is all his life short of money. He begins on as much land as he dare, and is, like all beginners, short for a few years. But as soon as he becomes wealthier and has enough stock and cash to properly run his land, he takes another farm. This process is repeated on a small or large scale by all successful farmers, and it is here that he is at a disadvantage as compared with the ordinary business man. The latter, with a growing concern, also finds his capital needs outstrip his surplus profits, and

Credit

takes refuge in the pockets of shareholders, but the farmer cannot fly to others, nor would he take partners if he could, so that, driven by land hunger, he is nearly always under-capitalized, however wealthy.

This leads to one of the worst agricultural abuses—the starving of the soil. If we turn to Denmark as an example we find that an average capital per acre will be, perhaps, £20 over a large farm, whilst in England it is rarely more than a third of that sum. They have more horse and hand labour per acre, more artificial manure, and as a corollary, immensely more produce. An equally glaring contrast could doubtless be drawn between the rich soils of South Lincolnshire and such poor localities as, say, some parts of Essex; but the point is that Denmark has not a rich soil at all. Rider Haggard, on making a visit, especially notes that their soil is not as good as our best, and on an average is certainly not better than ours. But their average yield per acre is more than twice ours, a fact which should make us blush. This is a good deal due to their credit facilities and co-operative systems, and it is to be hoped that something will be done in England in the same direction. The farmer, if he is to flourish and efficiently farm the land, needs more capital than is at present employed. Capital

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he must have—or, its equivalent, credit—and we want some method by which farmers of approved character and reasonable assets can obtain the same, and intensify their culture.

If he is a public benefactor who makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before, then he who in some manner as this could secure that the soil of England yielded—as well it might—three times more produce than now, would need no statue to his memory. It would abide securely for ever.

CHAPTER XVII

MONEY WASTED

WHY don't farmers get rich faster? Foodstuffs are enormously dearer than they were ten or fifteen years ago, and agriculture should be booming. But is it so? True, there are enterprising farmers making their fortunes, taking more land and buying land, starting like the proverbial Yankee, without a copper, and ending in a halo of cash. I could name a score in my own district who are doing this, and a hundred who are doing well, but alas, a great many more who plod along all their lives without advancing an inch. They get started in a farm, and if luck goes with them there they remain, or if not they dwindle away, like Pharoah's lean kine. It says much for farming that they do not go bankrupt more often, but they generally hang on until they die, when there is nothing left for their family, and little for creditors. But it should not be so, and what is more, it might not. Why is it? There are plenty to advise. Books are written by the shelf, breezy London journalists dash off

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admonitions to the "pigheaded" farmer to "wake up"; but that does not help him. He wants practical advice.

A large part of the money spent on manures is misapplied, and a good proportion is utterly wasted, and might as well be thrown in the street. Either it is placed where not wanted, or put instead of something more urgently required, or too much is applied at one time; in short, expert advice is badly needed. But there is no one to advise. Too often the manure manufacturer pushes what is most profitable, the text books are recondite, and personal experiment is difficult. But the last is our only hope, for land varies incredibly, sometimes there are three or four kinds of soil in one field, and the position, texture, and subsoil must be taken into account. Further, these trials must last several years, never less than three, whilst the usual period is one and no more. But you can tell no more what manure suits a crop or a field by one year's trial than you can tell what medicine suits an animal after one dose. If then, farmers would experiment with various manures, they would be gainers, and either obtain the same crops with less money, or greater crops with the same outlay.

Perhaps the most glaring instance of bad

Money Wasted

manuring that has come under the writer's notice is that of root crops, and especially potatoes. No crop is so profitable when well managed, and none more urgently needs its proper food-stuffs—nitrogen, ammonia, and potash—but nine farmers out of ten give them nothing but superphosphate, which contains none of the above ingredients. In a favourable year superphosphate may produce a good crop, but in a bad year it cannot. This is not the worst, however. Potatoes, properly manured, leave the land rich and ready for large crops of corn, but if they only get superphosphate the land is impoverished, and the farmer loses. I give potatoes as an instance, as the difference in profit between proper and improper manuring is so great; but any crop will point the moral. What is more satisfactory than improving poor grass land by suitable applications of slag or kainit, and turning a thin meadow into a rich one almost as by magic? I believe that the growing use of low grade superphosphate is a bad sign for farming, they have only a poor manurial value, but they are cheap and have a fatal attraction. I say fatal, because after a course of years of nothing but low grade superphosphate, land must deteriorate, and lose its heart and "steam." I have noticed it on many occasions. The bulk of the money

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paid for superphosphate goes in carriage, the freight of the raw material from abroad and the heavy rail rate from the works to the farm. Supersede common low grade superphosphate by higher grades, not less than 30 per cent, experiment with nitrogen, ammonia, and potash in various combinations on your crops, and keep a careful account of what pays best. Probably the most astonishing results can be obtained on potatoes.

Another point is the mechanical application of manures. Now that distributors are cheap no farmer should be without. Consider which pays best: to apply the manure evenly in small quantities, so that the soil and crop are regularly fed, or to sow by hand, getting a lump here, a handful there, and none at all elsewhere. The difference is greater than most would imagine, and should be noted by the up-to-date farmer.

England is behind in the use of manure, Germany uses more, and Rider Haggard reports that Denmark is far ahead of us. The Danes allow perhaps twice the capital that we do per acre for land no better than ours, they use more labour and much more manure; whilst the Channel Islanders in some places use £10 worth of guano to every acre. Compare this with the usual 3 cwt. low grade supers that the English farmer

Money Wasted

allows per acre for his land, and the Income Tax rate of reckoning one-third of the rent as the farmer's income, and put two and two together.

Of course, as much care is necessary in the purchase of compound manures as anything else. Fortunately, the Government has taken care of the farmer, so that he has the exact analyses on every invoice, also he can obtain a table showing comparative unit values and ascertain what any compound is worth. But he will not do this, and too often, after being guided into the harbour of high grade manuring, strikes on the rock of preposterous values, and is no better off than before. Some compounds offered to farmers are not worth one-third of their cost. In one of the County Analyst's reports a guano sold to farmers at £4 per ton, turns out worth about 25s, in actual manurial value! And this article must have been sold by thousands of tons!

Why do they buy them? It is a complete mystery. They are sharp enough in other ways. They will bargain for an hour over a shilling; they have eyes to see with, but do not see! Education may help them here, or agitation. At any rate, each can choose the best values, experiment on his own soil and reap the reward of his labour at the harvest day.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PROMISE OF SCIENCE

PROBABLY the greatest factor in agriculture is the weather. We are beginning to realize that drought in India, storms in the Argentine, frosts in Canada, or floods in Russia, mean disaster to the European, and a dry summer like 1911 for England spells scarcity for our town dwellers. Our food depends on good weather, and a series of bad seasons over the planet means the worst of trouble. But still, the spectre of famine stalks no more through the land; cheap transit has laid the ghost, and the failure of our own crops is less important than that of foreign ones. Yet if there were two bad years everywhere—what then?

It is not impossible—nor even improbable. Some extra-terrestrial influence might arise, some sun-spot conflagration—an unusually hot summer might loosen a century's accretion of ice-cap in the Polar regions—a thousand things might happen—and forthwith the English would be eating rats, the Americans horses, the Australians kangaroos, and the Chinese—each other.

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The sixteen hundred millions of this planet exist on artificial supplies, they no longer support themselves, as of old, and like certain South Sea Islanders, if the supply fails they must perchance live on their weaker neighbours. Our food reserve is almost nil, and one pictures the earth like a raft of starving survivors adrift on the ocean without hope, swinging through empty space, leaving its trail of dead behind.

The study of the weather then is of paramount importance, and the promise of science—to which we turn—is a more certain knowledge of the conditions that govern our seasons, with some help to ward off misfortune from afar. At least the warning of a catastrophe is much. There are countries that depend entirely on certain seasons, upon a minimum rainfall or so much sunshine—or, no harvest. We have begun to tackle the question in some countries, notably Egypt, that amazing belt of land which is nothing but the two banks of the Nile winding through a hopeless desert—we have dammed her waters, husbanded her reserves, regulated her flow, explored her sources, and so estimated requirements that she will soon be as certain of good seasons as anything can be in this world. This achievement is not only great in itself, but a promise of things to come. We have done wonders on the earth in

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a few thousand years, the last two or three centuries have seen gigantic changes, and we can face the future with confidence.

Our problem falls into two parts. First, what may be foreseen, and then what may be done when forewarned.

Weather forecasting is in its infancy; and we have hardly touched the question at all. First, to-morrow's weather or that of next month may, and will, be accurately known beforehand. There can be no doubt of this, it is only a question of time. The weather does not, as we once thought, suddenly appear from nowhere; the wind does not come and go as once it did beyond our knowledge, for we have tracked it down and traced its whither and its whence. If we lose it for a time, if our calculations and prophecies at present are faulty, it is only because of the gaps in our observing stations and the fewness of the workers.

If you look at the weather chart in the morning paper you will see a map covered with curving lines and figures. These are isobars, giving the mean temperature at various places. Where it is warmer the air rises and cooler air rushes in from surrounding parts to fill the gap, causing strong winds and storms, and bringing about atmospheric changes according to how much

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moisture the current bears with it. Further, there are the general air drifts, the Tropical and Polar currents with which we can always reckon and, from the knowledge obtained, deductions are made for the coming weather. At present so little is observed and the gaps through which fresh currents or disturbances come are so prevalent that we cannot safely reckon on more than twenty-four hours; but were these hiatuses filled we could greatly extend our prophecies. What we need is an observing eye everywhere. We shall have it presently—in a century or so—when the millions spent in war are diverted for man's benefit to research work—we shall have stations in every place—lightships will occupy important sea centres, watching the Gulf Stream and the Polar Drifts, observatories will perch upon mountain tops or plateaux to notice the gathering of clouds or the least increase in rainfall, and at all inaccessible points the airship will hover day and night to keep unsleeping guard.

The higher strata, where it is now believed our weather is brewed and regulated—that region where man cannot penetrate—the stretch of atmosphere between five and forty miles upward—will be explored by kites or captive balloons which will remain (there is always a current up above, and the higher you get the stronger the wind),

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bearing recording instruments and sending down their wires data of temperature, wind pressure, moisture, and those electrical changes that herald storms and general disturbances. When we know the probable ice crop of the Greenland plateaux the amount of moisture gathering in the uplands of Thibet and the Himalayas, and such things at present impossible, we shall be able to construct real weather charts, and when every weather centre on the planet has its observer there is no reason why accurate presentments should not be made weeks and months ahead.

Even whole seasons may be known. After all, why not? On the large scale we are influenced by known conditions, largely electrical, governed or heralded principally by sun spots, and when we can read them aright we shall have the key to a wider knowledge. Reports are taken, I believe, on all British vessels at mid-day, wherever they are, a record is kept and forwarded when possible to the head office of the direction and force of the wind, state of clouds, temperature of air and water, direction and rate of ocean currents and so on, all of which are valuable, but when every ship afloat has wireless, as they soon must, and transmits at a given time its record to headquarters, we shall be nearing our desired haven.

Wireless of course was the great step, the

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greatest that meteorology has had, for by its aid direct and immediate records are possible from air and sea ships, from mountain tops and from the uttermost parts of the earth. But when all this is done, when we know the weather a week or a month ahead as certainly as we know to-morrow's (say 90 per cent, correct), when we can guess at the next season, and begin to gauge the coming harvest. What then? We can guard against famine, husband our resources, grow more wheat or beef, less cotton and tobacco, and take general precautions against want, we could guard against unusual seasons, sharp winters, wet summers, or droughts, and generally so order our ways that we should no more be taken unawares. In those parts where floods descend there will be a time of preparation, digging of channels, cleaning of watercourses and strengthening of embankments, so that the danger may be averted. Where drought is feared water will be husbanded, the Nile will be stored behind its barrages, and the farmers of California or Australia will see to their irrigation and their wells.

Coming to more familiar details, haymaking will be but a pastime, and with the next month or more accurately mapped out, every agricultural operation will be simplified. It will put an end

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to the worst worry that haunts the farmer. In his ploughing, sowing, or reaping, he will be thus guided, everything will be done at the right time and will be well done, for work conducted at a wrong time is better left undone altogether. Further, we shall guard against sudden storms or frosts. In the fruit and flower districts, in all those parts where a belated spring frost may spell ruin and the destruction of a whole year's work in one night, the warnings will be gratefully received. Elaborate precautions will be taken, straw or matting will come into play, gigantic fires lighted in orchards, hot water conveyed here or there and possibly electricity will warm the soil and repel the dreaded frost. Everywhere, forewarned, tender buds and shoots would be protected somehow.

How far we may be able to pervert the weather and train the course of nature to our desires is beyond our knowledge. The phenomena of the universe march on so vast a scale that our interference is perhaps laughable. Still we have done much, and that must be the measure of our future. We have chained the sea, drained, and driven back our rivers and waters everywhere, and who shall say what we may not achieve with the atmosphere? The bridling of the Nile, the irrigation of deserts, the drainage of swamps

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and fens point the way. Already in the vineyards of Italy there are batteries of hailstorm guns, funnels that fire a vortex ring of air and break up a threatening hailstorm, so that it dissipates into rain or disperses entirely. This sounds like a fairy tale, but is after all no more wonderful than the shattering of waterspouts by cannon-balls.

At present, efforts at rain making are unavailing. There is—or was—a reward offered by one of the Australian States for anyone who could bring down rain and the boon would be incalculable. There is an idea that gun-fire brings down rain. It is said there have been storms of rain after battles but this is not authenticated, and we have no knowledge of universal rainfall near testing grounds where guns are fired heavily for long periods. If anything should be done it would be by imitating Nature, producing an uprush of cold air, or some such means, but the thing is doubtful. Elaborate experiments have been tried for fog clearing. Some time ago, near London, an attempt was made, with the aid of the L.C.C., but failed totally. Still, something may be done in the fog and cloud clearing; the latter would be most useful to farmers, allowing the sun to see their crops by an adaptation of the hailstorm gun possibly, or some use of electricity. This latter agent may be

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used to warm the soil and overcome frost and inclement or untimely seasons, and if so, it would revolutionize agriculture. Electricity will be plentiful soon, and cheap enough, either atmospheric, when the only expense will be the first outlay, or by the use of water or wind on a large scale.

A French scientist is carrying out most suggestive studies. He found that the air immediately above the soil is charged with electricity at different tension to that in the earth, and by inserting iron rods at intervals reaching below the crop roots and above the plant tops, tapping both strata, he obtained a weak but effective current with distinct manurial value. What he has begun others may carry on. Instead of allowing electricity to accumulate in the air until it discharges as lightning to the earth, in waste, we may tap all the strata for our own use and compel one of Nature's violent forces into harness. It is of course known that electricity is a valuable agent, and its uses on the land are but beginning. If we can regulate the temperature of the soil at will we shall be indeed advancing! Whether or no we succeed in producing rain, we can accomplish much by irrigation, by conserving existing supplies or by exploring the lower strata.

There are of course the larger dreams. Many minds have played around the utilization on a

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great scale of the earth's electricity, and thus directing the weather. We may discuss such projects, as the opening of those immense tracts in Northern Siberia and Canada, that at present stand starved and sterile. Breeds of wheat may be evolved that will bear the coldest weather, or indigenous crops may be adapted to our requirements. Certain it is that the cultivation of the land and the presence of man can modify a climate and thus whole territories now frozen may smile and be gracious.

The tropical deserts of Africa, Asia, and Australia—millions of square miles—await our attention. They need but moisture to bloom incredibly, as Egypt testifies, or any oasis assures. The interior of Australia or the Sahara may yet be inhabited, by the tapping of underground water *much deeper* than at present essayed, or by the irrigation of sea water, distilled by the sun on a gigantic scale. These are a few of the promises that science makes. The future belongs to the experimenter, the man of brain and foresight; the tiller of the soil will no more be an easy-going conservative fellow, but an alert and thoughtful citizen. Science is organized thought, and if we accept all that it would give we should work not wonders but miracles.

CHAPTER XIX

STATE AID

THERE are methods of State aid so directly beneficial to the country that they deserve serious attention. Such, for instance, as the development of railways, which can only be tardily advanced by private enterprise, yet confers a boon on every one. Seebohm Rowntree, in his *Land and Labour*, gives remarkable figures on the development of Belgium by light agricultural railways, fostered by the Government. Belgium has more ordinary railways, in proportion, than any country, and in light railways her preponderance is startling. She has, for every hundred square miles, $22\frac{1}{2}$ miles of line, against one-third of a mile in Great Britain, and it may safely be said that she owes her agricultural development to their aid.

If the Belgians require a light line, they communicate with a National Railway Society; agreeing to pay for an inquiry. This society ascertains the density of the population, the probable amount of traffic, and sends an engineer

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to survey the ground. Their report is submitted to the Government, and if it approves, the matter is put in hand. Up to the end of 1908, applications for 3,859 miles of line were made, and only 240 miles refused, so that practically, in that fortunate country, any district can obtain a line if it so desires.

The State takes one-half of the shares, the local Commune takes about one-third or a quarter, leaving the remainder to be subscribed privately. As the system is advancing by leaps and bounds, the provision of so much capital would embarrass the authorities, so that they pay for their shares by annual instalments over ninety years—a sum covering both principal and interest. They guarantee a dividend of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, so that the National Society has no difficulty in borrowing what may be requisite. Each railway thus obtains its capital as cheaply as the Government can borrow, whilst the latter is not burdened with debt nor the responsibility that would come from complete nationalization. All that the State or Provincial Councils have to do is to pay or receive the difference between the $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent and the profits of the line, yearly, and at the end of ninety years the railway is practically the property of the country. The National Society never works the railways, but rents them to

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private companies for a percentage of receipts, and thus conducts its operations with a minimum of trouble and outlay; the result being entirely satisfactory.

In England railways are looked on as an investment, and as, when built to develop the country, they cannot hope to more than pay their way, it is almost impossible to find capital for them. Further, there is in the case of light railway projects, an unreasoning opposition on the part of existing lines, which fight tooth and nail against them, and put every obstacle in their way. Belgian experience shows that so far from competing with the main lines, these light railways act as feeders, and largely increase the general traffic. In Belgium they are satisfied without profit on light railways, recognizing their value in developing the country, and there is no doubt, says Rowntree, that their intrinsic value to the community is inestimable. In accordance with this policy of encouraging agriculture, they carry the produce at very low rates, trying rather to increase the traffic than to tax what already exists "as high as it can bear." They convey 44 lb. of vegetables 94 miles for 7d., against the English rate of 2s. 1d. For lots of one to five tons their charge is two or three times less than ours, and they convey a can of milk of 22 lb. 93½

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miles for 2d.! Their rates are generally in accordance with the examples given, and are startling to the British agriculturist, who is accustomed to fierce opposition to his railway needs, and, if anything, a discrimination in favour of the foreigner.

In the last generation, in England, there have been innumerable cases where light railways have been planned. They would be desirable to develop the localities concerned, and would benefit these enormously, but the existing railways and landowners have opposed them, and then the capital has not been forthcoming, and they fall to the ground. The Government will grant a million or so for a railway in Uganda, but for British agricultural lines—not a copper—not even a Belgian guarantee. There is no doubt that the adoption of such a system would benefit us all, but Englishmen are too conservative. They fear State aid, and shrink from the cry of "Socialism." The Belgians, French, Germans, and Danes, do not fear it, the Prussians have long owned their railways, the Japanese have recently bought theirs, whilst the American Government spends millions a year to help the farmer. An account of the latter would need a volume, and there can be no doubt but that agriculturally we are put to shame. Our only

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consolation is that we can turn to them for a guide, and we revert to the example of Belgium because Rowntree's invaluable work contains so much data. Agriculture is indebted to him.

“The Belgian canal system,” he says, “is the most complete and efficient in the world. There is a whole network connecting the industrial and agricultural centres with the ports. Nearly all of these belong to the State. Large sums have been spent on their construction and improvement, and the receipts by means of low tolls do little more than pay the cost of upkeep.” Their Government regards waterways as we do our roads, and do not look for a profit. “It is evident,” says the British Consul-General, before our Canal Commission, “that to her waterways Belgium greatly owes her present prosperity, and they are of vital importance to her trade.” Britain's canals lie neglected. No one attempts to develop them. The shadow of the Railway King lies across our Parliament, and effectually crushes any attempts. We are not so fortunate as Belgium.

A recent report by the Departmental Committee on British Forestry says that “the world is rapidly approaching a shortage, if not an actual dearth of that timber which constitutes over three-quarters of our imports. The great area of waste land in these islands which might be

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afforested becomes a matter of national concern.”

Belgium has lately pursued a vigorous policy of afforestation of waste lands, with excellent results. Besides planting the Crown Estates, the Government encourage the Communes to plant their own waste areas (there is a good amount of common land owned by the various villages), paying half the cost of the trees, managing them free of charge and exacting no taxation for the first ten years. The advantages need no enumeration. Land at present absolutely waste, of which we have $7\frac{1}{2}$ million acres, is rendered profitable, returning, in Belgium, up to 6 per cent on the outlay. More than that, it provides work in the winter for large numbers of men.

If our waste areas were thus treated they would pay an annual profit of £2,000,000 a year, find work continually for 12,000 men, and, in the winter, employment for over 100,000. The provision of work at a period when unemployment is rife would be an invaluable contribution to a serious national problem, and further, the presence of a body of men who were busy in the winter but free in the summer months would materially benefit farmers. This is a matter for State aid—surely?

The question of credit is of vital importance

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to farmers. The difficulties that beset them in England have been largely solved on the Continent by the establishment of agricultural loan banks.

Our Government are taking the matter up, and there is a likelihood of some such system being introduced here. It will be a most desirable innovation.

Raffeisen was a German philanthropist, who, to help the peasants in his own village, started a bank on a new principle. There were no paid officials and no capital in the ordinary sense. A group of small holders in a village or immediately around join together to secure loans for their members from some outside source, each member accepting unlimited liability for repayment. Thus no one of doubtful character is admitted, as the capital of the syndicate is the character of its members.

They meet in committee to decide who shall join and who shall have a loan and how much it shall be. This is the strongest point, because a small farmer cannot possibly deceive his neighbours. They know all about him—every detail—and make very few bad debts. The idea started in 1849, and spread from Germany to Austria, Italy, France, and Belgium. The unlimited liability of each member which at first sight seems a disadvantage is the essence of the system's

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success, inspiring confidence among capitalists, so that money may be borrowed on most favourable terms. Besides granting loans they receive deposits, and the latter soon outstrip the former. In Belgium at the beginning, they borrowed their money from the Government Savings Bank, but soon the process was reversed, and now the well established ones lend the Bank their surplus.

The general confidence in these Raffeisen banks is not misplaced, for although they have no capital and but little reserve yet there has never (up to 1908) been a case in Belgium of failure, nor, so far as can be ascertained, anywhere else. In 1907 there were 523 such banks in Belgium, with 25,000 members, lending about £160,000 a year and receiving about twice as much on deposit. Each of them limits itself strictly to a simple village or community, and each member takes care that no wastrel is admitted; because every one would have to pay for his default. The Government encourages them, and to cover preliminary expenses buys books, etc., and makes a grant of about £5 to each bank at its start. In 1907 these 523 banks granted 3,626 loans, of which more than half were for less than £10.

We will take an instance to show how the money is used. The village of Rillaer in Brabant has a population of 2,500 souls and a credit bank. From

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December 4, 1898, to June 16, 1901, the bank granted 191 loans to its members amounting to £2,627; 110 of the loans were to buy cows, 34 to buy or repair houses, 7 for trading capital, 3 for marrying on, 8 for the purchase of land, 2 for buying horses, 13 to repay other debts, and 14 for miscellaneous objects. The rate of interest is only 4 per cent, whilst 3 per cent is allowed on deposits. Any profit, less working expenses, which are slight, goes to build a reserve fund. Wherever these banks exist they raise the moral tone of a neighbourhood, for no drunken or imprudent person is admitted, nor anyone who fails to command the confidence of the society. Many a man has pulled himself together in order to be able to join, and frequently the parish priest admits that the local bank has done more than all his teaching to improve a village.

To meet the requirements of large farmers, the Government in 1884 founded a number of agricultural banks. Each of these institutions consists of a small number of persons who negotiate loans to farmers. They provide no capital themselves, borrowing all they require from the National Savings Bank, giving their united personal guarantees and receiving as their profit one fifth of the interest charged to the borrower. This system shows how the Belgian Government

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obtains the services and supervision of local people. In 1907 there were eleven of these large institutions running, whose 2,755 loans came to £425,925, divided into sums ranging from £50 to several thousands. Now this is very interesting and points out a great need in England. Farmers as a rule are honest, substantial, and trustworthy. Although banks cannot give much credit to any one of them, they can safely lend on the security of a number bound together, especially when they know the members of that union are satisfied as to each other's integrity and stability. The Farmers' Union should press for the establishment of Raffeisen banks for small men and agricultural banks for the large men on the above system. It would solve a vital and ever-pressing problem.

In our usual blundering way we are tackling the division of land at the wrong end. Having realized that it is an absolute necessity we are going the most expensive and slowest way to work by purchasing farms as they fall into the market. If we reformed our idiotic registration laws, and abolished useless fees so that land could be bought and sold freely, we would do a useful stroke. The expense of purchasing small plots is almost prohibitive at present, as many know to their cost. The abuse cries aloud for reform.

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Finally, we must make some unpleasant remarks. How is it that we are so far behind in this matter of intelligent aid by the State for agriculture? We consider England and its Government to be more enlightened and progressive than its neighbours on the Continent, but wherever we turn (agriculturally) we find ourselves very backward indeed. The Government is only the people, and we farmers should have a powerful voice amongst the industries. How is it that we have been politically so impotent? Each farmer must ask himself. It is a vital question—if we shirk it we confess ourselves failures, and if we answer wrongly we are undone. We must answer it one way or another in the immediate future.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAND REMAINS

THERE is a sentiment about the ownership of land that nothing else confers. Shares cannot give it, business has it not, the ownership of a coal-mine or miles of railway never arouses this enthusiasm. Even cash—hard cash—is not the same, it is only a token of exchange; but land is always satisfactory. Things grow on it—you can visit it every day, and there is always something different. The desire for land is a craving universal to mankind. When the *Daily Mail* offered a model small holding to a *bona-fide* town dweller, there were, I believe, thousands of applicants. Probably 75 per cent of town workers would jump at a chance to go back to the land, and the present small holding boom is a straw in the wind.

Perhaps it is in France that the feeling is the strongest. After the Revolution, great estates were split up and never allowed to grow again, also the system of primogeniture ceased to hold there, and so the peasant proprietor has increased

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enormously. It is a revelation to visit their holdings; the industry, the earnest perseverance is amazing; they are determined to make the utmost of every inch of ground, and their soil is rather gardened than farmed. They are happy when they possess land, even the smallest plot will do, but it must be their own, and France is divided to the last degree, whilst its peasantry are the most thriving in the world. Probably the happiest people in existence are the negro small holders of the Southern States of America—but they deserve a book to themselves, living the “natural life” with a vengeance!

Our Colonies, notably New Zealand and Australia, have advanced ideas on the land problem. Their efforts are bent on preventing at all costs accumulation of land into large quantities, and they limit, by law, the amount that one man may own. Their cry is for closer settlement, and as they are much in need of farmers no doubt they are sensible. In England on the other hand the ownership and management of great estates has been brought to a fine art. Our large landowners are mainly noblemen, and have been trained to their duties. They feel that they owe something to their estates, and as a rule nobly abide by them. From time to time such men as the Duke of Bedford publish accounts

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and show the poor return obtained from their estates due to the low rents charged. As soon as his estate at Thorney was sold, the average rent (or its equivalent estimated on the purchase money) was probably doubled. Such men as the late Lord Winchilea spend their time working for agriculturists. There is no doubt that living on one of these estates is the finest lot that can befall a farmer. He pays less rent than those in the outside market, his buildings are excellent and in the best repair, his house is comfortable and sanitary, his rent is sometimes returned in a disastrous year, he is sure of practical sympathy in misfortune, and most important his tenure is secure. There is, therefore, tremendous competition for such farms, and the method of choosing tenants is perhaps the worst thing about them. Agents lean too much to the relations of old tenants instead of choosing the best men obtainable. As they could have the pick of the farmers around to choose from, this is unfortunate, and prevents good men from going forward. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to estimate the difference to a landlord between good and bad tenants. One is lost in amazement at the carelessness that some stewards betray in this matter, but after all it is the landowner's affair. Be this as it may, once the farmer is settled on such an

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estate his neighbours say "His fortune's made," and for this reason the continuance of the Feudal System is tolerated (and appreciated) in the Twentieth Century.

There are drawbacks, for the landowner. He gets a poor return on his capital, and sometimes has to part with his ancestral estates. But this is almost entirely his own fault in management—in the choice of a steward or neglecting to oversee him when appointed. Even in the best estates, the income is not perhaps more than 2 per cent or 3 per cent on the capital value, but the landowner gets a return in kind as well as money. He lives in a semi-feudal manner surrounded by his tenantry—and there are no better tenantry to live amongst than the English—his position is assured, his social station is supreme, and the countryside in all senses of the word belongs to him. Kings have not so happy a lot as this man, if he has a decent disposition and treats his dependants and tenantry fairly. We get the reverse of the picture in Ireland where the landlords are absentees, spending their rents in England or anywhere but at home. Their sympathy, their politics and religion are as the Poles apart. The result all may see—shooting of agents, cattle driving, no-rent campaigns, destitution, and rancorous strife. All things considered, the English

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landlord cannot expect a great income in cash. He gets value in other ways.

All riches come from the soil. It is the real wealth producer, the first and last resort and the mother of us all. Adam was made out of earth, we spring directly from it, our bodies are compounded of its ingredients, and at last we return to it again. The tilling of the soil is the oldest and greatest industry. At present it is abused and neglected, but one day it will come to its own as the most natural and honourable pursuit. Mines may be filled in, houses fall, businesses decay, factories vanish, companies liquidate, money take wings, but the soil is always there and always the same. Whatever may pass, the land remains.

There is an aspect of the question that has not been sufficiently considered, affecting both owners and occupiers—the matter of permanent financial security. Thoughtful people take a gloomy view of the future. There are many dangers ahead. In the last generation commerce has grown so fast that credit has swollen incredibly. Where once a sovereign was mortgaged a few times, to-day we have not enough gold to begin to cover our liabilities. The extension of cheques and bills has fostered this, and to-day we have a gigantic, unstable edifice, which will not, one

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fears, withstand a sudden shock. There have been panics lately—one recently in America—also we have seen bank-runs on a small scale in England which have echoed round the world. Stringency in America or Japan means shortage in England, and at a shock in Berlin or Calcutta businesses quaver throughout the earth.

It is dimly realized—only dimly—that a war between England and Germany would in a week ruin more than half the trading community in both countries, and if it lasted long probably the other half. This is no wild cat scare, but the sober conclusion of thinkers in the financial sphere. Credit will vanish at the declaration of war; people will fly to the banks for their money, and banks—in the (probably few) cases where they remained solvent would be compelled instantly to ask every customer to pay off his overdraft. Gold would vanish into cupboards and stockings, companies would crash down or at least their shares would be worthless for the time being. Creditors everywhere would demand payment—and where reader would you be? Unless you are a landowner or farmer (or army contractor) your plight will be best pictured by yourself. Think it over, and perhaps you will vote against war next time or at any rate will not be so pleased at “scare” news in the papers.

The Land Remains

But amid wars or rumours of wars, the land remains. The first effect of a scare will be to send foodstuffs leaping upwards. There is only thirteen weeks' supply in this country at the best of times and often less, so that in spite of our preponderance of warships (so rapidly vanishing) the spectre of want will have a deadly effect upon prices. Shipping will be almost at a stand-still or come here at "war prices," but food the people must have—and the farmer has it.

As long as he can defend his property with a rifle—one wonders what sort of a regiment his labourers would make—from the starving hordes that will roam the country, within a fortnight his fortune is assured. He has sheep, bullocks, pigs, poultry—and horses. He is never without hay and straw and a good supply of horse corn, and rarely is his yard without a stack, so that the time of famine will be his harvest. So, also, indirectly the landowner will stand secure. Amid the chaos of panic, ruin, and crumbling fortunes he will remain steadfast, and were I a wealthy man I should invest my money for security, apart from other considerations, in land. Whatever else may fail, the land remains.

To live in the country is to breathe properly; to lead the ideal life. For thousands, perhaps millions of years, man's natural environment was

Fortunes for Farmers

the open air, and the modern process of shutting him up in brick prisons where he hardly sees the sun or feels the wind is ruining his constitution. It is fitting that he should live amongst little things, growing things, lambs, calves, and foals, and his walks should be across grass and newly ploughed furrows, breathing always the unpolluted air. His ancestors lived in this manner for countless centuries, and he cannot remove without ultimate trouble.

They who live on or by the land are largely sheltered, and fear nothing. The seasons pass, the years roll on, but they persist in quietness, for whatever else may vanish, the land remains.

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