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Social Reconstruction Pamphlets

No. I.



THE
RURAL PROBLEM

By

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Price 6d.

Published by

THE ATHENÆUM,

Bream's Buildings,

London,

E.C.4.

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PREFACE.

THERE is no aspect of Reconstruction which is more important in its bearing on national well-being than that of rural life. The problem is not solely, or even mainly, economic in its character; rather is it that the economic question has arisen as a result of a defective and incomplete social ideal, with its correspondingly defective and incomplete social organization. It is because of this that this pamphlet is entitled 'The Rural Problem' and not 'The Agricultural Problem.' The former includes the latter, and much more besides. The great need is for a social motive in our rural policy, rather than a purely economic motive.

The problem is not primarily one of raising cheap agricultural produce, or of tariffs, or of settling discharged soldiers on the land, or of providing small holdings for townsmen with a craving for country life, or of making this country self-supporting; the real problem is how to give the rural population new hope and inspiration, how to develop in those who live upon the land a broader outlook, greater adaptability and initiative, how to establish new political, social, and economic traditions in the village and the farmers' club—in a word, the problem of rural life is essentially the same as the problem of urban life—how to utilize to the fullest advantage human capacity and human powers. If the farmers as a whole were more responsive to new developments and opportunities, if the labouring population were better paid, lived in better houses, had fuller opportunities for education and social intercourse, the economic problem would rapidly be solved.

The rural problem is both complicated and difficult, and though it must, in the main, be settled by the rural population, the industrial population must lend its aid. This pamphlet is intended chiefly for those who dwell in towns. It is the duty of every citizen to grasp the essential features of the rural problem and to understand both the difficulties and possibilities of rural life. The factory worker must be made to realize his obligations to his fellow worker on the land. As Mr. Ashby points out, the country districts need the Trade Union, the Adult School, the Workers' Educational Association. Those industrial workers who study this pamphlet will, one hopes, be led to see that along these lines lies, from the workers' point of view, the hope of rural reconstruction.

ARTHUR GREENWOOD.

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The Rural Problem.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are two aspects to what is broadly described as the rural problem ; one a problem of the organisation of the production and distribution of agricultural produce ; the other a problem of the just distribution of the profits arising from production, and a wise use of the wealth enjoyed as a result of occupation and of the leisure from economic obligations. In other words, there are both industrial and social problems in village life awaiting solutions, some of which are overdue. The failure to distinguish these two aspects has led to much misunderstanding and to greater rancour than was necessary in the discussion of methods of improving village life. Agriculturists, or national economists of a certain type, often lay much stress on the need for increasing production, either for the purpose of obtaining greater profit, or for the provision of greater national security by securing heavier supplies of home-grown food. The social economist, or reformer, is often preoccupied by such questions as rates of wages, housing conditions, and the depopulation of the countryside, without any clear understanding of the economic foundations from which these conditions spring.

Previous to the outbreak of war, interest in rural problems had centred in those questions which were predominantly social, but during the last two years these have taken second place, and questions concerning the organisation of production, to which little attention had previously been paid, have become prominent. In the future it should be possible to obtain a more balanced and comprehensive consideration of the whole of the conditions of the villages, industrial and social, and to arrive at some common agreement as to the general lines of policy that should be followed in an attempt to improve them. The solution of the problem of industrial organisation may have to be left mainly to agriculturists and their economic advisers ; but in the event of their failure to recognise the necessity for changes, the State must take steps to secure the best use of the economic resources now under control of farmers and landowners. Without changes in the industrial basis of village life, there cannot be much hope of permanent and progressive improvement in social and intellectual conditions.

The fear for the future is not essentially that policies as such may be antagonistic, but that there will be an acute clash of conflicting ideals. Some agriculturists and national economists still regard production as an end in itself, and this view necessarily involves the idea of the employees in agriculture (the most numerous class primarily interested in its organisation) as "hands," rather than as persons. In the past they have been regarded as servants, or as wards; in the future they may be regarded as "hands." The work of the various fraternal organisations of the towns in the regeneration of country life must be assistance of the villager to assert that he is a person with opinions, principles, ideals, and to show him the way in which he may realise his broader and deeper aims. The end of production is richness, variety, and vigour of life in all its aspects for all persons who give of their best for the social welfare. But as production must precede enjoyment, and the proper organisation of production is fundamental to social welfare, a considerable amount of attention will be given to this subject.

I. THE ORGANISATION OF PRODUCTION.

The main structure of the organisation of agriculture was erected during the period 1780-1830. The old common-fields disappeared, farms were made larger, and the three classes of the agricultural community—propertyless labourer, tenant farmer, and landowner—were separated and defined during that period. The Napoleonic wars caused a great demand for greater production, especially of corn; methods of cultivation were changed to meet the demand, stock was improved, and waste land brought under cultivation. With some fluctuations the process of improving methods of cultivation and increasing the area under crops continued till about 1875, and the arable area was increasing most of the time. The improvement of stock has been a continuous process. But it is with changes in production during the last quarter of the nineteenth century that we are chiefly concerned.

The total production of land depends very largely on the proportion under the plough, for the fact that land is subject to a rotation of crops, of which cereals form the main object, does not necessarily mean that live stock are absent. From 1872 to 1914 the area under the plough in England and Wales fell from 13,839,000 to 10,306,000 acres; or a loss of 3,500,000 acres, representing 26 per cent of the total; and since 1892 the total area under crops and grass has been diminishing at the rate of about 40,000 acres per annum. The area under wheat in England and Wales fell from 3,463,000 acres in 1872 to 1,702,000 in 1913; that of barley fell from 2,064,000 to 1,559,000 acres. The number of sheep and pigs declined with the area under the plough. But important increases in milch and other cattle have occurred. Also there has been considerable development in the production of vegetables and fruit for market, both in the area under these crops and the yield. But the total increases in both quantity and quality of cattle and garden produce have not been sufficient to compensate for the decreases in production of cereals, mutton and bacon.* Thus we have the unique situation of a decline in agricultural production at a time when population was growing in numbers, and purchasing power was increasing in greater proportion than population. The chief reason for this decline was the influx of cheap foreign produce. The opening up of the great American prairies by the railways and harvesting machinery made possible the production of wheat and other cereals at prices with which the British farmer could not compete. Later, the development of cold-storage facilities made it possible to convey meat from North and South America and Australasia in practically a fresh condition. A coincidence of the influx of cheap cereals at the end of the

* See A. D. Hall, 'Agriculture after the War,' ch. ii.; and 'The Industrial Outlook,' ed. by H. S. Furniss, pp. 210-212.

“seventies” was the occurrence of bad seasons. Crops were poor, many wasted in the fields, and diseases were rife amongst cattle and sheep; and through it all prices were falling. An indication of the course of prices is provided by the following index numbers, which represent the prices of 1900 as 100.*

PRICES OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE.

	British Wheat.	British Beef.	British Mutton.	British Wool.
1871	210·5	111·2	98·6	221·6
1883	154·5	125·9	120·8	111·4
1895	85·8	93·1	98·6	126·6
1900	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
1913	117·7	110·3	109·7	201·6

English trade also suffered at this time, but perhaps industrial enterprise was not weakened to the same extent through loss of capital. It has been estimated that landowners and farmers lost capital to the extent of £1,000,000,000 during the worst period of the depression. But whilst in industry steps were taken to meet the conditions, there was stagnation in agriculture for many years. The way out of the difficulty of farming land at a profit with low prices for cereals was found, as has been seen, by the increase of the milk trade, feeding more beef, and the development of the market for vegetables and fruits. Between 1872 and 1913 the total number of cattle in England and Wales increased by 1,212,000, of which increase milch cattle accounted for 490,000.

The market for milk and garden produce had been developing in the “seventies,” but while the prices of cereals were high, few farmers paid any attention to it. In many districts there are records that the production of milk for sale, potatoes, &c., was left to the smaller farmers and small holders; but these new types of farming eventually proved to be the salvation of many large farmers. In a district like the south and south-east of Oxfordshire, the system changed from one of cereals and sheep to milk production for the great industrial markets. Sometimes the changes were made by men actually on the farms, but often these failed, and new managers came from other districts, notably Scotland and the West of England. The traditional organisation of farming had to some extent failed. In particular, the market experience and outlook of the managers of the 150 to 500 acre farms were limited. They failed to appreciate the new demands which were arising around them, or to estimate the effects of the supplies from new sources. Although changes in production were slowly made, no essential changes in organisation occurred; and

* The use of index numbers renders comparison simpler, *e.g.*, the price of British wheat in 1895 was 85·8 per cent of what it was in 1900.

the effective organisation of agriculture in the future will require the business manager in a new form. The amount of business on the ordinary farm does not provide scope for the faculties or yield adequate remuneration to secure the services of managers of the type who have made possible the modern expansion of industry and commerce, men who are urgently needed in the direction of an agricultural industry which is in open competition with supplies from world-wide sources. In the future farming operations must be organised on a larger scale to provide scope for the capable manager of the commercial side of the industry, or co-operative societies must be formed to supply the element of commercial management in the processes of buying and selling.

While changes in the nature or amount of produce were being made, changes were occurring in the methods of production, especially in the employment of more machinery and power. In 1907 it was estimated that the value of agricultural engines, machinery, implements and tools annually purchased in Great Britain amounted to £1,500,000. The number of engines on farms in that year (excluding those temporarily hired) was 34,450, and the horse-power 213,523.* This would be much greater than the amount of power employed in 1875, but the exact amount of the difference is unknown. The amount of ploughing done by steam has slightly declined since the "eighties," but in almost every other sphere the amount of power used has increased. But more important than the application of mechanical power has been the development of horse implements, especially for harvesting. Drills, horse-hoes, and other implements have become lighter in draft, more efficient and adaptable; but the great development has been in the adoption of machinery for harvesting hay, corn and potatoes, and in the extended use of power for barn-machinery, including threshing machines, trussing machines, and others for preparing foods. Other machines have been adopted which effect a saving of labour at certain seasons, such as the shearing machine, and still others which improve processes while not effecting a great saving of labour, as the cream separator. The chief labour-savers have been the harvesting machines. These have regularised employment, and done away with the need for a large number of casual workers. Or, to speak more accurately, in some instances the absence of casual labour has forced the adoption of these machines.

The result of the adoption of more power and machinery in agricultural production was that output did not decline with the number of persons employed; indeed, output per man was increasing while total output was falling. From 1871 to 1901 the number of persons engaged in agriculture fell about 30 per cent, while

* Cd. 6277, 1912.

total production probably fell only about 10 per cent.* The figures may be given as follows:—

PERSONS ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE.

[Confining comparison with previous Censuses to male and female farmers and graziers and male farm workers (for which the statistics are most reliable), and excluding farmers' relatives under fifteen years of age, we have the following figures for decrease and increase of persons engaged in agriculture in England and Wales.]

	Number.	Increase or Decrease per cent.		Number	Increase or Decrease per cent
1861	1,456,015	— 1·8	1891	1,065,494	— 7·3
1871	1,264,335	—13·2	1901	939,437	—11·8
1881	1,148,814	— 9·1	1911	986,310	+ 5·0

Census of Occupations, Cd. 7018, 1911, p. xlvi.

GAIN AND LOSS IN TOTAL PRODUCTION.

(000 omitted.)

		Loss.		Gain.
Sheep... 1872 20,780	1900 19,278	1,502	Milch cattle 1900 ... 2,187	1872 ... 1,774
Pigs ... 1872 2,586	1900 2,249	337	Other cattle 1900 ... 3,420	1872 ... 2,731
Total 1,839			Total 1,104	
(Or 6 units of sheep and pigs = 1 unit of cattle) ... 306·5			Less loss in sheep and pigs ...	306·5
Produce of 2,726,000 acres of arable land.			Net gain in cattle	797·5

Up to 1901 the net loss was equal to the difference between the increase of about 797,500 cattle and the produce of 2,726,000 acres of arable land.

And since 1901 production has been increasing in the districts in which the most important increases in the number of persons engaged occurred. This increase in the production per man employed made possible a steady improvement of the lot of the worker, while both total production and prices were falling. In the "eighties" there was a considerable curtailment of hours in many counties, and wages were slowly rising from 1890 onwards.

Rise in Weekly Cash Rate of Wages. (Index numbers.) (Ordinary Agricultural Labourers.)

1880	92·6	1900	100·0
1885	91·2	1905	101·7
1890	91·4	1910	103·1
1895	92·8	1913	109·0

This fact is of great importance in the consideration of the future organisation of agriculture in this country. While we complain that the rates of wages earned by English agricultural labourers are low, we do not often remember that they are higher than in any other European country.† In no other European

* Cf. A. D. Hall 'Agriculture after the War,' p. 23.

† For figures see (1) 'Fourth Abstract of Foreign Labour Statistics,' Cd. 5415, 1911. (2) 'Recent Development of German Agriculture,' Cd. 8305, 1916; and (3) 'Evolution of Modern Germany,' W. H. Dawson.

country is the production per man in agriculture so high as in England. In Germany, the agriculture of which is sometimes held up as a model of organisation we should follow, production per person engaged in agriculture amounts to only about half the amount for the United Kingdom.* The production *per man* probably amounts to about two-thirds of the production *per man* in English agriculture. Low productivity per man leads to low wages, as exemplified in Germany, and a low standard of life.

However, the nation is not interested in the condition of the agricultural classes alone, it is also interested in the supply of food derived from the land. To secure a greater productivity per acre, it is necessary that more land should be put under the plough. From the point of view of productivity, there is no question of arable crops *versus* cattle, because arable crops and the number of cattle may be increased simultaneously. Much land under the plough can yield food for consumption by cattle, and for direct consumption by man at the same time.† But in providing for greater productivity, it is important to secure that the output per person engaged is sufficient to provide for a decent standard of life.

In these considerations three points indicate the lines of a policy for improving the organisation of production in agriculture: the need of commercial managers, either of large farming operations or of mutual associations for business purposes; the value of machinery and power in increasing the output per man, and the need for this because the standard of production is already low; and the need for a larger area of land under the plough. The methods of supplying these needs may now be discussed.

One panacea for the cure of many of our agricultural evils which has been put forward is the creation of more small holdings. It is urged that small holdings produce more per acre than large farms; and of this there can be little doubt. Statistics of arable crops on holdings of various sizes are unobtainable, but the following approximate figures for stock provide good evidence for that phase of production:—

ARABLE LAND AND STOCK ON SMALL HOLDINGS AND FARMS
(ENGLAND AND WALES).

	Total Holdings 5 to 50 acres.	Total Holdings 50 to 300 acres.	Total Holdings over 300 acres.
Proportion of arable ...	27·8 per cent	41·4 per cent	51·0 per cent.
Proportion of pasture ...	72·2 per cent	58·6 per cent	49·0 per cent.
Stock per 100 acres.	Number.	Number.	Number.
Cows and Heifers in milk and in calf ...	14	11	4
All Cattle ...	29	21	14
All Sheep ...	60	68	87
All Pigs ...	20	8	4
All Poultry ...	272	88	44
All Horses ...	7	4	3

* J. Ellis Barker, *Edinburgh Review*, October, 1916 (No. 458), p. 285.

† For a statement of this see the *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, xxii., 1915, p. 532; also A. D. Hall, 'Agriculture after the War,' ch. iii.

Thus, the proportion of arable land and the number of sheep increase with the size of the farm, but the number of poultry, pigs and cattle decrease. And as the group of small holdings not more than 50 acres in extent contains a large number of very productive market-gardens, there can be no doubt that small holdings are rather more productive than large farms. There is, however, a grave question whether the comparative pain and cost of producing a certain amount of goods is not greater on a small holding than on a larger farm. The small holding is not an economical unit in the use of implements, machinery or power. As shown by the table, the number of horses employed on small holdings is greater than on larger units, and, although the amount of horse-power is not exactly shown by the number of horses (as the horses may be smaller), more horses are kept on small holdings than on large farms with a larger proportion of land under the plough. This often means that horses are sometimes unemployed, while they still have to be kept, and consequently horse-labour is expensive. If the necessary machinery is present on small holdings, then it is not fully employed, and capital is both "lying dead" and depreciating. If it is not present, as is too often the case, there is wastage of human effort. Something may be done to improve methods of using machinery and power on small holdings by organising a co-operative supply, but even then use is less economical than on large units. In the sphere of sale and distribution of produce the small holding suffers from grave disadvantages. If the consuming market for goods is near, these disadvantages are not so evident, although eight carts may be sent to town with milk from eight holdings of 25 acres each, while one cart would do the work on a farm of two hundred acres. Where produce is sent to a distant market it must be packed, graded and grouped; and unless this is done co-operatively it is done by a middleman, who is the only person with an adequate knowledge of the market, and the small holder suffers from lack of knowledge of methods and prices on the market. Even an organisation of forty small holders on 1,000 acres of land cannot work as economically as a single unit of management on the same area.

In certain areas the number of small holdings could be increased to advantage, especially if accompanied with various forms of co-operative organisations, but it is to be feared that a vast extension of small holdings would make life harder for the majority of people engaged on the land they cover.* It is also noticeable that small holdings are not such stable units in rural economy as larger farms. The possibility of adaptation to the circumstances of the market is apt to be very small. This was proved in the early part of the nineteenth century, and, although it would be unwise to give too much weight to their disappearance at that time because effective public opinion and law were not in their

* For a fuller statement on this subject see 'An Economic Survey of Small Holdings in Oxfordshire,' by the present writer, now in the press.

favour, it would also be unwise to neglect that experience. With the exception of Denmark and Ireland, the stability of the small holdings in other countries is usually protected by a system of tariffs, and it should be noticed that both Denmark and Ireland export large quantities of agricultural produce. Even since 1890, while English public opinion has been in their favour, some small holdings have disappeared. In spite of a little private and public effort to secure an increase in the number of small holdings, there were some 3,000 less holdings in the group of from five to fifty acres in 1908 than in 1885. In the whole class of small holdings of from one to fifty acres in extent, the increase from 1908 to 1915 was only about 2,500, in spite of the creation of over 12,500 holdings by public authorities; and the area under small holdings actually diminished by 95,000 acres. In 1908 there were 287,176 holdings covering an area of 4,368,33½ acres, and in 1915 there were 289,689 holdings covering 4,272,582 acres. The conditions on small holdings can be improved, and their stability increased, but they have inherent disabilities which it is almost impossible completely to eradicate. Some other aspects of the small holding will be considered in relation to the broader social question.

Dissatisfaction with the results of the system of medium-sized farms as it exists, and fears of the inadequacy of small holdings as a remedy for the evils existing in the organisation of production, have given rise to suggestions for the organisation of "industrialised farms." It is said that "there are too many farms too large for persons who are prepared to use their hands, and too small for persons prepared to use their brains." The industrial farm would cover a large compact area of land, cultivated on a diversified system suitable to the soil and the market; it would be equipped with sufficient capital to provide for machinery and power of proved efficiency; and would provide scope for the employment of experts in special branches of management. Several economies would be possible on farms of this type. Amongst these are economies of capital and labour. By providing for substitution of manual labour in many processes labour would be saved; and by providing as complete employment as possible for machinery capital would be saved. On the farms of 100 to 300 acres as they exist, either machinery is absent or it is not fully employed. Large farms would also lead to economy in land, because they would require less fences. But greater economies could be made in buying and selling; and in the sphere of management.* The "industrialized farm" is not merely an idea, for already a few farms are organised on lines similar to those indicated, and in many respects the results are more satisfactory than on the smaller farms. But the question arises: if these farms are desirable, how will the initiative for their organisation be provided? To this question there is no complete answer. Joint-

* For a fuller discussion of the "industrialized farm" see A. D. Hall, 'Agriculture after the War,' ch. iv.

stock undertakings are uncommon in British agriculture, although they are better known in other countries; and even if the results already shown encourage a few experiments, progress will be slow. A few estate-owners may take land in hand and farm it on business principles—making a change from the too prevalent methods of “landlord farming” of the past. One or two municipalities are farming fairly large areas of land, and others have fairly large estates, which, with a little enterprise, they might farm. But while the process of developing farms of the industrial type may be slow, large farms of another type exist in many districts. These consist of a number of separate farms amalgamated under one management. Often the manager is a poor farmer but “a keen business man,” and while the farms are little more than half cultivated, large profits can be made. Here there is too much of what passes for economy of labour and certainly a frequent wastage of land. These farms are not the type of the “industrial farm,” but its antithesis, and if no social action is taken to curtail the wastage of land, the tendency may be for this type of farming to increase. The number is already increasing in some areas.

Apart from the apparent difficulty of securing the establishment of “industrialized farms,” some criticisms have been levelled at this form of organization. The chief criticism is that it would develop the less favourable side of “industrialism,” especially the strife between capital and labour. But there has been trouble about wages for the last fifty years—partly because productivity per man was not sufficient to pay rates equal to the rising standard in urban industry. In that sphere the employment of men in large groups led to the development of those mutual associations—the trade union, co-operative society, and many educational organisations—which mean so much in modern life. Similar conditions would probably lead to similar development in rural districts. And without the growth of various forms of mutual associations there is no hope for the economic and intellectual emancipation of the rural worker.

But, as the small and medium-sized farms* will long remain

* SIZE OF FARMS.

The sizes of existing holdings in England and Wales are as follows:—

	Number.	Acreage.	Average size in Acres.	Proportion to Total Acreage.
1 to 5 acres	91,570	282,980	3	1·05
5 to 20 „	121,698	1,366,990	11	5·04
20 to 50 „	78,454	2,636,094	33	9·72
50 to 100 „	59,514	4,340,952	72	16·01
100 to 150 „	31,860	3,940,343	123	14·53
150 to 300 „	37,615	7,848,424	208	28·95
Over 300 „	14,413	6,698,221	474	24·70

with us, measures must be considered for improving production on those units. There are three methods which may be employed:

compulsion; inducement; and education and persuasion. During the war period a slight amount of compulsion has been applied by the Government through the Orders and the Act dealing with the maintenance of live stock. Repeated efforts have been made to secure the offer of financial inducements in the form of a bounty or guaranteed prices for cereals; but this offer has been steadily refused. During the whole period the Boards of Agriculture have been attempting to maintain, if not increase, production by means of education and persuasion. These efforts brought some returns in the last cereal year, for some increase in total area under all crops, and especially of arable, was made. However, this is more important in its portent than in its immediate effect. Slight changes in the nature of production have been made since 1914, but the real increase in production is small.

INCREASE AND DECREASE IN CROPS AND STOCK DURING THE
WAR PERIOD.

[ENGLAND AND WALES.

	1914.		1915.		1916.*	
	Acres.	Inc. or Dec. compared with 10 years average.	Acres.	Inc. or Dec. compared with 10 years average.	Acres.	Inc. or Dec. compared with 1915.
Total Acreage under Crops and Grass ...	27,114,004	Per cent.	27,053,100	Per cent.	27,073,860	Per cent.
Arable Land ...	10,998,254	- 0·73	10,965,707	- 3·44	11,050,900	+ 0·8
Permanent Grass	16,115,750	+ 1·49	16,087,393	+ 1·03	16,022,960	- 0·4
Wheat ...	1,807,498	+ 7·02	2,170,170	+ 25·02	1,912,120	- 11·9
Barley ...	1,504,771	- 0·26	1,231,722	- 17·62	1,331,750	+ 8·1
Oats ...	1,929,626	- 8·00	2,088,047	+ 1·21	2,084,850	- 0·2
Potatoes ...	461,621	+ 6·85	463,399	+ 6·54	427,910	- 7·7
	Number.		Number.		Number.	
Horses ...	1,399,547	—	1,287,182	—	1,359,570	+ 5·6
Cattle ...	5,877,944	+ 1·60	6,064,154	+ 4·40	6,215,780	+ 2·5
Sheep ...	17,259,694	- 8·26	17,522,577	- 6·38	17,951,120	+ 2·4
Pigs ...	2,481,481	+ 3·00	2,420,027	+ 1·44	2,167,942	- 10·4

* Preliminary Returns.

Prior to 1914 efforts were being made to increase the facilities for technical instruction in agriculture, particularly in the development of Farm Institutes for counties, or groups of counties, and in increasing the local work of itinerant instructors and advisers. These schemes have been relinquished for the time being, but on the return of peace no effort or money must be spared in their development. It is primarily upon the education of managers and workers that the future of agriculture rests. There is sometimes a tendency to lay too much stress on the necessity for technical education when the need of general and business education

is quite as important. The real study of methods of business in relation to the agricultural industry in this country has only just begun, but farmers can obtain help in the methods of keeping accounts and advice as to marketing. The work of the Agricultural Organization Society is important in the latter sphere.

More co-operation in its various forms is urgently needed. Besides organizations for buying and selling, co-operative societies for the purchase and use of implements and machinery are needed, and some are being formed. But nowhere is there greater need for education and co-operation than in the provision of credit and capital. On small holdings the formation of credit societies will be necessary before much advance is made, but no generally acceptable scheme has yet been devised; and such credit societies as have been organised have had a chequered experience.* But it is essential that any scheme adopted shall be of a self-supporting character, without any element of subsidy, except perhaps for a little encouragement in the initial stages. If larger farmers kept more accurate accounts, and were better informed on banking methods, they could secure more credit from existing banks. There is little demand for more credit from this class, unless it were of an especially cheap nature; and joint-stock banks assert that they grant large amounts of credit to the farming class, although they fail to produce any figures. There is already some provision of capital for the permanent equipment of estates by owners under the Improvement of Land Acts,† but on many estates new or improved equipment is needed. Before much advance can be made, the development of more business interests and knowledge of management amongst owners will be required; and in cases where equipment continues to be inadequate, the State or local authorities should take over the land. But until the State has recognised the necessity for a better policy of management of the land it already controls, little progress would be made by a change to public ownership. There is need of an educated public opinion in regard to the use of land under both public and private control.

The demand for financial inducement for the increase of production arises from the fact that arable farming depends largely upon the price of cereals for its success; and the fear that prices may not be high enough, or stable enough, to induce farmers to put more land under the plough. But before the war most arable farms were returning a fair rate of return on capital; and there is reason to believe that the pre-war rate of prices will be maintained, even if they are not increased, for many years after the return of peace. The American price is the determining factor in the world's

* The Agricultural Organization Society is now making a study of credit conditions in England and Wales, and hopes as a result to be able to put forward a scheme of agricultural credit of a comprehensive character.

† The number of applications for funds in 1913 was 185, and the amount raised £104,000. (Cd. 7336, 1914.)

market for cereals, and the great destruction of men and dilapidation of farms in Europe, together with the great indebtedness of European countries to America which will follow the war, will probably operate to raise the price of cereals. Also, if general trade is good, freight rates will probably be higher than before the war, because of the diminishing carrying capacity of shipping.* The evidence for or against the necessity of a subsidy on arable land or guaranteed prices for cereals, is not complete on either side, but the agitation in favour of a guarantee has received considerable support from the report of a Committee on Home Production of Food, which sat under the chairmanship of Lord Milner.† The danger is, however, that a guarantee of 40s. or 45s. per quarter for wheat would lead to satisfaction with prevailing conditions amongst farmers, and a more rigid establishment of the *status quo* in regard to production, unless it were accompanied by other measures for securing the breaking-up of grass land that would be more profitable under the plough. And in any case the future prosperity of the industry depends upon the introduction of improved methods of cultivation and efficient forms of organization.

It is in relation to waste or uneconomically used land that it may be necessary to apply the principle of compulsion. There is much waste, or semi-waste, land in many parts of the country which owners are not willing to improve or to allow others to improve on fair terms. Not all of this land is privately owned, for some belongs to the Crown and other public bodies. But experiments are being made in reclamation, and where a process has been devised for any type of land it would be folly to allow individual rights of maintaining it in its present state to prohibit a development of greater utility. Compensation should be granted on its present value, and the land be taken and developed under some public authority. The types of existing waste land which could be made more productive include accretions from the sea, both slob-lands and sands; low-lying moor and bog; heath and upland sheep walk; and other land which could be improved for grazing purposes. Much poor grazing land, which now produces only a few pounds of mutton per acre each year, could be improved or turned into woodlands. But continued experiments are necessary before large areas of waste can be dealt with.

Akin to the subject of reclamation is that of afforestation. An increase of woodlands is highly desirable, as a great depletion of future supplies has occurred during the war-period. The prices of timber have been rising for many years, and, as the world's visible supplies are not as large as they were, other increases are in prospect. At present only land of low annual value can be

* For another discussion of the probable trend of prices of agricultural produce see 'The Industrial Outlook.' Ed. by H. S. Furniss, pp. 217-221.

† The Interim Report containing the recommendation for a guaranteed price for wheat was not published, but see the *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, September, 1915 (Vol. xxii. No. 6).

afforested with economy; but should the substitution of metal for wood in many spheres be slow, considerable increases in timber prices may be expected, and land of higher annual value could be planted with security of an economic return. At present there are several million acres of land in Great Britain which could be afforested, and the formation of public opinion and policy in regard to afforestation is highly desirable.* One reason why more woods are not planted or improved is that many nominal owners of estates are only life-tenants, and planting timber is a process of "planting for heirs." But again, the provision of capital and facilities for education, especially the latter, will be necessary before much progress is possible under either private or public enterprise.

In every phase of organisation and cultivation more knowledge is the fundamental requirement for progress in agriculture. There is much knowledge awaiting adoption in general practice, but also many spheres in which still more knowledge is required. Facilities for research and training in practice were being developed before the war, and these must be continued on the return of peace. And whether the general body of consumers decides to subsidise the agricultural producers or not, there cannot be any progressive improvement in agricultural production unless a more efficient body of managers arises either from the present class of farmers, or some other classes of society. Whatever form of organisation is adopted, it is essential that it should provide for a rising standard of life approximately equal to that provided by urban and semi-urban industry, otherwise there will be a recurring problem of rural depopulation. Neither the sons and daughters of labourers, small holders, nor farmers, will stop on the land under a system which does not provide an economic foundation for a life of equal variety and richness as that offered by the urban centres and the Dominions.

* On reclamation see A. D. Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-80. On afforestation see Report of Royal Commission on Coast Erosion and Afforestation. Cd. 4460, 1909. The proportion of land occupied by forests and woods in European countries is instructive:—

	Per cent		Per cent
England	5.3	France	17.0
Scotland	4.6	Belgium	17.3
Wales	3.9	Germany	25.9
Ireland	1.5	Hungary	27.5
Denmark	7.2	Austria	32.6
Holland	7.9		

—Departmental Committee on Irish Forestry. Cd. 4028, 1908.

II. SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

POPULATION.

THE broadest social question relating to the land is that of the number or proportion of the population who are directly supported by agriculture, or live in rural surroundings. It is undoubtedly true that many diseases are more rife and the population is less healthy in urban than in rural districts, but whether this is avoidable or inevitable has not been proved. There is a certainty, however, that a small country like our own cannot maintain a large proportion of its population in agriculture. A few elementary figures will prove this statement. The cultivated area of England and Wales amounts to 27,000,000 acres, and if another million acres or so could be added, the limit of settlement would soon be reached. Experience proves that for the maintenance and employment of a moderate family, twenty-five acres of land are needed under most types of cultivation. Five acres under vegetables and fruit may employ and support a family, but there is a distinct limit to the demand for the produce of such holdings. Even smaller holdings may be sufficient under highly specialised systems of market gardening, but these systems depend upon the demand for produce of a high quality, usually at periods when the general supply is unavailable. But in any case rich land is needed for holdings under five acres supporting a family, and this land is limited in amount. On the other hand, where land is poor, forty, or even fifty acres will be needed to provide a family with a decent standard of life.* Thus, if the average of 27 acres is taken, we could settle about one million families on the present area. With an extension of the area a small addition could be made. In 1911 there were 846,663† persons of twenty-five years of age and upwards employed in agriculture and gardening (excluding persons employed as domestic gardeners), and probably there would be more than this number of families to maintain. There may be a margin for the settlement of an additional 100,000 families, which would add another 500,000 people to the rural population, but this would be possible under healthy conditions only by a vast increase in total production. It does not always follow that when labour

* On types and sizes of possible holdings see the 'Report of the Committee on Settlement, &c., of Soldiers,' Cd. 8812, 1916, pp. 9-10. (Price 6d.)

† Persons Twenty-five Years of Age and upwards employed in Agriculture and Gardening, 1911 (excluding Domestic Gardeners):—

Rural Districts.		Urban Districts.†	
Agriculture—Males	580,910	Agriculture—Males	98,437
Females	48,860	Females	7,058
Gardening—Males	42,353	Gardening—Males	65,993
Females	1,437	Females	1,525
	<u>673,560</u>		<u>173,013</u>

is increased production increases in proportion, and when this is not the case a decline in the standard of life must occur. With an estimated number of agricultural producers of 1,673,000 in 1907 the value of the gross output of agriculture in Great Britain was estimated at £150,800,000, or £90 per person. To recover all the area of cultivated land lost since 1890, and return to the plough all land put under pasture since 1875 with an increase of 100,000 families would leave the rate of production much the same as at present, with still a smaller agricultural population than in 1871. But as most of the trouble with regard to rural depopulation has arisen from the fact that urban industries or colonial farming have offered a better return for labour than our own agriculture the need is for a progressively increasing rate of production per man. And every increase in number of manual workers must be accompanied by a large increase in the application of capital and power if healthy conditions are to be maintained.

There is a good deal of sentiment about life on the land when men are far from its unrelenting grip, but when they are subject to its call for drudging labour at all seasons and in all weathers, with but a small return at the end, the glamour of life is caught from other sources.

This sentiment is nowhere more to be feared than in regard to proposals for establishing home industries in conjunction with agriculture. In many parts of Europe, especially in Germany and Switzerland, where home-industries are common in conjunction with agriculture, the joint occupations only make existence possible. In most forms efforts to establish home-industries in rural districts are palliatives for existing evils which multiply the evils. If industry is to be decentralized in this country it should be under such conditions as will return an amount of wealth and welfare equal to that possible under present industrial circumstances. The small holder should not be required to spend ten hours in the field and four at the lathe or loom, the factory employee should not be required to spend ten hours in the factory and four in the field. Modern life and modern citizenship require a mental, as well as physical, quality in mankind, and this cannot be attained without leisure from economic obligations. The essential problem of decentralisation of industry is one for the engineer—it is that of the decentralisation of power at low costs. Residence may be decentralised by the provision of better and cheaper transport facilities.

There is a good deal of the red-herring in the cry of "back-to-the land," for, on the whole, the future stamina of the race must depend upon the improvement of working and housing conditions in urban and semi-urban areas. And in those areas was developed that freedom and variety of life which have enlarged the outlook of the masses of the population. Life on the land is not an idyll, for Jack and Jill bear a heavy yoke which can be made lighter only by severely practical measures. Partly because they have

not used the facilities open to them, but more because they had insufficient leisure or wealth to use facilities, the rural population have found the gates of civilization shut in their faces. Nor till they boarded the train for the distant city or the far dominion did they find the gates begin to open to them.

THE CONDITION OF THE LABOURER.

Previous to 1914, a good deal of attention had been given to the rates of wages earned by agricultural labourers, and there should be no need to give figures.* Since 1914 the changes in the rates of wages have varied considerably. In some districts with a large proportion of labourers over forty years of age the changes have been slight and were tardily made; in other districts where a large proportion of young men were employed the changes came more quickly, and were more important. But up to the middle of 1915 the wages of only about 75 per cent of the labourers had been affected. The amount of the increase given was usually between one and three shillings per week, but in some cases amounted to four shillings. The general rise may be computed at about fifteen per cent. But an inquiry undertaken in a midland county at the end of the year showed one district in which no general change in rates had taken place, and only one district in which total earnings for the year would average £1 per week.

During this year further increases have been given, and it has been officially stated that the general rise amounts to about 30 per cent.† This increase in rates is not sufficient to meet the rise in prices, but in many cases employment and earnings are more regular than a few years ago, and the conditions are better to that extent. From the employers' point of view the increases are considerable, because they have mostly been given to men over military age, whilst the most vigorous of the young horsemen and ordinary labourers have gone into the Army or to industrial employment. However, on many farms total labour costs have declined while rates have been rising, and as the prices of produce have been high no hardship has been felt.

As it is next to impossible to forecast the trend of the cost of living it is difficult to say what will be the net effect of the war

* Changes in rates of wages have occurred during this century, together with changes in details of other conditions of employment, but the reports of Mr. Wilson Fox on Agricultural Wages (Cd. 346, 1900, and Cd. 2376, 1905) will still be found useful. Cd. 5460, 1910, dealing with rates in 1907, is the latest official return. On the Theory of Wages in Agriculture, see R. V. Lennard. 'Agricultural Wages' (Macmillan, 1914).

† The following figures show the changes in Norfolk:—

	Weekly Wages.	Harvest Money.
1912	11s. to 13s.	£6 15s. to £7 5s.
1913	12s. to 14s.	£6 15s. to £7 5s.
1914	13s. to 15s.	£7 0s. to £7 10s.
1915	16s. to 18s.	£8 5s. to £9 0s.
1916	20s. uniform	£9 10s. to £10 5s.

on the wages of farm workers. Some farmers who had previously been deterred from making advances by the disapproval of their neighbours welcome the change; others look forward to being able to reduce rates of wages. The labourers generally are looking forward to their maintenance; and indeed if the return of labour to the land is to be secured the rates must be higher than in 1914. And there is general agreement that the conditions of employment should be attractive enough to induce the labourers to return in sufficient numbers to man the farms on the pre-war strength.

The best method of maintaining the rates of wages would be by an extension of trade union activity in the villages. Prior to the war some extension was taking place, with hopeful results. The National Agricultural Labourers' Union had been growing in numbers and becoming active in parts of several counties, including Lancashire, Cheshire, Northampton, Norfolk, Essex, and Somerset. In Scotland, also, a Union of farm workers had been very successful, especially in negotiations. But whatever method of supervising rates of wages is adopted it is essential that it should require personal initiative on the part of the labourer, and this will require some form of mutual associations. Employers in agriculture have long had both formal and informal (mostly informal) agreements to control rates of wages, and in principle there can be no valid objection to association amongst employees for the purpose of supervising rates. Some of the obstacles to the growth of unionism have been that the incomes of the labourers were not sufficient to provide a surplus for the adequate support of the organisation; that the natural leaders of the men, the young intelligent workers, were mostly drawn to the town, and for those remaining the training in leadership was poor; and that the men were isolated, working in small groups under varying conditions.

If State action to raise or maintain rates of wages is required on the return to peace conditions, Wages Boards should be organised on a county or other local basis, with adequate representation of employees. The need for obtaining information for the purpose of making awards, and for activity in enforcing them, would probably act as a spur to association amongst the labourers. Without their personal and mutual initiative little advance can be made. An increase in the rates of wages may be obtained by legal compulsion or dictated by the business instincts or generosity of employers, but the essential condition of the life of the labourer as a person who is controlled entirely by external forces will remain unless some effort is required from him in the fixing and enforcing of rates.

Next to the low economic return the most important cause of the labourers' dissatisfaction is the absence of reasonable prospect of advancement in life. The boy who begins work on a farm at the age of twelve or thirteen years generally reaches the maximum of his advancement at twenty-five, and often before. He may begin with odd work in the stable or yard, sometimes as a boy

The proportion of labourers who can, apart from the Small Holdings Act, become small holders or farmers varies in different counties. In some parts of Devon and Cornwall where farms are small as many as 40 per cent of the farmers have been labourers, or were the sons of labourers. But taking England as a whole, at least 70 per cent. of the farmers are of farming stock, *i.e.*, descendants of men who have been employers in agriculture; and it would be rash to assume that the other 30 per cent. had been labourers, or were sons of labourers. Many, perhaps most of them, are sons of other inhabitants of the countryside, particularly of tradesmen whose business is connected with agriculture. As distinct from farms, small holdings that have come into existence independently of the Small Holdings Act, vary in number and proportion in different counties, the proportion being high in such counties as Cornwall, Chester, Lancashire, Holland Division of Lincoln, Stafford, Cambridge, and Bedford, where either dairying or market-gardening fostered these holdings.

Since 1908 the number of small holdings established by county councils has also varied. In some counties the number of holdings would provide opportunities for advancement for as many as six or seven per cent of the labourers; in others less than 1 per cent. These holdings, too, tend to be more numerous in the market-gardening and dairying districts. But not nearly all the old small holdings or those recently established are sufficient to support a family, and many of the old-established small units are connected with other units to make a fairly large farm. Taking the country as a whole the Small Holdings Act has not provided opportunity to become controllers of land for more than 3 per cent of the farm labourers, even if all holdings were occupied by erstwhile labourers, which is not the case. Perhaps some 4 per cent of the labourers can actually become small holders, and a few become larger farmers. Also about 2 per cent can become bailiffs or foremen. But in any case not more than 7 or 8 per cent can rise to positions of control of land, labour, and capital, while they remain in the industry; and for the majority of the remainder their positions and earnings are fixed by the standard of the class which they attain by the age of 25 or 30 years.

Unless new forms of organisation of agriculture arise the best method of improving the labourers' prospect of rising in the social scale will be to increase the number of small holdings. Wherever possible they should be established in colonies of not less than forty in number, so as to provide scope for various forms of co-operative activity. But where it may not be convenient or possible to establish colonies, one or two single holdings, each sufficient to support a family under a type of cultivation suitable to the soil and the market should be established in each village. These would set up an "agricultural ladder" enabling the enterprising workman to obtain control of land and capital in the industry. But the majority of the labourers must find the solution of their

class problems in some form of associations for mutual protection and assistance. In some respects the establishment of the most intelligent labourers on small holdings robs the class of its natural leaders, while it is almost impossible to conceive the establishment of a small holding for each of the 400,000 adult labourers in England and Wales.

Allotments have not hitherto been mentioned because they are regarded rather as a method of enabling the labourer to eke out an existence than as helps to the improvement of the essential conditions of his life. Only a very few allotment holders in rural districts ever attain the position of self-supporting cultivators. To most of them an allotment is a means of increasing income to meet immediate needs, and to many it is a means to be relinquished as soon as the need disappears. There are now many districts where allotment cultivation is declining because employment and incomes have been regularised. On the other hand there are some districts where there is an unsatisfied demand for land for allotments. Frequently these are industrial or semi-urban areas where allotment cultivation is regarded partly as a form of recreation. But the machinery for obtaining allotments now exists, and in most cases only intelligent initiative is required to obtain the supply.

One of the most important causes of dissatisfaction amongst labourers' sons and daughters, especially the latter, is the lack of cottages or the deficiency of existing cottages. The shortage of cottages or deficiency in quality cannot be separated from the question of economic return from the industry. Cottages are not built or improved because owners of land who provide cottage equipment cannot build so as to secure the current rate of return on the capital invested. Farm rents again are too low to cover the cost of new or better cottage equipment. In some cases, however, cottages have been improved as a matter of social duty. Investors in small property do not build or improve cottages for the occupation of farm labourers because the rates of wages do not provide a sufficient margin for payment for better housing. Where the difficulty is one of absolute shortage of cottages, many complaints have been made against the restrictions of the local building bye-laws. But in the main the local rules are based on fair demands for a standard of housing under modern conditions; and in view of the general complaints as to the deficiency in quality it is useless to build cottages which will not meet the fair demands of the labourer and his wife.

The shortage of cottages in rural areas is often the cause of hard conditions, for the labourer who lives in a "tied" cottage may have to leave his cottage as well as his employment at the end of a short notice. With an adequate supply of free cottages the hardship would be mitigated to a great extent, but when all cottages are full the labourer may have to remove to another district.

It is difficult to see how farm organisation can be carried on without the residence of some men such as shepherds and carters in cottages attached to the farm. But they should not be penalised in any way because of such residence. They might be granted a little relief by a legal provision that a month's notice should be required for the termination of the tenancy of the cottage, without reference to the notice required to leave employment. This would tend to disorganise the farm occasionally, but it would make the employer considerate with regard to notice. It is regrettable that the tendency to attach cottages to farms is increasing in some districts, for nothing robs the labourer of his liberty more than this.

Many landlords or their agents defend themselves from the charge of not providing a sufficient number of decent cottages by stating that a large number of cottages are occupied by employees of public authorities, railway companies, &c. Undoubtedly this is true, but the reason they have been so let was partly because these tenants could offer higher rents, and if the estate owners want to increase the provisions for their labourers they have the remedy in their own hands. If the employees of public authorities, policemen, roadmen, &c., were given notice to quit the landlords would probably lose a little in rent, but public authorities could build for their employees, and conditions would be improved. Indeed the only satisfactory solution of the rural housing problem will be found in a policy of building houses by the local sanitary authorities. The danger is that demands may be made for subsidisation in the form of a supply of very cheap capital. If this was granted it would be nothing more or less than a grant in aid of the low wages paid in agriculture. The grant of a large amount of cheap capital should be accompanied by provision for raising wages, for if the industry cannot maintain its employees at a decent standard of comfort it has failed in its social purpose. A railway company does not expect the State to subsidise the housing of its employees, nor should a self-respecting farmer or landlord admit in this way that his management has failed.

The demands of the wife or prospective wife of the farm-worker are of great importance in regard to cottages. It is not generally recognised that the migration of the brightest women from the countryside has been, if possible, more disastrous than that of men. Unless the general conditions of country life are good enough to attract the brightest girls of the villages it will not be possible to retain the brightest men as they reach marriageable age, nor can a decent standard of civilisation in rural areas be secured without the co-operation of intelligent and energetic women. And from the point of view of national health and vigour no advance will be made by inducing men to return to the land unless women of equal mental and physical stamina can be induced to return to village homes.

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

For forty years or more the number of women employed in agriculture has been diminishing, and in most districts this has been regarded by the labourers as a sign of social advance. In general women on farms have been casual workers, and, as rates of wages have been low, the existence of self-supporting female field-workers has been a precarious one. In England and Wales the work of most of the women who are fully employed on the farm is partly of a domestic character. They work in the house or dairy for the main part of the day, except during the haymaking and harvest seasons, and milk or assist with cattle mornings and evenings. But in districts like Cheshire and Lincoln, where this was general a few years ago it is now less common. To obtain domestics for farm-houses it was necessary to relinquish the demand that they should milk or work in the stalls or fields. It has been suggested that the unwillingness of girls to engage in the dual aspects of farm work was due to the prevalence of false standards of life; but in the main it has been due to a demand that the standard of conditions of farm service should be raised in accordance with a rising standard in other occupations open to the girls. Domestic service in urban and suburban areas, which was the chief alternative, has not been an ideal occupation, but the rough work of the fields and the stalls was not added to the endless work of the house, and there was more variety to be obtained on the "evenings off." Ordinary field work for women in England has been more or less confined to the garden and fruit farms, and to such districts as parts of Lincoln and Cambridgeshire, Northumberland, and Durham.

Wages of women servants varied considerably with the age and ability of the girl, and with the district; and little general information is available. The best indication of the conditions is that it has been increasingly difficult to obtain the best girls either for domestic work of farm-houses or for the dual work of the house and the yards. Wages of women field-workers before the war varied between 1s. and 2s. per day, but were generally about 1s. 6d. The rates now paid vary from 3d per hour for odd work to 12s. and up to £1 per week of 48 to 54 hours for weekly work. In no district would the average rate amount to more than £1 per week for the time worked, and nowhere, except in Scotland, would the average for the year amount to £1 per week. In many districts the average earnings for the year would vary between £30 and £40 for women who are wholly or mainly self-supporting. For women who do odd work, 3d. per hour is the rate in most counties.

There are now between 50,000 and 60,000 extra women working on farms. Some of these are patriotic workers from the towns, others have been domestic servants or industrial workers who are self-dependent, and still others are village women who have another source of maintenance. Most of the patriotic workers may be

expected to return to their ordinary vocations on the return of peace, and many women who are not wholly self-dependent will not continue farm work on the return of husbands, brothers, &c. But many women will find it difficult to return to their ordinary vocations.

With decent prospects for male workers some would marry and settle down in the villages, and it is desirable that they should do this. For those that remain some kind of protection may be necessary, similar to that which may be provided for men.

But the important considerations arise from official suggestions that the number of women employed in agriculture should be largely and permanently increased. The lighter branches of skilled work in the dairy industry, market-gardening and fruit farming, and poultry-rearing offer scope for the capacities of a number of trained women, and some of those now employed will find positions of a satisfactory nature in those phases of the industry. But the prospects of the ordinary female field-worker cannot be regarded as satisfactory. The work in itself does not offer a career. Too much of it is of an unskilled and intermittent character. If the woman is to marry and settle down, the field work is not a satisfactory training for housewifery. Nowhere in country villages is the art of the housewife at such a low ebb as in the districts in which it is common for women to work in the fields. The effect of unskilled field work on the character and bearing of the women may easily be seen in some of the large villages and small towns of Lincolnshire and Cambridge. The increase in the number of women employed in casual and unskilled field work can only be regarded by those anxious for rural welfare, as it is by the labourers in some midland counties, as a social calamity. Standards of life adopted in modern cities are apt to be false and misleading when transferred to rural areas; but there is no reason why the standards of life in villages, although not exactly similar to those in towns, should not be equally attractive and satisfying. In many cases the refusal of women to work in the yards and fields began with the farmers' wives and daughters, and later spread to the female folk of the labourers' families. At the time this occurred it was a real advance, but in some branches of work, such as the finer processes in the preparation of various commodities, and in packing, there is scope for improvement by the aid of women's skill. A return of women to the unskilled work means, however, a wastage of human capacity and the decline of rural civilisation to a standard which can be compared only with that existing in the more backward parts of the Continent.

Previous to 1914 the decline of the employment of children in agriculture was commonly welcomed, except by a few farmers in some districts. In 1901 there were nearly 20,000 boys between the ages of 10 and 14 years employed in agriculture, and in 1911, less than 10,000, or less than half the number at the previous census. The decline in number was especially important among

boys between 10 and 13 years of age. This class fell from 3,376 in 1901 to 587 in 1911. But from July, 1914, to June, 1916, some 15,000 boys under normal age had been released from school for farm work, and the number is now probably 20,000. So there are now some 30,000 boys under 14 years of age employed on farms.

Some provision for the continuation of the education of boys prematurely taken from school should be demanded on the return to normal conditions, and the age for compulsory attendance at school ought to be uniformly fixed at fourteen years.

The reasons for allowing boys to leave school at thirteen years of age are the demand of farmers for boy labour, and the parents' need of the small earnings. A small increase in wages of adults over the real value of pre-war rates would in most cases compensate parents for the loss of wages of young boys, which do not often amount to more than 3s. or 4s. per week. The demand of farmers will be formidable in several agricultural counties, and local effort is not likely to be successful in raising the age for leaving school fixed by the local education authorities. But the work of many boys of thirteen years of age on farms is merely that of boot-black, messenger, and general drudge. He is half attached to the kitchen, half attached to the yard, and few of his duties require much skill or intelligence. The age of fourteen years is sufficiently early to begin learning the real work of the farm, and ultimately much better results would be obtained if part-time education could be continued for another year. Where a boy had actually chosen to become a farm-worker, the subjects taught might relate to the work of the farm, but the humane aspect of education should accompany the purely technical. Attempts to force village children into farm work will not succeed and will indeed defeat their own aims. The harder the conditions for the boy the greater is the incentive for the youth to migrate to other employment.

VILLAGE LIFE.

While the tendency during this century has been towards more willing engagement in agriculture and residence in villages there has been no real development in village life. Indeed the tendency has been towards a centralization of life in the small towns. The development of transport has much to do with this movement, but general social tendencies towards centralization are also partly responsible. The "general shop" of the village is in many cases now but a shadow of what it was. Indeed, in some villages, there is now no shop at all. The bicycle, the market train, and more recently the new development of the village carriers' business by means of the motor van, have carried the men and women to the shops of the local town. Also the great multiple shops have been extending their trade to the villages by means of horse and motor vans. In nearly every village, and in most articles of its consumption, the "ready-made" and the

“ready-packed” type of goods has come to stay. Also such centralizing movements as the National Insurance Act are robbing the village of its autonomy and its sense of community. The village sick-club is no longer self-organised and self-governed—either it has disappeared before the “insurance man” of the great companies, or become attached to one of the great orders of friendly societies. The immediate result is in most cases an increase in utility and financial stability. But even in the case of federation with other societies some villagers lose a lot of personal interest in organisation. Their initiative or capacity is not sufficient to carry them into the management of the federation, while the loss of power leads to lack of interest in the local body. In almost every phase of local government the tendency towards centralization leads to the governed village and the governing town. This is not entirely to be deprecated. Association in the villages is limited by mere numbers, and it has been limited even more by rigid class distinctions. The future of corporate life in rural areas will be found in group associations covering more than one village. When trade or occupational interest, intellectual aspirations or ideals, or religion, provide the motive for association more interest and power will be developed in a society consisting of groups of people drawn from several villages than in a limited village society. The status of purely local standing will vanish before the more real standards set up inside an association drawn from a wider area. The corporate life of the village community, with recognition of the rights and duties attached to status, has gone. Status remains to a large extent, with the demand for rights without the full recognition of duties, and no steps to return to the bygone conditions are possible. The future lies with a new grouping of interest not altogether on the lines of economic position, such as has developed in the towns. Meanwhile the village youth cycles to the town football match and cinema while he mostly neglects the town church, library, lecture, or trade union meeting—even though his trade has an association in the local town. The leeway to be made up in the dissemination of broader ideas and development of wider interests in the rural districts is enormous. More leisure and greater command of means will be necessary before great developments are possible, but no advance at all will be made without inspiration and guidance.

THE RURAL SCHOOL.

The most important of the organizations for developing intellectual and social life should be the rural school. But the people of some rural districts, or their governors, have not yet fully acknowledged the value of education. The schools are denied money, often for building conveniences, perhaps more often for salaries. The teachers are apt to be those who have failed to reach the standard of ability demanded in the towns, or merely

waiting and working to attain that ability to remove to a higher salary and a more varied life. But, given better financial prospects, many teachers could be induced to stay in the villages and develop the work and life of their schools. Indeed, if society and teachers were wise there would be prosperous and satisfying careers open to a number of teachers who would demonstrate the methods by which rural education might be improved.

The school of the future should be more than an instrument for teaching a few elementary subjects to boys and girls under fourteen years of age. Where no other institution exists it should be the centre of the intellectual development of youths up to the age of eighteen at least, the site of the village library, and possibly the building should be the home of the general social life of the village.

Some villages and their schools are too small to provide for more than a meagre education, even for children, but with a larger village as a nucleus classes in many subjects can be formed where money is forthcoming to induce a competent teacher to undertake the work. However, many of the technical instructors working in village continuation schools themselves need teaching. Their work lacks the element of inspiration and encouragement so badly needed by the youth of the village. And it seems probable that more humane education—for the purpose of developing general intelligence—will be necessary before even technical education can be improved. It is certain that improved general elementary education will be necessary in the improvement of agriculture and the condition of the agricultural classes, for unless a person can read with ease and pleasure he will not read technical matter; unless he can write with ease and confidence he will not be able to state a problem to a technical or business adviser; or be willing to ask advice. And without a good knowledge of arithmetic and allied subjects it is impossible to teach business methods. For instance, without a fair facility in arithmetic it is impossible to follow the methods by which the value of feeding-stuffs and fertilisers are calculated, or to estimate the weight of a stack from its cubic contents, to say nothing of accurate book-keeping or other complicated transactions.

If the erstwhile labourer is to become a small holder and business manager, or advance to other positions of control, a good general education will be necessary. But the modern demand for change in the curriculum of the rural school is for more manual, sometimes for more "vocational" instruction. There are good psychological grounds for demanding more manual instruction, but there are scarcely any valid grounds for demanding vocational instruction under the age of fourteen years, or before a child has chosen a vocation! A child of a farm-worker is not born an agricultural labourer, nor should society pay for him to be schooled into one. Vocational instruction should be given after the vocation has been entered; and if much manual instruction is to be given the school age must

be raised so that there shall be no diminution of the time given to other subjects, especially the "three R's."

The needs of the rural school may be summed up in three words—finance, teachers, and inspiration. Experiments are being made in the organising of facilities for secondary education and the supply of books in village schools; but more experiments are needed. In the provision of facilities for study for youths and adults there is an enormous scope for the work of the Workers' Educational Association, the Adult School Union, and similar bodies. Here again finance and teachers are required. Inaccessibility of villages and the small number of the group to be catered for often makes village work expensive, and it is not so easy to find teachers as in the urban areas. In two directions misapprehensions are apt to arise with regard to village work. It is sometimes thought that the educational provision for the villager must be "light." There is no greater mistake. It must be interesting, but it may still be solid and strong—as experiments have proved. Then it is sometimes thought that it is necessary to obtain the interest of the "upper classes" before anything can be done. They should be interested in every possible way, but too much patronage and too much "arrangement" for the villagers weaken their sense of initiative, and destroy the element of self-government which is one of the chief advantages of this type of work.

THE VILLAGE CLUB.

The village club or reading-room is an institution about which little is known, and to which little attention is paid. But there are large numbers of these institutions of almost every type and character. In a county like Berkshire one village out of every four villages has some such institution. Sometimes these have been provided by the landlord for the village, sometimes by the landlord for the church, sometimes by the rector and a group of parishioners for the church, or more often for the whole village, sometimes they are provided by village charities, or by the villagers for themselves. In some cases they sell intoxicants, but usually they do not. Often they sell light refreshments. But their chief purpose is to supply newspapers, periodicals, and games for the winter evenings. Some, perhaps the majority, do not open during the summer, others open all the year round. A library is often attached, but is usually absurdly out of date, having been composed in the first instance of books cast out of other people's studies. But the supply of newspapers and periodicals is often good, and much broader and more comprehensive than many people would expect. And in many villages the club is the centre of liberal and intelligent thought.

Occasionally the club is provided or dominated by a political faction, but this is not usually the case. Interest is social and general, and there appears to be scope for some guidance and help

in the development of these institutions. In them meet the local friendly society, the pig club, the allotment association, &c. In many villages they focus the local social life of a non-religious character. To get in touch with the club is to get in touch with many of the actual or potential leaders of village life. The organisation of a county federation for the purpose of developing the work of the clubs is an experiment which might be made by persons of education and broad outlook on life. Meanwhile, the study of the existing clubs, their organisation and finance, the facilities for information and recreation they provide, their general character and condition, would be repaid by much interesting and valuable information.

THE RURAL CHURCH.*

* For a convenient study of the conditions of village churches, see E. N. Bennett, 'Problems of Village Life,' ch. vi. (Home University Library).

It is scarcely possible to speak of the village church in the same sense as the village school or the village club. English villages contain religious groups of every description, from the Plymouth Brethren or Christadelphians to the Romanists. But a rough division may be made between the Established Church and the Nonconformists; and only the social side of church organization and work will be touched upon. The Established Church is still regarded by most villagers as the dignified organisation for religious purposes. Although they may never attend its services at other times many agricultural labourers would dread to think they might be deprived of its services of baptism, marriage, and burial. But for many village laymen who are attached to their church its organisation has obvious drawbacks. Amongst the laity of the villages evangelicalism is still strong, but the layman has less power in many villages than in the towns. The clergyman does not regard himself as a religious leader or teacher, but as a religious (and too often as a social) governor and monitor. On this question it may be well to let a clergyman speak.

"The ordinary village churchman has no interest in the annual Vestry Meeting, or in the business matters of the Church, for he has no real share in conducting them. Even the services awake in him little or no affection, unless he be of a pietistic turn of mind, for they are not his except in the sense that they are offered to him. The maintaining of the Parish House of God, the raising and expending of sums of money to which he is invited to contribute, the hours fixed for the different services, the Foreign Missions contributions of the parish—all these are matters in which he has no voice, no control, no real part to play save that of an unconsulted giver and receiver."

"In larger villages here and there a more public spirit may be found, fostered by an exceptional priest; but, for the most part, we would all recognise that the picture above is, roughly speaking, true in the case of most of our small rural parishes."†

† G. Lacy May: 'A Village Experiment in Christian Fellowship.'—*The Commonwealth*, October, 1915.

To many village laymen the church means so much that the denial of power or responsibility even in the small matters mentioned above is a grave limitation of the expression of their personalities. The next church of his own sect may be five miles away, and outside his parish, so that the conformity of the church organisation and services to his ideals are important to him. But on graver matters than the time of the service or contributions to foreign missions the layman is in even a worse position. The history and the philosophy of the church is against him. Nor have the clergy used their positions of independence and power for the benefit of the most deserving of their parishioners. The social work of the Catholic priests of some parts of Europe in the organisation of agricultural education and co-operation, or of the American clergyman in his "rural uplift" schemes is outside the comprehension of most of the village clergy of the Established Church. They are good men with bad precedents and training; and fortunately or unfortunately the organisation of their Church denies to the layman any effective initiative or control in its government.

A large part of the numerical strength and more of the moral force of the Nonconformist churches in the village has been due to their call upon the lay element for services of many kinds. Practically without endowment they build and support chapels, schools and ministers. The Established Church and its clergyman are always there with at least a minimum of support, but in the Nonconformist bodies the slackening of lay interest has an immediate effect on funds and organisation. Moreover, the social effect of the training in thought, organisation, and leadership, gained by the laymen in church work is almost inestimable. The Nonconformist feels that the welfare of his church depends upon his *morale* and support, and the habits of consideration and devotion engendered in the work of the religious body are carried into other forms of associational life. Indeed, the "dissenting chapel" has been the outstanding example of associative life—quite apart from its special religious functions—in many large agricultural parishes.

There are, however, elements of weakness in Nonconformist churches. In one large agricultural parish, with a population of 600 souls, there may be as many as two or three chapels, any one of which would accommodate the whole of the congregations. There are three buildings to maintain, three preachers to provide. If the ministers are of the travelling type and most of the work is done by laymen, there is much unnecessary travelling and work. But, worst of all, there are a number of young people attached to each church. Were all these gathered into one body it would be possible to provide for them suitable religious, intellectual, and social exercises. But, divided as they are, there can be no special provision for them, and the consequence is that they drift, intellectually and morally. Creedal divergencies have been

disappearing for many years in rural circles of Nonconformity, and often there is an exchange of preachers, or some preachers take work in several bodies almost indiscriminately. But there is lacking the essence of unity in organisation which would provide the numerical basis for work amongst the younger section of the community. There are many congregations which consist almost entirely of middle-aged and aged people, and some which consist entirely of these. The reason is partly that there are fewer young people in the village than formerly, but more because the churches have not been able to organise guilds, young people's societies, &c., which have done so much to keep urban churches together during recent years.

It would be almost impossible to estimate the growth or decline of religious influences in the villages. Moral conditions are undoubtedly better than they were forty years ago, and many religious abuses, especially in the Established Church, have disappeared. Education in various forms has filtered through village society and left it less barbaric than before. But when the elements of future development are sought, the result is often disappointment, sometimes dismay. The attendance of children at Sunday schools of both Nonconformist and Established Churches, has been declining in many parishes. This applies both to total numbers and to the proportion of the children in the village of school age. Here and there a strong and virile school may be found—usually because of an exceptional leader or body of teachers. But on the whole the schools are weak both in scholars and staff. And without some changes another fifteen or twenty years will see the end of many of the outposts of Nonconformity in villages.

Meanwhile, there is little or nothing to substitute for the little church. Specific, avowed free-thought is almost entirely unknown in the villages, but there is much untrained questioning and thinking on ethics, philosophy, and theology. The materials come through the daily newspapers, or through some of the strange periodicals which may be found in the village homes, but much comes direct from Biblical sources—some of the keenest critics of which can be found by village gates and firesides. There is, however, nothing to focus this, or to give it vent or direction, and most of it merely ends in thought.

But if any revival of village life is to be secured it must rest on a revival of intellectual vigour and spiritual interest, and on a vast growth of free association for mutual support and assistance in the pursuit of ideals. To name only one instance, the growth of the co-operative movement almost entirely depends upon the development of thought and sentiment of practically religious quality and intensity. The farmer cannot evoke the best services of labour without studying human qualities, besides paying attention to economic interest. And when the labourers aspire to gain knowledge, to seek variety and richness of life, they find that without association they are thrown back upon the thin and unsatisfying

commercial offers of the town. Many of them are now seeking distraction or amusement in the crowd of the street, the football match, and the cinema-theatre, and if rural prosperity ends with this it will mean that the national spirit and culture will receive a smaller contribution from the rural districts than even during the last forty years. Religion, politics, thought, in the villages will be shaped on the lower planes which now exist in the urban districts, for the humble villager is not brought into contact with the higher planes of life and thought of the towns he visits.

A revival of village life does not mean going back to the spade and the maypole ; it means going forward to the motor plough and the trade union, together with the village club and recreation ground, the co-operative society and its factory, the secondary school and the church which is not afraid to embrace ideas or form new ideals of individual and social life.

The watchwords of the new life of the villages are education and association. The workers of the towns can do much to show the villagers how to obtain education and how to associate ; but it is fatal to offer services in the spirit of superiority. Only in the spirit of community of interest and ideals can town and country work together to carry forward the spirit and culture of British democracy and civilization.

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