BRITISH AGRICULTURE THE NATION'S OPPORTUNITY

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There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat ;
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures.

BRITISH AGRICULTURE THE NATION'S OPPORTUNITY

**Being the Minority Report of the Departmental
Committee on the Employment of Sailors and
Soldiers on the Land**

**BY THE HON. EDWARD G. STRUTT,
LESLIE SCOTT, K.C., M.P., AND
G. H. ROBERTS, M.P.;**

**Together with Addenda on Housing, etc., by
the Signatories, some Considerations by "A
Free Trader" in favour of their policy,**

**And a Preface and Appendix on the Reclamation
of Land**

BY A. D. HALL, F.R.S.

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PREFACE

THE Minority Report of the Committee appointed to consider the employment on the land of discharged soldiers and sailors, with the addenda printed in these pages, represents a considered effort, the first to appear with any public authority, to set out a programme for the reconstruction of rural life. In this respect the Minority Report marks a considerable revolution in public opinion with regard to the position of agriculture in the United Kingdom, a revolution that had been obscurely progressing during the last thirty years.

A generation ago the prevailing attitude towards the problems presented by the condition of farming and the development of the countryside was one of complete *laissez faire*, and that point of view has governed the action of Parliament and of the Departments of State ever since. The opinion was then freely expressed that British agriculture had ceased to be a matter of any account in the national economy. Our population was open to draw its food supplies from the whole world ; it would be turned to better use by engaging in the higher and more civilised forms of industry with which it could profitably pay for the more primitive products of the soil. As for the countryside its destiny was to become the playground of the urban populace ; the rich

manufacturer would have his parks and shootings, while the commons and other open areas were to be preserved for the wage earner in search of health and quiet.

But from that Gradgrind vision we have been steadily progressing. Statesmen have begun to see the weakness of a nation developed on one side only, and the value of a rural population for the stability and habit of work it contributes to the community. Social reformers found the condition of the rural labourer intolerable in itself and a standing menace to the position of the labourers in more organised trades. Again, men of science discovered a new interest in the problems of growth that are always being revealed in the course of agricultural operations, and on the other side the attitude of farmers towards education and science has undergone a very general, though not as yet an entirely effective, change.

These movements of opinion have been suddenly strengthened and drawn into a common stream by the war; there are few people now who have not been taught by events that agriculture must be revived in the national interests. The high prices current for all foodstuffs, and the menace of the submarine to send them still higher, speak facts and not opinions as to the necessity of increased food production at home. The prospect of debt after the war, the possibilities of disorganisation of industry and consequent unemployment, direct our attention to the land as the great undeveloped asset of the nation, the prime source of real wealth and the first link in the whole chain of industries.

Every one will be disposed to grant the case for the reconstruction of agriculture; in these pages the neces-

sary elements of the process are set out. They are threefold—the establishment of such a level of prices as will render intensive farming possible ; the improvement of the position of the labourer as regards wages, housing, and the amenities of life ; and lastly the recognition that the ownership of land carries with it a duty to the Community.

In the proposals that follow this prime question of the reconstruction of our rural life is approached solely from the national standpoint. The object is not to make farming more prosperous nor land more valuable, but to build up an agricultural system that will ensure more food and more men.

A. D. HALL.

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(Written December 1916)

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PART I

THE POLICY OF THE PLOUGH

(BY A FREE TRADER)

PART I

THE POLICY OF THE PLOUGH

I

A NEW POINT OF VIEW

THE war has changed everything. This is an axiom wherever conversation is directed to the great industrial and commercial reconstruction which is to come after the war. The opinions of men are fluid ; all look on the world with new eyes. No longer do Free Traders and Tariff Reformers, for example, debate on the old battle ground. In the abstract their views are unchanged ; but in practice most Free Traders see, and hasten to acknowledge, that in the old days they argued too much as though economics were a matter of pure mathematics.

Cheapness was one of their avowed objects, and of course they still believe, with deep conviction, that Free Trade is the direct road to cheapness. But cheapness, as they have come to perceive, is a relative term in a predatory and violent world. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? The soul of England is now to be kept or bartered. It is madness from any standpoint to lose your country, your independence, or your

self-respect, in order to save a shilling. Economists of the old tradition admit to-day that alongside the purely mathematical operations of this or that system of economics there are moral, physical, perhaps spiritual, motives operating, which may utterly outweigh hard economic rules.

II

SOME HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

THE proofs that special human incentives may have a stronger governing force than economic laws already appeared in the past, it is true, but they were generally undiscerned. After the American Civil War, the exhausted citizens of the United States set to work to rebuild their shattered industrial edifice. High prices and the high cost of labour caused them to invent labour-saving appliances, and to standardise their products, and they thus evolved a wonderful system which produced cheaply in spite of the dearth of all the elements of production. Necessity, in fine, had become their incentive. That incentive, working as it were unconsciously, was more valuable to them in terms of money than the most perfectly economised system of production would have been before the war when there was no new and peculiar motive.

Similarly Denmark, after being crushed by Germany in 1864, determined to "cultivate her garden" more than ever. She had, as she still has, comparatively few industries. Agriculture was, as it still is, her one

means of national prosperity, by which she must succeed or fail. Her incentive was a spirited and absorbing determination to rise above the sorrows of war, and reconstruct her fortunes in spite of the loss of her provinces, through raising to a higher power her natural means of trade and subsistence. How she triumphed every agriculturist knows.

Yet again, Germany resolved to become a virtually self-supporting country for the purposes of the war which for many years she planned. Her soil and her climate are less favourable than ours, but twenty years ago she made up her mind (as Mr. T. H. Middleton of the Board of Agriculture has pointed out in a Memorandum which will be referred to again later) not to import food, but to *grow* it. The resolve was made good—made good marvellously. Germany's peculiar incentive was an engrossing military purpose.

Now, it must be noted that there is in these examples no question of any special system of economics producing of its own accord the desired result. Denmark is a Free Trade country; Germany and the United States are Protectionist. Yet it may be well to remember Lord Morley's reservation that the United States are a world in themselves, and that a hundred million people who engage in Free Trade with one another do not form a Protectionist community in any ordinary sense. This warning is recalled here only to emphasise the fact that we must put aside all idea of abstract economic principles, whether Protectionist or Free Trade, being *in themselves* decisive when we are looking for what is beyond and what is greater in the human motives which achieve industrial

progress. Economic expedients justify themselves in exact accordance with their ability to bring to a head, or to sharpen, an incentive. Moral energy is the true source of wealth.

Mr. Middleton has said that the German tariff did not of itself revolutionise German agriculture. What did revolutionise it was the policy of which the tariff was an expression. The tariff justified itself in being a visible pledge or guarantee that the State was behind the farmer. The State had adopted a certain policy for a very good—or, rather, for a very sinister—reason, and the farmer knew that the State in no circumstances would allow him to come to grief from any cause outside his own control. Every case of economic intervention in every country, if this reasoning be correct, must be judged on its merits. Where confidence is obviously needed to ensure the progress of some industry which is essential to the well-being or security of a nation, the State must act in such a way as to create an atmosphere of confidence in that industry. When there is no need for haste a growth of confidence may be cultivated in a leisurely fashion along the line of least resistance ; when there is need for haste the remedy must be more impressive, more potent, and also immediate in its action. In short, where a national end is to be served the State must act in the sincere belief that that end—something hitherto unattained and perhaps regarded as unattainable—is worth achieving, and that if the incentive for its accomplishment be successfully encouraged the price will be cheap whatever can be urged against it by mathematical demonstration.

III

THE REASONING APPLIED TO ENGLAND

A NEUTRAL observer who recently visited England stated that he noticed in our great industrial towns an alertness among the people, a great purpose, as it were, shining in their faces, which had not been there before. Even if his romantic imagination outran his eyesight he was at all events only finding evidence of what is known to be a fact. In spite of all the shortage of labour, the diversion of energy, and the difficulties of transport, those who have remained in the non-combatant industries, whether consciously or unconsciously, have increased their activity. The acceleration of industry has been so remarkable that the output has been equal to what marked a prosperous year's trading a few years ago. Here is a sure sign of the capacity of our people to rise greatly to a great occasion. The object of the Minority Report on the employment of sailors and soldiers on the land, which is reprinted in this book, is to insist on the vast importance of a whole-hearted improvement of British agriculture. Such an improvement, as the war has proved, is essential for our national security. It is a thing we must have whether it cost much or nothing; though there can be little doubt that so far from costing much, an increase of the output of the soil would be a source, directly or indirectly, of considerable national wealth. And the temper of the people proves that they are now in the mind enthusiastically to act upon what formerly may have seemed to be a counsel of perfection.

Now is the time. The opportunity is unique. It is not likely to occur again. After the war there will be a vast re-shuffling of the population. Discharged soldiers and sailors, men with an acquired distaste for their former sedentary work, will be looking for new jobs. The land calls to them. The land is in the deepest need of them. The land, then, should offer them conditions which will be sufficient to attract them and hold them—conditions worthy of the most natural and honourable labour a man can perform. At present the conditions in some districts are not worthy of civilised men, much less of men who have proved themselves, in the field or on the sea, knights of honour in the service of their country. It is the duty of the State to see that proper conditions shall be ensured by whatever means may be necessary.

Agriculture could afford to pay for conditions equal to those of several industries in which the standard of comfort is tolerably high. But the majority of farmers, for reasons which will be explained presently and which cannot by any means be ignored since they are good reasons in themselves, will not take the financial risks that are at present inevitable in increasing the output of the soil. What is needed is a method of assuring the farmer that he will not be allowed to suffer through mere bad luck. He must be given *confidence*. You may call any means which the State could conceivably employ of giving him confidence “artificial” if you please. You may ask why the State should do for him, what—as has been in effect admitted above—he could really do for himself. But could anything be more artificial than the

spectacle of farmers, for want of this very confidence, refusing to cultivate the soil to anything like the full extent of its known productive capacity, and therefore being unable to pay decent wages to their labourers ?

Judged on its merits here is a case, if ever there was one, for an immediate act of State intervention. For we cannot wait for the farmer gradually to find salvation for himself, for his labourers, and for us who depend upon the food he produces. If we do so we shall miss the glorious opportunity of the disbanding of the Army. Time is the most important element in our problem.

For generations it has been the hope of wise men to redress the balance between the urban and rural populations. But they did not see how to do it by any means that would not be slow and laborious. Now comes such an opportunity as a statesman might have dreamed of in a moment of exuberant and fanciful optimism. Many hundreds of thousands of strong men, capable with their hands, and having a disposition towards a life in the open, will certainly turn their thoughts to the land if the conditions seem to them to be good enough. They can be captured for agriculture. But they must come as happy and willing captives. They must, so to speak, be captivated. They will not accept the old conditions. They know too much about them.

They have seen very small farmers in France and Flanders living happily on land which they own. They have talked to men from the British Dominions who have told them of high wages and of the ease

with which land can be acquired over the seas. The world is not to them the world it was before the war. Economists may tell them that wages are governed by economic law, and that if economic law rules it so wages must fall after the war. They simply refuse to believe it. They say, "If the country can afford to pay high wages during the war it can afford still better to pay them during peace. During the war we have tasted more of the good things of life than ever before. We do not mean to sink back to the old level." Therefore if the opportunity is not to be lost the discharged soldiers and sailors must be promised new and better conditions on the land. And the farmer, for his part, must be assured that he really will be able to pay for these improved conditions of labour.

It is the important element of time which makes "artificial" expedients necessary. Legislation should be passed before the end of the war in order that the new conditions may be ready for the disbanded soldiers and sailors to take advantage of them during those few critical days when they are making up their minds what to do next.

The national incentive for a transformation of the character of our agriculture is obvious. It resides in the fact, already mentioned, that the production of a far larger proportion of our food supply is now seen to be essential to our national safety. This incentive visibly becomes stronger among the people. They now contemplate deliberately and calmly the necessity of expanding our agriculture at home even at some cost, if necessary, to those who are not engaged in agriculture. This is a great revolution of feeling. It is a thing

unknown before in our generation. Before the war it would have been impossible to persuade a majority of the nation that the people of the towns must pay more for their food in order (as they would have put it) that the people on the land might profit. This new sense that agriculture must be supported is a tremendous driving force. It is enough to enable agriculture to conquer its ailments and carry its burdens with ease. But we must recognise at once that it is not an incentive which works among the very class upon whom everything depends.

It will be defeated, if we are not careful, by the want of confidence in the farmers—want of confidence in the business of growing wheat, which is the primary food of man and the chief source of industrial energy. The action of the State—as it is the purpose of the following pages to show—is required to support the incentive, and allow it free play among farmers. If that object be achieved, the cost of the support will probably be repaid several times and in several ways. The farmer already knows his duty to the nation in circumstances which were not foreseen a few years ago. He does not want to shirk it; but he cannot be expected to enter upon what he thinks is a speculative enterprise. In fine, it is not a cheap policy—and it might be a ruinously expensive policy for the country—to withhold from the labourer the conviction that the land offers him a decent and agreeable livelihood, and from the farmer the assurance that he is engaged in a stable business capable of supporting properly paid labour.

Here in England we have a soil which is fertile, and

a climate which is friendly, measured by European standards. Yet we produce but half of the food we consume, reckoned by value, and less than half if we judge it by its capacity for maintaining industrial energy. As for the primary food of mankind, wheat, we were producing before the war—and that at a time when the prices of agricultural produce were rising—only a fifth part of what we consumed.

This is a very dangerous situation for a country which depends upon the safe arrival of its ships to avoid starvation. Can any man say with the faintest conviction that in another war submarines would not be able—at least for a period long enough to be disastrous—to keep from us our food supplies? In this war, though submarines have been put to the test for the first time, they have caused us much anxiety and indeed have threatened to reduce our margin of safety to the danger-point. Neutral ships as well as our own have been freely sunk. We should be mad not to prepare for the future.

Granted that we had a Navy beyond the dreams of avarice for size, we still could not guard all the trade routes from submarines. Yet the demand for ever more naval protection would continue. A vastly increased production of wheat at home should therefore appeal with peculiar force to those who are unwilling to spend enormous sums upon the Navy.

Nor is that the only reason for a great agricultural policy judged solely from the standpoint of national security. In war the exchange tends to alter to our disadvantage at every disbursement of money for supplies bought abroad. Money spent at home in war

does not injure our credit to the extent of a single penny.

Finally, a large rural population is the national reservoir of physical strength. This is no vague assertion, no unsupported tradition. It may be true that the existence of physical deterioration in the great industrial towns cannot yet be proved, but the conditions likely to produce physical deterioration can be detected plainly enough. Take the Report for 1915 of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education. It is impossible to summarise the figures here, but the medical examination of the Elementary School children in England and Wales showed that in the rural areas the children were noticeably superior to the town children in cleanliness—and disease wanes and waxes in schools in direct proportion to the personal cleanliness of the children—and exhibited fewer cases of malnutrition, defective eyesight,¹ and most diseases.

In submitting this Report Sir George Newman says: "In particular I venture to lay emphasis upon the extreme value of an open-air life and a proper system of physical training."

No one could contemplate the draining of the national reservoir of health without the most serious alarm. Yet that is just what we are threatened with. Even

¹ On the vital matter of eyesight the Report says: "It is interesting to note the difference in the percentage of serious defect in vision for the several types of areas. In the county areas which are largely rural in their constitution, the percentage judged on the examination of 18,273 children, is 9·2; in the county boroughs on an examination of 28,634 children, 25·1; in the boroughs on an examination of 15,732 children, 14·0; and in the urban districts on an examination of 8,489 children, 13·3. These figures would appear to show that the child living in the country has a distinct advantage in the matter of vision over the town child."

while agriculture has been "improving," as it has been during the last few years, the area of arable land has not ceased to dwindle. More land has continually been brought down to grass. But grass land employs fewer men than arable land. There is therefore this very menacing paradox, that even in a time of agricultural improvement (say, since 1906) when farmers have had appreciable inducements to embark upon a higher kind of farming, the essential food of the people has been produced in progressively smaller quantities. During the last forty years three and a half million acres have passed from arable to grass. This has meant the loss of 250,000 men.¹ It is estimated that each million acres of grass broken up would provide under existing conditions employment for an additional 40,000 men.²

As for the contrast in food values afforded by arable and grass farming, it is startling, but it is confirmed by the highest agricultural experts. Normally the money value of the produce of arable land is more than twice that of the produce of grass land, and the food value is from three to five times as great.³ And the conversion of grass to arable does not mean less meat or less milk—for both can be raised on arable land in the same quantities as on grass, *in addition to the grain*.

Pope, unconsciously prophetic, described the need of England now in his beautiful lines:—

Another age shall see the golden ear
Embrown the slope and nod on the parterre,
Deep harvest bury all their pride has planned,
And laughing Ceres reassume the land.

¹ *Minority Report*, para. 18.

² *Ibid.*, para. 56.

³ *Ibid.*, para. 54.

IV

THE NATURAL LIFE

BEFORE we examine the fundamental causes of the fact that British farmers tend to become less and less growers of wheat and more and more stock-raisers and dairy-farmers, thus producing less of the essential food of the people, let us look at some incidental aspects of British agriculture. These aspects are very important, for taken together they account for one of the most formidable ironies in our national life. They explain why the most beautiful and natural, and in the best sense wealth-giving, means by which a man can earn a living has become despised and avoided. They explain why the exodus from the country to the towns has long been the feature of industrial life. Without appreciating these aspects we cannot understand the nature of our problem.

On September 21st, 1870, while the guns of the Franco-German War were thundering in France, Charles Kingsley wrote these lines :

Speak low, speak little ; who may sing
While yonder cannon-thunders boom ?
Watch, shuddering, what each day may bring :
Nor pipe amid the crack of doom.

And yet—the pines sing overhead,
The robins by the alder-pool,
The bees about the garden-bed,
The children dancing home from school.

And ever at the loom of Birth,
The mighty Mother weaves and sings :
She weaves—fresh robes for mangled earth,
She sings—fresh hopes for desperate things.

The mighty Mother renovates with a generous hand whatever man disfigures and destroys. Kingsley did not know when he wrote those lines that by an exquisite appropriateness it would be the French cultivators of the soil who would pay, more promptly and more easily than anyone ever dared to predict, the mass of the great indemnity exacted by Germany. So in the reconstruction which will follow this war, and let us hope keep us safe from all similar wars, British agriculture must be one of the "fresh hopes for desperate things." Other countries less favourably situated than we are have prosecuted a great agricultural policy to success. We also can do it if we choose."

Nature is indeed a Mother ; she is what Virgil called Italy in the *Georgics*, "Mother of increase, mighty mother of men" ; and her service, which is agriculture, would be treated with more reverence had men and women been educated to respect that which is most worthy of respect. The cultivation of the soil visibly brings men closer to nature than any other industry ; the life of the agriculturist is a true and honest life. He who tends the fields deals in nothing that is sordid or ignoble ; the farmer is the most likeable of men ; naturally so, for he makes his living by the cleanest of trades. Moreover, he serves not only the most important, but the largest industry in England. What Prince von Bülow said of Germany is also true of this country, "Agriculture is the mother of that national strength which industry employs."

But how different, how perverse, and how unnatural is the conception of agriculture which is not indeed taught in our elementary schools, but commonly

results from their teaching! One of the chief, and certainly the most notorious, of the difficulties of British agriculture is that the people who are born in rural England do not as a rule want to stay there. The little learning of the schools causes them to refuse corduroy in favour of the black coat. At least the rural superstition is that the black coat, worn on week-days, is the symbol of worldly success. In practice the black coat plays a smaller part than is symbolically attributed to it. The boy who has spurned agriculture in order to "better himself" returns to visit his native village in a tweed suit cut with geometrical precision. He looks with a conscious air of superiority at his contemporaries who are carting mangolds or cleaning out the shippens; and the onlooker whose education happens to be more than "elementary" wonders in vain whether the like of this rising youth will ever be educated enough to see that carting mangolds, or even mucking, is a finer occupation than serving in a shop in the neighbouring town, or that corduroys are really handsomer than the geometrically cut clothes. Perhaps this will be recognised when agriculture gives the labourer less cause to want to change his livery. At present he has little or no hope of advancement. The "black-coat" genuinely means something after all.

Elementary education, while making British youths sensible of the stagnation and the hopelessness of rural life, has withheld from them for the present any recognition of its beauties. It is much higher up in the scale of education that men long for the tranquillity of the country, and would gladly dig a field rather than exhaust their nervous energy in the professions or in busi-

ness—if only the digging of fields were well enough paid. There is after all nothing new in this. Horace described with a delicious irony in the *Epodes* the sensitive passion of the Roman usurer, Alfius, for country scenes and the joys of farming. It is the common delight in contrasts which makes the countryman sigh for the town and the townsman for the country.

The dislike of our country-side, which impels the sharpest boys and girls to the towns and to the Dominions, is at once a deplorable and an intelligible fact. It must be examined, it must be considered seriously, and it must be met reasonably, if the land is to be cultivated by a contented and prosperous population. The numbers of the strictly agricultural population in England and Wales, in the forty years 1871–1911 (males from boys of ten upwards), decreased 16 per cent. ; that is to say by more than 200,000. Yet in the same period the population of the whole of England and Wales increased by 67 per cent.¹

It is the dullness of village life, not the dullness of agriculture, which makes men and women, boys and girls, flee to places where shop windows glare on the pavements at night, where streets are lighted like ball-rooms, and the cinema palaces provide their lurid attractions in every thoroughfare. The recreative side of village life can and must be organised.

¹ *Minority Report*, para. 18.

V

THE COTTAGES

ANOTHER notorious grievance in the country which strikes to the depths of the whole matter with which we are dealing is the poor and insufficient housing. People often talk of slums in the towns without a suspicion that conditions in several parts of the country are relatively worse. The cleanness of country air, and the picturesqueness of rural decay, combine to mislead. The agricultural labourer is harder put to it than the labourer of the towns to find a decent and solid shelter, for the insufficiency of cottages is characteristic even of those parts of the country where the cottages themselves are good. If we lived under a system which required him to pay an economic rent for his cottage, he would be less frequently the victim of low wages. A good deal of jugglery can be done with the nominal-rent system, as the question of wages can be dismissed with the argument that the apparent wages are not the real wages—which are something much higher. But the difficulty is to build a cottage for which the labourer can afford the true rent, and the owner of which can get proper interest on his capital expenditure. If that difficulty could be met the whole problem would be quickly solved. Mr. St. Loe Strachey before the war was aiming at building cottages at the almost incredibly low cost of £100. That, or even approximately that price, would finally remove cottages from the catalogue of rural difficulties.

Mr. Rowland Prothero and others have pointed out

that there would be no appreciable shortage of houses if men employed by the State and by local authorities, railway men, and so forth, were housed by their employers instead of occupying houses originally intended for agricultural labourers.¹ But here the conditions must be considered as they are, not as they ought to be.

Agricultural labourers, or at all events those who speak for them, believe that they endure a hardship in the fact that many rural cottages are "tied"—that is to say, are rented or bought by a farmer together with the other farm buildings. The farmer has an unfair hold, it is said, upon a labourer, since by dismissing him he also deprives him of his home. Certainly in a perfect world this could not happen. At the same time men can easily talk themselves into a kind of hypnotic state in which a sinister suggestion has the value of reality. After all, a man does not cease to be free because a particular job has a particular cottage attached to it. A coachman, a groom, a chauffeur, or a gardener puts up with a tied house without a thought that things could be managed otherwise—as indeed they could not be. Many cottages are built very near farms expressly for the service of those farms. If a man occupies such a farm cottage though he is not working for the farm, he may be a free man, but he is putting somebody else to outrageous inconvenience. Let us clear our minds of cant in this as in other matters. The Prime Minister, the Speaker, and the Archbishop of Canterbury all live in tied houses.

A minimum wage would unquestionably bring the

¹ *Facts about Land* (John Murray), p. 47.

day much nearer when agricultural labourers could pay an economic rent, for the wages could be fixed without regarding the rent of the cottage as part of the wage. But the need for the smallest possible expenditure on building will always remain. It will be perfectly useless to raise a man's wages, and then rent him off the face of the land altogether.

The by-laws are commonly criticised as an obstacle to rural building, and often their obstructiveness is justly criticised. But there is this to be said for them, that they do give an intending occupant a guarantee that a new cottage is not jerry-built. This point is generally overlooked. Yet when a husband and wife who have lived in a town, or who have knowledge of what decent conditions of housing are anywhere, contemplate moving on to the land, one of the first questions they ask is, whether the house they have in view is fit for the class to which they belong. The by-laws give them the kind of warranty they want. Such people may think beautiful things are ugly, and ugly things beautiful, but their pride or their prejudices must be as far as possible consulted. If the wife is too proud to have a cooking stove in a combined parlour and kitchen, by all means let her have one of those ingenious devices which can be either a kitchen range or a drawing-room fire as you please. But it is important that all the manifold inventions which make the latest model of country cottages a place of delight should be fool-proof. Mechanism which yields its secret only to the careful and the cunning is bound to break down in a very short time.

It is not proposed to say anything here about the

various schemes for building new cottages.¹ The intention of what has just been written is only to insist upon the importance of giving its full value to the housing question in any consideration of rural discontent. It would scarcely be possible to overstate the retarding effect upon rural progress of the inadequate supply of cottages. Capable and hardworking labourers are often condemned to live in cramped, leaky, and rickety hovels, which seem designed to forbid a man's family to maintain, or even to conceive, a respect for themselves. The labour of a man who lives under such conditions can never rise to its full efficiency.

VI

AGRICULTURE A SKILLED TRADE

MR. A. D. HALL has said that the wages of agricultural labourers have been permanently lower than in any industry employing comparatively skilled labour. "Comparatively" understates the case. Factory work, being highly organised, has become a kind of aristocracy of labour, and there is now a great deal of work exalted to the title of "skilled" which requires no more intelligence than is needed to turn a handle or pull a lever. Association with machinery confers the title. There is no need to quarrel with this; it is one of the conquests of Labour. It is mentioned here only to point out that by comparison much work of the agricultural labourer, which by a stupid or ignorant convention has come to be regarded as fit only for human clods, is not merely skilled, but highly skilled. Hedging, ditching,

¹ *Vide* "Housing" in the Addenda to the Minority Report, p. 157.

stack-making, thatching, ploughing, shepherd's work, horseman's work, dairy work, all require long practice for perfection, and those who know rural England well may have been tempted to discover in the arts of the agricultural labourer something of an hereditary instinct—so surprising are the results of the rule-of-thumb yet accurate craft which has been handed down from generation to generation. A man's life-work must be skilled work more surely than the labour which is learned in a short apprenticeship.

Here is a tribute to the agricultural labourer by one who has watched and understood :

“ As season succeeds season, one avocation is laid aside for another, and whether it is hoeing gingerly between rows of green springing corn, pulling and clamping roots for winter store, felling timber, bush-harrowing pastures or spreading manure, he is expected to be a past master in each art. Only the shepherd, the stockman, the carpenter, and thatcher are specialists in their own particular line, and often the ordinary labourer may be called to take his turn at one or other of these avocations of the superior workman. I never watch the building of a barley rick (tied corn is easier), or even the topping-up of a loaded waggon of hay, without marvelling at the precision of form attained by these simple rustics, ignorant of the very alphabet of Euclid. I cannot see them laying open a field for draining, cutting the ditches, adjusting the pipes to the fall of the surface, and covering them with a loose layer of bushes, without pondering upon their absolute innocence of all the laws of hydrostatics. And when it comes to striking furrows across a newly ploughed ten-acre bit, I am fairly lost in amazement at the unerring eye and mathematical precision of aim which steer the

huge unwieldy cart-horses down the diagonal line from point to point. It is this manifold direction of effort, this many-sidedness of his calling, solitary with nature and under the wide skies, that rouses all the dormant possibilities in his slow nature, and makes the really observant farm labourer the most interesting creature of the peasant class to talk to in his own age.”¹

The wages of agricultural labourers in many districts are purely arbitrary. Such-and-such wages are paid for no better reason than that they were paid last year or the year before. Each farmer would think it a kind of treachery to his neighbours to pay more. If one chooses to pay more—chooses to relate wages to profits—he does so almost on the sly, and knowing that he exposes himself to attack. Some budding economist among such farmers may have guessed that low wages produce on the average poor labour, but if so he keeps the revelation to himself. Naturally there are exceptions. Large farms worked on industrial principles pay good wages. And small farmers who have moved from one county to another have often been heard to say that they would rather pay the high wages of the county where the labour was good than the low wages where the labour is bad. Thus they show the beginnings of enlightenment.

But on the whole it is true that the wages of agricultural labourers are quite disproportionate to the value of their services. The intelligent farmers who give their men a direct interest in their work by a profit-sharing scheme, or a system of bonuses according to results, are few. Is it to be expected that men who

¹ Charlotte Fall Smith in *The Land Magazine*, 1898,

are looking for a fresh occupation after the war will enter an industry which pays such wages as are usual in agriculture? Those wages are enough to chill even the strongest disposition towards a country life. The discharged soldiers and sailors who have vastly enlarged their experiences during the war, and whose families have received generous allowances, will not look at such wages. No one can blame them. Let us be sure of this, that if the wages are not raised, agriculture will not be reformed.

The unhappy truth is that in many parts of the country a man who is performing what has just been described as skilled labour not only does not get the natural recompense of skilled labour, but does not even get a living wage. Those who agree with the Minority Report do not ask for what is unreasonable and impossible. They are content to leave the wages of skilled labour to the future. All they want to do now is to make good the claim of every able-bodied and industrious man working on the land to a *decent living* wage—such a wage as will attract the soldiers. Nothing seems more certain, if this be withheld at the critical time of demobilisation, than that there will be a serious shortage of agricultural labour. Then, instead of more food being produced on British soil, less than ever will be produced, because more land will be laid down in grass in order to save labour, and the rural population will shrink correspondingly. As will be shown later, there is a strong probability of a considerable shortage of agricultural labour as it is through losses in the war. It will be a disaster if no measures are taken to make this shortage good; and it will be a

source of perpetual national danger if we do not go much further and increase the rural population far beyond the old level.

While the deadness of village life is rightly spoken of as a comprehensive reason for the flight to the towns, it should also be remembered that men will put up with much for good wages. In thousands they leave the deadness of the English village behind in order to endure the more intense deadness of a Canadian prairie, or an up-country sheep station in Australia, where they are paid "good money," and have the ultimate hope of independence.

VII

FARMING AN INDUSTRY

AGRICULTURE could certainly afford to pay a living wage in an average year. The wealth is in the soil. It has but to be extracted by scientific and careful tillage. But in our underfarmed country where the land does not produce food to half the extent of its capacity, the farmer takes fewer risks than are taken in all other industries. Those farmers who have industrialised their farms—who manage them on the strictest business lines, as though agriculture were comparable, as indeed it is, with any other money-making concern—have prospered.

It must be admitted, however, that a very systematic industrialisation is necessary to hold out against a run of bad weather and low prices. Farmers who have the capital to carry on serenely through good and bad times alike may survive with something in hand.

But if wheat remained constantly at, say, the 1913 price, even the best farmers could not afford to pay the wages which are required to attract soldiers to the land.¹ Agriculture must be given stability of prices—not a guarantee of high prices, but protection against unprofitably low prices.

As for the ordinary farmer, he does not think of agriculture as an industry in the conventional sense of the word at all. He keeps no accounts; he has never penetrated the mysteries of a ledger; he conceives typewriters and telephones to be remote inventions possibly convenient to “black-coated” people, but of no use to him. As he sees farming it is not a business in which money may be made, but a means of providing a living for himself and his family—that and no more. It is an amiable view, admirable in its unworldliness, but it is not business. If the farmer has “something over” at the end of the year he has had a good year; in all other years it is lawful to grumble, though, to be sure, he has kept himself and his family.

It is all of a piece with this temper that the farmer should bring more and more land down to grass instead of increasing the fundamental food of the people. As things are, it would be ridiculous to blame him. He

¹ The varying prices of British wheat may be seen in the following table:

Year.	Price per quarter.		Year.	Price per quarter.	
	s.	d.		s.	d.
1851 . . .	38	6	1905 . . .	29	8
1861 . . .	55	4	1910 . . .	31	8
1871 . . .	56	8	1911 . . .	31	8
1881 . . .	45	4	1912 . . .	34	9
1891 . . .	37	0	1913 . . .	31	8
1901 . . .	26	9	1914 . . .	34	11

has his own interests to consider like any other man. He must not be grudged his caution. Undoubtedly he takes fewer risks in extending his area of grass instead of producing cereals. The memory, either derived or personal, of the disastrous years of British arable farming when the small men, who had not enough capital to hold on through the cycle of bad harvests which coincided with low prices, went under and were ruined, is still bitter within him.

Misgiving is never wholly absent from the mind of the wheat-grower.

Round the husbandman's head, while he traces the furrow,
The mists of the winter may mingle with rain,
He may plough it with labour, and sow it in sorrow,
And sigh while he fears he has sow'd it in vain.

Even if the farmer were prepared to stake his capital on arable farming, he has not enough capital to stake. Farming in England is notoriously under-capitalised, and in no other country is capital for agricultural purposes so difficult to find. In grazing the farmer does not tempt fortune. He sees his prospects clearly ; bad weather at a critical moment will not transform his profit into a loss. He will not make a fortune, but he can do very well on grass farming and therefore he is content with it. Indeed he believes that on an average of years he can make more money out of grazing than by growing cereals.

But, most unfortunately, the *farmer's interest is not the interest of the nation*. The two interests must be reconciled. And here comes in the need of resorting to what the Free Trader, arguing on first principles, would call an "artificial" expedient. The incentive

of the nation to place itself in security is quite strong enough, as has been said, to induce the people contentedly to put up with a rather higher price for their food—on the assumption that that would be the result of artificially helping the farmer. But the incentive is not strong enough to induce farmers who have deliberately chosen grass-farming in preference to arable-farming, or have increased the proportion of grass in mixed farms, to change their practice at what they think is a considerable financial risk. While they are all for national safety, they do not see why their industry should be expected voluntarily to sacrifice itself in the interests of everybody else. Clearly that is a very reasonable objection.

As things are, we witness a supreme irony. Agriculture, failing progressively to keep the national food supply near the point of safety, is said to be more prosperous than it was. Plainly there is only one cure: the farmer must be encouraged to plough much more land, and in order that he may think it worth while to do so he must be given confidence. Stability of the price of wheat is his first need. He must feel that the State is behind him and will by no means let him perish if he honestly does his duty to the country.

VIII

THE PRODUCTIVENESS OF THE SOIL

THE intense productiveness of the soil is a modern discovery. By a scientific use of agricultural chemistry the land can be made to grow crops, various and

abundant, beyond the imagination of our ancestors. The land will give you back more than you put into it. The falsest economy, for all but the knave who wants to milk the land and pass it on to an unfortunate successor in a few years, is to save money on the fertilisers which the land needs. In countries where intensive farming is carried to its highest refinement the amount spent on manures would turn the hair of an old-fashioned English farmer grey. Yet Frenchmen, Belgians, Danes, and Dutchmen are by disposition thriftier than Englishmen; they do not part with their money except for very good reasons.

Although agricultural chemistry has made a wonderful advance it has yet much to discover. The bacteriology of the soil is still but a partly explored field. The trouble in England is that farmers so far have not made anything like a full use of science as applied to their industry. The scientific farmer will have his soil analysed, and will apply manures to make good the lacking chemical ingredients very much as a sick man has a prescription written for him by a doctor. But this is not the way of the more backward farmers. They are rather like the people who buy quack medicines from hearsay or alluring advertisements. They find that a neighbour has grown a fine crop on one of his fields, and, discovering what fertiliser has been used, they say that they will try "some of that." Just so Mr. Smith says that he will try some of that concoction that did a power of good to Mr. Jones—who suffered from a wholly different complaint. What happens to be right for one field may happen to be quite wrong, even deleterious, in another. Yet on no better evidence

than their own stupidity, bad farmers have been known to abandon certain excellent chemical manures as an imposture.

It is generally believed that land is farmed more intensively on small holdings than on large farms. But the difficulty with small holdings is that the man of very little capital is unable to buy his materials cheaply, because he does not buy them in large enough quantities. The obvious remedy for his predicament is co-operation, by which men club together to buy their fertilisers and seeds in bulk, to market their products, and, so to speak, to pool their more expensive agricultural implements. But unfortunately mutual suspicion, imperfect loyalty, and want of understanding have impeded the growth of co-operation in England. Its spread, however, has been noticeable in the last few years, largely owing to the work of the Agricultural Organisation Society. Danish, Dutch, and Belgian agriculture is a triumph for co-operation.

To an appreciable degree the failure of farmers to make their land produce what it could is to be attributed to the amiable habits of those whom tenants gratefully call "good landlords." The typical landowner desires to live in friendly relations with his tenant farmers. Their good opinion is an essential part of the amenities of his property. He turns a blind eye to inefficient farming, and is more likely to reduce the rent of his tenants when they are in difficulties than to tell them bluntly that they are not doing their duty by the land.

Visitors from countries where every pole of ground is cultivated, owing to the pressure of the population,

look with amazed covetousness on the great tracts of English land which are let for insignificant rents, and where careful tillage would produce remunerative crops. Well may they look! In Holland men remove vast sand-dunes in order to create farms for bulb growing. They reshape fields and restrict the courses of waterways in order to gain "painful inches" for fresh cultivation. If England were Holland, as Sir H. Rider Haggard has pointed out, the Thames estuary would run in a confined channel, and the flats and saltings on either side would be reclaimed for the plough.

The wastefulness of the English farmer in our backward counties is a sort of indirect testimony to the productiveness of the land. Only in a country where crops are produced easily, and land is cheap, could our casual methods bring a man a tolerable living. Liquid manure is allowed to run to waste, though it is not a difficult or expensive matter to collect it in a tank. Hedges are allowed to grow till they keep in habitual dampness a broad margin round cornfields. A French visitor would notice that no English small farmer has thought it worth while to grow fruit in his hedges, though in France many of the small cultivators make an appreciable profit every year by this plan, which requires more forethought than labour.

Unhappily, English landowners, for all their characteristic generosity, do not set a good example to the farmer. They have not as a class regarded land-owning as a *profession* which requires serious training and high technical knowledge. In days when it

was certain that we could import all the food we needed, and thus also enjoy the advantage of buying it in the cheapest market, it may have seemed a piece of political rhetoric to speak of the land as a monopoly, particularly when the word was in the mouth of a Free Trader. But the war, once again, has "changed everything." We now see that we must produce much more of the essential food of the people and stop the rot of the country-side population or we shall occupy a position of extreme national danger. In this view of things the land is a monopoly, inasmuch as nothing but the land can produce the wheat, and if those who occupy the land do not do their duty they are excluding those who might do it in their place.

It is often said that our farming must be in good case since we produce a higher yield per acre of certain crops than any other country. But obviously the true test is the total amount of food produced for the people. British agriculture may be defended at numerous points; we may well speak with pride of our pedigree stock which is the envy of other countries, and is called in to improve the strain of stock all over the world; we may well say that we understand sheep-farming as perhaps no other European country understands it; we may say that in recent years we have done more and better dairying and have increased our head of stock; but these facts avail us little if the sum of food supplied to the people is very much less than it ought to be.

In his very important Memorandum on *The Recent Development of German Agriculture* written for the

Board of Agriculture, Mr. T. H. Middleton gives the following table :

On each hundred acres of cultivated land :

- (1) The British farmer feeds from 45 to 50 persons, the German farmer feeds from 70 to 75 persons.
- (2) The British farmer grows 15 tons of corn, the German farmer grows 33 tons.
- (3) The British farmer grows 11 tons of potatoes, the German farmer grows 55 tons.
- (4) The British farmer produces 4 tons of meat, the German farmer produces $4\frac{1}{4}$ tons.
- (5) The British farmer produces $17\frac{1}{2}$ tons of milk, the German farmer produces 28 tons.
- (6) The British farmer produces a negligible quantity of sugar, the German farmer produces $2\frac{3}{4}$ tons.

The cultivation of sugar in Germany deserves a few words of special comment. British agriculture should similarly develop on a grand scale the sugar-beet industry.

The anxieties and distractions caused during the war by the maintenance of our sugar supply are sufficient indication of the strength we should acquire as a nation if we produced a considerable proportion of our sugar at home. Our soil and climate are quite as suitable as those of Germany for growing sugar-beet. But the industry has never been encouraged, and without State help and encouragement it is not likely to succeed. Few men will risk their money in a new industry which requires the building of expensive

refineries if there is any chance of its being edged out of existence as a superfluity and almost as a nuisance. While the German farmers produce $2\frac{3}{4}$ tons of sugar on every hundred acres, British farmers produce hardly any.

No doubt the creation of a sugar industry will require a great deal of organisation. But agriculture stands to gain enormously by the dovetailing of its seasons into those of various subsidiary industries of which sugar refining is only one. In Germany the employment of part-time agricultural labourers is a much less precarious business than here, both for employer and employed, because the part-timer is always ready for his job, and the job (sometimes in one industry, sometimes in another) is always ready for the part-timer. The arrangement of part-time labour is comparatively easy where all the direct and indirect branches of agriculture are regulated as an organic whole; it is impossible where subsidiary industries—so far as subsidiary industries can be said to exist in Great Britain—fluctuate under absolute freedom of exchange, booming for some years when the markets are favourable, and languishing in other years when the markets are against them. Sugar is such an important element in the food of the people that it is not too much to say that the cultivation of sugar-beet might become a feature of our agriculture, rivalling, if not exceeding, in importance the cultivation of wheat.¹

¹ In 1913 the wheat we grew was worth £10,240,000, or with its straw about £14,500,000; but we imported £16,000,000 worth of beet sugar, either refined or as molasses.

It has already been said that the German soil is less naturally fertile than ours. On this subject Mr. Middleton writes :

“ There is much very poor land in Germany. Only one-fifth of the soil of Prussia, for example, can be classed as good ; two-fifths consists of indifferent loams ; and two-fifths is very poor. The climate of Germany may, on the whole, be better adapted for the ripening and ingathering of corn than the British climate ; but it is certainly not so well suited for the growing of large crops of grain, potatoes, roots, and hay as our own.”

Naturally German farming employs much more labour than is employed here. Mr. Middleton finds that while on every hundred acres English agriculture employs (male and female) 5·8 persons, German agriculture provides whole or part time employment for 18·3.

In Denmark, before the war, to take another example, it was almost the same story. While the average gross value of the products of the land in England and Wales was only £4 per acre, the average in Denmark—a country of small holdings and intensive farming—was £8.

In England and Wales only about 40 per cent. of the cultivated land is arable.¹ In France in 1910 nearly 65 per cent. was arable ; in Denmark in 1912 as much as 89·4 per cent. was arable. Even in Holland, afflicted with an excess of polders and wet land,

¹ Out of 27,000,000 acres of cultivated land 16,000,000 acres are grass and 11,000,000 acres arable (Cd. 7325, *Agricultural Statistics for 1913*, Part I., p. 28).

40 per cent. is arable. As for Germany, Mr. Middleton points out that while every hundred acres of English farm land has 69 acres under grass and clover, the German farm of 100 acres has only 32.

IX

THE EXAMPLE OF GERMANY

THESE are astounding contrasts. How are they to be explained? No doubt easy means of borrowing capital, the development of co-operation, and high agricultural education, are at the back of all such successes abroad, but in Germany there was a special reason for the rapid and wonderful development of agriculture. The transformation has taken place in twenty years. At the end of last century a group of economists began to preach the doctrine that German rural life, with all that it stands for in physical well-being, would be engulfed by the gigantic industrialisation of the country if care were not taken to treat agriculture as a thing apart, peculiarly worth preservation for its own sake.

Herr Wagner forced his ideas on the German people. The idea that Germany must "keep under the protection of her guns the ground upon which her corn grows and her cattle graze" became popular. And one can imagine the enthusiasm with which the leaders of the war-party pounced upon a doctrine which conformed so well with their aims, and adopted it and preached it as their own. Those who were in principle Free Traders—that is to say the majority of the economists, and of the German people themselves, up

to 1880—came round within a few years. There was no desire to help the Agrarian party, but for reasons of national policy and health the people were converted to the opinion that agriculture must be saved. Having come to that determination they approved the policy which culminated in the high tariff of 1902, and have never since looked back. They felt that intensive farming was necessary for the Fatherland to become self-supporting in its food supply, and believed that the farmers would not risk their money without real security.

From that time the position of the German farmer has been established. His credit is excellent because he is an important element in the German system. He can go ahead without a shadow of anxiety that he will be the victim of chance or of political caprice. As Mr. Middleton says :

“The main value of the tariff policy to German agriculture was the sense of security which it created in the farmer. It was the conviction that he was essential to the community, and that the community would not permit his land to go out of cultivation, rather than the prospect of receiving an extra two marks per 100 kilos for his wheat after the year 1906 that stirred the German agriculturist of the new century to make an effort : and, it may be added, it was the knowledge that his grain was not wanted and that his fellow countrymen did not depend upon his exertions that led the British farmer, at this same period, to cut down expenses and reduce, or at least fail to increase, the productivity of his land.”

The British farmer, as has been said, is still haunted by the fear of a cycle of bad seasons coinciding with

low prices. In the old days he used to be compensated to some extent for a poor harvest by high prices, but the development of the foreign wheat supply gradually deprived him of that compensation. Bad weather ruins his crops and low prices ruin his pocket at the same time. Between the two his heart is broken. It cannot be repeated too often that unless the farmer is assured that there will be a reasonable stability of prices he will not become mainly an arable farmer. He will remain rather a stock-raiser on grass; and small blame to him. The policy of "speed the plough" is possible only on definite conditions.

It is a mistake to suppose that if the land which has ceased to be arable since 1872—the year when arable farming in England touched its highest point—were reploughed, there would be a set-back to the success of English cattle-raising. The products of arable land can be fed to cattle all the year round with an advantage which has scarcely been suspected by most people in England. A "dairy farm" in the English language has come to mean a grass farm. But an arable farm will support more beasts, and though beasts are naturally associated with meadows, it would be well that magic should cease to be found in the very word "grass," when it means, as it too often does, a large proportion of couch grass or rank and noxious weeds. Rich and old pasture is one thing; the inferior grass lands are quite another. Of course very bad grass land—the land which is *infimus*—may not be worth cropping with corn at first, but the middling or "inferior" grass lands should and must be tilled.

Germany has proved to us the immense value of her "policy of the plough." If she had not introduced it twenty years ago she would long since have been a beaten country in this war.

X

HE WHO WILLS THE END WILLS THE MEANS

IN the Majority Report (Part II) on the employment of sailors and soldiers on the land various recommendations are made which are excellent in themselves. It is quite possible that if time were no consideration the reforms proposed would transform agriculture. We all desire that there should be more amenities in village life—clubs, libraries, places of entertainment for groups of villages—much better cottages, easier means of borrowing capital, better methods of transport, and more scientific agricultural education. But the vital question for us at the moment, after all, is whether the agricultural labourer has got to wait for the slow processes of time to bring him all the conditions and the better wages which would place his industry on the level of other skilled trades. The signatories of the Majority Report say in effect that nothing can be done till after the war. The Minority say that something must be done *now* or the golden opportunity will be lost. It is not only the farmer who wants confidence. It is just as necessary to inspire the working-man with confidence that agriculture is a good enough occupation for him to adopt.

This is the essential point. We cannot afford to wait. Our problem is unlike that which Germany

faced twenty years ago. It is also entirely unlike that of Free Trade Denmark, since Denmark has never had to keep a difficult balance between industrial and rural life. Rural life is her one life. In Denmark there is no exodus from the country to the towns because there are no great manufacturing industries to draw the people away. When our Army is demobilised, men returning to civil life will make up their minds within a month what they mean to do for a living. The Minority Report estimates that from 5 to 10 per cent. of those who are serving under arms will be disposed for the open life of the land after the war. That means from a quarter to half a million of men. The return obtained by Sir Douglas Haig from 97,000 men at the front showed that of these 17,000 wanted a life on the land either here or in the Dominions. The figures varied in different units; in two mainly urban battalions 5 per cent., and in two battalions mainly composed of miners, 9 per cent. wanted it; of a Suffolk battalion 46 per cent. wanted it. But it must be expected, quite apart from these striking indications, that many men who return to their old jobs in stuffy offices or in mines will soon find them intolerable, and that others will find that their old jobs are no longer open to them. While the fighting men have been away trades have been reorganised, and even the full restoration of Trade Union customs cannot obliterate all that has happened. It would not be surprising if quite 10 per cent. of the discharged men turned their thoughts to the land.

But what land? Why should they stay on British

soil under the old conditions if they have learned of the much better prospects open to any steady man in the Dominions ?

If the land of Great Britain holds out to them a prospect that an intelligent, reasonably ambitious, and self-respecting man can accept, the battle of agriculture will be more than half won. If the prospect is just what it is now the men will go elsewhere.

The Departmental Committee estimated that there will be a shortage of 80,000 agricultural labourers after the war, even if all those agricultural labourers in the Army who are not killed or disabled return to their old occupation. But in truth the shortage will be greater, for, if nothing is done, many of those who have tasted a better life will absolutely refuse to put up with the old wages, the old dullness, and the old cottages. Nor is that all, since it is necessary, as we have seen, not merely to meet the shortage, but to provide for a great expansion of agriculture. Nothing less than a guarantee of an adequate wage is likely to work the magical change required. To fail to draw a great number of new workers to the land is to fail to keep our country safe. He who wills the end wills the means. We must look at the problem from an angle wholly different from that of the reformers of Germany or of any other country. Our first need is to attract the men to the land, and to attract them directly the war is over. A minimum wage is therefore the starting-point of reform.

Of course there are difficulties. These need not be underrated, but if we allow them to frighten us we shall show that we do not know how to recognise and

seize an occasion. If we do not take this opportunity, and the farmers continue to consult their own interests, as they will be quite justified in doing as cautious men, more and more land will go down to grass; the rural population will become scantier still, and ultimately the State will be forced to step in and take over the business of food production in order that the nation may be secure.

But if there is one thing more than another that a farmer dislikes, it is being controlled or interfered with by officials. To him the inquisitions of the sanitary inspector, or of any official of the local authority, are the last word in impertinence. The farmer would do well therefore to recognise that all the conditions have changed, and that he had better put up with a small amount of intervention lest worse befall him. On this subject the mind of the public is forming itself rapidly. Even if the public did not perceive that the safety of the nation requires a definite agricultural policy, they would insist that the discharged soldiers and sailors who wish to go on the land should be treated in their wages and their housing as such men deserve to be treated. Nothing can be too good for them, and whatever is likely to be done will fall short of the compensations and rewards which are their due. But you cannot have one wage for old soldiers and sailors and another for civilians. The absurdity of such an idea is instantly apparent.

These considerations are commended to those who are disposed on economic principles to hold out against a minimum wage. Their principle may be perfectly sound in itself, but as Sir Robert Giffen used to say,

“What may be economically unsound may be politically expedient.”

The answer to the bogy of “controversial legislation” which alarms the authors of the Majority Report is that the necessary measures would not be so much controversial legislation as “emergency” legislation. The word is wisely chosen by the Minority. We all know that in Parliament this word clears the line for legislation to be rushed through on the understanding that ordinary preconceptions must be set aside when military necessity dictates. Cannot we truly say the same thing for this proposal of a minimum wage in agriculture?

The familiar objections to a minimum wage need not be met here. They are discussed ably and candidly in the Minority Report. The reader is specially referred to that part of the Report.

The objection raised in particular by farmers that agricultural labourers, having been made the special beneficiaries of the politicians, would learn the delights of political agitation and would hold up the harvest to enforce their will, is more “sensational” than well-founded. A harvest strike would not be spread all over the country if the recommendation of the Minority Report were accepted that the minimum wage should not be a national wage, but should be fixed by District Wages Boards. The reasons for this recommendation are interesting and should also be read carefully. Experience has shown that the effect of Wages Boards is to prevent strikes.

Give the labourers—and it is within the power of the nation to give these things—an adequate wage,

decent cottages, a cheerier life, and such a ladder to climb by as is provided in the scheme of colonies of small holdings for soldiers and sailors, and there will almost certainly be no shortage of labour for the land.

XI

THE COROLLARY OF THE MINIMUM WAGE

THE farmer will say, of course (and as things are he might be justified), that he cannot afford to pay the minimum wage. Minimum-wage legislation alone, so far from creating confidence in the farmer, which should be one of our chief aims, would cause him to redouble his caution. He would want to employ as few men as possible, and therefore to put more land than ever down to grass. It is necessary to convince him that he will be able to increase his area of arable and yet pay the wages. Wages are only one side of the question, though in the peculiar circumstances, as we have seen, they must be placed first. Prices are the other factor of the equation. The simplest plan seems to be that the farmer should be promised a minimum price for his wheat. It need not be a high price, but it must be high enough to make arable farming worth while year after year without a check.

As has been indicated, there are farmers in England who work large farms with abundant capital, who buy their materials cheaply, who can market their produce at the right moment, who run agriculture as an industry in the conventional sense of that word, who plough much land at considerable profit to themselves, and who are already able and glad to pay good wages and

to house their labourers well. Such men may be inclined to regard a State policy for agriculture as "all nonsense," as indeed from their personal standpoint it is. They have proved for themselves the wealth of the soil and are willing to stake everything on it. They see others put their money into joint-stock farms abroad that grow rubber and tea ; for themselves the soil of England is good enough. But the mass of British farmers are not of this kind. They farm comparatively small areas of land with insufficient capital and a narrow margin of profit. These are the men who count. If they are not guaranteed a stable market the situation from the point of view of national security will be lost.

But there is less need to argue this point than that of the minimum wage, for it is conceded in advance. The members of the Departmental Committee, though they represented all branches of political opinion, unanimously agreed that security for the farmer has become necessary if more food is to be produced and more men are to be employed. The Majority declared that the discussion of the best sort of security lay outside their terms of reference, but they suggested that the security should be given by (1) a minimum price for wheat, or (2) a bonus on the ploughing of permanent grass, or (3) a tariff.¹ If anyone had economic scruples he cast them away. Necessity conquered all. Truly the war has changed everything.

It will be seen, then, that it is no longer a question when any measure of State intervention is suggested, of satisfying economic tradition for its own sake. All men have ceased to do that. It is only a question of

¹ *Majority Report*, para. 181. .

what measures are politically most expedient ; and it has been shown that the Minority Report argues with great force that the minimum wage is the beginning of everything. The security for the farmer is its corollary.

The Minority recommend for the security of the farmer a minimum price for wheat based on 40s. to 42s. a quarter for ten years. They further suggest a bonus of £2 for every acre of grass brought under the plough, the payment to be spread over four years, and the payment of the later instalments to depend on the proper cultivation of the land. As for a tariff, the Minority do not definitely propose that, but they very rightly assert the claims of agriculture to its full share of consideration if a system of general protection of home products by import duties should be introduced. They point out that no one of these three methods—a minimum price for wheat, a bonus on fresh arable, and a Protective tariff—excludes the other two. Each is indeed complementary to the other two, and all three could be combined.

If we may judge from the evidence available in other countries, better cultivation of the soil under the policy proposed would soon cause all misgivings to disappear. In France, where a certain price for wheat is guaranteed,¹ £100,000,000 worth of wheat is produced annually within the country, as compared with the £12,000,000 worth produced here. The French people have not suffered ; they consume 486 pounds of wheat per head annually as compared with 358 in Great Britain.² Whatever be done or omitted, the days of low prices

¹ The import duty on wheat in France is 7 fr. per 100 kilogs.

² *Our Food Supply*, by Christopher Turnor, p. 142.

for wheat are probably over. The standard of living, and consequently the power of consumption, has risen rapidly all over the world.

It is far from being an improbable outcome of the proposed legislation that the obligation on the farmer to pay a certain wage would of itself cause him to discover the real productiveness of the soil. It has been said that the best top-dressing for a field is a good stiff rent, and though the maxim may easily be abused it embodies a profound moral truth. On the same principle a great deal of intellectual harm has been done to the average farmer in the past by his escape from Income Tax. If he had been compelled to pay the tax he would also have been compelled, greatly to his profit, to keep accurate accounts.

Whether we could become a self-supporting community by a great agricultural development may be a doubtful point. Some think that virtually we could. Mr. A. D. Hall is more cautious. But it is at all events certain that we could rise above the danger point. Every advance in the direction of self-support is an advance towards national security. Mr. Hall's examination of a programme which he believes to be practicable is particularly well worth reading.¹ He estimates that an extra 10,000,000 acres could be ploughed at an annual cost in bounties of £5,000,000. That is to say, for an annual sum equal to the cost of building and maintaining two battleships we should secure our food supply. In war the saving would be great, and even in peace a large proportion of the created wealth would probably find its way back to the State.

¹ *Agriculture after the War*, pp. 121 et seq.

The farmer need not be alarmed. Good wages create good labour. The higher agricultural wages of the northern counties are to-day justified by the efficiency of the labour.

The language of the Minority makes it plain that in their belief if the redemption of British agriculture is not accomplished by some such means as they propose, intervention by the State on a far larger scale lies beyond. The implied warning should be enough. No farmer wants the Draconian laws of Louis XIV under which in Canada men were imprisoned for not cutting their thistles in July.

Other recommendations, all of considerable importance, are made in the Minority Report, but these should be studied in their proper place. The purpose of the foregoing reflections has been not to follow the Report in detail, or tiresomely to cover the same ground, but to support and comment upon its principal theme.

XII

AN ILLUSTRATION

WHILE the war spirit is upon us we may get things done which would be stopped dead by the rancour or flippancy of partisanship in times of peace. An excellent instance is the Summer Time Act. The supporters of this measure had almost given up hope, when the war rescued it, and it was rapidly passed as an economical device—as “emergency” legislation. It had been so easy in time of peace to say that the scheme was controversial; that the whole thing was

a vast make-believe ; that it would be an humiliation to deceive ourselves by Act of Parliament ; and that self-respecting men could not possibly pass a law to assert that a thing was what it was not, when all that was necessary was to have the strength of mind to change our hours of work in the summer. All this criticism was true in itself, yet it left out of account the simple fact that the British people are tenacious of their customs and simply will not change them even though the reward be great. The reward offered by the Summer Time scheme was certainly great—a saving to everyone in the expense of lighting, and long, healthy, happy evenings which would arrive in the spring instead of as before in the summer. Well, the “artificial” Act was passed. It saved people the agony of reforming themselves and was, of course, a great success. We shall never go back upon it.

Under a similar impetus the agricultural policy of the Minority Report as to the most urgent points of a minimum wage and security for the farmer could be passed in a few days, or at all events weeks, if the Government would declare that a transformation of our farming is necessary for our safety. The frame must be ready for the picture to be thrust into it when the war is over.

A critical moment in our history comes nearer. If we hesitate, the demobilised armies will melt away somewhere, certainly not to the land, and agriculture will never again have such an opportunity of redemption. We must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures.

PART II
SETTLEMENT ON THE LAND

PART II

SETTLEMENT ON THE LAND

I

THE WORK OF THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE

It is desirable to say something here of the work of the Departmental Committee which led up to the issue of the Minority Report. The "settlement" of discharged sailors and soldiers on the land was the subject of Part I of the Committee's Final Report, and the subject of Part II was "employment." Part I was a unanimous Report ; Part II contained Majority and Minority Reports. Employment is by far the larger question, and, as we have seen, the Minority discovered that it could not be properly considered apart from a great national policy for agriculture.

The Committee was appointed in July 1915, and consisted of Sir Harry Verney (Chairman), Lord Northbrook, Mr. Henry Hobhouse, General Crutchley, Mr. Vaughan Nash, Mr. Sydney Mager, Mr. F. H. Padwick, Mr. G. H. Roberts, Mr. Leslie Scott, and Mr. F. L. C. Floud (Secretary). Its reference was "to consider what steps can be taken to promote the settlement and employment on the land in England and Wales of sailors and soldiers, whether disabled or other-

wise." An Interim Report was presented in September 1915 (but was not published) recommending a free course of training at an agricultural college for fifty disabled sailors or soldiers. Part I of the Final Report, dealing with "settlement" (that is to say, with small holdings) was published in January 1916.

The witnesses examined by the Committee were of the first ability and had an intimate knowledge of their subject. The Committee, after hearing them, were convinced that it was desirable to promote a policy of closer land settlement. They came, in fact, to the same conclusion that was expressed by the Board of Agriculture in their Report on the Small Holdings Act of 1909, that "the establishment of small holdings involves the application of more capital and more labour to the land." That is the experience in every foreign country where intensive farming is practised. Such farming is mainly the creation of the small holder. Part I may now be summarised.

II

SMALL HOLDINGS SO FAR

WHEN the Committee inquired what had been done so far to create small holdings, they found that the united efforts of all the county councils in England and Wales had provided land directly for only about 15,000 applicants in seven years. They recommended, therefore, that the Board of Agriculture should provide land for ex-Service men who are prepared to become members of a colony of small holders, where

instruction, supervision, and a business organisation for buying and selling can be arranged. But they also recommended that the Small Holdings Act should be amended in order to enable men to acquire holdings who are not prepared to join one of the colonies, or who want accommodation holdings to be worked in conjunction with some other business.

The Committee were impressed by the almost complete lack of any business organisation among small holders. "It demonstrates," they say, "a degree of economic waste that would ruin any other industry." No wonder, then, that it is usual to talk of small holdings as "a failure." A man with a minute purchasing power, and with no means but what he can provide himself of marketing his produce, cannot possibly compete with the large farmer. He is beaten even before he begins. Yet because men have failed freely in isolated small holdings—too often on land quite unsuitable for their purpose—we are told that small holdings "never pay."

The Committee insisted on the importance of this matter of co-operation and the disposal of produce. They say :

"In the case of perishable products like fruit and vegetables, it is obvious that it is no use encouraging small holders to produce them unless they can be marketed at a profit. We do not consider it essential that a fruit and market-garden colony should be in close proximity to a large town, though efficient arrangements for access by rail or motor to good markets are obviously essential. What is needed is some organisation by which the produce of the colony

should be sent each day to whatever market offers the best price of the day, or that arrangements should be made with a large consumer, such as an industrial co-operative society, to take the whole of the produce of the colony at the market price of the day. For this purpose collective marketing is essential. Whether this collective marketing must necessarily be on a strictly co-operative basis is another matter. We are inclined to think that for the purposes of a colony such as we have in mind, it is impossible to hope that the true co-operative ideal can be attained from the very beginning. True co-operation depends on a willing association of its members, their perfect loyalty to one another, and the subordination of selfish interests to the good of the whole society. We are convinced that co-operation is to the interest of every individual member, but it can only result from careful education, it must have time for growth, and it cannot be forced or compelled. Whatever may be the case in regard to men who are accustomed to co-operative methods, we think that in the case of a colony of men who will at first be strangers to one another, and who will not possess practical knowledge of the problems of marketing, it will be better to begin by setting up under the control of the director an organisation which can collect their produce, dispose of it to the best advantage, and pay them the proceeds less expenses and a reasonable commission, without attempting in the first instance to place such an organisation on a strictly co-operative basis. We should hope, however, that as the small holders acquired experience, realised the advantages of collective dealing, and became educated in the principles of co-operation, they would become capable of taking over the control of the organisation and running it as a co-operative society."

Danish farming is a triumph for small holdings, but the victory has come through co-operation. We must have a real test, not a sham one, before we have a shadow of right to talk of failure in England. As a matter of fact, where small holders in England have congregated together on suitable soil, have chosen the right sort of farming and have improved their machinery of distribution, they are already prospering, as at Evesham and elsewhere.

III

A SYSTEM OF COLONIES

EXPERT agricultural advice for beginners was considered by the Committee to be as important as business organisation. Obviously neither the one nor the other can be provided except where the small holders are grouped together. A system of colonies is obviously the only one under which the State can manage small holdings, and that opinion has, of course, been acted on in the Government's scheme for providing three colonies in accordance with the Committee's minimum recommendation. Moreover, in colonies there will be a prospect of that social life for which soldiers and sailors have acquired a discriminating taste. It would be futile to turn a man with the social habit into an anchorite, and then tell him to reflect upon the joys of rural life.

A community of at least a hundred families, including those engaged in trades subsidiary to agriculture, was regarded as the best size for a colony. Subsidiary trades are an important point, as the

small holder supplies them with their materials, and some persons are convinced that small holders cannot succeed at all without the proximity of such trades. As for the size of the colonies, 1,000 acres was decided upon as the minimum for a fruit and market garden colony, and 2,000 acres for a dairy colony or a mixed farm colony.

IV

SMALL-HOLDING PRODUCE

FRUIT and market-garden crops are the simplest for those who have everything to learn. There are many holdings of five acres growing those crops on which a good living is already earned. Indeed, if a man farms intensively he cannot manage alone more than three acres. No doubt there is a limit to the profitable production of fruit and vegetables. Some say that certain market-garden crops are already being over-produced. But this is only another way of saying that the methods of distribution are very bad. In years when we hear that the fruit does not pay to pick there are millions of persons in towns who never have a chance of tasting it. The very word "glut" is a humiliation and a confession of failure. The limit of profitable production has certainly not been approached yet.

In many parts of the country small grass holdings are very successful. Milk being rapidly perishable is self-protected from foreign competition. Further, there is notoriously no over-production, but rather a shortage of milk. This type of holding could there-

fore be safely multiplied. Everyone has heard of the cottager, in daily view of browsing cows, who would gladly buy milk, but can get none because it all goes to the towns.

Another type of small holding which has already been worked with success, where the occupier has not foolishly copied the methods of large farmers, is the farm of thirty-five to fifty acres. Such a farm requires varied knowledge of young stock, fruit, vegetables, pigs and poultry, but it is a type well worth encouraging where the necessary knowledge exists. The Committee expressed the opinion that pigs and poultry keeping should be a part of all small holders' farming, but they could not advise anyone to try poultry-farming by itself.

V

OWNERSHIP OR TENANCY

THE remarks of the Committee on the controversy Ownership *versus* Tenancy are very interesting,¹ but the general conclusions, which are strongly in favour of tenancy, were naturally reached with a view to establishing the smaller kind of holdings in colonies. The chief points made by the Committee are that under ownership effective supervision of small holdings is impossible ; that tenancy permits of greater mobility ; that tenancy does not absorb capital and therefore leaves capital free for the proper equipment of the holding ; that since money must generally be borrowed for purchase there is no such hard-and-fast

¹ Part I, paras. 37-48.

distinction as is generally supposed between ownership and tenancy; and that most small holders do not want to buy.

It is not necessary to discuss a very large subject here, but it may be said that many persons who are intimately acquainted with small holdings remain unconvinced by the arguments in favour of tenancy. The truth is that there is room for both principles. Moreover, it ought to be remembered that a large proportion of farmers in England and Wales are in effect small holders although their farms are not included in the Statutory definition of a small holding (50 acres); and that among this class of farmer the desire for ownership is generally strong. The example of Denmark should never be forgotten. There 89 per cent. of the small farmers are owners.

VI

THE WIVES

THE members of the State colonies will be employed at a weekly wage during their training till they have qualified to become tenants. But a very important matter is the attitude of the wives towards a country life. A man whose wife is ill-disposed for it should not normally be considered a suitable applicant for a small holding, as success or failure must depend enormously on the helpfulness of a man's family and especially of his wife. A woman can feed the pigs and the poultry, milk cows, keep the books, and so on, and it is probable that instruction for women in all these things will soon be provided. But of course

life should be made as pleasant as possible for the women. The women's institutes or clubs in Canada which have penetrated monotonous lives with a new ray of light are recommended as a model to be copied.

VII

EXPERT GUIDANCE

THERE will be an expert director in each colony who will be well paid and will have other special instructors under him. He will manage one or more demonstration holdings as examples of good cultivation ; he will insist on the hitherto unsuspected importance of book-keeping to agriculturists ; he will control temporarily the organisation for the collective marketing which is essential to small holders (since at first, at all events, tenants who are strangers to one another cannot be expected to engage in ordinary co-operation) and will also control the store for the hire or sale of implements, manure, seeds, and so on.

VIII

SOCIAL AMENITIES

THE Committee proposed that there should be a club room in every colony, a room for lectures, entertainments and dances, and an open space for physical recreation. They had no mad notion, however, that a community could be created, self-sufficient and exclusive, working by day and taking its relaxation in lectures by night. It was expressly suggested that

each colony should be placed in a position to share in the already existing social, educational, and religious life of the neighbourhood.

IX

FINANCE AND CREDIT

As for the finance of the scheme it is not necessary to say more here than that it was carefully thought out by the Committee and that it was proposed that £2,000,000 should be appropriated for the purpose. The expenditure, it should be remembered, will serve the purpose of agricultural education, and it is anticipated that it will be repaid to the State. As an earnest of this hope the Committee pointed out that the £5,250,000 advanced to County Councils under the Small Holdings Act is gradually being repaid with interest.

A word must be said in praise of the wise proposal to imitate the credit banks of Egypt and India. Co-operative credit has made surprisingly little headway in this country, though the system is very badly needed. Meanwhile the annual turnover of the Raffeisen banks in Germany has reached £300,000,000. The Committee recommended that the State should lend a small amount of money to co-operative credit societies established in connection with the colonies.

It is to be hoped that this will be a beginning of better things. In foreign countries credit is the commonplace of agricultural enterprises. How small English farmers have done even as well as they have without it is a mystery. The small English owner who wants money

almost invariably mortgages his farm, and as a mortgage has no sinking fund it becomes a perpetual charge.

X

THE PURPOSE OF THE COLONIES

THE three colonies will be under the charge of Captain C. Bathurst, and no better choice could have been made, for he has a passion for the land and everything to do with it. Each colony will be devoted mainly to a single type of cultivation—one to fruit growing and market gardening, one to dairy farming, and one to mixed farming. The colonies will be a torch to show men the way to contentment on the land. It is not pretended that small holdings, for the present, will be more than a small contribution to an agricultural policy. The effect of the colonies will be social and educational. They will stand as witnesses of what a clean and healthy rural life can be like. They will illustrate the best methods of farming on a small scale.

Above all, small holdings will be the ladder by which a labourer can rise from the lowest position to be his own master. With the help of credit banks it will be possible for any thrifty, sensible, and industrious labourer to move up. The old reproach that agricultural labour is a blind-alley occupation will fall away.

The opportunities for ambitious and determined men to climb up the agricultural ladder should be made known widely and vividly in England. The supply of small holdings only awaits the demand. Every year our villages have been the hunting-ground of emigration

agents who have told the villagers of the wealth and the pleasures reserved for them in the Dominions. Englishmen do not grudge the Dominions those who go. But the rearing of a healthy rural stock here is as much for the ultimate advantage of the Dominions as for ours. Let it be known that if a man will work in England as he works across the seas, he will be able to live happily on the land. The restless and the adventurous may always want to go, but it should be understood that necessity forces exile on no man.

PART III
THE MINORITY REPORT

PART III

THE MINORITY REPORT

BEFORE the Departmental Committee took up the second part of its work and considered the "employment" of sailors and soldiers on the land Sir Harry Verney retired and was replaced by Mr. Harry Hobhouse as Chairman. Mr. Edward Strutt and Sir Luke White became members of the Committee, and Mr. H. L. French succeeded Mr. F. L. C. Floud as secretary. Mr. Vaughan Nash resigned in March 1916. All the members of the Committee as reconstituted signed the Majority Report except Mr. Edward Strutt, Mr. Leslie Scott, and Mr. G. H. Roberts, who were the signatories of the Minority Report.

The Minority agreed with many paragraphs in the Majority Report, and in reprinting the Minority Report these paragraphs have been embodied. The Majority Report is not otherwise dealt with in this book.

THE MINORITY REPORT

*To the RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF SELBORNE, K.G.,
G.C.M.G., President of the Board of Agriculture
and Fisheries.*

A.—GENERAL STATEMENT OF DIFFERENCES FROM THE
MAJORITY, AND INTRODUCTION

MY LORD,

1. Although the Majority Report contains much with which we cordially agree, we are unable to sign it. Generally speaking, they hold the same views as we do as to what is desirable, but they do not think it practicable to do much. They express general approval of the policy we advocate, but are unwilling to advise the measures by which alone, in our opinion, it can be carried out.

The “general approval” expressed by the Majority is contained in the following paragraphs of their Report :

“ 175. We have in Section A. of this Report considered the steps which should be taken to provide for agriculture after the War a supply of labour equal to that employed before the War ; but we are convinced (as we have already stated in the introduction to our Report) that more than this is required in the highest interests of the nation. In our opinion, if advantage is not taken of the impending release of many thousands of able-bodied and energetic young men from the naval and military forces and the munition factories to secure a great reinforcement of our farm workers and rural population, an exceptional opportunity of increasing the nation's strength, both for peace and war, will have been lost. A healthy rural population forms a valuable recruiting ground for those departments of urban industry which require a high standard of physique, and for the class of emigrants chiefly desired by our Dominions. Indeed, it is frequently urged that it is highly desirable, on the grounds

of physique and health alone, to increase the numbers of our rural population.

"176. The desirability of increasing our home production of food, both for military and economic reasons, has also been urged by many of our witnesses, and there are, we think, indications that, as a result of the War, the nation may decide that national security demands a substantial increase in the agricultural output of this country.

"177. These two objects—the increase of the home-grown food supply and of the rural population—are closely inter-related, and, though they do not directly form part of our reference, they cannot in our opinion be left out of account in considering how to promote the employment of ex-Service men on the land.

"178. At the same time we recognise that the question of increasing the production of home-grown food can only be approached on the broad grounds of national policy, and that it is unlikely that a change of policy could be brought into effect in time to provide work for sailors and soldiers on discharge. A radical change in an industry such as agriculture must necessarily be slow in operation. Moreover, any legislation required to effect a change in policy would probably be regarded as of a controversial character, and might, therefore, not be possible during the War. On the other hand, the adoption of a new agricultural policy, primarily designed to limit this country's dependence on imported food supplies, would lead to the employment in agriculture of a large number of additional men. This would eventually open up a new and healthy career for ex-Service men previously employed in the towns, and, if the demobilisation of the large body of men comprised in the New Armies were spread over a number of years, the opportunities in this direction would be considerably extended. In these circumstances it may be useful to indicate the means which have been suggested with a view to increase the home production of food, by witnesses who have appeared before us.

"179. All agricultural authorities are agreed that the only means by which a substantial increase in the home production of food can be obtained is by bringing under the plough a large area of the land now devoted to pasture. Since 1870 more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million acres of arable land have been laid down to grass, and, coincident with this, the number of male farmers and farm workers has been reduced by nearly 300,000. We think it right to point out, however, that during the

same period the dairy industry has been considerably developed to meet the growing needs of the town population, and there has also been an increase of more than one-third in the number of cattle kept for meat production, while the number of sheep kept has been almost maintained. There is no doubt, however, that the shrinkage of the area under the plough has caused a considerable reduction in agricultural employment.

"180. While a good deal of the afore-mentioned $3\frac{1}{2}$ million acres has, by the course of time and the more general use of artificial manures, become valuable pasture, and further areas are becoming so, we have had evidence that there remains a large area of inferior grass which could with advantage be brought under the plough, provided steps were taken to give stability to the prices obtainable for arable produce so as to make the conversion remunerative."

2. The problem referred to the Committee for solution was "to advise what steps can be taken to promote the employment on the land of sailors and soldiers on discharge." The smaller part of this problem consists in making good the wastage of agricultural labour caused by the war; the larger part in making room in agriculture for the employment of many more men than were engaged in it before the war. Successfully to solve either part of the problem two things are essential. Firstly, the conditions of the life must be made good enough to attract the ex-sailor and ex-soldier; secondly, the policy must be carried out in time.

The Majority fail in both these essentials. They fear the difficulties, and in the result refuse to touch the question of remuneration to agricultural labour—a refusal which would, in our belief, be fatal to success; and, on the critical issue of time, they throw up the sponge. In paragraph 178 they say "that, if demobilisation were spread over a large number of

years," something might be done to create additional employment in agriculture. Is it possible to conceive a more disastrous contingency for the country? Is the Nation to attempt to force vast numbers of men who have enlisted for the war to remain in the army for years after the war at a cost of, say, £2 per week per man? Whereas if they were set free, they could earn wages and, at the same time, do productive work. We accordingly refuse to assume that demobilisation will be anything but rapid. It must be carried through as quickly as possible after the war is over. The great bulk of the men will insist on their release, and it is the business of the Nation to make the necessary provision in advance to meet the difficulties of finding immediate employment for the men as they are discharged. It is with a sense of the urgency of this necessity that we have approached our task. Much has to be done; many measures taken; great difficulties surmounted; and drastic means may be necessary. But the occasion requires it, and we disagree with the Majority, who seem to think it impossible.

3. The whole Committee defined its position in paragraphs 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 of the Introduction to both parts of the Committee's Report (Settlement—Employment), published in February last (Cd. 8182). And, as these paragraphs—particularly the sentences we have italicised—go to the root of our difference from the present Majority on the larger part of the problem, we reprint them here :

"We also desire at the outset of our Report to state our profound and unanimous conviction that a scheme for attracting a large population to the land is urgently

required at the present time in view not only of the obligation of the State to the ex-Service men, but of the highest interests of the Nation as a whole.

“One of the most important lessons learnt from the War is the extent to which the defensive power of a country is strengthened by its capacity to produce food for its inhabitants, and the developments of modern warfare have emphasised the danger of an undue dependence on foreign sources of food supply. There is also general agreement that, on economic grounds, it is a matter of the greatest importance to increase the production of food in this country, and so reduce the amount which has to be imported from abroad.

“Apart from the economic reasons for increasing the rural population there is, we think, a general consensus of opinion that it is also most desirable to do this on social grounds. The stability and physical strength of a nation depend largely on those classes who have either been born and brought up in the country, or have had the advantages of country life. It is certain that the physique of those portions of our nation who live in crowded streets rapidly deteriorates, and would deteriorate still further if they were not to some extent reinforced by men from the country districts. The recruiting returns show a much larger proportion of men rejected for physical reasons in the large towns than in the country districts. If, therefore, we desire a strong and healthy race we must encourage as large a proportion of our people as possible to live on the land. We fear that the growing tendency to move to large centres of population, a tendency which is not confined to this country, is likely to be more and more stimulated by the development of town attractions and facilities of locomotion, and can only be counteracted by a revival of agriculture, together with an improvement in the existing conditions of rural life.

The demobilisation of the Navy and Army at the close of the war will afford a unique opportunity of developing agriculture in this country. It is of the utmost importance to the welfare of the nation that this opportunity should be seized and turned to the greatest possible advantage. The men who have joined the Forces include representatives of all the best elements of our population ; many of them possess a high degree of enterprise and intelligence, and if any substantial number can be attracted to seek a career on the land at home it will give a stimulus to the agriculture of the country.

"A large number of these men were employed in agriculture prior to the war. Many of them will leave the Forces with a wider outlook and a heightened ambition. It is urgent that as many as possible of these men should be induced to resume agricultural life at home. In addition, there may be many others, formerly engaged in urban industry, who will be reluctant to return to the life of the factory, the shop, or the office, and who will seek opportunities for an open-air occupation. If no such opportunities are open to them in this country they will be attracted to the overseas Dominions, or may even be lost to the Empire altogether. We welcome the facilities offered by the Governments of the Dominions to emigrants from this country, but we cannot look with equanimity on the prospect of losing large numbers of the best and most vigorous of our population. The State will miss a great opportunity of benefiting agriculture in this country and will fail in its duty towards its sailors and soldiers if it cannot offer any alternative to emigration to those who would prefer to remain on the land at home."

4. The paragraphs we have quoted were signed without reservation by all the signatories of the present Majority Report, except Sir Luke White, who joined

the Committee since that time. The Majority still recognise to the full the great importance to the Nation of the object set out in them. So do we. But with the exception of the Chairman they do not believe those objects to be capable of attainment in time to afford employment for ex-Service men. We do, if the steps we advise are adopted as a whole. The note which the Chairman attaches to the Majority Report by way of reservation to his signature shows clearly that he accepts the principles upon which the Minority Report is founded.

The Chairman in his note said that he had signed the Majority Report in deference to the views of the Majority, but that in his opinion it did not emphasise sufficiently "the magnitude and urgency of the opportunity now offered." The development of dairying and stock breeding during the last thirty years, to which the Majority referred, had not, in his opinion, compensated for the serious decrease in cereal crops. He continues:

"Whatever may have been the case in the past, the lessons of the present war may well convince us that a country that has to depend on importation for four-fifths of its bread-stuffs is not in a sound position, either from the military or the economic point of view. When we add to these considerations the weighty social and hygienic arguments for increasing the number of our rural population, we are led to the conclusion that it is essential in the national welfare to bring back to the land as many ex-Service men as can be permanently employed there under suitable conditions. If the Government decide to adopt this policy, they should lose no time in introducing the necessary legislation to give effect to it, so as to secure additional employment on the land, and a substantial increase in the home production of food."

5. It became apparent to the Committee at an early stage that our inquiry into the employment of ex-

Service men on the land involved three distinct problems, viz. :

- (a) How to ensure the return to the land of as many as possible of the men who had been engaged in agriculture before they joined H.M. Forces.
- (b) How to fill the gap which will necessarily be caused by the war in the ranks of agricultural labour, thus bringing up the numbers to the pre-war level.
- (c) How to create in the industry a new and increased demand for labour so as to afford employment for a substantially greater number of rural workers than were needed before the war.

6. It is obvious that if upon demobilisation the ex-Service men are to be induced to come on to the land, the inducements of the life must be made sufficient to attract them there, *i.e.* to outweigh in the minds of the men the advantages which alternative modes of life present to them, whether in this country or the Dominions, or foreign countries. This elementary consideration applies, in our opinion, not only to men who were never on the land, but also even to the 300,000 or more farm workers who have left the land since the outbreak of war.

Another fundamental factor in the inquiry is that if a large new demand for labour is to be created in agriculture the State must take the necessary steps to ensure that the industry will both want the men and be able to afford them the rate of wages and other

conditions of life which alone will induce them to come. This involves two things : firstly, there must be an alteration of agricultural methods so as to call for more labour ; secondly, farmers must be secured such a return from agriculture as will make it profitable for them both to alter their farming methods and to pay all the men employed the higher wages. And it must be borne in mind that if better conditions of life are to be provided as an inducement to the ex-Service men, they will have to be provided all round for all agricultural labourers. Higher wages to ex-Service men would be neither practicable nor desirable.

7. The Majority divide their report into three sections :

- (a) Filling the gap caused by the war.
- (b) Temporary relief measures, such as the reclamation of waste land, to be adopted only if there is widespread unemployment in the country at the time of demobilisation.
- (c) Suggestions towards the alteration of agricultural methods which would have the effect of increasing the agricultural population.

It is chiefly on section (c) that we differ from the Majority. In regard to section (b) we concur in all they say, though, as we indicate below, we think that such reclamation work should be undertaken in any event, and not only if there is widespread unemployment, and further, that it may well be combined with ultimate permanent employment on the land.

8. We also agree in general with their views in section (a) as to the means to be adopted to induce non-

agriculturists from the Services to enter agricultural employment. But we agree with their advice, subject to one very important exception which, in our judgment, would prove fatal to success. They think that the wages question may be left to take care of itself, and are definitely opposed to any minimum-wage legislation. We believe it to be essential, and the Chairman agrees with us. Without it we do not think any appreciable number of townsmen will be attracted to the land. And, indeed, we fear that without it we may see a serious exodus from this country even of those ex-Service men who were previously employed in agriculture, thus increasing the already grave shortage of agricultural labour at the end of the war due to casualties, emigration, etc., which we agree with the Majority in estimating at not less than 80,000. Should this happen it would be a national disaster.

The passage in the Majority Report in which the Chairman assents to the views of the Minority as to a minimum wage is as follows :

“152. Some of our members (the Chairman, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Scott, and Mr. E. G. Strutt) are strongly of opinion that it will be necessary to give ex-Service men some guarantee that wages will not fall below such a minimum standard as will enable the industrious man to keep himself and his family in physical health and efficiency, and that unless this is done sufficient men will not be attracted to agricultural employment. These members consider that if the prices of farm produce fall after the war to approximately their pre-war level, farmers may make a corresponding reduction in wages, and this may result in the total earnings of agricultural labourers in many parts of the country falling below a living standard. The fear of this will be sufficient to prevent many of the men who have left the farm since the outbreak of war returning to agricultural employment, especially after having received Army food and pay, separation allowances,

etc. ; still more will it prevent suitable townsmen from seeking work on the land."

Our view is that the State must take action, on the one hand to establish and maintain a proper standard of wages for all farm workers, and on the other to ensure to the agricultural industry such measure of security and prosperity as will encourage the employment of labour at such wages. And in this view also we are glad to note that the Chairman agrees. We consider the two reforms as complementary to each other, and that the needs of the Nation can only be met if worker and farmer are helped together.

9. This brings us to section (c) of the Majority Report. It is here that we find ourselves in the most serious disagreement with our colleagues.

In paragraph 175 of their Report the Majority say that "*the highest interests of the Nation require that more should be done than merely to provide for agriculture a supply of labour equal to that employed before the War,*" and that the opportunity afforded by demobilisation should be seized in order to effect "*a great reinforcement of our rural population.*"

In paragraph 176 they refer to the importance of increasing our home production of food.

In paragraph 177 they say that these two objects—the increase of the home-grown food supply and of the rural population—cannot be left out of account in considering how to promote the employment of ex-Service men on the land.

But in paragraph 178 they express the opinion that the requisite changes in agricultural policy could not be effected in time to employ the ex-Service men. For

this conclusion they give two reasons : (1) that agriculture changes slowly ; and (2) that the necessary legislation “ would probably be regarded as of a controversial character, and might therefore not be possible during the war.”

10. We recognise that there are very great practical difficulties, but we do not consider them insuperable. It is the duty of the Nation to provide for its sailors and soldiers. It is to its interest that the rural population and our home output of food should be increased. We believe that the end of this war will afford an absolutely unique opportunity of achieving these great ends. We recognise that agriculture changes slowly if left to itself ; we recognise that if employment is to be created for a greatly increased number of men big changes will be needed. We recognise too that if we are to be in time to catch the men on demobilisation before they have dispersed into other occupations or emigrated, the necessary changes must be well on the way to accomplishment when demobilisation begins. But, serious as are the difficulties, the importance to the Nation of this opportunity is so great that we think a way of overcoming them must be found.

11. If the paragraphs quoted above from our original Introduction are true, as we are convinced they are, and if the Government realises what a tremendous opportunity the end of the war will present of achieving the twin object of an increase in our rural population and in our home-grown food supply, and how essential these two things are to national welfare, then the thing can be done because it must be done ; and if it is to be done at all it must be done in time.

12. The necessary measures to enable the industry to employ the men and afford the conditions should, we think, be regarded by Government and Parliament not as *controversial*, but as *emergency* legislation, to be passed during the war.

The Dominions are not postponing action. They are all taking the necessary steps now. It may be that, with their large areas of unsettled land, their problem is much simpler than ours. They can settle unlimited numbers of men. We agree with the views of the Majority that the numbers who can be settled at home within a short time is very limited, chiefly because the acquisition of suitable land in England and Wales is difficult and costly. Moreover, farmers and labourers on the land cannot be turned out wholesale even to make room for sailors and soldiers. If we are to provide a livelihood for large numbers of ex-Service men on the land, it must, for the great bulk of them, be by employment rather than by settlement. And the problems of providing "Employment" are for us more difficult than those of "Settlement."¹ "Employment" in England lacks both the sentiment and the glamour of "Settlement" in the Dominions. The settler anywhere is his own master, with all the attractions of independence. In the Dominions the settler's life means, to the enterprising and adventurous, the romance of great freedom, and the unknown possi-

¹ By "Employment" we understand employment at wages upon the farm or holding of another person, and by "Settlement" the settlement of men in holdings of their own, whether as proprietors or tenants. It is obviously in the former capacity, *i.e.* as wage earners, that the vast majority of ex-Service men who desire to come on the land will, at least in the first instance, have to earn their livelihood.

bilities of advancement and fortune. These are great inducements ; and we may rest assured that after the war the Governments of the Dominions will bring them vividly before the mind of every sailor and soldier and munition worker about to be discharged. The appeal to the imagination will be great. And on Imperial grounds we are glad that it should be.

13. But life in the Old Country has many advantages of its own ; and it could be made at least as attractive in our own country-side as in Belgium or Denmark or France. Only if we are to succeed in making Employment at home compete successfully in the minds of the sailors and soldiers with the attractions of Settlements in the Dominions, much must be done to make the conditions of the life more attractive than they are. It is, in our opinion, possible to do this, and we think it ought to be done.

14. Lest what we have said about competing with the Dominions should give rise to misconception, we desire to add that we do not advocate a policy for the benefit of the United Kingdom at the expense of the Dominions. The increase of the agricultural population of these Islands is just as essential in the interest of the Empire as of the United Kingdom. If there is here at home a healthy, prosperous, and rapidly increasing rural population, every year there will be a surplus of young men and young women to emigrate to the Dominions. And if these have been educated in the right way, they are just the type of immigrant that the Dominions must want. It is by such migration that the waste spaces of the Empire can be filled successfully with a fertile population of British stock.

It is thus indirectly by increasing the man-power of the Empire as well as directly by increasing the output of home-grown food in the United Kingdom that a policy which brings greater security and prosperity to British Agriculture will promote the military strength of the Empire at the same time that it benefits the Nation at home.

The Terms of Reference

15. The reference to the Committee is "To report what steps can be taken to promote the Settlement and Employment¹ on the land in England and Wales of sailors and soldiers . . . on discharge."

16. The inquiry into Employment in agriculture naturally falls under the following heads :

1. Given suitable conditions of life, how many men are likely to be attracted to employment on the land ?
2. (a) Are the conditions of the agricultural labourer's life as they may be expected to be after the war such as will attract the ex-Service man, *e.g.* wages, housing, village life, opportunities of advancement and career ?
(b) If not, what changes are required to make the offer of life on the land at home prevail against the counter-attractions of emigration or town life ? (c) How are such changes to be effected ?

¹ "Settlement" has already been dealt with in Part I, and nothing further need be said on that subject for the moment.

3. (a) Taking British agriculture as it was before the war, how many men will be wanted in it after the war? (b) What changes in the industry are necessary to provide employment for the additional numbers who may want it?
4. (a) Can agriculture afford the better conditions which are necessary to attract the men, and also the changes which are necessary to employ the additional men? (b) If not, what measures will make it possible?
Are such measures desirable in the interest of the Nation and the Empire?
5. Can such measures be carried out in time to provide employment for the men on demobilisation?

B.—PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF CONDITIONS EXISTING BEFORE THE WAR

17. A short preliminary survey of the conditions of agriculture in the years before the war is essential to an understanding of the problem. It is convenient for discussion to speak of the position which existed just before the war as the present position, disregarding the abnormal changes caused by the war. Where we use the present tense, we would, therefore, be understood as referring to the year 1913, unless the context excludes such meaning.

18. Of the conditions of agriculture in England and Wales before the war, the decline of the agricultural population is the most marked. Although, owing to

the steady growth of our population, our home consumption of food is increasing, and with it the market for an increased agricultural output and its corollary of more employment on the land, the number of agricultural workers was until the 1911 census not only not increasing or even holding its own, but actually decreasing.¹

In the forty years 1871–1911 the total male population aged ten and upwards in England and Wales has *increased* by no less than 67 per cent. The total male

¹ TABLE A.—NUMBER OF MALE PERSONS* ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE IN ENGLAND AND WALES AT EACH CENSUS 1871–1911.

Group.	1871.	1881.	1891.	1901.	1911.
1. Farmers, Graziers	225,569	203,329	201,918	202,751	208,761
2.*Farmers' and Graziers' male relatives assisting in the work of the farm	74,620	75,042	67,122	83,410	92,294
3. Farm Bailiffs, Foremen	16,476	19,377	18,205	22,623	22,141
4. Shepherds	23,323	22,844	21,573	25,354	20,838
5. Agricultural Labourers, Farm Servants	898,731	807,608	734,984	583,751	622,279
Total Farm Workers	1,013,150	924,871	841,884	715,138	757,552
6. Others engaged in Agriculture (including Woodmen, Gardeners, etc., but excluding Domestic Gardeners)	113,379	85,370	†	147,396	168,807
Total	1,352,098	1,213,570	†	1,065,285	1,135,120

* In the later censuses the figures relate to persons ten years of age and upwards, but in 1871 and 1881 persons under ten years are included. In each year, however, the figures for farmers' relatives exclude those under fifteen years.

† In the census of 1891, Domestic Gardeners were not shown separately. It is, therefore, impossible to supply the number of persons in Class 6 in the above table.

agricultural population aged ten and upwards has *decreased* by 16 per cent. or by over two hundred thousand.

19. The cause of this flight from the land is to be found in the great agricultural depression which continued up to 1906. Corn prices fell to a disastrous level, and the farming industry suffered very serious losses. In order to cut down expenditure the farmers between 1871 and 1911 laid down more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million acres of arable land to grass,¹ thereby dispensing with the work of over 100,000 men. At least a similar number were dispensed with on the 11 million acres still remaining under the plough, partly by the extended use of labour-saving machinery, but chiefly by cutting down the farm staff to the narrowest possible margin.²

20. The period of depression ended in 1906, but, in spite of the improvement in prices which has taken place during the last ten years, the tendency to lay

¹ TABLE B

					Total Arable Land. Acres.	Proportion per cent. of total Cultivated Area.
1871	.	.	.	.	14,946,179	56·8
1881	.	.	.	.	13,977,662	50·9
1891	.	.	.	.	12,903,585	46·1
1901	.	.	.	.	12,118,289	44·0
1911	.	.	.	.	11,299,220	41·5
<hr/>						<hr/>
Decrease						
1871-1911	.	.	.	.	3,646,959	15·3
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² Board of Agriculture and Fisheries; *Report on Migration from Rural Districts*, 1913, p. 3.

In 1906 Sir Henry Rew expressed the opinion that the saving of labour on land still under the plough had in the aggregate been greater than on the two million acres laid down to grass between 1881 and 1901 (see *Report on the Decline in the Agricultural Population*, p. 14).

down land to grass has continued (more than 1,000,000 acres having been withdrawn from arable cultivation between 1901 and 1914). This further reduction is still due, at least in part, to the working of economic causes ; the farming industry is as yet far from having recovered the loss of capital sustained during the years of depression and is still suffering from the sense of insecurity then produced.

21. But part of it is now due to the working of a false economy. In the first place, the supply of labour has now fallen to such a point that its very scarcity tends, in many cases, to restrict and starve farming operations¹ and thereby to reduce still further the opportunities for employment on the land. In the second place, the quality of farm labour is prejudicially affected by the general tendency of the young and adventurous workers to seek their fortunes elsewhere. This rural exodus has been intensified by our system of elementary education, which, whatever its advantages, makes a youth seek his career in a wider field than a country village. The old system of fathers training their sons in the technical work of the farm has to a large extent died out ; education has not filled the gap, and it is difficult in many districts to obtain skilled shepherds, hedgers, and thatchers.

Conditions after the War

22. We consider that unless the steps we advise are adopted, the unsatisfactory conditions of British

¹ Sir Henry Rew, writing in 1913, stated that " it is evident that at the present time considerably more men could find employment on the land than are now available. There certainly appears to be a fairly general deficiency of skilled farm hands."

agriculture in relation to the supply of labour which existed before the war will be aggravated in the future ; indeed, there is danger of the numbers of farm workers after the war being actually less than before, which would be a calamity. Understaffed though our industry of food production was before 1914, the imperative demands of the war have nevertheless taken away from it so far one-third of the entire staff, and there is ground for apprehension that the number of workers left may be still further reduced.

The pressure of war conditions has operated in various directions. The shortage of farm labour sent up the wages of those who remained. Patriotism and a sense of duty induced many thousand of women to volunteer for farm work. Local demands brought about the employment of school children. Finally, farmers in many places have been compelled to relieve the strain by letting important tillage operations go by the board.

23. Some attempt at a forecast of the conditions in the agricultural labour market at the close of the war is desirable.

- (1) First of all the women who are doing farm work as a war duty will give it up as soon as demobilisation releases the man power, for which the women had offered themselves as substitutes.
- (2) The employment of school children cannot and should not continue.
- (3) The inevitable shortage in the supply of farm labour at the end of the war will not be less than 80,000.

The paragraph in the Majority Report which refers to the shortage of labour after the war, and to which the Minority assent, is as follows :

“ 141. The evidence which we have received on the point leads us to expect that most of the older and of the married men will probably wish to return to their former occupations. But, owing to the wastage of war and to the desire which some of the men may have to remain with the Colours, or to settle in towns, or to emigrate to the Dominions, the number of farm workers who will return to agriculture is certain to be considerably less than the number who have left the land since the outbreak of war. We estimate a shortage of, at least, 25 per cent. of those who have enlisted or (say) 80,000 men.”

- (4) There is grave danger of this shortage being increased by excessive emigration among ex-Service men who were employed in agriculture before the war. They will come back with a wider outlook and heightened ambition, while the separation allowances will have enabled their wives to enjoy a higher standard of life. Many will return to their old employment, but unless we make it worth their while, it is to be feared that many will be unwilling to stay in this country. The Majority in their estimate of a shortage of 80,000 make no allowance for this element of loss. We consider it a serious danger, and believe that if the right steps are not taken to make the conditions of the labourer's life more attractive than they were before the war in many countries, we may see this initial shortage of 80,000 gravely increased. Indeed, this is what we fear will result if the advice of the Majority be followed.

- (5) The saving likely to be effected by the extended use of labour-saving machinery we regard with the Majority as a comparatively insignificant factor in our inquiry (para. 144). We do not think it will fill the place of the men to an appreciable extent.

Paragraph 144 of the Majority Report is as follows :

“ 144. As regards labour-saving machinery, it is generally agreed that scarcity of labour during the war has greatly stimulated the interest of farmers in machinery, and we expect that, as soon as the agricultural engineering firms resume production, there will be a large demand for all types of machines, especially motor tractors and motor ploughs. It is very questionable, however, whether such machinery saves man labour to as great an extent as is often suggested. The evidence which we have received from users of motor ploughs and tractors suggests that the chief advantage of these machines is that they enable the farmer to get work done at the right time, but that the saving effected is in horse labour rather than in manual labour. In any case small farmers are not likely to make much use of motor machinery for some time, and on all farms there are some classes of labour, *e.g.* shepherds, stockmen, etc., which cannot be replaced by machinery. For these reasons it appears certain that the reduction which the increased use of machinery is likely to cause in the labour required on the farms of England and Wales cannot be more than a small proportion of the total shortage.”

C.—THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM—HOW MANY MEN WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR EMPLOYMENT ON THE LAND

24. Though it is impossible to foretell within narrow limits of accuracy what number of men will when peace comes desire employment on the land, if such employment is available, it is nevertheless essential to form the best estimate we can.

We agree with the Majority (para. 145) that large numbers of the men discharged from the Services will desire an open-air life whether at home or abroad.

Paragraph 145 of the Majority Report is as follows :

" 145. We are accordingly forced to the conclusion that unless the fourth course we have mentioned is to be adopted [viz. to put more land down to grass], thereby reducing still further the agricultural production and the agricultural population of England and Wales, it will be essential to provide agriculture with a considerable number of ex-Service men who were not employed in farm work on the outbreak of war. We consider that the demobilisation of our Forces will afford an exceptional opportunity for providing a new supply of agricultural labour. Excluding the munition workers, there will be about three million men discharged or awaiting discharge, who will not have been in agricultural occupations before the war. It seems probable that many of these men after months spent in the open air will prefer not to return to the confinement of the office, shop, or factory, provided they can earn a livelihood on the land under favourable conditions. Some of them will come to this decision as soon as the war is over. Others may return to their former occupations and soon find the confinement of their life irksome. According to our present estimate we shall, even after making allowance for the use of more machinery, want many thousands of these men to fill up the gaps made by the war in the ranks of agricultural labour. Most of these ex-Service men should be more or less handy ; many of them will be already familiar with the use of machinery or horses, and after a few months' experience should become efficient agricultural labourers. Doubtless a large number of these men will prefer to emigrate, and while it is true that the Mother Country cannot, in some respects, make the ex-Service man as good an offer as the Dominions, or as foreign countries like the United States of America and Argentina, we think a great deal might be done, not only to bring home to him the comparative advantages of life in a more settled country, but to improve the conditions that have hitherto prevailed."

The war will have so utterly changed the mental outlook of nearly every man that the force of habit

will have been broken, and the tendency of men to return to their old occupations will have been to a great extent neutralised ; and the majority will have no definite post waiting for them. No doubt many at first may resume an indoor occupation. But we are convinced that the desire for the open air will be firmly rooted in the minds of vast numbers. And they will emigrate either on discharge, or after a short trial of indoor life, unless the conditions of agricultural life which the Nation has to offer them here at home are made good enough to satisfy them.

25. The only basis of an estimate is a percentage, at which we are in little better position to guess than anyone else. But we cannot think that the percentage of men who will want an agricultural life will be less than 5 per cent. of the total discharged from the Forces ; and it may conceivably be as many as 10 per cent. What proportion will emigrate and what stay at home will depend on what is done by the Government to make the offer of home life attractive before the moment comes for the man to choose, *i.e.* before he is discharged.

D.—THE CONDITIONS OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER'S LIFE AND THE NECESSARY CHANGES

26. On the conditions of life which have in the past influenced the men and women to leave the land there is a general consensus of opinion among the authorities. Thus, Sir Henry Rew has accounted for the reduced supply of agricultural labour by (1) the desire of the men to obtain the higher money wage

paid in towns, (2) the deficiency of satisfactory housing accommodation, and (3) the absence of reasonable prospects of advancement in life ; as well as by (4) the attraction of the Dominions to which we refer later.¹

Mr. Prothero, in contrasting the conditions of the agricultural labourer with those of the town worker, wrote : " In money wages artisans are better paid ; they have greater chances of rising to higher rates of remuneration ; they have larger facilities for recreation and amusement ; so far as their homes are concerned, they are less directly under the thumb of their employer ; they belong to a less isolated and more numerous class. Agricultural labourers believe that there is life in the towns ; they know that in the villages there is none, in which they share as a right or which for them has any meaning." ²

Sir H. Rider Haggard has attributed the discontent of the agricultural labourer to (1) our system of education, and the restless spirit of the age ; (2) the attractions of the towns, where there are high wages, company and amusements, and also a chance of rising ; (3) the want of prospects on the land, where he is a wage-earner without outlook ; (4) bad cottage accommodation.

Mr. Seebohm Rowntree, who gave evidence before us as to conditions of agricultural labour, attributed the decline in the numbers of labourers to low wages,

¹ Report on the Decline in the Agricultural Population, 1881-1906 (p. 15), and Report on Migration from Rural Districts, 1913 (p. 3).

² *English Farming*, pp. 409-16.

long hours, and lack of good cottages. The representatives of the Agricultural Labourers' Union who appeared before us expressed similar views.

27. The tendency to emigrate has been greatly stimulated of late by the activities of the Dominion Governments, especially Canada. Previous to the outbreak of war, every spring, country villages were placarded with advertisements of the good wages and offers of land to be obtained oversea, while it was nobody's business to bring home to the agricultural labourer the hardships and difficulties which must be faced as an offset against the advantages which the settler's life in these distant countries has to offer.

There will always be men of the type of mind whom nothing would keep from emigrating. But as regards the great majority of farm labourers and a large proportion of the new would-be workers on the land, we are convinced they would rather stay in the Old Country if they could be sure of satisfactory wages and housing, and if they knew they had a chance of rising above the status of a wage earner.

28. So far these conditions have not been provided. On the other hand, the Nation has encouraged the notion—and the Majority Report endorses it—that the Mother Country is under an inevitable disability; that she cannot in some respects make the discharged sailor or soldier as good an offer as the Dominions, or as foreign countries such as the United States and the Argentine.

We do not accept this view as sound. The reason why our Dominions and some foreign countries are able to outbid us is that they long ago realised the

value of the food producer to the State and society, and created efficient machinery for settling suitable men on the land. Here in Great Britain we have hitherto failed to appreciate the value to the State of a healthy agricultural population. No Government whether Liberal or Tory for half a century has treated agriculture as possessing any peculiar importance on broad national grounds.

29. An adequate wage, a good cottage,¹ the attractions of a living community, instead of the dullness of village life as it is to-day, and access to the first rung on the agricultural "ladder,"—these essential conditions are all well within the Nation's power to offer. And such an offer will, we believe, be good enough to keep in the United Kingdom its fair share of the ex-Service men who want a life on the land.

30. The principal factor in the problem we are dealing with is the question of an adequate wage.

In 1907² the average weekly cash wages of farm labourers varied from 12s. 1d. in Dorset to 18s. 7d. in Middlesex. Taking into account certain privileges (such as payments in kind, or cottages rent free³), the total earnings, as estimated by the Board of Trade, varied from 14s. 11d. in Oxfordshire to 20s. 5d. in Derbyshire.

¹ An addendum to the Minority Report, written after the presentation of the Report, discusses the question of housing.

² Board of Trade: Earnings and Hours Inquiry. Vol. V.—Agriculture in 1907 (Cd. 5460), 1910.

³ "The value of a cottage has been taken as £4 per annum, and board and lodging has been computed at £20 16s. per annum (8s. per week). The averages stated represent not the earnings during a given week, but an average of the weekly earnings during the whole year." (Cd. 5460) p. xvi.

Between 1907 and 1913 ¹ wages rose by 7·0, but this rise was offset by a rise of 7·2 in the cost of living. Again, since the beginning of the war there has been a rise generally of from 3s. to 5s., but this too has been more than counter-balanced by the rise in the cost of living.

At present, owing to the shortage of labour and the high prices of agricultural produce, wages have in most counties been raised to a fair standard. As to whether they will remain at that level when the war is over opinions are divided. To judge by the evidence given before us, farmers believe that the present rate will be continued after the war, at least approximately, whilst labour representatives are convinced that, when several million men are returned to the labour market, the tendency will be for wages to fall.

31. It appears to us that in default of State action the rate of wages must be mainly regulated by supply and demand, and if there is a surplus of labour after demobilisation of the Forces, it is very unlikely that wages will remain as high as they are during the present period of scarcity, especially if there is a reduction in the demand for labour owing to the fall in the prices of agricultural produce. We have, therefore, asked ourselves if the State would be justified in intervening to ensure that efficient labourers are not paid less than a certain minimum representing a living wage in the district.

32. From our inquiries it appears that the majority

¹ According to Mr. Rowntree. There are no satisfactory official figures later than 1907.

of farmers are opposed to any legislation on agricultural wages. The principal grounds for this opposition are—

- (1) That such legislation is unnecessary.
- (2) That the machinery of district Wages Boards necessary to fix and put into operation a minimum wage will cause grave disquiet among the agricultural population, promote combinations of labour and disturb the existing relations between masters and men.
- (3) That the farmer would, at certain seasons of the year, be at the mercy of a trade union agitation, and suffer heavily by even a short strike.
- (4) That farming is carried on under special conditions, particularly as regards weather, that make the regulation of hours of employment impossible, and that such regulation is an essential part of minimum-wage legislation.
- (5) That the industry may be unable to provide increased wages.

33. These arguments are entitled to, and have received from us, careful consideration, but we have arrived at the following conclusions :

- (1) In order to promote the settlement of ex-Service men on the land it is necessary to give them some guarantee that wages will not drop below such a minimum standard as will enable the industrious man to keep

himself and his family in physical health and efficiency.

(2) We therefore think a district wage-board system desirable by which a statutory minimum wage would be settled for each district. There is no doubt that hitherto the farm labourer has in most districts found it impossible to protect himself by combination. This is mainly attributable to his isolated position and comparative want of mobility in seeking better-paid employment. This helplessness results in many agricultural labourers, especially in those districts where competitive industries do not exist, failing to obtain an economic wage.¹

(3) The experience gained under the Trade Boards Act shows that in trades for which minimum-wage legislation has been enacted friction between employer and employee has been reduced, strikes have been avoided, and bad employers forced to adopt the methods of good employers. Persons who have had experience of the working of that Act state that workers brought under the Act have, after a short time, greatly increased in efficiency.

(4) The relations of the ex-Service men with the farmers are likely to be more harmonious if a regular machinery is created for bringing

¹ In the words of a high authority, "Considering the comparatively skilled character of his work, he is much worse paid than his fellows in any other industry" (A. D. Hall, *Pilgrimage of British Farming*, p. 443).

the representatives of the two classes face to face to discuss labour conditions.

- (5) In the farming industry no cast-iron regulation of hours of employment is possible, but much consideration has already been given to the subject, and we are convinced that it would not be difficult for a District Wages Board to devise a workable system. In fixing a minimum wage the Board would determine the number of hours per week for which the minimum wage would be paid, and work in excess of that number would be paid for as overtime.

It is urged by some that the long hours which the agricultural labourer has to work, combined with the necessity, in the case of carters and stockmen, of working part of Sundays, have in the past acted as a deterrent to men continuing in agricultural employment, and will prevent many ex-Service men returning to agriculture. The requirements of horses and stock necessitate early morning and evening work as well as Sunday labour. This cannot be avoided, but it is urged that it would be more satisfactory for all classes of agricultural workmen if they were in a position to know how many hours' work they were expected to give for an agreed wage.

- (6) If the prices of farm produce are maintained at their present level, or continue materially higher than in the years preceding the war,

higher wages than obtained in many counties before the war can undoubtedly be paid by the farmer without placing on him any undue burden.

34. One of our witnesses advocated a national minimum wage being fixed for the whole country. If this were practicable, it would no doubt have the advantage of giving the ex-Service man a more definite idea of what wages he could get than he would obtain from the establishment of Wage Boards in different districts. But, considering the variety of wages and extra payments in different parts of the country, we think that a system of District Wage Boards is the best solution.

35. There are obvious difficulties in fixing a minimum wage for certain classes of agricultural labour. The very young and the very old will either have to be excluded altogether or to have different rates assigned to them. We are alive to the other difficulties inherent in the working of minimum-wage machinery, and have given them careful consideration. We do not think, however, that it is necessary here to discuss their solution in detail, for we are satisfied that they can be surmounted.

36. Despite the difficulties we consider that the advantages of securing to the agricultural labourer a minimum wage outweigh the disadvantages, and that legislation on the subject is necessary if a sufficient number of ex-Service men are to be attracted to the land after the war. We are, however, of the opinion that such legislation should, on permanent grounds

of national policy, be accompanied by such legislative support to agriculture as will ensure a reasonable measure of stability to the whole industry, and especially to the arable farming which will be most affected by a rise in wages. Agricultural prosperity cannot be brought about by piecemeal legislation passed in the interests of only one of the classes connected with the soil. We have to consider its effect on the other classes as well.

37. The principal danger which we foresee from a system of wage boards is that farmers, fearing the effect of such legislation, may reduce the number of their employees by laying down more land to grass. If this were to be done the result would be a smaller, although better paid, agricultural population. But, in our opinion, it is in the interests of the Nation as a whole to increase and not to reduce the size of the agricultural population as well as the acreage of arable land. If agriculture be considered from the national standpoint, it is worth the Nation's while, as a matter of high policy, to give the industry such support as will enable it to afford reasonable conditions of life to its workers. We consider, therefore, that it will be necessary to associate with the minimum-wage legislation other measures calculated to give the farmer, especially the arable farmer, sufficient security and stability of prices for his produce to enable him to pay an adequate wage to his employees. These measures we indicate in later portions of this Report.

38. We agree with paragraph 154 (as to bonus to labourers) and with paragraphs 155 to 161, relating

to the housing and the general conditions of life of the agricultural labourer. The provision of proper housing accommodation is imperative and urgent.

Paragraph 154 of the Majority Report is as follows :

“154. Some farmers pay an annual bonus to their employees when the results of the year's farming have been satisfactory. This is a practice which should be encouraged, as it tends to increase the men's interest in their work. In one case of which we have particulars the giving of annual bonuses has developed into a system of profit-sharing which, while it could not be applied to the farming industry generally, could, we think, be followed on many large farms, with advantage both to the men and their employer. The bonuses, on the farm to which we refer, are either paid in cash or invested in the farm, whichever the men prefer. The men may add to their credit accounts with the farm any savings of their own or of their families. They are guaranteed interest at the rate of 4 per cent. on their investments, and, in addition, they are paid at the end of the year such dividend as is earned by the farm after expenses have been deducted. The result of the scheme, which has been in operation since 1908, is that more men leave their money in the farm each year, and some of them have accumulated in this way over £100 each. Investments, which in the aggregate amount to several thousand pounds, may be withdrawn at a month's notice, and are repaid, with interest, on a man leaving the farm.

“Schemes of this kind, if more widely adopted, might have the effect of retaining agricultural labourers on the land, of encouraging thrift, and of improving the relationship between employer and employed. While a worker is entitled to an adequate wage without reference to the profits earned by his employer, the knowledge that he will directly benefit from the prosperity of his employer will undoubtedly stimulate his industry and lead to an improvement in the quality of his work.”

Paragraphs 155-161 are as follows :

“155. One of the greatest obstacles in the way of retaining men in the country in the years before the War was the lack of good cottage accommodation in many parts of England

and Wales, and it will also be found to present difficulties in arranging for the employment of ex-Service men on the land. In the period immediately preceding the outbreak of War, some progress was made towards the solution of the housing problem in rural districts, especially as a result of the Housing and Town Planning Act, which was beginning to effect substantial improvements. In August 1914 an Act of Parliament¹ was passed to authorise the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries to advance large loans to local authorities and public utility societies in agricultural districts for the purpose of erecting cottages. The Act was passed as an emergency measure at a time when it was thought that, owing to the war, the country might be faced with serious problems arising from unemployment. Owing to the financial position and the scarcity of labour, the Act has not been put into operation. We are, however, strongly of opinion that, as soon as practicable, it should be made operative, and that local authorities should be empowered to raise loans for building, and otherwise be encouraged to build in the districts in which cottages are most needed, and especially where the condemnation of cottages under the Housing and Town Planning Acts tend to accentuate the shortage. Public utility societies and landowners should also be encouraged to build by the offer of loans.

"156. It has been suggested to us by the Right Hon. F. D. Acland, M.P., that war memorials might often take the shape of groups of cottages for discharged ex-Service men, or almshouses for disabled sailors and soldiers, and that these might, when built, be vested in some public authority such as the Parish Council or the County Territorial Association. We entirely approve of this suggestion.

"157. The difficulties in the way of providing new cottages in country districts would be largely removed if an economic rent could be charged for them. The present practice of letting good cottages at a nominal rent not only tends to keep the standard of wages low, but discourages building and aggravates the problem in other ways. The cottages are usually provided by the landowner primarily for agricultural workmen, but they are often occupied by the employees of local authorities and railway companies and by

¹ Housing (No. 2) Act, 1914. Section 1 (i), which gave the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries powers, during the period of one year from the passing of the Act, to acquire land and buildings for housing purposes, has expired.

other persons.² This increases the shortage of cottages, and in many cases these tenants benefit from the system under which agricultural labourers receive a lower wage because they are charged an uneconomic rent for their houses.

"158. The system of "tied" cottages—that is, the system by which farmers purchase or rent with their farms a number of cottages in which their stockmen, horsemen, and other employees are housed—is frequently the subject of serious criticism. We were told by the representatives of the Agricultural Labourers' Union that a man living in a 'tied' cottage was not a 'free man'; that, for example, he was deterred from joining the Union more from the fear of the farmer turning his wife and family out of their cottage than from the fear of losing his employment, and that he cannot leave his employment unless he is willing to give up his cottage. In theory there is, no doubt, considerable force in the objections to the 'tied' cottage system, but it is exceedingly difficult to see how farmers could, in many cases, conduct their business if the cottages which have purposely been built near to their farm buildings were to be occupied by men not in their employ, and their own labourers were forced to find houses at a distance. The problem would, however, be largely solved if more cottages were provided by the local authorities. The proportion of 'tied' cottages would then become much smaller than it is at present, and a labourer who was obliged to leave a 'tied' cottage would not experience the difficulty he does now in finding a suitable house in the neighbourhood.

"159. If the discharged sailor or soldier is to be attracted

² In his evidence before us Mr. Rowland E. Prothero, M.P., said : "I have returns relating to some 1,700,000 acres and 22,000 cottages, scattered over every county in England and Wales. All are cottages built by agricultural landowners for housing the agricultural labourer on the land; every one of the 22,000. At the present moment, only 13,000 of those are occupied by agricultural labourers; 3,000 are occupied by old-age pensioners, 1,000 are occupied by Government and local-authority employees, some 350 are occupied by railway employees, and 5,000 are occupied by the employees of trades and industries, other than agriculture, who have not spent one farthing on housing their men. If you apply those figures to the cottages throughout England, assuming that there are some 600,000 agricultural labourers' cottages, that shows that something between 200,000 and 290,000 of the cottages built for agricultural labourers in England are occupied by other people than the agricultural labourers themselves. . . ."

to agricultural employment in England and Wales it will be necessary to offer him more opportunities for recreation and self-improvement than have been provided in the past, and more prospect of advancement in life. A good garden should be attached to every cottage, and the labourer, if he desires to cultivate more land, should have an opportunity of renting an allotment. Country children should always be within reach of a good school, where, in addition to receiving instruction in the ordinary school subjects, they will be taught the use of their hands and eyes, and trained to take an interest in, and to appreciate, the garden, the farm, and the natural objects of the country-side. A brighter village life is also highly desirable. All villages of any size ought to have a club room, public library, recreation grounds, and the like to break the monotony of country life. In many places these have been already provided by the liberality of land-owners and philanthropic individuals, and we hope that this practice will be followed by all those who are interested in the maintenance and improvement of our rural population. The buildings and lands so provided might well be vested in the Parish Council, and maintained by them partly or wholly out of the parish rates. Where, owing to the poverty of the neighbourhood or other circumstances, such desirable attractions cannot be provided without recourse to outside help, application might be made to such bodies as the Carnegie Trustees to assist in providing them.

“160. One great drawback to the life of an agricultural labourer is that, no matter how persevering and industrious he may be, he has little prospect of obtaining a position of independence. The opportunity of obtaining allotments and small holdings is a great assistance to agricultural labourers, and an improved organisation of co-operation and agricultural credit will enable them to take more advantage of the opportunities which exist. The scheme of ‘Colonies’ of small holders, if developed as we suggested in Part I of our Report, will, we believe, act as an encouragement to the agricultural labourer to aspire to a position of more independence. It will, no doubt, be capable of considerable expansion, and will become the agricultural ‘ladder’ by which the industrious and enterprising labourer can obtain a small holding as the best means of exercising his industry and intelligence.

“161. If the improvements which we have outlined above with regard to the housing and general conditions of agri-

cultural labour in this country are adopted, and given effect to in good time, these changes, together with the maintenance of the present rates of wages, will, in our opinion, result in a large number of ex-Service men being willing to undertake employment on farms, and thus provide the number of men required."

In regard to the place of small holdings in the agricultural system of the country, we desire to emphasise the great value of the labourer having an outlook in life. Every boy who begins as a labourer on a farm ought to know that he has a chance of becoming a farmer; that as a reward of industry, honesty and intelligence he may rise above the rank of a hired worker, and through the allotment attain to a small holding, and ultimately, perhaps, to a large farm. This scope for ambition is of incalculable importance, whether many or few actually arrive. Though it will only be the exceptional man who succeeds in mounting the agricultural ladder to the very top, a large number of labourers ought in due course to become independent small holders. To every man who emigrates to the Dominions, the prospect of owning his holding is a certainty if he works hard and saves—and it is just this certainty of independence which is the great attraction of the settler's life, and the place of the small holding in our agricultural economy here at home should be the same. The function of a well-organised system of small holdings is to prevent the labourer's life being a blind-alley employment, and to convert it into merely the first rung of the agricultural ladder. It is consequently of fundamental importance that our small-holdings system should be sound, and afford to the small holder all possible oppor-

tunities of success. Part I of the Committee's Report, in our belief, fulfils this condition, and we are glad to see a start being made with the three Pioneer Colonies provided for by the Government Bill recently introduced in the House of Lords.

39. In Part I it was contemplated that some 5,000 men might after the war be settled in State Colonies and another 5,000 by County Councils. But if this is to be done the land must be acquired and the colonies equipped ready when they are wanted, *i.e.* before demobilisation is over. We, therefore, think that the Government should forthwith extend their operations on the lines of their present Bill,¹ and also introduce a Bill to amend the Small Holdings Act, 1908, and effect the other changes advised in paragraphs 103 to 114 of Part I. of the Committee's Report, to enable County Councils to establish colonies of small holdings similar to the State Colonies.

The summary of paragraphs 103 to 114 of Part I is as follows :

"(a) That county councils should undertake the provision of small holdings for ex-Service men who are not prepared to go to the State Colonies (paras. 21 and 103).

"(b) That as far as possible councils should establish colonies of small holdings similar to the State Colonies (paras. 107, 112, and 113).

"(c) That the Public Works Loan Commissioners should be authorised to resume the issue of loans to councils for the purchase and adaptation of lands for small holdings (para. 107).

"(d) That the Small Holdings Act should be amended, so that the Board of Agriculture may become partners with the county councils in the whole business of providing small

¹ The Bill to establish three State colonies of small holdings was passed, and is known as The Small Holdings Colonies Act, 1916.

holdings under the Act, and may pay half of any losses that may be incurred (para. 110).

“(e) That certain other amendments should be made in the Act (para. 114).”

40. The reason why in this part of our Report, where we are dealing not with Settlement, but with Employment, we thus emphasise questions of settlement is that for our purposes we consider the two inseparable. It is probably true that if the good wages, good houses, and village amenities which we advocate are provided, many ex-Service men will be quite content with Employment on the land. But to many we think Employment in agriculture will be unattractive unless they see a chance of ultimately becoming small holders. Such men will emigrate to the Dominions, where they are certain to get holdings of their own, rather than undertake a career in which they must always remain labourers at a wage. We are, therefore, convinced that if the United Kingdom is to compete successfully with the Dominions it is important that there should be a well-developed system of small holdings in our agricultural economy.

41. It would be outside our inquiry to discuss agricultural education in detail. But it is, of course, vital to any great agricultural development. If, as we think ought to be the case, the agricultural labourer is to be afforded facilities for mounting the ladder, he must be educated for his career. Country children must always be within reach of a good school where, in addition to receiving instructions in the ordinary school subjects, they will be taught the use of their hands and eyes, and trained to take an

interest in, and to appreciate, the garden, the farm, and the natural objects of the country-side. The manual system adopted in the Lindsey Division of Lincolnshire should be made general. The elementary school must be followed by the continuation school and so on. And scientific advice, both as to farming methods and processes, and as to business methods, must always be available. The farmer, as well as the small holder, needs it. It is only thus that success in life can be assured to the individual, and that the output per acre of our land can gradually be raised to what it ought to be. But there is a further aspect of education. One of the cogent arguments for increasing our agricultural population is that we may be enabled thereby to increase the annual stream of British emigrants to people the empty lands of the Empire with British blood. If we would fit these young men and women best for their task we must give them the right kind of agricultural education.

E.—THE FARMER'S POSITION AND THE INTEREST OF THE STATE

42. Assuming that by measures such as we have outlined above the State succeeds in inducing large numbers of men discharged from the Forces to seek employment on the land, we have further to consider how such employment can be secured for them. After filling up the deficit in the supply of labour created by the war, the farmer will only be willing to employ additional men if there is work for them to do and the profits of the industry permit it.

43. Moreover, if a minimum wage were introduced in the farming industry without corresponding measures to ensure the ability of the industry to stand the increased cost of labour, there would be a danger that farmers would meet it by laying down still more land to grass and so dispensing with still more labourers ; for though the State may enforce payment of a minimum wage it cannot force farmers to employ any more men than they choose. And, in addition to such a permanent reduction of the number of men employed on the land, farmers would be tempted to keep a smaller permanent staff of men employed all the year round ; supplementing it by temporary labour in the busy seasons. This risk, incidental to any minimum-wage system, can only be met by an agricultural policy which ensures stability to the industry, and instils a real sense of security into the mind of the farmer. And we regard this risk as a grave one. A weekly wage at not less than a given rate is of little good to a family if the wage-earner is from time to time off work altogether.

44. To understand the farmers' position it must be remembered that during the years of the great depression agriculture was left by the State to save itself as best it could, and the changes which farmers were then forced to introduce as an alternative to going under have brought about a position in which the methods of agriculture preferred by many, and perhaps most, farmers to-day are not identical with the interests of the Nation.

If we are, therefore, to achieve the purposes of this inquiry, we must first of all reconcile the interests of the farmers and the State ; we must realise that just

as the minimum wage is the key to the problem of how to attract the largest possible number of suitable ex-Service men, so other measures, calculated to give the farmer sufficient security and stability of price for his produce, are essential if the land of England and Wales is to be farmed in such a way as to provide employment for the men and promote our national interests.

45. During the last two generations it has been our economic policy to develop our manufactures to the neglect of our agriculture, and to rely to an excessive extent on the markets of the world for foodstuffs. At the present time we import four-fifths of the wheat and one-half of the meat we consume in this country, as well as enormous supplies of cheese, butter, sugar, fruit, eggs, and other farm produce.

The average value of such imports, excluding tropical products, but including sugar, consumed in the United Kingdom in the three years before the outbreak of war, 1911-13, exceeded £200,000,000 per annum. We do not contend that the whole of these imports could be produced with advantage within the United Kingdom. We must, in the future as in the past, draw considerable supplies from our Dominions over the seas, as well as from foreign countries such as Russia, Denmark, and Argentina; and we do not for a moment dispute the supreme importance of maintaining unimpaired our *ability* to import freely in time of war; but we have learnt from the circumstances of the present War the danger of relying to too large an extent on imported foodstuffs. The high prices now prevailing constitute a grave menace to the strength and resources of this

country, both from the economic and the military point of view.

46. On the economic side, according to Professor W. G. S. Adams, the increase in the cost of imported foodstuffs in 1915, as compared with 1913, amounted to no less than £85,000,000, although the actual quantity imported had not been increased at all.

These high prices are often ascribed to high freights. This is only partially true. The main cause is to be found in the operation of the ordinary law of demand and supply. The total weight of food imported into this country during the war has been about the same as before the war, *i.e.* the supply to this country has been kept up in spite of scarcity of ships. But prices have been affected by several factors. The supply of food produced in Europe has been restricted by the war. The war has also prevented the export of grain from Russia, with the result that countries which used to draw largely on that supply have become our competitors for supplies from other markets. In addition, consumption has risen through the military demands of ourselves and our Allies, and in this country from the increased spending power of the population resulting from higher wages. Two consequences have resulted. The internal demand in the United Kingdom has greatly increased. The demand of other buying Nations competing with us in non-European markets has forced up prices there. In the case of many raw materials imported by this country for which the demand has not increased, there has been little, if any, rise in price, although the freights for their carriage have been enormously advanced. But where there is

no home source of supply, the importer can force the consumer who cannot do without the article to pay the freight in the shape of increased price. And there is no doubt that if the extent to which this country produces its own food can be substantially increased there will be less danger of a rise in price due either to higher freights or to increased demand from any market on the year's world crop.

47. Moreover, the enhanced prices of food have contributed to the heavy excess in the value of imports over exports which has caused so much anxiety. For many years to come, the change produced by the war in the balance of our financial relation to certain foreign countries, especially the United States of America, will make it desirable to reduce, as far as possible, the excess of our imports over our exports. It is probable that in no other way could imports be so easily reduced as by increasing the produce of the land of the United Kingdom.

48. Discussing the military reasons for increasing the supply of home-grown food, Lieut.-Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, K.C.B., Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence, pointed out to the Committee that the weak point, "the Achilles' heel," of this country in the matter of defence is its dependence upon imported supplies, and that while the cutting off, for a time, of the imports of raw materials for industries would be serious, the Nation could tide over such a period, provided it had adequate supplies of food. Surprises cannot be eliminated from war, and the present war has not only provided a large number of surprises, but has suggested the possibility of more

and greater surprises in any future war. It is in order that the naval and military forces may have time to cope with surprises that an increased production of food within these islands is so important.

49. It is generally agreed by the leading authorities on agriculture that a large increase in the output of the land is practicable in this country, and would be readily effected by the enterprising farmer if he were only secured more stable prices for his produce in the future than have prevailed during the past forty years. Mr. Prothero, writing in 1912, said :—"Thousands of acres of tillage and grass land are comparatively wasted, under-farmed, and under-manned. Countries whose climate is severer than our own, and in which poorer soils are cultivated, produce far more from the land than ourselves. The gross receipts per cultivated area in Great Britain have been calculated at only one-fifth of those of Belgium and two-thirds of those of Denmark." ¹

50. The inquiries undertaken last year by the Departmental Committee ² presided over by Lord Milner, and the similar Committees for Scotland and for Ireland, have made it unnecessary for us to conduct any exhaustive examination into the means for increasing the home production of foodstuffs.

Lord Milner's Committee was appointed "to consider what steps should be taken for maintaining and, if possible, increasing the present production of food in England and Wales on the assumption that the war

¹ *English Farming*, p. 401.

² See their Interim Report (Cd. 8048) and Final Report (Cd. 8095).

may be prolonged beyond the harvest of 1916." They confined their inquiry to the period during and immediately succeeding the present war, whereas we have to consider how the future prospects of agriculture, for many years after the war is over, may affect the fortunes of the ex-Service men whom we wish to attract to the soil.

51. Allowing for this difference in our points of view, we desire to express our concurrence with the following conclusions arrived at by Lord Milner's Committee :

- (1) " That there is great need to increase the productivity of the soil of our country by stimulating more intensive cultivation and bringing under the plough a large area of land at present wastefully devoted to inferior pasture.
- (2) " That the only method of effecting a substantial increase in the *gross* production of food in England and Wales for the harvest of 1916, and later, consists in restoring to arable cultivation some of the poorer grass land that has been laid down since the seventies."

52. We desire, however, to qualify the second of these conclusions by pointing out that whilst it was true if limited to the harvest of 1916, yet, given the necessary time and favourable conditions, some material addition may be made in the amount of foodstuffs produced in this country by improved methods of farming applied to both arable and grass land as they exist, and even apart from ploughing up the grass.

Among these methods we would specially direct attention to more scientific manuring, better seeds, more machinery, milk records, arable dairying, and alterations in the rotation of crops. Moreover, the adoption of better business methods (*e.g.* book-keeping, marketing, co-operation, credit and transport, to all of which allusion is made in Part I of this Report) would enable the cultivator to make larger and more regular profits, and so directly or indirectly increase his power of production. These improvements, however, can only be introduced gradually, and their adoption would depend partly on the application of new capital to the farming industry, and partly on the advance of agricultural education and research. The schemes recently brought into operation by the Board of Agriculture for providing education and technical advice for farmers were, before the war, promising good results, at any rate as far as the younger farmers were concerned.

53. We do not think, however, that these improvements, essential though they are to the future prosperity of British agriculture, would result in the employment of a much larger amount of labour than was employed before the war, unless a larger acreage is brought under the plough. We mentioned before (paragraph 19) that the area of arable land in England and Wales during the last forty years has been reduced by over $3\frac{1}{2}$ million acres. Apart from the question of profit to the farmer, there is no doubt that the decline in arable farming represents a very serious loss of produce to the Nation.

54. Speaking broadly, the money value of the

produce of arable land is, in normal times, more than twice as great as the produce of grass land, and the food value which, in time of war, may be a matter of serious importance, is from three to five times as great. Mr. T. H. Middleton, who dealt with this matter exhaustively in a paper¹ before the British Association last year, stated in his evidence before us that, "on a mixed arable farm, an acre should feed a man for about 290 days, as against a medium grazing farm, 58 days—about five times as much human food. The same idea was expressed by Mr. Hall, who stated that an acre of arable land produced "600 lb. of wheat and 300 lb. of barley over and above the same amount of meat as the acre of grass land produced."

55. The fear is sometimes expressed that a reduction in the area of land under permanent grass would seriously affect the production of meat and milk. This fear is not, however, shared by leading agricultural authorities. For instance, Lord Milner's Committee, who examined several witnesses on this subject, such as Mr. M. J. R. Dunstan and Professor T. B. Wood, stated in their Report: "We accept the opinion, which was confirmed by all the witnesses examined on the point, that an increase in the area under arable cultivation will, with proper farming, add to the production of wheat and other crops for human consumption without diminishing the capacity of the country to maintain its existing live stock and its output of meat and milk." Similar opinions have been expressed by Mr.

¹ *Systems of Farming and the Production of Food—The Need for More Tillage*, by T. H. Middleton, C.B.—*Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, September 1915.

A. D. Hall, Sir Herbert Matthews, Mr. T. H. Middleton, and other witnesses who have appeared before us.

56. We think it is of the first importance, if the objects of our Report are to be attained, that the State should secure the breaking up of a large proportion of the land which has been allowed to go down to grass during the last forty years. Each million acres broken up would provide employment for an additional 40,000 men¹ and, of course, the families of the men would mean a very much larger increase of the rural population. With the important question of the time within which these measures must be carried out with a view to the ex-Service men we deal later.

57. We do not contemplate the breaking up of really good pastures or of very poor land only suitable for sheep runs. But we have evidence to show that between these two extremes there is a large acreage of inferior grass which might be ploughed up with advantage to the Nation, and also to the cultivator, if the prices of corn are maintained at a reasonable remunerative level.

¹ We have received various estimates as to the number of additional men who would be found employment in agriculture by the breaking up of pasture. Mr. Hall and other witnesses considered that, after allowing for the use of labour-saving machines, rather more than 20,000 additional men would be employed on a million acres of grass converted to arable. Sir Henry Rew, who, in giving evidence before us, approved of the estimate of three additional men per hundred acres, has stated that probably 60,000 to 80,000 men were displaced in 1881-1901 by the laying down of two million acres to grass. Mr. Middleton considered that on the basis of the number of men returned in the 1911 Census as farm workers, the number actually employed on 1,000 acres of ploughed land was 83 as compared with 16 employed on grass. This would indicate that if a million acres of grass were broken up and, on the average, two-thirds of them were annually under the plough, the number of additional men employed would be 44,500.

58. The present condition of agriculture, as we pointed out in paragraph 20, is the direct result of the years of depression when the price of corn fell to a disastrous level, the corn area shrank by $2\frac{1}{2}$ million acres, land was laid down to grass, and farmers began to pay increased attention to grazing and dairying.

It cannot be wondered at if agriculturists are reluctant to sacrifice the capital outlay involved in laying down land to grass, as well as to accept the risks inevitable in a change of system, unless they are assured that the returns obtainable from their corn crops will not again fall to the low figure which brought such disaster to the industry thirty-five years ago. Moreover, it is held by many agricultural authorities that at even the improved prices which prevailed before the war, grazing and dairying were more profitable industries than corn growing, owing principally to the increasing demand of the towns for fresh milk and milk products, and to the prices obtainable for home-grown meat.

59. We think it important to realise that the farmers as a whole will be reluctant to plough up land under grass. High prices have been ruling during the war for arable crops, but farmers have long memories and once bitten are twice shy. High prices ruled half a century ago, but they fell, and every farmer in England suffered and many were ruined ; and many more would have been ruined but for the general reduction of rents by the landlords, who at their own expense practically financed the farmers through the bad years ; and what most farmers did then was to put plough land down to grass, and they will be very fearful now of

undoing what they did then ; the more so where the land has matured into really good pasture. We are satisfied that a sense of real security against an undue fall in the gross money return to arable land is absolutely essential if farmers are to be persuaded to plough up much land. Nothing short of this will do, unless it be compulsion.

Various proposals have been made in order to get the grass ploughed up.

60. The proposal of a Minimum Guarantee for Wheat has been much discussed among agriculturists in recent years, and was advocated by Sir Herbert Matthews, the Secretary of the Central Chamber of Agriculture, in his evidence before us, and by other witnesses. Lord Milner's Committee, in their Interim Report, July 1915, recommended that the State should guarantee 45s. a quarter for all marketable home-grown wheat for a period of four years. It was suggested that any payment to the farmer should be regulated by the difference between 45s. and the *Gazette* average price of wheat for the year in which the wheat is harvested, the farmer being left free to dispose of his produce in the open market. The recommendations of Lord Milner's Committee were designed to meet the circumstances of the present war and to safeguard the country from what was then considered the urgent danger of a shortage in the supplies of food.

61. Our objects are somewhat different, because they are permanent and not temporary, but we have little doubt that, if Lord Milner's recommendations had been adopted, and had the weather been favour-

able and labour available, a considerable amount of grass land would have been broken up, and there would consequently have been more scope for employment of labour after the war; although we recognise that during last winter these conditions were not present. The permanent employment of this labour would, however, not have been attained by limiting the guarantee to a period of four years, and we are convinced that many farmers would be unwilling to plough up pastures which were at all profitable without having an assurance of remunerative wheat prices for a considerably longer period.

62. We do not consider it within our functions to give definite advice as to the particular method by which the Government should give such stability to the industry and security to the farmers as is necessary for the better conditions of employment which we desire and for the breaking up of the grass land. But we venture to put forward certain considerations affecting the various alternative methods of carrying out such a policy. If the method of guarantee were adopted, we should, for permanent purposes, advise a guarantee of from 40s. to 42s. per quarter extending over a period of ten years. If this were done we should hope that it would result in large additions being made to the arable land of this country. It is impossible to forecast the rate at which land might be expected to be broken up, and if the first two seasons after the war were favourable, and the necessary amount of machinery and labour were procurable, we should hope that a substantial beginning would have been made at the end of the second year in the

process of restoring to the plough the 4,000,000 acres put down to grass in the last forty years.

The advantages of this method would be that—

- (a) The price of wheat to the consumer would not be raised ; and
- (b) The farmer would be given a strong inducement to cultivate his wheat land intensively, so as to secure as large a yield per acre as possible.

63. The proposal of a guaranteed price for wheat has met with opposition from some who think that it would involve an undue preference to a particular class of farmer in the country, and would consequently involve an unfair discrimination against others, such as the farmers in the West of England, whose main business is the growing of meat and the production of milk. Two answers are made to this objection. The first is that the milk farmer has a monopoly and is completely protected from foreign competition. No fresh milk is imported. The meat raiser is not completely protected, but his foreign competition is less than 50 per cent., and since the introduction of chilled beef some years ago he has maintained his position. The second is that a minimum guarantee for wheat would in our opinion tend to cheapen cattle foods, and thus lower the cost of raising meat. If at the same time the export of millers' offals were prohibited, the dairy and pig industry would at once derive a great benefit. This would be particularly helpful to small holders.

64. In addition to guaranteeing the minimum price

for wheat, it has been suggested to us that the State should offer a bonus to every farmer who is willing to break up land which is at present "permanently" under grass, and to cultivate it properly. If this plan were adopted, we believe that £2 per acre would be an adequate sum to offer, the payment to be spread over four years. Payment of the later instalments should be dependent on the land being kept in good cultivation. This combined scheme of guarantee and bonus would assist both those farmers who have grown wheat during the period of lower prices and those who have sown down their land. We do not consider that a system of bonus by itself could take the place of a guarantee; for there would not be sufficient incentive to keep land under the plough.

65. There is no doubt that most farmers are at the present time, as they have always been, in favour of stimulating the home production of food by the imposition of Import Duties on foodstuffs. What they want is security against excessive fluctuations of the market caused by the importation of foreign supplies at very low prices. We do not propose to discuss in this Report the question of protection for home products; but we assume that if any general system of protecting home products against foreign competition is adopted by Parliament, full consideration would be paid to the claims of the farmers to share in such protection for all his products which are seriously affected in price by such competition.

66. If the import duties were sufficiently heavy they would have the effect of increasing the production in this country of wheat and of any other pro-

tected articles, and if they were not confined to grain and flour it would be possible to give assistance to every class of farmer. If continued for a series of years, they would undoubtedly lead gradually to the increase of arable land and more employment in agriculture, and in any case the State would have a new source of revenue instead of a new liability as under the proposals for a guarantee and bonus. On the other hand, it may be doubted whether import duties without such a guarantee as we have suggested would give the farmer the security which would be necessary. In the first place, if the produce of the Dominions were subject to a substantial preference over foreign produce, it is open to doubt whether the home output would be *sufficiently* benefited. In the second place, though a sliding scale might be adopted, we doubt whether the necessary *stability* of home prices could be assured. In any event, for the purpose of employing the ex-Service men, it is essential to get a large area of grass land broken up very quickly, and for this, the operation of import duties would be too slow.

67. But it is important to observe that no one of these three suggested methods excludes either of the other two. The bonus is expressly for the purpose of obtaining prompt action. The guarantee and import duties could easily be combined, for if import duties raised the price of wheat to the level of the guarantee, no demand would be made on the Exchequer, and if the import duties did not produce a sufficient stability of minimum prices, the Exchequer would only be called on to make good the balance.

68. In some quarters the Compulsory Breaking-up of Grass Land is suggested. Measures of compulsion would not, however, in our opinion, be right unless the State were prepared either—

- (a) by one or other of the means above indicated, or otherwise, to make arable cultivation profitable to the farmer ; or
- (b) to pay him, and, in some cases, his landlord, any compensation that might be judged equitable by an independent assessor.

The only possible alternative in many cases would be for the State to take over the land at a valuation, and make arrangements for its being broken up and cultivated. But it would hardly be possible to deal with small parcels of inferior pasture under such a scheme, and it would be expensive and might be unremunerative for the State to acquire large areas of poor land.

69. We do not advise compulsory measures in the first instance. At the end of the war, when labour, horses, and machinery are available, an appeal should be made by the Board of Agriculture, based upon such measures of assistance to the industry as the Government may adopt. But if the farmers proved unwilling to respond to such an appeal, the question of compulsion would, we think, in the national interest, have to be considered. We regard the possession of land as involving duties to the State. Land ought to be well farmed, and we think the State justified in taking measures, if necessary, to enforce good farming.

70. We hope that voluntary measures will succeed,

but should compulsion ultimately prove to be necessary in order to secure the breaking up of inferior pasture, all land suitable for ploughing up would have to be scheduled in each district. This scheduling might be done through the agency of the Small Holdings Commissioners of the Board of Agriculture, aided by a small committee (chosen perhaps from the local War Agricultural Committee) representing the landowners, farmers, and public authorities in the district.

Several of our witnesses considered that scheduling inferior grass suitable for breaking up would be of advantage in itself, as directing the attention of agriculturists to the improvement of their land. We do not, however, advise it, except as a part of a general scheme for increasing tillage; nor do we advise it until our landowners and farmers have been given an opportunity of responding voluntarily to the Nation's call.

71. It has been suggested (by some of those who object to all the above proposals) that certain inducements might be offered to farmers to break up grass land by relieving arable land from a large proportion of the rates and taxes which it would otherwise pay. We consider that the whole question of local taxation requires review, but, while we regard such relief as long overdue, we do not think that any changes that would be practicable in the laws of rating would be of sufficient magnitude to affect to any considerable extent the objects we have in view.

72. We suggest that the Board of Agriculture should acquire or rent in different parts of the country a certain number of farms on which the land is at pre-

sent mostly under grass, with a view to breaking the grass up and running it as a Demonstration Farm under a competent manager. We think it would be possible in this way to demonstrate to all the farmers of the district the practical possibility of making an arable farm pay as well as or better than a grass farm. Farmers are cautious in adopting changes of a permanent character and slow to move, but we are convinced that for such a purpose ocular demonstration is the best teacher. The farm should be run as a purely commercial proposition and not for experimental purposes; the farm accounts should be kept in detail and all the books be open to inspection.

73. Whatever policy be adopted to secure the provision of more arable land, it is highly desirable that the Board of Agriculture, either directly or through the local authorities, should arrange for the supply of motor ploughs and steam cultivators in the districts to which they are suited, so that the best possible use may be made of them during the appropriate seasons. The machines might be kept under the control of an official of the county council or of a local agricultural society, who would arrange with the farmers to pay a fee for their use sufficient to cover all expenses.

74. We also think it desirable that the Board should arrange with the Ministry of Munitions that certain suitable munition works should be utilised as soon as war demands permit of it for the manufacture of agricultural machinery. And even before this time agricultural engineering firms should, if possible, be permitted to turn out a reasonable supply of spare

parts for machines now in use, as otherwise many of these cannot be kept running.

75. We strongly agree with the advice of the Majority as regards the establishment of new agricultural industries (para. 184); we endorse what they say as to sugar beet, and desire to call attention to the fact that in 1913 we imported almost £11,000,000 worth of beet sugar from Germany, all of which could have been grown in this country.

Paragraph 184 in the Majority Report is as follows:

“184. Apart from the general question of policy discussed in the preceding paragraphs, we think that agriculture might be developed and agricultural employment increased by the establishment of new agricultural industries. The sugar-beet industry, which for several years has claimed the attention of the agricultural community and the Government Departments concerned, might after the cessation of hostilities be established in time to provide employment for a certain number of ex-Service men. In order to test the possibility of growing beet and manufacturing sugar on a commercial scale it will be necessary either to lend Government support to private enterprise or for the Government itself to undertake the cultivation of beet and the starting of a factory or factories for the manufacture of sugar. In the latter case the Government could absorb a number of ex-Service men amongst its employers. The growing of more potatoes in those districts which are suited to the crop has also been advocated by several of our witnesses, in order to make it economically possible (as in some continental countries) to manufacture industrial alcohol and starch on a large scale, as well as increasing the supply of home-grown food both for men and cattle. There are, in addition, some minor industries, such as the use of osiers for basket making, the manufacture of acetone, and the use of underwood for making fences, hoops, crates, etc., which might be carried on under improved conditions and would lead to the employment of a certain number of men, including some who were disabled. The cultivation and manufacture of home-grown tobacco are also deserving of further investigation.”

76. Our views on the possibilities of beet sugar are well expressed in the following paragraph from the pen of a well-known agricultural authority, whose anonymity we respect but regret :

“The sugar-beet industry has assumed gigantic proportions in Germany, and its introduction into this country has been urged with gathering force for the last ten years. The advantages of a home-grown supply of sugar and of a valuable cattle food are too well known to need repetition. The indirect benefit which the industry confers on agriculture by affording an object-lesson in highly intensive farming has also been noticed. In one direction the industry has in this country already passed beyond the experimental stage. It has been demonstrated that sugar beet can be grown in England as well and as profitably as on the Continent. The one unknown factor is whether the manufacture can be made to pay. That is a point which experience alone can decide. It is believed that, without the imposition of any additional duties, beet sugar can now be manufactured with commercial success. But the initial cost of the venture can scarcely be put at less than £250,000. If the capital were found, and if the experiment were tried and succeeded, an excise duty would be, in all probability, imposed which would crush the nascent industry. The enterprise is, therefore, too hazardous for private capital alone.

“The case would seem to be one for the Development Commissioners. Here is an experiment which might prove of immense advantage to the Nation, and Parliament has placed public funds at the disposal of the Commission for the purpose of assisting useful experiments. Unfortunately, the Act, as interpreted by lawyers, excludes from its benefit any company

which makes a profit. It does not matter whether the company returns its profits to the Treasury or applies them to public purposes; the company must not make a profit. Hence all experimental commercial undertakings, where the attempt to make profits is the very essence of the experiment, are excluded. The result is that the Development Commission are powerless. They cannot even guarantee the investors against an ascertained and strictly limited portion of the possible loss. It may be thought that the narrow objections which hinder, if they do not prevent, the establishment of an industry of such great potential value in this country push the principles of Free Trade to the verge of pedantry.”¹

77. We also suggest that the Government should turn its attention forthwith to the development of our potato industry. The prospects in the United Kingdom in this respect are highly favourable. In the first place, the potato is grown everywhere throughout the kingdom, and our average yield per acre compared with the yield of other nations shows that in this crop we still hold the premier position. But the store of knowledge accumulated in this country on the subject of potato breeding and growing would raise even this satisfactory yield considerably if the growers could rely upon a profitable market. At present the limit to our annual productions is set by the market for table potatoes. The present moment is a good opportunity for creating additional profitable markets, by establishing potato-drying plants and factories for the industrial use of potatoes for starch and alcohol.

¹ *The Times*, April 25th, 1916.

78. It is important to realise that the potato and the sugar beet are not merely profitable crops in themselves, but may, in addition, be made into instruments for conserving and increasing soil fertility and inducing a high standard of farming, if the State will go into partnership with the farmer and enable him, by means of distilleries and starch and sugar factories, to turn the substance taken by the plant from the air into articles of commerce, and return in the by-products and waste to the soil (via the live-stock) all that the plant had taken from the soil.

79. The establishment of minor industries, such as tobacco growing, basket making, hoop making, and the encouragement of woodcraft generally, the establishment of fruit and vegetable drying plants, and largely increased facilities for townsmen to obtain and work allotments, are all part of that larger conception of the functions of agriculture which will tend to attract men and attach them permanently to the soil, and should therefore find a definite place in the agricultural policy which must evolve out of our deliberations unless we are to lose the greatest opportunity of our days for establishing a just balance between the State and this vital industry.¹

F.—RECLAMATION OF WASTE LAND

80. With paragraphs 170 to 174 of the Majority Report (Reclamation and Afforestation) we entirely agree.

¹ An addendum to the Minority Report, written subsequently to the presentation of the Report, discusses further the question of agricultural organisation,

Paragraphs 170 to 174 of the Majority Report are as follows :

“170. In the foregoing part of this Report we have discussed the future of British agriculture on what appears to us the most probable hypothesis, *i.e.* that there will be a shortage in the supply of agricultural labour after the war. But it is quite possible, and even consistent with this theory, that the demobilisation of the forces at the close of the war will result in a serious condition of unemployment in the labour market generally. It will be very difficult for the Government to retain for any length of time after the conclusion of peace the services either of the sailors and soldiers enlisted for the period of the war, or of the persons now engaged in munition factories. With a view to the probable discharge within a few months of large numbers of these workers, it will be necessary for the State and the local authorities to prepare beforehand schemes of remunerative works of improvement, both in town and country, on which the surplus labour may be employed without delay. We consider it of great importance that there should be included, among these, schemes of reclamation and afforestation, which will directly benefit the agricultural districts. Mr. A. D. Hall has placed before us an interesting memorandum on the subject of the reclamation of waste lands, which we append to this Report. The Royal Commission on Coast Erosion received a considerable volume of evidence indicating the existence of large areas of tidal lands in England and Wales which were suitable for reclamation for agricultural purposes, but the Commission came to the conclusion that, in most instances, reclamation would not be profitable from a financial point of view.¹ It appears possible, however, to reclaim considerable areas of slob land on the East Coast and of bog land in Wales at a cost which would be reasonable in proportion to the ultimate value of the land to be gained for cultivation. If the experiments now being carried on by the Development Commission on heath land in Norfolk prove successful, some of these areas might also be taken in hand with a view to their improvement, and to the employment of ex-Service men on the land.

“171. In view of the dangers revealed by the war which result from the dependence of this country upon timber im-

¹ Third (and Final) Report of the Royal Commission on Coast Erosion, 1911 [Cd. 5708], p. 144.

ported from abroad, we consider that schemes for the planting of waste and other suitable land should be prepared with a view to their providing employment for ex-Service men at the end of the war. The State might itself undertake schemes, or might make loans to landowners for the purpose, or might advance money to the Corporations of some of our large cities to enable them to plant their water catchment areas. A policy of afforestation might reasonably be adopted on the grounds of national security or as a means of creating permanent employment.

"172. Whatever schemes are drawn up it is desirable that the work should, as far as possible, be of an economic and useful character, and not mere relief works of the ordinary kind. If undertaken under proper conditions, land reclamation would afford a considerable volume of employment for unskilled labour in embankment, drainage, levelling, clearing, and road making. It would also, under skilled guidance, add to the acreage capable of cultivation, would provide additional land for settlement, and should ultimately prove a not unprofitable investment for the State. Planting and afforestation would also provide a large amount of employment both immediately and in the future, and this employment would be chiefly available in the winter season, when there is comparatively little demand for agricultural work. It might be of great advantage to some districts if there were more facilities for combining woodcraft with work on the farms.

"173. The important thing is to have the schemes ready, and all legal and other obstacles removable at short notice. For this purpose, further powers to acquire and develop land will have to be vested by law in some Government Department, preferably the Board of Agriculture, as that Department already deals with commons, land improvement, and forestry. The Board of Trade would doubtless be able to facilitate the operations so far as foreshores are concerned.

"174. Where ex-Service men are employed by public authorities on reclamation works, care must be taken to make the conditions of their life reasonably attractive. If huts have to be erected they might be provided with small gardens. There should be a temporary building for meeting and social purposes. Some provision should be made for lodging the families of the married men within reasonable distance. A good living wage will have to be paid where piecework is not possible, but, in fixing wages, the men should be classified according to the value of their labour."

We desire, however, to make an additional suggestion. We recognise that, however strong an inducement the State offers to farmers to break up grass land, the process will be slow; and that it is impossible to expect a large area to have been broken up before demobilisation is over. If, therefore, the men are ultimately to be employed on the new arable land, some means must be devised for providing them with remunerative occupation in the meantime. Now, reclamation schemes involve the temporary employment of a large number of men on a small area of land. We suggest that reclamation work should be undertaken to whatever extent is necessary to ensure the retention of the men for ultimate employment in agriculture. Military hutments could no doubt be used for the purpose of housing them.

G.—THE ELEMENT OF TIME

81. If the men are to be retained in this country it is plain that the Nation must be in a position to make them a "firm" offer at the time when they will have to make up their minds. That, as General Childs¹ told us, will be before they receive furlough, preliminary to discharge.

In our view it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this fundamental factor of the problem. Everything hinges on it. It means, in our opinion, that the whole policy of the Government must not only be thought out at once, but that most of it

¹ Brigadier-General Childs gave evidence on behalf of the Adjutant-General's Department.

must be passed through Parliament before the end of the war. If that be done the delay inevitably incidental to employing large numbers of men in excess of the number employed in farming before the war need not be fatal. By means of temporary expedients, such as reclamation schemes, or the need of farmers to take on extra hands for breaking up grass land, or definite promises by farmers of employment at deferred dates, the men may probably be persuaded to stay in England. But they will not be persuaded unless they know exactly what sort of a life they will have to look forward to when they do get their employment.

82. We, of course, realise that the proposals we make are drastic ; that to carry them out involves big changes in the whole outlook of the country towards agriculture ; that it means a new agricultural policy ; and that we ask for all or much of this to be done during the war. That is true, but the opportunity, we repeat, is unique ; it will never recur ; and the time which will be available for seizing it will be short, just as long as it takes to discharge the men at the end of the war. It is this exigency of the occasion which necessitates such rapidity of action.

83. In order to get hold of the men elaborate arrangements for propagandist work will be needed. Lists of men who are thinking of an open-air life must first be obtained through the regimental officers, as General Childs advised. But after that it will be necessary to bring the Government's detailed proposals before the men so ascertained. The persons selected for explaining the proposals to the men must be qualified by a real knowledge of the subject. We

do not, however, deal with the matter in detail, as we think a small executive committee should be appointed to work out a scheme. The Committee should contain representatives of the Admiralty, the War Office, the Board of Agriculture, and also, we suggest, the Agricultural Organisation Society.

The terms of our Reference are limited to England and Wales, but it is evident that a Committee such as we suggest would act for the United Kingdom as a whole, and would include representatives of Scotland and Ireland. Indeed, the Land Settlement of the different parts of the Empire is so much one subject that we conceive it possible that the various Governments of His Majesty here and in the Dominions might consider it desirable to constitute one Joint Committee for the purpose. Such a plan would prevent overlapping and simplify administration, and would ensure that the offers of both the United Kingdom and the Dominions were brought effectively to the notice of the men. The uses of such an Imperial Committee would be capable of extension.

CONCLUSION

84. We recognise that the majority of farmers would be content to be left alone, but the recommendations we make are based on consideration of the national interest. Our views may be summarised as follows :

- (1) That it is essential for the national welfare and for the future development of British agriculture to bring back to the land as many as possible of the agricultural labourers who have left it, and to attract to the same

occupation a substantial number of ex-Service men who have not hitherto had any agricultural experience.

- (2) That we shall not achieve either of these objects unless important changes are made in the pre-war conditions both of the farming industry and of the agricultural labourer's life on the land.
- (3) That the measures necessary to secure these changes should be introduced and passed into law at the earliest possible moment, so as to retain in this country the ex-Service men who desire occupation on the land.
- (4) That if advantage is not taken of the impending release of millions of able-bodied and energetic young men from the Forces and munition factories to secure a great reinforcement of our farm workers and rural population, a unique opportunity of increasing the Nation's strength both for peace and war will have been lost.

85. We desire cordially to join in the Majority's appreciation of the services which our secretary, Mr. H. L. French, has rendered to the Committee.

We are, my Lord,

Your obedient Servants,
(Signed) GEO. H. ROBERTS.
LESLIE SCOTT.
EDWARD G. STRUTT.

H. L. FRENCH (*Secretary*),
June 19th, 1916,

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Memorandum on the Reclamation of Land by Mr. A. D. Hall, M.A., F.R.S.

THE area of land under cultivation in England rose year by year from the date at which exact records begin up to 1892; since then it has declined similarly year by year, about 800,000 acres in all having been lost. In the main this loss represents urban encroachments which have no longer been balanced by the bringing into cultivation of portions of the margin of waste still existing in the country. The work of reclaiming, which had been most active towards the middle of the last century, proceeded in two ways, occasionally as a landlord's enterprise on a large scale, but more generally as the tenant farmers, with or without improving leases, gradually drained and cleaned up the rough land adjacent to their holdings. The process stopped with the great fall in agricultural prices; the cost of the labour to clear the land ceased to be repaid by the value of its produce, for at that time labour was the main almost the only item in the cost of reclamation, and no new factor had arisen to alter the situation. In Germany, however, the march of events has been very different; the cultivation of the waste land—moor and heath—has been taken in

hand in increasing areas year by year. For example, in the small province of Oldenburg about an average of 60 settlers per annum were placed on reclaimed land between 1901 and 1910, but the numbers rose to 130 in 1910, and 166 in 1911, each colonist possessing some 20-25 acres of land that had been added to the cultivated area. So convinced of the economic soundness of the process had the State become that in 1913 the Prussian Diet sanctioned a loan of 1½ millions sterling, half of which was to be devoted to State schemes of reclamation, £150,000 to drainage, and £500,000 was to be used in subventions to provincial schemes of reclamation. This contrast between the action of the two countries is not to be accounted for simply by the difference in fiscal policies and the higher prices for agricultural produce ruling in Germany; it is in the main due to the fact that the Germans had studied the problem and were employing modern resources, both in the way of knowledge and materials, to the treatment of the land. The same process has been going on in the free-trade countries of Holland and Belgium. In Great Britain no advance had been made upon the methods in vogue at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the land was drained where necessary, the rough vegetation was burnt off, the soil broken up, the only treatment other than mechanical being a dressing of lime. Once cleansed the land was put under the ordinary crops, with as a rule extremely poor results for many years, though eventually, by dint of perseverance and an annual expenditure that was in the aggregate considerable, though perhaps not large in any one year,

the land accumulated fertility and became a paying proposition, like the little farms one sees everywhere bitten out of the waste on the flanks of the New Forest, on the Bagshot Heath, and the Surrey wastes. The German land reclaimers on the other hand have recognised that the natural infertility of the heaths and moors is in the main due to their deficiency in mineral salts—lime, phosphoric acid, and potash—and after the mechanical operations of drainage and clearing had been effected they set themselves to remedy this deficiency by an initial expenditure on fertilisers that would appear to a farmer enormous for such land, but without which even a moderate crop cannot be grown. In this way the land at once becomes capable of yielding a living return for the labour of cultivation, the initial outlay on basic slag and kainit proves to be much less costly than the recurring losses involved in growing crops with no special manuring until some sort of fertility is built up. Indeed, in many cases one sees that the existing farms reclaimed from the heaths in Great Britain are still suffering in part from their original deficiencies; their productivity is at a low level because even after half a century or more of cultivation the soil is still short of lime, phosphoric acid, potash, sometimes of one constituent, sometimes of all three.

It is necessary to emphasise this general statement—that land reclamation as practised in Great Britain has never taken into account the chemical constitution of the soil and its possible rectification by cheap mineral fertilisers, largely because the process was already falling into disuse by the time these fertilisers became

available, and because few landowners have had sufficient confidence in the situation or faith in science to embark capital on agricultural enterprises during the last thirty years. It is for this reason that such accounts as are available of the costs of land reclamation in England afford no guidance to the possibilities that are open. They sometimes show good results where the land was initially healthy, as on Lincoln Heath, or where plentiful supplies of town refuse were available, as in Cheshire, Bedford, or parts of Surrey ; elsewhere they have been unremunerative and have led to the widespread tradition that the most ruinous of all proceedings is to try to turn bad land into good.

Before discussing the different types of waste land that are capable of reclamation in Great Britain, it is perhaps advisable to render the term more precise by excluding those forms of improvement that may be regarded as within the scope of a tenant holding a lease of reasonable duration. Many examples of rough waste land occur that can profitably be brought into cultivation by ordinary means, *e.g.* fields of clay land overgrown with briars and brambles, which only require cleaning and draining, with a dressing of basic slag, to convert them into decent grass land. The term "reclamation" is better reserved for such cases as involve a preliminary expenditure of capital on a scale comparable with or greater than the initial value of the land, and begin with certain defined operations which are apart from the ordinary routine of cultivation. Reclamation deals with land the initial value of which lies between £1 and perhaps £7 per acre as an upper limit, and the outlay before the land can be

let for ordinary farming may be as high as £7 an acre, irrespective of buildings and roads.

In Great Britain opportunities for reclamation on a reasonably large scale are to be found as follows :

(1) *Salt Marsh and Slob Lands under Water at High Tide.*—While no great area of this debatable ground exists, payable areas ripe for reclamation are to be found in many of the estuaries of our rivers, particularly on the East Coast. Round the Wash the process has always been going on and could now be resumed with advantage; other areas have been examined in the Dee Estuary, the Firth of Forth, Cromarty, etc. The process is well understood; it consists in throwing up a wall round the area, embanking any streams and providing them with outlets, cutting drainage channels and providing them with sluices to discharge at low water or with a pumping station. In the Eastern Counties experience has shown that it is rarely wise to embank land that has not already been so far built up by natural actions as to have acquired a green covering of vegetation. The embankment is comparatively costly in labour and varies with the size and shape of the area, but the land gained is nearly always of high quality, worth from £30 to £50 an acre. Perhaps the chief obstacle to the prosecution of such work is the uncertain nature of the title to areas of this kind. In the main the property resides in the frontager; the Crown possesses certain ill-defined rights, but rarely can make use of them except to deal with the frontager, the more so as the strip to be reclaimed is often only accessible by leave of the frontager.

(2) *Areas of Blown Sand adjoining the Sea.*—On the coast of North Wales several large areas of this kind are to be found ; next the sea comes a line of dunes, behind which is a comparatively level stretch covered with rough grass and rushes, the soil being almost pure sand. To reclaim these areas the dunes have to be fixed by planting with Austrian pine, gorse, elder, marram grass, etc., a few drainage cuts are often necessary, then the light soil is readily brought under cultivation. This type of land is well suited for market-garden cultivation, both by its ease of working and proximity to the sea, provided that it is liberally supplied with phosphatic and potash manures at the outset. Some of these areas contain a certain proportion of strong alluvial soil adapted to corn growing and akin to the valuable land adjoining the Wash and the Humber. The cost of the preparation of the land for cultivation is low, but the charges to be met depend in each case upon the proportion the cultivable areas bears to that of the dunes requiring fixing. In some cases too high a price is demanded for areas of this kind capable of profitable reclamation because of their possible value of development as seaside estates.

In character intermediate between this type and that previously described are certain areas that are neither links nor slob land. In one case there lies about six square miles of land that only commands a few pence per acre for rough grazing, in part strong alluvial soil, in part peaty and elsewhere sandy, a large proportion being subject to flooding at high spring tides. The work required is embankment, drainage, possibly a pumping station, and special

manuring on the peaty and sandy portions of the area, but the cost would be small in proportion to the ultimate value of the land to be gained for cultivation.

(3) *Heath*.—In England there exist comparatively large expanses of uncultivated sandy heath, now covered with a valueless vegetation of heather or bracken and worthless grass. Such is the “brek” land of Norfolk and Suffolk, other heaths farther south in Suffolk, land upon the Bagshot Sand formation and Lower Greensand in Surrey, Sussex, and Hampshire, the Dorset heaths, etc. The reclamation of this type of land has been reduced to a system in Germany; after drainage where necessary, the clearing of shrubs and bushes and levelling of any mounds or banks, the surface is pared and allowed to rot for a winter, or if a meadow is to be formed, a tilth is obtained by continued cultivation with implements of the disk type. At the same time about 2 tons per acre of chalk or its equivalent, 8 cwt. per acre of kainit, and 5 of basic slag are worked in as the fundamental preliminary dressing, these quantities being increased if a meadow is in preparation. For a meadow a special mixture of grass and clover seeds are sown directly on to the shallow worked surface with surprisingly good results. For the arable land the best preparation is to grow a crop of lupins the first year and turn that in, thus increasing the stock both of nitrogen and humus and binding and adding to the water-holding capacity of the soil. Afterwards the land will grow all the cereals, especially rye and oats; potatoes, carrots and peas give good crops, and lucerne also answers well on such land. Liberal manuring with

artificial is required in the early years, the cost is made up by the cheapness of cultivation. In Germany as much as £7 an acre has been paid for such heath land, the reclaiming including the ploughing in of the lupin crop, costs £5 to £6 per acre, and after two or three years' cultivation the land sells at £20 to £30 an acre. A small experiment is in progress by the Development Commission on 200 acres of land of this class in Norfolk formerly let as a rabbit warren; in the second year 136 acres were under crop, and though the season (1915) was unfavourable, yielded per acre $27\frac{1}{2}$ bushels of wheat, 28 bushels of oats, 17 bushels of peas, and 65 cwt. of potatoes. The cropping of 136 acres that had been reclaimed in the previous year cost in 1914-15 £1,051, and the receipts are estimated at £1,330. Despite difficulties with regard to labour and the dearth of the indispensable potash manures, the reclamation of the 160 acres which are now clear and ready for ordinary cropping has not cost more than £4 11s. per acre, exclusive of management and administration, charges for which have been heavy on so small an experimental area. It may be estimated that land of this class having initially a letting value of 2s. to 3s. an acre (exclusive of sporting rights) may be given a letting value of 15s. per acre by an expenditure on reclaiming property of about £5 an acre. Buildings have also to be provided, but the cost is low because no horned stock has to be provided for, about £5 per acre (reckoning half the cost of cottages to be covered by their rent). The reclamation of this type of land would therefore just pay its way, but the land improves with cultiva-

tion, so that in twenty years' time it would be worth a further 5s. or so per acre. In many cases the chief obstacles to the acquisition of land of this type are the existence of common rights, often of the smallest value to the commoners, and in the Eastern Counties the high value attached to the land for sporting purposes.

(4) *Low-lying Moor and Bog*.—A few areas exist in this country where the land is water-logged and is covered by a thick accumulation of peat. Such are the carrs and moors near the mouth of the Trent, and a few inland areas like the Bog of Tregaron in Mid Wales and Otmoor in Oxfordshire. The reclamation of land of this type has been very thoroughly studied in Holland and Germany, and in Friesland and North Germany flourishing colonies of small arable farmers may be seen on such moors that formerly carried only a crop of rough grass. As the reclamation depends upon thorough drainage the scheme has to be a comparatively large one in order to deal with all the sources of incoming water or to straighten and deepen the river channel so as to lower the water level on the drowned land. When the surface is dry the deficiencies in phosphoric acid and potash, and often in lime, have to be repaired as on the heath land, but the accumulated vegetation provides a great asset in the shape of nitrogen which becomes available when the mineral salts are supplied, so that the reclaimed lands carry good crops. Sometimes it is remunerative to remove the lower layers of peat for fuel, and it is often desirable to bring a layer of earth or sand to the surface. The cost varies with each

scheme, according to the extent of drainage required, the value of the peat, the proximity of mineral soil, etc., but areas of this type are regarded in Germany as the most profitable of all.

To what extent similar processes can be extended to the higher-lying peat and bog areas in places like Dartmoor, parts of Wales, the North of England and the Highlands is doubtful, because the climatic conditions are often too severe to permit of profitable crops to be grown. For the present, at any rate, until more experience has accumulated it would not be wise to touch land of this kind except by way of experiment on selected favourable areas, as, for example, on some of the cut-over bogs in Ireland.

(5) *Upland Sheep Walk*.—In many parts of the country, notably in Mid-Wales and the Lowlands of Scotland, lie extensive tracts of grassy uplands which have never been improved in any way and are held as farms of 1,000 acres and upwards for breeding sheep which are sold away and fattened on the lowlands. In Mid Wales many thousands of acres of land of this type are let at rentals of about 1s. per acre. They possess a fair mineral soil generally deficient in lime, the herbage is rough and poor, but consists in the main of grass, boggy patches occur in which peat has accumulated. Being grass covered, game are scanty, and the sporting rights of little value; on the other hand certain commoners' rights often exist though there are few commoners to exercise them. From the evidence afforded by neighbouring farms it is certain that this land is capable of profitable development, and that much of it is cultivable when

the situation is not too exposed nor the slopes too steep. The difficulty of communication has been the main reason why the land has not been divided into smaller farms and improved. The work of reclamation would begin with the construction of roads. The better land by the stream courses would be prepared for arable cultivation by drainage and the use of basic slag and lime, the steep slopes would be best utilised for forestry, while the higher land would be still left as sheep walks to be improved by the occupier as time went on. After the preliminary operations what would be aimed at would be the creation of small farms of 150 acres or so of the better land, 20-30 acres of which would be under the plough and the rest improved grass, while to each farm would be attached a stretch of sheep walk above the forest. The forestry and the farming would react favourably on one another, as the forest would provide winter occupations for the occupiers of the farms and thus derive the labour for planting and maintenance which would be otherwise unobtainable in those districts. The relative proportion the forests would bear to the farms would depend upon the configuration and elevation of each district. It is not possible to frame any general estimate of the expenditure and returns for reclamation of this kind, but as the rentals run as high as 12s. an acre for farms in Wales on precisely the same class of land and at similar elevations as that which in its unimproved state only commands 1s. to 1s. 6d. per acre, and the buildings and fences cannot be set at more than £4 an acre on the existing farms, there is a considerable margin for expenditure. The cost

of the roads should not be wholly debited to the reclamation, as they will to a large extent be paid for in the increased rating of the area. None but schemes on a large scale, however, offer prospects of ultimate success and some time would elapse before they became paying propositions. It may be estimated that the gross expenditure on the reclaimed land (regarding the afforested portions as a separate enterprise) would be £8-£10 an acre before the farms could be let, and for the first year or two the rents would have to be kept low, not rising to the normal for at least five years. But allowing for half the land in forest it would ultimately carry a family per 300 acres where it now only carries a family per 1,500 acres.

One aspect of reclamation work that has not hitherto been considered is that it would afford a considerable volume of employment for large gangs of unskilled labour during the preliminary period of actual reclamation. Most of the work that requires to be done—embankment, drainage, levelling, clearing, etc., road-making, and even building—could be done under direction by able-bodied men with no previous experience of the land. For example, regiments awaiting discharge could well undertake such work on a prepared scheme with a small amount of technical direction, the huts that have been erected in so many camps about the country being moved to supply the necessary housing. As the work progressed and became more definitely agricultural, the men with a desire to remain in the country, and some aptitude for farming, could be selected to become the occupiers of the holdings that had been prepared for farming,

and, since the occupiers would form definite colonies, some technical guidance could be provided in the earlier years.

In conclusion, it should be said that the full value of reclamation schemes is only apparent after the lapse of time, the true capacity of the land is only attained after many years of cultivation, the best uses to which it can be put in any district are only learnt by experience. Many of the advantages also are indirect: the land won is sheer gain to the cultivated area, no previously existing labour is displaced, the increased population provided for, the absolute addition to the production of food and to the wealth of the nation both by the commercial exchanges promoted and the new contribution of rates and taxes.

ADDENDA TO THE MINORITY REPORT
(*Written December 1916*)

A. AGRICULTURAL ORGANISATION

ALTHOUGH we realised, when we wrote our Minority Report last May, that the problem of the returning soldiers necessarily involved the whole question of British Agriculture, we felt constrained to limit ourselves to those aspects of the agricultural problem which affected the employment of soldiers most directly. Agricultural organisation is one of the topics which we barely touched. And yet it is essential to the success of the industry. It is good organisation more than anything which has made Danish and Belgian agriculture flourish so wonderfully. And it is better organisation which agriculture in the United Kingdom so badly needs. We need the development of real co-operation in the collection and distribution of produce; the utilisation of the great market afforded by the network of industrial co-operative societies; and the adoption of a proper system of agricultural credit. It is in these directions that we must largely look if we want to see the 380,000 small holders and farmers with holdings of under 150 acres each (whose total acreage is six-sevenths of our cultivated land) greatly increase their production of food and the amount of labour they employ. And for these purposes we believe that the system of combining voluntary organisation with official support and public grants, upon which the Agricultural Organisation Society has been based since

1912, is better than any scheme which is either purely official or purely voluntary.

The new Agricultural Organisation Society has only been at work four years, and the war years must inevitably have caused it great difficulties. No doubt its methods of working can be improved ; and no doubt it could have achieved more with more money. But the field of work is vast, the subject is complex, and British farmers are slow to adopt co-operative methods ; and we desire to record the opinion that the Agricultural Organisation Society is, broadly speaking, constituted on right lines, and ought to be developed and improved, and not, as certain people think, scrapped or deprived of its semi-official character by the loss of its annual grant. If we may put forward a suggestion without attempting to develop it in detail, it is that the central body, with its twofold character partly official and partly voluntary, should find its counterpart in every county with a local association in which also the two elements—the official and the voluntary—are both represented : the local associations working with and receiving assistance and guidance from the central body. Agricultural organisation may be *planned* centrally, but it must be *carried out* locally ; and the local body must be permanently on the spot to assist when wanted. One of the chief difficulties of the Agricultural Organisation Society has undoubtedly been its inability to remain continuously on the spot in the many districts of England and Wales in which it has started movements.

Great as is the indirect importance of agricultural

organisation to the employment of soldiers, there are two subjects of direct and urgent importance—Housing and Village Life.

B. HOUSING

Imagine a village with twenty old cottages let at 1s. 6d. and twenty new cottages to be let at 8s. Is the farmer to pay Smith, who is to live in an 8s. cottage, 6s. 6d. a week more wages than Jones, who lives in a 1s. 6d. cottage? If so, economic forces won't encourage the occupation of the new cottages by agricultural labourers. Naturally more and more farmers would get the old cottages into their own hands, and make them "tied"; and the new cottages would be occupied by the non-agricultural classes—by men employed by Government or County Councils, or Railways. The returned soldiers who had wanted to take up agricultural employment—for whom *ex hypothesi* the new cottages were built—would find themselves unemployed unless they could get room in the old cottages at the low rents.

This is the problem—this disparity of rents—with which we have to deal, and of which we hope to suggest a solution.

There is general agreement that in order to meet the inflation of building cost, due to the war, there must be a State bonus or similar financial easement of some sort. To burden the already difficult problems of rural housing with the additional difficulty of full war prices would be simply to make them insoluble. Even before the war a five-roomed cottage rarely could be built to let at less than 4s. 6d. a week, as

against the actual rent paid for existing cottages of from 1s. to 2s. 6d. At the present prices of labour, materials, and money, the cost is £300¹ per cottage or thereabouts, and the economic rent (to include rates) is about 8s.² To ask discharged soldiers to pay a rent raised so greatly by war conditions is neither politic nor just. It is unjust that having risked their lives for their country in the war, they should in addition be saddled with a burden of expense directly resulting from the war. To raise wages immediately to such a point that they could pay a rent of 8s. and still have enough money over to feed and clothe themselves and their families in decency and comfort is not a practical policy. Again, the standard wages of the industry cannot be raised all round, merely to meet the special needs of one class of the workers—viz. those in the new expensive houses.

The alternative of making individual wages vary with the rent of each wage-earner's house seems to us to present insuperable difficulties. We therefore think the argument sound, that the State ought, both as a measure of justice to the returning soldiers and as a matter of practical expediency, to treat as a war expense payable out of the Exchequer a considerable part of the cost of the necessary new housing accommodation which is attributable to the war.

If the State were to do more than this, the rent based on the remaining cost would be lower than it ought to be; and in the days to come when normal

¹ This cost includes land and all charges.

² We use the word "economic" throughout in the sense in which it is understood by Local Authorities, Public Utility Societies, and similar corporate bodies, viz. a rent that avoids a loss,

conditions had returned, it would be difficult to get an economic rent for new cottages built without State help. In fact such a plan would repeat and perpetuate the evil of uneconomic rents from which we are now suffering.

Whatever doubts there may be about the trend of prices after the war, we think that the imperative necessity of being ready with a definite housing policy before the end of the war compels a decision forthwith on certain main points so that the requisite legislation can be passed and the necessary arrangements made. In our view if the war ended in 1918 it would not be wise to assume that the cost of building would average less than £280 per cottage over the following five years, 1919–1923, or that the State would lend at less than 5 per cent. over the same period. On a sixty years' sinking fund basis we must not expect the economic rent of a new five-room cottage to be less than the amount we have already mentioned, viz. 8s. But as we have said, the State should pay as a war expense, without charging it on the cottages—that is to say by a bonus—a considerable part of the extra cost of building which is the result of the war. The financial arrangement made under the Emergency Housing Act 1914, by which 10 per cent. of the capital cost of the proposed cottages was to be granted by the Treasury as a bonus to meet the increased cost of building, was a sign that in matters of housing the banker's point of view had ceased to confine the State's outlook. The precedent which that Act made of setting aside actuarial logic in order to cope with an impending crisis of unem-

ployment in the building trade is encouraging, and the principle it embodies of adjusting finance to industrial needs is one which should be extended to rural housing. Unemployment in the building trade is not to be compared for gravity to the nation's need of maintaining and increasing employment in agriculture. Let us, then, assume that with the help of the State bonus the rent of the new cottages will be 6s. 6d. a week. Writing off the bonus required by the peculiar and temporary war conditions, we may regard 6s. 6d. as the economic rent of the future cottages so far as we are able to see ahead.

Now, one of the greatest practical difficulties, as we have seen, will be the presence side by side in every village throughout the country of old houses let at, say, 1s. 6d. a week, and the new houses let at 6s. 6d. a week. If supply and demand had been allowed to operate freely in the past, the rents of the existing houses would have gone up as the scarcity increased, but agricultural wages have been low, and landowners and farmers alike have habitually accepted the uneconomic rent with which we are familiar. It is partly, perhaps chiefly, that fact which has deterred the private builder from building cottages as a commercial proposition. And so long as economic rents are unobtainable, private enterprise will continue to hold itself aloof. Once wages are raised to a level which will really leave enough weekly margin to pay the 6s. 6d. a week of the new houses, the tendency of the rent of the old houses to remain below the economic level will cease, and gradually the rents of all cottages will approximate to their value as measured by their

condition and accommodation. This is what we must aim at. To exclude the private builders' assistance and competition for many years to come would be a deplorable result. We must not, however, ignore the fact, already stated, that at first the disparity of the rents will make considerable difficulties in regard to wages, and if a means could be devised of reducing this disparity within a certain period time would be given for natural economic conditions to assert themselves.

We think there is a way. We have come to the conclusion that the State must bear a further charge than the bonus already mentioned, but only for a comparatively short period. If the new State-provided houses were let on an extending scale of rent, rising, say, by 6*d.* a week per year, the change would be gradual, and the disparity would in all probability never be felt. They might be let at 3*s.* 6*d.* the first year, 4*s.* the second, and so on up to 6*s.* 6*d.* a week in the seventh year.

The rental finance of each cottage, after the State had wiped off the extra cost of building, would read as follows :

Interest and Repayment on the Annuity	£	s.	d.
System at 5 per cent. for sixty years			
= £5 5 <i>s.</i> 8½ <i>d.</i> on £210	11	1	11½
Sundries : Repairs, Insurance, Rent Col- lection, Rates, etc.	4	11	0½
Reserve Balance : accruing from seventh year, and used as interest and capital repayment of amount deferred during first six years (see p. 162).	1	5	0
	<hr/>		
	£16	18	0
	(= 6 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i> a week)		

The portions of rent payments deferred by the State would, with compound interest, amount to £23 14s. 1d. by the following stages :

	Weekly.	Annually.	Towards Int. & Repayt.	Debit Balance.
	s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1st year. .	3 6	9 2 0	4 10 11½	6 11 0
2nd year .	4 0	10 8 0	5 16 11½	5 5 0
3rd year .	4 6	11 14 0	7 2 11½	3 19 0
4th year .	5 0	13 0 0	8 8 11½	2 13 0
5th year .	5 6	14 6 0	9 14 11½	1 7 0
6th year .	6 0	15 12 0	11 0 11½	0 1 0
7th year .	6 6	16 18 0	—	—
			Comp. Int.	19 16 0
				3 18 1
				£23 14 1

To clear the amount of the portions of interest and capital repayment accumulated during the first six years, viz. £23 14s. 1d., would require £1 5s. 6½d. annually for the remaining fifty-four years. This could be supplied by the reserve balance of the 6s. 6d. rent, viz. £1 5s.; the odd pence annually being paid from the Sundries Allowance.

Instead of extinguishing the extra cost of building over pre-war prices by a bonus, it might, of course, be thought preferable to meet it by a loan at a low rate of interest on the Total Cost. That is to say, there would be no bonus at all, but the interest asked by the State on the whole capital advanced would be much lower.

It should be remembered that in putting the life of a cottage at sixty years—the period of the proposed sinking fund—we are making an extremely moderate estimate. A well-built cottage kept continually in a good state of repair should last well over a hundred years.

Under this scheme of gradually rising rents the tenancy rent card would clearly state the annual increase. Should one tenant replace another, he would pay the current rent.

Security of tenure, irrespective of employer, but subject to "good neighbourship" and payment of rent, would be enjoyed by every tenant. This would mean that State money could not be used for building those cottages for stockmen and other special hands which are part of a farm's equipment, and which must remain tied cottages. Owners would necessarily continue to supply these "official residences" as they have been termed.

We are well aware that this plan of asking the State to defray the excess of the cost of building in the near future, over the normal cost of building, not to mention the expenses of the period during which the disparity in rents is being reduced or removed, would involve a large amount of money. Suppose that the bonus granted for each cottage reached £70 and 200,000 cottages were required. The total capital grant on which the State would receive no interest would be £14,000,000—the cost of conducting the war for a period of three days. We cannot be charged with disguising the fact that this is a large demand. We ask the country to face it. If agriculture is to meet our requirements, and make us safe as a nation, we must have the men on the land; and the men must have cottages to live in; and the cottages cannot be built in any other way. The syllogism is inevitable and unanswerable.

We have considered the question of using military

huts as far as possible for cottages, and we certainly think that the huts may be of use in helping to bridge over a difficult period. But honesty compels us to say that the use of huts cannot dispose of the housing problem or even affect its character very appreciably. It is much better that the public should understand the magnitude of the problem and come to close quarters with it at once.

We pass now to the question of the authority which should be responsible for the actual building of the cottages. The Rural District Councils are the bodies who possess housing powers, and who, through their officials, supervise and control local building. Whatever fresh legislation may ensue involving State grants for agricultural housing, the powers of the Councils to obtain loans and build will continue after the war, probably with the addition of the power to form and invest in authorised Public Utility Societies for the purpose of entrusting these societies with the carrying out of housing schemes in their areas.

Experience has shown that this proposed new power would be welcome to Local Authorities. In one instance a District Council keenly anxious for one hundred new cottages in its district, but not willing to load the rates with their total cost, arranged for seven of its members to form themselves into a Public Utility Society, and, after allowing for two-thirds of the capital from the Public Works Loan Board, obtained the outstanding third from a private investor. The Council of course gave the society every facility, including the services of its surveyor in connection with the house plans. In this case an example is afforded

of a Local Authority working through a Public Utility Society with every prospect of success. The war intervened and stopped operations, but the society remains, and directly hostilities are over will go ahead.

In 1913 the following resolution was passed by the Rural District Councils Association :

“That it is desirable that Section 72 of the Housing, Town Planning, etc., Act, 1909, should be amended so as to confer on Rural District Councils the same powers as are now possessed by County Councils to promote the formation or extension of and to assist societies on a co-operative basis, having for their object, or one of their objects, the erection or improvement of dwellings for the working-classes, and to make advances to such societies upon such terms and conditions as to rate of interest and repayment or otherwise and on such security as the council think fit.”

The resolution was passed on the understanding that Local Authorities should only be looked to for the last third of the requisite capital for the society, the other two-thirds being obtained from the Public Works Loan Board in the ordinary way. The wording of the resolution was taken from the precedent contained in Section 72 of the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909 which confers powers on County Councils to invest money in “societies on a co-operative basis,” having the objects stated in the resolution. But in fresh legislation these words should be replaced by “societies whose rules are approved by the Local Government Board.”

We think that an adaptation of the principle of combining official with voluntary service by the special form of Public Utility Society in view offers a

suitable means for dealing with State grants for agricultural housing. A society's Board of Management would always include the Chairman of the Council and the Clerk (*ex-officio*). Of the remaining five members two could be nominated by the Board of Agriculture through the local Small Holdings Commissioner, and two by the County Council, while the fifth could be co-opted. This would constitute a fully representative and responsible body.

If the policy of enabling the Local Authorities to co-operate with Public Utility Societies be once adopted, it will be possible to form the latter very speedily and economically. Suitable model rules exist, and registration could be carried through in a fortnight, and a society be registered, fully equipped with seal, books, etc., for from £6 to £10. A central body could undertake this work and cover the country quite rapidly. Local Authorities could become the eventual owners of the cottages as trustees for the community.

If a Local Authority were to purchase the land and lease it to a Public Utility Society at a ground rent which would cover the interest of the money borrowed for the purchase, it should prove the best method both for immediate and future requirements.

While Parliament would settle the number of cottages to be built for the whole country, it may be suggested that the Local Government Board would allot the number of cottages which should be built in each county, referring to the County Councils the decision as to the number for the various Local Authorities' areas in their respective counties, while each Local Authority, in consultation with a Small

Holdings Commissioner, should settle in which villages in their district the allotted number of cottages should be built, and acquire the necessary land. The Public Utility Society would then take this over on lease and manage the rest.

For the scheme we propose powers of compulsory purchase of land would be essential. Each individual piece of land should be bought on the basis of its proper rental value.

As regards the building by-laws, unless the scarcity and cost of materials after the war should lead to the suspension of all by-laws, we propose that the rural code of the Local Government Board should be operative wherever the cottages are built.

The model rural by-laws, while securing all essentials, are not over-elaborated and allow freedom where freedom can be safely entrusted to the builder.

C. VILLAGE LIFE

In conclusion, we desire very briefly to indicate the means of organising village life. We have dwelt at some length upon the prospective services of Public Utility Societies in connection with housing, because it is through such bodies as these that the social side of village life can also be developed. The magic touch cannot come from an official body already tasked with many recurring executive duties ; nor will it come from a body which has all the necessary local knowledge and plenty of enthusiasm but not enough powers. A Public Utility Society of the kind we have in view combines individual interest with authority to act.

The principle of the Public Utility Society has, however, been reproduced in cognate bodies. For example, in some places what is known as a Village Society is responsible for organisation. The secret of success is invariably to make the villagers interested in their own institutions. They must be encouraged to support them financially and to help in their management. These conditions are absolutely indispensable. It is a great mistake to suppose that a village hall, entirely supported and managed by a philanthropist, has such a popular place in the estimation of the people as a hall which they themselves assist in controlling, for the building of which they have collected money, and for some of the advantages of which they pay small subscriptions.

In every large village and every group of small villages there ought to be a public hall and library and a recreation ground. Compulsory powers of land purchase would be necessary. We think the purchasing body ought to be the County Council, which would let the land and the buildings to the Public Utility or Village Society. But not all the cost of purchase and building should fall on the rates. Before the County Council consented to a scheme it should insist on the Public Utility or Village Society proving its good faith by supplying a fixed proportion of the cost.

(Signed) GEO. H. ROBERTS.

LESLIE SCOTT.

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