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THE AGRICULTURAL PROBLEM. II.

THE FUTURE OF FOREIGN COMPETITION.¹

THERE is, of course, a great deal of uncertainty as to the probable competition of the future. With respect to wheat, which among all agricultural products is the one which has most seriously fallen in price, the increased competition seems to be largely owing to the production of two phenomenal crops in the United States in 1891 and 1892. During the last ten or twelve years there has been no considerable increase in the wheat area of the world ; not nearly sufficient to meet the increase of population when the yield per acre is not above the average. In the decade preceding 1880 there had been a very great increase in the area under wheat, and the glut in the supplies thus created was not covered by increase of consumption until about half the next decade had expired. But in 1891, when there was reason to expect that production would be barely equal to the consumption, the greatest crop ever known in the United States was produced. It was officially estimated at nearly 612,000,000 bushels, a quantity which has since been admitted by the Statistician of the Department of Agriculture to have been much less than the actual production. This enormous crop was followed by another in 1892, only second to it in the record of American crops, being returned

¹ The first part of this article appeared in the September number of this journal.

at nearly 516,000,000 bushels, which again was an underestimate. Judging from supplies that have come to light, there is good reason for believing that the two crops amounted to no less than 1,234,000,000 bushels. The average production in the United States for the ten years preceding 1891 had been about 440,000,000 bushels per annum, whereas the mean production of 1891 and 1892 is now believed to have been about 617,000,000 per annum, an excess of 177,000,000 bushels, which more than doubled the usual surplus of wheat in the United States. It happened, too, that India had a great crop in 1891, and the shortness of crops in Europe counted for little in comparison with the great surplus referred to. In 1892 Europe had a fair crop of wheat, and the supplies, including heavy reserve stocks from America, and the surplus of the new crop, were altogether in excess of requirements, although the Indian surplus in 1892 was a very small one. During the present year prices in the United States have been lower than they have been known to be before. Most of the countries of Europe have a deficient wheat crop, and the United States will have one of the smallest crops grown during the last ten years; but India has a better crop even than that of 1891, and America has a considerable surplus of old wheat, so that the prospect of any substantial improvement in prices this year is doubtful.

In a calculation which I made in 1892, after obtaining the official figures for all the principal wheat-growing countries in the world, as far as they were available, I found that, whereas in the ten years ending with 1880, the wheat area of the world had increased by about 22,000,000 acres, in the following decade it increased by only about 3,500,000 acres. In the United States there had been a small decline, which, however, was more than recovered in 1891. In 1892 the area was 38,554,430 acres, or nearly a million acres less than it was in 1884. For the present year the acreage is not yet exactly known; but there can be no doubt that it is less than it was ten years ago. Taking one year with another, it may be said that the wheat acreage of the United States, in spite of the great extension of cultivation in the west and north-west, where wheat is almost necessarily grown as a first crop, has been stationary during the last decade, while the population has increased by more than 12 millions. Even in India there has been a decrease of more than a million acres since 1886, and in all our Colonies together there has been a decrease in recent years. The only country in which any considerable increase is recorded is the Argentine Republic, the statistics for

which, however, appear to be nothing better than a series of rough guesses. There is no doubt as to the increase, but its extent is uncertain.

There can be only one reason for the decline of wheat-growing in nearly all countries of the world: namely, the prevalence of unremunerative prices. In a few countries in which wheat growers are protected by high duties, such as France, and Austria-Hungary, the acreage has increased slightly; but nowhere, except in the Argentine Republic, and one or two other new settlements, in proportion to the increase of population. According to Mr. C. Wood Davis, the bread-eating population of European blood, including Americans and Colonial people, during the decade ending with 1890, increased by 42,000,000, required increments of 170,000,000 bushels of wheat and 100,000,000 bushels of rye per annum, whereas the increase in the annual production of wheat was only about 62,000,000 bushels, and that of rye had decreased. If these figures are even approximately correct, it is clear that nothing but the enormous crops of the United States in 1891 and 1892 saved the world from an actual scarcity of wheat. That there will be a scarcity in the near future unless prices advance, there is no doubt; but of course prices would quickly advance in such a case, and the wheat acreage would be increased to a corresponding extent. There is abundant evidence to show that wheat-growing has not paid in the great producing countries during recent years, although the cost of transport has been greatly diminished, mainly by the vast improvements made in the steam-ships, enabling them to carry a great bulk at a low freight. Without any great increase of area an immense increase in the production of wheat is possible, if only the price be high enough to make improved farming in America and elsewhere remunerative. Wheat is such a favourite crop, and is so well suited to new countries, that it is not likely to be dear again for many years to come; but, on the other hand, the probability is that it will not be, as a rule, nearly as cheap as it has been during the last nine years. There is no reason to expect any increased direct competition in other kinds of grain grown by the British farmer. On the contrary, there appears to be rather a probability of a diminished competition; but the growth of maize has enormously increased, and probably will increase, and it competes with oats and feeding barley. Cheap maize, however, is a great advantage to British farmers as a feeding material, and probably, taking them as a whole, the pastoral farmers as well as grain-growers, a plentiful supply of maize is

more beneficial than disadvantageous to them. The chief disadvantage suffered by the growers of malting barley is the use of sugar and other malt substitutes in brewing. Whether this practice will increase or not remains to be proved.

Turning to our foreign meat supplies, the outlook for the future is altogether a doubtful one. As the great ranges of the United States are being rapidly settled, the supply of cheap cattle is certain to grow smaller, and the diminished receipts of fat cattle and fresh beef from that country during the first half of the present year show that it does not pay well to ship these products to us when prices are low in this country. Indeed, it is stated on good authority that shippers have suffered heavy losses during the present year and previously; but there appears to be no end to the development of the trade in frozen meat from New Zealand and Australia, and if a method of sending it in a chilled instead of a frozen condition, as American meat is sent, should be discovered, the supplies may be enormously increased. The rich and well-to-do people in this country, however, will always prefer the prime fresh meat of our own production to that which is imported, and, if the country prospers, the demand for meat of the best quality will be certain to increase.

As to dairy produce, I know of no reason why the farmers of this country should not be able to compete on favourable terms with those of any country in Europe, and hitherto European countries have been our chief competitors in the supply of butter. The unfair competition of margarine sold as butter should of course be stopped. New Zealand and Australia are increasing their supplies of butter; but the prices quoted in the preceding portion of this article appear to show that consumption fully keeps pace with the supplies, and if our dairy farmers take care to make butter of first-rate quality, as they all may if they take the trouble to follow the proper rules, they will be able to hold their own against the world. Cheese-makers who produce an article of prime quality have suffered less from agricultural depression than any other class of agriculturists in this country, and they are not at present threatened with any important increase in foreign competition, as the attempts of New Zealand and Australia to supply us with cheese have not made any considerable progress.

Probably the imports of early fruit and vegetables will continue to increase; but it is only the competition of countries which produce these commodities earlier than they can be grown in this country that tells seriously against home producers. Even

this disadvantage might be checked considerably if the growers of fruit and vegetables would more generally follow the example of Guernsey growers, by the use of glass-houses for the growth of early fruit and vegetables, which command very high prices.

If we look to the somewhat distant future, when all the available lands of the world will be covered by settlers, there is reason to feel confident of more prosperous times for the cultivators of the soil than they have enjoyed for many years past. But it is to be feared that for some years to come the farmers of this country will have a hard struggle, and will need to avail themselves of every advantage that they can secure by their own efforts, or by the help of Parliament, to relieve them from all unfair impediments to their success.

ECONOMIC PRODUCTION.

It must be admitted that the farmers of this country have been more given to calling out against foreign competition, and declaring themselves hopeless to meet it, than to a resolute effort to beat their competitors by producing the greatest possible quantity of commodities at the smallest cost. They have greatly reduced their employment of labour, and in most counties they have obtained material reductions of rent, while they have also retrenched considerably in their household and personal expenditure. But it is a question whether the cutting-down of expenses has not been a false economy in many cases, especially where it has included a diminished use of manures and feeding-stuffs. The expenses of producing a small crop are very nearly the same as those of producing a great one, with the exception of the cost of manure, and there is reason to believe that the use of artificial manures might be greatly increased in the country generally with advantage. Unfortunately the capital of too many farmers has been so seriously diminished by the losses of past years that they cannot farm well if they would. This is one of the most serious difficulties of the situation, and the remedy for it is not easy to find; but if farmers had complete security for their improvements, their credit would be improved, while it is a question whether the system of land banks, which has been very successful in many European countries, should not be introduced in the United Kingdom.

It would occupy more space than is available to me to go into details as to the reduction of rents and labour expenses

which has taken place in recent years. According to the returns of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue, the depreciation in the annual value of agricultural land in the United Kingdom which has taken place since 1879-80, when it reached the maximum, amounted to £12,442,950 up to 1891-92, the last financial year for which the figures are published. This is equivalent to a reduction of a little over 5s. an acre in the rent of the total cultivated area of the United Kingdom. Such a reduction goes a very small way towards meeting the great decrease in the farmers' returns. In many arable districts the reduction in rents has been commonly from thirty to fifty per cent.; but in certain counties it has been very small, and in some of the pastoral districts there has not been any general decrease. Landlords have been too fond of making temporary remissions instead of permanent reductions, and the former give no hope and confidence to farmers for the future. In a great number of instances rents have been maintained until the tenants were ruined, and then have been enormously reduced by necessity to new-comers. The present year will be the worst ever experienced by the farmers of the greater part of England, and further reductions of rent will be needed to enable them to retain their farms. Low as rents are in many districts, some undesirable farms being let at from 5s. to 7s. 6d. an acre which formerly commanded 20s. to 25s., a further reduction will be absolutely necessary unless prices quickly improve. That there is still a wide margin for reduction of rent may be seen from the Income Tax Returns under Schedule B., which show the gross amount of rent and tithe charged on farms, market gardens, and nurseries. In 1890-91 the total for England and Wales was £41,804,179, and the total cultivated area, including pasture, was 28,001,134 acres. Thus the average of rent and tithe together was £1 9s. 10d. an acre. Deducting for tithe, the average rent was over £1 6s. per acre.

One method of reducing expenses which has probably paid better than any other is that of laying arable land down to permanent pasture. During the last twenty years the area of permanent pasture in the United Kingdom has increased by nearly five million acres. The result unfortunately has been to diminish the demand for labour, and to stimulate the migration of country people into the towns, which has been excessive during the last twenty years; but farmers must do the best they can to make ends meet, and the plan of laying down land to permanent pasture, where the soil and climate are suitable, has much to recommend

it. It not only enables many a farmer to pay his way who would not be able to do so if the land were under the plough ; but it has the further advantage of giving the land a rest, and enabling it to accumulate the elements of fertility, so that, in the event of a considerable rise in the price of corn, it may be ploughed up once more in a condition favourable to the production of heavy crops.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the decrease in the cost of labour on farms chiefly arable commonly amounts to about 10s. an acre, not because wages have become lower, but because fewer men have been employed. The common estimate of the cost of labour on such farms as are under consideration used to be from 30s. to 35s., whereas now, in many instances that have come under my notice, it is reduced to 20s. to 25s. Further reductions in expenses have been obtained by farmers in the reduced cost of almost everything which they have to buy ; but all the reductions put together are unquestionably smaller than the fall in the money returns of farming. In an estimate made by Mr. Charles Clay, the founder of the Chambers of Agriculture, and the present chairman of the Farmers' Club, the annual returns from the agricultural land of the United Kingdom in 1891 were more than 77 millions sterling less than they would have been at the prices current twenty years ago. Some of the amounts given in the details supplied by Mr. Clay appear to me to be exaggerated, and I should reduce his total to about 60 millions sterling, which is serious enough. On the other hand, prices were much lower in 1892 than in 1891, and Mr. Clay's list of agricultural products is not complete. An accurate comparison is impossible, owing to the absence of trustworthy accounts of quantities and prices with respect to many commodities ; but I should be quite prepared to find, if an accurate comparison could be made, that the gross returns from the cultivated area of the United Kingdom are fully 96 millions, or £2 an acre, less than they were twenty years ago.

SOME SUGGESTED REMEDIES.

If farmers have not discovered a way of escape from the difficulties in which they have been placed, it has not been for the lack of advice from outsiders. They have been recommended to grow fruit and to produce jam, to cultivate market garden vegetables, to produce more meat and less corn, to improve their dairying,

and to concentrate their capital on a smaller acreage. Another remedy recommended for the resuscitation of agricultural prosperity is the establishment of a peasant-proprietary in this country,

With respect to fruit-growing, I have made special enquiries as to the condition and prospects of the industry in many counties, and I have found that success is mainly dependent upon situation, soil, and climate. By situation I mean not only nearness to good markets or to a cheap means of reaching them, but also a favourable altitude and inclination towards the sun. But there has been quite sufficient increase in the area of land under fruit during the last ten years to meet the demands of the population under the existing conditions of distribution, which are extremely wasteful and extravagant. The same remarks apply to market gardening. Both for fruit and vegetables there would be a greatly increased demand if they were brought within the reach of consumers at a moderate increase on the prices paid to producers; but, under existing conditions, with high railway rates, market monopolies, the exactions and unfair tricks of salesmen, and the wasteful system of sending everything to great centres to be re-distributed to small towns, there is no opening for any sudden extension of either industry. As already intimated, however, I believe that a great deal might be done by the growth of early vegetables and fruit under glass, either in unheated houses such as are common in Guernsey, or in hot-houses.

It is a doubtful question whether the advice to produce more meat and less corn should be adopted. During recent years, until the great fall in prices in the spring of 1892 took place, the breeding and fattening of live stock, when carried on in the best manner, had been more profitable than corn growing; but, looking to the probable future of foreign competition, it is by no means certain that the advantage will not lie in the other direction a few years hence. Our dairying system has been vastly improved during the last fifteen years; but a great deal still remains to be done, especially by means of co-operative dairying, which has achieved remarkable success in Ireland. It is only by making the best butter and cheese that our dairy farmers can hold their own against foreign competitors. The price of milk has fallen greatly in recent years, except when there was a great scarcity of it, as there has been during the past season. Dairy farmers suffer almost equally with fruit growers and market gardeners from our extravagant system of distribution. The difference between the prices paid by consumers for milk,

butter, and cheese and those received by producers is far greater than it should be.

As to the concentration of farm capital upon a smaller acreage than it is spread over at present, it is strongly to be recommended, but only in the event of a good law to secure to tenants the value of their improvements being passed. Such a law, it is also to be observed, is needed to enable tenant-farmers to plant fruit trees safely. With respect to the establishment of a peasant-proprietary, I am strongly opposed to any artificial attempt in this direction, as likely to do a great deal more harm than good. Small holdings should be placed within the reach of thrifty and capable men in all districts; but, as a rule, only those are likely to succeed in the great difficulty of making them pay well who obtain them by their own exertions, taking a little land at first, and gradually adding to it if they get on well. Moreover, a labourer who has saved money does not often care to invest it in the fee simple of land, which pays a very small rate of interest; for he can hire a great deal more than he can buy. If applicants for small holdings are made into small landed proprietors with the help of national funds, without any discrimination as to their ability to make land pay, the result must be generally disastrous.

MEASURES OF RELIEF AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

As the imposition of duties on imported food is quite out of the question, and the agriculturists of this country must meet the competition of the world as best they may, Parliament should be willing to do the very utmost that can be done to remove all unfair impediments to the success of farmers in their great struggle which can be removed by legislation. It is not only a question of the prosperity of landowners and tenant farmers; but it also immediately concerns the agricultural labourers and the rest of the rural community, and either directly or indirectly all classes of the nation. The vast importance to the country of the wealth produced by agricultural industry appears to be very inadequately appreciated. So long as the people get plenty of food they are too apt to think that it does not much matter whether it is of home or foreign production. But this is a great mistake, not only because all classes directly connected with the land suffer from its diminished productiveness, but also because there is no such free gift to a nation as the bounty of nature provided through the soil. Independently of any fluctuations in prices, the difference between good farming and bad farming in a single year

might be equivalent to an increase or a decrease of 100 millions sterling in the wealth produced in the country, and it is the business of the nation to see that the cultivators of the soil are allowed to pursue their industry under such conditions as will encourage them to make the best of it.

In a preceding portion of this article several possible reforms have been briefly indicated. As a measure of immediate relief there is nothing like a substantial reduction of rent; but I am not an advocate of State interference with the rent of land, except so far as it is necessary in preventing the landlord from levying rent upon the improvements of his tenants. It is true that reduction of rent is not a remedy for agricultural depression, but is rather one of its results, seeing that it gives relief to one class of the agricultural community at the expense of another; but under present conditions it is inevitable. Land is worth hardly any rent with prices as they are at present. I do not care to enter at much length into the question of local taxation, because it is vastly exaggerated as an agricultural grievance.¹ It is, no doubt, unfair to levy an excessive share of the numerous expenses now paid out of the rates upon one class of property; but great relief has been recently afforded by Mr. Goschen, and as far as tenant farmers are concerned, local taxation is a question of very slight importance. No probable adjustment of the incidence of local taxation would reduce the amount payable by land on the average by more than about sixpence per acre, and this is mainly a landlord's question. The question of the tithe rent-charge is far too large to be dealt with on the present occasion, and I will simply say with respect to it that liberal terms of redemption might fairly be offered to the hard-pressed landlords.

Tenant right is a topic which has been very much in the shade during the last ten years, farmers having been more concerned in reducing their outgoings to an extent as far as possible corresponding with their diminished receipts than in launching out in improvements for which they might require compensation in the event of their quitting their holdings. There is reason to believe that they have retrenched in an unprofitable degree; but they could not spend what they did not possess, and most of them have lost a great portion of their capital. Still, those who have had the command of capital or credit might have done more than they have done to improve their farms in a lucrative manner if they had enjoyed security for the value of improvements. The

¹ If the Local Government Bill passes in anything like its original form, the question may become a very serious one.

recommendation of the Duke of Richmond's Commission, to the effect that compensation for unexhausted improvements effected by the tenant should be made compulsory by law where compensation was not otherwise provided, was carried into effect, after a fashion, in the Agricultural Holdings Act of 1883, but with so many limitations, complications, and countervailing provisions that few tenants have deemed it desirable to make claims under it. The good it has done has mainly consisted in its influence in inducing landlords, for the sake of avoiding it, to make arrangements with their tenants for a limited amount of compensation for improvements. Where it has come into operation the expenses of arbitration or legal proceedings have usually nearly or quite covered the small balance awarded to the tenant on his claim or to the landlord on his counter-claim. The tenant has had no claim for any such permanent improvements as the laying down of land in permanent pasture, the planting of fruit trees and bushes, and the erection of buildings, unless he first obtained the written consent of his landlord to the execution of such improvements; nor for draining unless he gave notice of his intention of doing the work, and the landlord failed to exercise the option of executing it at his own expense. Moreover, valuers are instructed by the Act to make allowance for 'the inherent capabilities of the soil,' although those capabilities are precisely what the tenant pays rent for. Again, while the tenant's claim has been restricted in almost every conceivable way, the landlord's counter-claim is unlimited in respect of alleged deterioration or infringements of covenants. In several instances the landlord has been allowed to recover penal damages for infringements of the strict letter of leases or other agreements, even when the farm has been left in a more valuable condition, owing to those irregularities.

Now, whenever a turn in the tide of depression takes place, it will be of the utmost importance that tenant farmers should be encouraged by a fair compensation law to increase the productiveness of the soil to the utmost extent likely to prove profitable, and this they will not do unless such compensation is secured to them.

For my own part, I do not believe that any system of compensation for improvements, however comprehensive, will be successful, if based on the existing method of valuation by arbitrators, as the difficulty of valuing the residue of improvements made two or more years ago is too great. Besides, while on one hand it is desirable to allow the tenant the utmost latitude for improvements, on the other hand it is hard to require a landlord to pay an

unlimited sum for improvements carried out without his approval, taking his chance of recovering his outlay from a future tenant. In consideration of all the objections to the valuation system, I am strongly in favour of Free Sale, under which system the tenant would execute experiments at his own risk, taking his chance of their proving remunerative while he continued in his holding, and of getting their unexhausted value in the open market in the event of his quitting the farm. The landlord should have the right of pre-emption, so that he could buy up the tenant right if he chose to do so.

Free Sale would involve the limitation of the landlord's power to raise the rent of a farm, or otherwise he might confiscate the tenant-right purchased by a new tenant by means of an advance in the rent; but I would limit interference with rent strictly to this extent, and the restriction would not need to last for many years after the entry of a new tenant.

Another necessary reform is such a change in the law as would afford to tenants complete freedom of cultivation and sale of produce, except that the landlord should have power to obtain an order from a Court of Justice to restrain a tenant from continuing to commit obvious waste. It is absurd that the hands of farmers, in their great struggle with a whole world of competitors, should be tied by harassing restrictions, such as that which prohibits the sale of hay at a time like the present, when its sale value is three times its feeding value, and five times its manureal value; or, again, limitations as to the precise area of the crops which are to be grown. Covenants providing for damages in the event of their infringement should be rendered nugatory by limiting the penalty legally recoverable to the actual damage proved.

A good tenant-right law would stimulate improvement so generally that there would be little reason to fear deterioration arising from freedom of cultivation and sale of produce.

The prevention of the sale of adulterated products as genuine is an urgent reform. The subject needs an article to itself, and it can be only briefly mentioned on the present occasion. The Fertilizers and Feeding Stuffs Act, passed by Parliament this session, is a fairly satisfactory measure. As to the Margarine Act, it needs to be extended and amended by making its administration on the part of local authorities compulsory, and in other ways.

It is nothing short of a scandal that the Railway and Canal Traffic Act, the result of a prolonged agitation carried on to

prevent the exorbitant and preference charges of railway companies, should have been so framed as to empower those companies to increase their exactions. That it was so framed was proved by what took place at the beginning of this year, when it came into operation, and it was found that rates had been enormously increased. Parliament had to interfere, and the new scale of charges was withdrawn, while a Committee is now sitting to inquire into the state of affairs, and to draw up some plans for preventing injustice to agriculturists and traders for the future. The representatives of the companies admit that, even now, the charges to consigners of small quantities of goods and upon the traffic for short distances generally are higher than they were before the Act was passed. Again, by means of cheap ocean and railway through rates, the foreign competitors of British and Irish farmers have an undue advantage over them, which is utterly intolerable in the face of the difficulties which they have to encounter under Free Trade. Low railway rates on agricultural produce should be secured, even if the State has to purchase all the railways for the sake of granting them. Probably they would pay better than high rates, through the great development of traffic which they would stimulate.

Foot-and-mouth disease has been completely got rid of, except when it is reintroduced from foreign sources, and pleuropneumonia has been suppressed except for a few local outbreaks caused by contact of animals affected by the disease in the encysted form. But swine fever and two or three diseases affecting horses or cattle have yet to be stamped out. We should not be contented until all the contagious diseases of live stock have been suppressed, and then we should rigidly prevent their reintroduction. It is satisfactory to notice that the Swine Fever Bill has become law since this article was begun.

The abolition of all market monopolies ought to be insisted upon by producers and consumers, who are alike injured by the limitation of liberty of sale which they impose. The owners of such exclusive privileges have enjoyed them too long, to the wrong of their fellow countrymen, and not a penny of compensation should be paid on the extinction of the monopolies.

Inquiry by the new Royal Commission into the system of gambling in farm produce, already described, is called for, with a view of suggesting its prevention in this country. Such action would strengthen the hands of the American farmers in their efforts to do away with practices which discourage legitimate trading, and depress prices.

My list of measures of relief and encouragement is already a long one ; but I must not omit to include in it the prohibition of the limited ownership of land, the simplification and cheapening of land transfer, the abolition of the Law of Distress for rent, and the readjustment of local taxation. There is no need to advocate increased facilities to enable industrious and thrifty labourers to obtain small holdings as well as allotments, all our legislators being possessed with a consuming desire to do what this large class of voters may desire ; but it is to the interest of landlords and tenant-farmers to render rural life attractive to the best of the young men, who now turn their faces to the towns or the mines.

With all the disabilities under which farmers labour removed, so far as they can be by legislation, I believe that the agriculturists of this country would be able to make their industry pay, in spite of foreign competition. Under the favourable circumstances supposed, the farmers might be left to their own shrewdness to guide them to the most profitable branches of agriculture, without advice from outsiders. Such special industries as fruit-growing and market-gardening would become possible to tenants, where they are hardly so now, with compensation for all unexhausted improvements secured to them, railway charges reduced and made equitable to home and foreign producers alike, and market monopolies abolished. Other reforms in our system of distribution, however, would be desirable, not only for the growers of fruit and vegetables, but also for all classes of cultivators of the soil, and these they might accomplish for themselves by co-operation in the economical production, collection, conveyance, and sale of their products, or of some of them. The establishment of such agricultural credit banks as have proved highly beneficial to the cultivators of the soil in many Continental countries is also to be recommended. With all the changes suggested realised, farmers would find it to their advantage to concentrate their capital upon smaller areas of land than it is now spread over.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

So far as my ability lies, and as the space at my disposal allows, I have endeavoured to show the means of escape from the difficulties which have so long puzzled all those who take an interest in agriculture, and I believe that, if those means are adopted, the greatest of our national industries will be placed on

a sounder footing than it has ever before enjoyed, although its complete revival may be gradual and slow. The great difficulty is to induce party politicians to recognise the importance of anything concerning agriculture besides the vote of the farm labourer. Indeed, a strong feeling of antagonism is commonly manifested by a great number of politicians towards landlords and farmers, and measures of bare justice towards them meet with strong opposition. For example, a leading Free Trader, and a member of the Government, does all in his power to prevent any interference with the fraudulent sale of margarine as butter; and, again, certain members of the House of Commons strongly oppose all restrictions against the introduction of cattle disease from foreign sources. This is not only ungenerous towards men struggling with adversity, but also scandalously unfair. Legitimate competition, through Free Trade in genuine farm products, must be met by the agriculturists of this country to its full extent; but it is cruel as well as unjust to expect them to submit to unfair competition and free trade in cattle disease. Mere cheapness is not such an unmitigated advantage as to be maintained by the sacrifice of honesty and justice. Indeed, I am convinced that those who rejoice to see the prices of agricultural commodities below the cost of production in this country are seriously mistaken in their ideas of what is best for the welfare of the nation at large; for the maintenance of our rural industry is of the utmost importance to others besides landlords and farmers. All that the farm labourers need, including higher wages, better cottages in some places, and more allotments and small holdings where they are scarce, would have the best chance of attainment under the conditions which have been advocated in this article, and town workmen would suffer less than they suffer now from the competition of crowds of countrymen. Moreover, as already stated, the prosperity of the nation at large depends to an extent not fully realised upon the profitableness of agriculture, and nothing would do so much to remove the general depression in trade as the restoration of agricultural prosperity.

WILLIAM E. BEAR