

OUR NATIONAL PERIL.

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Author of "The Imperial Heritage," "Made in Germany," "Marching Backward," and "The Foreigner in the Farmyard."



PERILS beset every nation. Some, by fortune or wise statesmanship, are avoided, or their maleficent influence is mitigated. Sometimes the peril becomes an overwhelming evil and

the nation succumbs. In placing the title, "Our National Peril," at the head of this page, I am not ignoring the fact that more perils than one beset the English people at the present time. But there is one peril which looms so gloomily upon the nation's horizon, which has already inflicted such grievous harm upon the nation, which is so particularly a source of national decadence, that without violation of language it may legitimately be allotted a seemingly exclusive description and be named Our National Peril. The peril I mean is that which lies in the ruin of this country's agriculture.

The history of the world demonstrates that an essential to the health, or even the long-continued life of a nation, is that it shall be rooted in the soil. To the decline of agriculture upon the Italian plains the fall of Rome was in no small measure due; the rich and powerful Venetian Republic withered away because it was only commercial, and had no roots in the soil. The trouble between Chile and Argentina arises from Chile's lack of agricultural lands, without which her future is doomed to poverty and insignificance. And it must always be so. As Alison writes in his "History of Europe": "No nation can pretend to independence which rests for any sensible portions of its subsistence, in ordinary seasons, on foreign, who may become

hostile, nations." And Burke has told us that "in every country the first creditor is the plough. This original, indefeasible claim supersedes every other demand." Nature, in making the soil the mother of all wealth, its only real source, reminds us, in point of economic fact, and also after the manner of an allegory, that the tilling of the soil must ever remain the basis of industrial society. Without agriculture, as Alison said, no nation can really be independent, for it continuously leaves hostages of first importance in the hands of possible enemies. Without agriculture the vital forces of the nation die away. For it is not the denizens of crowded cities, even of the wealthiest manufacturing and commercial towns, who keep up the country's population; it is to the countryside we have to look for the continuation of the race. It is to the countryside the recruiting-sergeant goes for the best of his soldiers; it is from villages—from agricultural even more than from fishing villages—that the Navy draws its supply of sailors.

So it is also in economics. Agriculture is not only the greatest wealth producer amongst all the departments of industry, but the manufacturing industries themselves depend upon it. The best market for all manufactures is the market at the door of a factory—that is to say, the market of the surrounding countryside, where manufactures can be sold without the profits being drained by transport charges and the army of middlemen, which intervene when a far-off market is sought. Agriculture and manufactures living side by side support each other, even physically, as well as economically, as the most elementary agricultural chemistry will explain to you; and when they are wedded in the same community, wealth and economic well-being are produced and conserved to an extent which is not possible when they are divorced.

* NOTE.—The WINDSOR does not necessarily identify itself with all the deductions contained in Mr. Williams' careful article, but publishes it as a striking contribution towards the study of a subject which all thoughtful people admit to be one of vital importance.—EDITOR.

ENGLAND'S SUICIDE.

To kill agriculture is something worse even than the murder of a great industry. So intimately bound up with the well-being of a country is that country's agriculture that to kill it is to drain away the country's life-blood, and the nation which kills its agriculture commits suicide.

Yet England has deliberately killed her agriculture. In a moment of madness, succeeded by years of thoughtless folly, the Parliament of this country signed the death-warrant of the queen of this country's industries. It committed this crime in the fancied interests of the manufacturing and commercial interests of the country, though these interests were progressing to a degree which was the world's marvel. I say that this act was performed in a moment of madness, and in support of this view that the country's politicians were suffering from a fit of aberration of mind, I may appeal to Gladstone's own words, uttered a year or two before he plunged into the hysterical agitation against agriculture. In 1843 he declared: "I am strictly correct in saying there would be no new labour set in motion by the manufacturers of this country if foreign corn were admitted free, but what would be more than counterbalanced by the displacement of the labour of the British peasantry."

Those were the words of the patriot and the economist in his time of soberness. With his mind as yet clear of the turgid rhetoric of the Repeal League, he saw clearly enough that the evils and losses attendant upon the ruin of agriculture must be greater than any advantage in the way of an increased export trade in manufactures which might possibly accrue from withdrawing the necessary support from agriculture. Yet Gladstone's flash of insight into the real bearings of the matter were soon lost amid the growth of such doctrines as that tersely and cynically expressed in Thompson's "Free Trade Catechism": "It may be information to the home agriculturists to state that there would be no physical impossibility in living without them altogether."

And so the deed was accomplished. It was not all at once that agriculture began to die. Just as a man may, by some foolish course of living, sow in his system the seeds of death, and yet continue for some years afterwards in fair and apparent health, so it was with English agriculture. The "natural protection" of distance, which Cobden promised

to the English farmer, did shield agriculture for awhile. The prairies of North and South America were as yet but sparsely employed in arable cultivation, and, apart from the comparative smallness of the foreign wheat supply available, a lack of facilities for transportation and the high charges for freight did give the farmer protection against foreign competitors, even after the duties were removed. But all through the intervening years the foreign wheat-lands have been developing, railways have made a mesh over them, and the seas are now so crowded with ships that they are carrying grain across the Atlantic for a penny a bushel, and in some cases actually as ballast.

Meantime also the commercial and manufacturing population of England was largely increasing; not, however, as Free Traders vainly imagine, because of England's free import system, which as yet was not in practical operation, but because England was the world's workshop, and the world's gold discoveries and other industrial developments were daily augmenting the number of purchasers crowding around that workshop; and therefore, with these two advantages in hand—the lack of effective competition, and the growing urban population at its doors—English agriculture did seem for a time to be impervious, or almost impervious, to the attacks which had been made upon it in the 'forties.

THE DOWNFALL.

This period culminated about 1875. Shortly afterwards signs of change became apparent. The protecting influences were disappearing, competition was growing and becoming growingly effective. The approaching *débâcle* first became alarmingly noticeable during, as it was in a measure precipitated by, the bad season of 1879. That misfortune may be likened to the chill which, in the case of a man who has within him the seeds of consumption, discloses the real state of his constitution, and plunges him into the illness from which he never recovers, though the chill itself may be a small and temporary ailment which otherwise he would easily and quickly have thrown off. This country's agriculture has never recovered from 1879. I do not mean to say that the disease was not apparent to an ordinarily close observer before 1879, or that, even supposing 1879 had been a good year instead of a bad one, the depression would have been much longer delayed. Still, in the history of

English farming the dire trouble which has since overtaken it is currently dated from that year. Nevertheless, it is well to bear in mind that the decline, in spite of the apparent good times of the middle 'seventies, had commenced prior to that period, for the acreage under wheat in the United Kingdom amounted in the middle 'fifties to about 4,200,000, whereas the average for the first quinquennium of the 'sixties was only 3 $\frac{3}{4}$

exhibited a practically unbroken record of decline in this country's agriculture. Notwithstanding that almost at the beginning of this quarter-century a Royal Commission sat upon the then existing depression in agriculture, the position since has steadily worsened, and shows not the slightest sign of mending. If the complaints of distress do not continually augment, it is for the ominous, baleful reason that the farmers and



PROPORTIONATE YIELD OF TOTAL WHEAT ACREAGE 25 YEARS AGO.

million acres, and for the first quinquennium of the 'seventies it was some 13,000 acres below this figure. But for general purposes of comparison it will suffice to take as a starting point the middle years of the 'seventies.

A QUARTER OF A CENTURY'S RECORD.

I want, in the course of this short exposition of the state of British agriculture, to be as parsimonious of statistics as an adequate treatment of the position will allow. For I know that to the ordinary reader figures wear a repellent look. But their use cannot be altogether avoided, and I must therefore ask your indulgence for, and your attention to, a few figures I am now about to inflict upon you, because they are necessary to an adequate presentment of the case. I want you to get well into mind the fact that the last quarter of the nineteenth century has

their labourers, in yearly increasing numbers, have given up in despair and disgust the struggle to maintain the country's chief industry—there is less and ever less

farming now than formerly. This will be apparent if I detail the acreage figures over the period. And I will mitigate the number of the figures by tabulating



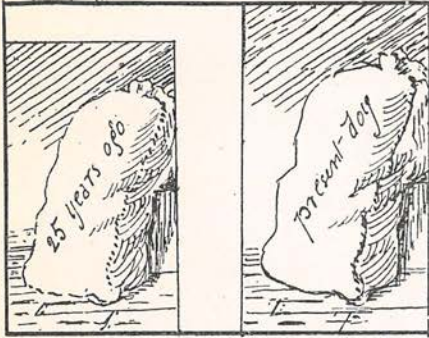
YIELD OF THE SAME ACREAGE AT THE PRESENT DAY.

them in quinquennial averages. Here is the result.

THE WHEAT ACREAGE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.			
	Average.		Average.
1871-1875 . . .	3,737,140	1886-1890 . . .	2,488,357
1876-1880 . . .	3,190,086	1891-1895 . . .	2,015,647
1881-1885 . . .	2,829,584	1896-1900 . . .	1,957,573
GREAT BRITAIN ONLY.			
1900 . . .	1,845,042	1901 . . .	1,700,828

These wheat acreage figures are those to which your attention should chiefly be drawn : for the production of breadstuffs is the most

important department of agriculture, and it may be taken as typical of arable cultivation generally. But it may be well to demonstrate this last point. This will be done by reproducing a similar acreage table to the above, but including all kinds of corn crops—



IMPORTED WHEAT.

that is to say, in addition to wheat, barley, oats, rye, beans and peas.

THE CORN CROPS ACREAGE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Average.		Average.	
1871-1875 . . .	11,543,777	1886-1890 . . .	9,722,297
1876-1880 . . .	10,931,553	1891-1895 . . .	9,234,921
1881-1885 . . .	10,345,860	1896-1900 . . .	8,816,109
BARLEY AND OATS ONLY, IN GREAT BRITAIN ONLY.			
1900	5,016,353	1901	4,909,350

Here the same tale of continuous decline may be read. The other corn crops have gone the way of wheat. Nor have these lost corn crops been replaced by green crops. I will not worry you again with tabulated statements; let it suffice to compare the average at the beginning of the quarter-century with the average at the end. The green crops of the United Kingdom, which comprise potatoes, turnips and swedes, mangolds, cabbage, vetches, etc., were from 1871 to 1875 planted over an annual average of 5,073,843 acres. From 1896 to 1900 they were planted over an average of 4,318,733 acres. So it is with flax, the average acreage of which from 1871 to 1875 was 136,005 acres; from 1896 to 1900 it was only 47,974 acres. Even hops have declined in the same period from 64,044 acres to 51,600 acres.

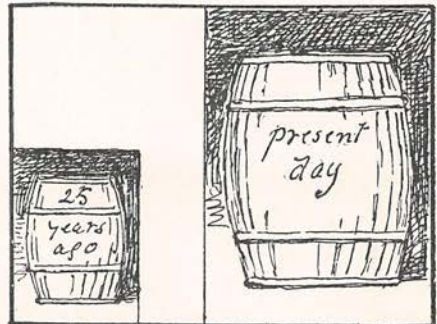
There is a proverb "Down corn, up horn"; but the later history of England poorly exemplifies that proverb. Notwithstanding the land which the diminished arable cultivation set free for stock and sheep raising, the head of cattle held in the Kingdom has only increased from 9,932,443 to 11,178,976; while the number of sheep pastured in the United Kingdom has positively declined during

this period, the figure being in the first years 33,192,418, and in the last years 31,051,718. We have failed even to increase the number of pigs, which have declined from 3,782,134 to 3,663,716.

Now think out the meaning of these figures in the light of the growth during the period of the population, which has increased from 31½ millions in 1871 to 41½ millions in 1901, and which would have increased, it may be remarked, yet more, but for the extensive emigration from rural Ireland, and for the substantial emigration from rural England and Scotland, caused by the decline in agriculture. And consider these figures, moreover, in the light of the increased wealth per head of the population, which means increased purchasing power, and therefore increased consumption of food.

Consider them in the light of our increased imports of foodstuffs. In 1875 we imported 51,876,517 cwt. of wheat; in 1900, 68,669,490 cwt.; in 1875 we imported 6,136,083 cwt. of wheat flour; in 1900, 21,548,131 cwt.; in 1875 we imported 11,049,476 cwt. of barley; in 1900, 17,054,990 cwt.; in 1875 we imported 2,955,202 cwt. of meat, bacon and hams; in 1900, 17,911,738 cwt.

This is the record for the queen of industries in this country during the past quarter of a century. Are you satisfied? Do you now accuse me of exaggeration in speaking of the present condition of agriculture as our national peril?



IMPORTED FLOUR.

THE LOSS OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL.

There are many points of view from which this death by inches of our chief industry may be regarded, and from time to time publicists invite your attention to one or other of these aspects. Before I close this brief survey I purpose to touch upon most

of them; but in the first place I would direct your attention to one aspect, which, though of very great importance, has not yet received the serious consideration which it deserves—I mean the loss of capital which the country has suffered, and continues to suffer, by reason of the decline in agriculture. In a way it is somewhat strange that this aspect of the matter should not have received greater attention, because Englishmen are apt to pride themselves upon their huge accumulations of capital, and of late years they have been a little exercised in their minds over the question whether the nation's capital is growing at a satisfactory rate, compared with its progress in past times, and compared with the present progress of other nations, or whether, indeed, it is now growing at all. And in truth the question is a vital one; yet scarce anyone discussing it includes in the discussion the question of agricultural capital. Yet the capital invested in the best of all the industries is surely proper matter for inclusion in any discussion of the nation's capital generally.

Let us, therefore, before proceeding to other aspects of the rural problem, try to find out how the position stands in regard to the loss of capital which the country has suffered by reason of the decay of its rural industries.

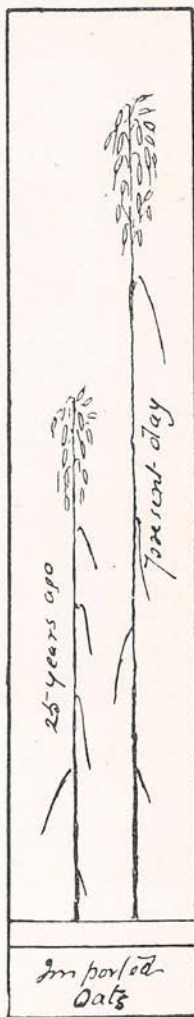
It is not easy to appraise this loss. Various estimates have been made, but they can only be estimates; exact aggregate figures are not obtainable, and in so far as the estimates are based upon exact statistics, and confined within their range, it is safe to assume that the real loss of capital has been very much greater than such estimates say. This point I would like you to bear in mind

when perusing the estimates I am now about to lay before you.

For the purpose of calculating the loss, I doubt if we can find a better authority than Mr. Robert E. Turnbull, a land agent of great experience, who prepared statistics upon the subject for the London Farmers' Club, and afterwards put in these statistics as evidence before the last Royal Commission on the Depression of Agriculture. Listen to them, and say if they are not startling enough to shake the most confirmed optimist.

First for the landlords' capital. Between 1874 and 1892-3 the value of agricultural land decreased from £1,874,000,000 to £1,160,000,000; that is to say, in eighteen years it fell off by 38 per cent. Think of what that means. In this brief space of time 38 per cent. of the agricultural landlords' capital was swept away. It is an enormous amount; it represents capital invested in the best of all the industries, and the loss occurred at a time when capital generally in the world was growing at a rapid rate. It was the first fruits of Free Trade. For the loss began synchronously with the coming into force of unchecked Free Trade in this country.

Moreover, it is a moderate estimate. Indeed, when the data upon which Mr. Turnbull formed his estimates are examined, it will be agreed by most persons that the estimate is too moderate, for it assumed that agricultural land was worth twenty-eight years' purchase in 1874 and 1875, and twenty-five years' purchase in 1892 and 1893; whereas it is asserted by many of those who follow the course of land prices that in the former period agricultural land was selling at thirty years' purchase, and doubt has been expressed as to whether twenty-five



years' purchase was not too heavy a figure to take for the sale price of agricultural land in the 'nineties. If the estimates had been thus altered, the enormous drop in capital would have been yet greater; for the method of calculation was, of course, the capitalisation of the rents and tithes in the two periods.

Now, the case has worsened since 1893. As the acreage figures I have already given show, there has been a progressive loss since 1893 in the Kingdom's arable acreage, and there has not been any recovery in rents. Bearing these various facts in mind—the underestimation of the loss in the period covered by Mr. Turnbull, and the loss since then—I am not exaggerating seriously, if exaggerating at all, when I put the total loss of agricultural landlords' capital in the last quarter of a century at the round figure of 1,000 millions sterling. Think of it!

But this is not the end of the story. There is the farmers' capital as well as the landlords' capital, and the farmers' capital, according to Mr. Turnbull's estimates, declined between June, 1874, and June, 1892, from £440,550,000 to £330,575,000—a loss of £110,000,000, equal to 25 per cent. And this loss, too, has been progressive.

The farmers' capital, it may be said, is calculated by adding together the value of the following items, which I reproduce in shortened form from Mr. Turnbull's table.

FARMERS' CAPITAL IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

	1874.	1892.	Decrease.
Live Stock	£265,750,000	£185,725,000	£80,025,000
Implements, etc.	48,000,000	48,000,000	—
Manures	48,000,000	38,500,000	9,500,000
Labour	28,000,000	25,500,000	2,500,000
Seed	19,800,000	12,310,000	7,490,000
Hay	8,800,000	5,750,000	3,050,000
Corn	12,750,000	5,770,000	6,980,000
Straw	2,500,000	2,250,000	250,000
Hop gardens, orchards, etc.	2,500,000	2,500,000	—
Tradesmen's charges	3,000,000	3,000,000	—
Dairy produce	1,450,000	1,270,000	180,000

In explanation of some of the above items, I may say that "corn" comprises 20 per cent. of the wheat, oats, beans and peas upon the farm, that the "straw" is that reserved for thatching and for stock, while the "hay" is that reserved for live stock and for sale. The "tradesmen's charges" are 25 per cent. of the estimated annual outlay, being part of the cost of the growing crops, and the "dairy produce" represents one-sixth of the season's make of cheese in stock on the 4th of June.

For the agricultural year from June, 1874, to June, 1875, the gross revenue upon the

above capital is estimated by Mr. Turnbull at £267,718,000, and for the agricultural year June, 1892, to June, 1893, at £185,750,000—a decrease of £81,968,000. (Just imagine what that means to the yearly income of the agricultural and the other classes of the country!) The first year's gross revenue was equivalent to £5 13s. 6d. an acre, that of the second year to £3 17s. 4d. an acre. The gross revenue of the first year represented $60\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. upon the capital, of the second year $56\frac{1}{5}$ per cent., notwithstanding that that capital was, as we have seen, so greatly reduced.

Now, if you will run your eye over the items in the above table, you will see that there has been no increase in farmers' capital since 1892, but, on the contrary, there must have been a considerable decrease in the aggregate. But there has been no general improvement in prices, either—a slight improvement here and there, but considerable decreases elsewhere; and, as the acreage returns which I have tabulated in an earlier part of this article show, the actual amount of farming is less to-day than it was eight years ago. If, therefore, in order to arrive at a round figure, we say that to-day the farmers' capital in this country may be returned at 300 millions, as against the 440 millions of a quarter of a century since, we arrive at a loss in farmers' capital during that period of 140 millions sterling. The extreme Radical may rail as much as he pleases against the landlord, and profess no sympathy with the loss of his capital, but even the extreme Radical must look with sympathetic eyes at the loss of capital suffered by hard-working farmers. But there is no need, even for the purpose of gaining the sympathy of the extreme Radical, for shutting out from consideration the huge loss of capital sustained by the landlords, because economically the loss would have been just the same whether the land had been owned by an aristocratic landlord class, by a multitude of small peasants, or by the State. It is the actual loss of capital value in the land itself which, in an economic view, we have alone to consider. The personal factor may be altogether eliminated, and the case remains just as strong and the facts just as glaring. Then once again get into your minds the sum total of those facts—namely, that owing to the decline in agriculture, this country, during a bare quarter of a century, has lost more than 1,100 millions of capital.

Patriotic reader, when you are bidden, as you so often are bidden, to glow with satis-

faction over the increasing capital held in this country (much of which is not capital at all, or at best only capital and water, principally water, and much of which is invested in foreign enterprises which are of no use to this country, and often breed harmful competition with its industries), at such times I beg of you to moderate your enthusiastic transports and remember that your country during the last twenty-five years has lost over 1,100 millions of the capital invested in the best of all its industries.

Closely associated with the capital question is its partner—the labour question. It is computed that for every twenty-five arable acres put down to grass, a labourer is thrown

country. In the case of that valuable branch of rural industry, the cultivation of hops, the lowered acreage is per acre a much more serious matter for labour than is the loss in other branches of farming. The amount of labour employed upon every acre of hop-gardens is estimated by Colonel Brookfield at £24 9s. a year. Now, as we have seen, the loss of acreage among hops during the last quarter of the century amounts to 12,500 acres. This decline in hop-growing means, then, that labour in this country gets now over £300,000 a year less wages than it would have received, had the hop-gardens of this country been merely maintained at their former level. And when it is remembered

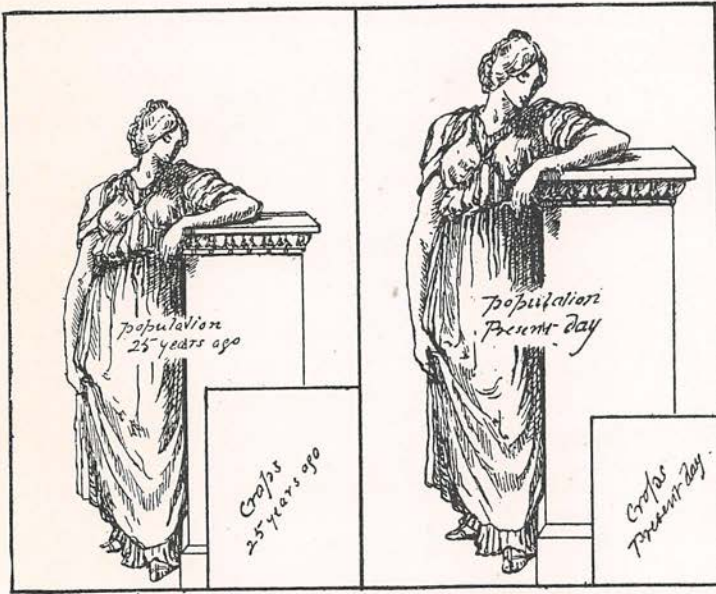
who the hop-pickers are—the poor of London slums, who make each year a valuable addition to their wretched incomes, and at the same time get much-needed fresh air, and what is practically a country holiday as well—it will be realised that there is involved not only an economic loss, but an element akin to tragedy.

INDIRECT LOSS OF CAPITAL.

But if we are to discuss, as it is necessary we should discuss, the collateral losses in capital which have resulted from the loss of agricultural capital, we get on to a much widened area. Loss of capital means loss

of income, and loss of income is loss of purchasing power, and the loss of purchasing power by one class involves loss of income and capital to other classes, who would have made money out of the larger purchases of the first class. Those 140,000 labourers, for instance, whom I have just mentioned, would have spent their money among local shop-keepers, and so increased the trade and eventually the capital of their district and their country.

I have lately come across an excellent presentment of the case from this point of view which found its way into one of the appendices attached to the Evidence given before the last Royal Commission upon



RELATIVE SIZES OF POPULATION AND TOTAL OF HOME-GROWN CROPS OF ALL KINDS.

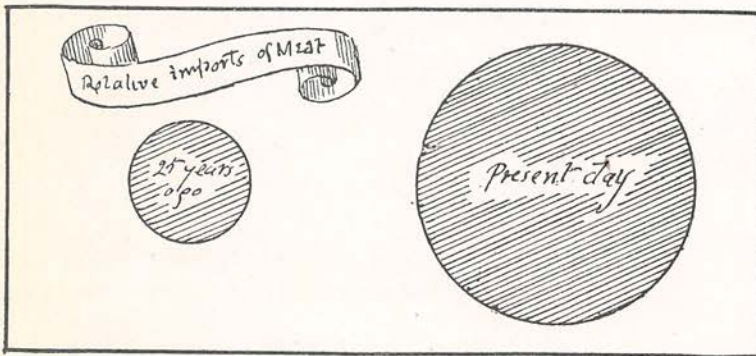
out of employment. Now, the loss of corn and green crop acreage during the last quarter of a century amounts to fully 3½ million acres. Therefore, were the arable acreage of this country only as large as it was twenty-five years ago, and it might and should have been very much larger, there would be employed upon our fields to-day 140,000 men more than are, in fact, employed. That is a point for working-men to consider. They might have been, perhaps, had they chosen, among those 140,000. Or, if they had preferred the urban life, their position in the urban labour market would have been better, unhampered by the competition of those 140,000 men from the

Agriculture. Mr. W. H. Haughton, a Land Office inspector of the Board of Agriculture, was requested by his Department to furnish a statement regarding the acreage of uncultivated land in his district, the county of Bedford. One of the instructions given to this gentleman was to make an approximate estimate of the extent of land which, having been arable within the past ten years, was no longer cultivated, but was left to the unaided efforts of Nature, and was therefore of little or no value. And he reported that in his county there had to be returned under this head 8,904 acres, all of which used to be under the plough, in a clean state of cultivation, growing good crops of corn and supporting fat stock. The landlord received his rent, and the land supported prosperous tenant farmers and a large number of agricultural labourers. "Now," wrote Mr. Haughton—this was in 1895—"nearly all

adds that the result is that many farmers have not now the capital to cultivate the land properly.

But it is the part of Mr. Haughton's report from which I am now about to quote to which I would particularly direct your attention in this place. He is speaking of the large number of farmers proposing at that time to let considerable quantities of their land go to grass, and of one farmer in particular who told Mr. Haughton that he was going to put down 500 acres. From this text the Board of Agriculture inspector proceeds—I cannot do better than quote his own words: "In this one case alone the loss to the country is large—loss of home-grown food, of employment for labourers, blacksmiths, carpenters, harness makers, agricultural implement makers, etc., etc. On all sides in the agricultural districts, distress and loss of capital are increasing. The landlord

each year is getting less out of his property. The clergyman's income decreases. The farmers, in numberless cases, get no return from their farms and are losing capital. The merchants and tradesmen in the country towns suffer, the mechanics in all trades connected with the manufacture of implements



RELATIVE TOTALS OF IMPORTED MEAT.

the old farmers of the above reported land are gone, having lost their capital. The land being out of cultivation, the labourer's occupation on it is gone, and they have been driven to seek work elsewhere. The farm buildings are fast going out of repair, with the fences and field gates to keep them company." And he adds that most of this land could not be brought into cultivation again except at an expenditure at from £7 to £10 an acre, in addition to large sums upon repairs, etc., which the landlords would have to incur. And then, speaking generally of the tenant farmers, he writes: "Their capital has seriously decreased, their credit is gone, the merchants, cattle auctioneers, and tradesmen are now very shy of giving any fresh credit to the men who, a few years ago, were their best customers, and whose names they were only too glad to have on their books for good round sums." And naturally he

for agriculture must suffer from loss of work; so it is not the landlord and the farmer alone who suffer from agricultural depression."

And to this statement may be appended Sir James Caird's estimate, made in his evidence before the Royal Commission upon the Depression of Trade, that in one year (1885) the loss in the purchasing power of the classes engaged in or connected with agriculture amounted to £42,800,000.

The Bedfordshire Land Office inspector winds up his report to the optimistic gentlemen at Whitehall with the following pregnant paragraph, which deserves to be rescued from the obscurity of a dusty Blue Book:—

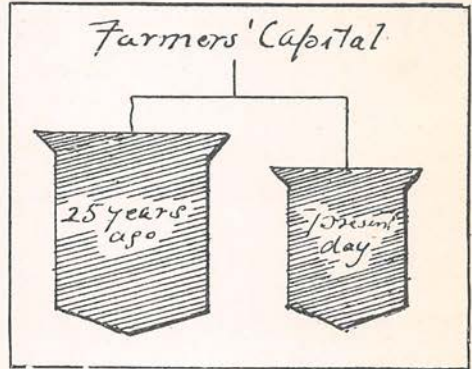
"This is a point I consider is not brought sufficiently to the front, as a large proportion of the voters in the country believe that agricultural depression hurts no one but the landlord and the farmer, and as long as they

get the benefits of the low prices for corn they do not think it matters if the landlords and the farmers in the country are ruined and the clay land goes out of cultivation."

It is not only that the agricultural capital of the country is so much less than it would have been but for the decline in cultivation; there have been losses to other sorts of capital, which it is impossible to number, but which are real and serious. It was the manufacturing interests of this country who sacrificed agriculture half a century ago, but those same manufacturing interests to-day would be better off, would have more trade, and more profitable trade, if a thriving agriculture were spread over the countryside around our factory towns. Do not think that if you are not a farmer or a landlord this question of agriculture does not affect you. It does affect you, whoever you are. You may be a doctor—the denuded countryside gives less scope for your practice. You may be a stockbroker—there would be more business coming to your office if the agricultural classes had not lost their money. You may be (let me take a quite extreme case) an actor—theatres in country towns, and in London also, would be better filled if farmers and their wives had not been ruined. Therefore, this question of agricultural decline does affect every one of you, whatsoever your trade or profession, and if

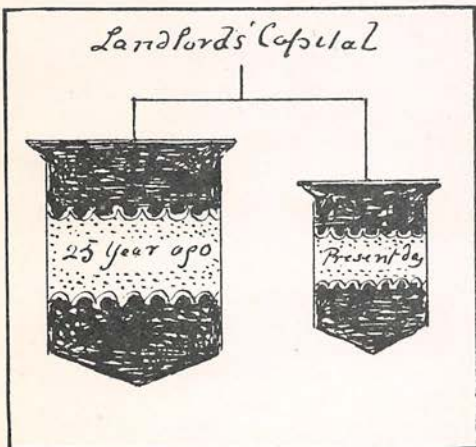
OTHER ECONOMIC LOSSES.

This question of the capital loss which the country has suffered is of such pre-eminent importance that the subject needs to be thrashed out in all its bearings, and before passing away from it, therefore, I would



direct your attention briefly to one or two other aspects of the matter.

In the first place, let no one run away with the notion that the frightful loss of landlords' capital which I have enumerated above consists only in depreciated values. During these years of vanishing capital the landowners have actually been sinking large additional sums in their estates, and therefore their real loss of capital is very much greater than the figures compiled upon the basis of purchase values indicate. Thus, Lord Harrington's agent, Mr. Gilbert Murray, told the Royal Commission on Agriculture that during the twenty-six years he had been connected with the Elvaston estate, he had spent £40,000 on 6,000 acres in buildings and drainage, entirely out of income. Again, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach told the same Royal Commission that for the past thirty-five years he had "practically spent his income upon them." These examples might be multiplied indefinitely. Nor is it an adequate reply to say that the landlords spending these sums got interest upon the money. Colonel Hughes, when giving evidence before the Royal Commission, upon the large sums that had been spent in improvements upon the Wynstay estate, said that the return in the way of interest amounted only to 2½ per cent. Now, I need hardly remind you that one expects more than 2½ per cent. return from money invested in a losing and most uncertain business. It is not fair, either, to treat the matter quite in this way. The money spent upon improvements on an estate should be



you do get out of ruined agriculture a loaf a halfpenny cheaper, or a pound of butter a penny cheaper, think seriously whether even from the point of view of your own pocket you are really enriched by the ruin of your fellow countrymen in the villages.

considered as part of the general capital of the estate, and the income of the estate should be treated as a whole. Doing this, it is doubtful if the additional money put into agricultural land can be said generally to have yielded even the poverty-stricken return of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

There is another point which it is worth while to impress upon the reader. The official returns which give the statistics of the amount of land going out of cultivation from year to year understate the actual position. This will be apparent if I quote a few sample extracts from reports made to the Board of Agriculture by land officers and inspectors. Mr. Creed reported from Essex that, in addition to the land actually out of cultivation, "a great many farms are unlet and out of owner's hands." From Lincolnshire, Mr. Higgins reports that though he is not aware of land having gone out of actual cultivation, "certain lands have gone into a partial and imperfect state of cultivation." Again, from Norfolk, Mr. Beck reports: "No land out of cultivation, but large areas have been left in grass as sheep-walks." It will thus be seen that the actual condition of farming is worse even than the official returns show, depressing though these are.

There is another feature of the case which may be mentioned in this place. It may be asked, seeing that the farmer's heaviest losses are usually upon wheat-growing, why do farmers let their capital and income slide away by continuing to grow wheat, instead of devoting themselves to other kinds of farming, in which there is more profit or less probability of loss? There are various answers to this question. For one thing, farmers *are* growing less and less wheat every year; but there are many reasons why they hold on as long as possible to the old staple industry. There is one reason which I would particularly mention just now, as it more immediately concerns the point of view that we have just been discussing. The reason is this. The cultivation of wheat divides farm labour over the season more equably than do other branches of farming; and the urgency of this reason for wheat cultivation will be apparent as soon as it is stated. But I may add that the practical economics of farming furnish yet another reason why wheat is grown even after it has ceased to be directly profitable. That reason is, that a lot of straw is required upon farms; and even in these days we have not yet got to the pitch of importing straw from foreign countries.

Again, with regard to the loss of national

capital, through the decline in agriculture, by other than agriculturists, as I have said, this loss cannot be estimated, though it spreads far and wide into all sorts of industries, like the ever-widening circle made by a stone falling into a pool of water; but I may make particular mention of one such industry, since it is, or was, largely a rural industry in close connection with farming. I refer to the milling of wheat. It may without exaggeration be said that the ruin of the miller is greater even than the ruin of the farmer. One of the most melancholy, as it is one of the most common sights in the country is the broken-down mill. I am not aware that any estimates have been made of the loss of capital in the milling industry, but the figures, if they were compiled, would undoubtedly be of formidable dimensions, and the loss to the miller is continually mounting, at an even greater ratio than the loss to the farmer. For whereas the import of wheat grew from 52 million cwt. to 68½ million cwt. between 1875 and 1900, the import of wheat-meal and flour grew from 6 million cwt. to 9½ million cwt. in the same period—that is to say, during the last quarter of a century our wheat imports have increased by 31 per cent., but our flour imports by no less than 58 per cent.

And this increasing stoppage of English mill-wheels is of even more moment than the direct loss of production in the mills themselves indicate; for milling gives the valuable by-product of offal, the uses of which to other industries are important. By importing flour in ever larger quantities we not only ruin the wheat-farmer and the miller, but we also deprive the country of a vast mass of offals which, if we had them, would enrich other departments of rural industry.

A RÉSUMÉ.

Let us sum up the position so far. For the main facts we have dealt with are so important, so appalling in their significance, that it is well the impression of their recital should not be weakened by the explanatory matter in which it has been necessary to imbed them. The salient facts, then, are these.

The power, the health, the wealth, the very existence of a nation are in the long run bound up with the prosperity of its agriculture. England has, for a certain fancied consideration in other directions expected to be received, deliberately sacrificed her agriculture. The effect of the sacrifice has be-

come increasingly apparent during the past quarter of a century.

The wheat acreage of the United Kingdom has fallen from $3\frac{3}{4}$ million acres in the early 'seventies, to well under 2 millions at the present time. That is to say, within a quarter of a century we have diminished our native supply of breadstuffs by one half, and this notwithstanding that the population has increased in the period from $31\frac{1}{2}$ millions to $41\frac{1}{2}$ millions.

The increase of population has, however, been only in the towns, for the abandonment of agriculture has brought about the gradual depletion of the countryside by the emigration of the villagers into the towns or abroad.

The abandonment of wheat-growing has not been compensated by increases in the other branches of rural industry. The acreage of corn crops generally has declined from $11\frac{1}{2}$ million acres at the beginning of the quarter century to $8\frac{3}{4}$ million acres at its end. The green crop acreage has declined from 5 million acres to $4\frac{1}{2}$ million acres. The valuable flax cultivation has declined from 136,000 acres to 48,000 acres. The yet more valuable hop-gardens have declined from 64,000 to 51,000 acres.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding the extended area thus rendered available for pasturage, the head of cattle has only increased from 10 millions to 11 millions, while the number of sheep has declined from 33 millions to 31 millions, and there is a slight decline in the number of pigs fed in the country.

This decline has proceeded *pari passu* with an enormous increase in our imports of foodstuffs—that is to say, an enormously increased dependence upon the goodwill or the impotence of foreign nations, and an equivalent weakening in our defensive power, issuing in ever greater anxiety regarding our naval power and continuously augmented attempts to strengthen that power. Taking breadstuffs alone, we eat roughly four—in some years five—loaves made from imported wheat to one loaf made from home-grown wheat.

Consequent upon the permanent depression in our agricultural industries wrought by foreign competition, and the abandonment

of home production, the country has suffered stupendous losses in its capital, and this at a time when other nations are augmenting their capital with startling rapidity, and the possession of a great capital (upon which England has prided herself) is as necessary to a nation as the force which makes the heart beat is necessary to the sustenance of animal life.

That part of our agricultural capital which is vested in the owners of the land has, during the past twenty-five years, been diminished by 1,000 millions sterling; and not by its transfer into other industrial channels—the diminution is sheer loss.

That part of the nation's agricultural capital which is vested in the hands of the farmers has diminished within the same period by a sum little short of 150 millions sterling. And this diminution also represents actual loss of capital.

Great losses of capital have also been suffered by industries such as milling, which are allied to the farming industries.

With this loss of capital has proceeded a general loss of trade and wealth in the country, ramifying all through our industrial society and inflicting loss of wages and other evils upon labour, increasing pauperism—which, again, is a charge upon capital and labour—and augmenting the emigration of the very men whom it is in the interest of the country to preserve within its borders.

* * * * *

This, in short, is the situation which England has to face at the dawn of the twentieth century. It is an overwhelmingly serious situation viewed from any point of view, and the aspects are many. It is indeed a situation which can only adequately be described as our national peril.

No more urgent problem than the renovation of agriculture can command the attention of statesmen and all citizens of this country at the present moment. The questions involved go to the very root of our national well-being, even of our national existence. In a subsequent paper I purpose to discuss the possibilities of renovation.

(To be concluded.)

OUR NATIONAL PERIL.

By ERNEST E. WILLIAMS,*

Author of "The Imperial Heritage," "Made in Germany," "Marching Backward," and "The Foreigner in the Farmyard."



IN my former article I endeavoured to lay bare the nakedness of the land. I showed how deterioration, decadence, practically death, had

descended upon the queen of our industries. Then I went on to show how, among the various and serious evils which have followed in the train of this national disaster, the loss of capital invested in the industry was not the least serious. Within about a quarter of a century agricultural landlords' capital had been diminished by about £1,000,000,000, while the loss in farmers' capital was not much less than £150,000,000. Were no other evil results but this loss of capital involved in the destruction of rural industry, the matter would demand the most earnest attention; but other grave evils wait upon a country whose villages are derelict.

THE DEPLETED VILLAGES.

It is no light matter this denudation of the countryside. Even supposing that the men who leave the villages get as remunerative employment elsewhere, it is a loss to the country when they go abroad. New countries are glad enough to have them, and like them in preference to any other class of immigrants—an excellent reason why we should look askance at losing them. Yet they continue to be drained away.

Five thousand seven hundred and one agricultural labourers, gardeners, carters, etc., emigrated from the United Kingdom in

1900. They were accompanied by 3,508 farmers and graziers, by 60 millers, maltsters, etc. And in respect to the other classes of emigrants—the blacksmiths, the carpencers, the general labourers, the sawyers, the shopkeepers, and the rest—fewer of these would have needed to leave their native country had it not been for the depression in agriculture, which diminished their chances of earning a living at home.

And while we are thus draining away the best elements in our population, we are receiving from Continental countries their worst elements. Europe has made England the dumping-ground of her surplus population, in the same way as she has made it the dumping-ground of her surplus production. And if "cheap and nasty" may be applied to some of Europe's surplus production, it may certainly be applied to much the greater part of Europe's surplus population which she shoots upon our shores. 62,505 of these alien immigrants (against 50,884 in 1899, and 40,785 in 1898) arrived in England in 1900. In the Immigration Returns they are classed as aliens who are not stated to be *en route* to America and other places out of the United Kingdom. Exactly. They were mostly aliens whom America and other countries would not admit. Those other countries prefer the flower of our villages, which we send to them. We let the best go, and fill up with a class of foreigners who, at the best, only serve to make our city slums more slummy.

And when our agricultural workers migrate from their villages, not abroad, but to the towns and mining districts of this country, can the change be commended? Take first the case of those who become colliers. Regarded in an economic view the depletion of our mineral reserves is not as good an industry as the growing of grain. When the coal is taken out of the ground there is no more to follow, and the country's

* NOTE.—The WINDSOR does not necessarily identify itself with all the deductions contained in Mr. Williams' careful article, but publishes it as a striking contribution towards the study of a subject which all thoughtful people admit to be one of vital importance.—EDITOR.

capital is lessened. But the fields may be tilled over and over again, and, if they are properly manured, there is no exhaustion. On the contrary, the greater the income derived from agriculture, the greater the principal left behind. A country, therefore, which exchanges agriculture for mining does but impoverish itself.

Regarded from the point of view of the men themselves, the change is not to be commended either. They get better wages down a coal-mine; but at what a price! Compare the life of the reaper or the teamster, bathed in the sunlight, inhaling fresh breezes, following a healthful and natural occupation, surrounded by Nature's best sights and sounds and scents, with the lot of the collier, crouching in the gallery of a coal-pit, grubbing in grime and darkness, exposed to awful danger. And the same sort of comparison, in its measure, holds good between rural and urban labour. Compare the agricultural labourer and the factory hand; the dairy-maid and the pallid girl in poisonous white-lead works or match factory; the farmer jogging along the countryside to market, with the clerk mewed up in a city office, crouching on a stool over endless rows of figures. It is necessary that we should have our mines and our factories and our city offices, but it is an evil thing that men should be forced from the healthful life of the country into them.

It is more than doubtful if men and women are the happier for the change. One hears of the dulness of country life, but the dulness is largely the product of the very agricultural depression which has been denuding the villages, and it is largely a false assumption based upon an unreal comparison of the quiet village life with the noise of gas-lit pavements. I doubt if a man is more cheerful in a gin-palace than in a village inn; if his wife is happier in a one-roomed slum lodging than in a country cottage; if the children are happier playing in the reeking back streets of large towns than in the lanes and fields of the villages.

Certainly they are not better. One needs to be a man of considerable culture and education, to enjoy many advantages which are denied to the poorer classes, in order to withstand the evil moral and spiritual influences of town life. There are plenty of evils in villages: I am not idealising the spiritual or moral attainments of the average rural population; but they are at least, speaking generally, spared that dreary, deep-rooted scepticism which eats like a dry rot

into the lives of, I fear, the majority of modern dwellers in big towns. The man whose horizon is bounded by brick walls, who does not steep himself in the star-lit nights of the country, who is unaccustomed to the sound of rushing water and of the fresh wind swaying great trees, is deaf and blind to sights and sounds to which it is very essential that his eyes and ears should be opened. It is not alone in the economic view that the depletion of the villages must be deprecated.

THE NATIONAL LOSS.

What affects the individual affects the nation of which he is a part. But just as the foregoing considerations may be said to apply more particularly to the individual, so there is another set of considerations which may be described as more exclusively national.

The depopulation of the villages acts in diminution of the population in two ways. There is, first, the fact that it is by no means necessary to a plentiful urban population to have an uninhabited countryside. If the farms and villages were thriving, there would be more work, and not less, for the manufacturing and commercial classes. I do not know that anyone has said it outright, but by a method of implication, at all events, it has been customary to speak of our industrial prosperity as the consequence of our agricultural decadence; as if the latter were the necessary price to pay for the former. Yet a moment's consideration will suffice to show how utterly preposterous is this notion. The diminution of the rural population means, to a large extent, if not *pro tanto*, or more than *pro tanto*, the diminution of the entire population.

Secondly, the transfer of the population from rural to crowded urban districts means a diminution in the reproductive vigour of the race. It is a fact attested to by statisticians that a third generation of pure Londoners is unknown. The amenities of London life—good drainage, access to hospitals, and the rest—may keep the average Londoner fairly healthy, in a way, but he lacks the vigorous health which ensues in the reproduction of his species. Partly the artificial life, partly the lack of ozone in the air, are, I understand, the causes. What we have to regard, however, is the fact; and it is a serious fact for any nation. For, however hardly a large family may press upon the individual parent, the merest tyro in



economics knows that the larger the population, the larger the aggregate wealth of the country. Every man born into the world, unless he be a vagrant, a criminal, or an invalid, makes more wealth than he consumes; else it would not be a profitable operation for anyone to employ him. Therefore, in an economic view, the diminution of the population is a serious matter for the State. So it is also, obviously, in a political view: a nation, other things being equal, is great in proportion to its numbers.

There is, further, the question of national defence. Since our recruiting sergeants have had to draw more and more largely upon the towns there has been a continuous diminution in the Army's physical standard; and the puny appearance of many of our soldiers has now become a common theme for melancholy jocularities. I believe it has been proved over and over again during

the South African war that our town-bred soldiers have been unequal to the exposure and the incidental hardships of rough campaigning on the veldt, and that thereby the efficiency of our Army in dealing with the hardy Boer farmers has been seriously impaired. In the Navy, too, the dearth of men is causing no little anxiety. It is from the villages rather than from the towns that sailors are recruited, and the villages are becoming empty at the same time that the need for a larger Navy is increasing.

But there is one other factor of a political kind which may be mentioned here—the importance of a large rural population in order to furnish the country with that measure of real conservatism which is so essential to the stability of a nation. By conservatism I do not mean an attachment to any particular party in politics; I mean rather instinctive conservatism, the habit of mind which makes for stability; and that habit of mind will always be found in the largest measure amongst the agricultural

classes. It is well to have progress, but progress without the element of conservatism is too apt to become a mere restless and reckless pursuit of change for the sake of change. And it is this habit of mind—which, unchecked, tends towards disaster—that flourishes chiefly in big towns. It is needful to keep the balance. This is seen more particularly to-day in France, whose very salvation lies in the great solid weight of its peasantry, counteracting the incipient revolutionism of Paris and the big manufacturing towns. Similarly the looming evils in Spain centre in the big towns, such as Barcelona. Germany is even now appreciating the necessity of, and taking steps to insure against, the depletion of its villages. The political stability of England, and therewith its commercial greatness, are becoming endangered by the draining away of the solid political basis which the villages furnish to the Constitution.

OUR FOOD IN WAR TIME.

There is another great danger to which the nation is exposing itself by a lack of native food supply. We do not produce much more than a fifth of our consumption of breadstuffs. We need, roughly, 30,000,000 quarters a year. Our production in 1901 is estimated at about 6,500,000 quarters, and in 1901 the yield per acre was 1 per cent. above the average of the decade. Nor is the whole of these 6,500,000 quarters available for consumption, as 2 or 2½ bushels per acre from the crop each year are needed for seed. Further, we do not keep in the country large stocks of imported wheat. Under the modern practice less wheat is stored in the country than formerly, and the tendency to shorten the stocks is steadily proceeding. In point of fact, we practically, in this matter, live from hand to mouth. Millers sell flour ahead to the bakers, when they have not, perhaps, bought more than half the wheat wherewith to make it. Many of our largest mills have not even two or three days' supply. Millers used to buy wheat; they now buy options in wheat. The wheat remains stored in foreign granaries. Sometimes the entire stock of wheat in the country, both foreign and home grown, is less than 2,000,000 quarters—not equal, that is to say, to more than three weeks' supply. For the six months following March each year, the quantity of wheat in the country seldom exceeds six weeks' supply, not infrequently is lower, and tends to become still lower. Even just after harvest there is barely fourteen weeks' supply in the country.

Now think what that would mean in time of war. I mean a war waged against us by one or more great naval Powers. "Oh! but the Navy," perhaps you say. But does it not strike you that perhaps our Fleet would have something better to do than convoy grain ships across the Atlantic during war time? that its operations might be seriously hampered by having to perform this big service? Easily, then, the country might run short of food; for it is not only wheat, but all sorts of foodstuffs, for which we are largely dependent upon imports. That is to say, famine would stare the country in the face. Even if the Navy devoted itself to the convoy of food-carrying ships, famine prices would at once result. Corn merchants estimate that the commencement of a naval war against this country would mean the immediate rise of wheat to anything between one hundred shillings and two hundred shillings a quarter. What would be the effect

of that to-day upon the working classes? With trade disorganised, and wages therefore lower or non-existent, it would mean grievous suffering, bread riots, revolution—unless the country sought peace at once upon any terms the enemy would give it.

But would there be any grain to convoy? By a few smart and secret financial operations agents of the enemy could corner the world's wheat supply; and as this would be the most effectual method of bringing England quickly to her knees, it is more than probable that such a course would be followed. Suppose that the enemy declared war in the spring-time, when there was not more than a month's or six weeks' supply in the country: how long, under these circumstances, could England stand out, even though she succeeded in holding down her famine-stricken population? She could not stand out until the harvest-time. Even if war came upon the eve of the harvest, she would still have only about two months' supply, and so would have to beat the enemy off the sea within a few weeks, in order that then she might get access to the wheat of the Colonies—unless the enemy had forestalled her there. The position is most formidably serious; the danger, when it is examined, is really frightful.

Yet, if we were producing, as we might produce, the greater part of our own breadstuffs, we should be secured against this awful peril.

And as to the Navy. If it really is the fact that our gigantic Navy, growing more costly every year, does exist largely for the purpose of convoying imported grain to our shores, rather than for fighting operations, is it not a mad waste of money to spend so many millions every year upon a fleet which would be superfluous if we had not abandoned our arable lands?

THE LOSS OF THE MANUFACTURERS' MARKETS.

I touched briefly upon this matter in my last article, when speaking of the loss of capital and income which agricultural depression necessarily inflicted upon every department of trade, every occupation in the country, in varying degree. But a word further upon the matter is desirable in this place. We have so often been told, by apologists for the present state of things, that England's trade is an export trade, and that above all things it is necessary that she should have cheap food, from wherever it may come, in order that her manufacturers may (through

the payment of lower wages) be enabled to sell cheaply in foreign markets. As a description of the general course of our trade, this statement may be accepted. But whether the economic situation it reveals is desirable or not, is another matter. The more closely it is examined, the less desirable does it appear.

In the first place, our manufacturers, faced by the growingly keen and formidable competition of other nations, have to fight harder and ever harder for the retention of their foreign markets. And it is quite clear that in the future they will inevitably be edged out of those markets, for other nations are building up their own manufacturing capacity, while for what import trade remains, the competition of America and of Germany is too formidable to allow the English manufacturer to retain more than a small remnant. All this means that our manufacturers, in

concentrating their attention upon the export markets, are working in a field which is shrinking, and is bound to shrink, both in profitableness and in extent.

But always, in the very nature of the case, an export market must, saving certain abnormal exceptions, be less profitable than the home market. The cost of transport has been wonderfully cheapened of late, but it is still an item; so are the commissions of the various middlemen through whose hands manufactures destined for distant markets have to pass. And when, in addition, there are heavy import duties to pay, some part of which at least must fall upon the exporting manufacturer, and a keen price-cutting competition with other exporting nations also to face, in addition to the relative uncertainty of foreign markets, as compared with home markets, it will be seen without further argument that our manufacturers would be

much better off had they a good home market at their doors instead of this precarious and comparatively unprofitable foreign market.

But a good home market at their doors would help them to gain and retain foreign markets. It is because America and Germany have a better home market than that which is afforded to English manufacturers that these rivals of ours are able to sell more cheaply abroad than we can. They so arrange their affairs as to secure a profit upon the home market. The cost of producing over and above that quantity with the same plant, the general charges having been already paid, is much less. If English manufacturers, therefore, had a larger and better secured home market, they would be better equipped for, and able to sell more cheaply in foreign markets. Now the depletion and the impoverishment of the countryside seriously diminish the market for English manufacturers. Every fresh acre put under cultivation, each added dairy head of stock, each new dairy and restarted



mill, would mean so much more population in the rural districts, so much more purchasing power, so much improvement in the home market open to English manufacturers. The questionable advantage of ultra-cheap foodstuffs as an aid to the payment of low wages is far more than equalised by the real disadvantage to the English manufacturer of a falling and faded market for his goods in the villages and country towns.

Again, therefore, let it be impressed upon the reader that the abandonment of our farming industries issues not alone—though that, in truth, is serious enough—in the loss of national wealth through the diminished production of the fruits of the soil; it issues also in a loss of potential wealth of all kinds. Our factories would have more work, and more profitable work, with an increase in the purchasing power of the agricultural population; and they would even have better foreign markets, since they would be more powerfully equipped to contest those markets.

UTILISATION OF SEWAGE.

A discussion of the loss of potential wealth through the depression in agriculture, and of the contrast between town and country life, naturally calls to mind the question of the replenishment of the soil's productive power by its manuring with the excreta and refuse from the towns. Where natural manures, as contrasted with chemical manures, are used, this process of rejuvenating the soil is already in existence. But there is a widespread belief that very much more could be done, that the sewage of great towns might be utilised upon an extensive scale. At present it is wasted, and worse than wasted, for it tends to propagate disease, and the only problem which is tackled in practice is how to get rid of it. In the opinion of some experts this waste is waste in the proper sense of the word. Sir Edwin Chadwick, for example, has said that for 2*d.* a ton he could distribute London sewage over the country for the farmers' use. I am aware that, on the other hand, so eminent an authority as the late Sir John Lawes has taken an adverse view after examining the matter at length and carrying out experiments. His opinion was that sewage is so diluted that it is hopeless to think of doing anything with it. With all due respect, however, to Sir John Lawes, it should not be assumed that his opinion is the last word upon the matter. The experiments which he conducted were carried out a great many

years ago, and it may easily be that now, or in the future, practical scientists may devise means of getting over the difficulty which oppressed Sir John Lawes. The matter is even now under the consideration of a Royal Commission, and it is well worth the attention which is being bestowed upon it, for the absorption into the soil of excremental and decaying vegetable and animal matter is Nature's own remedy for the exhaustion of the soil consequent upon crop-bearing. And if adequate means of transfer from the drains to the cultivated lands could be found, the land would be enriched and the farming industry would benefit by what would practically amount to an infusion of free capital into the farmers' business, and the public health would be better secured besides.

THE QUALITY OF THE FOOD.

Here is another consideration which should not be passed over. Opinions differ as to the relative qualities of imported and home-grown foodstuffs; and though I would not go so far as to contend that imported food is not generally wholesome and palatable, it will not be maintained, save, perhaps, by importing merchants, that the food we get from abroad is quite as rich in character, quite as grateful to the palate, as the home-grown article. I will except grains from this category. The best American and Canadian wheat is doubtless fully equal to our own; though I doubt if as much can be said of that which comes, say, from Russia. But the best home-made butter and cheese and home-cured hams are certainly superior to anything we get from abroad. So it is with meat. The chilled beef and the frozen mutton which come to us from the ends of the earth are good enough, at the price; but who, apart from questions of price, would not prefer a Welsh saddle of mutton or a joint of Scotch beef to anything from the United States or New Zealand? And it isn't always the good stuff from the United States and New Zealand which you get: there is the inferior mutton from the River Plate, the inferior beef from Australia, which, often unannounced, take the place of the better sorts at our tables. So it is with fruits. California and Canada send us respectable apples, but their flavour is not as that of the old English varieties, which are becoming rarer and rarer upon our sideboards.

There is a more serious point of view from which to regard this question of the relative

quality of English and foreign food. Many of the Continental butter factories are not above suspicion. A few years ago the Board of Customs instructed its analysts to test imported butters. Out of 890 samples examined, 106 were declared to be adulterated. When I referred to this matter in my book, "The Foreigner in the Farmyard," I was taken to task by the official organ of the Danish butter trade, which protested that Denmark, at all events, was pure, and that the Dutch Chamber of Commerce had protested against the results of the English analyses in regard to Dutch butter. Undoubtedly the Danish Government does exercise admirable care over the products of Danish factories, but with respect to Holland I do not see why the protest of a Dutch Chamber of Commerce should override the tale told by scientific analyses in England; though, it may be added, Germany came out of the analyses as a worse offender than Holland. Nor was France exempt. A Frenchman himself, M. Guillemin, chairman of the commission in charge of a French Margarine Bill, declared in the House of Deputies that Normandy and Brittany butter was sent over to England containing 15 to 35 per cent. of margarine. Nor would the passage of a law against adulteration appear to have been quite effectual. Professor Long told the Food Products Adulteration Committee that in a French factory which he visited he found margarine being blended with butter for the English market, the product being exported as "guaranteed pure butter," and this notwithstanding that the owner had been repeatedly fined by his unappreciative compatriots.

There is also the preservative question. It is hardly open to doubt that the boracic acid which preserves food by killing the microbes has a like deadly effect upon the organisms which inhabit the human stomach and are necessary to the due performance of digestion—in a word, that the use of boracic acid and similar food-preservatives breeds dyspepsia. Now, English dairymen are not proof against the temptation to use these deleterious preservatives, though steps are being taken to check the habit; but obviously those foods which come from a great distance, often half-way round the world, are still more likely to be doctored with chemicals than are home-grown products.

THE CASE OF IRELAND.

I wonder when people will begin to realise that what more than anything else is the

matter with Ireland is the ruin of her great staple industry, agriculture. It is generally recognised that, apart from fomented treason and race hatred, the Irish question is an agrarian one; but the full content is not given to the word "agrarian." People wander off into mere questions of landlordism. Landlordism in Ireland is no more to blame than it is in England or any other country. On the contrary, the Irish farmer is placed in a far better position relatively to his landlord than is the English or the Scottish farmer. It is the agricultural industry itself which ought to be considered. A few do consider it. Mr. Plunkett and his co-workers in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society have appreciated the trouble, and have seen that Irish renovation depends upon the renovation of Ireland's staple industry, and are working valiantly to that end by the establishment of co-operative dairies and agricultural banks. Politicians of the type of Mr. Dillon know it also, though they will not confess it; but they virtually confess it when they stand aloof from invitations to join the work of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, and shrink with terror from anything that would make agriculture more prosperous in the country, because they know that the prosperity of agriculture would mean the end of the treason and political agitation upon which they batten. But when will the mass of Irish people and of English people see the thing also?

In the past England treated Ireland badly. Cruel and oppressive and foolish laws were made, hampering, even prohibiting, the formation of manufacturing industries in Ireland. These laws, however, having done their work of evil, have since been repealed. But greater than the evils they have wrought has been the blow which England struck at Ireland's chief industry. And that has not yet been put right; and so Ireland still suffers, and will go on suffering, and the country remains impoverished, and her children continue to emigrate, to cherish in a foreign country their rancour against England. Inoffensive Irish landlords have been treated badly; coercive laws, the necessity of which in a civilised country is a shame to that country, have been passed; the time and the energy of the Imperial Parliament have been wasted year after year, to the neglect of other business, while Irish questions have been debated; men have been murdered; the Empire has been weakened, and is still exposed to danger—

all on account of the Irish trouble, which is very largely the result of the decadence of Ireland's rural industries, and might very largely be cured by a return of agricultural prosperity. If only as a solution of the eternal, harassing Irish question, it would be well worth while to take almost any steps, to submit to almost any sacrifices, in order to bring prosperity to Irish agriculture.

But a notion of Governmental insensibility to the need of encouraging Irish industry may be gathered from the following reply made in 1884 by Mr. Childers, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, to Lord John Manners, who had asked whether the Government would be prepared to allow the agriculturists of the United Kingdom to grow tobacco. Mr. Childers said:—

“At that time—1779—1830—when tobacco was allowed to be grown in Ireland, the Free Trade rules, which are the basis of our legislation, were not so well understood, and the tobacco grown in Ireland was not subject to duty. Of course, now, if the permission were restored, the tobacco would have to pay an Excise duty, and a countervailing Customs duty. . . . I therefore, after the fullest consideration, have come to the conclusion that *it would not be possible to allow the growth of tobacco in this country.*”

Of such are our legislators made.

THE DEADLY CRY OF CHEAPNESS.

And it is all for the sake of cheapness. This tremendous loss, these most serious and threatening evils of various kinds, are all deliberately incurred by this nation upon the one plea of Cheapness. It is the most monumental, the deadliest folly that ever entered into the mind of man.

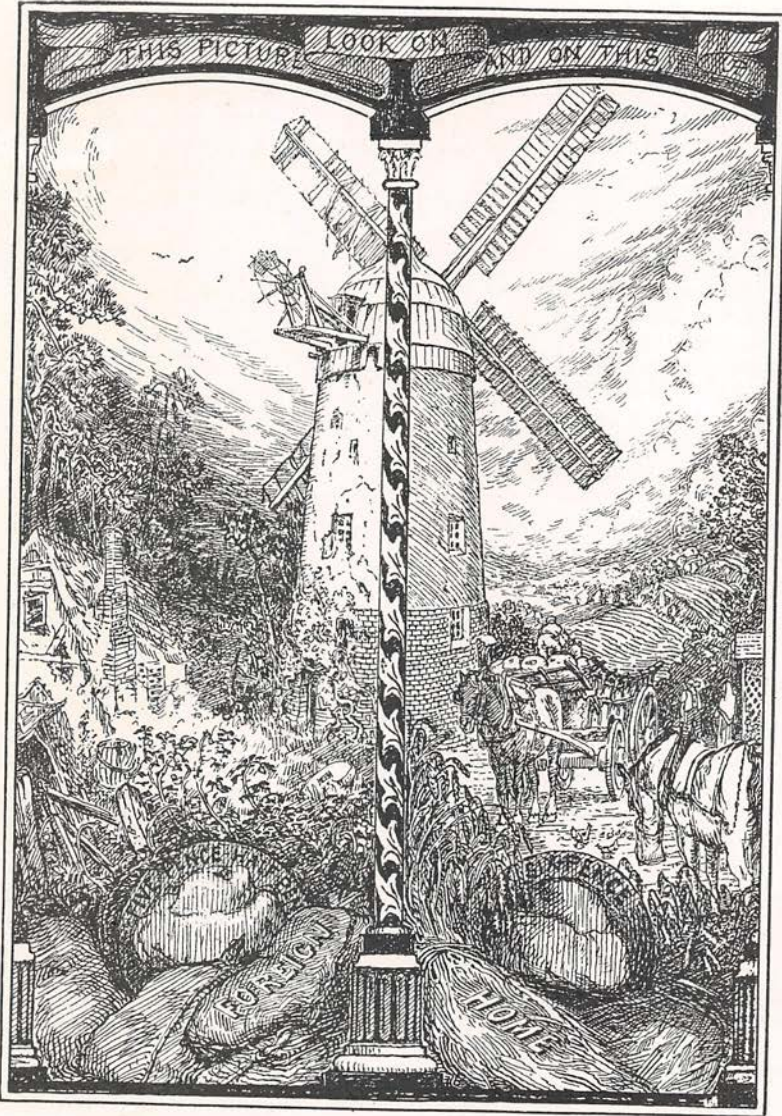
Dr. Johnson, with that characteristic rough common-sense of his which brushed aside the sophisms overlaying any subject with which he was dealing, once wrote: “It is to no purpose to tell me that eggs are a penny a dozen in the Highlands; that is not because eggs are many, but because pence are few.” This is a passage from the great doctor's works which might well form the subject of serious meditation to-day. An impartial meditation upon it, in the light of the facts that we have already been considering, will play havoc with this short-sighted Cheapness theory.

The actual case may be put more strongly than in Dr. Johnson's words. When a country's production is properly cared for and guarded, a rise in the price of commodi-

ties is not only compensated by a rise in wages and profits, but is more than compensated. According to evidence given before the Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade, the cost of living in the United States was 10 per cent. more than the cost of living in this country; but wages were 80 per cent. more. And the position in America has not worsened since then. The marvellously increased production of all kinds of wealth there has made the cost of living cheaper than it was in 1886, though wages have not gone down; on the contrary, I believe they have gone substantially upwards. Anyone who has lived in the United States, as I have done, knows that the American workman is far better off than the English workman. And yet we are bidden not to follow America's example in the safeguarding of native industries, because by so doing we run the risk of paying a little more for certain commodities! Let us have done with this huckstering folly before we are utterly ruined. Let us remember that production must precede consumption, and that if we look after production, consumption will take care of itself. What on earth advantage is it to a working man to have bread cheapened by a halfpenny a loaf, which means the yearly saving of less than half-a-crown per head, when the result is that working men's wages are lowered by much more than half-a-crown a week? Is it not cruel mockery to tell the working man he can buy his loaf for fivepence-halfpenny instead of sixpence, when, in consequence of lack of employment, he hasn't the fivepence-halfpenny in his pocket?

The mad theory does not bear argument. And yet it will perhaps be as well to point out that not only is the adoption of the theory an act of national suicide, but the alleged fact upon which it is based is largely false. In the first place, owing to the great increase in the world's production of all kinds of wealth, and the development of the credit system offsetting the depreciation of gold, commodities generally are cheaper than they used to be—that is to say, they are more easily within the reach of the poor man. Any necessity, therefore, which may have existed in past years to study cheapness as a subject of crying moment is disappearing. The greater power which the working classes of all nations have now of demanding a bigger share of the fruits of industry makes this desirability of studying cheapness yet more remote.

And then there is the fact, ignored by the



all your importations you cannot get it much below that to-day. And why was bread sold at fivepence-halfpenny a loaf in 1836? Because the nation's agriculture had been protected and developed to such a degree that the country was self-sufficing, and when the harvest was bountiful the wheat could be sold as cheaply as it can be sold to-day under the influence of decayed home agriculture and unrestricted foreign competition. In lean years more had to be paid, but the protective duties were arranged upon a sliding scale, which, by admitting foreign wheat upon lower terms in proportion to the increase in the price, mitigated the danger of very dear bread. Nor would it have been either just or wise, our fathers saw, to make the agricultural classes, who sustained the great

national industry, bear all the brunt of bad seasons. It was right and proper that the effect should be distributed over the whole country, so that the agricultural producers should not be impoverished and their industry brought to ruin. That was the old wise principle; the adoption of the contrary principle has brought about the melancholy and disastrous and menacing results which now confront us.

Cheapness theorists, that the protection of industry does not, in the long run, make for dearth. It helps to ensure a reasonable profit and reasonable wages to those engaged in industry; but it also develops industry within the protected area, and thereby develops competition, and so forces down prices to a reasonable level. It is not in the interests of permanent cheapness of food to let the excellent food-producing lands of this country go to rack and ruin, and so to give the foreigner a monopoly of the supply. Do you know that in 1836, the year of highest protective duties in this country, bread was selling at fivepence-halfpenny a loaf? With

national industry, bear all the brunt of bad seasons. It was right and proper that the effect should be distributed over the whole country, so that the agricultural producers should not be impoverished and their industry brought to ruin. That was the old wise principle; the adoption of the contrary principle has brought about the melancholy and disastrous and menacing results which now confront us.

WHY WHEAT IS AT PRESENT UNPROFITABLE.

It may be well to say a word or two with regard to the economic necessity for the

abandonment of our wheat acres. Why, it may be asked, cannot the English farmer under present conditions make wheat-growing pay?

The best answer to this question will be to transcribe the substance of Mr. W. J. Harris's evidence upon the subject before the Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression. This witness made estimates of the comparative costs of production of English and foreign wheat farms. His conclusion was that the foreigner (in a gold currency country) had a net advantage of 40s. an acre over the Englishman. And he calculated thus: The ease with which the foreigner's soil is worked, including lack of preparation and the saving in ploughing and harvesting, is equal to an advantage of 40s. an acre over the Englishman; the absence of weeding = 2s.; certain harvest weather and continuous instead of rotatory crops = 20s.; the English farmer's use of manures and growth of intermediate crops for fertilising, which probably do not pay expenses and rent as well = 20s.; the English farmer's rent and tithe = 15s.; his rates and taxes = 5s.; advantage to the foreigner = 102s. per acre. Upon the other side are the disadvantages which the foreigner suffers. Freight and insurance = 15s. per acre; short yield of foreign land compared with English = 50s. per acre. Thus the Englishman has an advantage over the foreigner of 65s. per acre, and the foreigner an advantage over the Englishman of 102s. per acre—net gain to the foreigner, 37s. per acre; or, if we add 3s. saved by American and Colonial farmers in the cost of seed, 40s. per acre. These calculations are, of course, conjectural, though it is worth stating that other experts have calculated the Englishman's position as being less favourable than appears in Mr. Harris's estimates. And, of course, in respect to competition from silver and paper currency countries, the foreigner's position is yet more favourable. I may add, too, that since Mr. Harris made his estimate freights have tended downward, and that agricultural machinery abroad, owing to the growth of the American and German industries, is also getting cheaper. Further, English wheat lands are much better than foreign wheat lands. You will notice that Mr. Harris puts the English farmer's advantage in this respect at 50s. an acre. Of course, that is in part accounted for by the contraction of English wheat lands, the less prolific being abandoned, while some of the more prolific remain. But even when twice the amount of wheat was grown in England that is grown to-day, the

yield of our wheat lands was well in excess of the average yields in foreign countries; indeed, upon well-manured lands it was as high as the present average. With our soil so well adapted to wheat cultivation, therefore, apologists of the present condition of the industry have no justification for using the argument that England is not naturally suited to wheat cultivation. Wheat is certainly not an exotic in this country. It is not Nature which is against the English farmer; it is the English Legislature.

PILLS FOR AN EARTHQUAKE.

The scene was in a rural district of the United States. Two farmers were conversing about modern improvements. From their dialogue I extract the following passage:—

UNCLE JOHN: "Why, yes; they have agricultural schools where they teach scientific farmin'."

UNCLE HIRAM: "I s'pose some day they'll have schools where they'll teach scientific bunco-steerin'."

In Uncle Hiram's caustic rejoinder there is a parable for application upon this side of the Atlantic. I don't wish to talk disparagingly of any sort of education. Agricultural colleges and the like are excellent institutions, and peripatetic Government dairy experts going about instructing farmers and dairymaids in more scientific methods of following their calling (as is now done in Canada) are quite excellent in their way. But, on the other hand, there is a good deal in Uncle Hiram's comment. The English farmer does not want to be taught how to produce a good crop of wheat or barley. If he sows less perfect sorts than formerly, it is because they yield more prolifically; whereas for the better but rather less prolific sorts which he used to sow he can no longer command an adequately increased price, now that the miller has learned to blend English with foreign wheat. It is not the professor steeped to the eyes in agricultural chemistry, but the man who has been reared on the soil, and knows it and its products as an artist knows a picture, to whom one would go for the best judgment upon meadow grass or the quality of a head of stock. We can do very well indeed with a larger infusion of agricultural chemistry and scientific methods (though they are mainly applicable to the minor rural industries, rather than to the major ones); but do not let us abuse the English farmer as a man who fails

because he doesn't know his business. Neither let us think that agricultural education or any other palliative will renovate our derelict countryside. In their place all these various reforms of which we hear are good enough as palliatives during the present distressful period, and as useful accompaniments of agricultural industry when, if ever, it shall be renovated. But if we regard them as more than this; if we regard them as in themselves adequate remedies for the awful disease that has struck down our agriculture, then we are like the people who propose pills to cure an earthquake. I am an enthusiastic advocate of co-operative dairy farming, of co-operation for the purchase of seeds and manures and for the sale of produce. I believe in agricultural banks upon the Raiffeisen system for the encouragement of small peasant farmers. Our villages would flourish better if more attention were given to the poultry run and the orchard, particularly with regard to the better and ex-

tended manufacture of cider. Railway rates are in a very unsatisfactory condition, and agriculture calls loudly for more reform than the railway companies have hitherto deemed it worth their while to grant. The incidence of rating and taxation might be changed so as to fall less hardly upon the agricultural classes. Imported produce should be marked. But though you might execute all these reforms, agriculture would not be lifted clear of the Slough of Despond into which it has been plunged. There is only one full, real remedy.

WHAT MUST BE DONE.

This nation must return upon its steps. It must go back to the system under which, and by which, England was elevated to her commanding rank among the nations. It is of no use to tell me that Englishmen will never consent again to have a duty put upon corn. The time is coming when Englishmen will remember Burke's words that "in every country the first creditor is the plough. This original, indefeasible claim supersedes every other demand." To act upon these words, to admit the necessity of a duty upon corn, may mean a breaking with old prejudices and old traditions. But the break has got to be made; and there is hope that it will be made, and made before very long, in the fact that, conservative and slow-moving as are the ideas of the English people, Englishmen have already broken with the Cobdenite philosophy at every other point. The Cobdenite school would have nothing to do with Empire; the people to-day values its Empire as its most treasured possession, as the guarantee of continued existence. The Cobdenite school would have nothing to do with legislation for the protection of the worker against tyranny and of the consumer against adulteration; modern Englishmen have insisted upon such protection. Why should they not go just one step further, and break completely with Cobdenism, and insist upon protection for the great industry itself? For it is the fundamental industry of the



country; the industry without which the nation itself is endangered; without which the industrial and commercial society and the body politic which are reared upon it will in time crumble away, or, maybe, will topple over before the first serious assault.

Those who glibly repeat the phrase that the country will never consent to import duties being re-enacted upon corn utter a parrot cry. Each man will tell you that the country will never consent, etc., though he himself quite sees the necessity. Some day the country will wake up to find that a vast majority of the individuals composing the nation are entertaining simultaneously the same idea as to the necessity. The parrot phrase about corn had an analogue until last year in a similar cry about the country never standing an import duty upon sugar. As we know, the country took the duty without a murmur. Nay, professional Free Traders like Sir Robert Giffen have recently put forth suggestions for a shilling a quarter import duty upon grain itself, and there has been no outcry. The country accepted the sugar duties because it knew they were necessary in the interests of the revenue. It will accept also import duties which are necessary in the interests of the greatest of national industries and of the nation's own safety, as readily as it accepted a burden for

the purpose of paying for an ill-managed war.

There is one more matter upon which I must touch. It is commonly said that we could not, and we would, grow all our own food. The statement is not true. Except in lean seasons, we might, with an effort, produce the whole of our own consumption. Eight million arable acres would probably suffice for our wheat consumption; and eight million acres of good wheat land could be found in the United Kingdom. Similarly, a much greater head of stock could be kept in this country, if we adopted the Scandinavian system of stall-feeding. But it is not necessary that we should produce the whole of our supply; it would be enough that in normal years we should produce, say three-fourths of it, and for the other fourth let us go to our Colonies, who are already trying hard to get into our markets, and for whose products, in larger measure than obtains at present, we could still find room, after renovating our own agriculture. To secure that these importations should be from the Colonies it would only be necessary to give Colonial produce a preferential tariff, such as Canada accords to-day to our manufactures; and in return we should be granted a preference in their markets against the competition of foreign manufacturers.

