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## THE EFFECT OF THE WAR ON IRISH AGRICULTURE.

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The subject of my address is not statistical. It is an attempt to show Irish farmers that as a result of the universal war prevailing in Europe we shall have in all probability a bad shortage of all kinds of provisions, both corn and meat, next year and probably the year after, and my object is to urge them to increase their tillage, including in this expression, turnips, mangold and other forms of food for cattle and stock, so as to provide meat ready for market, instead of exporting them alive to be "finished."

We obtain wheat for the most part from abroad, but we supply ourselves with a quantity of barley and oats, and "store" cattle. When I say "stores," I mean the lean cattle called "stores" to which Irish farmers have for years been devoting most of their attention, but which are not fit for food till later. What we want are fat "finished" cattle ready for the butcher, and these will be required in enormous numbers, for we shall need them to feed our armies, while we shall have fewer hands to do the work, because many of the men are now in the army. This makes the necessity for expedition greater.

I want to reach "the men in the fields," and therefore I wish to use language which can be easily understood, and as free from figures and calculations as I can.

What I have just said of Ireland is equally true of Great Britain—of England, Scotland, and Wales.

This would be bad enough of itself, but there is worse to come. The British are only a portion of the immense hosts gathered for combat on one side or the other. The nations actually fighting include the greater part of

Europe, and the call upon the populations of the other nations is much heavier than with us. Roughly it is about one-half of all the men in each country who are in the full vigour of manhood, and the loss of their labour will throw a heavy strain on the labour market. All of them are in the same plight; all will want food, and far more food than usual, for war is very wasteful in its demands, and this will lead to competition for the food which may be obtainable from the other side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

On one side of the great struggle are the giant forces of Germany and Austria, the criminal originators of the greatest war-struggle the world has ever seen. The number of their troops runs into millions.

On the other side are ranged—gallant little Belgium. I put her first alphabetically, but she is entitled to the first place as of right. Then come France, Russia, Servia, and the United Kingdom, and their numbers must also be recorded in millions.

The only "Great Power" in Europe not actually engaged at the time of writing is Italy.

It is a very serious thing to contemplate the preparation of increased supplies of food when the number of workers is diminished by millions. During the absence of the troops in the field the soldiers must themselves be fed, and their food must be provided for them by others, and at the same time preparations must be made for a future supply, on a scale as gigantic as the number of troops in the field.

The effect therefore is, that all the nations involved in the war have been deprived of a very considerable number of their best men for ordinary work: they have not got their usual "hands," and they are short of labour.

Even this is not the whole difficulty; we have not only to contemplate an enormous increase of persons to feed and a diminished number of persons to do the work, but there is another difficulty which is nearly if not quite as bad. All these nations except the United Kingdom are affected still more terribly, for their lands have been subjected to invasion, or are liable to be so affected in the future. For instance, the Germans have swept over Belgium like a destroying pestilence, blasting the country worse than the Ten Plagues that destroyed Egypt when the world was young.

Further the Germans have swept through Northern France from the Belgian frontier, till they reached almost to Paris, marking their course in letters of flame and blood. Rheims is only one of many places destroyed. The food supply of Belgium and of Northern France has practically been lost for a year, perhaps for years.

The same is probably true of the Eastern war between Germany, her ally Austria, and Russia, with which we are only connected by the fact that the destruction of resources there leaves the inhabitants destitute, and forces them to become claimants upon foreign sources of supply, and thus to diminish what might be available for us.

It is not only crops which have been and will be destroyed, but cities, towns, villages, factories, mills, railways and roads. These will need workmen in hundreds and thousands, and the workmen must be fed till long after the actual war is over.

The British Isles are mercifully free from invasion and destruction, and the same area is available as usual for crops; further we retain the command of the sea, but we cannot expect to get as much grain from abroad as in ordinary times, for France and Belgium, generally self-supporting, will be in the market bidding against us for food, and it is possible that Russia may also be short of food, instead of having a surplus available for exportation.

The conclusion is obvious that we must increase our home supply of food, and the question is: "How can this be done?"

Of recent years an enormous change has been taking place in regard to Irish land. Every year the acreage under crops, including hay, has been diminishing.

In 1851 the tillage was 5,858,951 acres, including meadow and clover. In 1913 it had gradually sunk to 4,814,591, a decrease of a million acres.

This area, as I have pointed out, included meadow and clover among the "tillage." The Government Agricultural Returns, from which I took these figures, state that between 1851 and 1913 the real "tillage" fell off 59 per cent., more than one-half, and the hay and clover increased 99 per cent., that is to say they were doubled.

Finally, the pasture since 1851 has increased from 9,483,634 to 12,408,803 in 1913, three million acres.

The total area of Ireland available for use in tillage and pasture was given in 1910 as 20,350,725 acres.

It was noted in a paper read before this Society on June 12th last by Professor Oldham that in Ireland only 11 acres out of 100, equal to 11.1 per cent., of the land was under crops, the lowest in all Europe. Even Switzerland, with more than a quarter of her whole area taken up with unproductive barren mountain land, and another 18 per cent. of "forest," which is much the same, has 16 acres in tillage out of every hundred, equal to 16 per cent.

In contradiction, as regards pasture, Ireland has the highest proportion in all Europe. It reaches the enormous proportion of 64 acres out of every hundred, equal to 64.1

per cent. Switzerland, which is naturally next, as cattle can feed on steep slopes where ploughing is impossible, has only 36 acres out of a hundred (35.9 per cent.) in pasture. As to France, it has only 11 acres (11.3 per cent.) in hay and pasture out of each hundred, and no less than fifty-two acres in tillage out of every one hundred in the country. Ireland and France appear to reverse each other. Ireland does the opposite to France all round.

Such results as these show that crops are systematically neglected in Ireland, the average of only 11 acres in tillage and no less than 64 acres in pasture out of every hundred positively demands explanation.

What is the cause?

I deeply regret to say that it is much to be feared that the farmers of Ireland have to a large extent ceased to be farmers and have become cattle-watchers, or ranchers. They formerly protested that these cattle ranches were the work of landlords, land-agents, capitalists, of anybody and everybody except themselves, but the fact is that the farmers, speaking generally, have made few efforts to depart from permanent pasture since they have been freed by the judicial rent system from any attempt to raise the rents on their improvements. The Land Purchase Acts of the present century, which have freed them from any rent whatever, have also failed to make any change in their system of so-called agriculture. It would appear that the cause of the change is not the system of rents nor the dread of confiscation of improvements, but that it must lie elsewhere.

The farmers themselves are becoming conscious of this, and they are now putting forward a new reason or theory, they say that they have given up tillage because it does not pay.

I again regret to say that I am not satisfied that this is true. I do not wish to make reckless and sweeping assertions, but I am not altogether without experience, and I have found that this excuse is not usually put forward by the good farmers, but by the lazy, idle men who sub-let their land for grazing and do absolutely no work whatever, men who sit on the bank and watch their neighbours' cattle feeding on the land which they themselves have sub-let to them, while they live in idleness on the grazing rents they are receiving.

I do not say that this is universal, far from it, but I do say that it prevails to a very great extent.

This conclusion is the result of, I think I may say, years of experience, but now I must go back to the present state of Europe, where not only Ireland, but by far the greater part of the Continent is engaged in the most widespread and universal war that has ever been waged in the world.

The forces arrayed on both sides throw the Napoleonic struggle into insignificance.

The first question is the duration of the war. I believe, the German Emperor is said to have stated that two months would see France conquered and Russia subdued. All his predictions seem to be exactly the opposite of what occurs, but many persons to whom I have spoken have given their opinion that the war would be over by Christmas.

I regret to say that I did not, and do not share that opinion. My view was and is that at the very least the war would last for a year from the 1st August, 1914, when it was begun by the Germans crossing the Belgian frontier.

Since that time the German Emperor's sanguine idea, so characteristic of the man, of occupying Paris on the anniversary of Sedan, the 2nd September, has failed, and the Austrians have been overwhelmed in the east. The aggressive German war has, I think, failed, but we have now to deal with the question of how long it will take to subdue the German resistance to the attacks of the French and British in the west, and the ponderous advance of Russia in the east. After what the Germans have said and done, we cannot accept any assurances they offer as to abstaining from further attacks on us, we must put it out of their power to do so.

In connection with this, we have not merely to remember the awful collapse of Germany in the time of Napoleon, but the wonderful way in which Prussia defended herself against France, Russia, and Austria in the Seven Years War, fifty years before. It is also necessary to point out that Germany is studded with fortresses; they preponderate on the western side, where stand Cologne, Coblenz, Ehrenbreitstein, Metz, Strasburg; but there are others all over the land. It is true that the defences of the eastern side are perhaps not so powerful as those on the west, but so far as I can learn they are of considerable strength, and the distances are great, while the railways are comparatively few. Each of these fortresses will require a siege, and the defence is likely to be desperate, if the Germans fight as Frederick's Prussians did.

Lastly, we have the winter approaching, a very serious difficulty in moving troops and maintaining supplies. I think it is a very sanguine estimate that the war will be concluded in a single year, that is on the 1st August, 1915. We live in an age when events happen quickly, but I do not see how peace can be reached even then, though the end may be in sight. After that comes what I may term, like Carlyle, the "rebuilding of a ruined Europe."

The consequence, to my mind, is that the crops of 1915

will be practically unsown in Northern France and Belgium, in Germany and Austria, and, owing to the absence of the workers as soldiers, even in Russia.

By the same time (August, 1915) our own reserves of food, of corn and meat, will have been strained, and those of all the other combatants, except perhaps Russia, almost exhausted.

Under these circumstances by that time we shall have all the Great Powers of Europe save Italy seeking to obtain supplies from other parts of the Globe. The British have the advantage, as the Colonies and India will contribute grain and meat as willingly as they have sacrificed their blood, but other nations will compete so far as they can do so for such of the necessaries of life as can be supplied by the United States, South America, and the neutral countries generally.

Under these circumstances, in my opinion, we shall have, for at least two years, an enormous demand for corn and meat.

Meat includes the fattening of the cattle and stock, and this includes tillage to supply roots for winter feeding.

As I have already said, the Irish farmers have of recent years devoted themselves to simple grazing, sending their "stores" or lean beasts to Scotland and England to be fattened, alleging that tillage does not pay.

I do not for a moment believe that the canny Scots and practical English are graciously pleased to fatten our thin cattle merely out of benevolence, so as to help us. I believe that like one of Shakespeare's characters they do it "to put money in their purses." The Irish farmers may put entire confidence in the statement that benevolence and philanthropy "have nothing to do with the case." Great Britain practices tillage because it pays, and the tillage supports a number of agricultural labourers and an army of workmen who deal with the "offal," otherwise called the "by-products."

While we have no work for our town poor, in Great Britain there are great works and factories devoted to tanning, felting, glue, albumen, manure, and fifty others. They would soon be established in this country if we had a dead meat export trade, and till the works were ready the "offal" could be exported.

What we want first and foremost is an increase of tillage.

I am not arguing for the growth of wheat, though I think that the price of that necessary of life will rise rapidly during the next year, but I am pleading for more barley and oats, more turnips, mangold, beetroot, vetches, rape, hay, so that we can increase the barley and oats we produce for ourselves and for which we may have to pay

famine prices if we be forced to buy them ; and also supply the cattle-food which we need for winter feeding.

I do not want to go into figures, for they convey but little meaning to those who are not accustomed to them, and I wish to influence and persuade the farmers, but in 1911—I take that year because the foot and mouth outbreak interfered with the more recent figures—we exported out of Ireland

694,828	head of cattle,
654,197	„ sheep,
342,340	„ swine.

The great bulk of these were “stores,” or lean stock. Great Britain got the profits of the fattening as well as of the “offal,” including the hides, to work up in their factories of various kinds.

I will take the hides as a specimen of the whole as to the value of these by-products.

The Irish farmer, I understand, reckons that the hide of a store beast represents 15s. of the total price he obtains for his lean beast or “store.”

An ordinary hide weighs about 80 pounds, and therefore the value of the hide is about 22s. 6d. a hundred-weight. The declared value of leather for export is £12 or 240 shillings a hundred-weight, as anyone can see for himself by consulting Thom's Directory, ten times the original price and more!

Comment is unnecessary. It stands to reason that if Great Britain can buy from Ireland for 15s. what she can sell for 240s. elsewhere, she will keep on doing so. It is rather like the savages selling their pearls for a tin pot.

I have avoided figures as much as possible, as I have said, but I think this specimen ought to go a long way in proving that what I say is common sense.

I also feel bound to mention that I look forward to a great scarcity of horses after the war. The rapidity with which horses are used up in war time is simply appalling. It is true we have motors taking their place in many respects, but these can never supersede the horse for many purposes. We shall want an immense number of them as soon as possible.

I have appealed, so far, to the self-interest of the Irish farmers. I believe that it will be greatly for their benefit to increase their supplies of meat and horses, and take advantage of the high prices which must follow the increased demand, but finally I wish to appeal to the patriotism of the nation, however feeble may be my pleading.

There is a possibility, at the very least, perhaps I should

say it is uncertain whether our food supplies may be cut short or fail, not only for Great Britain but Ireland. We are a poor nation, we cannot compete for food in the markets of the world.

Are the farmers of Ireland prepared to do nothing but wait and see starvation prevailing over the land, as it did in "Forty-eight." Starvation brings with it disease, ruin, suffering, hopeless misery and death to men, women, and children. It will be too late if preparations be not made now, and if the provisions be not required to save life they will still be of the usual value in the market.

We may remember that the first thing the Canadians sent us at the beginning of the war was a splendid supply of flour: it was to my mind a very strong hint of what they thought the motherland would require. It was manifest they felt the question of food was one of supreme importance.

It is an awful thing to contemplate that this scarcity may come upon us within a year from now. It is a risk such as none should dare to take. The times demand foresight, energy, activity, industry and perseverance, lest these evils and perhaps worse come upon us.

It is because of this that I have tried to place before you, so far as I could do so, the awful condition in which we shall be placed if our food supplies fail.

Should they do so, it will be useless to lament it next year, when the consequences of our neglect rise up in judgment to condemn us. It will be too late.