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*Labour and
Wages
Agricultural*

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AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN ENGLAND AND WALES

PART I

1900—1920

by

E. MEJER, M.Sc. (Wilno).



University of Nottingham, School of Agriculture
Department of Agricultural Economics
Sutton Bonington
Loughborough.

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FOREWORD.

In this study Mr. Mejer reviews the conditions of agricultural workers in England and Wales from 1900 up to the end of the First World War. A second report will deal with the period between the two World Wars and a third will describe conditions from 1939 to the present time.

It is realised that by division in this way the continuity of the subject may suffer. A preliminary survey of the field, however, indicated the importance of the political, economic and social effects of the two wars on labour problems and suggested the division that has been adopted. The 20-year period covered by this study is marked by notable changes both in the attitude of agricultural workers to their environment and in the attitude of the community to the workers. After a temporary set-back during the early years of the First World War the agricultural Trade Unions movement achieved a remarkable impetus until by 1920 as many as 210,000 workers or something like one out of every three hired workers belonged to a Trade Union. The second period from 1920 to 1939 is marked, until well on into the thirties by a declining interest of agricultural workers in Trade Unionism and as a result of the Agricultural Wages Regulation Act 1924, by the introduction of a new era in the relationship between the worker and the State. In 1939, the beginning of Mr. Mejer's third period, the position again changed. The Second World War with its attendant circumstances placed the agricultural worker in a new relationship to the community. The blockade, the shortage of shipping and the subordination of the whole national effort to the one aim of winning the war had far reaching effects on the conditions of agricultural workers in England and Wales. These conditions will form the subject matter of the third report.

There are many articles, papers and reports dealing exclusively with various aspects of labour in agriculture and much contemporary economic and historical literature contains brief references to problems of agricultural labour. In this and the two reports which will follow this information is brought together and reviewed.

Wm. E. HEATH,
Head of Department of Agricultural Economics.

INTRODUCTION.

Until recently there has been a tendency in many quarters to regard agriculture in Britain as a way of life (and an inferior one at that), or at the best as an extra source of food supplies in times of national emergency and ensuing difficulties of importing foodstuffs from overseas. This tendency originated from the fact that by 1900 Britain had become a great industrial and commercial country and agriculture seemed to have lost its importance especially in view of the readiness with which the cheap food was offered to this country in exchange for manufactured goods. Agriculture had been relegated to the secondary position in our economic life but from the national point of view its importance remained unchanged.

Since 1939 the economic life of Britain has undergone a number of revolutionary changes which have not only affected agriculture, but also influenced public opinion and national policies. These changes are not confined to Britain alone and their importance lies principally in the fact that they represent general recognition of the rights of primary producers. No such recognition would have been possible without far reaching effects of the fear of want caused by the war, and in that field the foundation of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations may be justly regarded as an important step to better understanding and more effective co-ordination of the rights of primary producers and of the nutritional requirements of consumers.

Historically we see the social consciences stirred into action during periods of depression, but a country largely dependent upon manufactures and with a large industrial population cannot resist the clamours for cheap food. In the 19th century cheap food meant imports from the New World but now all this has changed. This country has spent many of its foreign investments and its hold on the world's market for manufactured goods has weakened.

It is now realised that in agriculture Britain must not only strive to achieve a very high standard of efficiency and production, but also to maintain that standard, once achieved, for an indefinite number of years. The country is now in the middle of what is called the battle of export, in fact, in the middle of what is probably the most acute economic crisis which it has experienced. Unless this battle is won and the gap between imports and exports is closed, our standard of living will have to be lowered. Also because of fears that the nations, generally, may fail to establish and maintain friendly relations, it is felt necessary to safeguard against the possibility of shortage of food in some future international conflict. We are now striving therefore to expand and develop agriculture in this country.

The world to-day is divided by curtains of distrust and fear, and the indications are that these curtains, instead of vanishing, will tend to grow firmer and more impenetrable. It is also important to

remember that in the world, generally, many people have spent a large part of their lives either in the armed forces or under some other form of regimentation and war economy. It is not surprising, therefore, that the feeling of uncertainty of the future, and the instinctive distrust of any bright prospects which may be displayed, permeated the lives of individuals as well as those of the whole communities. It would be a dangerous folly for Britain to advocate ideas of an economic nationalism or national self-sufficiency. The choice of an effective economic policy for Britain lies in striking a balance between the internationalism with all its economic advantages, and the development of a high degree of efficiency and adaptability in its home industries. Such policy should be pursued relentlessly in our own interest as well as in the interest of human progress in spite of disappointments and difficulties arising from the confused state of the world to-day.

In analysing the present position and the future of British agriculture the social aspect of the problem must be considered. The history of the last hundred years of agriculture in Britain tells, on one hand, of a continuous struggle of the farming community in maintaining their standard of living, and on the other of a bitter and often hopeless fight of the agricultural labourer for something better than an existence on or just above the starvation level.

A detailed analysis of the present state and future ways and means of British agriculture is outside the scope of this series of reports, which are confined to the labour aspects of the situation. But, however good the national policy and however great the effort in planning and in investing capital and machinery in the industry, it is the human factor which is decisively important.

The First World War and the realisation of the importance of agriculture in the national economy contributed to an improvement of the position of both the employer and the employee classes of the industry, but conditions, at the beginning of the Second World War, still remained far from satisfactory. The Second World War made it clear that neither the policy of grudgingly granted concessions nor part-time restrictive measures will bring about a steady development of agriculture as an industry of national importance.

Mechanisation of agriculture during the Second World War, the recruitment of labour force from all levels and quarters of the community and the renewed interest of all those engaged in agriculture in the development of the industry in other countries, contributed greatly to the better understanding between town and country population. Thousands of town people with hardly any previous knowledge of agriculture, in war time and through direct contact with country life, have become receptive to new ideas. They are much more appreciative than formerly of the trends and problems of the rural worker.

It is necessary that the industry should be run with the maximum of efficiency, and to achieve this some reorganisation of systems of farming and of methods of production is necessary. Maximum economic efficiency will not be reached until all

economic and social resources available to the industry are allocated in such a way, that no further gain can be achieved through their re-allocation, and an allocation of fresh resources becomes necessary. A combination of balanced industries creates the framework of an efficient national economy, and it is the task of the policy making bodies to determine for each the volume, the character of production, and the distribution of national resources.

The efficient organisation of agriculture represents a combination of manual labour efficiently utilised, capital economically employed and distributed among farm enterprises, and managerial ability of those responsible for the organisation of production. Taking into consideration special characteristics of agriculture, these elements of efficient organisation should be supplemented by the permanency of national policies, creation of conditions in which the industry may be run at a reasonable profit and readjustment of conditions of life and work of those actively engaged in farming at least to the level afforded by other industries of national importance.

The absolute importance of each of these factors is beyond question, but the most important is the human factor. It is the focal point of every economic and social activity. The labour bill of farm enterprises constitutes about one-third of total expenditure and the shortage of labour is now claimed by agriculture as one of the main obstacles to further progress. The whole set of problems of demand, supply, efficient allocation and utilisation of labour calls for an urgent investigation especially if, as we hope, agriculture in this country is going to embark on a long term policy of development and expansion.

Since 1881 this country has experienced a continuous drift of men from the land, which varied in strength but was never reversed or even permanently arrested. It is also interesting to note that only in war time, and that mainly because of the direction of labour, has the agricultural labour force increased to any considerable extent. Even then the ranks of the agricultural labour force were supplemented by the members of the Women's Land Army and by prisoners of war, of which the former afforded only a certain degree of permanency and the latter none at all.

The decline in agricultural population has attracted considerable attention in the past. It has often been stressed that poor pay and unsatisfactory living conditions of agricultural workers constituted one of its foremost reasons. Another, and not a less important reason given was a lack of possibilities of advancement, a dead-end alley, out of which every ambitious individual tried to escape before his ambitions were damped and he himself engulfed in the dreary existence afforded by agriculture. This reason was not confined to workers alone, and owing to the uncertainty of the future, low returns and competitive attractions of other occupations had its effect too upon the members of the farming community.

This view, though frequently exaggerated on sentimental grounds, should not be underestimated. On the other hand, however, the decline in agricultural population may be regarded as a normal occurrence resulting from the increasing efficiency of farm-organisation. Neither of these views can be accepted unreservedly on the strength of available evidence and only further studies of this problem may contribute to finding the right answer. A similar difficulty arises out of consideration of the adequacy of the labour force in agriculture to-day. The generally accepted opinion that agriculture is undermanned is not sufficiently substantiated and will remain so until the questions of efficient organisation and utilisation of labour are carefully examined and the size of labour force required for running the industry efficiently will be determined on the basis of results of such an examination.

However, the labour problem is not confined to ensuring an adequate volume of labour for the needs of the industry. The question of quality is equally important, and the methods of engendering the requisite degree of labour efficiency for the future constitute a whole set of problems in themselves. Agriculture of to-day is very different from that of fifty years ago. It may still be regarded as an art in so far that the inbred ability to sense things, common to all successful business men, plays a more important part in agriculture than in any other industry. But agriculture of to-day is a highly specialised job and in many ways it requires skill and technical training of a very superior quality.

The adequate supply of a well trained labour force does not solve the problem entirely. Appeals to the man's patriotic feelings or forced labour camp tactics will not make an efficient worker out of a man unless he and his family are given decent living conditions, unless he is adequately paid, and has equal facilities for advancement as in other industries, and finally, unless he is conscious of the value of the quantity and quality of work he performs in his own interest, as well as in the interest of the community.

It is a formidable array of questions and the task of answering them is not an easy one. It includes a great variety of problems, some of which may only be measured by an estimate, always open to criticism, especially if conclusions drawn are intended to cover the subject on a national scale. Many aspects of these problems have been the subject of study by various investigators and the results of their studies have been of a great value in the task of sizing up the position of labour in agriculture.

I. COMPOSITION OF LABOUR.

1. PROBLEM OF MAN-POWER IN AGRICULTURE.

A survey of the problem of agricultural labour, as it is to-day would not be complete without, at least, a brief review of events and an analysis of conditions prevailing in the past. The end of the 19th century, the early years of the 20th century, and especially the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War brought a valuable crop of books, articles and other publications dealing with economic and social conditions in agriculture. They provide most valuable information both in contemporary and in historic retrospective, and among other problems discussed, that of the agricultural worker takes a prominent place.

The minute study of the history of the agricultural labourer by Dr. W. Hasbach¹ and the valuable works of J. L. and B. Hammond² Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall³, or Sir Rider Haggard⁴, not to mention Mr. Wilson Fox's Report on the Wages, Earnings and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in Great Britain⁵, and many other studies, have introduced the public mind to the problem of labour in agriculture and disclosed at the same time the unhealthy state of that problem.

Just after the turn of the century events were leading up to some constructive action in respect of the general conditions, wages and security of agricultural workers in this country.

The Land Enquiry Committee⁶ under the chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. A. H. Dyke Acland summarised the position on the eve of the First World War, but however beneficial its recommendations might have been for the agricultural population, their execution was arrested by the outbreak of hostilities.

It is not proposed to extend this survey of the agricultural labour problem further back than the years preceding the First World War. Too many changes have taken place since in the political, economic and social life of the country to make the comparisons possible or useful for our study. The intention is to draw a picture of conditions of agricultural workers towards the end of the First World War. It gives the starting point for future studies, and it must be remembered that in many ways the position then was analogous to that existing now.

¹ Dr. W. Hasbach. *A history of the English Agricultural Labourer*. London 1920. (First Original Edition 1894).

² J. L. and Barbara Hammond. *The Village Labourer, 1760—1830*.

³ B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall. *How the Laborer Lives*, 1913.

⁴ Sir H. Rider Haggard. *Rural England*, 1902.

⁵ A. Wilson Fox. *Report on the Wages and Earnings of Agricultural Labourers in 1906*. Cmd. 341.

⁶ *The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee*. Vol. I. 1913.

From the time of the Enquiry by the Royal Commission on Labour in 1891-4 until 1917, no official overall investigation of the conditions of agricultural labour had been made. But before the First World War had been in progress long, it became obvious that something would have to be done to stabilize the position of the farm worker. Following Mr. Lloyd George's declaration of the new agricultural policy guaranteeing, among other things, prices of wheat and oats to the farmers over a period of six years, and a minimum wage of 25s. a week for the able-bodied agricultural workers, the Agricultural Wages Board was established on the 6th December, 1917. The establishment of the Board could not be delayed in view of the urgency of the problem and it proceeded at once with the task of fixing the basis of minimum rates of wages throughout the country.

The investigation into wages and conditions of employment in agriculture which was instituted by the Board of Agriculture was started early in 1918 under the direction of Mr. Geoffrey Drage primarily for the purpose of providing the Agricultural Wages Board with essential information. The report¹ presented at the end of 1918 has proved to be a document of great historical interest. The investigation covered the whole of England and Wales and each county was separately reported upon.

According to the census of 1911 the total number of persons engaged in agriculture, excluding the farmers and graziers was 1,006,000. Excluding employers and those "working on own account" in market gardens and nurseries, as well as agricultural machinists, the total of workers was estimated as 971,000 persons.

The Board of Trade return of numbers of agricultural workers in England and Wales employed on holdings of over 1 acre in 1913 resulted in the total of 651,000, but the members of the occupiers, families were excluded from figures of 1913 whereas they were included in the census of 1911 and therefore the two totals cannot be compared.

The decrease in the agricultural population, which can be traced from 1881 onwards, was due to a number of interrelated causes. There was, in the first place, the steady growth of manufacturing industries and the development of new overseas trade which affected the agricultural population in two ways. Industry was drawing on the agricultural population for its workers and the steady increase in imports of agricultural products from abroad compelled farmers to make adjustments in their systems of farming. The period up to 1914 was one of change from arable to grass land farming—a change which meant a reduction in the demand for labour. At the same time the introduction of a new range of farm machinery—all associated with the production and harvesting of arable crops—assisted farmers to operate with smaller labour complements. Among

¹ Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture. Cmd. 24. 1919.

other causes of the decline in the agricultural population contemporary investigators stressed the contributory effect of the unsatisfactory housing conditions in rural districts and of the poor prospects of advancement for agricultural workers¹.

The rate of decrease in the agricultural population was slowed down in the years immediately preceding the First World War but was not totally arrested. This slowing down cannot be traced directly to any one particular cause. There is no evidence to attach more than a very limited importance to the view² that the more intensive cultivation and the extension of the small-holding facilities arrested the decrease of agricultural population. Since 1900 our agriculture was adjusting itself to a new set of conditions and by 1914 it reached a stage of relative stability which could not fail to affect the problems of population.

The drain on labour was further identified with emigration overseas, although this factor in the years immediately preceding the First World War was not as important as at the close of the 19th century. In 1900 about 9,000 labourers and farmers left the United Kingdom for non-European countries. This yearly rate of emigration was rising steadily up to 26,000 in 1907, dropped to 15,000 in 1908 and rose again to 23,000 in 1912³.

It was estimated that in 1911 about one out of every forty agriculturalists left the country and enquiries made at the emigration offices disclosed that the majority of emigrants belonged to the class of agricultural workers⁴.

2. ADULT MALE LABOUR.

During the war years 1914-18 the number of agricultural workers was further reduced both by recruitment for the war service and through the transfer to other industries. The exact figures of the number of agricultural workers during the war years are not available and the extent of the reduction of the labour force varied considerably from one county or even one farm to another. It was estimated, however, that by the beginning of 1917 the total number of male workers had been reduced to 65-70 per cent of the normal pre-war supply.

These losses were compensated to some extent if not wholly, by the soldier labour, women, children and prisoners of war, although it is debatable whether those latter classes of labour were capable of substituting effectively the able-bodied and trained agricultural workers.

¹ The Decline in the Agricultural Population of England and Wales during 1881—1901. Cmd. 3273. 1906.

² Migration from Rural Districts in England and Wales. 1913.

³ The Land. The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee. 1913.

⁴ B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall. How the Labourer Lives. 1913.

In the Kesteven Division of Lincolnshire for example, the loss was estimated at approximately 32 per cent. The extent of the reduction of the man-power in agriculture at that time is well illustrated by the Report of the Executive Officer of the War Agricultural Executive Committee in the Lindsey Division of Lincolnshire, who found only 10 men between 24 and 31 years of age on some 166 farms taken at random and who estimated that farms in his Division lost 50 per cent to 75 per cent of men between 18-40 years of age¹.

An interesting analysis of man-power in agriculture in Buckinghamshire was included in the report of the Investigation of Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture². Numbers of boys and women were included in both 1914 and 1917 figures, but for the purpose of comparison boys, women and old-age pensioners were converted into able-bodied men at the rate of 2, 3 and 2 to one respectively. One-quarter of the land from which this information was obtained was arable in 1914, by 1918 the proportion had increased to nearly one-third.

The final numbers of "men" employed in two years are as follows :

	1914	1917
Total in terms of "men"	359.33	289.50
Persons per 100 acres	2.9	2.5
"Men" per 100 acres	2.7	2.1

The total supply of labour in 1917 represents approximately 80 per cent of the supply in 1914.

3. CHILD LABOUR.

By 1916 certificates of exemption from attendance at school were granted throughout England and Wales in varying numbers. The total number of certificates granted to boys was 13,823 and girls 1,092.

The whole scheme of the exemption from school for agricultural work was strongly opposed by the National Agricultural Labourers' Union. Much discussion, at times, heated, developed on moral and social grounds around the subject of employment of children. Green³ quoted from the "Morning Post" of 6th March, 1915, "the farmer has come to depend too much on cheap and casual labour; casual because it is cheap, and cheap because it is casual". For support of their argument, the critics of the scheme often quoted the attitude of the contemporary French authorities in this matter.

1 Cmd. 24 Vol. I.

2 Cmd. 24 Vol. I.

3 F. E. Green. A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, 1870—1920.

Faced with the shortage of labour in no lesser degree than this country, the French authorities directed that school attendance must be maintained more strictly than ever, since ".....it would be disgraceful to see children robbed of their education as if the military service of their fathers had left them only the choice between beggary and premature wage-labour"¹.

The exemption of children from school attendance and their subsequent employment was not, however, confined to agriculture.

However deplorable the loss of education by children due to their employment may have been, it must be borne in mind that the needs of war for man-power were at that time of the utmost importance and that no source of labour available even as imperfect as child labour could be neglected.

4. WOMEN.

The employment of women was a very important factor in the problem of agricultural labour during the First World War. The number before the war was falling steadily from year to year, one reason being the low level of women's wages, accompanied by slightly increasing wages of men. But more important was the competition of other industries with their offer of higher wages and through their location in or in the proximity of the towns.

The seasonal employment of women continued without any marked change but in most of the counties their regular employment was reduced, by the end of the nineteenth century, to very small numbers. The following summary shows numbers of female employees at different census dates².

FEMALE FARM EMPLOYEES IN ENGLAND AND WALES	
1871—57,981	1891—24,150
1881—40,346	1901—12,002
1911—13,245	

Women and girls employed on farms during the 1914-18 war can be divided into two classes: those living locally and employed within normal travelling distance from their homes; and those in the mobile force of the Women's National Land Service Corps. This latter body was set up at the beginning of 1917 to act as the agent of the Board of Agriculture for the organisation of seasonal workers on the land. Later in 1917 a more complete organisation was set up for the enrolment of women workers under the official designation of the Women's National Land Army.

It was estimated that by the spring of 1918 the regular female labour in this country increased by 11 per cent over the number employed in 1917 and by 33 per cent over the pre-war figures.

¹ F. E. Green. A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, 1870—1920.

² Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. Report of Sub-Committee appointed to consider the employment of women in Agriculture in England and Wales 1919.

The "village women" class of the female labour consisted in the first place of those women, members of the family, who either by virtue of the possession of a farm, or by the necessity of maintaining the family, had to step into the shoes of their men-folk, on war service. Whether by previous actual experience or by close association with farming, they proved to be of great value to farmers suffering from shortage of labour. It must be pointed out, however, that the number of women and girls available depended largely on the presence or absence of other competing industries in the locality.

The Women's National Land Army was composed of women of widely differing experience. It consisted mainly of women and girls who had very little if any previous knowledge of country life and of farm tasks. After passing through a short training they had to undertake employment in agriculture for at least three months, and were expected to take over skilled work, especially the care of livestock and machinery. It was certainly a revolutionary idea and it is not surprising that the subject produced much controversy at the time. These women did splendid work and certainly broke down many prejudices and alleged difficulties connected with the employment of women in agriculture¹.

The total number of women employed as "permanent work-people" in agriculture in Great Britain during the war years was estimated by the Board of Trade as follows (for July of each year).

1914—57,000	1916—79,400
1915—41,000	1917—87,100
1918—90,900	

According to the Ministry of Labour figures² the Women's National Land Army since its formation in January 1917 and up to January 1918, employed in agriculture in Britain between 7,000 and 8,000 permanent women workers. During the same period over 2,500 permanent women workers and about 950 temporary workers had been placed on the land by the Women's National Land Service Corps. The Board of Agriculture stated in 1919³ that since the first recruitment into the Women's National Land Army started in 1917, 43,000 applicants had been interviewed, and 23,000 had been selected and placed. Of the latter, 15,000 received short courses of training.

All estimates are in agreement in so far as the existing tendencies are concerned and there certainly had been a continuous increase in the numbers of women employed in agriculture since 1915.

It would be interesting to establish some direct link between the decline in the employment of women in agriculture during the 60 years or so before the First World War and the gradual improvement of conditions of employment of agricultural workers on the one hand,

1 Report on Increased Employment of Women during the War. Cmd. 9164. 1919.

2 The Labour Gazette. Vol. XXVI—No. 6. 1918.

3 The Journal of the Board of Agriculture. Vol. XXVI—No. 7. 1919. Official Notices and Circulars.

and the changing type of farming on the other. On balance one would judge that it was the type of farming rather than the level of men's wages which determined the extent of employment of women. In some of the worst paid counties where farming was based on grass relatively little female labour was employed. In the Holland Division of Lincolnshire, on the other hand, where the highest wage was paid to men, the proportion of women employed was relatively high. References were frequently made by contemporary writers to the employment of women as an outcome of the underpayment of men, and this point too, if not generally applicable, at least in some cases should be taken into consideration.

5. SOLDIERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR.

The shortage of labour in agriculture during the First World War was remedied also by the employment of soldiers. Here again no exact figures are available, but those quoted by the investigators in "Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture"¹ indicate that in eighteen counties of England some 18,000 soldiers were employed.

Considering the general shortage of labour soldiers were on the whole gladly accepted, even if there were complaints about their distribution and allocation to various tasks. One of the main drawbacks was the uncertainty of their retention, as it was a common occurrence for a soldier to be recalled just at the time when he had got used to his particular work and began to be of real assistance on the farm.

The popularity and the value of this type of labour is best proved by the estimate that by the summer of 1918 there was hardly a county in England where less than one thousand soldiers were engaged in agriculture.

Prisoners of war and interned enemy aliens constituted another source of labour, much smaller in size than that of soldiers but not without its value to agriculture. Distribution of the prisoner of war labour was fairly widespread all over the country with the exception of the North, North-Eastern and Eastern Counties.

Although the enthusiasm of some prisoners for their work was remarkable no particular zeal could be expected from prisoners as a whole in their work for their enemies. Their employment was also hampered by their status and the necessity of providing guards, which often made employment of prisoners on a very small farm uneconomical or entirely impracticable.

The best use of prisoners was made where the character of work permitted the employment of large gangs, as in potato harvesting, timber felling or drainage, and where the work did not require any particular agricultural skill.

¹ Cmd. 24 Vol. I.

6. CASUAL AND MIGRATORY LABOUR.

There are three distinct types of casual labour: skilled men engaged in such tasks as hedging, ditching, thatching, draining or sheep-shearing; unskilled casual labour which is being employed in the area in which it is resident; and migratory casual labour domiciled in the towns and migrating to the country for hop-picking, pea-picking or fruit-picking operations.

All these types of casual labour had been reduced in the war years and only by mechanizing some tasks or dispensing with certain operations, could farmers remedy insufficient supply of casual labour.

Irish workers represent an important element in the total of casual workers. Each year they came over in large numbers in the spring working until October and being engaged in all agricultural operations but primarily in harvesting crops and potato lifting. They were employed chiefly in the North Midland and Northern counties and only small numbers penetrated further south than Leicestershire and Lincolnshire.

As a result of war conditions (1914-18) immigration of Irish labour diminished considerably, due, not only to travelling difficulties, but also to the friction existing between Irish and their British fellow-workers, and the reluctance of farmers to employ able-bodied Irishmen of military age at the time, when their own sons and employees were in the armed forces.

The decline in the piece-work system in agriculture in some counties towards the end of the First World War is often ascribed to the reduced immigration of Irishmen, who as a rule worked on the piece-work system, never greatly favoured by our own agricultural workers.

7. SUPPLY OF LABOUR IN WALES.

In Wales conditions were different. In 1917 nearly 70 per cent of the Welsh agricultural holdings were of 1 to 50 acres in size, making "family farming" one of the outstanding features of agriculture in Wales. Over 60 per cent (as compared with 31 per cent for England and Wales) of all the persons engaged in agriculture in South Wales and Monmouth consisted of farmers and their relatives, and it is not surprising therefore, that the shortage of labour during the war was not felt to the same extent as in England.

The agricultural labour force in Wales showed a steady decline from 1851 until 1901, but between the latter year and 1911 there was a slight increase. At the time of the Investigation of Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture¹, the number of persons employed in agricultural occupations, that is farmers, labourers, and those directly connected with agriculture was nearly 106,000. At that time Wales had a higher percentage of workers between 20

¹ Cmd. 24.

and 45 years of age than England. This was particularly marked in North Wales. In Montgomeryshire the percentage of men up to 45 years old was 47 per cent as compared with 30.8 per cent for England. The percentage was not much lower in South Wales (45.8 per cent). In contrast to the English conditions farm workers in Wales considered their occupation as a temporary one and a step to moving out to some other more attractive and remunerative industry. It was the practice for sons of small farmers and sometimes the farmer himself to go and work in the coalmines for a spell.

Another feature of Welsh agriculture affecting the supply of labour, especially in the South, and arising out of the small size of holdings and limited supply of labour, was an old custom of "mutual help" (cymhorthen), by which farmers mutually agreed to help each other during the busy seasons. Due to the special character of farming in Wales, the classification of labour according to various skilled jobs was virtually non-existent. Shepherds, of course, formed a class by themselves, but otherwise most workers were of a "general" type. Hired labour consisted mainly of single men lodging in the farmhouse with their employers, the comparatively small number of married men employed in agriculture being partly the result of the higher wages earned in other industries, shortage of houses, and farmers' preference for young boys, who, living on the farm could be used for any odd jobs at the farmer's call and partly because many of the single men were minors and their parents did not like them to go too far away from home. Both single and married workers, especially in the Welsh speaking areas, were customarily supplied with food on the farm, their cash wages being correspondingly lower.

The outbreak of the First World War did not alter the position in Wales to any great extent. Soldiers and prisoners of war or aliens were employed on farms in Glamorgan and Monmouth. This, however, was done only on a small scale and gave grounds for a feeling of resentment and jealousy on the part of the local men. The chief complaint was that the possibility of employing soldiers or prisoners served the farmers as a whip over local men. Soldiers and prisoners of war actually received only their service pay but the farmer had to pay to the military authorities the rates appropriate to the class of labour normally used.

The family farm in Wales prevented also any extensive use of the Women's National Land Army. Although employment of women in agriculture before the war was fairly widespread in South Wales normally it was not on purely agricultural work, and care of livestock, and help in the fields was heavily supplemented by the performance of various household duties, with no defined hours of work, and not much pay. As a result women were inclined to leave agriculture for better paid and lighter jobs in other industries, or to take up domestic work in large towns. Members of the Women's National Land Army were only expected to do a defined type and amount of work. This often met with resentment or blank refusal to employ them and did not help to increase the use of this source of labour.

II. QUALITY OF LABOUR.

1. ELEMENTS OF EFFICIENCY.

The quality or efficiency of labour depends on more than one element and must not be confused with physical capacity, which is conditioned by the supply of food, clothing and housing. An efficient worker is one who possesses health, skill and the will to perform his allotted task as well as possible. He must be free from personal worries, and the work he is doing must be, as far as possible, of his own choice. Granting all these conditions, the efficiency depends still further on the skilled management and the amount and utilisation of machinery. Technical efficiency of machinery and the efficient organisation of the industry, that is, the general policy creating the framework within which the industry is working and the rate of development required from the national point of view are also important factors. In other words, the efficient organisation of production is not a static conception, it is a combination of manual labour efficiently utilised, capital economically employed and distributed among the farm enterprises, and the managerial ability of those responsible for the organisation of the production.

2. CONDITIONS OF EFFICIENCY.

The study of methods of measuring the efficiency of labour in agriculture has made some progress since the First World War, but because of inherent difficulties the subject was approached reluctantly, and no real effort was made towards its solution. This apprehensive attitude towards the examination of the efficient use of labour during the First World War is reflected in the study of efficiency made by Mr. Drage in his Report on Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture¹. Mr. Drage stressed the adverse effect of the food shortage and of the call-up of the majority of men between 18 and 45 years old on the physical efficiency of agricultural labour, and enumerated the following five necessary conditions for efficiency of labour :

- (a) Muscular fitness.
- (b) Mental alertness.
- (c) Manual dexterity.
- (d) Knowledge and experience of the materials with which he must work, *e.g.* animals, implements.
- (e) Willingness to work.

¹ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

(a) MUSCULAR FITNESS.

Muscular fitness depends on adequate nutrition and the age of an individual. Commenting on the subject of nutrition and referring to the earlier enquiries into the matter¹ Mr. Drage came to the conclusion that at the time of his report (1918) the standard of nutrition of agricultural workers, and therefore their standard of muscular fitness so far as it was dependent on food, was at least equal to that of the other workers. He admitted that the inadequacy of certain foods, especially of milk, bread, cheese and bacon had been raised by some of his investigators. This, however, with the exception of milk, he ascribed chiefly to the abnormal war conditions.

There is, however, no evidence of any marked improvement in the agricultural workers' diet since 1913, when B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall wrote in their study of the living conditions of the agricultural labourer and his family: "On the average the 42 families investigated are receiving not much more than three-quarters of the nourishment necessary for the maintenance of physical health"². This last view although based only on a small sample was confirmed by other contemporary authors who stressed not only the inadequacy, but also the absolute monotony of the diet.

As regards age, the prevalence of boys and aged men in the labour force, always a characteristic of agriculture, was accentuated still further by the war conditions. Figures given in the ten-yearly censuses since 1891 show a tendency towards the reduction of the under 25 years old group and the over 65 years old. The table on the following page illustrates the position in detail³. Whilst there was no doubt as to the existence of such a slow but steady change, the distribution of the age groups of labour in agriculture still compared unfavourably with other industries. The "weak middle" suggested inefficient utilisation of the labour force and also meant that the more enterprising and better workers tended to desert farm work.

¹ Cmd. 2376. 1915. Cmd. 8421. 1917.

² B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall—How the Labourer Lives. 1913.

³ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

TABLE 1.
AGE OF MALES EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE.

Age.	1891	1901	1911
	%	%	%
10 and under 15 years	8.5	6.1	4.0
15 and under 20 years	18.8	17.8	18.0
20 and under 25 years	11.8	11.2	11.1
Total under 25	39.1	35.1	33.1
25 and under 35 years	17.0	16.9	18.2
35 and under 45 years	13.2	15.9	15.4
Total over 25 and under 45	30.2	32.8	33.6
45 and under 55 years	12.1	13.0	14.1
55 and under 65 years	10.3	10.6	10.9
Total 45 and under 65	22.4	23.6	25.0
65 and under 75 years	—	6.9	6.2
75 and upwards	8.3	1.6	1.2
Total 65 and upwards	8.3	8.5	7.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

In 1911 just under 16 per cent of the total occupied males (excluding those employed in agriculture) were between the ages of ten and twenty. In agriculture the proportion was 22 per cent. The corresponding figures in the age group of 20 and under 55 years were 73 and 59 per cent and in the age group of over 55 years 11 and 18 per cent.

(b) MENTAL ALERTNESS.

Mental alertness is of course closely connected with age and physical fitness of workers. Little work had been done on this subject up to the time of the First World War and little evidence is available to draw any conclusions as to the state of the agricultural workers' mental alertness. But the reports of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education¹ threw some light on this problem indirectly, for they quoted approximately 8 per cent children in the rural schools as suffering from defective sight and slightly over 3 per cent from defective hearing. Comparable figures for the town children were either the same or slightly higher.

Mental alertness is mainly a matter of mental capacity and receptiveness, the power of sizing up things quickly and correctly and using the observation in the optimum manner. Various investigators recorded the need of an education which would develop the powers of observation and lead to the widening of the mental horizon of the

¹ Cmd. 8746, 1917.

workers. The apparent deficiencies in education as reflecting on general efficiency were the subject of the now almost traditional complaints of the farmers that labourers, especially the young ones, lacked interest in their work, which the older men acquired in the course of their life.

(c) SKILL.

At the time of the First World War complaints were frequently made on the declining skill and manual dexterity of agricultural workers, particularly in such operations as thatching or hedge-cutting. Whilst the existence of a decline in craftsmanship for specific operations cannot be questioned, it was often erroneously regarded as a sign of the generally declining efficiency of the workers. The real causes were different. Both the farmers and the labourers admitted that it used to take the best part of a man's life to become, for example, an expert thatcher. Until the time that a man became an expert in his job and was paid for it accordingly, he had to put up with the poorly paid existence of a "helping hand". With the development of other industries and the gradually diminishing scope for what were once considered highly skilled operations in agriculture, due to mechanisation and to the consequent substitution of hand made products and tools by cheaply manufactured ones, the numbers of men skilled in specific farm tasks declined. At the same time, changes in agriculture created opportunities for workers skilled in other tasks and the loss of skilled workers for tasks going out of fashion was offset by the recruits to other skilled operations. Available means of transport and the competitive powers of other industries in the labour market attracted the village youths, especially the more ambitious and enterprising type, cutting down at the same time the labour force available for agriculture both in quantity and in quality.

It was generally agreed, however, that the men employed in livestock production and in the care of farm animals had a high degree of efficiency. Perhaps the traditional fondness for animals so characteristic of farm workers explains that to a certain degree, but the slightly better pay due to longer hours received by the men in charge of animals was certainly an important factor, and what is still more important, the feeling of responsibility and authority as compared with the other general workers on the farm.

The value of the incentive to work may be relative, but it seems that a word of encouragement and support, and a recognition of efforts made towards the successful accomplishment of a given task has paid good dividends in the past and will do so in the future.

The manual dexterity of workers in their handling of machinery seems to have been at a high level. No doubt a natural interest in the construction and working of a machine, common to most of the men, was a contributory factor. Representations were made by both farmers and workers urging the extension of training facilities for young workers in the handling of modern farm machinery.

(d) WILLINGNESS TO WORK.

The importance of willingness to work cannot be over emphasised but unfortunately it is a difficult factor to define. It may be argued that it depends on the working conditions offered, or, to put it the other way, on the strength of the incentive to work. On the other hand, it is often said that some men are born to work willingly whatever the conditions of their work.

Most country people from very early youth are brought up in the realisation of the necessity and importance of work. Leaving aside otherwise important influences of an early education, of the church, and of the social influences, it is however, left largely to the individual's relations with his employer and to the factors closely linked with the work to develop and to shape the man's attitude towards his work.

It seems futile to say, as was often recorded by investigators, that men now (as opposite to the past) are not as willing to work as before, or that they only "work according to pay". To assess the value of a man's willingness to work it would be necessary to take stock of the existing working and living conditions of the worker, and by comparing them with conditions in the past, to see any change in its true light.

During the First World War there was a fairly widespread belief among the farmers that the willingness to work was declining in their men. They seemed, however, to have ignored the importance of stimulating interest and willingness among their workers by means more effective than verbal encouragement or criticism. The saying "work according to pay" in itself suggests that the pay may have been insufficient to call for such zeal as would be desired by the employers, and it is known from other sources, the financial position of agricultural workers in various parts of the country was below that required to provide an adequate standard of well-being. Incidentally, the attractiveness of other industries, the possibilities of emigration, or otherwise improving the agricultural workers' position were not without their effect upon the willingness of men still employed in agriculture.

To complete the picture of efficiency of agricultural labour at this period, the efficiency of management by farmers must be noted. Information is very scanty. Evidence collected shows that in many cases farmers admitted lack of organisation and leadership, and workers spoke of inefficient machinery and management, affecting adversely the output per man and the efficiency generally. As an illustration of the extreme view held on this subject by agricultural workers the following contemporary statement may be quoted. "Farmers do not deem it necessary to show any sympathy for or take any interest in the general well-being of their workmen, but treat them as paid hands from whom they must by some means extract a day's work and, it is

to be feared, by many farmers a day's work for the lowest wages it is possible to pay"¹. But it must be remembered that in very many cases where small farmers were working side by side with their family and with hired men the latter were required to work as hard as the farmer himself but not harder.

3. FARMWORKERS' BUDGETS AND EFFICIENCY.

In order to achieve a state of efficiency it is necessary that the physical capacity to work should be maintained and, in addition, that income should be available for expenditure on other items such as tobacco and sport, which, because they add to a man's industrial efficiency, are regarded as conventional necessities. Earnings are, however, a dominant but not a decisive factor, and the conditions of work are nearly as important. Leisure for example, is one of the conditions of industrial efficiency but it is not possible to enjoy it even if it is financially feasible, if there are not enough holidays and the working day is too long.

The total weekly earnings of an ordinary agricultural worker in England in 1914, when the figure officially calculated for a weekly wage was 18s. 0d., amounted to 20s. 11½d., as estimated in another place of this report; 17s. 8d. was estimated as a corresponding figure for Wales. In 1918 the total earnings of the same class of agricultural workers were estimated as 30s. 0d. and 31s. 10d. for England and Wales respectively.

The following tables show that the expenditure on commodities essential for the maintenance of the purely physical capacity of the worker and his family, exceeded the worker's earnings. To some extent the deficiency was made up by the earnings of other members of the family but it is evident that no balance was available for expenditure on non-essentials. Further, it must be remembered that the farm worker's diet was ill-balanced and monotonous. Large families dependent upon a farmworker's wage suffered great hardship and petty stealing such as the taking of rabbits or turnips often meant imprisonment.

¹ Cmd. 25. Vol. II. 1919.

TABLE 2.
ESTIMATED WEEKLY EXPENDITURE OF A FARM WORKER'S FAMILY. *

Expenditure	1902		1912-14	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Food	13	5½	15	6
Rent	1	6	1	6
Fuel and light	1	9	1	9
Clothes	3	0	3	0
Clubs & insurances		6		9
Total	10	2½	22	6
Index	100		111	

* For six persons allowing for certain changes in consumption between 1902 and 1912, the Committee estimated that the cost of revised dietary, October 1912 would be 15s. 6d. as compared with 13s. 5½d. in 1902. †

TABLE 3.
WEEKLY EXPENDITURE OF FARM WORKERS' FAMILIES IN 1918,
AND INCREASE ON ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE IN 1914. †

Expenditure	Estimated Expenditure 1914 (pre-war)		Expenditure of 396 families Mar.-June 1918	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Food (principal items)	15	9½	28	11½
Other foods	1	0	2	1
Rent	1	11	2	1
Fuel and light	1	9	4	1½
Clothes	3	6	6	8
Insurances		9	1	6
Cleaning materials		6	1	0½
TOTAL	25	2½	46	5½

The average size of the farm worker's family in 1918 consisted of between 5 and 6 persons and the amount of weekly expenditure per head was only 8s. 6d. The estimated increase in the expenditure between 1914 and 1918 was 85 per cent. The Committee added the following note about the increase in the cost of food from March-June 1918 to January 1919: "The prices of bread, flour and margarine have remained stable, but considerable increases in prices of meat, cheese and new milk have occurred. On the basis of quantities of food recorded in the budgets, the increase in the cost of food from March-June 1918 to January 1st 1919, is nearly 2s. 0d. per week, which will bring up the increase in expenditure since 1914 to 93 per cent" †.

† Report of the Committee on Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural Land and the Cost of Living of Rural Workers. Cmd. 76. 1919.

† The practice of relating household expenditure to an average family obscures the greater poverty of the households with six to eight children who were earning very little if anything.

TABLE 4.
COST OF LIVING.
DIETARY OF FARM WORKER'S FAMILY IN 1902, WITH
ESTIMATED COST IN 1902 AND 1912. ¹

Articles.	Unit	Dietary	1902 ²		1912	
			Unit price	Approx. cost	Unit price	Approx. cost
		Pounds	s. d.	Pence	s. d.	Pence
Beef or mutton	lb.	3.35	7½	24.43	8	26.85
Pork	lb.	1.10	8	8.80	8½	9.42
Bacon	lb.	2.70	6	16.20	10	27.00
Cheese	lb.	1.20	6½	7.80	8	9.61
Bread	4-lb.	19.50	4½	21.93	5½	26.81
Flour	14-lb.	14.87	1 5½	18.58	1 8	21.24
Oatmeal and rice	lb.	1.25	2	2.50	2	2.50
Potatoes	14-lb.	25.75	6	11.07	7	12.87
Tea	lb.	0.46	1 4	7.36	1 4	7.50
Coffee and cocoa	lb.	0.15	11½	1.85	1 0	1.87
Butter	lb.	1.04	1 2	14.65	1 2	14.65
Other fats	lb.	1.03	6	6.18	7	7.21
Sugar	lb.	4.31	2	8.62	2	8.62
Syrup, treacle, jam	lb.	1.61	4	6.44	4¾	7.69
Milk, new	Pint	4½ pts.	1½	(6.75)	1½	6.75
Milk, skimmed	Pint	8¾ pts.	1½	4.37	1½	4.37 ³

¹ Cmd. 76. 1919.

² In 1902 Mr. Wilson Fox gave only the total value of food consumed. The items have consequently been priced from records of retail prices in Cmd. 1761, 1903. The difference in cost between this estimate and the total value recorded by Mr. Wilson Fox amounted to 1¼d.

³ 1912 only new milk included in total.

TABLE 5.
RATES OF CASH WAGES OF ORDINARY AGRICULTURAL
LABOURERS.

1907—1917 and Minimum Rates 1918—1919 (Report of the
Committee on Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural
Land and the Cost of Living of Rural Workers. Cmd. 76, 1919)
The London Gazette, No. 31343, 16th May, 1919.

County	Board of Trade Enquiry	Board of Agriculture Investigation Reports.		Minimum Rates ¹ (21 yrs. and over)	
	1907	1914	1917	1918	1919
		ENGLAND—WINTER RATES.			
	s. d.	Shillings	Shillings	s.	s. d.
Bedford	13 9	14 to 16	18 to 21	30	36 6
Berkshire	13 8	12 to 13	15 to 16	30	36 6
Buckingham	14 9	13 to 15	18 to 26	30	36 6
Cambridge	13 2	13 to 16	18 to 27	30	36 6
Cheshire	17 2	20 to 22	25 to 27	36	38 0
Cornwall	15 0	—	—	31	37 6
Cumberland	18 4	—	—	35	35 0
Derby	18 8	16 to 21	23 to 30	31	37 6
Devon	14 6	12 to 18	15½ to 22	31	37 6
Dorset	12 1	13 to 14	18 to 19	30	36 6
Durham	—	21 to 25	—	36	42 6
Essex	13 7	14 to 22	20 to 26	32	38 6
Gloucester	13 11	12 to 20	18 to 26	30	36 6
Hampshire	14 0	14	20	31	37 6
Hereford	13 11	13½ to 15½	18 to 21½	31	36 6
Hertford	14 9	14 to 16	20 to 23	32	38 6
Huntingdon	13 4	15	21 to 23	30	36 6
Kent	16 2	16 to 20	25 to 28	33	39 6
Lancaster	19 4	18 to 25	24 to 35	35	39 6
Leicester	16 7	16	25	31	37 6
Lincoln	15 4	15 to 18	22 to 30	34	40 6
Middlesex	18 0	20 to 25	27 to 33	34	40 6
Norfolk	12 6	12 to 15	22 to 25	30	36 6
Northampton	14 5	14 to 18	16 to 26	30	36 6
Northumberland	—	—	32 to 34	36	42 6
Nottingham	17 2	16 to 26	26	35	38 0
Oxford	12 11	12 to 19	16 to 21	30	36 6
Rutland	14 10	15½	22½	31	37 6
Salop	15 2	15 to 16	20½ to 23	33	37 0
Somerset	14 0	12 to 19	14 to 26	30	36 6
Stafford	16 3	15	23	35	38 6
Suffolk	12 5	13 to 15	20 to 22	30	36 6
Surrey	16 8	15 to 20	20 to 24	33	39 6
Sussex	15 1	13 to 17	22	32	38 6
Warwick	15 4	13 to 18	20 to 22	30	36 6
Westmorland	19 2	18 to 30	24 to 30	35	35 0
Wiltshire	13 0	13 to 14	19 to 20	30	36 6
Worcester	14 5	12 to 18	16 to 26	30	36 0
Yorkshire	17 6	18 to 21	24 to 35	35	41 0

¹ The minimum rates for 1918-19 include the values of certain "allowances", therefore are not strictly comparable with cash wages 1907-1917.

TABLE 5 (continued).
 RATES OF CASH WAGES OF ORDINARY AGRICULTURAL
 LABOURERS.

County	Board of Trade Enquiry	Board of Agriculture Investigation Reports.		Minimum Rates (21 yrs. and over)	
	1907	1914	1917	1918	1919
		ENGLAND—SUMMER RATES.			
	s. d.	Shillings	Shillings	s.	s. d.
Bedford	13 10	14 to 18	22½ to 35	30	36 6
Berkshire	13 9	14 to 15	17 to 18	30	36 6
Buckingham	14 11	13 to 20	18 to 28	30	36 6
Cambridge	13 3	13 to 16	20 to 30	30	36 6
Cheshire	17 2	24	30 to 33	36	38 0
Cornwall	15 0	—	—	31	37 6
Cumberland	18 4	—	—	35	35 0
Derby	18 8	16 to 21	25 to 30	31	37 6
Devon	14 6	11 to 17½	16½ to 23'	31	37 6
Dorset	12 1	13 to 14	19 to 20	30	36 6
Durham	—	21 to 25	—	36	42 6
Essex	13 7	14 to 22	25 to 27	32	38 6
Gloucester	14 0	12 to 20	18 to 26	30	36 6
Hampshire	14 1	14 to 15	20	31	37 6
Hereford	14 0	13½ to 15½	18 to 21½	31	36 6
Hertford	14 9	14 to 16	25	32	38 6
Huntingdon	13 6	15	24 to 25	30	36 6
Kent	16 5	17½ to 27	25 to 28	33	39 6
Lancaster	19 5	—	—	35	39 6
Leicester	16 8	16	25	31	37 6
Lincoln	15 4	16½ to 18	25 to 30	34	40 6
Middlesex	19 0	20 to 25	27 to 33	34	40 6
Norfolk	12 8	14 to 18	25	30	36 6
Northampton	14 6	14 to 20	20 to 27	30	36 6
Northumberland	—	—	32 to 34	36	42 6
Nottingham	17 2	16	26	35	38 0
Oxford	13 0	12 to 19	17 to 25	30	36 6
Rutland	14 10	15½	25	31	37 6
Salop	15 2	15 to 16	20½ to 23	33	37 0
Somerset	14 1	—	—	30	36 6
Stafford	16 4	15	24	35	38 6
Suffolk	12 6	14 to 15	22 to 24	30	36 6
Surrey	16 8	15 to 20	21 to 25	33	39 6
Sussex	15 1	13 to 17	22	32	38 6
Warwick	15 5	13 to 18	22 to 25	30	36 6
Westmorland	19 2	18 to 30	24 to 30	35	35 0
Wiltshire	13 0	13 to 14	20	30	36 6
Worcester	14 6	12 to 18	16 to 26	30	36 6
Yorkshire	17 7	18 to 21	18 to 21	35	41 0

In his study of the rural standard of living¹ Ashby stresses that it is the standard of living which plays an important part in the determination of earnings, and not the other way round. In this connection it must be borne in mind that it was most difficult for farmworkers to organise themselves into a trade union for the protection of their standard of living. This principle was recognised in the wording of the Agricultural Wages Act (1924), which instructed the Agricultural Wages Committees: "in fixing minimum rates a Committee shall, as far as practicable secure for able-bodied men such wages, as in the opinion of the Committee are adequate to promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family in accordance with such standard of comfort as may be reasonable in relation to the nature of his occupation"². It was the duty of the Agricultural Wages Committees to give effect to the intentions of this clause and it is not surprising that in consequence both minimum rates and conditions of employment in each of the counties showed wide differences. The point in question is of course what may be considered as a reasonable standard of comfort in relation to the nature of the agricultural worker's occupation. Before the introduction of statutory regulation of agricultural wages in 1917 farm workers' standard of living was closely tied to the fluctuating economic conditions of the industry. They were unable to resist the pressure to force wages down when prices declined, and not able to secure commensurate improvements when prices showed improvement.

In the absence of sufficient information efficiency of labour cannot be measured in terms of total net output of the farms, nor can the output of the manual labour be gauged without a special study of output. In order to obtain at least some approximation of the existing tendencies in respect of efficiency, students of the subject have been compelled to apply the land and stock managing capacity measure as a test of the effective utilisation of labour³. However imperfect, this test gives some idea of the effective use of labour as compared with the past. Thus the effective use of labour in relation to land and stock in England in 1911 may be compared with that in 1871. The following figures indicate the position: (without weighting the number of persons according to the relative numbers of women and children)⁴.

1 A. W. Ashby. *The Rural Standard of Living*. The Welsh Housing and Development Association, Cardiff.

2 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act, 1924, Sec. 2.

3 A. Bridges. *Economics of Farm Management*. Farm Labour Organisation and Efficiency. "The Farmer and Stockbreeder." 8.9.1924.

4 Cmd. 24. Vol. I. Para. 209.

TABLE 6.
EFFECTIVE UTILISATION OF LABOUR IN ENGLAND.
(Unweighted figures).

	Per person of total engaged in agriculture		Per person excluding farmers & graziers	
	1871	1911	1871	1911
	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres
Total cultivated area	18.5	25.2	22.5	32.0
Pasture and rotation grasses	10.1	17.3	12.3	21.8
Arable land	8.3	8.0	10.1	10.2
	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
All cattle	3.0	5.4	3.6	6.9
All sheep	14.2	17.9	17.3	22.7
All pigs	1.6	2.4	1.9	3.1

A marked progress in the field of effective utilisation of labour took place during the forty years since 1871 and this progress is particularly noticeable in relation to stock. Between 1871 and 1911 the stock managing capacity per person engaged in agriculture (excluding farmers and graziers) increased from over 30 per cent in the case of sheep to over 90 per cent in the case of cattle.

The same figures, weighted at the rate of one woman equal to 8/10ths of a man, each youth under 20 as 6/10ths of a man and each girl under 20 as $\frac{1}{2}$ of a man, are as follows:

TABLE 7.
EFFECTIVE UTILISATION OF LABOUR IN ENGLAND.
(Weighted figures).

	1871	1911
Man units, including farmers	1,257,610	981,507
	Acres per man unit	
Total cultivated	29.9	27.7
Pasture and rotation grasses	11.4	18.9
Arable	9.4	8.8
	Numbers per man unit	
All cattle	3.3	6.0
All sheep	16.0	19.6
All pigs	1.8	2.7

The corresponding figures of the effective utilisation of labour in Wales are as follows (per person engaged in agriculture) ¹.

TABLE 8.
EFFECTIVE UTILISATION OF LABOUR IN WALES.
(Unweighted figures).

	North Wales (six counties)		South Wales (seven counties)	
	1871	1911	1871	1911
Total cultivated area....	Acres 21.19	Acres 26.47	Acres 26.14	Acres 34.56
Grass	14.73	21.90	19.14	29.48
Arable land	16.46	4.57	7.0	5.08
	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
All cattle	5.29	7.77	5.58	8.52
All sheep	25.55	41.54	24.79	38.17
All pigs	2.22	2.38	1.88	2.47

Observations, as to the effective use of labour on farms in Wales, were very similar to those noted above for England. The common complaint in Wales seems to have been the flight of the able-bodied men from agriculture. The majority of farmers considered, however, that the efficiency of the workers had declined, and even if the effects of that decline were not felt, this was only due to the advance of mechanisation ².

As regards the efficiency of labour organisation in the whole of Wales, it was estimated that from 1871 to 1921 it increased by 37 per cent. The increase was ascribed to the competitive influence of other industries on the supply of labour, and to the application of more effective implements and machinery ³.

Opinions regarding the output per man both in England and Wales were divided, and in view of the inadequacy of evidence, it is worth recoding the reasons given for the alleged decline or improvement in the efficiency of the workers.

¹ Cmd. 24.

² Cmd. 24.

³ A. W. Ashby, M.A. and J. Llefelys Davies, M.Sc. The Work Efficiency of Farm Organisation in Wales, 1871—1921. The Welsh Journal of Agric. Vol. V. 1929.

The main reasons given in 1918 in support of the opinion that the efficiency of workers was declining may be enumerated as follows: (i) the advancing age of the skilled men and the lack of replacements; (ii) the reduced nutritional value of food, especially shortage of cheese and bacon which used to be the mainstay of the workers diet; (iii) relatively low output capacity of soldiers, women and children replacing the called-up men; (iv) demoralising effect of higher wages and the influence of working conditions in other industries; (v) bad housing; (vi) abnormally long working hours; (vii) low wages; (viii) days of labour without holiday intermission; (ix) poor clothing; (x) the lack of hope for any advancement and improvement in the worker's living conditions.

Contemporary investigators ascribed increasing efficiency only indirectly to agricultural workers. The decisive part of the improvements was credited to the farmers. The reasons supporting that view were summarised by the investigator for Lancashire¹ as follows: (i) a spirit of patriotism inspired the extra effort of the whole farming community; (ii) the encouragement given by extra gain for both farmer and his man (better prices for agricultural products and higher wages); (iii) vastly increased use of labour-saving machinery; (iv) use of large additional supplies of artificial manures; (v) considerably longer and harder work by everybody connected with agriculture; (vi) employment of women on a large scale; (vii) unprecedented spirit of mutual assistance; (viii) more scientific methods of farming generally.

The last of the reasons for declining efficiency enumerated above is undoubtedly one of the most important not only from the point of view of the quality or efficiency of the workers but for the correct appreciation of the significance of the decrease in numbers of workers engaged in agriculture. The conditions prevailing in agriculture offered no opportunities for advancement of workers which could be described as a "ladder" in the sense of a gradual improvement of the worker's economic and social status. The matter of the "agricultural ladder" in Britain was and still is very frequently referred to by the agricultural economists, and it is agreed that the lack of its existence in British agriculture constitutes one of the major obstacles in the way of improved efficiency.

¹ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

The existence of an "agricultural ladder" is dependent on one or more of the following conditions: (a) expanding area in use; (b) reduction in size of farms; (c) rapid change of status of persons within the industry; (d) efflux of farmers to other occupations¹.

It was estimated that approximately 11 per cent of the farmers in Wales were the sons of farm workers, and as many as 22 per cent of the farmers had worked at one time or another as employees on a farm. This was particularly the case in the districts where occupiers of small farms were numerous and it was a common practice for farmers' sons to hire themselves as paid workers to other farmers. It must be remembered that such recruitment was consistent with the "family" organisation of farming in Wales, referred to elsewhere.

Similar recruitment existed in England. An economic survey of agriculture in the eastern counties of England² revealed that two-thirds of the occupiers in those counties came from farming families, and that at the time of survey (1931) which covered over 1,000 farms 75 per cent of the occupiers of holdings over 20 acres had always been farmers and 9 per cent were ex-farm workers, and 16 per cent were originally members of some trade or profession. Out of 190 farmers in South Devon in 1935, 80 per cent were farmers' sons, about 6 per cent sons of farm labourers, small holders and gardeners and the remainder mostly craftsmen or retired professional men³. It was also estimated that in Mid-Devon farmers were recruited largely from the farming families and to some extent from other, mainly wage earning occupations⁴.

The direct movement of a man from the status of a farm worker to the status of an independent farmer is of course an extreme view of the agricultural ladder, and may prove on closer investigation not quite so encouraging as it sounds at first. The status of a small sized farmer carries with it only very little difference from the status of a worker; for all practical purposes, the difference is confined to the position of authority held by the farmer on his land. The low standard of living

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- 1 A. W. Ashby, M.A. and J. Llefelys Davies, M.Sc. *The Agricultural Ladder and the Age of Farmers.* The Welsh Journal of Agriculture, Vol. V. 1930.
 - 2 *An Economic Survey of Agriculture in the Eastern Counties of England, 1931.* University of Cambridge Department of Agriculture. Farm Economics Branch, Report No. 19, 1932.
 - 3 *Some Changes in South Devon Farming.* Farmers Report No. 11. Dept. of Economics, Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, 1935.
 - 4 J. J. McGregor. *Recent Land Tenure Changes in Mid-Devon.* Economics Department, Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, "Economica", 1934.

of both small farmers and workers and conditions of work of the farm employees, are such as to make the transfer from one status to another a real possibility. But the change of status from worker to independent farmer often meant in fact a change from dependence upon an employer to dependence on the natural elements, price fluctuations and marketing facilities which often offset the apparent advantages of independent farming. The capital brought in by the "newcomers" into the industry was largely represented by their savings, and these could rarely be made without far reaching privations and hardships. There was a lack of clear cut economic and financial policies as regards small farms¹. Had the advanced systems of land utilisation, farm organisation and credit facilities existed in respect of small farms, they would certainly attract the entrants to the industry. At the same time they would have a steadying effect on the "agricultural ladder", swayed by the chronic want of capital and the lack of conditions assisting its climbers in their farming enterprise.

The relative advantages gained by such an achievement as acquiring a small holding by a worker could be best assessed by the fact that every other industry could still compete successfully with agriculture in the matter of supply of labour. In neither England nor Wales was there much specialisation in agriculture on an industrial scale, and no system providing for a gradual but steady progress of a worker from the least paid and the least responsible jobs on a farm to a highly paid position of authority. The importance of a worker becoming an independent farmer is often overestimated. The value of an "agricultural ladder" lies not only in its extremes—agricultural labourer and a farmer—but mainly in the existence of the intermediate rungs which by proper organisation of the industry provide workers with the opportunities of improving their occupational status.

No clear cut conclusions can be drawn and it is not surprising therefore that the authors of the reports themselves admitted inability to measure the level of efficiency of the agricultural worker. The evidence was insufficient, and in too many cases not impartial.

¹ A. W. Ashby, M.A. and J. Morgan Jones, B.A., *The Social Origin of Farmers in Wales*. *The Sociological Review*. April, 1926.

III. CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT.

1. CLASSIFICATION OF LABOUR.

Agricultural workers can be divided into two main groups according to their functions on a farm: those in charge of animals (*i.e.* shepherds, horsemen, cattlemen), and ordinary workers (skilled and unskilled). This classification cannot, however, be applied too rigidly. A horseman who was supposed to take care of and to be responsible for the horses on a farm was passing some of his horses at the beginning of a working day to and receiving them back when the day was over from a ploughman. A ploughman, who according to our classification falls into the group of ordinary workers, was a skilled man and was responsible for the horses during the time he worked with them. (The horseman had charge through the day of most of the horses—the day labourers rarely had charge of more than a fourth of the horses during the day). The war conditions in many cases affected the differences existing between various classes of workers, and the classification may have differed somewhat in various parts of the country, but basically it still remained as given above. On the whole work with animals involved longer hours. It extended over Sundays and other holidays and there was more responsibility attached to it. Longer hours enabled those workers to earn more both in the form of cash wages and of perquisites. The casual workers constituted a class apart, and their employment obviously had a seasonal character.

2. METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT.

The prevailing method of engaging workers at the time of the First World War seems to have been a verbal agreement between master and man. Only in exceptional cases were written agreements found, and these, mainly in Lincolnshire and Northumberland, were of two types: either an agreement with skilled men on a yearly engagement, especially if they were going to be responsible for the work of others, or agreement with the men who were going to have free farm cottages, in which case it was intended to cover the grant of a cottage rather than to define duties and privileges. The annual form of engagement was general in northern counties, especially Cumberland, Westmorland, Northumberland and Durham and still prevails in those counties. The workers were usually engaged as a result of personal enquiries made in the neighbourhood, or at the markets or through advertisements in the local papers. "Hiring Fairs" were common in all parts of the country up to the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, and they still take place in some districts in Wales and Northern England.

3. LENGTH OF ENGAGEMENT.

There are two types of engagements, short (weekly, fortnightly or monthly) and long hirings (half-yearly or yearly). The application of one or another form of engagement depended on a number of factors, most important of which were the size of the local supply of labour,

the function for which the man was engaged, the existence or absence of a tied cottage allocated to a man, and in many cases, especially in chiefly pasture counties, whether the man was to live in or out of the farmhouse. It should be pointed out, however, that a form of short hiring did not necessarily prevent a worker from obtaining a tied cottage. The special classes—horsemen, cowmen, shepherds, foremen, who occupied the tied cottages were hired by the half-year or one year engagement, general labourers were on short term engagements. The length of hiring was also influenced by local customs. In some districts all single men living in the farmhouse were hired on long engagement irrespective of the nature of their work. In others the long engagements were confined to men in charge of livestock and to the foremen, general labourers being hired by the week. In Lincolnshire it was the common practice to hire afresh each spring the general labourers living in tied cottages and in cases of disputes which could not be amicably settled, the engagement would normally terminate at the end of the year (April 6th). But neither the men nor the employer had good contractual claim to insist upon observance of a yearly engagement.

By 1914 employment of women, children and youths in agricultural gangs survived only in those counties where a large amount of seasonal work had to be done, and in those cases labour employed was either paid through the gang-master, or directly to each member of the gang, the latter way being naturally favoured by the workers.

4. HOURS OF WORK.

Any uniformity in the normal length of the working week that existed was limited within small localised areas. Often the hours of employment on individual farms varied with the class of worker, those in charge of livestock as well as foremen generally having to work the longer week. Farm to farm differences resulted from customary practices and these were later recognised by some Agricultural Wages Committees, which specifically related wages to the customary hours.

The longest working week seems to have been worked in Cumberland and Westmorland, due mainly to the pressure of a large number of small farms or to the predominance of livestock enterprises. In these cases a 70-hour working week was a common feature (that is nearly 10 hours a day and 7 days a week and rarely if at all a half-holiday). The figures just quoted were of course the upper limit and refer to summer. The length of a working day differed not only seasonally, but with the class of work, so that, for example, the working day of an ordinary labourer ranged from 9-10 hours in summer and 8-9 in winter. Horsemen worked, as a rule, long hours, extending from 9-12½ hours in summer to 8-12 hours in winter; long hours were worked by cattlemen, about 10 hours a day being a general rule, but ranging from 9-11 hours with not much difference between summer and winter seasons. An average 10 hour working day seems to have been customary in market-gardening. Considering the length of a working day an allowance should be made for meal-times, so that the

total working time very rarely exceeded 12 hours in summer for the workers in charge of livestock and 10 hours for those working in the field.

The hours worked by the members of the Women's National Land Army were generally the same as those of the men, but where the hours of the local women were shorter, and these women were part of the regular team, the Women's National Land Army worked the same hours as the local women. These working hours included as a general rule meal times extending from one to one and a half hours, although this again depended on the local customs. In South Westmorland, for example, only bare time for eating was allowed, whereas in Norfolk two hours and even two and a half hours for dinner was customary. The same customary rule applied to "walking time", which in some cases (*e.g.* Kesteven, Norfolk, Suffolk) was included in the hours of work and in some other cases was not (*e.g.* Leicester).

The problem of weekly half-holidays, Sundays and annual holidays was a sore one. Although the custom of having an annual week holiday, particularly at the time of re-engagement, seems to have been fairly widespread, it concerned mainly special classes of single hired workers—chiefly horsemen who worked long hours and who often never saw their home, except for a few hours on Sunday, at any other time of the year. Under those conditions an annual week break could hardly be regarded by them as paid holiday. The granting of odd days off—a day at the local fair or a visit to the seaside if it were near—was fairly common too, but the effort of the workers in obtaining a regular weekly half-holiday and Sunday met with the unyielding opposition of the farmers. Farmers argued, especially in the case of men employed in the care of livestock, that to grant the half day would affect the farm organisation. Dairy production especially would suffer. It was argued also, that the introduction of weekly half-holidays would be inconsistent with and damaging to the general intensification of agricultural production in time of war.

Considering the length of the ordinary working day, there was not much scope for overtime except in some special seasons like harvesting or fruit picking. These tasks were generally either done at piece-work rates or a lump sum was paid at the completion of the operation, and overtime payments were an exception until the outbreak of the First World War. A good deal of overtime was revived during the years 1914-1918. The ordinary day of a general labourer finished at 5.30 p.m. and with an hour off for tea he could and often did two hours overtime after 6.30 p.m.

There was no marked difference in the conditions of employment between England and Wales with the exception of the length of a working day, which in Wales seems to have ranged from 13 to 16 hours on week days and 3 to 6 hours on Sundays. This was the prevailing position in North Wales. In South Wales and particularly in the industrial areas, working hours were shorter: 10½-11 hours in the industrial counties and 12-13 hours in the counties or districts removed further from the coal mining areas.

IV. EARNINGS.

At the time of the First World War agricultural wages varied not only from one county to another, but from farm to farm. Local customs affected not only rates of wages paid in cash but also the relation between cash wages and wages in kind as well as overtime and any other special payments.

1. CASH WAGES.

From the middle of the nineteenth century the level of agricultural wages was rising steadily but the movement was extremely slow in relation to the rise in wages paid in other industries. Agricultural workers claimed that they failed to get a fair share in the rising prosperity of agriculture which took place after 1900. It is true that higher prices of agricultural products were followed by the increase of rents whereas these were seldom reflected in a rise of wages. Low wages were due to a combination of factors acting against the interests of workers. These landless workers were entirely dependent on what they could earn from selling their labour. During the earlier years covered by this survey and up to the outbreak of the 1914-18 war there was no shortage of labour sufficiently acute to force farmers to make any substantial increase in wages. Trade Unionism made little headway and the workers were never sufficiently well organised to enforce their claim to improved conditions.

The establishment of the Agricultural Wages Board in 1917 was the result of the Government's anxiety to ensure smooth working conditions in agriculture and it brought the element of the judicial arbitration into the employer-employee relationship, in agriculture.

The representation of workers' interests in the Agricultural Wages Board had increased considerably the authority and popularity of trade unionism among the workers. In later periods fears were expressed that excessive powers and ambitions acquired by a trade union may go too far and result in disorganisation of the industry¹. However, in the initial stages of the operation of the Agricultural Wages Board these fears did not prove justified and the admission of workers to the wage arbitration machine in agriculture did not result in any unreasonable demands on their part.

Weekly cash wages prevailing in 1914, 1917 and 1918 for the four main classes of agricultural workers in England, and for the "living-in" and "living-out" workers in Wales in 1913-14, 1916-17 and 1917² are shown in the following tables.

¹ John Orr. *The Economic Basis of the Minimum Wage in Agriculture.*
Journal of Proceedings of the Agr. Econ. Soc. December, 1930.

² Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

TABLE 9.
ENGLAND—PREVAILING WEEKLY CASH WAGES.

	Shepherds		Cattlemen		Horsemen		Ordinary Labourers		Average of the four classes			
	Range		Range		Range		Range		Range			
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.		
SUMMER RATES	1914	15 9 to 19 8	16 2 to 19 9	16 0 to 20 1	14 11 to 18 7	15 9 to 19 6	1917	23 0 to 27 9	23 4 to 27 4	23 9 to 27 7	22 4 to 25 9	23 1 to 27 1
WINTER RATES	1914	16 4 to 19 3	15 6 to 19 3	15 7 to 19 7	14 8 to 18 2	15 6 to 19 0	1917	21 8 to 26 1	21 10 to 26 4	22 1 to 27 0	20 9 to 25 0	21 7 to 26 1
	1918	26 4 to 30 10	26 3 to 30 10	26 6 to 31 8	24 11 to 31 8	26 0 to 31 3	Average rate January 1918	29 3	32 2	29 2	26 3	29 2
	Average rate at end of 1918 ¹		38 1		31 5	33 0						

¹ Report on the Financial Results of the Occupation of Land. Cmd. 76. 1919.

TABLE 10.
WALES—PREVAILING WEEKLY CASH WAGES.

Class of workers	November 1913	May 1914	November 1916	May 1917	November 1917
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
Living-in	10 10	11 0	13 8	14 8	15 8
Living-out	18 1	18 2	23 0	24 9	27 0

The above figures represent the average rates of pay in force at the time. Considerable differences existed in various parts of the country and it must be borne in mind whilst reading these figures that they are based on the reports of investigators who were only able to provide an estimate of the rates prevailing in a district or a county.

2. OVERTIME.

It has already been noted that the length of a working day left little scope for overtime under ordinary circumstances and that it occurred mostly during the seasonal operations such as hay-time or harvest. It was then customary to pay from 8d. to 1s. per hour for recorded overtime, although this was by no means a prevalent practice, and in most cases the farmers favoured paying a lump sum at the end of a season which was supposed to cover any extra work involved. This sum again varied in different counties from £1 to £10 (in Yorkshire and the Eastern Counties from £6 to £10) in 1914, and from £8 to £10 in 1918. The harvest money in Norfolk was a form of overtime based on an agreement with the workers to work the harvest for a fixed lump sum irrespective of the length of time involved. In some counties this money was customarily not paid to the man until Michaelmas (hence "Michaelmas money") and was held in the meantime by the farmer as a retaining fee. In some cases the harvest money was supplemented by "beer money" or "cider money", paid in lieu of the customary refreshments during the harvesting operations.

3. PIECE-WORK.

After 1914 a decline of piece-work in certain tasks, particularly harvesting, could be observed in various parts of the country. The decline is reported to have started even earlier and was merely accentuated under the war conditions by the mechanisation of various farm operations. At the end of the War, and except for certain operations like hedge-cutting or hoeing, piece-work was reported to be mainly concentrated in the eastern and south-eastern counties, especially Kent, or the fruit growing areas of Hereford.

The rate and the extent of this decline of piece-work cannot be measured, but in view of the fact that in some counties piece-work was still maintained or increased as a result of the War, it would seem, that the statements claiming a general decline of piece-work were grossly exaggerated. They may have been caused by the impressive decline in numbers of Irishmen coming over for seasonal employment and working as a rule on piece-work, rather than by the decline of piece-work done by the local men.

The reasons most often quoted by farmers for the decline of piece-work were: mixed nature of the farm staff, reluctance of workers to undertake the piecework due, in the farmers opinion, to the increase of wages, difficulty of fixing the standard rates for piece-work with the rising wages and changing prices of agricultural products. From the workers point of view the piece-work rates of pay seem to have been insufficient in relation to the ordinary daily wages to encourage them to undertake piece-work.

The report on the Investigation of Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture, contains an exhaustive table of the piece-work rates paid for various operations throughout the country both in 1914 and in the closing years of the First World War. In order to illustrate the conditions then prevailing, the following examples of rates paid for piece-work in various counties of England and Wales are given¹.

TABLE 11.
PREVAILING RATES OF PAY FOR PIECE-WORK
IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

County	Operation.	RATES.			
		1914		1917-18	
		Range		Range	
		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
ENGLAND					
Rutland	Sheep shearing (per score)	3 6	to 4 0	6 0	to 9 0
Yorkshire	Sheep shearing (per score)	—	—	7 0	„ 10 3
Leicester	Sheep shearing (per score)	4 0	to 5 0	6s. 0d.	—
Norfolk	Manure spreading (per acre)	—	—	2s. 0d.	—
Worcester	Manure spreading (per acre)	—	2s. 0d.	—	—
Leicester	Manure spreading (per acre)	—	2s. 6d.	—	2s. 9d.
Oxford	Thatching (per square)	10	to 1 4	1 3	to 1 8
Northampton	Thatching (per square)	1 0	to 1 2	1 0	„ 1 2
Northampton	Hedge laying (per chain)	—	2s. 6d.	5 0	„ 10 0
Oxford	Hedge laying (per chain)	2 6	to 3 6	4 6	„ 5 6
Leicester	Hedge laying (per chain)	3 0	„ 3 6	4 0	„ 7 6
Gloucester	Hedge cutting and plashing (chain)	8	„ 10	—	2s. 6d.
Warwick	Hedge cutting and plashing (chain)	4d.	—	—	8d.
WALES					
North Wales	Shearing (per head)	1½	to 2	2	to 3
North Wales	Manure spreading (per acre)	2 6	to 3 0	5 0	„ 6 0
North Wales	Hedging (per rood)	6	„ 1 0	10	„ 1 6
South Wales	Hedging (per 7 yards)	—	—	2s. 0d.	—
South Wales	Manure spreading (per heap)	—	—	½	to 1
South Wales	Thatching (per yard)	—	—	6	„ 1 0

¹ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

4. CUSTOMARY PAYMENTS.

In addition to the ordinary cash wages, overtime and piece-work customary payments were made to skilled men on special occasions or at the completion of some special seasons. This custom seems to have declined with the introduction of minimum statutory wages. The customary payments may be grouped into four main classes: "journey money", "foal money", "calf money" and "lamb money", and their names indicate the nature of payments. According to the length of a journey horsemen used to get 6d. to 1s. 0d. for providing themselves with refreshments on the road; horsemen were also customarily paid about 5s. 0d. on the birth of a foal. These two customs were dying out and were rarely observed in 1917. Similarly cattlemen were paid from 6d. to 1s. 0d. for each calf born of the cows under their charge. Most common, however, was "lamb money", paid to shepherds in the lambing season. There were various systems of paying "lamb money", which was calculated in some counties at the rate of 3d.—6d. per lamb born or weaned, or as in Gloucestershire 1s. 0d. per lamb born over the number of ewes, or finally paid by a score or a lump sum varying from £1 to £2, although it was reported that in some counties, *e.g.* Kent and Essex a lump payment of £5 was not uncommon. Some shepherds were, in addition, provided with coal during the lambing season.

Besides these customary "monies", there were other occasions when workers used to be paid bonuses, *e.g.* herdsmen being given special payments on the output of milk, or in the hop growing areas special bonuses (up to £5) paid to the men supervising the drying of hops. Very frequently a nominal sum or a percentage was paid to the men on sale of an animal which was previously under their charge.

Special payments were not so widespread in Wales as in England, though as will be seen later, other customs were observed in Wales, especially in the payment of farm servants who lived in the farmhouse, and it must be remembered that the farm servants living-in and available for work of all sorts at all times and therefore difficult to distinguish from the domestic servants, were one of the characteristic features of the Welsh farming.

5. ALLOWANCES.

In many cases the cash wage was supplemented by allowances. Until 1918 an "allowance" was rightly called so, because it formed an addition in kind to the man's cash wages, although allowances could not be regarded as a gift bearing no relation to the cash wages and the type and the amount of allowances were discussed and reckoned before the rate of cash wages was determined and a contract of engagement made by a farmer and a worker. But the Agricultural Wages Board under the provision of the Corn Production Act 1917 altered the position, in that certain items of allowances, like board and lodging, cottages, milk and potatoes, could now be regarded as a part payment instead of

cash, and as such, reckoned against the statutory minimum wage at the rate determined by the District Wages Committee. † The allowances were often more important to the worker than his cash wages, because a good cottage with a large garden, even if the cash wages were lower than elsewhere, meant more than higher cash wages offset by the lack of satisfactory accommodation and a kitchen garden attached to it.

Cottages were given either rent-free or at a low customary rent and usually with a garden attached; other allowances were potatoes or potato ground, manure, milk, coal and wood or free cartage of coal and wood, and in some parts of the country (notably Nottinghamshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire) bacon or pork. Other, less common, allowances were straw, vegetables, plough holding, malt, peat, oil, game, cider in cider making districts, and occasionally meal. The allowances, and especially the more common ones like cottages and gardens or board and lodging, were given in the first place to the skilled men, ordinary labourers receiving the lesser allowances. The allowances were often a subject of adverse criticism mainly on the grounds of creating inequality among the workers on a farm. The level of cash wages before the passing of the Corn Production Act was such that even if they were supplemented by the allowances' value in money, the worker could not benefit from them to the same degree as having been paid partly in kind. There was also another important aspect to this question. The cash wages may have varied considerably from one district to another, but they were on the same level in a limited locality, and just as a worker had little chance of obtaining better wages unless he migrated to another county or changed his occupation, so did the farmer have little chance of increasing his men's wages against the opinion of his neighbours. The allowances were the only way left to the farmer who wished to acknowledge a man's devotion to his work, or to help the man and his family should the need arise. In some cases a man with a large family was given much larger allowances than the man with a small family or a single man, and whatever is said to the contrary it must have in many cases relieved a man's worry. It must be remembered also that the allowances had a permanent character and therefore were particularly important when the bread-winner of the family fell sick or was otherwise temporarily disabled.

The Welsh system of allowances only remotely resembled that operative in England and was based on a different set of customs and on a different agricultural structure. In 1914-1918 the custom of a "tod-stone" still survived, that is wool (11-lbs.) given to both male and female servants in Cardiganshire, or a gift of a heifer to a man and a pair of blankets to a maid after seven years service in some other parts of the Principality. The relationship between the worker and the master in Wales was different from its counterpart in England. There was more independence in the economic sense, and more possibilities for advancement, even if at the first glance the position of a

† Further references to allowances in this report should therefore be regarded in relation to the time period in which they occur.

servant may have appeared more subservient than in England. The method of payment of workers provides a good illustration of the peculiar relation of the farmer and worker in Wales. Apart from the allowances common in England, Welsh workers used to receive commodities and services that could hardly, if at all, be described as allowances. Livestock free or at the reduced price was provided, food and pastures for the livestock, and finally, fairly often a small holding of a few acres at a low rent, creating what is known in Wales as "bound tenants." The system of the "bound tenancy" best known in West Wales works out as follows. The farmer has a number of small holdings ranging from 2 to 5 acres attached to his farm and he sublets them to his labourers. The rent is low but the labourer undertakes to work for the farmer. The help is mutual, for not only has the farmer an assured source of labour, but the labourer can also count on the labour services of the farmer and his resources in addition to all other benefits arising out of the possession of a small holding of his own. It is one of the steps of the "ladder" towards the final goal that is the possession of a full-sized farm. The advancement of a Welsh agricultural worker starts early in his career, for even a single man "living-in" may start by keeping livestock on his master's land and by saving the small profits he may make out of it towards his future independence.

6. TOTAL EARNINGS.

Because there existed a great diversity of customs and conditions of pay it is difficult to present a simple picture of the true total earnings of the agricultural workers, on a national scale. The Investigation of Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture¹ contains, however, some useful calculations of total earnings (made by some investigators) which illustrate the position then prevailing in parts of the country. The enquiry also throws some light on the relative importance of cash wages and allowances and especially on the value of the latter in relation to the class of worker.

¹ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

An estimate of the total yearly earnings of workers in the three administrative divisions of Lincolnshire in 1914, 1917 and January 1918 is provided in the following table.

TABLE 12.

TOTAL YEARLY EARNINGS OF WORKERS IN LINCOLNSHIRE

Class of workers and type of earnings		1914	1917	1918 (Jan.)
KESTEVEN				
Ordinary labourers	Average cash wages	£ 42 s. 2 d. 10	£ 65 s. 2 d. 2	£ 70 s. 4 d. 0
	Extras and allowances	4 6 8	9 2 0	—
TOTAL		46 9 6	74 4 2	70 4 0
Waggoners	Average cash wages	42 9 4	61 15 0	71 14 4
	Extras and allowances	17 6 8	32 10 0	—
TOTAL		59 16 0	94 5 0	71 14 4
HOLLAND				
Ordinary labourers	Average cash wages	49 0 10	75 12 4	79 14 8
	Extras and allowances	9 8 6	18 17 0	—
TOTAL		58 9 4	94 9 4	79 14 8
Waggoners	Average Cash Wages	45 1 4	73 4 8	89 14 0
	Extras and allowances	18 8 4	36 5 10	—
TOTAL		63 9 8	109 10 6	89 14 0
LINDSEY				
Hired men	Average cash wages	36 8 0	54 12 0	65 0 0
	Extras and allowances	19 10 0	22 10 8	22 10 8
TOTAL		55 18 0	77 2 8	87 10 8

Unfortunately the amount of allowances except in the case of Lindsey was not separated from cash wages in the figures for 1918. We can see, however, in the two preceding years that the allowances of waggoners were anything up to four times higher than those of the ordinary labourers.

From another investigator comes information on wages of what he called three "typical men" during 1913 and 1917 on a farm in West Kent:

TABLE 13.
WAGES IN KENT †

FARM LABOURER		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1913	Wages 18s. per week	46	16	0			
	Milk, house and garden	13	0	0			
	Extras, haymaking and harvest, some Sunday work included	4	16	0			
					64	12	0
1917	Wages 21s. per week	54	12	0			
	Haymaking and others	5	10	0			
	Milk, house and garden	13	0	0			
					73	2	0
CARTER AND PLOUGHMAN		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1913	Wages 21s. per week	54	12	0			
	Haymaking and harvest	4	1	0			
	Milk, about	1	10	0			
					60	3	0
1917	Wages 26s. per week	67	12	0			
	Haymaking and harvest	4	10	0			
	Milk, about	1	15	0			
					73	17	0
COWMAN		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1913	Wages 18s. per week	46	16	0			
	Milk, house and garden 4/6d.	11	14	0			
	2 tons coal	2	6	0			
	Extras, poultry rear. (no haymaking or overtime)	3	11	0			
					64	7	0
1917	Wages 23/6d. per week	61	2	0			
	Milk, house and garden 4/6d.	11	14	0			
	2 tons coal	3	14	0			
	Extras, poultry rear. Haymaking, etc.	2	0	0			
		1	10	0			
					80	0	0

† Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

An analysis of the rates of wages per acre in England in 1913-1914, made by W. H. R. Curtler¹ and covering twenty-four English counties shows similar figures. He obtained his figures by comparing 1907 data published by the Board of Trade with those of the Rural League return which related to 1912-13, and with changes in the rates of wages recorded in the report, prepared for the Agricultural Wages Board on changes in Wales². The average weekly earnings (including allowances, perquisites, etc.) of an ordinary labourer in 24 English counties amounted in 1914 to 20s. 11½d., that is £54 9s. 10d. per year, just over the average yearly earnings of the ordinary labourers in Lincolnshire, as given in Table 12 (£53 12s. 3d.)

W. H. R. Curtler. Enquiry into the Rate of Wages per acre in England, 1913-1914. International Review of Agr. Econ. Year VII No. 8-10, Rome, 1916.

Cmd. 7635.

The report of the Land Enquiry Committee¹ referring to the years immediately preceding the First World War, estimated that over 60 per cent of the agricultural workers received less than 18s.0d. whilst there were still some 20 to 30 thousand workers whose total weekly earnings did not exceed 16s. 0d. The report further estimated that considering the rise in the cost of living, the real wages of the workers in some counties had actually decreased since 1907.

Rowntree and Kendall found that taking wages in 1900 as a 100 they were 93 in 1880, remained almost stationary until 1894 after which they began to rise. Between 1900 and 1910 they rose by three points. During the first decade of the present century the cost of living rose by 10 per cent and by a further 5 per cent between 1910 and 1912².

Ashby and Smith³ quote the figure of 18s.0d. per week (£46 16s. 0d.) as the net value of cash wages and payments in kind of an ordinary worker in England in 1914, based on the information supplied from various official sources. They quote 17s. 8d. as the comparable figure for Wales. In 1918 weekly earnings of labourers were 30s. 0d. in England and 31s. 10d. in Wales.

7. EARNINGS OF "BOARDED-IN" WORKERS.

Though the cash wages of some workers who lived-in with their employers were higher than those of the other workers, they did not, as a rule, receive any payments for overtime or for other special duties.

The relative advantages of living-in or away from the farm depended upon the comparative changes in wages and cost of living. If cost of living increased more rapidly than wages, then those workers boarding with the farmer suffered least and any similar change in the opposite direction gave the worker living away from the farm an advantage. But in any case it should be remembered that increases in wages which occurred between 1914 and 1917 tended to lag behind those in cost of living and there was a general worsening in the conditions of all classes of farmworkers. An estimate of the relevant figures illustrating the amount of wages and of the cost of board and lodging, compiled for eleven counties of England for boarded-in workers in 1914 and 1918 is as follows⁴:

1 The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee. 1913.

2 B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall. *How the Labourer Lives*, 1913.

3 A. W. Ashby, M.A. and J. H. Smith, M.Sc. *Agricultural Labour in Wales under Statutory Regulations of Wages, 1924—1937*. *Welsh Journal of Agriculture*, Vol. XIV, 1938.

4 Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

TABLE 14.

ESTIMATED WAGES AND COST OF BOARD AND LODGING
IN ENGLAND.

Counties	1914		1918	
	Estimated average yearly cash wages		Estimated average yearly cash wages	
Northern Counties	£28 4 0—£36 8 0	£ 49 0 0—£63 16 0	£39—£48	
Midland Counties	£19 10 0—£26 0 0	£30 0 0—£39 13 4	£38—£46	
Eastern Counties	£30 0 0	£50 0 0	£45	
Southern Counties	—	£20 0 0—£26 0 0	£42—£47	

There is little information on the value of the board and lodging in Wales but from the estimates available it would appear that it ranged from 6s. to 15s. per week in 1914 to 28s. in 1917¹.

Until wages and conditions were placed under statutory regulations there were not any general rules as to what requirements were supposed to be covered by the term "board and lodging", and conditions showed wide differences which were not necessarily relative to the value of the food and services provided.

8. JUVENILE LABOUR.

The shortage of labour due to the war conditions increased the demand and the cost of juvenile labour. It was a prevalent practice for the boys to be living-in on a farm, and their wages in 1914 and in 1917-1918 varied very considerably according to age and district. The following table therefore can only serve as an indication of the approximate wages of juvenile labour.

¹ A. W. Ashby, M.A. and J. H. Smith, M.Sc. Agricultural Labour in Wales under Statutory Regulations, 1924—1937. Welsh Journal of Agriculture, Vol. XIV, 1938.

TABLE 15.

AVERAGE PREVAILING RATES OF YEARLY CASH WAGES
OF BOYS BOARDED ON A FARM.

Counties	1914	1918
Northern	£15 0 0—£22 10 0	£25 10 0—£43 10 0 according to age
Midland	—	£22 0 0—£29 0 0
Eastern	—	£28 0 0—£36 13 4 according to age
Southern	—	£19 0 0—£28 0 0 according to age

TABLE 16.

AVERAGE WEEKLY CASH WAGES OF BOYS LIVING AWAY
FROM A FARM.

Counties	1914	January, 1918	
Northern	Range 2s. 0d. to 5s. 0d.	Range 6s. 0d. to 10s. 0d.	
Midland	} according to age and ability	5s. 3d. ,, 12s. 0d.	
Eastern		8s. 3d. ,, 15s. 6d.	
		—	9s. 6d. ,, 20s. 6d.
Southern		6s. 3d. ,, 8s. 0d.	9s. 3d. ,, 13s. 7d.

9. WOMEN'S WAGES.

The wages of women varied very considerably according to the type of work and the district. Information is scanty and only an approximate estimate can be made. Members of the Women's National Land Army had in 1917 a minimum wage of 18s. 0d. a week in Suffolk and 20s. 0d. a week in all other counties, plus 2s. 0d. a week extra efficiency pay, applicable to members of the Women's National Land Army in most districts. Those boarding with the farmer used to receive from 6s. 0d. to 8s. 0d. a week cash wages.

In the arable areas country women were employed casually on seasonal tasks and were paid by the hour, sometimes by the day and only in exceptional cases by the week. In some other areas dairymaids were employed and in some instances they were hired at the yearly or half-yearly hiring fairs while in others they were married women employed locally and often on the same farm as their husbands. They had regular employment and payment was on a weekly basis. In addition to weekly wages, the dairymaids were often paid 1s. 0d. per cow per week.

The estimate made at the time puts daily rate of pay of country women in 1918 at 2s. 10d. or 4½d. per hour, and the general average for a weekly wage at 18s. 0d. Only in isolated cases were women receiving extra or overtime pay or allowances in kind.

10. CHANGES IN EARNINGS 1914-1918.

To sum up, the agricultural labourer's earnings towards the end of the First World War had increased by approximately 95 per cent on those prevailing in 1914¹. At the same time the cost of living of a farm worker's family rose by 85 per cent.

The very high wages offered in other competitive occupations caused much criticism from farmers. Mr. F. L. Wallace reported in his "Notes upon Farming Costs", written in 1918¹. "In the North labour is, on the whole, much less unbalanced than it is further south, by the frequent neighbourhood of such works as for Contractors for Government Works, such as Aerodromes and Road Boards, who pay such exorbitant wages as £2 per week to an undersized boy of 16 for shovelling sand, and £3 12s. 0d. per week and up to £5 per week for ordinary unskilled navy work with short hours. Such pay results in upsetting the balance of all labour in the neighbourhood with the consequence that the output from the farmers' labour is much reduced".

As to the profits earned by farmers during this period opinions are divided and not infrequently contradictory. Mr. Wallace said, when summing up his enquiries into the "general estimate of profit"¹, "I am inclined to think, and the general opinion of many

¹ Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural Land and the Cost of Living of Rural Workers. Cmd. 76. 1919.

farmers whom I have consulted supports my belief, that the average profits from any dozen farms rented at from 25s. 0d. to £2 in 1914 would have been about 18s. 0d. to 20s. 0d. an acre and the average of the subsequent years of the war from 35s. 0d. to 45s. 0d. an acre. The farmer would have to live out of these profits—they would not represent savings after the farmer has deducted the cost of his living expenses”.

11. LOSSES OF WAGES DUE TO “STANDING OFF” OR SICKNESS.

The shortage of labour experienced during the closing years of the First World War had its effect in the matter of stoppages of pay due to “standing off” or sickness. According to the local custom “standing off” time, due primarily to the bad weather, may or may not have meant a loss of wages, but generally speaking this practice seems to have been abolished, or at least postponed during the War. All contemporary investigators were in agreement that the time lost due to sickness was not important. Loss of time was small and when sickness occurred the men, after a waiting period of a few days, had their insurance benefits. In instances where the men were also members of a friendly society or a club they drew benefits from two or more sources. Some farmers paid the workers, during periods of sickness, the difference between the amount of insurance benefits and their usual wages and in some cases paid the men’s insurance contributions as well.

For the worker, however, the most important fact was that whatever loss of cash wages he may have had to suffer owing to sickness or “standing off” time, it did not affect his allowances in kind. While workers may have lost some cash income it was uncommon for farmers to stop the allowances of workers during periods of temporary loss of employment due to sickness or to “standing off.”

There was little available evidence relating to customs in Wales. It would appear, however, that in the cases of a prolonged illness the men drew their insurance benefits, and that no stoppages of pay were made for the short periods of absence. Undoubtedly the special character of Welsh farming and of the relations existing between farmers and their employees, had something to do with the fact that no mention was made of losses of wages due to “standing off”, by the contemporary investigators of the agricultural labour problem in Wales.

V. HOUSING AND RENTS.

The housing of agricultural workers was and still is one of the most urgent and difficult problems facing those concerned with the welfare of the countryside. The Royal Commission on Labour¹ which reported on conditions as they existed in 1891-95 found the supply of cottages insufficient and their condition below any satisfactory standard from the point of view of comfort and sanitary requirements. Rents bore no relation to the value of accommodation provided or to the level of wages paid. The position showed little improvement by the end of the First World War.

The condition of many houses was such that local authorities could have condemned them as unfit for families to live in². Provisions for such action were made in the Public Health Act of 1875, the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890 and the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909. But any action taken by the authorities had to be tempered by their house building programmes. Since the erection of new houses was proceeded with in a very timid way, many families had to continue living in houses which were a danger to their health.

The housing of agricultural workers falls into four categories : those living in tied cottages, those living in farm cottages without any service obligations, those renting cottages detached from the farm and those living in their own cottages. The last three categories of workers mentioned above covered mainly ordinary labourers or casual labourers, not bound by any agreement with one particular farmer, but working on various farms in the district. It is the first type of housing, tied cottages, that constituted the bulk of the rural housing problem, and gave rise to so many heated arguments and controversial comments.

The total number of new cottages needed to house the rural population of England and Wales cannot be exactly assessed. The Land Enquiry Committee estimated³ that about 120,000 would be required. This Committee investigated a large sample of parishes and the results were as follows :

¹ Cmd. 6894.

² L. Marion Springall, *Labouring Life in Norfolk Villages, 1834—1914*. London, 1936.

³ *The Land. The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee, Vol. I.* 1913.

TABLE 17.
ESTIMATED POSITION OF RURAL HOUSING IN
ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1913.

	England	Wales
(1) Number of parishes investigated	2,624	135
(2) Number of parishes where shortage is reported	1,345	51
(3) Number of cottages in parishes investigated	355,140	12,473
(4) Number of additional cottages required in parishes investigated	22,706	572
(5) Percentage of additional accommodation required apart from the condemnation of existing cottages	6.39%	6.0%
(6) Estimated further additional accommodation required, if cottages unfit for human habitation were condemned	5.0%	5.0%
(7) Total estimated additional accommodation needed in England and Wales, say	10.0%	10.0%

There were 1,650,000 inhabited houses in the rural districts of England and Wales according to the census of 1911. The Land Enquiry Committee estimated that about 1,200,000 houses out of that total were inhabited by working classes (including agricultural workers), and that therefore the estimated 10 per cent additional accommodation needed in England and Wales would represent about 120,000 new houses.

1. TIED COTTAGES.

Tied cottages were in the first place granted to the regular workers, especially those in a position of responsibility, like horsemen, cowmen, etc. In 23 per cent of the parishes investigated by the Land Enquiry Committee¹ the ordinary labourer received a free cottage as part of his earnings while for men in charge of animals the percentage rose to 36 per cent. The occupying workers did not pay rates and taxes and the rent was low, forming a part of what was known as "allowances".

The main objection to tied cottages was the loss of independence, and the worker's inability to terminate his contract of service at short notice. The family also had to put up with hardships due to the long distance of the cottage from a shopping centre and school, and the poor state of repair of the cottage. The farmers, on the other hand, claimed that tied cottages were important for the supply of regular labour and that the worker did not have to pay any rent. They also claimed that it gave more permanency to the man's employment and especially to men in charge of animals who were required to be as near their place of employment as possible.

¹ The Land. The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee, Vol. I, 1913.

It was a fairly common practice to give hired workers living in tied cottages three months notice to quit and therefore termination of employment did not signify immediate vacation of the cottage. In some cases a fortnight's notice for the termination of employment and three months notice for the vacation of a cottage were accepted but there was no uniformity and legally cottages should have been vacated on cessation of employment.

Although there were cases, where the system was abused by both parties it does seem that the question was often given an exaggerated importance.

The existence of tied cottages or their equivalent was not confined to agriculture only, but appeared also in other industries (e.g. coal mining). There was hardly any occupation in which, a change of employer did not for some workers mean a change of residence. The farmer regarded it as necessary that vacation of a tied cottage should coincide with termination of employment since he required the cottage for a newly engaged worker. The root of the trouble, however, was the existence of an acute shortage of houses, and the low level of earnings of agricultural workers prevented them from competing with workers in other occupations for "non-tied" houses.

Although there was a widespread demand for more cottages, much more important was the lack of attention given to their maintenance. With the decline in agricultural population during the latter part of the 19th century a considerable number of cottages was left in a state of neglect and either fell into ruin or became unfit for human habitation. The reduced number of cottages was not sufficient for the increase in numbers of workers during the war years. Further, because of a change in outlook and habits people were becoming reluctant to occupy the cottages on isolated farms far removed from the communal life of a village, from school and from centres of shopping and entertainment. The supply of cottages was further reduced by the condemnation of cottages on sanitary grounds under the provisions of the Housing and Town Planning Act 1909, though this reduction was arrested during the war. Thus it was reported¹ that in the years 1909 to 1912—1453 cottages were condemned and only 312 new ones built.

The building of new cottages before the First World War lagged far behind the demand, principally because of the uneconomic basis on which the provision of farm cottages existed. During the war demand for man-power for other more urgent purposes precluded any expansion of the housing programme. On the eve of the First World War the rent of a farm cottage was estimated at 1s. 6d. to 3s. 0d. a week. Workers could hardly afford more out of their wages yet this was not sufficient to pay rates, taxes, repairs, or set anything aside for depreciation and interest on the capital invested in the building.

¹ Cmd. 24. Vol. I. and the Report of the Land Enquiry Committee, 1913.

The deductions made from a farmworker's wage for use of a cottage were referred to by the Wages Board as a benefit value and not a rental value since they could not be regarded as an economic rent. Under the circumstances, however, only the wealthy landowners or public bodies could be expected to invest in building farm cottages. Whilst the latter were bound to exercise great caution in administering public funds, especially when an investment did not promise any reasonable return, the former, if they built cottages at all, did it with a view to increasing the value of their estates as well as of improving the living conditions of their workers. But there was no concerted effort and the building enterprises were always conditioned by the financial results and the prospects of farming as a whole. As regards "non-tied" cottages, they were either in a very advanced state of disrepair, or the rents were much higher than the benefit value of tied cottages.

There was no uniformity in the size, layout or sanitary arrangements. Overcrowding was fairly widespread and this, apart from the purely physical discomfort, often adversely affected the moral and social conditions of family life. But the main evil was undoubtedly the lack of proper sanitation. Overcrowded cottages with poor ventilation assisted the spread of diseases and lowered the health of the workers.

Few cottages could boast a supply of piped water, and supplies often had to be fetched from wells more or less distant from the cottages. No drainage and an earth closet often situated near to the water supply, completes a picture of farm cottages.

As new cottages were built improvements were achieved, but these were too few to affect the general position.

2. RENTS.

A report of a Committee of the Agricultural Wages Board¹ estimated that to build and to maintain, as a reasonable investment, a cottage whose initial cost would be £200, the rent would have to be charged at approximately £18 a year or 7s. a week. The following figures were presented as the basis of their estimate:

	£	s.	d.
Interest and sinking fund	12	0	0
Repairs and maintenance	2	0	0
Rates	2	15	0
Insurance		4	0
Collection		15	0
Voids and losses		10	0
TOTAL	£18	4	0

¹ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

But contemporary prices indicated that the initial cost of building a cottage in 1918 would probably be about £300 and not £200, in which case the rent would need to be £27 a year or 10s. 6d. a week. The above estimated rent cannot, of course, be applied to a tied cottage, and it should be pointed out that the arguments about tied cottages were often obscured by confusing the principle of a house leased for an economic rent, with a tied cottage from which a farmer could evict worker when the latter ceased to be employed by him but where consequently the farmer was not entitled to be paid a rent covering sinking fund, interest, and other expenses.

The demands of the war restricted the building of new cottages and in any case the economic rents of such houses were beyond the capacity of the farmworker's pocket.

It should also be noted that the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 amending previous legislation of 1890 (Housing of the Working Classes Act) gave the local authorities full powers to deal with the housing question.

Immediately after the war further legislation assisted the building of houses for the workers in rural districts by both local authorities and private enterprise. The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 known as the Addison Act and the Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919, as well as the Chamberlain Act of 1923 (Housing Act), and the Wheatley Act of 1924 Housing (Financial Provisions) Act provided subsidies for working class houses in rural districts¹.

The basic reason for the unsatisfactory state of rural housing at this time was the economically unsound system under which houses had to be built and maintained either at a loss to the investors or by charging rents which the agricultural workers could not pay.

Housing conditions in Wales were, if anything, worse than in England. The shortage of rural cottages, especially near industrial areas, was very acute. A great proportion of the existing cottages consisted of old houses, which, but for the war, would have been condemned as unfit for human habitation. The worst housing conditions seemed to have prevailed in Pembrokeshire, where the "two rooms and a loft" type of cottage was the common rule. The rents were lower than in England, from 1s. 0d. to 2s. 6d. a week being the amount usually charged. The evidence suggests that only limited action was taken by the local authorities towards the improvement of rural housing conditions, mainly because houses could only be condemned if other accommodation for the occupants was made available.

¹ Rural Housing. Third Report of the Rural Housing Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, 1944.

VI. OTHER PROBLEMS AFFECTING AGRICULTURAL LABOUR.

1. RELATIONS WITH THE EMPLOYERS.

Much has been said on the antagonism or even open hostility that was supposed to have existed between the farmers and the farm workers in the early years of this century. In fact it was not so much antagonism between those two classes as discontent of each at the existing system and conditions of life. Many investigators indicated that farmers, on the whole, did not complain so much of the rising cost of labour as of the feeling of insecurity of their returns and as they explained, they would only be too glad to pay high wages provided prices of farm produce were sufficient to meet the cost. Workers, on the other hand, felt restless and dissatisfied with their lot, particularly after improved communications, their growing interest in the outside world, and the opportunities of mixing with other people during the war, brought home to them the knowledge of their inferior position in the community¹. There was little class hatred in the relationship between agricultural workers and farmers, but there was at different times during the period covered, a feeling of great despondency on the part of workers and small farmers. In spite of the incidents testifying to the contrary, Arch's words written in 1872 still remained the basic philosophy of organised action by the agricultural trade unionists: "Let courtesy" wrote Arch², "fairness and firmness characterise all our demands. Act cautiously and advisedly that no act may have to be repented or repudiated. Do not strike unless all other means fail you. Try all other means; try them with firmness and patience. Try them in the enforcement of only just claims, and if they fail, then strike".

The labour shortage experienced in agriculture during the war did not produce such a strengthening of the workers' bargaining power as might be expected, because the bargaining activities of workers were curtailed by their exemption from military service for employment in agriculture. In addition, owing to the peculiar conditions of work in agriculture, lack of experience and lack of tradition in collective bargaining, the concessions won still lagged behind the achievements made by the workers in other industries and behind the rate of improvement in profits made by the employers.

One of the investigators of wages and conditions of employment in agriculture, referring to Oxfordshire³ very pertinently described the position as follows: "The rural brain may move slowly, and may be incapable of expansion except very gradually and to a limited extent. It has, however, grasped one fact firmly, and that is, that the farmer is now prospering, and that prosperity is to a large extent the result of the labourer's effort, and that the labourer should have his share in the result".

¹ J. S. Nicholson, M.A., D.Sc. *The Relations of Rents, Wages and Profits in Agriculture and their Bearing on Rural Depopulation*. London, 1870.

² quoted by: F. E. Green. *A History of the English Agricultural Labourers, 1870—1920*.

³ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

2. GARDENS, ALLOTMENTS AND SMALLHOLDINGS.

The provision made for the use of land is an important factor affecting farmworkers' well-being. It may be viewed from two angles: an immediate relief brought to the worker and to his family by the home grown foods as supplements to their diet, and, in the case of allotments and smallholdings as one of the steps in the ladder of the social and economic advancement of the worker.

It is a particularly important matter in Britain where an extremely high proportion of agricultural workers are without land of any kind or at the best have no more than the gardens attached to their cottages.

(a) GARDENS. As an immediate relief to the worker's budget, the importance of a piece of land whether it be a garden or an allotment, cannot be overestimated. Investigations showed that the supply of gardens was sufficient in almost all counties of England, with the exception of Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire where they seem to have been inadequate both in numbers and in size. A shortage of gardens was sometimes offset by the provision of potato ground. The Land Enquiry Committee of 1913 claimed that no more than one sixth of the total number of cottages in rural districts had gardens of one eighth of an acre or more in size¹.

In considering the advantages of a garden to the worker, one must not, however, lose sight of an important point to which it is closely related, namely, the length of the working day and the level of wages. The level of the workers' wages was such as to leave a very small margin, if any at all, for spending on what were considered unessentials. At the same time it is safe to assume that the length of a working day very rarely, and then only in winter, fell below 9 hours a day and often exceeded 12 hours. This working day was further extended during the war years by overtime employment. Under these circumstances a worker had little time left for gardening, although some farmers gave their men a day off at intervals specifically to do their gardening. The Report on the Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture stated that there was little demand for gardens in the northern counties of England², due partly to the high wages, to potatoes given in most cases and to the prevalence of "living-in" workers, as well as to the system of yearly and half-yearly hirings. It is true that wages in the northern counties were higher than elsewhere in England, but it is equally true that those counties were outstanding for their length of a working day, 13 hours a day in the summer and seven days a week having been by no means an unusual occurrence. Under these circumstances any interest in cultivating the garden was out of the question.

¹ The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee, 1913.

² Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

(b) ALLOTMENTS. Allotments, unlike gardens, were not usually given to the worker as a part of the allowances. More often they were rented from Parish Councils or Charity Trustees. They were not attached to the house or cottage and very often they were situated at some distance from the worker's house. In some small localised areas farmers provided their ordinary labourers living in tied cottages with half an acre or one acre allotments. Facilities for providing allotments were created by the provisions of Acts of Parliament. Allotment Acts of 1882 and 1887 and the Smallholdings Act of 1892 were the first of these Acts, but the most effective one was the Local Government Act of 1894 which instituted Parish Councils and enabled workers to obtain allotments without undue difficulties. From this Act until 1907 when the new Small Holding and Allotment Act was passed the number of allotment holders was rising steadily.

It was estimated, however, that only about two-thirds of all the villages had any allotments before the First World War¹.

Allotments were generally larger in size than gardens, and whilst the latter ranged from 10 poles to as much as 40 poles, the former sized anything from 200 square yards (Derby) to 5 acres (Bedfordshire). The rents for the allotment land ranged at the same time from £1 to £8 per acre.

The additional interest and demand for allotments, observed during the First World War was due, not so much to the shortening of the working hours, or to the general improvement in the workers' economic position, as to the actual shortage or fears of a shortage of food and its high prices caused by the war.

(c) SMALLHOLDINGS. Statements that the demand for smallholdings among the agricultural workers in the middle years of the First World War was not great obviously refer to the actual demand as conditioned by the worker's financial capacity to equip and manage a farm. Before 1914 it was estimated that there existed a large unsatisfied demand for smallholdings but very few agricultural workers were able to build up enough savings to be able to afford to take a holding. There existed a very considerable potential demand for what workers always regarded as an independent way of life. This is confirmed by the fact that comparatively few applications for smallholdings were made by agricultural workers and the majority were from ex-railwaymen, tradesmen, ex-servicemen, who were usually countrymen and had been agricultural workers in the early years of their careers.

A correct appreciation of this question is complicated by the effect of war conditions and by the fact that even in the pre-war years only a small proportion of agricultural workers availed themselves of the facilities provided by the Smallholdings Act of 1907, the majority of those who could set up an independent smallholding having acquired the land by private treaty.

¹ The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee, 1913.

Between 1908 and 1913, three thousand applicants had been provided with 37 thousand acres by direct negotiation with private landowners, and just over 6,000 acres had been let to smallholding associations in England and Wales¹.

Generally speaking the size of a smallholding ranged from 5 acres up to 50 acres, that is, from the size of what can be reasonably regarded as an allotment, to a small independent farm.

The following figures for 1914 indicate the extent of the action taken by County Councils under the Smallholdings Act 1908. There were in England and Wales 3,582,536 acres occupied by holdings above one and not exceeding fifty acres and only 169,813 acres out of that total were acquired by County Councils and let out to 14,381 new smallholders². A further 946 statutory smallholdings were created during the period 1915-1918.

The small percentage of holdings obtained through the public authorities (4.7 per cent) is explained by the comparatively higher rents charged by the County Councils. Investigators reported cases where the County Council's rents exceeded by over 50 per cent those prevalent in the county.

The exact numbers and distribution of smallholdings acquired by private treaty are not available. Mr. Drage came to the conclusion in his final report that "in most counties therefore it appears that the demand, even where it is large, has been satisfied". He admitted however, that "it is none the less true that in most cases applicants have made their little money not in, but outside, agriculture".

The revival of smallholdings schemes occurred after the First World War, when as a fulfillment of promises made, the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act was passed in 1919. A fund of £20 million was provided, 250,000 acres of land were acquired, and 16,740 smallholdings for ex-servicemen were created³. But unlike the earlier legislation this was not to satisfy land hunger as such, but to settle ex-servicemen on the land.

It is interesting to note the attitude of the farming and of the official mind towards the question of smallholdings, as reflected in the official reports⁴. Whilst admitting the importance of smallholdings as an essential element of the "ladder" in agriculture, they often stressed the necessity of economic self-sufficiency, if small holdings were to be a successful proposition. The implications of such views were countered by the opinions expressed by the farmers in the northern counties, where apparently workers would have no time to cultivate their smallholdings owing to their duties on the farm.

¹ J. A. R. Marriott. *The English Land System*. London, 1914.

² Cmd. 2145. *Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation. Final Report*, 1924.

³ Rt. Hon. Lord Ernle. *English Farming, Past and Present*. 5th Edition. London, 1936.

⁴ Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

The question of smallholdings is one where social, moral or intellectual aspects outweigh the pecuniary ones. One gets the impression that behind the criticism of smallholdings by the farming community there was a fear that any considerable extension of smallholdings would affect the supply of labour and the demand for improved wages of farmworkers.

This country is in an exceptional position of having a large army of landless wage earning agricultural labour, and the creation of the interest of the workers in the industry in which they are employed cannot be over-emphasised.

The demand for smallholdings appeared to be much greater in Wales than in England. This was explained by the specific organisation and the employer-employee relationship which existed in the Principality. Incidentally, the evidence shows that the increased provision of smallholdings, was co-incident with a decline in the migration of workers from the countryside. It is, however, obvious that the small number of holdings provided was not the prime reason why the flow of workers from agriculture was reduced. Nevertheless "land hunger" was and undoubtedly still is widespread among the agricultural workers in this country.

(d) PROFIT-SHARING SCHEMES. Although numerically insignificant, profit-sharing schemes in agriculture deserve brief mention. Profit sharing is a broad term for what may be described on the one hand as pure profit-sharing and on the other as a labour co-partnership. Pure profit-sharing is based on an agreement between an employer and his employees, whereby the latter receive, in addition to their ordinary wages or salaries, a share in the profits of an undertaking. Since no losses are shared this system should not be confused with profit and loss sharing schemes. "Labour co-partnership" is defined as a modification of profit-sharing, which enables the worker to accumulate his share of profit in the capital of the business employing him, thus gaining the rights and the responsibilities of a shareholder.

The main reason why such schemes have not been applied to any great extent to the agricultural enterprises was the necessity of keeping formal accounts, properly and regularly audited¹. This and the farmers' objection to the disclosing of profits prevented such schemes from spreading in agriculture. Nor did the workers themselves press for an extension in view of the very small benefits they promised, and in view of the amount of extra effort involved. Workers' uncertainty as to the amount of their share of profits and employers fears that profit sharing would not provide added incentive to increase work output were powerful influences against the introduction of more schemes in agriculture.

¹ J. Wylie, B.Sc., N.D.A. (Hons.) Profit and Loss Sharing in Agriculture. Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture, Vol. XXVI, No. 9, 1919, and Vol. XXVI, No. 3, 1920.

The total number of such schemes operating in all industries of the United Kingdom in 1919 amounted to 176 (47.9 per cent of the total number of schemes started before and up to 1919). Out of that number only 9 were of an agricultural character (5 purely farming and 4 market gardening). The number of employees participating or entitled to participate in the shares in 7 out of the above 9 schemes totalled 542. The following table illustrates the development of profit sharing in the Agricultural Productive Co-operative Societies in the United Kingdom¹.

The majority of these societies were in Ireland (out of 387 in 1916, 318 represented Irish Dairying Societies) and only one-fifth of them shared their profits with the employees.

TABLE 18.
PROFIT-SHARING BY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVE SOCIETIES
1911—1916.

Year	Total number of all Societies at the end of year	Societies which shared profits with their employees		
		Number of Societies which paid bonus in year	Number of employees receiving bonus on wages in year	Ratio of bonus to wages of participants in year
Average of 1901-1910	261	29	181	% 4.5
1911	338	51	372	5.6
1912	352	55	316	6.6
1913	368	67	432	5.4
1914	383	61	435	5.6
1915	389	67	488	6.3
1916	387	79	484	8.2

Experiments in profit-sharing schemes were made by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in respect of their farm settlements for ex-servicemen in Patrington (Yorkshire), Pembrey (S. Wales), Rolleston (Notts.), Amesbury and Berwick St. James (Wilts.) and Wantage (Berks.), though by 1920 they were only in the initial stage of organisation.

3. SOCIAL INSURANCES AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS.

(a) HEALTH AND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE.

Provision for financial assistance against the hardship, caused by sickness, death, old age and unemployment, was provided for in several ways. Up to the time when the National Health Insurance Act of 1911 was passed, an important part was played by the Friendly and Benefit Societies and the village "Sick and Dividend Clubs". The National Health Insurance Act caused most of these small village societies to

¹ Report on Profit Sharing and Labour Co-partnerships in the U.K. Ministry of Labour (Intelligence and Statistics Dept.) Cmd. 544, 1920.

be taken over by the bigger ones. The local village clubs and lodges managed by local people on behalf of the National Societies remained, and although it was claimed that they lost some of their informal and social characteristics, there is no doubt that the bigger societies were sounder economically, and incidentally the number of subscriptions to the local societies had not dropped as much as could be expected, for most of the workers preferred to draw benefits arising from voluntary subscriptions in addition to the National Health Insurance. The weekly contribution of an agricultural worker to the National Health Insurance amounted to 4d. whilst the voluntary contributions ranged from 4d. to 7d. a week. A total benefit of up to 22s. 0d. a week could be drawn for the first six months, if, in addition to the National Health Insurance, the worker subscribed to one or more voluntary societies. Under the National Health Insurance a three days waiting period was operative. After six months, or in some cases after one year, the benefits from the voluntary contributions were reduced by half.

(b) OLD AGE PENSIONS. A further alleviation of the workers economic insecurity was provided by the increase of the 5s. 0d. a week old age pension based on the Old Age Pension Act of 1908 to 7s. 6d. This, and the general policy of fixing the minimum wage in 1917, relieved the "poor rates" and also removed one of the abnormalities, surviving from the times of the Speenhamland policy of the early part of the 19th century, whereby the low wages of a fully fit wage earner were supplemented by "poor" assistance in the form of free clothing and fuel. The Speenhamland policy, laying down the minimum of subsistence for the agricultural worker determined by the price of bread and the size of his family, and bringing up his wage to its minimum level by grants from the "poor rates" was a desperate measure adopted in order to save the country from famine and revolution threatening at the time of the Napoleonic War. The reform of the Poor Law in 1834 had as its main object the reversal of the Speenhamland policy but the effect of this reform often resulted in pauperising the rural population still further. Parish charities directed to the relief of the poor were a very common feature in England. Villages were known by the extent of their charities and these often decided whether a man took a job in a particular village. Such a state of affairs occasionally produced a vicious circle for, with the increased supply of labour attracted by the charities of the locality, the wages there would go down calling for a still further extension of the financial assistance.

(c) CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT. The increasing popularity of the Co-operative Societies among agricultural workers is worth noting here. From 2 millions in 1904 co-operative membership grew to 4 millions in 1919 and included a considerable number of agricultural workers. Agricultural workers' participation in the Co-operative movement was growing steadily especially when rising wages enabled them to make use of the Co-operative Societies, and development of trade unionism exemplified to them the advantages

arising from an association¹. From a quarter to all the agricultural workers in the neighbouring villages were members of the Uppingham Branch of the Melton Mowbray Co-operative Society².

The membership not only protected workers economically but also gave them some social advantages and a feeling of real participation in the activities of the Society.

4. TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

The Agricultural Labourers' Union became an approved society under the National Health Insurance Act of 1911. Whilst its activities in this field have never shown anything startling they did contribute to the growing industrial membership of the Union.

After paying 6d. entrance fee, a member was entitled for his 3d. weekly contributions to draw 10s. 0d. per week sick benefit. A subscription of 6d. a week covered in addition to the ordinary benefits the benefits required in cases of accidents, need of legal assistance, funeral expenses for a member or his wife and strike pay.

The rates of benefits were as follows: (1) accident benefit of 7s. 6d. per week for the first two weeks; (2) total permanent disablement grant of £10; (3) strike pay, victimisation pay or lock-out pay of 12s. 0d. per week.

After the initial struggle and defeat of the agricultural workers trade union in the middle seventies of the last century, accentuated by the agricultural depression, it gradually declined until membership, which numbered over 86,000 in 1874, dropped to barely 4,000 in 1889 and then was represented mostly by participation in the sick and funeral benefit activities only.

The early efforts of leaders, headed by Joseph Arch, though more often than not unsuccessful, were not wasted, and there is no doubt that the right to vote granted to the agricultural workers in 1884 as well as the Allotment Acts of 1882 and 1887 and the Small Holdings Acts of 1892 and 1894 were largely due to the demands expressed by the Union and by the pressure of the Trade Union movement generally³.

A fresh attempt at a revival of trade unionism in agriculture was made in 1906 by George Edwards, who organised the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union with George Nicholls, M.P., as the President, and Edwards as the General Secretary.

¹ Sidney and Beatrice Webb. *The Consumers Co-operative Movement*, 1921.

² Cmd. 24. Vol. I.

³ Sidney and Beatrice Webb. *The History of Trade Unionism*. London, 1911.

The part played by George Edwards in the agricultural workers trade union movement was particularly important, since, realising the weakness of the agricultural workers as an organised body, he firmly believed that no progress in improving farm wages could be made without a statutory minimum wage, and it is largely due to him that, in spite of Mr. Lloyd George's opposition in March 1912, progressive Conservatives such as Lord Henry Bentinck and Mr. Leslie Scott, introduced in May 1912 a Bill in the House of Commons, directed towards improving conditions in some specially low paying counties. Other organisations took up the matter and another and better Bill, sponsored by the National Land and Home League, was introduced in the House of Commons on the 27th May, 1913. It failed to obtain the support of Parliament. A year later Mr. Leslie Scott introduced an Agricultural Employment Boards Bill which also failed to become law.

The movement promoted by the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union was confined to the Eastern Counties and in a short time developed into fifty branches with a total membership of 1,600 which rose by 1910 to 4,000.

In May 1910, a strike broke out in the parish of St. Faith in Norfolk. It was called by the local branch of the Union without consultation with the Executive of the Union. However, the Executive eventually recognised the strike and commenced paying strike benefits. The workers' demands met with unyielding opposition from the farmers and the strike was prolonged and finally collapsed in December 1910 without the workers having obtained any concessions. The strike proved to be very costly for the Union which spent £1,300 on it, and also led to internal disagreements. At the Union Conference in 1911 members passed by a large majority a note of censure on the Executive for its mishandling of the strike and changes took place in the posts of president and treasurer. However, the Union soon overcame the set-back and in response to requests organisers were sent to organise workers in other counties, and the movement progressed steadily soon bringing the membership up to 4,000 again.

At the Conference held in 1912 the Union changed its name to the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union¹. The objects of the new Union were: "to regulate the relations between employers and employed". In more detail they were: (a) to improve the social and moral conditions of its members; (b) to establish central funds for the purpose of securing a better distribution of the land by assisting to provide allotments, smallholdings, improved housing accommodation and better conditions of living; (c) to secure proper legal advice when necessary and to shield members from injustice; (d) to relieve members unemployed through disputes, strikes and lock-outs sanctioned by the Executive Committee or the General Council of the Union; (e) to encourage intercommunication with Unions in other parts of this and other countries.

¹ The Report of the Land Enquiry Committee. Vol. I. 1913.

The new rules stated that "those persons shall be eligible who are allotment and small holders, agricultural labourers, gardeners, navvies, yardsmen, carters, roadmen, female workers, carpenters and skilled artisans, who from health, age, distance of nearest branch or other sufficient reasons are unable to join the recognised unions of their respective trades, and any other person agreed to by a branch and not vetoed by the General Council or the Executive Committee".

It will be seen that the above rules not only covered a great variety of workers but actually, for the first time, admitted women to full union membership. Thus reformed, the Union became affiliated to the Trade Union Congress, where it was entitled to two representatives at their Annual Conference.

The increasing cost of living and the improvements gained in wages and conditions of work by organised labour in other industries caused unrest and dissatisfaction of agricultural labour in the years 1912 to 1914 and assisted the development of their trade union.

Among the number of minor disputes and strikes which took place in various parts of the country, the Lancashire strike merits attention, because of the demands put forward and eventually satisfied. Nearly 30 branches of the Union with a membership of over 2,500 were established in that county during the latter part of 1912 and early 1913. King George V had arranged to visit Lancashire, as the guest of Lord Derby, and at the time of this visit a strike of agricultural workers broke out in the South Western part of the County. The demands put forward were: (1) Saturday half-holiday, work to cease at 1 p.m.; (2) minimum wage of 24s. a week; (3) 6d. an hour overtime, and (4) recognition of the Union.

In answer to these demands, one of the farmers dismissed all his eight men and served them with notice to quit the cottages they occupied. All attempts at a peaceful settlement failed and on 20th June, 1913, some two thousand workers in the district came out. The strike lasted two weeks, at the end of which period, due, possibly to the influence of the impending Royal visit and Lord Derby's mediation, the workers' demands were granted in full. The Union reported: "this is the first time in history of the agricultural labourers they have ever had a reduction of hours".

By the end of 1913 the Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union had 232 branches in 26 counties of England and Wales and its total membership numbered nearly 12,000. The Trade Union Congress in 1913 voted £500 towards the organising expenses of the Union.

A new series of strikes started in 1914 in Essex, Norfolk and Northamptonshire. In February, 1914, some farmers in North Essex, witnessing what they considered a dangerous spread of Unionism among their workers, jointly decided to dismiss their men and to evict those

occupying cottages unless they left the Union. Out of the total of 130 workers in the parish of Helion Bumpstead 82 were then members of the local branch of the Union. The workers refused to comply with the farmers' demand and stopped work declaring that they would not return unless their wages were increased by 2s. 0d. The strike spread quickly and involved about 95 per cent of the workers in the adjoining parishes, who demanded the increase of wages to 16s. 0d., 18s. 0d., to 20s. 0d. and 20s. 0d. a week for the ordinary labourers, stockmen and horsemen respectively, weekly half holiday, holiday on Bank Holidays, Christmas Day and Good Friday, £8 harvest money for four weeks and 5s. 0d. a day in excess of four weeks, 6d. an hour overtime, and "tied cottages" held on a three monthly tenancy.

Even before the strike reached its peak, and though not directly affected by the strike in Essex, some employers in other counties increased the wages of their workers. In March 1914, the tenants of Lord Leicester's Holkham Estate in Norfolk increased the wages by 1s. 0d. a week and the tenants of Sir Ailwyn Fellowes' estate at Honningham followed this example. The Nottingham Corporation, who farmed about 2,000 acres at Stoke Bardolph and Bulcote increased the waggoners' wages from 21s. 0. to 22s. 0d. a week, and the labourers' wages from 18s. 6d. to 19s. 6d. excluding free cottages and gardens. Finally the King on his Sandringham estate, increased wages by 1s. 0d. a week and granted a weekly half holiday. Under the slogan "King's wages and King's conditions", other men in the district demanded and struck for a general increase in wages from 14s. 0d. to 16s. 0d. and a weekly half holiday.

Further trouble started in Northamptonshire on Lord Lilford's estate where the workers demanded a 1s. 0d. rise in wages and a weekly half-holiday. A general settlement satisfactory to the workers was reached in July 1914, but apart from the immediate successes, those disputes contributed a great deal to swelling the ranks of the Union. It was estimated at the time that due to the strikes and disputes the membership of the Union was increasing weekly by some 600 workers¹.

In addition to the activities of the Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union, an important part in the Trade Union movement among agricultural workers in the years preceding the First World War was played by the Workers' Union. Originally an organisation of the unskilled workmen in towns and urban districts, it commenced its rural operations in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire and Suffolk and met with immediate success.

The Union became actively interested in agricultural workers in 1910 after the slump in trade unionism at the end of the last century. Its organising campaign was prosecuted with great vigour and at the beginning of 1914 it had 600 branches with a membership of nearly 100,000 including agricultural workers organised into the "Farm Workers' Section", entrusted to the hands of Mr. George Dallas.

¹ "Manchester Guardian". 22nd June, 1914.

The organisation and the tactics employed by the Workers' Union were somewhat different from and superior to those of the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union, and of other Unions then in existence. It was organised on a county basis, which ensured elasticity and adaptability of the Union's policy to the particular conditions of the area concerned, backed by the Union's support on a national scale. This was particularly important in the cases of disputes and strikes, for the demands could always be adjusted to local conditions and strikes could be so timed as to increase the chances of success.

The Union claimed that there were advantages arising from the combination of the unskilled town workers and of the farm workers in one Union. The bitter experience of the Great Dock Strike of 1889 had taught urban trade unions the danger of neglecting the organising of farm workers into trade unions, and however co-operative urban and rural unions might have been, a mutual appreciation of the interests of the rural and urban workers was best achieved when they were members of one trade union.

Another secret of this Union's success lay in the tactics employed when bargaining for improvement of wages and conditions of work. These are best described in the Union's circular convening a Conference in Herefordshire in 1914: "In drawing up a programme it will be well to bear in mind that it must be reasonable, so as, first to lead the employers to discuss it, and in the second place, so as to convince the general public that it ought to be conceded at once, and further that it should be of such a nature as to secure the greatest enthusiasm and unity amongst the workers themselves".

The Workers' Union not only grew in numbers, but also in funds and on the eve of the First World War it was the financially strongest Union among those concerned with agricultural labour, although the bulk of its members were not farmworkers. It eventually incorporated two other unions, each of which included agricultural workers, namely, the National Amalgamated Union and the Dairy Workers' and Rural Workers' Union.

The outbreak of war and the truce declared in the field of collective bargaining arrested further development of trade unionism among agricultural workers. The break was, however, only temporary and entirely due to the state of emergency. The passing of the Corn Production Act in 1917, and the establishment of the Agricultural Wages Board where the workers' interests were defended by their own representatives, contributed to a tremendous growth in workers' interest in the Unions.

By July 1919, it was estimated that the total number of agricultural workers belonging to one union or another reached 250,000 and was increasing still further. The two most important Unions catering for agricultural workers in England and Wales were in 1919, the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union with nearly 2,600 branches and a membership of over 100,000, an average

weekly income of £1,200 and total funds of £54,000, and the Workers' Union, with a total membership of over 600,000, including over 100,000 agricultural workers, a weekly income of £7,000 and £300,000 in the reserve funds. In addition to those two, there were in existence some minor unions of agricultural workers, and the Dockers' Union, the Union of Municipal Employees, the National Union of Gasworkers, and the Union of Co-operative Employees contained a certain number of agricultural workers.

The rapid growth of trade unionism and the achievements of that movement, of which the most important was the establishment of the Agricultural Wages Board and of the statutory minimum wages, by no means solved all the problems of the agricultural workers well-being. The main service which the trade union movement rendered to agricultural workers was keeping public opinion informed of, and stirring the public conscience about, the unsatisfactory conditions of their work and pay. Furthermore, and through the agency of what were often referred to as trouble makers and agitators, the movement set up and maintained a link among the isolated and often distant working communities; this helped workers to maintain their self-respect and helped them to overcome the feeling of hopeless neglect and indifference by the surrounding world.

The actual achievements in improvement of wages and conditions of work were not great. Even the introduction of the minimum wage, interpreted by many if not by the majority of the employers as a maximum wage, often meant reduction in earnings, and particularly in standards of living since the perquisites became more prescribed and uniform. This does not mean that the minimum wage, weekly half-holiday, overtime, etc., were devoid of importance to the agricultural workers. But regulation meant uniformity and personal interpretations of obligations were replaced by statutory requirements. Some workers were bound to suffer loss of earnings. The highest achievement of agricultural labour, however, lies in the final recognition of the farmworkers' right, as an organised body of people, to representation on equal terms on boards and committees set up to determine the level of wages and conditions of work.

Although subsequent events confirmed the weakness of the bargaining power of agriculture, and of agricultural labour in relation to other industries, the importance of the emancipation of agricultural labour at the conclusion of the First World War cannot be over-emphasised.

The first steps towards the lasting improvement of the agricultural worker's fate were made. It remained to augment the ranks of organised agricultural labour in numbers as well as in the realisation of their aims and of the needs of the country, to secure for them the right place in the industry, in society and in the economic life of the country.

CONCLUSIONS.

The greatest achievement of agricultural workers, accomplished during the first twenty years of this century was undoubtedly the official recognition of their interests and of their trade organisations. Even if all other achievements were considered to be of little practical value, the recognition of the workers' right to take, collectively, an active part in making decisions concerning conditions of their work, constituted a great step forward.

The objective was achieved because of the dogged determination of both leaders and members of the unions. The evils of unregulated wages, hours and conditions of work were well known and fully appreciated not only by the workers themselves and their leaders, but also by all fair-minded farmers. It was recognised that under the stress of overseas competition improvements in conditions would not come from voluntary action. The economic uncertainty made farmers cautious and the workers were not sufficiently well organised to demand better wages and shorter hours. This is best acknowledged by the principle which is worded by the Trade Board Acts of 1909 and 1918 as follows, and which was later reflected in the Agricultural Wages Board's policy: the Trade Boards may be established where the Minister "is of the opinion that no adequate machinery exists for the effective regulation of wages throughout the trade, and that accordingly, having regard to the rate of wages prevailing in the trade, or any part of the trade, it is expedient that the (Trade Boards) Act should apply to that trade".

The establishment of the statutory minimum wage in agriculture came as a part of the Corn Production Act 1917, which, in turn, was the outcome of the Government's anxiety caused by the course of the War and was meant to increase the production of home grown food through the medium of guaranteed prices.

Under the circumstances it was unavoidable that statutory facilities should be provided to ensure that workers obtained a share of the concessions made to agriculture.

The immediate effect of control of wages and conditions of employment was hardly satisfactory. The minimum wage of 25s. 0d. week came at a time when the rates actually paid already exceeded that level. Further, apart from a reduction in the working week, conditions of work had not changed materially. Housing and the provision of allotments and small holdings made little progress. Because of the rise in cost of living the increased earnings left the workers very little better off than they were before.

The failure to provide opportunities for social and occupational advancement was the workers' greatest disappointment. Lack of a scheme of small-holdings or of some means whereby workers could improve their position on farms meant that the industry was drained of its best workers.

The farmers were often charged with economic exploitation and a social indifference or an open hostility to and a contempt of the workers. There were plenty of examples to support such charges, just as there were examples to the contrary. Viewed impartially it would seem that, on the whole, the farmers' attitude towards labour was short-sighted but that was not entirely their fault because national policies in relation to agriculture were equally short-sighted. Even with a declining agricultural population the supply of labour was adequate to farmers' requirements and this was one of the reasons why wages remained low.

The instinctively cautious outlook of the farmers, their economic tradition coupled with the disastrous effects of the great depression of the seventies and again nineties, led them to the principle of cutting down farm expenses to the minimum. The labour bill being one of the biggest single items of expenditure, and offering the least resistance, naturally had been regarded as a way out of the financial difficulties.

Unfortunately, this attitude had not always been confined to the "lean" years of farming only, and whereas it was intended to safeguard the farmers' income in the depression, it often extended to and secured an increase of profits in good years.

In fairness to the farming community of those days it must be admitted that their policy was not simply born out of greed. Farmers suffered great financial losses during agricultural depressions, and in good years some improvements in wages and conditions of employment of workers occurred although they did not fulfill the workers' expectations.

The history of the last 100 years of agriculture contains only too many examples of the economic weakness and the political impotence of the industry, until the very weakness of the industry became its chief weapon of bargaining with the landlords, labour, the state and the community as a whole¹. What was often referred to as the "usual grumblings" of the farmers was but the expression of their caution, common to farmers all over the world, and especially to peasant farming communities. It induced them to exaggerate their losses and to underestimate their successes.

The present century has brought many technical changes and improvements in agriculture. Transport facilities by easing the exchange of ideas and personal contacts, have gone a long way towards removing obstacles which existed in the past in the way of mutual understanding and co-operation of farmers and workers. The First World War helped these feelings to take root and to establish themselves. It is therefore doubly regrettable that the effects of the past evils were too deeply imbedded in agriculture to be remedied promptly and successfully.

¹ A. W. Ashby, M.A. *The Social Purpose of Adult Education: its Relation to the Improvement of Rural Social Life.* Aberystwyth.

The fact remains that, by being continuously underpaid, separated from the land, having no prospects in life and being practically defenceless against any encroachments on their economic, political and even personal freedom, agricultural workers had their attachment to the industry killed at birth. The only ambition that remained alive to their minds was to escape from the land and though the farmers were to some extent in a similarly helpless position they could have done more than they did to improve the lot of their workers. Their apparent indifference, generally speaking, hastened the process.

After the middle of the 19th century national policies were too much concerned with industrial developments and with the growth of our trade with other countries. Britain's growth as a first-class world power, politically as well as financially, was based on manufacturing and the importation of cheap food from the new countries was part and parcel of that growth. It is the casual attitudes of governments to agriculture during the half century before the First World War that is most striking. National interest in disputes arising between the farmers and workers was less concerned with effecting radical changes to prevent their future re-occurrence than with establishing peace in the industry. On occasions when the public conscience was disturbed about the lot of the farm workers action was taken to secure allotments and smallholdings.

Improvements gained by the agricultural workers were due, in the first place, to the perseverance of their leaders, to the support of their few friends and to the general spirit of social progress, then prevailing in the country.

Governments could not be criticised because of a healthy and natural movement of workers, especially a surplus, from one industry to another. The governments concerned were, however, responsible for not promoting and pressing into service such schemes which could prevent the migration from turning into a flight, and which would ensure that agriculture, instead of becoming a blind alley for the unfortunate few, would become a healthy industry, offering the prospects of a steady and decent livelihood to all those engaged in it. The cumulative effects of those neglects and omissions were not felt and not always realised until the First World War, when the food shortage called for the utmost effort in agricultural production.

