

Agricultural Devastation in France and Allied Countries

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When France was overrun during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-72, British farmers came generously to the rescue of the small cultivators of France, whose land had been devastated and crops destroyed by ruthless invasion. The lead in this matter was taken by the Royal Agricultural Society of England, acting in concert with the Societe des Agriculteurs de France, and what was known as the French Peasant Farmers' Seed Fund succeeded in collecting subscriptions amounting to about \$260,000, which was expended in the purchase of seed grain and potatoes and in the relief of distressed families.

During the present war the need for similar action soon became apparent, and on January 27, 1915, the Royal Agriculture Society appointed a committee to organize agricultural relief for those countries of the Allies which have suffered from the effects of the war. Of this committee the Duke of Portland, president of the Society, was elected chairman. The Earl of Northbrook became chairman of the Executive Committee and Mr. C. R. W. Adeane (Chairman of the Society's Finance Committee) was appointed as Honorary Treasurer. Early in the present year the Fund was reported to have reached the total of £50,000, about (\$250,000). The Committee have already sent money to Serbia for the purchase of seeds and small implements, and practical assistance has also been rendered to French farmers in the shape of implements, such as binders, threshing machines, ploughs, harrows, etc., and live stock comprising Southdown sheep, pigs and goats, as well as seed wheat for sowing last fall.

Agricultural Conditions in France.

Three members of the Committee having recently paid a personal visit to France, one of them, Mr. Adeane, the honorary-treasurer, read last month before the Farmers' Club in London a paper vividly describing the agricultural conditions in the devastated areas. Some extracts from this paper and from the speeches of others present will be of interest to Canadian readers. Mr. Adeane stated that the German, Austrian and Bulgarian armies had between them laid waste not less than 168,000 square miles. The war methods of the Germans were first to terrorize the inhabitants by murder, arson and sacrilege, then to pose as benefactors to the human race, and finally, when driven back to destroy systematically and maliciously everything within their reach.

The Champagne Country.

It is to France that we must look for an object lesson of what the invasion and retreat of a German army really mean. In the whole of France no district could be found of a more varied cultivation than Champagne. It is a gently undulating country, which is put to the fullest use by an industrious peasantry. The hills, where they slope to the sun, carry vineyards; the valleys provide the ploughland and pasture. The soil is of a poor chalk and powdery nature—a hungry soil of a sort, which had it been in England would have gone out of cultivation in the nineties. It is farmed for the most part by small proprietors who live in the villages under a communal system. There are no farm-houses and buildings and cottages scattered about in the fields as in England; but the occupiers live in villages, an arrangement which is about as uneconomical as one can imagine. Manure has to be carried long distances before it is spread, and the energy and time of the laborer are wasted in trudging to and from the land, which is cut up into little parcels. The system of cultivation is that of small holdings, perpetuated and increased by the compulsory division of property, the holding in general consisting of a strip of oats, a strip of wheat, a strip of alfalfa and a strip of roots, the holders having communal rights over open spaces. To the English farmer, who is accustomed to farm 400 to 500 acres, the system appears strange, but it is suited to the people, and makes them happy and contented.

The war descended upon these peasant cultivators in August, 1914, like an avalanche. The harvest, which is some weeks earlier than the English, had just been gathered in, when the sound of cannon heralded the invasion of the country. Then began the retreat to the gates of Paris, which had that city fallen and been destroyed, would have cul-

minated in a disaster which our Allies would hardly have survived. Few realized the danger our cause stood in on September 5th, 1914. No single town in the United Kingdom occupies the same position that Paris does in France, and General Joffre realized the gravity of the situation when he issued his famous order to the French Army "to stand firm or die."

German Methods of War.

The Germans did not do much damage to the country in their advance into France for the reason that they expected to hold it. The battle of the Marne, which drove them back in six days to the position which they now hold, filled them with anger, and they vented their spite on the country through which their retreat lay. That is why the departments of the Marne and Meuse suffered so cruelly. As they retired, the German army destroyed whenever they had time, every village and farm. They slaughtered or drove away the cattle; they broke the machinery; they devastated the land. The following statement taken from official lists of the French Government shows that about two-thirds of the cattle and sheep have been destroyed:

Description.	Marne		Meuse	
	No. 1913.	No. 1915.	No. 1913.	No. 1915.
Horses	51,500	28,580	46,650	20,201
Asses	840	800	190	80
Mules	100	56	50	22
Cattle	112,050	55,000	97,900	25,358
Sheep	254,050	97,800	76,890	39,916
Swine	46,280	14,065	60,410	20,000

In the districts that had been involved, but from which the enemy had retired, many of the villagers had returned, not to their homes, for those had been destroyed, but to temporary hutments, cellars and other shelters. These unfortunate people found almost everything which was required for husbandry lacking.

Foresight of the French Government.

The Government met the situation as far as possible by making advances to these peasants, so that they should have the means of cultivation. The agriculturists of France, being for the most part small shareholders, are largely dependent on credit banks for their financial requirements, and these were in danger of breaking down during the war. If they had done so a catastrophe would have befallen agriculture which would have been far-reaching and of long duration. The Government, as early as August, 1914, foresaw this, and came to the assistance of the banks. The State made advances to the Caisses Regionales de Credit Agricole, which in their turn advanced money to the co-operative societies, especially for the payment of labor, the purchase of draught animals and of other agricultural requirements. Later on, advances were also made for the purchase of manure and seeds.

Agriculture in Serbia.

In Serbia, agriculture is of the most oriental and primitive description, and it would be obviously useless to send out heavy machinery to that mountainous country. Not only would the natives not understand it, but the small oxen, which are used for draught purposes, would not be able to move it.

Trade Alliance After the War.

There is another point to consider. After this war we shall be engaged with our Allies in a great economic contest against the Central Powers, and the prizes will be won by whichever side is able to recuperate most quickly when the fighting is over. There is talk of a great trade alliance with our Allies, and therefore, in helping these devastated countries we are helping the great common cause. The basis of the prosperity of France, Serbia, Poland and Belgium is agriculture and to meet their needs the Agricultural Relief of Allies Committee will send out live stock, seeds and machinery. Every pedigree animal that we are able to give, every sack of seed we are able to distribute and every farm implement we are able to send is a most practical means of assisting to defeat the common enemy, and in making these gifts we remember with gratitude the sacrifices which the people of France, Belgium, Poland and Serbia are making by reason of the invasion of their territory.

Rural France and Peasant Proprietorship.

The next speaker was Mr. Rowland E. Prothers,

M.V.O., M.P., who is known as a leading authority on agriculture, both past and present, and who is agent for the agricultural estates of the Duke of Bedford. In moving a vote of thanks for the paper read by Mr. Adeane, Mr. Prothers said that for a good many years he had wandered on foot in nearly every part of rural France even to its most remote villages, and he would say that it was not in the gay cosmopolitan Paris, and it was not in French newspapers or French novel that they could best study the character of their national ally. France was still, in the main, an agricultural country, and it was in the rural districts that the heart of the nation beat most strongly and most soundly, and it was there that some of the very finest qualities of the nation were trained and disciplined. He thought a good many Englishmen were surprised, not at the dash of the French soldier—that they were prepared for—but at his doggedness, and his power of "sticking it." Roughly speaking two-thirds of the cultivable area of France is owned and tilled by men in estates of 15 acres and under, and 39 per cent by men whose estates are between 15 acres and 125 acres. But, and this was really a significant fact, the great wheat-growing districts, and the great cattle-breeding districts of France were cultivated in large farms as they were in England. Generally speaking, they would find that small owners succeeded wherever population was dense and labor dear and markets good for dairy produce, garden stuff and poultry, and where manufactories were abundant. That last condition might strike some English ears as curious. The meaning of it was that in France many manufactories were carried on in quite country districts, and the factories were manned by artisans who were themselves peasant proprietors supplementing their wages with the produce of their fields. Champagne was a country of small peasant proprietors, and to all appearance it did not fulfil one of the conditions just laid down. What it had got was an enormous amount of common pasture, which was held together with the small arable ownership; that was the secret of the small owner in Champagne holding his own, and they could not, even before the war, call his condition prosperity. He did hold his own, but he did it by unremitting labor.

Mr. Samuel Kidner, a well known farmer and stock-breeder of Somerset, who had visited France as one of the Committee, seconded the vote of thanks and referred to the differences between the agricultural conditions of France and England. He often thought what would happen if they tried to imitate the peasant proprietors of France and other places. When he had seen the Breton peasant come over to England with his cargo of onions, take them round to their villages, live on about 2d. or 3d. a day, and take back practically the whole of the money he had made back to France he wondered what their English workmen would do under similar conditions if they went to France.

Scenes in Rural France.

Mr. Percy Hurd then showed a series of lantern slides illustrating parts of the devastated districts of France and Belgium. In the course of his explanatory remarks he said that wherever they went prefects, sub-prefects, mayors and peasant folk expressed the greatest gratitude for the ready help from England. It was especially the moral support that they valued, although, of course, the practical gifts were of the utmost service to them at a critical moment. Slides were shown of a pen of Southdown rams which the King had presented from the Sandringham estate and the peasant homes that they had found in the communes of Thieblemont, Villers Aux Vents and elsewhere. Their ex-president (Mr. Kidner) was the hero of the day when they visited the particular ram shown. The farmer not being used to pedigree stock was tugging at the beast with a cord round its neck, and the ram very much resented the treatment. A little boy begged them to be careful. "This ram," he said, "is a dangerous beast; he will run right at you." But Mr. Kidner walked forward with that courage which distinguished him and said: "Leave him to me." The ram was tugging and trying to get at us, but the expert put his hand underneath its chin, and made it as quiet as a little lamb.

Then we get a scene that meets the eye all through the country. This was the grave of a French officer, and they saw his children beside it. In contrast they had the picture of a German grave. They saw the respect shown to the body of the enemy. As they went through the villages they would find all the signs of German ravage and outrage; yet directly they left the village in the country owned and tilled by the people who had been so sorely dealt with, they found the grave of the German (Continued on page 17.)