

machinery are used where wages are high than where they are low, and this points to a conclusion that low wages may mean cheaper labour. When the interests of the whole group of employers are considered over more than one generation, however, the advantages of low wages tend to disappear. Should the rates of pay not be sufficient to induce the most intelligent and efficient of the workers to remain on the land, the standard of efficiency of the labourer declines, and labour becomes dearer, even at the standard rates of wages. Since 1876 this effect has been felt in Oxfordshire. Complaints, at first sporadic, then more general, have arisen that it was impossible to obtain milkers and men for skilled work. Further evidence on this point is provided by the census. Of the number of agricultural labourers, including all classes, 8.5 per cent. are sixty-five years of age, or over, in Oxfordshire, while in Durham the proportion is 4.2 and in Lancashire 4.3. The proportion for England and Wales is 7.4 per cent. Also when wages are very low they do not represent the total charge of the cost of labour on the farm. Indirect charges, especially in the form of poor rates, are increased. Oxfordshire is one of the agricultural counties in which the rates of paupers to population is over 30 per 1,000. In 1909, Norfolk had the highest rate with 38.5 per 1,000, and Oxfordshire came sixth on the list with 33.3 per 1,000. However, as the cost of maintaining paupers which are to some extent created by a system of low wages is not entirely borne by the agricultural industry, this indirect charge may not be equal to the charge which would be imposed by a wage adequate to provide a complete life-maintenance for the labourer. The farmer whose rate of wages is not sufficient to induce the best labourer to stay upon the land imperils the future effective power of the State in the production of food, which may prove to be one of its most vulnerable points. But the interest of the State is affected before a low rate of wages has been in existence long enough seriously to influence the supply of labour. The future of the State lies with its children. One of its first concerns is that these shall be