

of each kind of crop is struck in each district by first class judges, called together to give a verdict upon them like a jury. Mr. Maxwell said:—

Since I was Secretary to the Highland Society, I have been in communication with no fewer than four Presidents of the Board of Trade, all differing in their political views, but all agreeing that information in reference to agricultural matters was of great importance to the public, and to the farmer, their only point of difficulty being how these statistics are to be got at. It is now two or three years since Mr. Labouchere first applied to the Highland Society for a statement of their views, and a plan of this inquiry. That plan was prepared, went into the hands of Mr. Henley, the President of the Board of Trade under Lord Derby. It met with his approval, and afterwards came before his successor in office, Mr. Cardwell, under whose sanction, as you are all aware, an experimental trial was instituted last year in three of our Scotch counties, and in two English counties. The results of that experimental trial, owing to the active assistance and co-operation of the tenant farmers in these three counties, were so satisfactory that Government found itself in a position to extend the inquiry to the whole of Scotland; and I think it is honourable to you, as a class, that the example which your brethren in these three counties set has enabled—in fact, has induced Government to place Scotland in the van in this matter. Government has thought proper in extending this inquiry over Scotland, again to employ the Highland Society, and again to ask for the assistance of the farmers; and we have every reason to believe, when we look to the assistance obtained from the farmers last year, and the results of the meeting held this year, that the co-operation which Government seeks at your hands will not be withheld. The plan of this inquiry, as recommended by the Highland Society for the adoption of Government, is characterised by certain distinguishing features. In the first place, we took the liberty of strongly advising Government not to make this matter compulsory—not to come down upon the farmer, through any central board, or by any act of Parliament, extracting by main force that information which Government seeks. We recommended Government to try, in the first place, the voluntary system, and to try to work that system by means of the farmers themselves, in the manner adopted last year. In the next place, we insisted as emphatically as we could on the importance of stripping this inquiry of everything of an inquisitorial character, and at the same time of publishing the results in such a shape as to make it totally impossible for any party to extract from the published returns the particulars applicable to any one farm or farmer. It will be for you to say, when I describe the manner in which we conduct the inquiry, whether we have suc-

ceeded in giving effect to these features. We thought them necessary, and I think we have succeeded in providing for these characteristics, by the machinery we employ, which I shall now explain. In the first place, I am now engaged in framing a list of the whole of the farmers of Scotland. I was startled, when I last looked at that list, to find that there are 48,000 names upon it. With each of these farmers I have to communicate, and I hope that next month every farmer in Scotland paying £10 a year of rent will receive a schedule with a letter from my office, containing all the the questions to be put to the farmer. What are these questions? We do not ask the farmer to tell us what crops he raises, how much of wheat, of oats, or of potatoes. We do not ask any one for information that would lead us to discover the amount of crops raised on any particular farm. We only ask him to tell us that which every neighbour knows—namely, how many acres he has under cultivation. The return is divided into two heads, crop and stock; and with reference to the crops, we simply ask how many acres the farmer has under cultivation, and how these are subdivided into the different crops? And as that is all we ask, I think I may assure you that we do not ask anything that any man has any great interest in concealing. And I beg you to remember that I do not publish your lists. They are confidential between you and me. Last year the schedules were sent to farmers in certain districts, who sent them to their neighbours, and after they were filled up, sent them back to me. That was found objectionable, as the farmer did not like his schedule to be submitted to his neighbour, especially the stock schedule, however respectable that neighbour might be. But this year the schedules go from me direct to the farmer, who fills them up and sends them back directly to me, so that no man can be the wiser for what he communicates to me. For example, I divide the county of Fife into three districts—one of these is the Cupar district, with ten parishes in it. Every farmer tells me how many acres he has under cultivation, and how many are under each kind of crop. I add them all up as they come in, and after harvest I am in a condition to tell Government that the whole of the farmers in that district have a certain quantity—say a thousand acres under cultivation, of which so much is under wheat, and so much under the other kinds of grain—so that all that Government or the public knows is not what a farmer has in this district, but what the whole district has of any particular crop. You will see, therefore, that the questions I put to you are not inquisitorial, and the way I put the answers cannot divulge anything; and the best proof of that is, that the returns for last year have been before the public eight months, and I defy any man to extract from these nuclei of intelligence in reference to any par-

ticular man. After alluding to the importance of giving to every farmer, early after harvest, correct information as to the state of the crops throughout the country, Mr. Maxwell proceeded to explain more particularly the manner in which he collected the required information, by stating that in each district they had a committee composed of one practical farmer from each parish in the district, each committee having an enumerator or convener—the enumerator for the Cupar district being the Secretary of the Fife Agricultural Society (Mr. Dingwall, of Ramornie), whose services he had secured in that capacity. These members of committee would in a short time receive their instructions, their duty being to make their own observations as to the state of the crops in their respective parishes, ask the opinions of their neighbours, and after some experiments are made on the barn floor, to compare notes, and make up their minds as to what they consider shall be put down for the Cupar district as the fair average produce of bushels per acre of the various crops, which average would be sent to the office of the Highland Society by the enumerator. Thus, continued Mr. Maxwell, if it is reported to me that the average of a particular kind of grain is thirty bushels per acre in this district, then I am enabled, from the information I have already received as to the total number of acres under cultivation in the district, to return the number of bushels for the district. And when this is done for every district by experienced farmers, I have no doubt it will come very near the mark, and will tend to relieve you from the speculators of the country. As to the stock, we require to be a little more inquisitorial there, simply because acreage will not give us any criterion for stock. A number of sheep farmers were at first unwilling to tell the number of sheep on their farms; but when it was explained to them that it was not the stock of their farm, or their parish, but of a large district comprising a number of parishes, they found they were as safe as the grain farmer was, and I am proud to say that in the sheep districts we were in last year not a single farmer refused the information. I have just come from Argyleshire, which is a difficult county to work. There was an opposition there, but it fell to the ground. I have met men strongly opposed to the whole thing, not understanding what was to be done, and not being convinced that any practical good would be effected by the inquiry, but having always received a fair hearing, the result has in every case been a hearty vote of approval, and a promise of support and co-operation.

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