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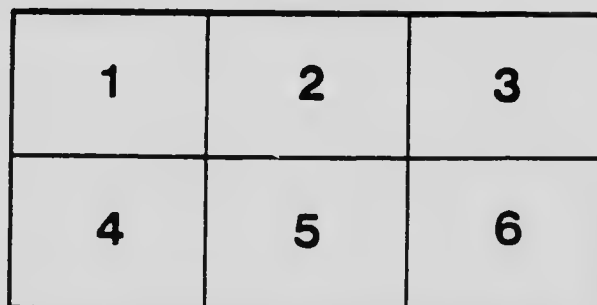
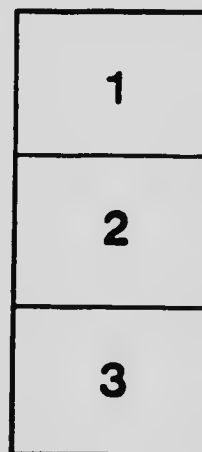
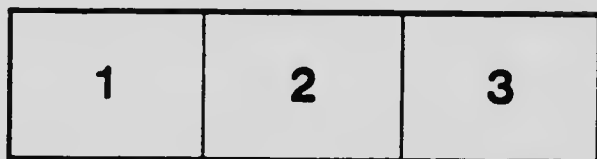
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FOOD SUPPLIES IN WAR TIME.

FOR many years the British peop. have been warned by innumerable writers that in the event of war with a naval Power they ran the risk of famine and even of starvation by reason of the interruption of their overseas supplies of food. Only in July last one of our most popular novelists, in a vivid story, depicted the abject surrender of Great Britain to a small State after a war of about five weeks in consequence of the attacks of eight submarines upon vessels bringing food to our shores. Many people indeed were fully convinced that any interference with our commerce, even if it should be for only a few weeks, would reduce the whole population to dire straits.

It is quite true that we depend upon other countries for large supplies of food, and that the regularity of these supplies maintains prices at a moderate and uniform level in our markets. The precise extent of our purchases of imported food is not very readily stated. It is sufficient, as an instance of the difficulty, to cite the fact that although the whole of the £29,000,000 which we spent last year on corn and meal, other than wheat and flour, from abroad is commonly classed as food (as in a sense it is), when we are talking of food for direct human consumption it is clear that only a fraction of such grain as barley, oats, and maize should be regarded as foodstuffs in the ordinary acceptation of the term. In round figures it may be reckoned that about £200,000,000 per annum represents the amount

spent on imported foodstuffs (excluding beverages) of all kinds which are consumed by man. If tea, coffee, and cocoa be added the total would be rather more than £220,000,000, being an average of about £4 15s. per head of the population.

The sources of supply are various and widely distributed. In 1913 they ranked roughly in order of value of shipments of foodstuffs to the United Kingdom as follows: United States, Argentina, Denmark, Canada, India, Australia, Russia, Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Austria-Hungary, France, Spain, Ceylon. From Germany and Austria-Hungary our receipts were nearly all sugar, and from Ceylon, tea. Wheat came principally from the United States, Canada, India, Argentina, Australia, and Russia; meat (beef and mutton) from Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, and Uruguay; bacon, pork, and hams from the United States, Denmark, Netherlands, and Canada; rice from India; sugar from Germany, Austria, Cuba, Netherlands, and Belgium; butter and margarine from Denmark, Netherlands, Russia, Australia, Sweden, France, and New Zealand; cheese from Canada, New Zealand, and Netherlands; fruit from Spain, United States, France, Canada, Canary Islands, Costa Rica, Columbia; tea from India, Ceylon, Java, and China; cocoa from British West Africa, British West Indies, Netherlands, Brazil, and Switzerland; coffee from Brazil, Costa Rica, Columbia, Guatemala, India, and Mexico. This catalogue shows only very superficially the extent of the area from whence the greater part of our supplies come; smaller quantities are sent from many other countries. There is indeed scarcely any part of the world which does not in some degree contribute to the omnivorous appetite of John Bull. It is hardly necessary to observe

that under normal circumstances in the multitude of competitors there is safety for the customer, and that even under abnormal circumstances there is a great advantage to the buyer that so many are in the habit of selling to him and may be presumed to be anxious to continue to do so.

One result of this world-wide competition to provide John Bull with the necessaries and luxuries of life is to make him very exigent in his demands. He is not content with a sufficient supply ; it must be of the kind which suits him. To take one of the commonest articles—not so very long ago he liked nothing but China tea, now on the whole he insists on having Indian or Ceylon tea. He is a creature of habit, and grumbles extremely if he is forced against his will to change it even to the extent of drinking another kind of tea. He has been in the past probably the most pampered person in the world in his choice of food, and a little less diversity of selection for a time would do him no harm.

From the list of countries given above it will be noticed that we got no food supplies of importance from our enemies except sugar, for the maintenance of the supply of which the Government, as is well known, have made special arrangements. It may be added that we imported in 1913 from Germany potatoes to the value of £422,000, cocoa to the value of £246,000, and eggs to the value of £216,000. From Austria-Hungary we also received eggs to the value of £376,000. These amounts are an insignificant fraction of our total supplies. Not to overlook our latest enemy, it may be mentioned that we paid the Turk £305,000 last year for fruit.

It may be said therefore that the stoppage of trade with enemy countries does not in itself affect our normal supplies of food (with the exception of sugar) to any

appreciable degree, as long as other purveyors for our markets continue to send their goods as before.

The public are not now justified in scoffing at 'alarmists'. Had some at least of the warnings given by sober and level-headed persons during the past ten years received more general attention, the nation might have been better prepared to meet the day of its supreme trial, and more ready to fight the great fight for existence in which it is now engaged. Where, however, so much that 'alarmists' have said has proved—at any rate as regards the designs and preparations of Germany—to be justified, it may be permissible to point out that the effect of the outbreak of the war on our food supplies has been far less than was confidently predicted by them. Some of the witnesses before the Royal Commission on Food Supplies stated that, assuming that our Navy was undefeated, the rise in the price of food here would still be enormous. The Royal Commissioners—who included the Prince of Wales, now His Majesty the King—themselves in their well-considered and circumspect Report summed up thus :

We do not, therefore, apprehend that any situation is likely to arise in which there would be risk of the actual starvation of our population into submission. But we do regard with much concern the effect of war upon prices and especially therefore on the condition of the poorer classes ; for they will be the first to feel the pinch and it is on them that the strain of increased prices would chiefly fall. We do not, however, look with any great alarm on the effect of war upon prices, so far as concerns what we have referred to as the economic rise in prices, i. e. the increase likely to be produced by the enhanced cost of transport and insurance in time of war. . . . At the same time it seems to us that it would be unwise to disregard the dangers which might accrue from what we have

described as the 'panic' rise of prices of staple articles of food, which might take place in the excitement sure to be caused by the outbreak of a great maritime war. No doubt the rapid spread of accurate information would tend to prevent any considerable duration of a rise due solely to panic, and we may assume that the greater the rise of prices the greater would be the exertions to pour in supplies. But it can hardly be doubted that much suffering would be caused if the rise in prices was sudden in its inception and more especially if it were to continue over any lengthened period of time; and we cannot disregard the possibility that it might result in danger to calmness and self-possession, just when those qualities would be of greatest importance.

The effect on overseas supplies during the first three months—when a number of hostile commerce-raiders were at large and succeeded in doing a considerable amount of injury to our shipping—may best be shown statistically. In the following table the quantities of various kinds of foodstuffs reaching these shores during the three months August–October, 1914, are shown alongside the quantities received in the corresponding months of 1913 :

	<i>Aug.-Oct.</i> 1914.	<i>Aug.-Oct.</i> 1913.	<i>Increase.</i>	<i>Decrease.</i>
	<i>cwt.</i>	<i>cwt.</i>	<i>cwt.</i>	<i>cwt.</i>
Wheat and flour . . .	34,665,000	31,454,000	3,209,000	—
Rice	1,223,000	882,000	341,000	—
Beef	1,903,000	2,626,000	—	723,000
Mutton	784,000	1,115,000	—	331,000
Pigmeat	1,527,000	1,630,000	—	103,000
Butter and margarine	1,017,000	1,197,000	—	180,000
Cheese	783,000	734,000	49,000	—
Fruit (raw) and nuts	3,738,000	4,221,000	—	483,000
Tea	864,000	1,206,000	—	342,000
Coffee	113,000	114,000	—	1,000

The reduced imports of fruit and nuts may fairly be attributed, in some degree at least, to the great crops of fruit in this country which, in fact, resulted not only in a glut on the markets but in absolute waste, while there were special circumstances due to the war, but not directly to the action of the enemy, which accounted mainly for the substantial diminution of the meat supplies. But it is to be noted that in total bulk the imports of these primary articles of food were larger by 1,500,000 cwt. during three months of war than during the corresponding period of peace. Some petulant persons still ask—What is the Navy doing? This surely is a sufficient answer. Certainly the most optimist of pre-war prophets would not have ventured to predict that we should receive on the whole more food than usual from abroad during the first three months of warfare.

But, it will be truly said, there has nevertheless been a rise in the price of food, as of nearly all commodities. The rise has been to a comparatively slight extent directly due to the existence on the high seas of enemy cruisers and to the consequent risk of capture. After a short period of uncertainty the rate of insurance against this risk settled at about 2 per cent., which may be taken as the measure of the extent to which prices were affected by the existence of the hostile navies. Of greater effect on prices were the financial difficulties which for a time upset the delicate equilibrium of credit, and the dislocation of shipping arrangements in connexion with the transportation of troops with the consequent disturbance of the freight markets. Thus the freight on a ton of wheat from New York to Liverpool was quoted as 20s. 5d. on November 17 as compared with 8s. a year ago.

The Commission on Food Supply felt somewhat

nervous about the danger arising from a 'panic' rise of prices. There was a brief period at the outbreak of war when their anxiety seemed to be justified. Happily the nation as a whole kept its head, but among certain classes of the community there was a disgraceful rush for food. It was the worst episode of the war, and the lack of patriotism of those who took part in it might have caused serious national embarrassment had their example been widely followed. It is satisfactory to reflect that they had to pay for their selfish folly, and pleasing stories were told of shopkeepers being shamefacedly asked to take back, at reduced prices, the stores which had been purchased in a panic.

The retail prices of various commodities are affected by diverse conditions, and the rise which has occurred has differed in different localities—the difference being due not only to the ordinary causes, e.g. proximity to distributing centres, amount of active competition, rents, costs of distribution, &c., but also to some unusual causes, such as the concentration of troops and disturbance of railway facilities. The course of prices may, therefore, best be shown by the records of the wholesale markets, and I give a few figures, compiled from returns collected by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, showing the monthly averages of a few typical agricultural commodities in the form of 'index numbers', taking the month immediately prior to the outbreak of war as the base (100). Take first some figures of English live stock :

	<i>July.</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>
Fat cattle—Shorthorns	100	104	102	101
Fat sheep—Downs	100	106	103	103
Fat bacon pigs	100	111	114	114
Veal calves	100	103	97	97
Fowls	100	97	89	89
Ducks	100	95	87	89

Compare these with prices from the dead meat markets of home-grown and imported meat :

	<i>July.</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>
English beef	100	106	104	99
Irish beef	100	106	105	102
Argentine beef—frozen	100	142	147	144
Argentine beef—chilled	100	125	137	126
English mutton	100	105	101	99
Australian mutton	100	122	133	134
Irish bacon	100	122	121	110
Danish bacon	100	129	125	110

It is clear that, except in the case of pigs, the price of English live stock has been very little enhanced by the war, while poultry have fallen considerably in value. The independent course taken by prices of commodities which one would expect to be closely inter-related appears curious. The markets for Irish and Danish bacon are evidently sympathetic, and such difference as is shown may be regarded as due to the fact that the supply of the one had to cross the North Sea, and of the other the Irish Sea. Perhaps there is nothing which proves more conclusively the silent force of the Navy than the simple fact that our supplies of bacon and butter from Denmark have continued almost uninterruptedly from day to day since the war began. Six months ago probably every one would have accepted as an axiom that in the event of war with Germany our supplies of food across the North Sea, at any rate, would at once be seriously depleted, if not altogether stopped. Yet during more than three months our supplies from Denmark and Holland have on the whole been rather larger than usual.

The substantial rise in the price of meat from the Argentine and Australia may be attributed to a combination of causes. They have been especially subject to risk of capture, difficulties of finance and shipping have

been aggravated in their case, and in addition, there has been an exceptional demand which could not readily be met from any other source. The time has not yet come to write an account of the difficulties which arose in this trade, and of the steps taken to meet them, but it is permissible to express the hope and belief that the worst of them have been greatly reduced and will soon disappear entirely, though the effect of an unusual demand will, of course, continue.

Let us now look at the position of the staple foodstuffs from the vegetarian point of view, and for that purpose it will be sufficient to give wheat, flour, oats, oatmeal, and rice, taking in the case of wheat the prices of British and of the chief American grade, it being remembered that the ordinary loaf is made of a blend of flour in which imported wheat largely predominates :

	<i>July.</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>
British wheat	100	109	111	109
American wheat	100	113	121	116
Flour—' Town Households '	100	123	131	126
British oats	100	116	118	114
Scotch oatmeal	100	149	139	133
Rice—Java	100	115	120	119

I include oats as a foodstuff, as indeed they are, especially north of the Tweed, but the market for them is not in fact greatly affected by human consumption. The price of Canadian oats rose greatly (by about 50 per cent.).

One other set of figures may be added :

	<i>July.</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>
Irish butter	100	115	108	114
Danish butter	100	110	102	114
Cheddar cheese	100	112	111	112
English eggs	100	118	122	160

These articles always rise in price during these months, and as regards butter and cheese the increase shown is

about normal. Danish butter in September, indeed, had risen considerably less than usual. The rise in the price of eggs, large as it appears, is only about 12 per cent. more than usually occurs during this period of the year.

On the whole it may be said that the rise in food prices since the outbreak of war has not exceeded about 10 or 12 per cent., and that so far the much-dreaded 'war prices' have been little, if any, more than a variation which might well occur, by failure of crops or other natural calamity, in time of peace. It is difficult to make accurate comparisons with former periods owing to the lack of continuous records for the same commodities, except in the case of wheat. Of corn prices there is a consecutive and fairly consistent record since 1771.¹ During the Napoleonic Wars the average annual price of wheat rose (in 1812) to 126s. 6d. per quarter, although it is true that in Waterloo year it was no more than 65s. 7d. After 1805 our command of the sea was undisputed, but our dependence on overseas supplies was small. Since then we cannot be said to have engaged in any war which seriously affected our food supplies, but the price of wheat rose in 1854 to 72s. 5d., and in 1855 to 74s. 8d., notwithstanding an excellent home crop in the former year, in consequence largely of interference with shipments from the Baltic during the Crimean War. These prices were not then regarded as extraordinary, and twelve years later (in 1867) the average price was 64s. 5d. It was, indeed, only in 1883 that the period of cheap wheat which the present generation takes as a matter of course began, and it may be regarded as practically certain that never again in the lifetime of any person now living will the price of wheat be so low for any considerable period.

¹ *Agricultural Statistics* 1913, Part III (Cd. 7487).

The extension of the world's wheat area has been for many years proceeding more rapidly than the growth of the world's wheat-eating population. At the present time economic prophecy is especially rash, but, apart from the immediate effects of the present war, it may be predicted with some confidence that the demand for wheat in the future is likely to keep pace with increasing supplies, and that the coming generation will probably on the whole have to pay more for its bread than the present has done.

We have seen that so far, with our fleet keeping the seas open, our food supplies have been maintained, and that such increase in price as has occurred has been due in the main to other causes than actual shortage. But the nightmare which has prevented many good people from sleeping quietly in their beds has been the dread of a naval reverse. 'No one,' they say quite truly, 'can be certain of victory. When the great battle of the North Sea is fought we believe we shall win, but if we lose shall we not, for a time, also lose the command of the sea? We shall, of course, not give in, and our Navy in due time will recover, and in the end will be strong enough to vanquish the foe, but meanwhile he will for a time obtain command of the sea and will embrace the opportunity to stop our supplies and starve us into submission.' This sounds plausible, and no doubt it is commonly believed that a temporary stoppage of our supplies would bring us instantly to disaster. Conan Doyle thinks that five or six weeks would suffice, and Kipling expresses the same idea :

For the bread that you eat and the biscuits you nibble,
The sweets that you suck and the joints that you carve,
They are brought to you daily by all us Big Steamers,
And if any one hinders our coming you'll starve !

The notion that the British Isles can be beleaguered by any conceivable naval force so that no supplies can run the blockade is fantastic. I believe it is true to say that the annals of sea warfare contain no record of the blockade of any port so absolute that no ship got through. At any rate it is inconceivable that the long coast line of the British Isles, with its countless harbours and creeks, could be guarded so that many enterprising ships, stimulated by the certainty of big gains, would not succeed in landing supplies.

Let it be assumed, however, that an absolute blockade were possible, and that the British Isles could be as closely invested as was Paris in 1870-1, and for the same period, viz. about four and a half months. Let it be assumed also that the investment took place so suddenly and simultaneously that there was no chance to rush in supplies and that even ships on passage to the United Kingdom were all prevented from reaching our ports. Under these circumstances what would be our position, for how long could we live on the supplies of food in the country?

So far as bread is concerned there is at the present time sufficient wheat and flour in the country to supply the whole population, at its normal rate of consumption, for about four and a half months. It is true that at the end of that period we should have practically exhausted all the wheat in stock, except that reserved as seed for the next crop, which would only be drawn upon at the very last extremity. But if we had to live on our stocks, in this way, we should of course at once adopt measures to economize them. One simple and obvious expedient would be to make only 'standard' bread, i.e. bread made from flour which contains about 80 per cent. of the wheat-grain instead of only 68 or 70

per cent., as is the proportion in the flour ordinarily used. This would at once add about 10 per cent. to our wheat supplies, and the bread would be, from a nutriment point of view, more rather than less valuable.

Bread, however, can be made of other cereals than wheat. We have not in this country the alternative of rye, which furnishes the staple food of many millions of Europeans, but we have in stock at any given time nearly as much barley and more than as much oats as we have wheat. Barley bannocks and oatmeal cakes are not unknown in some parts of the country now, and they would go far, if the occasion required, to provide cereal food for the people. At least they would enable the supplies of wheat to be economized, and it may fairly be said that breadstuffs in one form or another could, if necessary, be found to supply the people for a twelvemonth. The total crops of the three chief cereals—wheat, barley, and oats—grown in this country supply a larger quantity of cereal food per head than is now eaten. We have taken no account of maize, which again is the staple breadstuff of millions of people, or of rice, of both of which there is always some stock in the country. It is therefore a very conservative statement to say that for a year there would be, if supplies were properly distributed, no reason why any one should go short of daily bread, even if nothing reached our shores. Of course if barley and oats were used for bread, live stock would go short and beer and whisky would be scarce, but the problem of live stock would to a large extent be solved by killing them and a deficiency of alcoholic beverages would have to be endured. It may be noted that we are self-supporting as regards potatoes. The average crop grown in the

United Kingdom is sufficient for our normal consumption, and although we import a certain quantity, largely from the Channel and Canary Islands, to enable us to forestall our own crop of early potatoes, the quantity is comparatively insignificant, and would be foregone without any serious deprivation.

Of meat we usually import about 36 per cent. of beef, about 42 per cent. of mutton, and about 46 per cent. of pigmeat (bacon, pork, &c.) consumed each year. The stocks in hand of these imported supplies at any time are not very large and would probably not last for more than a month under ordinary conditions. But in case of emergency there is, of course, the whole stock of the country to fall back upon. At the present time about 26 per cent. of the total cattle and about 37 per cent. of the total sheep in the United Kingdom are annually slaughtered. No doubt it would be wasteful to kill half-fattened or immature stock, but it is evident that, in the hypothetical state of siege, there would be no lack of meat for a very long period and no necessity to resort to horseflesh or other still stranger sources of meat supply.

It is clear, therefore, that for any such period as we are contemplating there would be no question of starvation, as there would be ample supplies of bread and meat. Nor would milk be lacking—so long as the cows were kept alive—for in this respect we are also self-supporting. Some kinds of fruit, such as bananas and oranges, would disappear from the markets, and onions would be somewhat scarce, but generally we should have a sufficiency of fruit and green vegetables, the latter especially being almost entirely home-produced.

It is not suggested that if the British Isles were beleaguered for four or five months there would not be

much discomfort. The choice of food would be much restricted and dinner menus at the restaurants would present a very unusual aspect. Sugar and all the comestibles of which it is an ingredient would be scarce, and tea, coffee, and cocoa would become probably as expensive as champagne. All food supplies would probably be taken over by the Government and all those persons who 'live to eat' would be extremely unhappy. But I think I have shown that to speak of 'starvation' is a gross exaggeration, and that the country contains ample supplies of the necessaries of life to enable the whole population to exist on a fairly liberal diet for a considerable period. It may be noted also that I have taken no account of what may be termed the 'invisible' supplies of such food-animals as rabbits, game, fish, &c., which in the aggregate would provide a substantial addition to the siege dietary.

The fact is that the nation has been too long obsessed by the wheat question. It is quite true that we produce in ordinary years only about one-fifth of our requirements of wheat. But man does not live by bread alone, nor is bread necessarily made of wheat. The supplies of possible foodstuffs produced are very large. Under ordinary circumstances, as I have shown elsewhere,¹ we produce not one-fifth but about one-half of our daily food, while in case of necessity we have resources by which our ordinary dietary can be sufficiently supplemented for many months. That a stoppage of our overseas supplies for even a brief period would cause considerable discomfort is obvious, but in time of war the people have no right to expect comfort or to complain of discomfort. Whatever inconvenience or even hardship

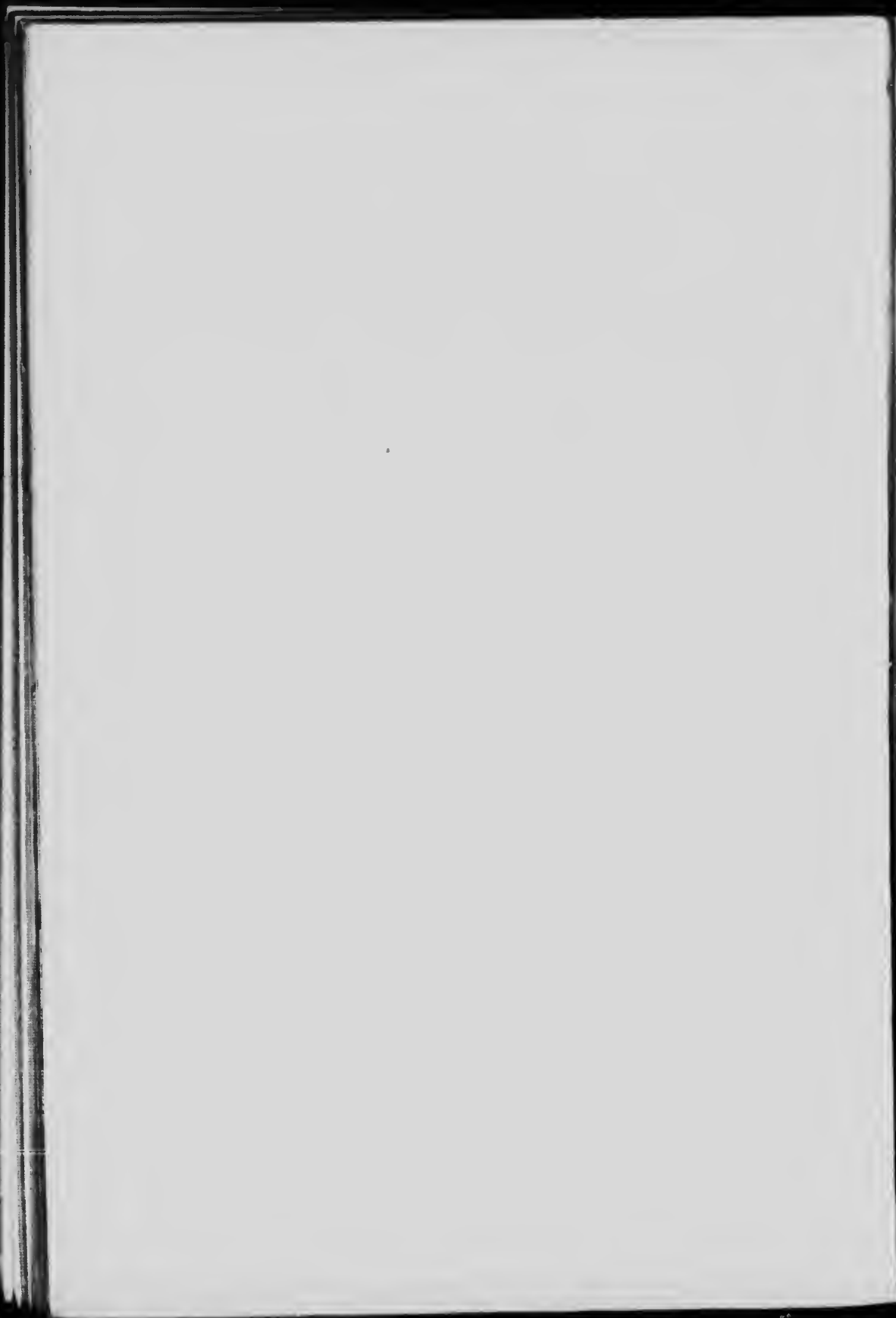
¹ *An Agricultural Faggot*, P. S. King & Son, 1913.

might be caused, it is not true to say that if supplies of food from abroad are interrupted we necessarily starve. Just as if a hostile army landed we should fight for a long time before we admitted defeat, so if our shores were blockaded we could live for a long time before we submitted through hunger.

One word as to those who supply our home produce. For over thirty years I have been engaged in the service of British Agriculture, and during that time, as there are many records to prove, I have been a consistent believer in the capabilities and character of the British farmer. He has been, as I think and have often said, much maligned in the past. But he has never in my experience been so much maligned as he has been, in some quarters, during this time of national stress. The fate of the Empire, the future of the race, the lives and liberties of ourselves and our children are at stake, and it has been ignobly suggested that farmers think not of the nation's needs but only of their own pockets. I refuse to credit so gross a charge. The occupation of land, no less than its ownership, is a trust. Dr. Kelly¹ said of the Irish farmers: 'If they show a selfish policy in trying to use the land for their own benefit only, and to the detriment of national or neighbourly interest, or of the wider interests of humanity, then it would be the duty of the nation to step in and deprive them of that land, and to create some new system by which the land could be used for the benefit of the nation.' Farmers, in my belief, will prove, in this crisis, not unworthy to be countrymen of those who are heroically defending British homes and hearths on the fields of Flanders. They will do their duty by working their utmost—often

¹ *The War and Ireland's Food Supply*, by the Most Rev. Dr. Kelly.

under grave difficulties—to maintain and if possible increase the produce of their farms, not because it is (as in fact it will be) profitable to do so, but because it is the desire, no less than the duty, of every Briton, each in his own sphere, to do his part to help his country in the time of her direst need.



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