

BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS. No. 6

---

# Oxford and the Rural Problem

BY

THE RIGHT HON. SIR HORACE PLUNKETT

P.C., F.R.S., D.C.L.

BEING THE FIRST

SIDNEY BALL MEMORIAL LECTURE

DECEMBER 1, 1920

HUMPHREY MILFORD

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK

TORONTO MELBOURNE CAPE TOWN BOMBAY

1921

*Price One Shilling*

## BARNETT HOUSE, OXFORD

### Visitor:

THE RIGHT HON. VISCOUNT BRYCE, O.M.

### Honorary Associates:

Mrs. Jane Ashall	THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.
Mrs. Sydney Ball	THE RIGHT HON. VISCOUNT MILNER.
Mrs. S. A. Barnett, C.B.E.	THE RIGHT HON. SIR HORACE PLUNKETT.
Mr. George Casbutt	THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.
THE RIGHT HON. H. A. L. FISHER.	THE MOST REV. THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.
THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP GOAT.	
Sir Henry Hadow	
THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.	

### President of the Association:

THE MASTER OF BALLIOL.

### Vice-Presidents:

THE FACTORY OF ORIEL.	Mrs. S. A. BARNETT, C.B.E.
THE WARDEN OF WADHAM.	PROFESSOR W. G. S. ADAMS.

### Hon. Secretaries:

THE REV. DR. A. J. CARLILE.  
MISS A. W. THACKERAY.

### Hon. Treasurer:

MISS M. VENABLE.

### Hon. Auditors:

Messrs. FRICK, WATERHOUSE & Co., 3 Frederick's Place, Old Jewry, E.C. 2.

### Bankers:

BANCLAY'S BANK, LTD., 93 High Street, Oxford.

### COUNCIL:

PROFESSOR W. G. S. ADAMS.	Mr. R. V. LENNARD.
THE WARDEN OF ALL SOULS.	Mr. A. D. LINDSAY.
Mrs. THE Hon. J. J. Astor.	THE FACTORY OF ORIEL.
THE MASTER OF BALLIOL.	Mr. C. S. OSWIN.
Mrs. S. A. BARNETT, C.B.E.	Mr. C. G. REYNOLD.
Miss C. V. BOWLES.	Miss A. M. A. H. ROGERS.
THE REV. DR. A. J. CARLILE.	Mr. W. D. ROSS.
Mr. E. S. CLAYTON.	Mr. J. L. STOKES.
Mr. E. St. J. CASSELL.	Miss A. W. THACKERAY.
PROFESSOR F. Y. EDGECROFT.	THE WARDEN OF TOWNHALL.
PROFESSOR W. M. GREGG.	Miss M. VENABLE.
THE REV. DR. W. W. JACKSON.	THE WARDEN OF WADHAM.

### Secretary:

Mrs. G. E. HADON.

### Librarian:

Miss MACKINTOSH.

BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS. No. 6

# Oxford and the Rural Problem

BY

THE RIGHT HON. SIR HORACE PLUNKETT

P.C., F.R.S., D.C.L.

BEING THE FIRST

SIDNEY BALL MEMORIAL LECTURE

DECEMBER 1, 1920

HUMPHREY MILFORD

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK  
TORONTO MELBOURNE CAPE TOWN BOMBAY

1921

## OXFORD AND THE RURAL PROBLEM

I WAS one of those who, for too short a time, had the inspiring friendship of Sidney Ball. We were brought together by his interest in my Irish work, and I valued his sympathy with my efforts the more because his own extra-academic work was on the urban side of things. From my reading of his heart and mind I think I can interpret the wishes of those in charge of the memorial lectures I have the honour to inaugurate to-day. Their aim will be the promotion of an intimate and mutually helpful relationship between the thought of the University Sidney Ball adorned and the working life of the community he lived to serve.

With this aim in mind I have chosen for my subject a national problem of the first importance which, after long and dangerous neglect, has been made clamant for solution by the greatest war in history. I shall present it as it appears to those who are seeking to build up rural life from within and need the help of those who are engaged in the systematic, scientific study of the problem at Oxford. As the practical experience from which I draw will be chiefly Irish and I am about to assign the leadership of thought upon the problem to this University, I must anticipate a natural suspicion that I thus treat the subject because I am an Oxford man whose work lies in Ireland and am speaking to an Oxford audience. The impression would be confirmed by the circumstances of my life. If I may slightly change a well-known couplet of Dryden—

‘Twas Athens did my ruder years engage,  
But Thebes has chosen all my riper age.’

Happily I can assure you that both Oxford and Ireland come into the picture because they belong there. Some time before I was selected to address you I felt it my duty to take thought and make provision for the carrying on of my life's work when,

in the course of nature, my own part in it weakened and finally ceased. In consultation, therefore, with Professor Adams, who had worked with me for some years in Ireland, I founded and endowed a Trust for the promotion of rural development.

The Trust Deed gives to the Trustees power to co-operate with any institution 'within the British Empire or the United States of America' in the furtherance of the objects of the Trust. It specifically mentions the Plunkett House at Dublin and, at Oxford, the School of Rural Economy, the Institute for Research in Agricultural Economics and Barnett House, where Mr. Ashby has already broken ground for my Trustees with two admirable courses of lectures on Rural Sociology.

You will now understand my treatment of the subject. It will begin with a sketch, in the broadest outline, of the rural problem as I see it. I shall indicate the main causes and consequences of its neglect in order to justify the national importance I claim for it, and to establish the urgency of its solution. Next I shall tell the story of Ireland in the throes of rural neglect. It will be seen how some thirty years ago the economic and social conditions of that country were recognized as determining the treatment which I shall submit is almost wholly applicable to the wider problem under review. I shall show that in the working out of the Irish scheme of rural regeneration certain definite principles emerged and were proved. I shall note in passing that the same general principles have been accepted by workers upon the rural problem in the western hemisphere, while not a few recent developments of the later agricultural policy of England drew their inspiration from the same sources. I shall turn lastly to the concern of the Universities for the rural problem, and more particularly to the development of study and redirection of thought at Oxford through which it seems to me this University can provide the leadership now urgently needed by workers upon the problem everywhere.

It is not necessary to attempt a scientific definition of the rural problem, which we are not discussing in its entirety, but only in those of its aspects which must be considered in relation to work here. The main condition to be dealt with is the

neglect of the countryside by the statesmen, economists, publicists; by the churches and the social workers, and until recently by the Universities not only of England but of all countries whose national economics are influenced by English thought. The problem does not arise elsewhere. The Central Empires and France, probably for military reasons, have not neglected the welfare of the rural population, which supplied the best fighters as well as the most important munition of war-food. Such countries as Belgium, Holland and Denmark have done well by the farmer. I could find no other reason than that they had too much sense to neglect him, but Mr. Ashby tells me that agriculture is there given its proper place through an intense patriotism intelligently directed. The Argentine Republic and other South American countries are so predominantly agricultural that the farmer controls the politician. The United States, however, and the other overseas Dominions ought to be governed by their rural populations; but these countries are under the obsession of British industrialism, the *causa causans* of the rural problem.

The policy of rural neglect was incidental to the building up of British commercial and industrial supremacy. Great Britain's insular position and the fact that she was a sea and not a land power led directly to this fatal policy, which was inaugurated during the industrial revolution. In the formative years of the industrial era England was immune from the interference of militarism with her industrial life. On the other hand she had in her sea-control every inducement and opportunity to make commercial expansion abroad keep pace with industrial development at home. With the opening up of vast tracts of virgin soil in America, and with the rapid growth of the merchant marine, food could be more easily and more profitably brought in from the outside and paid for by the products of factories than it could be grown at home. This simple fact is the basis of the British economic policy with its subordination to urban interests.

Historians and economists may question this account of the origin of the rural neglect which now has to be repaired, and there may be even more doubt as to its consequences, upon which

I must say a word. About fifteen years ago there began in the United States an awakening of the national conscience at the reckless exploitation of the national resources of that land of promise for the enrichment of the financiers of the present generation to the utter disregard of future generations. President Roosevelt launched his famous Conservation policy which was intended to check the waste. Thought had not gone far upon the problem when the late railway king—James J. Hill—delivered a remarkable lecture to a body of farmers in Minnesota. He laid particular stress upon the exhaustion of the fertility of the soil, but he drew an interesting distinction between this form of wastage, which admitted of replacement, and the using up of mineral resources, which was much more serious than was generally appreciated and which was irreparable. Among the effects of this pronouncement was the supplementing by President Roosevelt of his Conservation policy by his Country-life policy, and some of those in his confidence called his attention to work being done in Ireland upon its rural problem. He asked me to confer with him on this subject, and I was glad to find that our ideas upon it were identical. We agreed that, quite apart from the more obvious reasons for helping the farmer which appealed to him quite as much as they did to me, even looking at the matter from the purely urban—still more from the broadest national—point of view, rural neglect was fraught with the gravest economic, social and political consequences. Let me indicate these in the fewest possible words.

The economic reasons relate to the interdependence of town and country, of which two aspects may be mentioned; first, the greater volume of internal than foreign commerce, and second, the essential importance of rural prosperity as a factor in financial stability—the most striking illustration being the way in which the thrift and industry of the French peasantry seem to save France from financial crises which many people think would otherwise be as frequent as political upheavals.

In our discussions of the social aspects, chief stress was given to the dependence of the modern city for its physical well-being upon the constant influx of fresh blood from the country.

Our most interesting discussions were upon the political value of the rustic mind in a modern democracy. If you compare the mentality of the town artisan and the country labourer, it is by no means certain that the quicker intelligence of the one is really more serviceable to the State than the slow reasoning of the other. Admitting that democracy requires for success a higher level of intelligence and character in the mass of the people than other forms of government, and that the townsman has a wider theoretical knowledge than the countryman of the main processes by which the community lives, is not the latter's knowledge, which is quite as important as intelligence, more fundamental—nearer, I mean, to the root of things? Has not the division of labour, the triumph of 'get-rich-quick' industrialism, limited the appreciation of the town worker for the factors other than his own labour to which the creation of great fortunes around him is due? And is not the countryman's first-hand knowledge of all the processes by which the chief wealth of the country is created a natural corrective of wild revolutionary schemes for scrapping the whole economic and social system? Is it not as true now as when Aristotle said it, that 'where husbandmen and men of small fortune predominate government will be guided by law'? We must admit, however, that none of these considerations have led to the belated recognition by British statesmen that the English industrial policy had neglected the rural side of our civilization, and that if only a way could be found the neglect should be immediately repaired.

Following the plan I have adopted we must now go back thirty years and trace the practical work done upon the rural problem of Ireland from its first inception until it became an object lesson in rural reconstruction for the English-speaking world. If I can satisfy you that the facts justify giving to my country such a position, there are several advantages in selecting it for this purpose. In the first place the sea boundary enables us to isolate the problem; the Irish land reforms of the last fifty years were radical and, from the British point of view, in advance of the times; and in Ireland both State assistance and organized voluntary effort have, now for three decades, played a

part in rural progress beyond, as I well remember, the most sanguine expectations of our pioneers.

The story opens in the year 1889. The agrarian agitation was dying down and it became vitally important to release the economic energies it had repressed. The first thing was to direct the energies of the rural population now no longer needed for the struggle for obtaining the land to the no less important task of learning how to use it. Here at once we are faced with what was generally regarded as an insuperable difficulty. Parnell was at the height of his power, which was based upon his victory over the landlords. I happen to know that he had enlightened views upon agricultural economics; but he soon passed, and his followers took the view that all movements which were calculated to turn the attention of the people away from their further efforts in Parliament should be discountenanced. I dare say they had little choice. In a backward agricultural community the political machine is generally run not by the farming majority but by the trading minority. I suppose few here remember what a political bombshell the very word co-operation was in England in those days. The new movement was co-operation and nothing else. We camouflaged it by the term 'organized self-help', but it was not long before the attack upon the divine right of middle profits was scented. The control of the political machine in advanced industrial communities by combines and trusts was never comparable to the influence upon Irish politics of the village traders. It is generally known how 'Big Business' has aroused the ire of progressive leaders in American politics, but the way in which Little Business retarded rural progress in Ireland for a quarter of a century has escaped notice. Owing to this formidable difficulty it was not practicable to commence the agricultural co-operative movement in the easiest and surest way—that is, by demonstrating the immense advantage, both in quality and price, to be gained by the joint purchase of agricultural requirements. In order to evade the trade opposition, farmers had to be organized in the first instance for the difficult and risky enterprise of co-operative dairying. In the light of these experiences, which taught us the immensely

greater educational value of co-operative production than of co-operative distribution, I have often regretted that the Rochdale pioneers combined to divide up a chest of tea instead of killing and curing a co-operative pig.

The first creamery, which was brought to birth by infinite travail (including, incidentally, fifty meetings on which I inflicted my own eloquence), proved to be the thin end of a very thick wedge. The movement just begun had not gone far when the politicians put a spoke in our wheel. We were preaching the damnable doctrine that what the workers on the land could do for themselves by intelligent combination—another splash of camouflage—was immeasurably greater than what the best of governments could do for them. The popular instructors in the Press and on the platform denounced this heresy. They pointed to the protective tariffs and all the machinery of governmental assistance by which the foreign producer was enabled to prosper at home and even to beat our farmers in their own markets. This, of course, was in the days of *laissez faire*, which in the circumstances of Ireland simply spelled neglect. No useful teaching was given there to the young or the adults which had any relation whatever to the industry by which they lived.

It was to meet this criticism that in 1895 we organized a non-partisan committee to promote economic legislation for the development of our agriculture and industries. The committee made an inquiry into the economic policies of nine agriculturally prosperous continental countries, and its report formulated a demand for similar assistance to Ireland. 'The Recess Committee' (as it was called because, owing to the large number of parliamentarians upon it, it had to sit in the Parliamentary recess) was so well supported by political, industrial, commercial and professional leaders—and, I think I may add, it did its work so well—that its labours resulted in the setting up in 1900 of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. The Chief Secretary of the day, Mr. Gerald Balfour, to whose unostentatious statesmanship due credit has never been given, entered into the spirit of the Irish rural movement and gave to

the new Department a constitution, functions and resources adequate for the purpose our rural reformers had in view.

The then outstanding principles of the policy recommended were representation, organization, and education. In its execution it was essential that State aid to agriculture should be administered, as far as possible, through local representative bodies which were made contributory, and that both the combined local and central authorities should recognize and assist voluntary associations of workers. No difficulty arose in fulfilling the first condition, and much admirable work, predominantly educational, in agricultural development has since been done by the Department acting with committees of the County Councils. But when the claim of our voluntary associations of farmers for recognition came before the Department, the old political opposition to co-operation revived. The relations between the Department and the hundreds of branches of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society became increasingly difficult and were finally severed, with incalculable injury to economic progress in Ireland.

Once more this non-political movement, which has now had a remarkable record for over a quarter of a century of rigid adherence to its non-sectarian and non-political pledge, was attacked by the politicians. The Development Commission was created by the Act of 1909; its statutory objects included 'aiding and developing agriculture'. Among the means to this end 'the organization of co-operation' was mentioned. It was specifically provided that 'voluntary associations not working for profit' might be employed for aiding and developing agriculture. When the Minister in charge of the Bill was challenged by an Irish member to say whether this provision would permit the Irish Agricultural Organization Society to be officially recognized, he was told that it would. But so powerful are the trading political interests opposed to us that the English and Scottish Agricultural Organization Societies, which I do not think it will be denied were flattering imitations of the parent Irish Society, were subsidized by the Development Commission for two years before it could, without making trouble in Parliament, utilize the

services of the Irish Society. Once this restraint upon the Development Commissioners' assistance to Irish Agriculture was removed, the most fruitful relationship between that splendid body of shrewd and benevolent administrators and the Irish Society was inaugurated. I think I may say without fear of contradiction that the Commission are entirely satisfied with the use made of the funds with which State aid has supplemented voluntary effort in the organization of co-operation in Ireland.

You will expect some indication, however brief, of the direction which the various forms of co-operative enterprise initiated by the Irish Agricultural Organization Society took, of the number of persons engaged, and the amount of business transacted. For reasons I have explained, our energies were at the outset concentrated upon the Dairying Industry, which at this time was changing from a home to a factory industry, or, in other words, passing through its industrial revolution. Over 400 Co-operative Dairying Societies working in 1919 had a membership of over 50,000 and a trade turnover exceeding seven millions sterling. Many of these Societies, besides manufacturing their members' milk into butter and cheese, the greater proportion of which is exported to Great Britain, purchase agricultural requirements; others sell their members' eggs and mill their grain. In some districts about 300 Societies, doing a distributive agricultural business, have a turnover of roughly a quarter of a million sterling. Thirteen Societies, dealing exclusively in eggs and poultry, have achieved an equal turnover. There are also forty-six miscellaneous Societies, covering many branches of farming activity, which include bacon-curing, the after-treatment of the flax crop, and joint ownership and operation of agricultural machinery, otherwise too costly for small farmers. 'Raiffaisen' Credit Societies have been widely adopted in poor districts, where their chief aim was to get small cultivators out of the hands of the local usurer. But the tendency of the movement is towards attaining this object through the cautious use of credit by Societies doing the varieties of business above mentioned. There are two Federations of Societies modelled after the English and Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies. The total turnover

of the Irish movement (by which I mean business transactions done through Co-operative Associations which would otherwise be done individually) now aggregates between eleven and twelve millions sterling. The total membership is roughly 120,000; and, as the members are pretty nearly all heads of families, about 600,000 of the rural population of Ireland may be said to have thrown in their lot with the movement.

Far more important, however, for my present purpose than these dreary statistical details of material achievement are the combined social and economic aims of this scheme of rural progress, and the methods by which they were pursued. Let me, therefore, summarize the salient facts of the story. For thirty years a group of social workers have been engaged upon the solution of our rural problem. Those of them whose circumstances permitted gave free service and helped to pay the staff of the Central Society. This Institution, which was founded in 1894, has received in voluntary contributions over a quarter of a million sterling—most of this sum being subscribed by the branches it has spread all over the country. There have been subsidies from public funds, but these were in a relatively small proportion to the voluntary contributions. Throughout, the main reliance has been upon the organized voluntary effort. I have traced the strange origin of State assistance to Irish Agriculture, and the still stranger interference with that part of the policy which sought to establish ideal working relations between the voluntary and official bodies. Fortunately, while they were divorced both were doing good work. The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, in a sense the child of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, had been thought out in Ireland and was an adaptation of foreign experience to Irish needs. The relations between the two bodies are now satisfactory. The controversy which led to their temporary divorce is dead, otherwise it could no more have been mentioned here than can the burning of the creameries, which is troubling us not a little at the moment. It is surely a remarkable fact that the movement has not only survived the attacks made upon it, but that neither in the agrarian nor in the political troubles which

have disturbed the country in the last thirty years has the loyalty of its members ever been shaken. At many thousands of meetings men of all creeds and politics have observed our non-sectarian and non-political pledge, to which no doubt its remarkable success is largely due.

I pass now from the practical to the theoretical work of the Irish reformers. In the Plunkett House, the home of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society—a sort of Boeotian Barnett House—there was established in 1913, with a liberal subsidy from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, a Co-operative Reference Library. Its function is to supply complete information upon co-operative effort, both urban and rural, past and present, and to conduct social and economic research as needed by the Irish and other Co-operative movements. To this Institution students have come and are coming from all over the world, notably from the United States and India. The foundation of this specialized library synchronized with the coming to Ireland of the American Agricultural Commission, which in the year before the War made an inquiry into the agricultural organization of European countries very similar to that of the Recess Committee a quarter of a century ago. It is remarkable that these American investigators, who represented nearly every State in the Union and Canada, devoted seven out of the eleven days spent in the United Kingdom to a study of agricultural development in Ireland. I give you these evidences of the wide external interest in our Irish efforts, because it created the demand for a clear statement by the Irish workers of the principles underlying their work. And thus it came to pass that Ireland, with all her troubles, found herself regarded as a pioneer in rural reconstruction.

The policy I have now to submit for your consideration is threefold, and is reduced to the formula 'better farming, better business, better living'. Agriculture must be regarded as an industry, as a business, and as a life. To the industry must be applied all the physical sciences relating to soil, climate, plant and animal life, to the buildings and mechanical equipment of the farm. Oxford is doing her share of this work, which, however, does not



come into the present discussion. To the business of farming must be applied methods upon which all business undertakings now depend for their commercial success. Here, it seems to me, Oxford is doing more than her share. But if the Irish story I have told means anything—and I told it chiefly because I wanted it to teach this—it is that the chief need of agriculture as a business is organization upon the co-operative, and not upon the joint-stock plan which is suitable to all other business combinations. But far the most important part of the rural problem is that which treats agriculture as a life, and to this I must ask your special attention.

Where three things are necessary it is absurd to discuss their relative importance; but both better farming and better business are in the minds of the best of my fellow workers chiefly interesting as means to better living. Agriculture as an industry and as a business will not in our view survive the conflict between the various competing social orders unless and until a solution of the rural problem has been generally accepted which clearly envisages a rural community, every member of which can be satisfied that remaining on the land does not imply being in a backwater of modern progress.

We must realize that, while an agricultural existence admits of physical welfare above the average of a town existence, it does not offer, and cannot be made to offer, the opportunities of material advancement which urban pursuits provide. It is absolutely necessary to brighten rural life by developing its social pleasures and its cultural side in a way which will enable it to compete with the modern city. For this there is at present hardly any social organization, and our Irish experience has convinced us that only in one way can this vital need be supplied in time to meet the urgent demand of the present day. The rural community must be organized for business purposes, and the business association must be used for the higher purposes of social and intellectual advancement, and, if I may put it bluntly and plainly, for fun. If I have one criticism to offer of the splendid work being done by your two Agricultural Institutions here, it is that they have not sufficiently emphasized the

importance of better business (which remember means chiefly co-operative organization) as a means to the end of better living as well as of better farming. And here I think the needs of the situation will be best supplied by a co-ordination of the work of these institutions with that of the Voluntary Association whose joint Committee for Oxfordshire meets at Barnett House.

I have been fortunate enough to learn from the Secretary of Barnett House the view that band of social workers take of the better living part of the rural problem. Village life in England, they say, suffers from lack of organization. Spasmodic attempts are made to form clubs or found reading-rooms, but in nine cases out of ten they die out or become moribund in the course of a few years because they have been dependent on the initiative and enthusiasm of one or two people, and these leave the neighbourhood or find other claims on their interest. The problem of making rural life as full of stimulus and as attractive as it ought to be can only be solved by educating the villagers themselves in the broad principle of co-operation—co-operation in social and educational as well as in strictly agricultural matters. New ideas are stirring in the countryside. Men who have come back from service across the sea, women who have come back from work in munition factories, have learned a new independence and a new vision. From village after village come requests for lecturers and books on every subject, from Industrial History to the League of Nations, from Astronomy to Shakespeare. The difficulty is to meet the demand. One of the principal pieces of work before Barnett House at the moment is to help the various Voluntary Organizations at work within a radius of thirty or forty miles of Oxford by supplying lecturers and books, and by encouraging the formation of Village Social Councils and other such organizations which are based on the principle of co-operation within the village itself.

Such a statement of rural social needs and of the general means by which they may be supplied opens a vista of rural progress which fills me with a desire to help and get help for Barnett House, but obviously its work must depend for its fruitfulness upon the co-operation of the other rural workers

here. I shall therefore conclude with some observations upon the claim of agriculture upon the Universities and try to make it clear why I assign to Oxford leadership in thought upon the threefold problem in its entirety. I wish it to be borne in mind that while Oxford has done more than any other seat of high learning for better business, she must, in my view, utilize to the full the services of Barnett House if she is to take on and hold the leadership in better living.

It is right that there should be a more generous recognition in our Universities of the claims of agriculture in the curriculum of studies. For even in an industrial state like this country, agriculture is still the greatest among our industries in value of output, and by far the greatest in importance from the point of view of the number of persons employed. The Universities, as the head of our national system of education, as the training ground of our research students, and as the chief centres of advanced research work, have been rightly giving increased attention to the place of agriculture and of rural economy in national education.

But in the past, agriculture has been mainly associated with the physical sciences, and especially is this so as regards the work of research. To-day, however, it is becoming increasingly clear how complex and vital are rural problems of an economic and a social character. These problems are affecting all countries, but they press for our attention, particularly in our own country and throughout our empire. Great national and imperial interests have to be reconciled in the field of production and exchange. Questions of the right use of land, of its settlement and tenure, of the organization of the agricultural community in respect of production and distribution, of transport, credit and insurance, of systematic and comparable costings, which are so vital not only to modern ideas of State policy but to the guidance of individuals and of countries as to the lines of economic production—these and many other economic questions are as urgent, and in some cases more urgent, in agriculture than in any other industry. I do not wish for any divorce between agricultural and industrial economics; the field is one, but the

importance of different systems of organization, such as the co-operative system on the one hand and the joint-stock system on the other, varies widely in these two great sides of our productive organization, and a closer attention to the particular phases of the problems of political economy which are presented in connexion with agriculture and rural life will broaden and widen the whole field of economic study. It will redress the balance of thought, which has been concerned too much, in this country at least, with the problems of the town and of manufacture and commerce, to the neglect of the rural side of our national life.

There is, too, another aspect of rural studies which should not be overlooked. Agriculture is a great meeting-place of the sciences. The growth and care of crops and stock brings the student into a most living and real relationship with the methods and results of modern science, while on the other hand the field of study, as I have indicated, is rich in economic and social meaning. What I ask, therefore, is that we should try to see our agricultural curriculum as a whole. In the last generation there has been a growing development in our elementary and even in our secondary schools of nature study. So in our more adult work, the significance of rural life and its problems merits, and will reward, a far greater attention than it has hitherto received. The Universities above all, as the crown of our system of national education, must see to it that they are thinking out and embodying in their curriculum the study of this great side of life, and that they are pioneering the way and preparing teacher-guides in this field of study.

Here it is that there is a very special claim on Oxford. For in England, Oxford and Cambridge, unlike most of the modern Universities, are in location almost rural Universities. They have had, and will have, a far more intimate relation with the land than the rising City Universities can ever attain, though the agricultural work which is being done at many of our Provincial Universities deserves the highest praise. But the colleges in Oxford and Cambridge have their estates scattered all over England; they have drawn and will continue to draw to them large numbers of men who have interests in and obligations to

the land. Oxford and Cambridge also have had their special connexion with the public services not only for this country but also for the wider fields of the Empire. Each of these two ancient Universities has its own particular contribution to make to the rural problem. Here in Oxford there has long been the Sibthorpe Professorship of Rural Economy, which in its very title suggests something wider than technical agriculture as its province. Here, too, the Schools of Agriculture and Forestry have become integral parts of the University, while the action of the Development Commissioners in asking Oxford to take up specially the field of research in agricultural economics has emphasized the particular character of the service which this University can discharge in the field of rural studies. *En revanche*, as they say in Gaul, let us cede to our sister Cambridge with her fine achievement in agricultural research, University leadership in better farming.

And there is another consideration—to an increasing degree Oxford has become a great Imperial University. She cannot turn back from her destiny; and in the economic and social sphere there are no problems which are more urgent, whether for the Self-governing Dominions, or for the Empire of India, or for the Crown Colonies, than the development of their great agricultural resources and the security thereby of the basal source of employment and well-being of their peoples.

There is a wonderful comity in the pursuits and interests of rural life. The husbandman, from whatever country he comes, soon begins to understand the doings and interests of the husbandmen of other countries. The life of the country unites us. 'Nature's social union' is a very wonderful thing to observe and reflect upon. It is because I wish to see this great human element emphasized in our agricultural education and in our ideas of rural economy that I appeal to the University of Oxford, to its Schools of Agriculture and Forestry, and to its Institute for Research in Agricultural Economics, to provide a larger leadership—a wider vision of 'better living' as well as better farming and better business in our own countryside and in the great far-flung lands of the Empire.

## BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS

### *Already Published:*

- No. 1. 'The Problem of Juvenile Crime.' By the late C. E. B. RUSSELL, H.M. Chief Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools. Price One Shilling.
- No. 2. 'Development of the Education of Wage-earners.' By SPURLEY HEY, Director of Education, Manchester. Price One Shilling.
- No. 3. 'The Needs of Popular Musical Education.' By Sir W. HENRY HADOW, Mus., Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University. Price One Shilling.
- No. 4. 'The Place of the University in National Life.' By the Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER, D.Litt., M.P., President of the Board of Education. Price One Shilling.
- No. 5. 'The Industrial Section of the League of Nations.' By the Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, P.C., M.P. Price One Shilling.
- No. 6. 'Oxford and the Rural Problem.' By the Right Hon. Sir HORACE PLUNKETT, P.C., F.R.S. Price One Shilling.

# BARNETT HOUSE OXFORD

---

**B**ARNETT HOUSE, established in Oxford as a memorial to the late Canon Barnett and incorporated as an Association on March 17, 1916, has three main objects in view:

1. To advance the systematic study of social and economic questions. A reference library of modern social and economic literature is open to all those interested in the study of such subjects; public lectures and conferences are arranged and papers are issued from time to time on subjects of social inquiry.

2. To advise and train men and women who wish to take up social work, either under the State or in Settlements or other Voluntary Organizations.

3. In close co-operation with the W. E. A., the University Tutorial Classes, and other bodies interested, to assist in promoting Adult Education, especially in relation to the problems of citizenship.

The Association of Barnett House is open to all who are interested in social and economic questions. Associates will have all the privileges of the House and of its membership; they will receive the assistance which can be given by a bureau of information which endeavours not only to give access to published materials but to bring into touch persons engaged on similar work; and they will obtain the publications of the House.

Minimum Subscription for Ordinary Associates, £1 per annum; Minimum Subscription for Life Associates, £5 per annum for five years, or a single donation of £25.