

SOME FUNDAMENTAL LESSONS FROM WAR CONDITIONS

"Experience is the greatest teacher, but the dearest," says the proverb. Its truth is written with blood and tears on the annals of the world.

Yet the plain teachings of even this master are often disregarded, they are even flouted and laughed at. "A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still." The lessons of experience are disregarded because of mental inertia, because of ignorance, incapacity to distinguish between cause and effect and because of self-interest.

People who believed in Tariff Reform, Protection, State regulation of industry, before the war, still clamour for its increase either now or after the war, in spite of the proved failure of these remedies. The cure is a hair of the dog that has bitten them. "If I just had one more glass," says the drunkard, after a twelve hours' respite in sleep. Let us have a Government regulation of shipping, coal and wheat supplies, after the plain failure of railway control and sugar control.

President Wilson is reported to have said: "The Republican Party if returned says it will control the trusts, but who will control the Republican Party?" Who is going to control the Food Controller, and the other controllers? In other words, who is going to control the Government?

Let us have fixed prices for sugar, bread, coal, &c., say our well-meaning war Socialists, forgetful of the fact that supplies are not forthcoming to maintain the fixed price. The price for coal and sugar, in the absence of supplies, will be determined, not by Government fiat, but by human need and the means of demanding these necessities.

The first plain lesson of war conditions is that politicians cannot dominate economic laws. We might say by altering a well-known aphorism: "Government causes most of the evils it seeks to cure, but fails to cure the evils which it causes."

We are well protected, we have Protection such as the keenest Protectionist in the United States, Germany, or France never dreamed of. We are almost absolutely protected from the supplies of Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Turkey, and pretty well protected from the supplies (other than munitions) of the other nations of the world; and yet we are not happy. The plain lessons of experience are against Tariff Reform, Protection—anything which hinders free exchange, yet we have even so-called Liberals advocating a continuance of such conditions after the war is ended.

What of Socialism and competition? Does our experience lead us to believe that the establishment of the one and the annihilation of the other is the way of political salvation? In the absence of the natural control of competition, we are left to the control of bureaucrats, but who is to control the bureaucrats? If the Government consisted entirely of Socialists and Labour representatives, would the condition of things be any better? The best such a Government could do would be to apportion better existing supplies, but the forces against such a better distribution, the power of the almighty dollar, the influence of friends, the desire to placate powerful interests, would operate as greatly, if not more greatly, than before. The plain lesson of experience is that the absence of competition is not salvation but damnation.

The war itself is it not just caused by the attempt to nationalise economic conditions? The high-water mark of such an attempt has been registered in Germany. Political and military organisation of the ablest and most efficient character has attempted to dominate—not the political world, for that might possibly succeed, but the world underlying that, the world of needs and their satisfaction—that unseen world which takes no cognisance

of government or human law, which obeys only human instincts, that greater leviathan, the economic world. Attempts of such political and military domination in the past have always failed. This one has already failed. Shall we copy this the greatest failure in the world's history, continue tariff-mongering, political and military regulation, and have the same results 50 or 100 years hence, or shall we listen to the plain lessons of experience, establish the freest opportunity, the freest exchange, and the minimum of government?

WM. CASSELS.

FOOD DESTRUCTION.

The Ravages of Deer.

At a meeting held under the auspices of the Scottish Chamber of Commerce in the Christian Institute, Glasgow, December 13th, Mr. Archibald McNeilage (chairman) said: Deer were animals that would have food at all costs, and they were animals that destroyed almost as much as they ate, and he had heard a gentleman who had seen a farm after a visit by a herd of deer state that of all the pitiable sights he had seen, that farm was the worst after the deer had had a run over it only for one night. The first thing to be pressed for was immediate action under the Defence of the Realm Act in connection with the questions of food production or food destruction—because it was a question of food destruction. If it were the case that men could not be got to shoot down the deer, then some other method must be got to prevent destruction of food supplies. Anything that destroyed food was a pest, and, under the Defence of the Realm Act, means should be adopted for destroying that pest at the shortest possible notice. On the general question as to whether agriculture should be subservient to sport, the Chairman declared that the farmer was a far more important man than the gamekeeper or the sporting tenant. The settlement of people on the land, moreover, was of infinitely more importance than the employment of a number of ghillies or the affording of sport for a number of American millionaires. It was a pity that it should have required a desperate war like this one to teach us such elementary lessons.

Mr. A. P. McDougall, High Craigton, Milngavie, agreed that it was one of the saddest things to know that at the present moment when the whole country was gasping for food—he did not think that was an exaggeration—so much damage was being done by deer and game. The deer pest ranged from Kintyre right up to Sutherland. Not only so, within 15 miles of Glasgow there were cases where valuable crops—not merely grass—were being wasted at the present moment by deer. It did seem preposterous that on the very environs of a city we should have food which should be fed to dairy cows being fed to deer.

Mr. Robert McDairmid, Loch Awe, spoke from experience of the ravages of deer in Perthshire and Argyllshire, and asserted that the problem must be faced, and faced soon.

Mr. Willison, Parishholm, Lanarkshire, dealt with the need for more systematic heather-burning in order to improve pastures, and Mr. Stewart, Milton, Duntocher, and other speakers urged the need for ridding the countryside of sparrows, rooks, wood pigeons, gulls, and "idle dogs."

Mr. Thomas Hunter, Cumnock, moved, and Mr. James Kilpatrick, Craigie Mains, Kilmarnock, seconded, a resolution calling upon the Government to take steps without delay to prevent the destruction by game and deer of food for men and agricultural live stock, and strongly urging that in any amendment ultimately made in the Game Laws agriculture must take precedence of sport.

Mr. Lewis, Chamberlain to the Duke of Argyll, moved the deletion of the following words: "And strongly urge that in any amendment ultimately made in the Game Laws agriculture must take precedence of sport." He thought this might be left to the future. Mr. Steuart Walker, Greenock, seconded.