

"Did the people appreciate the fact that the valuation of land would help them to gain the object of the Small Landholders' Bill?"

"Throughout the campaign the close relation was shown between the question and the reform of rating and the Small Landholders' Bill, and special attention was laid on the new valuations under the Budget as providing the basis for the joint reforms. It is found almost everywhere that there is a great demand for Small Holdings. Indeed, only recently applications for Small Holdings were received by one important County Council to the extent of nearly 1,400. The best answer to the suggestion that there is no land suitable is the Report of the Highlands and Islands Commission of about 16 years ago which reported giving details for each of the Crofting Councils of Scotland, that in the six crofting counties of Scotland there were about 1½ million acres of practically unused land suitable for the creation of Small Holdings or the extension of the existing ones, or for the establishment of small farms. It is high time that the recommendations of that Commission were given effect to."

MR. JOSEPH FELS ON SMALL HOLDINGS.

AN INTERVIEW.

"I understand, Mr. Fels, that you have lately changed the method of managing the Mayland Farms?"

"I have not exactly changed my method, but I have corrected my way of dealing with most of the small holdings. The reasons for this are that the small holders originally put in were more or less inexperienced, and had very little capital, and further, because of the poor quality of the land."

"From what sources were your small holders drawn?"

"The small holders were drawn principally from London, from the industrial classes instead of from the people we should have drawn them from, men with agricultural experience."

"Then your experience would lead you to conclude that it was not a successful policy, that of taking men in middle life from the towns?"

"No, I found it was a poor policy, because the middle aged industrial worker took quite as long to learn anything about farming as he would to learn any other trade, and, on the principle that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, it is best to take experienced agriculturists of whom there are plenty and to spare in Great Britain looking for land."

"Would your experience lead you to say that it was better to attempt the solution of the unemployed problem by different means than those which you employed in this case?"

"I did not start this small holding scheme in Mayland for this reason at all. To the outsider it appeared a benevolent or philanthropic enterprise; to some as the fad of a well-to-do man; to others as a fool thing generally. My object in starting it was to demonstrate that the presence of an industrious population gives value to the land on which they work and to adjacent land."

"Were there other causes of the failure than the unsuitability of the men?"

"Well, among other reasons was the distance from the railway station, nearly four miles. The soil is about the heaviest clay land in Essex, in fact practically in all England, and being so near the sea-level difficult and expensive to drain."

"What satisfactory features were evolved from your experiment with Mayland farms?"

"Among these are the gradual improvement in the condition of the small holders who are left; the proper development of intensified agriculture; the starting of a co-operative shop; an open-air and closed school, etc., etc."

"You have done something in the way of advancing education at Mayland, giving the children special opportunities?"

"Yes, when we bought the land at Mayland the nearest school to the farm was a little under two miles. The school was of the old type, the principal object being apparently to make the children sit up and keep silent. The Essex Educational Council agreed to staff the school at Mayland if we provided the building, but in a very short time it was found necessary to give notice to the Council to vacate. Since then I have been running the school myself, based on lines that give the children more freedom. Within a year we have "re-made," for want of a better term, the sixty or seventy children in constant attendance, physically and mentally."

"You attempted to organize a co-operative system of dealing with the produce of each consumer. I understand that system broke down. To what do you attribute this?"

"To the fact that the small holders themselves were not trained or educated to co-operation, and though most of them called themselves Socialists, they were Individualists almost to a man, and being strangers to each other, distrusted each other. To have changed this would have meant to have changed the nature of the small holders. Given access to land of the right quality by a sufficient number of men of the right quality and with agricultural knowledge, and with a sufficient amount of capital, these men would naturally co-operate as most men are willing to do when they are on an equality. I should certainly say co-operation is entirely feasible where men have equal opportunities, and it would be to their profit in every case to co-operate with each other, as is pretty conclusively proved by the widespread co-operation that has actually come about, and also in Denmark by conditions of land tenure which promoted the better development of land and human relationship."

"What is your opinion of the Hollesley Bay Farm Labour Colony experiment on which there is said to have been a loss of £79,000?"

"In the first place, I do not believe there was any such loss, as opponents of a thing can usually cook up any account or statement they want; figures are easily played with, but it was never expected that a Labour Colony for the Unemployed would or could under present conditions be made self-supporting, just as in my experience of Mayland with men brought from the city and unused to land cultivation. The Hollesley Bay labour was equally inexperienced, and, as we cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, naturally men who are used to sawing timber, driving nails, loading machinery and sweeping streets would not make very good farm labourers for a three months' stay as a limit. It takes a man three months to get his muscles in shape for farm work. All these small holdings and Farm Colony cultivation schemes under such conditions as we find must necessarily be mere palliatives and of no constructive importance, but given free access to land, exemption from taxes and rates on industry, and buildings, men would find their own level and small holdings would spring up almost automatically in great numbers wherever the land was suitable for them."

"What are your future plans for Mayland?"

"My idea is that the occupants of the small holdings would be paid a fair wage of £1 per week, which is to be charged to them along with the expenses of the particular holding, and give credit for the produce of their Small Holding, the balance belonging to the occupant so that he may be made more or less independent by what he makes."

"How has the presence of the Mayland enterprise affected land values within say a radius of 2½ miles?"

"It has put them up 70 to 100 per cent. My next-door neighbour wants 100 per cent. more for the 141 acres he has than he asked the day after I purchased the farm."