

COUNTRY LIFE

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COUNTRY LIFE & COUNTRY PURSUITS

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"No Majorities for Nostrums"

IN his serious speech in the agricultural debate in the House of Commons on Thursday night, Mr. Buxton reminded his opponents and, incidentally, his Labour friends, that this "Parliament had no majorities for nostrums." This does not at all indicate a bad state of affairs. The production of food is not a subject for partisans or extremists, but for those capable of discussion without heat or hatred of any kind. There are certain objects in connection with it which all are striving for, independent of the politics they profess. The increased productivity of the soil stands first in importance, though not in sentiment. Many of the Labour men would give that place of honour to increased wages for the labourer; but, surely, increased productivity is the source from which better sustenance for the worker must flow. Wages cannot permanently rise unless higher profits are made. Does a rigidly fixed wage appear likely to secure this end? The most intelligent student of politics thoroughly appreciates the desirability of enlarging the earnings of those engaged in the hard labour of the field, but there is, generally, more than one way of getting to a desired destination, and in this case there is a better road than that favoured by the Labour Party. If they would think it over in a reasonable spirit, they would find nothing contrary to their aspirations and much that would help to achieve them.

The first object is to provide funds out of which better wages could be paid. The next object is that, in whatever we do, the importance of growing more food should not be lost

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Our Frontispiece

A REPRODUCTION of the fine portrait of the Countess of Ancaster by Mr. P. A. Laszlo, which is at Grimsthorpe Castle, is given as frontispiece to this week's issue of COUNTRY LIFE.

labourers has been more than trebled in the time mentioned. It is a mixed farm, on which are kept a flock of sheep, a dairy herd and a goodly number of pigs. Each worker, from the oldest man down to the youngest boy, has the opportunity of earning an addition to his wage each week. It amounts to an increase of about 20 per cent. on the wages of each, these wages being such as are generally paid in the district. An interesting feature is that the bonus is earned with surprising regularity—that is to say, it is not an occasional payment, but one that any keen and industrious man, boy or woman can make sure of, and it very seldom goes unearned. Nothing better could be expected from human nature, because there are some people habitually neglectful of their opportunities. The effect on the labourers is very marked. They are more energetic, far keener and exceedingly cheerful. If the moral effect be compared with that produced by a cast-iron minimum rate it is seen to be stupendous. The minimum rate is a purely mechanical contrivance that stifles interest instead of creating it, and might be said to turn the men into machines, except that it tempts them to study how to get their wages without doing their work. On the other hand, if they make up their minds to study how to increase their incidental earnings, they obtain extra money to put into the Post Office Savings Bank. It will be a help towards the hire or purchase of that bit of land which it is the dearest wish of the labourer to possess. We repeat, then, that though a minimum wage is in itself an instrument of mischief, it works to the advantage of everyone when combined with the commission paid for work satisfactorily done. To a Parliament where there are "no majorities for nostrums" it ought surely to commend itself.

Mr. Buxton, in the course of his speech, dwelt on several signs and tokens that point to a revival in agriculture. He said that statistical facts confirm the view that the industry is on the up-grade. Prices are fairly stable, arable crops tend to improve. Above all, there is, he says, an extraordinary demand for farms. The number of bankruptcies has been fewer than the average in the years 1893-97. This view of increased prosperity does not seem to us too optimistic. The facts go a long way to bear it out, and the explanation is that the more enlightened farmers are widening out their activities. They are using the plough to provide food for the dairy; they are taking to pig-keeping in continually increasing numbers, and they understand the value of poultry far better than they did before the war. If Mr. Buxton will go on steadily substituting common-sense for nostrums a real revival of agriculture may be expected to take place.

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* * * It is particularly requested that no permission to photograph houses, gardens and livestock on behalf of COUNTRY LIFE be granted except when direct application is made from the offices of the paper.