

LABOUR ON THE LAND. By W. H. Pedley. (King and Staples; 10s. 6d.)

It has just been announced that the Central Agricultural Wages Board has agreed that farm workers shall have four days' paid holiday a year and four statutory holidays, and that the Ministry of Health is introducing a scheme for building three thousand cottages. To the reader of Mr. Pedley's book this will be good news, for he has abundantly demonstrated that the drift to the towns is due primarily to wages, hours of work, and housing. Mr. Pedley has done his work thoroughly and well, and his findings will come as a shock to many town-dwellers; as for example that in some counties as many as 56 per cent. of the agricultural workers are paid less than the statutory minimum, and that in 1937 there was a contraction of the Act in 22 per cent. of the workers' wages throughout the country.

The housing evils are many and various, and the chief among them would seem to be the tied-cottage which still holds many in a quasi-feudal thralldom. Witness the following notice: 'As a tenant of a service cottage on the above estate, please take notice that on or after 11th October, 1935, all labour residing in the cottage shall work on the estate if, as and when required. No member of the household shall obtain work away from this estate unless he or she previously obtains permission in writing from the office to do so. Permission will only be given in exceptional circumstances.' That was not in pre-revolutionary Russia, nor in the Southern States before the Civil War, but in England in 1935! Can one wonder that no country in the world has a smaller proportion of its population engaged in agriculture than England—probably only 6 per cent. in 1939. Throughout this section, as in the one on wages, one cannot overlook the culpability of the 'vested interest,' the rapacity of the farmers over wages (the Wages Act of 1924 has failed as did the early Factory Acts through lack of inspectors), the fact that nine-tenths of the money provided by rate relief, subsidies, etc., has gone into the pockets of the farmers, and finally the indifference of County Councils ('the preserve of the landed aristocracy and large farmers') to education, housing, sanitation and other amenities. There is quite evidently need for a new and more powerful Joseph Arch to set the countryside ablaze. Mr. Pedley pays a well-merited tribute to the W.E.A. and to the Women's Institutes which are doing magnificent work in the promotion of education, health and domestic economy.

This is a *must* book for all those who love the land of England and who wish to see it flourish once again. Before prescribing remedies they must read here a diagnosis which though cold and factual cannot fail to move. Mr. Pedley's own suggested remedies will not meet with universal approval. There is more than emotion in the arguments of those who do not wish to see farming turned into 'a high-class business.'

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