

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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War Organisation.

IN the article "Preparedness: The American Way," in NATURE of November 2, the report of the Committee of the Naval Consulting Board, therein quoted, is in some respects open to criticism. That report says:—"Behind every man in the firing line in Europe, from three to five persons are employed to supply him with food, ammunition, and other needs." For the third step of the programme the committee lays it down that skilled mechanics in all lines of production must be kept from enrolment in the Army. Rather must bankers, clerks, shopkeepers, and professional men be sent. The skilled workers must be badged, and the only restriction imposed on them by the badge will be prevention of enlistment. Enrolment in the Industrial Reserve will be considered to carry with it honours equal to enrolment in the fighting forces.

From the above it appears that the American view is that, of the men of military age in the nation, one portion should work in safety and comfort while the other portion should do the fighting. To the latter would fall all the loss of life, disablement from wounds and sickness, and extreme hardship; meanwhile the former will live as in time of peace, and enjoy equal honours with the fighting group.

A scheme of preparation for war in which sacrifices and benefits are so unequally distributed does not appeal to one as being either just or admirable, and I shall show that it is not in the least necessary.

I will make the following assumptions, which are sufficiently accurate for the purpose of my argument:—

(a) I assume the best fighting age at from twenty to twenty-seven.

(b) I assume four supply workers as required for one soldier.

(c) Unskilled labour is necessary among the supply workers.

(d) Men will be efficient as supply workers and for the necessary subsidiary duties certainly up to the age of fifty.

(e) It is apparent that there will be at least three men above fighting age available for supply work for each man of fighting age; assume that this is so.

Let N be the number of men between twenty and twenty-seven: we cannot take all of these, for above that age only $3N$ workers are available. Let x be the number of men we can take; then $x(1+4)=4N$, therefore $x=0.8N$. Hence if we take all men up to twenty-five and a half as soldiers we shall have enough workers to keep them supplied. Doing this, we shall use some skilled workers in the ranks, but skilled work is also required at the front, and this is now provided for.

If to this proposition a clause be added whereby he who, either physically or mentally, is unfit to fight shall be held as unfit to vote, we shall have a scheme fair to all, which also does not offer the glorious opportunities for undue influence and shirkers so thoroughly provided in the report.

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Farmers and Wheat.

IN your review of Messrs. Gray and Turner's "Eclipse or Empire?" (November 9, p. 185) the following passage occurs:—

"The third chapter, on 'The Slackening of Momentum,' shows by telling figures and statistics how serious has become our competition with better organised or more hard-working nations. . . . British production has increased at a far less rate than that in Germany or in the United States. As regards home-grown wheat, it has fallen by 20 per cent. in the last thirty years in England, and increased in Germany by 50 per cent."

Turning to p. 190 in the same number, I read:—" . . . Without heavy protective duties, the chemical industry of the finer products, including dyestuffs, cannot possibly be built up and firmly established in this country."

The first of these quoted passages seems to impute the fall in production of wheat to "slackening of momentum," implying indolence, or at least want of spirit, on the part of British farmers. But what, it may be asked, might have been said of their intelligence if, instead of diverting their "momentum" to dairy farming and stock-feeding, they had persisted in growing wheat at a loss after it had fallen to 23s. a quarter? And how would it be consistent with prudence now to break up land for wheat-growing in the absence of any guarantee against a prospective ruinous fall in prices? We do not ask for the promise of "heavy protective duties," such as your correspondent describes as indispensable, as doubtless they are, for the establishment and maintenance of the finer chemical industry, but we do claim that, before investing heavily in wheat production, some assurance may be obtained against the farming industry being wrecked by indiscriminate freedom of imports.

HERBERT MAXWELL.

Monreith.

Greek as a Specialised Study.

AS you have done me the honour of commenting (NATURE, November 16, p. 221) upon what would seem to have been an abbreviated report of what I said at the Hellenic Society's meeting on November 14, perhaps you would allow me a few lines to remove a misapprehension to which that report seems to have given rise.

It is quite true that I deprecate the study of Greek at preparatory schools, as I do not think the language can be begun before thirteen or fourteen years of age without narrowing unduly the basis of general education; but I did not in the least wish to suggest, nor do I think, that it need not be studied at public schools. To abandon it there would be, in my judgment, to abandon the finest part of that humane training which has created all the great traditions of English public life.

I contended, indeed, that students of special ability who had been thoroughly trained in Latin could study Greek fruitfully during their university course if that course extended above four years and were wholly devoted to classical work. This I urged as a reason for allowing clever boys from municipal schools a free choice of the subjects which they are to study by the aid of municipal leaving scholarships. But I believe it would be a national misfortune if the study of Greek in this country were confined to this comparatively small class of students. The affection felt for the study by those who know what it is, is so keen that I do not think there is much danger of this result.