

## Public Health and Agriculture

IN his address to the Farmers' Club on February 3, Sir John Orr further expounded his views on the necessity for a national food policy (see NATURE of November 16, p. 771). The powers now given to marketing boards carry grave responsibilities; if fully used, 7 per cent of the population would control the remaining 93 per cent; therefore those exercising control must think not only of the wholesale price that will make farming remunerative, but also of the retail price within the reach of consumers. The Market Supply Commission is considering food supplies from all three points of view—consumers', exporters' and producers'. The food question has been affected by new scientific discoveries, by our greatly increased productive capacity, and by the world economic crisis. Under-consumption by the poorer classes, with its *sequelae*, stunted growth, ill-health and poor physique, must be rectified by increases in their dietary of at least 12–25 per cent for dairy produce, vegetables, fruit and meat. Low consumption is due both to poverty and to ignorance. Ten per cent ( $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions) of our population spend on an average only 4s. a head a week on food, and the total income of these families is only 10s. a head a week. To meet the extra consumption required, the necessary foodstuffs must be made available to the poor at prices lower than the present retail prices. But the farmers are justly asking for higher prices for their produce. How can both of these opposing needs be satisfied?

SIR JOHN ORR thinks there are two ways of dealing with the problem. Distribution costs must be lowered, and the Treasury, after partly recouping itself from ear-marked tariff revenues, must find the difference. Opposition to State expenditure on great schemes of social welfare, like sanitation and water-supplies, housing and unemployment, has always been strong when the reformatory measures were proposed; but in all cases the subsidies given have been justified by results. Both health and a prosperous countryside can be bought by spending money on a national food policy. The discussion on Sir John Orr's address evoked much sympathy from his audience, although it failed to elicit any constructive suggestions. Lord Bledisloe stated that, during his tenure of office as Governor-General of New Zealand, he had ascertained that about 60 per cent of the inmates of public hospitals and similar institutions had suffered from under-nutrition. Several speakers disapproved of a State subsidy as part of a permanent policy, but only one voice—that of a milk-distributor—was raised against the proposal to reduce distribution costs. Lord Radnor, however, pointed out that hitherto no courage had been shown in tackling this important problem. He suggested, as a *tertium quid*, a general increase in the purchasing power of the nation, but no one supported him. It looks, therefore, as if considerable difficulty will be found in arranging a satisfactory 'marriage allowance' for the projected union of public health and agriculture.

## Dangers of Modern Civilisation

CIVILISATION and its dangers formed the subject of a recent address by Prof. H. E. Armstrong to the Lancaster Society, the occasion being the delivery of the third Frankland Lecture. Reviewing the chemical foundations of the Industrial Revolution, he laid emphasis on the part played hitherto by coal, and on the necessity of preparation for the coming exhaustion of coal supplies, possibly not more than two centuries hence. Few to-day realise what coal means to them, or they would not use it thoughtlessly; they must take care for the morrow, and efforts should be directed not to employing more miners but to economising the use of coal. The 1851 Exhibition was the first witness to other nations of the fruits of the use of coal; but thereby the jealousy of other countries was excited, and then the engineers began to sell their machines abroad for others to copy, if not improve. They could not both have their cake and eat it unless in some way more cake were provided. Commercial war reigns everywhere; and this, the main problem of to-day, is brought upon them by the advance and spread of knowledge, especially by their power to use it. Insular conservatism is still a hindrance to progress; too often knowledge is ignorantly put aside, and management placed in uninformed hands. "Probably we are at the most perilous period in the history of our country, if not of the world," said Prof. Armstrong, "with little time to look around and put our house in order." Civilisation is fast becoming developed, if not organised, to promote the survival of the unfit. We are already in the position, owing to the art of scientific discovery and invention, of enjoying much more than before without striving; and he reminded his audience that man must either strive or degenerate.

INTELLECTUALLY, morally and physically, declared Prof. Armstrong in his lecture, man is being debased by his own inventions. The 'pictures', the wireless, cigarette smoking, and the aimless use of motor-cars all received their due meed of his disapproval; so also did the schools, the universities, the classical (or closed) mind, and the mechanism of society. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Prof. Armstrong generally hits a nail on the head, even though he is apt to use a steam-hammer for the operation. It is true enough that the function of the schools should be to give training in the art of understanding; not merely to impart knowledge. It is likewise true that men who have no understanding of the modern world cannot train for a service of reasoned intelligence. Wherefore, he claims, we must now place the schools in charge of men of charitable mind, men who will seek to evoke an understanding of the world in their pupils, that they may be enabled with some degree of thoughtfulness to do their duty with efficiency. It is impossible, said Prof. Armstrong, to overrate the danger arising from our failure to place general education on a scientific basis. Democracy is fast being made impossible by the one-sided application of the skill of the few; it can be saved from an early downfall only by an effective general spread of