

The outstanding features of the movements indicated by these statistics are:—

(1.) The fact that there has been a reduction since 1901 in the relative numbers of those actively engaged in producing foodstuffs in the country. In 1901 this class accounted for over twenty-five in every one hundred breadwinners; and in 1911 for a fraction over twenty-three. The relative increase in the number of breadwinners engaged in occupations other than rural is by no means inconsistent with a rapid rate of increase in the general progress of the community. It indicates, first, that an increasing proportion of the people are devoting themselves to the production of goods and services of a high order, such as the provision of the comforts and harmless luxuries of life, governmental services, the growth of art, science, education, and truly recreative leisure; secondly, it may indicate that labour and directive ability are being set free by the progress of agricultural art and science for application to these other spheres. But your Commissioners are not able to state definitely that such is the position in New Zealand at the present time to the extent of urban increase noticeable in the comparative tables, or that the cost of living will not be raised if the trend shown by the figures quoted is continued. For the pronouncement of a definite opinion on the subject there is need of a more intensive inquiry into all the conditions bearing on the problem than your Commission has been able to make.

(2.) The shifting within the rural occupations themselves from the purely agricultural branch to the pastoral and dairying branches. Whilst the numbers engaged in agriculture have fallen during the last ten years by more than 25 per cent., the numbers employed in the pastoral industry have more than doubled, whilst those in dairying have nearly trebled. The new distribution of labour within the group is also indicated by the available statistics of the production and export of grain, meat, wool, and dairy-produce. (See page liv.)

Causes of the
relative in-
crease of
urban popu-
lation.

3. Your Commissioners have given some attention to the causes that have brought about the relative growth of the town population. It is understood, of course, that there is no falling-off in the absolute numbers dwelling in the country, but only a decrease in the rate at which these numbers grow compared with the rate of growth in the town population.

(1.) It is clear that the education system of the Dominion, particularly during the earlier part of the period under review, was generally of such a nature as not to interest the children, even in the country, in the natural objects and the occupations of the countryside. An undue bent was given towards commerce and the Civil Service. Your Commissioners therefore agree with the Education Commission, which reported recently that one of the outstanding weaknesses of the present education system is "the want of facilities for rural training,"* and that "in respect to the great importance of agriculture to the Dominion this subject is not receiving the attention it deserves."† At the same time we recognize that since the introduction of nature-study and agricultural and gardening courses into the primary-school syllabus some attempt has been made to interest country children in their surroundings and in the opportunities which country life affords for healthy, stimulating, and remunerative work. The subject of agricultural education is everywhere regarded as a question of vital importance to the community. In England a good deal is being done to make the education in rural schools more consonant with the environment of the scholars. Dr. James Mills, late president of the Guelph Agricultural College, in a report, points out that the Canadian people have come to the conclusion that courses of study and methods of training should have special reference to the work and surroundings of after-life; that for economic and other reasons it is a great mistake to go on educating the rank and file of our boys from five up to sixteen or eighteen years of age without any direct reference either to the domestic duties or to the principal industries of the Canadian people.

In France, which is in many ways one of the most progressive countries from an agricultural point of view, and in which the increase in the price of foodstuffs has been least marked of all countries,‡ the Minister of Public Instruction declared that "Instruction in the elementary principles of agriculture that can be properly

* Report of Education Commission—E.-12, session II, 1912, p. 6.

† Ibid., p. 16.

‡ See p. xxviii.