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THE HOMECROFT SCHEME

By PROFESSOR J. W. SCOTT. TUE most of a year has passed since the generosity of Spectator readers made a scheme of Homecroft land-cultivation and housing a prospective possibility. The delay in making a report has been long. I must first speak of the state of the fund. No money has yet been moved from the bank ; although, out of a total fund of somewhere in the neighbourhood of £1,500, the cost of options, legal charges, meetings, printing, postages, railway fares, &c., has absorbed to date a sum of approximately £100. Of this, almost half was spent on the original offer of land. It will be recalled that the appeal was originally issued with reference to a particular piece of land on the outskirts of Cheltenham. We bought an option on that ; and, as it was actually within the borough, had to conduct a good deal of collateral and legal negotiation in connexion with it. I am not sure but that the £40 or £45 thus absorbed will have rendered some public service if it draws effective attention to the occasion for our disappointment. What lost us that land was only partly the fact that the fund was still short when the option expired. It was partly also the inordinate expenditure which we found was going to be required for roads, &c., under the local by-laws. This points to something which has in the past, if I do not mistake, lain close to a central contention of the Spectator. It constitutes another reinforcement of the argument for a discretionary power on the part of local authorities, which, when a new and approved movement like Homecrofting comes into being, would enable them to suspend in its favour by-laws originally designed solely to control ordinary residential development. But I do not think the getting of the land is a difficulty which is likely finally to hold us up—I judge simply by the number of offers of land we 'have had to consider. The real difficulties are elsewhere. They are connected with costs.

It will be remembered what a Homecroft Settlement was intended to do. It was to house the industrial Working 'man and his family on a miniature "croft," of 2/5 of an acre, with a "home" on it ; situated near enough to the town to permit the man to travel to and from his wage-earning work. It was to be completed at a cost low enough to permit of the workman (with his garden to help him) paying such a weekly or monthly purchase rent as would make the Homecroft his own in a not too long term of years. The net outcome, then, of the report on this matter, by the local business men of Cheltenham, who were interested in its being tried there, and were helping me, is to the effect that if 5 per cent. is to be 'paid on the capital expended, the lowest possible purchase rent for home and croft together is 1s. 8s. to 21s.

a week, spread over a period of 25 years. - The reason by the finding must, in my judgment, be considered unfavourable is this. We might get these rents. —A working-Class family "exceptionally placed— one having, say, several wage-earner's in the family, or a pension coming in, or the like—might give them. But we have to

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remember the class we wish to reach. The average family could not stretch to them. Not at present. I insist," Of course, on vision: In the future it may easily be different. Very easily--whether we look to the eonipulSiVe side of the case for Homecrofing, or the attractive side. "TO entrench individual families, as hir as everpossible, beside the nucleus Of a food-supply" May easily come to be a most important Matter for our country. That is

why we are trying to work out now the System on which it can be done--in -order that the rush to the soil for support, should the emergency ever arise, may not need to be a stampede. That is the com- pulsive or imperative side of the ease. When this is once widely perceived; and science mobilized to the task perfecting the complete food garden, things may easily be different. The shillings per week, saved to the self-feeding working man may easily rise. But we experi- menters are at the beginning. We cannot count on what might be done once the systeM is mastered ; and" Once the mastery of it becomes an integral part Of every child's education. Did we say of every child's education ? Yes, we must think of this also. Our national position demands that we think of it. The child's education itself is asking for it. But we who are trying to start actual Homecroft Settlements cannot wait for these things. We must bring the Homecroft within reach of the average good workman of the allotment-holding class. This means taking at least three shillings off the lowest of the Cheltenham figures.

. Difficulties, then. Yet when I spoke above of certain things getting under way, I spoke not only,- I trust, with gratitude and joy, but also advisedly. Cheltenham Homecrofing is not dead. The business men who helped me there are still sympathetic and willing to be con- vinced. That is all I want of them. There are the solidest- of reasons for not being dismayed by their report. What runs up the cost of a Homecroft is, of course, the building and there is still the whole field of mass-produced building to explore. • Our great objective is a (locally-supported and paying) running model Settlement of 20 to 40 houses. We want to set up somewhere a perfect model of what could be rapidly done everywhere, in case ive were, nationally, actually plunged into the hitt einergency. But it is of no use to do it by philanthropy only. We must induce capital to do it. The only thing we should pay for, out of philanthropy, is whatever it costs to convince capital. That is the only reason why I contemplated a " free gift " portion in our fund.

There - are possibilities to explore, then. There are alsci- signs that other. local centres of interest -are coming to life besides Cheltenham. And I haVe steps to suggeit. It would be of vast encouragement to such local efforts to precipitate themselves, if they 'could feel themselves linked, in spirit and aim, with something, relatively to themselves -broad and central, and carrying names of weight. And I think, • perhaps, the time has come for the original subscribers to meet, -form them-selves into the- nucleus of a "-National Homecroft Association," and appoint their own committee 'to a'dministe'r their own fund as they think most wise. Their work could be, not only to invest such - sums as they- have for invest- ment in such local Homecroft enterprises as they -can inspire to begin on true lines ; but, with another_ fund (of which, perhaps, with the donors' consent, the present "-free gift " fund could be the nucleus), to conduct investigations and build -up -the business' argument for local Homecroft Associations - by -ascertaining fully the tracks on which to run them.

• If, therefore, I receive no contrary proposal, I propose shortly to call together those who- have supported me. I long at least to see them in the flesh and shake -hands with them ! And I trust my proposal also - may commend itself. If it does, I need hardly point out how much depends on this Committee--perhaps, all of - our hopes



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for the future of Homecrofting in this country. Personally, I am willing to be a most interested member of it ; though I cannot myself be either its head or hands or feet, removed as I am from London ; my energies, such as they are, must, in any case, go into Cheltenham and other-local associations. The Committee need not be large ; and it would need, I think, to be honorary. The right people for it certainly exist. If, therefore, possible names occur to subscribers or to others,- would they endeavour to think of them with reference, roughly, either (a) to the contribution they would represent, in experience of the problems concerned, or (b) to the civic or social weight they might carry, or (c) to. finance ? If helpful suggestions can , be made, I should be most glad to receive them ; especially for the offices of Chairman and Secretary. Sympathy with the Homecroft idea,* would also, of course, be assumed.



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