

THE CHANGING RURAL SCENE¹

by Professor E.W. Hofstee

'We live in an obsessed world; and we know it'. Huizinga's *In de schaduwen van morgen*, written in the 'thirties, opened with these words.² A present-day variation might be 'Our farmers live in a changing rural world; and they know it', although changing the first few words deprives that fine sentence of much of its beauty and impressiveness. But it is the second part of the sentence with which I am more concerned. Those four simple words are a clear, accurate description of our attitude in the 'thirties; of how we watched disaster approach, fearful and yet resigned to what we clearly saw to be inevitable.

The same feeling of awareness – although perhaps no longer combined with fear – of being confronted with something of vital significance is common to those who, interested in the world around them, see what is now taking place in our rural areas. All who are not deliberately deaf or blind now realize that we are taking leave of the countryside as we knew it in our youth and that this farewell will be permanent.

Anyone wishing to grasp the extent of the feeling which has gained an increasing hold since the war years, namely that rural life is undergoing an irreversible basic change, would do well to compare the discussion on rural problems and agricultural policy as it has developed in recent years with what was written and said on the subject in the 'thirties. The rural world was in a turmoil then as well, though for different reasons. But rural society was still regarded as being essentially static in character. Even though unfavourable circumstances, faulty Government policy, selfish manipulations by all sorts of non-rural groups or any of the other reasons put forward might be responsible for the disturbances, recovery was considered to be both possible and essential. Both the Government and those who had organized themselves in the radical rural movement of 'Agriculture and Society' – to mention two extremes – worked to procure the return of the 'natural' order of things, even though their respective images of that restored world were highly dissimilar. Now,

¹ This article is a slightly revised version of a lecture given during the Agriculture Week, 1962.

² J. Huizinga, *In de schaduwen van morgen*, second edition, 1935, p. 1.

however, we are all convinced that the country areas are in rapid process of change. We all feel that we are moving towards something else, something new. We know that any attempt to halt this process, let alone to turn back the clock, would be utterly futile, in spite of the fact that the image we try to form of the future is often shadowy and indistinct.

This growing awareness of radical, inevitable change is a significant phenomenon in itself, one that will have important consequences. Of course one could not really maintain that the dynamics of our agricultural and rural world did not manifest themselves until the post-war period, although the tempo and the extent of the changes have been greater since the war than ever before. But as long as changes are not consciously experienced as such by the persons concerned their reaction will be different from that which might have been expected had they been aware of the existence of those dynamics.

The normal reaction to finding oneself in a rapidly changing situation is one of uncertainty. The individual who no longer sees firm points of orientation in the social world in which he lives and works, ceases to act in the self-evident, clearly-directed way which had hitherto characterized his behaviour. Not only are his actions influenced by such uncertainty; his feeling of being at peace with himself and with the world around him is affected as well.

BASIC CHANGES

The causes of the changes occurring in rural areas may, in my opinion, be traced back to two basic phenomena, the first of which is the gradual alteration in the culture pattern of rural populations¹. That pattern, essentially traditional for centuries, is now being replaced at a slow but steadily increasing rate by the modern dynamic culture pattern. The second basic factor is the contact which rural areas have now established with the rest of the world; in other words, they are no longer isolated. This process, too, is gathering tempo. Neither phenomenon is entirely independent of the other, but on the other hand, one cannot be said to be a function of the other. There are instances of the modern culture pattern having reached an advanced stage of development before the opening-up of rural areas had proceeded very far while, on the other

¹ E. W. Hofstee, *Sociological Conditions for Economic Development in Agriculture*. Paper read at the International Association of Agricultural Economists' Congress, Cuernavaca (Mexico), 1961.

hand, some regions have discarded scarcely anything of their traditional mentality in spite of the existence of modern means of communication¹.

THE MODERN CULTURE PATTERN

The essence of the modern dynamic culture pattern² is, in contrast to the traditional one, its attitude to change. The traditionalist regards change as something essentially wrong and dangerous. His standard of conduct is geared to the past; the methods then used were the right ones and they ought to be continued now and in the future. Because of his strong attachment to the past and the large measure of stability which characterizes his type of society the traditionalist displays great firmness of conduct, at least in his own surroundings³. He knows exactly what is required of him with regard to his work, his family and his village and knows, too, when and in what order those duties are to be performed. The modern dynamic individual is prepared in principle to accept change. That does not mean that he will immediately accept all that is new, but he believes that changes in his business, in his family and in society as a whole can lead to improvement and to more adequate fulfilment of existing needs. Consequently, he is ready to consider adopting new methods and new ideas; to entertain the possibility of their helping him to achieve his aims.

Both people's aims and their motives for their actions show a large measure of variety. Their dependence on many different circumstances means that an innovation acceptable to one person will be rejected by another. But this fact in no way alters the essential characteristic of the modern dynamic culture pattern: the readiness to give serious consideration to the idea of change.

Although older in origin, the modern dynamic culture pattern first began to find gradual acceptance among wide strata of society in the 18th century. Developing first among the upper classes, it spread by degrees to the lower as well. The development of that culture pattern and the

¹ A situation of this sort is described by L. W. Moss and S. C. Cappanari, *A Sociological and Anthropological Investigation of an Italian Rural Community*, Paper read at the Fourth World Congress of Sociology, Stresa, 1959 (stencil).

² For the development of the modern culture pattern see, inter alia, E. W. Hofstee, 'De groei van de Nederlandse bevolking' in: *Drift en Koers, een halve eeuw sociale verandering in Nederland*, 1962, pp. 13-84.

³ When not in his own surroundings, however, this firmness of conduct is usually lacking. See E. W. Hofstee, 'Rural Social Organization' in: *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. I, No. 2, 1960, pp. 105-117.

disappearance of the traditional one is a process that still continues today. The modern culture pattern developed comparatively late in rural communities. This should not be ascribed solely or even principally to their geographical isolation¹. For in areas such as the northern part of the province of Groningen, where a prosperous, independent farming community had been in existence for many years, the modern culture pattern made a fairly early appearance², clearly discernible symptoms of change being apparent in that region as early as the end of the 18th century. The fact that the majority of rural areas and, in the Netherlands, especially the sandy soil regions in the east and south of the country, were comparatively late in showing definite signs of a more modern mentality is probably attributable to the fact that the small farmers in those regions occupied a rather low place in the social scale as compared with the rest of the population and, like their counterparts in urban communities, did not really come into contact with the modern culture pattern until it was fully accepted by those higher in the social scale.

Research carried out by the Sociology and Sociography Department of the Agricultural University at Wageningen³ has shown beyond all doubt that the process of changing from traditional ways of thought to the modern dynamic culture pattern is one of the phenomena that lends a great deal of colour to present-day rural communities. All types of farmers, from traditionalists to really dynamic individuals, exist side by side in our rural villages, so that a great variety of modes of behaviour may be observed in many spheres of life. The extremes of the continuum are almost diametrically opposite to each other. The reader is referred,

¹ This article can of course provide no more than a rough outline of the development of the modern culture pattern among the agrarian population. It is a highly complex process involving the continuous interaction of many different phenomena. For instance, not only does geographical isolation check the development of the modern culture pattern; but as long as the traditional culture pattern remains in force the desire to break through that isolation will be lacking. To give another example: poverty is a result of the traditional culture pattern, but at the same time it hinders the casting off of that culture pattern. The extent to which the development of the modern culture pattern is dependent on the social position of the population group in question is illustrated by the situation in North Groningen, where, roughly speaking, the farm labourers accepted the new pattern almost a century later than the farmers.

² E. W. Hofstee, 'Het Oldambt', Part I, *Vormende krachten*, 1937.

³ See, inter alia, B. Benvenuti, *Farming in Cultural Change*, 1961; A. W. van den Ban, *Enkele kenmerken en eigenschappen van vooruitstrevende boeren*, Part I, 1956 and Part II, 1958; A. J. Wichers, *De beoefening van de bloemisterij en groenteteelt in Beesd*, 1957; E. Abma, *Boer en coöperatie in Nederland*, Part I, 1956 and Part II, 1958; A. W. van den Ban, *Boer en Landbouwvoorlichting*, 1963; R. Bergsma, *Op weg naar een nieuw cultuurpatroon*, 1963.

for instance, to the sketches of a number of modern farmers and of a few traditionalists found in B. Benvenuti's dissertation¹. The proportion of one to the other is not the same everywhere. The traditional pattern will be dominant in some places and the modern pattern in others².

The development of the modern culture pattern, combined with the gradual disappearance of the traditional one, is enough in itself to cause insecurity and tension in the rural community. In the initial stages the man who inclines towards modernity is in an especially insecure position, for he is the deviationist, the minority. All the means of social control – derision, insinuation and even physical force – are employed to make the modernist see the error of his ways and he will often wonder whether he is, in fact, on the right track. But once the modern dynamic culture pattern has spread to the extent that it more or less sets the fashion it is the turn of those who remain behind, who still cling to the old traditions, to feel uncertain. They realize that they have dropped behind but are incapable of discovering why this is so for the very reason that they still retain the traditional mentality, believing that they can be sure of avoiding mistakes as long as they stick to familiar paths. The undisguisable fact of their being an anachronism is blamed on anything and everything; on the Government, the trade unions, the Agricultural Corporation (Landbouwschap), international trusts, natural adversity and, in fact, on anything that comes to hand. It is not altogether unusual for them to feel so frustrated that they deliberately shut themselves off from all outside influence and oppose everything that could be regarded as a harbinger of innovation.

Although the resistance of the traditionalists is gradually weakening it has not yet disappeared by any means. Their resistance is understandable, supported as it is by the cultural traditions of centuries. Virtually all countryman's lore as it is preserved in sayings, proverbs and other elements of folk culture breathes the spirit of a fixed traditionalism and this is not something that will vanish in the space of a few years. A research project³ carried out some years ago revealed that approximately one third of all Dutch farmers have regular contact with the Agricultural Extension Service, one third spasmodic contact and one third none at all. It may definitely be assumed that those who have no contact are on the whole still firmly rooted in tradition. But at the same time it can most certainly not be claimed of the other two-thirds that they have

¹ Op. cit.

² A. W. van den Ban, op. cit.

³ E. W. Hofstee, *Rural Life and Rural Welfare*, 1957, pp. 299-300.

completely renounced that mentality. Insofar as can be ascertained they are, however, drifting rapidly away from it.

So the mentality that is becoming increasingly characteristic of the rural population is one of the most significant causes of the changes taking place in rural areas.

But, as mentioned above, the growing readiness to adopt a positive attitude to social change is not enough in itself to indicate what those changes will actually be. In addition to the willingness to consider the idea of change, that will depend on the concrete 'supply' of new ideas and behavioural roles offered to the population group in question and on the latter's choice from among this 'supply'. The 'supply' will derive partly from the group itself, i.e. the new ideas and behavioural roles that it produces will, if they take root, lead to social change. The major part of the 'supply' will, however, come from outside and both its content and the readiness to accept it will determine the way in which the group will change.

That brings us to the second basic reason for the changed way of life now to be observed among rural communities.

URBAN SOCIETY AS A NORM

There is no need to explain in detail the way in which the rural population came into increasingly close contact with the rest of the country. The part that modern means of communication – education, the press, radio and television – have played and are now playing more and more are already well known. The rural communities' integration in the life of the country as a whole meant first of all a very considerable intensification of their contact with urban life in all its aspects. A not unimportant reason for the marked predominance of urban values in this mutual contact is the enormous change which has taken place in the ratio of city- to country-dwellers and of the agrarian to the non-agrarian population. Some hundred years ago half of the Dutch working population consisted of agricultural workers¹; now they comprise no more than an estimated 10%. In 1899 more than 50% of the population lived in municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants; the figure in 1960 was less than 25%². A hundred years ago country life was normal and urban life abnormal; now the reverse is the case.

¹ See, inter alia, 'Landbouwcijfers', (Agricultural Figures), published in 1960 by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, p. 20.

² *Statistisch Zakboek*, Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics, 1961, p. 7.

Consequently, an increasing number of new ideas and behavioural roles bearing an urban stamp are being made available to the rural dweller and he, in turn, is showing an increasing willingness to accept them.

In other words, urban values are steadily becoming the norm amongst the rural population. Not so very long ago it had its own conception of what constituted a reasonable standard of living and was content with a lower material, social and cultural level. It was sufficient unto itself. Of course what was happening in the city did have some effect from a distance, but the country dweller did not derive his values from the urban dweller. Now the city has become the 'reference group' for the country dweller; the group that he looks toward, against which he measures himself, that set the standards on which he would like to model his own life.

The growing acceptance of urban norms is a matter of far-reaching consequence for the development of rural areas. Many of the aspects of the development of rural life that rural people dislike, or even find unacceptable, they unconsciously bring about themselves through their assumption that their standards of living and way of life should be, if not equal, at least roughly comparable to that of the townsman.

A concrete example of the general acceptance of urban norms is provided by a desire which has found general acceptance since the war as an aim of social policy, namely that of raising the wage of farm workers to the same level as that of workers in non-agrarian occupations. This equalization of farm labourers' wages with urban wages affected the rewards of the farmer's labour as a result of the way in which cost prices were calculated with an eye to the policy of guaranteed prices. That course of events is largely responsible for a series of phenomena that are making themselves felt throughout the whole of rural life. The higher wages and the farmers' consequent demand for a higher return for their own labours stimulated the rapid development of agricultural mechanization which, beginning in the post-war years, is still under way. It is not yet possible to predict the outcome. Mechanization, together with other factors, facilitated in turn the mass migration of farm workers while the desire of the farmer and his family to remain financially in step with the wage earner led to an equally rapid decrease in the number of farmers' sons still working for their fathers. The third phase in the decline in the number of persons earning a living on the land, viz. the disappearance of farms too small to provide a full livelihood even with the minimal manpower, has only just begun.

The Agricultural Economics Research Institute has calculated that the num-

ber of successors available in some regions is already so limited that the number of farms cannot fail to show a rapid decrease over the next few years¹. The process is already discernible among the smallest type of farm.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The decrease in the number of people working on the land has had a retrogressive effect on the population of those villages that have no industry or from which it is not possible to commute. The problem of small villages wasting away is a common one in the clay regions of the north and the south-west and, although to a lesser degree, in other parts of the country as well.

The situation is worsened by the fact that this process also affects the service occupations. In their desire to approach the urban living standards and way of life as closely as possible, the rural population is continually raising its demands with regard to both the nature and the variety of the goods and services provided by the service sector. They want shops offering a greater selection of goods and a wider variety of brands, entertainment and recreation of the quality offered the town-dweller² and a similar education for their children. The village can no longer provide them with everything they want. The improved means of transport offers a simple solution, for the nearest town is now within easy reach by bus or car. And the result is that the services provided by the village find themselves in a vicious circle. Since they cannot fulfil all the villagers' requirements the latter go to the bigger centres, thus diminishing still further the number of clients and persons interested in the local services and making it even more difficult for them to fulfil the wishes of those remaining. The situation is even worse in respect of the professional services, since their employees are also demanding higher wages and they themselves feel entitled to a higher return as well. Broadly speaking, they can only earn more if there is a greater demand for their services, but both the population decrease and the departure of former clients for the cities act as a check rather than a stimulus. Consequently, they are disappearing from the small villages in increasing numbers and a general process of decline is setting in.

¹ See some of the reports and monographs issued in recent years by the Regional Research Section of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, including Monograph No. 160, *Linde Zuid, sociaal-economische schets van het ruilverkavelingsgebied in het zuidoosten van Friesland*, 1961.

² H. D. de Vries Reilingh, *Onderzoek regionale culturele situatie in de provincie Noord-Holland*, Prins Bernhard Fonds, 1956.

Moreover, non-commercial services such as those provided by a multiplicity of associations are also suffering from those developments. A growing number of associations, especially those in the socio-cultural field¹, are running into difficulties and many of them are forced to bring their activities to an end. It is not to be wondered at that this situation often gives rise to a certain defeatism among villagers with regard to the question of the future of their village, an attitude that is of course not in the best interests of that future and one that to some extent endows the process of decline with the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy².

ACCELERATED SOCIAL CHANGE

A summary of some of the most prominent aspects of the fundamental changes taking place in rural areas will suffice here; they are already sufficiently well-known. It would not be difficult to make the list of changes a lengthy one. Time and again, however, we shall encounter the two basic causes referred to above: the changing culture pattern of the rural population and their acceptance of urban norms. The effect of these two phenomena on rural communities is even greater in view of the fact that the whole of society is in motion, so that the 'supply' of social changes is gaining in both quantity and intensity.

Changes have taken place at a tremendous pace since the war, and it is natural that we should wonder where it will all end. So I would observe first of all that many of the changes now apparent are merely the beginning of what is still to come. Even if it were possible to arrest the development of the modern culture pattern and to hold urban influence on rural communities at its present level, fundamental changes could still be expected since the rural communities are not yet by any means adequately adjusted to the present state of affairs. But things are not standing still; on the contrary. The intensity of their contacts with the city and the openness of their connections with the Dutch society as a whole (as well as with foreign countries) will increase considerably. Intensified contact with urban life will be sufficient in itself to help

¹ See, inter alia, *Bedreigd bestaan, de sociale, economische en culturele situatie in Noord-Groningen*, 1959.

² The term 'self-fulfilling prophecy' derives from the American sociologist Merton and is used to describe a development that takes place wholly or partly because the population group concerned, being convinced, for whatever reason, that circumstances beyond its control make that development inevitable, bases its attitude and actions on that assumption and thus gives it added momentum, while it was perhaps by no means as inevitable as it was thought to be.

ensure the continuance of the shift from the traditional to the modern culture pattern. The further development of secondary education may also be expected to make a sizeable contribution to this process. The data collected in the course of an agricultural survey conducted in 1955 on the agricultural training of farmers and aspirant farmers showed very clearly how wide a difference there is between the older and the younger generation in this respect¹. The deep effect which agricultural training has on the farming community has not yet made itself felt. In addition, secondary education in general is worthy of mention in this context. The sharp rise in the number of children attending secondary schools since the war has not been confined to the urban and industrial centres. On the contrary, the educational gap that existed between rural and urban areas for many years is fast closing. It may therefore be assumed that rural life and agriculture in the Netherlands will be controlled by people with a modern culture pattern to a much greater extent in the future than is the case at present.

THE MODERN FARMER

Research projects of all sorts have gradually built up a picture of the modern dynamic farmer². A not unsatisfactory figure, on the whole he measures up to the standards that we now expect of our fellow-men. He is a man who tries to get the most out of his farm and although working under much the same conditions, his annual production is considerably higher than that of the traditional-minded farmer. In general still really attached to his farm, he works with perhaps even greater pleasure than the traditional farmer, partly because he sees results for his work. In contrast to the traditionalist, however, to him being a farmer is not something that is a matter of course. Should he consider farming to hold no real prospects for his son he would find it perfectly natural for him to choose another occupation. Unlike the traditional farmer, his interests are not confined to the small world in which he lives and works; they extend to the world beyond and he is not only actively aware of what is taking place there, but forms his own opinions on the problems besetting it. In general, therefore, he takes a lively interest in politics.

If he is a church member, he is an active member and churchgoing to him is more than just the routine duty that it is to many traditional farmers. He is keenly interested in educational matters and follows the scholastic

¹ A. W. van den Ban, *Boer en Landbouwonderwijs*, 1957.

² See the literature referred to in note 3 page 38.

achievements of his children with close attention. Active in associational life, including the farmers' co-operatives, he sits on numerous committees. Notwithstanding his much greater economic achievements, he manages to enjoy more free time than his more traditional colleagues. He goes on many excursions, takes a regular holiday and entertains at home. He will always be receptive to change.

THE NEW RURAL LIFE

The above means in fact that the rural life of the future will have exchanged its tranquillity for continual movement. The farmer, living in unbroken contact with the outside world, will be spurred on by the rising standard of living in the non-agrarian world, which will mean continual efforts to increase the production per man, greater mechanization and rationalization and a steady reduction in manpower. It will also mean that the average size of farms will show a continual increase, although it should be noted here that the size of the holding will not invariably be expressed by the number of ha. under cultivation any more than is the case at present. The fact that the average number of ha. per holding will increase considerably can, however, scarcely be doubted. The average labour supply in the Netherlands agrarian sector has fallen by approximately 2% each year since 1950¹ and it is not at all unlikely that 25 years hence the number of agricultural workers in the country will amount to no more than half the present total.

Although development may be expected to lag behind actual needs there is every reason to suppose that the rural cultural scene will undergo a radical change. Many farms will disappear, even though some will continue a sham existence as the country home of a city-dweller. The need for land consolidation will continue to grow and cannot fail to result in increasingly radical action. Numerous small villages will disappear and timely concentration constitutes the sole chance for a limited number of sizeable villages to survive in the purely agricultural regions. A combined population of agrarian and non-agrarian people will become much more common in large sections of the country and the farmer will have to take care to keep in step with his new neighbours if he is to retain his position and his voice in village affairs. For that matter, the entire agrarian population which, as stated above, will probably constitute no

¹ Between 1959 and 1961 the agricultural labour force, expressed in man years, dropped from 533,000 to 425,000. See *Maandschrift*, Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics, February, 1960 and March, 1962.

more than 5% of the total working population in the not too distant future, will only be able to maintain its position in the community if it does not cut itself off from that community, but works together with other groups and makes its influence felt through those groups¹. Little will be left of typically rural manners and customs. A farmer's family will be practically indistinguishable from a middle class urban family; indeed, this is already often the case.

The fact that it is impossible to predict any sort of stabilization cannot be stressed often enough. The only element remaining unchanged will be change itself. As noted by Mendras² and others, a large section of the agrarian population still finds it difficult to grasp this fact. Many farmers recognize the need for some change, for the modernization of their farming methods, but many of them still believe that once that is accomplished they will be able to settle down to a new period of uninterrupted peace and quiet. It will scarcely be necessary to add that they are mistaken in their belief. The future is not a slope to be ascended in order to reach level ground; it requires a continuous climb.

It follows automatically, as it were, that all plans for rural development should aim at creating conditions that do not exclude the possibility of further growth. Land consolidation, for example, and the opening-up of new lands should be planned in such a way as to prevent a particular farm size – even though it might be an improvement in itself – from becoming more or less fixed. Efforts should be directed towards designing a basic plan, like that now in operation in the Ysselmeer polders, that will form no real hindrance to any radical alteration in farm size that might later take place. By the same token, plans for the development (or, if need be, disappearance) of our villages should take into account the possibility that the appearance of rural areas will change out of all recognition and, more especially, that very little of the present settlement structure may eventually remain. It may be doubted whether North Groningen, which can claim the honour of being the first to design a village plan for a whole region, has made sufficient allowance for that possibility³.

¹ See E. W. Hofstee, 'Welke plaats zal de boer – sociaal gezien – straks innemen in het totale Nederlandse bestel?' in: *Doelmatige Veevoeding*, Jubilee issue, 1962.

² Paper read at the Fourth World Congress of Sociology. It has not been published, but is discussed in E. W. Hofstee, 'Agriculture and Rural Life in an Industrializing Society', *Transactions of the Fourth World Congress of Sociology*, 1959, pp. 13-28.

³ A study of the distribution of the population and the services provided in North Groningen carried out by the Groningen Provincial Planning Service. Opinions are still

It is even more important to try to ensure that the rural areas be populated with people who are prepared as far as possible for any developments that may eventuate. A great deal will be asked of the farmer as the head of his enterprise. In addition, he will need to be a fully qualified member of the larger society, informed on what goes on in the outside world and interested in discussing the subject with others. His occupation will require a fairly high level of intellectual development; the position he will have in society may demand it even more. For that reason we may seriously doubt whether the primary agricultural school, starting immediately after six years of elementary education may be said to provide an adequate education for our future farmers. An advanced primary or three-year secondary course followed by a course at a secondary agricultural school would seem to be the very least that the farmer of the future will need to equip him for his career.

So the rural areas will be altogether different from those that we knew in the past. East Flevoland, the third Ysselmeer polder now under construction, affords us a glimpse of the future, even though the older parts of the country will not be able to follow its example in the next few decades. It will comprise few, but large villages occupying an area twenty times greater than that of many villages in the clay regions of Frisia and Groningen. Many of the farms, which will be large, rationally designed units, will be situated at such a distance from the nearest village that they will only be really accessible by motorized transport. Intensive mechanization and a use of manpower per ha. far below that usual in the rest of the country at the moment will be another feature¹. The way in which the village community will function in this region has been described by Dr. Constandse in his dissertation, 'Het dorp in de IJsselmeerpolders'². His point of departure here was the

divided on the question of the future of the small village, undecided points including the direct and indirect possibilities that will be offered these villages by industry and other new means of subsistence. See, inter alia, J. J. Kalma, *Dorpen willen leven*, 1960; H. Kotter *Landbevölkerung im sozialen Wandel*, 1958; Th. Quené, 'Reconstructie van het platteland', in: *Tijdschrift voor Volkshuisvesting en Stedebouw*, 1958; A. J. Voortman, 'Ontwikkeling en toepassing van een methodiek ter afleiding van patronen van verzorgende centra', I and II, in: *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, December, 1961 and January, 1962.

¹ For the use of labour and the farm sizes in East Flevoland see A. J. Louwes and J. de Veer, 'De toekomstige economische mogelijkheden voor akkerbouwbedrijven van verschillende grootte bij verschillende zwaarten van de grond in de IJsselmeerpolders', in: *Bedrijfs-economische Mededelingen*, Agricultural Economics Research Institute, No. 42, 1962.

² A. K. Constandse, *Het dorp in de IJsselmeerpolders*, 1960.

fact that the country dweller's social, cultural and material requirements will be essentially the same as those of the town dweller.

It may be wondered whether the rural districts of the future as described in outline above will still be rural in the true sense of the word, whether they will not have lost so many of what must be regarded as their essentially rural characteristics that it will no longer be accurate to refer to them as such. It is an indisputable fact that many such characteristics will be lost – are, indeed, already lost; nor can it be doubted that much of what we lose in this way must be regarded as being of value.

But there are good reasons for continuing to apply the word 'rural' to the image of the future as sketched above, or at any rate for regarding that type of society as one which is clearly distinguishable from urban society. Although it was not specifically stated, the reader will have noticed that the foregoing is based on the implicit assumption that agriculture will continue to be characterized by a type of farming in which the manpower is largely supplied by the farmer and his family; in other words, the normal type of farm will be the family farm or that employing a very limited number of farm labourers. As long as this remains unchanged, rural areas, even those where a considerable proportion of the population is composed of commuters, will retain a social and economic structure widely different from that of urban and industrial regions and the survival of the smaller type of population centre, i.e. the village, will be practically assured (see Constandse's dissertation). The difference between that type of society and the one in which agriculture has no part will perhaps be accentuated still more.

TOWARDS AN INDUSTRIAL TYPE OF FARM?

Are we indeed moving in this direction? At first glance the question would scarcely seem to be warranted, since for many years the agrarian sector has been developing in a direction that is the exact opposite of that being taken by the non-agrarian economic sector. Family manpower is becoming increasingly preponderant and it seems probable that this trend will continue for some time to come. There are indications both in this country and abroad, however, that a change could take place. A type of agricultural production that shows little or no relation to the family farm is becoming evident in some areas of production; it is in fact similar in all respects to the capitalist industrial enterprise. The mass

¹ See G.G. Jonkhans and R. Jonkhans, 'Aanpassen in nieuwe stijl', in: *Kern en Keur*, March 1962, p. 18.

production of broilers is a well-known case in point, and it now looks as though large scale production will win the day. In England, moreover, as in a number of countries, the production of eggs is well on the way of becoming a large-scale enterprise. A meat products factory in this country started the production of pigs on a large scale. A chain store established a branch company for the production of eggs for its grocery-stores and supermarkets. Some time ago it was announced that two South Holland dairy factories plan to have their own herds of dairy cows (1,000 and 3,000 respectively)¹. The developments in market gardening are worthy of special mention in this context. Even cursory observation shows that a considerable number of very extensive glasshouse holdings have been developed in the west of the country in recent years. They are enterprises in which very large capital investments have been made and in which horticultural crops are grown on an industrial scale. Should we view these phenomena as an indication that agriculture will shortly develop into a big business enterprise aimed at the mass production of agricultural products? At this juncture it would certainly be premature to announce the end of the family-type farm. But we should be acting equally hastily if we were to assume that the future of agriculture and the future of the family-type farm are one and the same thing.

The family farm is the basis of EEC discussion on agricultural policy and West Germany, mindful of the collectivization of agriculture in East Germany, has made a special effort to prove that this type of farm can hold its own against mass production methods. But has it proved its point conclusively? One cannot help feeling that when Von Blanckenburg, for instance, states that 'Der bäuerliche Familienbetrieb ist dem landwirtschaftlichen Grossbetrieb in der ökonomischen Leistung nicht unterlegen, obgleich der letztere gewisse Vorzüge in der Ausnutzung der Technik hat'², the wish is father to the thought³. The not very impressive agricultural production figures for the Soviet Union should not

¹ *Landbouwdocumentatie*, 1962, No. 20, p. 636.

² P. von Blanckenburg, *Einführung in die Agrarsoziologie*, 1962.

³ H. Priebe has written a great deal on the subject of the economic potentials of the family-type farm. See, inter alia, his recent publication *Neuzeitliche Familienbetriebe, Forschungsstelle für bäuerliche Familienwirtschaft*. Solid and interesting as his material is, he furnishes no conclusive proof that the family farm would be able to hold its own against the large-scale agricultural enterprise and his conclusion that 'die wirtschaftliche Wettbewerbsfähigkeit bäuerlicher Familienbetriebe ist durch die Ergebnisse erwiesen' (p. 81) is premature, to say the least. His data do, however, demonstrate how greatly the economic results of the family farm depend on the intellectual level of the farmer and external production factors.

be taken as a criterion here. After reading a recent study by Chombart de Lauwe¹ on agriculture in Russia and learning how primitive, traditionalist, ignorant and undisciplined many kolkhoz farmers still are and how the organizational and administrative incompetence of the kolkhoz leaders sometimes verges on the incredible, one is not surprised that the agricultural production per man in that country is only a fraction of that in the Netherlands.

A true comparison can only be made with really large-scale enterprises which both employees and management have joined of their own free will and which make full use of the possibilities offered by modern science in both the technical and the economic spheres. As far as arable and dairy farming are concerned, enterprises of this sort are still difficult to find in Western Europe, which is one of the reasons why it is not easy to make a pronouncement regarding an ordinary farm's chances of competing with capitalist mass production methods should they be introduced in agriculture. The best means of comparison, at least as far as arable farming is concerned, is presented perhaps by the large-scale State exploitation of land prior to its being handed over to individual farmers in the Ysselmeerpolders, although for various obvious reasons this comparison is not an altogether valid one either². The results of that temporary State exploitation have never been studied systematically with a view to a comparison of this sort. Knowing the data on the use of labour per ha. in those projects, however, and taking into account the other economic advantages attaching to exploitation on this scale, one finds oneself doubting the arable farmer's chances of offering any real competition. It is in any case certain that the defects from which agriculture in the Soviet Union is suffering are not an intrinsic part of large-scale farming as such.

The principal argument put forward by those who maintain that mass production methods are unsuited to agriculture is that livestock cannot thrive without the special care and attention of the farmer. Once again, the situation in the Soviet Union in this respect is cited as proof. But here, too, the Russian example would seem to be of doubtful value as an argument. For some branches of livestock production are the very areas in which mass production methods have been employed most extensively in the West. In my opinion agrarian circles often underestimate the

¹ Jean Chombart de Lauwe, *Les paysans soviétiques*, 1961.

² Comparison with the results obtained in the Ysselmeerpolders is complicated by the fact that the labourers there are sometimes engaged in reclamation and sometimes in cultivation.

possibility of specialization, the division of labour and systematic scientific control becoming substitutes for the love of the land, the personal devotion and the 'Fingerspitzengefühl' that are the ordinary farmer's strong points. It would be too much to attempt to discuss all aspects of the economic possibilities of the large-scale enterprise in agriculture in the space of this article. The foregoing will, however, suffice to emphasize the need to give serious reflection to the possibility of the rapid advance of mass production methods in agriculture and it will be wise to follow all developments in this field closely. Events in the United States, where in certain regions, e.g. California, the large-scale enterprise is already well entrenched in agriculture, form an additional reason for giving our careful attention to this phenomenon¹.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

It is difficult to resist the temptation to speculate on the possible advantages and disadvantages of a development of this sort, even though this would of course mean abandoning to some extent the strictly scientific method. Certainly one should not only attempt to answer the question from the point of view of its economic effectiveness; the social and cultural consequences should be examined as well. If the large-scale agricultural enterprise becomes more predominant in the future it will have to be assumed that one consequence will be the disappearance of rural society as a type of society clearly distinguishable from urban society in both structure and function. The management and senior staff of a large agricultural enterprise cannot be expected to live scattered throughout the district or even in a real rural village. In their relationship to the higher-grade personnel and management, the lower-grade workers will be in a position analogous to that of their counterparts in non-agricultural enterprises. Those who are not skilled workers will probably alternate between agrarian and non-agrarian occupations, depending on the work offering. A similar system is already well established among the horticultural workers in the western part of the country².

Apart from a few whose duties oblige them to live nearby, there is no longer any need for them to live in the country. The traits so characteristic of our farm labourers – the strong ties between their personal life

¹ Stated by G. Simpson in a lecture entitled 'The Decline of Rural Life in the United States' given at Wageningen, 5th April 1962.

² S. van Veen and M. A. J. Visser, *De tuinarbeiders in Nederland*, Agricultural Economics Research Institute, 1959.

and the land, farms and farmers of their village and their strong emotional relations thereto – will vanish.

Many managers and senior and other personnel of big agricultural enterprises may, like many people in other occupations, prefer to 'live in the country'. But that does not mean being a real 'rural man'. It means a continuation of the urban way of life on the one hand, and a rejection of some aspects of town life on the other; but in essence it always remains directly connected to urban life¹.

The image of the village of the future, if the family farm would continue to dominate agriculture, in the way we pictured it before, is one of something very different from the village in the old, traditional rural areas. But in some respects it will still be different from the city, the residential suburb and the commuter towns. The smallness of the village (even allowing for its expansion in scale) as compared to the city, the predominance of one branch of industry (agriculture) and the consequently strong psychological orientation of the entire community towards that branch of industry, the predominance of the small business concern and the social structure that differs so greatly from that of the city as a direct consequence thereof and the considerable degree of social transparency that the community will retain even in this modern rural society are only a few of the main elements of which the special character of the village in the changed rural areas will be compounded. But this would all be doomed to extinction or never come into existence if the large-scale agricultural enterprise gains the upper hand.

There is hardly any doubt of the fact that a development of this sort would show serious disadvantages. Even if one is convinced that there is no valid reason for preferring rural moral and social values to those of the city, or vice versa, it is still possible to regard their existence side by side as a considerable advantage. Although many people have no definite preference, there will always be some to whom life in the country means the fulfilment of their dearest wish, just as there are others who can only live happily in the city. Some will be definitely in favour of self-employment, or of working for a small concern like a farm; others will prefer employment in a large concern. The fact that people are able to choose for themselves is worth a great deal. In addition, a spell in the country can make a pleasant change for those who on the whole feel quite at home in the city while, on the other hand, a contented country

¹ See *Het Forenzen-kamperen, Eerste Orientatie*, The Netherlands Institute for Motivation and Marketing Research, 1961. This investigation was conducted by the Government Physical Planning Service and the report has not been published commercially.

dweller may feel an urge to taste the joys of city life for a time. It is precisely because of this contrast that town and country each provide recreation and real relaxation for the other. The city dweller will find little or none of this sort of relaxation in the suburbs or the bungalow park. The different society and the different sort of people characteristic of rural areas contribute to his relaxation, even though he may be only aware of them as a background.

I would repeat that symptoms of the development of large-scale agricultural enterprise should not be dismissed with the idea that 'it won't come to that'. Of course the old-style type of farm would not be swept away in the space of a few years. But long before that stage had been reached the growth of big business in agriculture would have had a paralyzing effect on the farming population and on the family farm. Having lost its expansive force, the population would fall prey the more easily to the encroachments of the large-scale enterprise. Many farmers already have some doubt about the future of their occupation, but how would it be then! It was reported recently¹ that plans are now in existence in Switzerland for the establishment of an enormous concern that may be expected to produce eggs and broilers in sufficient quantity to supply the whole country. Imagine one or more giant enterprises of that sort being set up in this country and sounding the death knell of poultry keeping on our farms! It can scarcely be doubted that not only would many farmers lose their means of livelihood, but that many more would lose all faith in the future.

Some people may be of the opinion that there is little point in worrying about the possible social consequences of such a development. They may reason that if it happens, it is inevitable and all resistance will be purely reactionary. As stated in the foregoing, changes producing a new rural scene and modern family-type farms must indeed be regarded as inevitable. The factors underlying these changes, viz. modernization of the culture pattern of the rural population and their no longer being isolated, plus all that that entails, can no longer be altered because, for one thing, no one really wishes to do so.

But the situation is somewhat different with respect to the possible development of large-scale agricultural concerns. To begin with, that development would reflect no more than the desire of a few individuals to further their own financial ends rather than a radical psychological change and an essentially different attitude to the world on the part of a large

¹ *Landbouwdocumentatie*, 1962, No. 19, p. 604.

section of the population. The situation is very different from the macro-economic point of view as well. A short time ago approximately 20% of the working population were in agrarian occupations; the figure may now be something like 10%. As stated in the foregoing, it would seem to be highly probable that the number of persons employed on the land will fall to 5% (or perhaps even less) of the total working population in the near future, even if we maintain the family farm as the basis of our agricultural system. Assuming that the percentage of the national income accounted for by the agrarian income will continue to be roughly equivalent to the percentage of the total working population accounted for by the agrarian working population, as is the case in the Netherlands, agricultural production will account for no more than 5% of the national income. Measured against the present situation, this will be a vast reduction and we can be sure that both the Government and the consumer will bring pressure to bear to ensure that it is in fact effected. But what will happen once that level has been reached? It might be possible to reduce the cost of production still further by organizing agricultural production along big business lines, but the effect would be negligible in view of its relation to the total national income. Assuming that the costs of production were reduced by another 20% in that way, it would mean no more than that the percentage of the national income contributed by agricultural production would drop from 5% to 4%. It is difficult to imagine that the authorities and the consumer would be so greatly in favour of this as to bring great pressure to bear in order to effect it. So from both the economic and the social points of view development of agricultural production along the lines of the big business enterprise would seem to be much less inevitable than the development of rural areas now under way.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing may seem to contain a suggestion to the effect that if the Government cared to take direct action it could perhaps put an end to the threat of large-scale agricultural enterprises gaining the upper hand. That may well be so in theory. But we should be careful not to draw the over-simple conclusion that such a course ought indeed to be followed. To begin with, it should be borne in mind that under the present circumstances the Dutch Government is scarcely in a position to take such drastic action. It is in any case a matter that would have to be handled within the framework of the EEC, and in spite of the member countries' preference for the family-type farm, it would be anything but easy to

persuade present and future members to adopt a uniform policy in this respect. Apart from the technical difficulties of designing and implementing a policy of this sort, many countries might be expected to object from motives of principle. Even if one personally is not in favour of the large-scale agricultural enterprise, a complex body of regulations devised to combat it would not be very appealing for a number of reasons, one being that it would almost certainly curb the development of the family farm as well. Moreover, it may be doubted whether such regulations would continue to be effective in the long run if there were to be a wide margin between the average production costs for the family farm and those which could be achieved by large-scale methods. On the other hand, one should not lose sight of the fact that agricultural activities hold no attraction for the large enterprise unless there is a considerable difference between its potential production costs and those of the family-type farm, or unless shortcomings in the production and marketing methods of the latter mean that there are technical advantages to be gained by undertaking agricultural production. The present situation is certainly tempting in many respects while, furthermore, the rural social situation weakens the competitive chances of the family farm. If, however, the family farm could now achieve what we believe it to be capable of achieving in the future, agricultural production would lose much – or even all – of its attraction for the large-scale enterprise.

So for the most part it is a race against time. The only way to halt the agricultural production trend in favour of the large-scale enterprise is to promote and accelerate the modernization of rural areas now in process. Only a farming community that employs methods and techniques of production adapted as far as possible to modern requirements, that is enabled by its intellectual level and general psychological attitude to exploit its farms in the most effective manner and that inhabits rural areas offering social, cultural and economic opportunities roughly equivalent to those of the city will have any chance of successfully combating the large-scale enterprise. Government help will be essential and it may even occasionally be necessary for that help to take the form of direct protection for the family farm. But the Government's main task will be to increase its efforts to help modernize and strengthen both the material and the non-material basis of the family-type farm and to ensure that rural life is imbued with a new vitality.

I shall end, therefore, with what appears to be a paradox: the development of new rural patterns will have to be accelerated if we are to prevent that development from getting out of control.