



## CHAPTER VI

### *Hollesley Bay and Mayland*

AS THERE APPEARED to be considerable prospect of local authorities taking advantage of Joseph's offer, now made broadly known through the Press, he and Mr. Lansbury found themselves, not long after the successful beginning of the Laindon experiment, making visits throughout England, and inspecting land of all kinds. As a result of these investigations, an estate at Hollesley Bay was discovered to be available. This was a property of thirteen hundred acres organised as an agricultural college for the sons of gentlemen, but it had fallen upon bad times and was now for sale. The difficulty was that the price was something over thirty thousand pounds, an amount which few public authorities might be willing to venture.

Meanwhile matters were becoming more acute, and the Government was being greatly worried, partly owing to the agitation which had been set on foot. It was at this stage that Mr. Walter Long called a conference of guardians and counsellors and from it formed the organisation known as the London Unem-

ployed Fund, upon which all London Authorities were represented. At the first meeting a letter was read from Mr. Fels offering the loan of an estate of thirteen hundred acres for three years free of rent. Mr. Lansbury, who was a member, moved that this generous offer be accepted. The motion was seconded by Mr. Grinling, of Woolwich, and unanimously carried. Thus was quietly inaugurated, without flourish of trumpets, a practical experiment full of great possibilities.

Joseph bought the estate, and within a few weeks the place was occupied by five or six hundred of the unemployed. The question arose as to how the land should be worked, and after some months Mr. Thomas Smith, later Joseph's manager at Mayland, was called in as expert. Among the unemployed men sent to the colony were numbers who showed great adaptability and proved capable of doing much better work than was possible under the conditions prevailing there. The problem was therefore as to whether some of the men should not be permanently settled on the land. This raised the question of lack of cottage accommodation, and the degree to which development could be undertaken, which depended upon whether or not the estate would remain public property.

By this time unemployment had assumed alarming proportions, and agitation was rife, particularly in

London. Demand was made for the passing of a "Right to Work" Bill. Demonstrations and processions organised by Keir Hardie, Geo. Lansbury, and others at last awakened the authorities to the seriousness of the situation. In all this Joseph gave effective aid. Again the women played a prominent part. On one occasion, 10,000 of them, chiefly from East and South London, marched in a great procession across London. A deputation of from twenty to thirty women, and some men representing the London Trades Council, waited on Mr. Arthur Balfour, M.P. Very little practical encouragement resulted immediately. But the agitation was continued, and the Unemployed Workmen Bill, the fate of which had hung in the balance, was passed, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain intervening in its favour. This was at the end of 1905.

With the advent of the Central (Unemployed) Body set up under the Unemployed Workmen Act, the position was more secure, but there was a shortage of funds to carry on the work at Hollesley Bay. As a result of the appeal made to Mr. Balfour by the deputation, Queen Alexandra opened a fund, and for one winter this fund provided all the money necessary.

The Central Body which had taken the place of the London Unemployed Fund was persuaded to take over the estate at Hollesley, and Joseph loaned two thousand pounds with which to build cottages. As soon as these cottages were completed they were

occupied by the London men who had been trained on the colony. The attention of Mr. Fels and Mr. Lansbury was then given to extending the plan so as to deal with larger numbers of men. It was intended to purchase another estate, and much territory was scoured to find a suitable one. It was found close to Hollesley Bay, and the purchase was at the point of completion when another factor entered into and altered the whole situation.

With the change of Government early in 1906, Mr. John Burns became President of the Local Government Board. Mr. Burns forbade the Central Body to have anything to do with the purchase of a new estate and the whole plan was ruined. All the progressive action of those enlightened statesmen, Walter Long and Gerald Balfour, who had presided over the department, was reversed, and Hollesley Bay became merely a country annex to take the overflow from London workhouses.

It will have been discerned that Joseph's main object was to establish a permanent relation between the land and as many of the workers as could adapt themselves to its cultivation. Of each property offered to the public authorities, he proposed to retain something like a quarter, to be developed into small holdings for the benefit of men trained in the colony; they would serve, at any rate, as an example to the others. The whole work was an endeavour to remedy

that topsy-turvydom in which millions of acres lying uncultivated, and tens of thousands of men wanting work and ready to cultivate them could not be brought together. Plans were made for utilising a property at Wye as a colony for women, but once more Mr. John Burns blocked the way.

Thwarted thus in his endeavour to contribute to the solution of the unemployed problem, Joseph decided to test possibilities on his own account. He had acquired a property at Mayland, near Althorn, in Essex, about forty miles from London, and now proceeded to use it for the purposes of his experiment. The remaining possibility seemed to him to lie along the line of small holdings. He therefore proceeded to establish upon the farm in question twenty-one holdings of from five to ten acres, each equipped with dwelling and out-houses and partly planted with fruit. The larger portion of the estate was carried on as a farm under the management of Mr. Thomas Smith, an expert agriculturist and enlightened man, who was willing to give the small holders needful advice and supervise their work until they had learned to find their own way. For the purposes of instruction and also to give a demonstration of the possibilities of intensive culture, a French garden was established which was extended to cover two acres, equipped with frames and bell-glasses, sheds and watering facilities, and a great range of hot-houses. A gardener was

secured from near Paris and kept for two years to demonstrate the best methods that were being utilised in France. The Mayland experiment was a costly one, something like thirty-five thousand pounds being required to lay out and equip the estate.

It was Joseph's desire on this occasion to reach a somewhat better type of human industrial product than the unemployed examples he had been dealing with. The small holdings were therefore allotted to individuals with families who possessed a certain minimum amount of capital. Needless to say, there were many hundreds of applicants.

There was much hope, in the early days of Liberal administration, of a great development in the direction of small holdings through a vigorous application of the Small Holdings Act, which conferred considerable power upon county councils. But, as everyone knows, the Act remained, and still remains, a dead letter. One reason for this is clear. The Act is based upon the wrong principle, land purchase, and this imposes so heavy a burden upon the small holder that its operations are necessarily limited. In those earlier days it was thought, and Joseph shared the hope, that the time was arriving when Britain might be an agricultural nation, and again fasten in the soil the roots of its national life.

From this costly experiment Joseph learned a number of lessons. There was clearly manifest a desire on

the part of the industrial labourer to enter agricultural life, as shown in the twelve hundred or more applications for these few holdings, and a strong determination, among most of those who had embarked, to continue the new mode of life in spite of all discouragement. It was clear, again, that some of the factors that could have turned failure into success lay outside his control and were of the nature of public services and utilities. Most important of all, it became evident that for a number of reasons every small holder would lie in the hollow of the landlord's hand. Other impressive facts came to light. The rates paid in 1905, when the population was fourteen, amounted to thirty pounds twelve and threepence. In 1910, with one hundred and seventy-four persons, the rates amounted to one hundred and fifty-six pounds nine and twopence. The land was originally purchased at about eight pounds three shillings per acre, but after the enterprise developed it was not possible to obtain adjoining land for less than fourteen pounds per acre. Thus the small holders through their own industry, by increasing the land values for all the neighboring landlords, blocked the way to expansion. Joseph had also learned that the twenty-one holdings which he had established and supported could do nothing towards assisting the hundreds of thousands that it would be necessary to aid, if the problem of poverty was to be solved.