I. Introduction.

Following a decision reached by the Council on October 5th, 1937, the Preparatory Committee was instructed to make proposals regarding the scope, agenda, and technical preparation of the European Conference on Rural Life to be held in July 1939 in accordance with a resolution of the 1937 Assembly.

In carrying out its task, the Committee gave its closest attention to the progress which was made in the course of the previous work, and which was finally to lead to the decision to convene this Conference. In this connection, it will be well briefly to recapitulate the facts.

In 1931, on the proposal of the Spanish Government, the Council convened a European Conference on Rural Hygiene. In its report, the Conference drew up a programme of studies to be carried out under the auspices of the Health Organisation and reached the conclusion that it would be desirable to convene a further Conference—also European—in five years time "to examine the results achieved and to adapt its recommendations to current problems and to the progress of public health technique". This twofold initiative constitutes the real origin of the Conference to be held in 1939.

1 The Committee met from April 4th to 7th, 1938, under the Chairmanship of M. A. Wauters, Belgian Minister of Public Health, and, in his absence, of Professor J. Parisot, Chairman of the Health Committee. The members of the Committee were:

- Mr. F. L. McDougall, C.M.G., Economic Adviser to the Australian Government in London;
- M. A. Wauters, Belgian Minister of Public Health;
- Mr. R. Enfield, of the British Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries;
- M. Sorensen, Agricultural Adviser at the Danish Legation in London (was not present at the meeting of April 4th to 7th, 1938);
- Professor Jacques Parisot, Member of the Health Council of France, Professor of Health and Social Medicine at the University of Nancy;
- M. Rudolf Dzerve, President of the Latvian Chamber of Agriculture;
- Professor Witold Stanewicz, former Polish Minister of Agriculture, Professor at the Scientific Institute of Agriculture at Wilno;
- Dr. Milestev Stoyadinovitch, of Yugoslavia.

Were also present:

- The representatives of the International Labour Office;
- The Secretary-General of the International Institute of Agriculture;
- M. Louis Tardy, Honorary Director-General of the Caisse nationale de Crédit agricole, of France.

The Health Committee was instructed to make preparations for the second European Conference on Rural Hygiene, and in 1931 began a systematic survey of factors which influence health in rural areas. During these studies, ideas developed rapidly: the conclusions indicated a new trend of opinion. They showed, in fact, that there can be no improvement in health in rural areas unless there is a parallel improvement in conditions of living, for in the absence of the latter the work of hygienists is likely to be of no avail. Health factors, therefore, cannot be separated from economic and social factors; the idea of the standard of life must underlie all real health progress.

For this reason, the Health Committee concluded in 1936 that the new Conference should consider rural hygiene questions "in their general setting—namely, that of rural life—while account must be taken of the factors of all kinds which come into play." The Assembly endorsed this conclusion, and decided to convene, not a Conference on Rural Hygiene, but the "European Conference on Rural Life" (document A.48.1937).

At the same time, the studies made by the technical organisations of the League of Nations, the International Labour Office and the International Institute of Agriculture with regard to nutrition and housing corroborated this new conception, and showed that in point of fact the rural population of many parts of Europe is badly housed and inadequately fed.

On the other hand, everything seems to prove that general economic progress depends to a great extent on the purchasing-power of agricultural workers, and consequently on their conditions of life. For this reason, at the suggestion of the Australian delegation, the 1937 Assembly drew up for the Economic and Financial Organisation a plan of work based on the fundamental notion of the standard of living. Similar studies are being carried out by the International Labour Office.

Furthermore, in a great many countries it is being increasingly recognised that the standard of living of the rural population is a primary factor in economic and social progress; under the influence of public authorities, social insurance funds, co-operative associations and agricultural associations, a real movement towards the raising of standards in rural areas is in course of development.

II. OBJECT OF THE 1939 CONFERENCE

The Preparatory Committee takes the view that the main lines of the programme for the 1939 Conference and the general character of the preparations for it must be determined by the development of the ideas recapitulated above. As far as possible, the object in both connections must be:

1. To obtain the technical advice of certain international organisations or qualified experts on certain problems of common interest to the rural populations of all European countries;
2. To collect documentary material giving as vivid a picture as possible of the various forms of rural life in the different parts of Europe;
3. To organise between the European countries an exchange of information and ideas, in order to mobilise the experience of all for the benefit of all:
4. To make known the methods adopted in certain countries for the definite purpose of improving the standard of rural life and the results achieved through such methods;
5. To ascertain what difficulties stand in the way of similar progress in other countries;
6. To consider whether, and if so to what extent and with what assistance, the methods employed in certain countries can be adapted to the special circumstances of other countries;
7. By discussion and example, to encourage the Governments and the general public in European countries to take a definite and continuous interest in all attempts to improve the conditions of life of rural populations;
8. To lay down certain guiding principles applicable, mutatis mutandis, to all the rural populations of Europe;
9. Finally, to ascertain how the individual efforts of different countries might be supported by appropriate international action.

It will be seen from the above that the documentary material in question should, in the first place, be such as would give us something which does not as yet exist for the rural population of Europe as a whole—namely, a number of general descriptions emphasising the characteristic features of the rural life of each country, or even the main types of rural life (plains or mountains, pastures or forests, fields or vineyards, etc.) within each country.

The life of the working-classes, governed as it is by modern technical conditions, is somewhat similar everywhere. The life of the peasants offers the greatest variety, not only as regards the degree of material comfort enjoyed, but also as regards the forms it takes. Nothing could be more interesting, nothing could do more to awaken public interest, than a panoramic view extending from one end of Europe to the other, giving some idea of the daily life of agricultural workers and of the outstanding differences that may be noticed from country to country and region to region. But, for this general survey to be possible, it is essential that the descriptions, though vivid, should be brief.

The next stage will be to indicate the directions in which the rural populations seem to be developing: the tendencies and trends by which they are influenced; the progress achieved and the improvements still to be made; the difficulties and the means which seem best adapted.
for overcoming them. Once this general survey is completed, each Government should be free to make a fuller study of such questions as may be of particular interest to it.

Furthermore, in regard to general problems—those which can be studied while setting aside to some extent the conditions peculiar to each country—the various international technical organisations on whose help the Conference can count are already in possession of considerable preparatory material.

The Preparatory Committee has no doubt that, through the bringing together of these various factors, the first Conference on European Rural Life will be able to arrive at a number of practical conclusions and, in particular, to determine by what means and in what specific fields more active international collaboration might help to improve conditions of existence, especially in those parts of Europe where these conditions leave most to be desired.

III. Remarks on the Programme and the Preparations for the Conference.

The expression "rural life" is all-embracing. The Preparatory Committee had therefore to endeavour to bring some order into the many problems covered by this title, in order to direct the preparatory work and the discussions of the Conference towards a few of the main problems with which, in different forms and at different stages, all countries are faced. With this in mind, the Committee, after careful consideration, drew up the agenda which will be found below. Nevertheless, in order to obviate the differences of interpretation that are bound to arise from a list of this kind, a list inevitably brief and therefore vague, the Committee feels that it should be prefaced with a few general observations.

(a) Special Nature of the Conference.

The Preparatory Commission wishes in the first place to dispel a possible misunderstanding. It fears that the proposed agenda may convey the impression that the Conference is meant to be an international Economic Conference, or rather an international Conference on agricultural economy. This is not the case.

People are far too ready to identify the conditions of daily life of the peasants with the economic conditions generally prevailing in the country in which they live, or even with the temporary fluctuations of the world economic situation. By a logical process, which there is a strong tendency to substitute for observation of the facts, they draw from world economic conditions at any given moment uniform conclusions about the standard of life of rural populations in the most diverse countries. For the purposes of the Conference, however, it would clearly be dangerous to assume that "economic situation" and "standard of living" are synonymous terms. We fully appreciate the importance of the economic factor; but to overlook the gap between the two ideas described above would amount, among other things, to delivering the coming Conference over to all the difficulties, all the risks, entailed by the antagonisms now prevailing in European international affairs.

Moreover, this alleged identity exists only in a limited degree. For instance, the catastrophic fall of agricultural prices between 1929 and 1933 affected all the agriculturists of Europe; but that does not alter the fact that during and after the depression there were always profound differences in the manner of life of the rural populations of Eastern and Western Europe. The reason is that the standard of life, particularly at the lower levels, is made up of a number of factors which, while related to the economic situation, also depend on a number of other factors that it is very difficult to express in figures or to measure with the aid of comparative statistics. The method of establishing a direct relation between the average prices on the world market and the manner of life of the farmers is perhaps justified in the case of the rural populations of certain highly developed oversea countries, but would be very imperfect if applied to the extremely varied types of European rural life.

The Preparatory Committee stresses this point because it desires the proposed Conference to retain its special character; while the utmost importance must be attached to the views of the experts on general problems, the documentary material, particularly that from the Governments of the countries taking part in the Conference, must be based on direct and objective observation of peasant life in the different European countries. On those lines, it will be possible for the Conference's conclusions, not to remain in the void, but to adapt themselves freely to the different forms of rural life, and thereby acquire an immediate value.

(b) The Part to be played by the Public Authorities, and the Composition of Delegations.

It must be clear, therefore, that the object of the League's action cannot be limited to writing a fresh chapter in the natural history of the peasantry. Close observation of the actual facts is essential, but it must be looked upon as the basis of a deliberate policy of initiating, supporting and accelerating, at a rate necessarily varying according to local conditions, the material and moral improvement of the conditions of life of rural populations.

Of course, in a rural environment, as in any other, progress is often the outcome of a spontaneous evolution, itself brought about by innumerable forces, of which the development of communications is one of the most important, in that it makes contact possible and thereby liberates the imitative instinct—a factor of great weight. There can be no doubt, however,
that well-planned and sustained intervention by those responsible for the conduct of affairs at every step in the social scale can greatly help—examples are not lacking—to speed up the naturally very slow rise of a generation of peasants towards a standard of living higher than that of the previous generation.

Hence when, from the material laid before it, the Conference has gained an idea of the position in the different countries, it should concentrate its attention on the part that the public authorities play, or should play, in any endeavour to bring about an improvement in any aspect of the life of rural populations. From this standpoint, clearly, the conception of public authorities must be understood in the widest sense, so as to include, from the capital city down to every little country parish, all authorities, and all semi-official bodies, which seek to improve rural life, either generally or in any specific field. It follows, therefore, that the idea in view is not a congress of experts on rural life, but a conference of Government representatives. At the same time, it would be highly desirable for delegations to include members with special knowledge of the various subjects mentioned in the Conference's agenda—civil administration, agricultural engineering, health services, agricultural technique, co-operation, education, etc.

Even before the Conference meets, initiative on the part of the League might do considerable service if it led to the formation, within each Government, of a nucleus of persons selected from the various branches of the Administration and other national activities, who were resolved to put their authority and their efforts at the service of the cause to which the Conference is devoted. The Preparatory Committee feels that the participating Governments could contribute to the formation of such an active nucleus, and at the same time enhance the cohesion and continuity of their efforts, if they would select their delegations 
forthwith
and place the delegates in charge of the preparation of the material to be submitted to the Conference.

(c) Dual Nature of the Documentation — The "Principal Preparatory Document".

According to the Preparatory Committee's conception, the documentation will be prepared by two main sources—the participating Governments and the international experts (bodies or individuals).

At the risk of repetition, it feels that it may be well to set down certain proposals for securing the two bodies of documentation to which reference has been made.

First class. — The present report and the agenda it contains should be sent to the European Governments as soon as possible, and each of them should be asked to produce, by November 1938 if possible, a general monograph on national lines, briefly describing the conditions of life of its rural population and going in greater detail into the efforts the authorities are making, intend to make, or would think it desirable in certain circumstances to make, in the different spheres of rural life, in order to improve those conditions. (The length of such monographs should, as far as possible, not exceed fifty quarto pages printed in type of average size.) The agenda that follows suggests the natural chapter-headings for these national monographs, but must be regarded as purely indicative, and should in no sense be looked upon as an absolutely rigid programme.

The Committee attaches special importance to these national monographs, from which the Conference will be able to gain a real knowledge of the problems as they arise in practice in each country. They should therefore illustrate, by actual instances if possible, the results that have been secured and the difficulties encountered, and should likewise show in what directions the authorities have been able to do useful work, and what resources are lacking. In short, it is the national monographs that will provide what might be called the living matter of the Conference's discussions. But, while these monographs should contain one or more chapters dealing with the problem as a whole, there is no reason why Governments should not go in greater detail into questions of which they feel more particularly qualified to treat. If these are matters in which they meet with special difficulties, a knowledge of those difficulties will indicate whether international co-operation might help to overcome them. If, on the other hand, the questions referred to cover a field in which the particular country has already made considerable progress, its survey will afford encouragement and instruction of value to other countries.

Second class. — The Conference will also have before it technical monographs on certain general questions, the preparation of which has been distributed by the Preparatory Committee among the various international organisations, and in some cases entrusted to experts with special qualifications. The Conference will thus be able to profit by the considerable work already carried out by the Health Organisation, the Economic and Financial Organisation and the Organisation for Communications and Transit of the League, the International Labour Office, the International Institute of Agriculture, and the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, to which bodies the Preparatory Committee desires to express its deep gratitude at the present stage.

There will also be individual studies; all these will bear upon the main problems on the agenda, and will thus enable every Government taking part in the Conference to see how the best-qualified experts view the solution of the difficulties with which it has to grapple in its own country.

On the basis of these two classes of documents, the Committee proposes the preparation of a "Principal Preparatory Document", containing, in addition to the agenda (which may have
been amended by that time), a condensed statement of the results of all the preparatory work now in progress.

This principal document should in itself suffice to enable any member of the Conference to keep abreast of its proceedings and to take a useful part therein. At the same time, it will in no sense form an adequate substitute for the national monograph on any given country, or for the individual study on any particular problem.

The Preparatory Committee proposes to hold another meeting towards the end of this year to discuss in detail the "Principal Preparatory Document", which it will submit to the Council with its second report.

IV. Agenda.

Rôle of the Public Authorities (National, Regional and Local) in improving the Conditions of Rural Life together with the Rôle of Agricultural Associations, Co-operative Societies and Other Similar Agencies.

1. Influence of demographic conditions. Density of the rural population. Relations between urban and rural populations. State of health, etc.

2. Land tenure systems, land settlement, agrarian reforms. Technical improvements in agriculture, designed to raise the standard of life of the rural population.
   - Local, regional and national measures.
   - Soil improvement;
   - Crop improvement, improvement of live-stock;
   - Equipment;
   - Rural industries;
   - Reduction of cost prices, organisation of sales and markets;
   - Grading.


4. Agricultural credits and insurance against agricultural risks.

5. Education.
   - General, domestic, technical, adult education. Peasant art, peasant culture, folklore; organisation of leisure.

   - Results of the recommendations of the European Rural Hygiene Conference of 1931—health centres—collaboration and coordination of the action of the public health and relief authorities, of the medical practitioners, of insurance institutions, of mutual assistance associations, health co-operatives and benevolent societies.
   - General study of certain diseases specially affecting rural populations and rural economy (including alcoholism).

   - Study of physical fitness and of the state of nutrition of rural communities (including a survey of actual consumption, a determination of the adequacy of the diets, and consideration of the measures required to remedy any defects of diet noted).
   - Special studies on milk and bread.
   - Economic considerations.

8. Rural planning:
   (a) Area planning.
       - Transport and communications;
       - Water-supply, sewage disposal;
       - Electrification, etc.
   (b) Community planning.
       - Community centres, cinemas, libraries, wireless, playing-grounds, baths, swimming-baths, wash-houses.
   (c) The rural house and outbuildings.

V. Remarks on Certain Items of the Agenda.

The Preparatory Committee hopes that, read in the light of the considerations set forth in the preceding chapters, the above agenda will not give rise to unduly divergent interpretations, in spite of the very general terms in which it is couched. It may perhaps be useful to add a few very brief remarks with regard to the principal items, in order to explain more clearly their scope and, in particular, to indicate how the work will be divided between monographs by experts and national monographs.


The relation between man and the land undoubtedly has a considerable influence on the standard of life of rural populations; but the familiar fact that some parts of Europe have a very dense agricultural population enjoying a very high standard of life, while on the other hand the lowest standards are found in thinly populated regions, gives ground for thought.
Indeed, the influence of demographic conditions on the standard of life can only be determined more or less accurately if the population figures are examined in conjunction with all the natural, economic and social factors affecting a country or a given area. It follows that it is only from national monographs that the Conference will be able to obtain useful information on this subject, and then only on condition that they do not draw conclusions about the standard of rural life from the population figures alone. On the contrary, careful study is required of all the constituent factors of rural life before it is possible to determine, by a process of elimination, what part in the whole is played by the demographic factor.

To enable the Conference to form a comprehensive idea about the rural population of Europe from which comparisons can be made between one country and another, or one region and another, a study by the International Institute of Agriculture of the relation between the degree of density of rural populations and the other main factors should be of value as a means of gauging the relative importance of the density figures. Further, the Health Organisation proposes to submit to the Conference a general study from which conclusions may be drawn regarding the physique and health of the European peasantry, including the frequency of morbidity and mortality.

One extremely interesting subject to which the Conference will doubtless devote considerable attention is the diverse and changing relations between ruralism and urbanism, between village and town—two extremes in human life which are constantly reacting on one another. The Committee understands that this interesting problem will be dealt with fully in certain national monographs.


A survey of the different types of land tenure systems, the way in which they vary from country to country, and the social or natural causes by which their selection is determined; a broad outline of the agrarian reforms which have profoundly changed the system of land tenure in a considerable part of Europe since the war; and, further, a few interesting examples of land settlement will form the subject of one or more studies by the International Institute of Agriculture. It will be for the Governments participating, however, on the basis of their own exact knowledge of their respective peasant populations, to determine what influence these problems have had on the standard of rural life.

With regard to technical improvements in agriculture, it is hoped that the International Institute of Agriculture will be able, on the basis of its own documentary material, to supply the Conference with one or more studies showing, by means of a comparison with the past, or between one country and another, or one region and another, what results can be obtained by the adoption of rational methods in the different fields enumerated under this head and in similar fields. To attempt to cover all these subjects for the whole of Europe would be too difficult a task; and the results might well prove to be of doubtful value. It is better to take a few well-chosen examples calculated to bring out the full importance of technical progress as a factor in well-being.

Here also the Conference will derive most benefit from national monographs. This will give satisfaction to the legitimate pride of those countries which have considerable progress to their credit. But it is equally important, in the cause of European solidarity, to ascertain what difficulties stand in the way of similar progress in the less fortunate countries, and to see whether international collaboration cannot serve a useful purpose in this connection, particularly in the matter of the capital requirements involved.


A thorough survey of the forms of agricultural co-operation would be outside the scope of the Conference. It would be very interesting, however, to ascertain by means of examples to what extent co-operatives have actually assisted to raise the standard of life in rural communities by facilitating technical improvements, improved equipment (use of machines), the industrial exploitation of farm products (milk, butter, cheese), the purchase at reasonable prices and on credit of certain articles, such as fertilisers, etc. The public authorities can undoubtedly do much by their support to develop co-operation, and in their turn the co-operatives can assist in the application of a policy of rural development. Even in countries where co-operation is most highly organised, improvements are constantly being introduced which have an appreciable influence on the conditions of life.

Interesting information will be obtained on this subject from a study by the International Labour Office. But there are countries—Denmark holds a place of honour among them—in which co-operation has reached a high level. It is to be hoped, therefore, that national monographs from these countries will bring out the full importance of co-operation as a factor in the well-being of rural populations.

4. Agricultural Credits. Insurance against Agricultural Risks.

In September 1937, the Assembly of the League of Nations requested its Economic and Financial Organisation to study the systems of agricultural credit and insurance with a view to the elaboration of principles calculated to strengthen internal and external credit, and suitable for adoption by countries contemplating a modification of their existing legislation. It may be
pointed out that the discussions which took place on this subject in the Assembly related, in particular, to the position of the predominantly agricultural countries of Central and Eastern Europe which are relatively poor in capital and are divided into small and medium-sized estates, thus rendering credit operations difficult. The position in these countries will therefore form the principal basis of the study undertaken by the Financial Committee of the League of Nations, which will in due course be placed at the disposal of the Conference. On the other hand, information on the position in some countries where credit operations take place under better conditions will enable instructive comparisons to be made. The same study will also extend to the problem of agricultural insurance, which is inseparable from that of credit.1

Apart from this international enquiry, the national monographs will, without doubt, refer to the problems of credit and insurance, at any rate in so far as these two factors exercise an influence on the standard of living of the rural classes. In order to avoid overlapping, it may be again pointed out that the League enquiry, which will be directed and to a great extent carried out on the spot by M. Louis Tardy, the Honorary Director-General of the Caisse nationale de Crédit agricole de France, will relate mainly to the position of the agricultural countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

5. General, Domestic, Technical and Adult Education. Peasant Art, Peasant Culture, Folklore; Organisation of Leisure.

In item 5, the agenda enters directly into the real subject of the Conference.

On this subject, the national monographs will necessarily form the most important contribution to the Conference, especially as regards general elementary instruction. The Commission hopes, however, that it can provide the Conference with a special monograph drawn up by a highly competent expert and relating to the technical education of farmers. The International Labour Office, on the other hand, proposes, in co-operation with the Health Organisation of the League of Nations, to furnish a study into the organisation of leisure, a problem which has in recent years constantly gained in importance. Contributions relating to peasant art and folklore will probably be supplied by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation and by certain Governments.


In the work of improving the living conditions of country dwellers, the doctor and hygienist are pioneers. The "health centre", which was defined by the European Conference on Rural Hygiene in 1931, and the work of which is based on the co-operation of the health authorities, public assistance, the medical profession, social insurance associations and mutual aid institutions, forms a sort of advanced post of progress wherever it has been established.

In the sphere of health, the ground has already been well prepared by the Conference held in 1931, which exercised a considerable influence on the health organisation, the arrangement and equipment of the rural areas of Europe. The Health Organisation has also carried out studies in the international field, which may be grouped as follows:

(a) Sanitation. — Supply of drinking-water, analysis and survey of waste water, treatment of household refuse and manure, fly-control, etc.;
(b) Prevention of the most dangerous diseases in country areas: tuberculosis, typhoid, undulant fever, etc.;
(c) Medical and sanitary assistance. — The cost and efficiency of various types of sanitary services, the protection of mothers and children, the training of the technical staff of health services;
(d) Medico-social protection of the rural populations. — Nutrition, housing, rural planning.

The above work will need to be supplemented to show the effects of the 1931 Conference and to utilise the experiments already carried out in the prevention and treatment of disease. In this connection, special attention should be paid to certain diseases which are still prevalent in rural areas, such as typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and those affecting man and live-stock (e.g., brucellosis).

The Health Organisation has already taken the necessary steps regarding technical preparations for the discussions on medico-social policy.

Mention should also be made of the Health Organisation's work in non-European countries. A Conference of Far-Eastern Countries on Rural Hygiene was held in Java last year. Previous to that, the Pan-African Sanitary Conference had dealt with the same problem (Johannesburg 1935). Lastly, a Conference on Rural Hygiene for American Countries is to be held in Mexico in November 1938. The documentation and conclusions of these conferences will of course be available for the Conference to be held next year.

1 The forms of insurance to be considered are obviously against agricultural risks, and not social forms of insurance (such as those covering employers' liability).
The Conference has at its disposal in this connection important studies made by the Mixed Committee formerly set up by the League of Nations for the study of problems connected with nutrition. The results of these enquiries will be found in the Final Report of the Mixed Committee. The Committee's enquiries have enabled a considerable amount of documentary material to be collected. The report of the Committee terminates with practical conclusions on the framing and execution of a nutrition policy by public authorities.

More recently, the Health Organisation has undertaken further studies in conjunction with public hygiene authorities, national nutrition committees and, in particular, European institutions and schools of hygiene, in order to ascertain the effective consumption of particular groups, to consider whether their dietaries are sufficient, and to evolve measures for combating defects. They will probably take place in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Roumania, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

There are two foodstuffs of primary importance—viz., bread and milk. The composition of bread (and, accordingly, its nutritional value) varies considerably from one country to another, and even within particular countries. The Health Organisation is accordingly engaged at present on a study of bread, which will be ready before the Conference meets. The study deals with the kind of cereals consumed, their degree of sifting, form of consumption, quantity consumed and composition of the bread.

In the case of milk, the Health Organisation already has copious documentary material at its disposal on the subject of the peculiar nutritive value of milk, and on the place which it should hold in a system of nutrition, together with the hygienic questions arising in connection with its production and distribution. The Health Organisation is at present working, with a view to the Conference, on the extension and completion of this material.

Moreover, the participating Governments will, it is hoped, be in a position, on the basis of the above extensive international studies, to give more detailed particulars in their several national monographs as to the nutrition of the rural classes in their respective countries.

8. Rural Planning.

A number of countries have been making efforts on a considerable scale for some years past to improve housing conditions and to plan urban and rural districts. In 1931, the European Conference on Rural Hygiene devoted a chapter of its report to this subject. Since then, the Health Organisation has endeavoured to extend the information available; and a plan of study with a questionnaire was drawn up in 1934 with a view, in the first instance, to a general survey of housing conditions in the country districts.

The results of these studies were exhibited last year in a pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition, which was placed by the French Government at the disposal of the League. Thirteen European countries submitted proposals for the development of modern hygiene in connection with rural habitations and country life. The Health Organisation is now endeavouring to formulate the fundamental requirements of healthy and cheap housing. It is also studying the problems of rural and community planning.

The International Labour Office has at the same time made enquiries into the question of the housing of agricultural workers. It submitted a report to the European Conference of 1931 in this connection, and has since been associated with later studies by the Health Organisation.

The 1937 Assembly was of opinion that the scope of these studies should be extended to include all aspects of the housing problem. The Economic and Financial Organisation is at present studying the methods employed in different countries to improve housing conditions, with reference to cost, results and objectives. These studies will be gradually extended to cover relations between the building trade and business activities in general, and to the question of statistical methods.

We have observed in respect of item 5 of the agenda that the problems relating to education, hygiene and rural planning constitute the real subject of the Conference.

These three spheres are closely connected. A total lack of education makes the peasant indifferent or even hostile to the most elementary rules of health, of which he does not grasp the importance. There is, moreover, a danger that these rules will ensure insurmountable material obstacles if the planning of the farm, the village or the district remains below the indispensable minimum. In addition, education, hygiene and rural planning introduce those elements which, in order to distinguish them from those directly influenced by the temporary economic position, might be called the permanent elements of the standard of living of the rural population. For instance, the habit of clean dwellings and of healthy water constitutes a durable achievement which will tend to persist even under the pressure of a difficult economic position. Moreover, the existence of a road giving access to the market, or of a storehouse for storing the harvest, is a means of permanent protection against exploitation and usury.

1 See document A 13.1937 (Final Report of the Mixed Committee). See also Vols. III and IV of the Preliminary Report [documents A.12(b) and A.12(c). 1936].
Lastly, rural planning calls for installations going beyond the reach of individual property. This means that in this sphere no considerable progress can be made without constant efforts on the part of the authorities, for whose action it opens up an unlimited field. It is not only in the great agricultural countries which have insufficient capital and are far from the great industrial centres that planning conditions are inadequate; there are very few countries in Europe which can boast of having extended the benefits of rational planning to all parts of their territory. Among the principal countries there is, perhaps, not one which does not possess backward areas, where the conditions of rural planning are still in a primitive state and are not a source of pride for European civilisation. In this connection, it may be sufficient to point out that in the great countries of Western Europe, which are so justly proud of their culture and economic prosperity, there are thousands of villages, and even entire districts, in which the quantity and quality of the drinking-water is inadequate.

There is no need to insist on the importance of this subject, for the study of which the Conference must count in particular on the contribution of the Governments taking part. It is to be hoped that the Conference will be the starting-point of a movement which will result in the acceptance by European public opinion of the idea that the duty of working unceasingly for the improvement of rural planning, on which the health and well-being of the rural areas depend, must be inscribed among the permanent obligations of the authorities.