

RURAL HUSBANDRY

RURAL POPULATION

Since the colonization farming has been the chief occupation of the Icelanders. In former times it constituted, so to say, their only means of livelihood, besides the fisheries, which at that time were of secondary importance. But of late, fishing, commerce and various industries have developed so strongly that the number of those who live by farming is not only relatively, but absolutely, lower than it was a generation ago. In 1920 the rural population numbered a little more than 40 000, or about 40 per cent. of the nation (cfr. Population, p. 17).

According to the census returns of 1920 the number of farmers in Iceland was 6364, besides 300 who carried on farming as a subsidiary source of income. To this number must be added another 300 'lodgers', i. e. subtenants, who, as a general rule, do not themselves rent farms, but reside with the farmers and hire a plot of the respective farms. The number of farms, therefore, probably does not exceed 6700.

AREA OF INHABITED LAND

Iceland has an area of 10 285 000 hectares, four-fifths of which are quite uninhabited, namely the highlands in the interior and the mountain ranges branching out from them, which are for the most part useless, being either glaciers, driftsands, mountain wastes or lava-fields with little or no vegetation. But though unfertile on the whole these highlands are not all equally barren, and a considerable part of them is used as mountain pasture for sheep and stud-horses which in spring are driven to the highlands and there left to their own devices during the summer months.

The total area of inhabited land probably amounts to about 2 300 000 hectares at most. Of this only 30 000 hectares are cultivated (i. e. manured homefields, vegetable gardens, and irrigated meadows). Of the