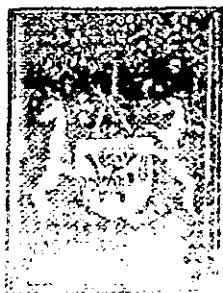


THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

F. E. KEBBEL.



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“The Reports of the Agricultural Commissioners are ably summarized in Mr. Keibel’s book. After the flood of literature called forth by recent events, it still contains the best general survey, in a small compass, which has yet appeared.”—*Edinburgh Review*, 1875.

“An excellent little book.”—MR. CLARE SEWELL READ, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, April, 1887.

THE
AGRICULTURAL LABOURER:

A SHORT SUMMARY OF HIS POSITION.

BY

T. E. KEBBEL,

OF THE INNER TEMPLE, BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

A NEW EDITION,

BROUGHT DOWN TO DATE, WITH FRESH CHAPTERS ON WAGES, LABOUR,
ALLOTMENTS, SMALL HOLDINGS, AND THE EDUCATION ACT.

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THE PRESIDENT OF THE POOR LAW BOARD,*
BY HIS OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.

* Now Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1887.

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THIS little book is intended chiefly for that class of readers who, while they take a considerable interest in the subject which it deals with, have no opportunities of obtaining access to original sources of information, and but little leisure to wade through bulky Blue Books, even if they had. The earlier chapters are confined more exclusively than the later within the area of the Reports* on which the work is primarily based. But into all alike I have allowed myself, in the course of reconstruction, to import whatever fresh matter appeared suitable for the purpose. Some subjects I have investigated independently for myself; and for a great part of the last four chapters I am scarcely, if at all, indebted to the Reports of the Commissioners. I have, however, consulted the works of various other writers who have recently devoted much time and thought to the condition of agriculture, both in this country and abroad.

* Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners appointed to enquire into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1867. Report of the Enclosure Commission, 1869.

Some degree of dryness is almost inseparable from the subjects of the first two chapters ; and the chapter on Education, having been written before the introduction of the present Bill, will naturally have lost some of its interest. But, on the whole, I venture to hope that the book may prove acceptable to the public, and perhaps encourage others to condense in a popular form some of those stores of information which are periodically entombed in the Reports of Commissioners and Committees.

T. E. K.

1870.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION.



WITHIN the last seventeen years so many things have happened affecting the condition of the agricultural labourer that a volume written as long ago as 1870 might naturally be expected to contain little that was either useful or interesting. Life, however, even at the latter end of the nineteenth century, moves slowly in an English village; and, “though much is taken, much remains” of the old habits and customs with which I was familiar in my youth. The Education Act of 1870, the agricultural Union, the agricultural depression, the gradual but steady decline in the numbers of the peasantry, two Agricultural Holdings Acts, the prominence assumed among the questions of the day by the demand for allotments and small holdings, and the attention bestowed upon them by some of the leading landowners of the country; last, but not least, the extension of the county franchise, and the endowment of the labourers with the consciousness of political power, have effected a change in the moral tone of the English peasantry, while other circumstances have added greatly to their material comfort. Yet in much that concerns them very closely the Reports of

the Duke of Richmond's Commissioners (1879-1881) do but echo the words of the Commission of 1867 "For inquiring into the employment of women and children in agriculture," and the information supplied to myself by my own correspondents in 1887 is in many respects an echo of both. Chapters II., III., IV., V., and IX. are entirely new, and Chapters VII. and VIII. nearly so. But other portions of the work I have retained as originally printed; and it has been my object throughout so to arrange my materials as to enable the reader to compare the condition of the labourer and the state of public opinion concerning him as they stood at the three different periods referred to in the book—1870, 1880, and 1887. It will be seen that the experience of seventeen years confirms most of the opinions which I advanced in 1870, and that on numerous questions of which I then wrote with some degree of hesitation, I have now felt justified in writing with much greater certainty and decision.

It will be found, I think, that in point of wages, food, and work, he is decidedly better off than he was when I first took up his cause. His circumstances have fluctuated very greatly during the interval on which we are now looking back, and comparing the end with the beginning, the balance of advantage is not always on his side. But it is generally. Wages, which rose with the agricultural Union, and fell again with the agricultural depression, have no more than

gone back to the point at which they originally stood, even if they have done that, while, on the other hand, the purchasing power of money has increased within the same period by something like 30 per cent. The agricultural labourer, therefore, has been no sufferer by the agricultural distress of the last ten years. It has not really fallen upon him. His condition, instead of being worse than it was before, is better; and when we look round on the predicament of the farmers and gentry whom it has sunk so low, and then on the fortunes of the agricultural labourer, which are above par, we shall be justified in concluding that the employers at all events have done their best, and that they are at present paying the very highest wages they can possibly afford to give.

Had it not been for the unfortunate cloud which settled down upon our great rural industry some ten or eleven years ago, a different prospect might still have been before us. I said in 1870 that the source from which the ultimate improvement of the agricultural labourer was to be looked for was a permanent and substantial rise in wages, which the then prosperity of the agricultural class seemed to render not improbable. I had even allowed myself to hope that the day might not be far distant when the average weekly wage of an ordinary day labourer might be as high as a pound a week. To any such hope as that we must be prepared, I fear, to say farewell; and the bulk of the new matter

imported into this volume will be found to relate to other theories and experiments which are in fashion at the present moment; though whether they will answer all the expectations that are based on them is perhaps a doubtful question.

It will be seen that for the tables of wages and perquisites added to the second edition, I have gone to what may be considered representative counties, herein following the example of the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834 (Supplement 1, p. 2), who, to illustrate the condition of the labourers, took the answers which they had received from seven representative counties, than which they thought "a fairer average of the whole country" could not be taken. I hope my own selections will be accepted as an equally fair one, and at all events the information contained in it has the merit of being completely fresh.

In conclusion, I will only express my thanks to those friends who have so kindly assisted me in obtaining the information I required: Earl Stanhope, Mr. E. Stanhope, Sir Mathew White Ridley, Mr. Clare Sewell Read, Mr. Albert Pell, and, above all, Major Craigie, Secretary to the Central Chamber of Agriculture, without whose valuable advice and opportune suggestions I should hardly have succeeded in bringing out the present volume.

T. E. KEBBEL.

May 13, 1887.

THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.

CHAPTER I.

CORRIGENDA.

Introduction, p. xvi.—Among the names of those to whom I am indebted for information the name of Lord Stanley of Alderley should be included.

Page 99, line 8.—For “is now” read “was when the Report was published.”

field labour it was necessary to ascertain to what causes their employment was assignable, and to consider with great care how far it was desirable to abolish it altogether, or only to curtail and place it under certain restrictions. It was clear that to arrive at any satisfactory solution of these questions the whole system of agricultural labour would have to be reviewed in detail. Wages, allotment grounds, cottage accommodation, the size of farms, the nature of the work

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May 13, 1887.

THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.

CHAPTER I.

FOOD AND WAGES.

1867-1870.

THE Commissioners appointed in 1867 to inquire into "the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture" have now completed their Report. This Commission, though ostensibly issued for the purpose described upon the title-page, is, in fact, nothing less than an inquiry into the whole condition of the agricultural peasantry. It was found, of course, that before offering any opinion upon the employment of women, children, and young persons in field labour it was necessary to ascertain to what causes their employment was assignable, and to consider with great care how far it was desirable to abolish it altogether, or only to curtail and place it under certain restrictions. It was clear that to arrive at any satisfactory solution of these questions the whole system of agricultural labour would have to be reviewed in detail. Wages, allotment grounds, cottage accommodation, the size of farms, the nature of the work

required, and the influence of local manufactures upon the position of the peasant, all have a direct bearing upon juvenile and female labour; and we find, accordingly, that the Commissioners have instituted searching inquiries into most of them. The result of those inquiries forms the staple material of the earlier of these Essays. [As the gang system which was one of the great blots on our agricultural industry twenty years ago is now practically at an end, I may proceed at once to the question of food and wages, leaving out the chapter which treated of agricultural gangs.—1887.]

In point of physical well-being the Northumbrian peasantry seem to bear away the palm from all the rest. It is difficult to believe, however, that something of this superiority is not due to the race, since their actual food and wages do not seem sufficiently removed from those of more Southerly districts to account for the whole difference. Still, in their system of hiring, they possess this advantage* over agricultural labourers in general, being hired by the year, and certain of payment during the whole year, both in health and sickness. This arrangement, however, is peculiar to North Northumberland. The other peculiarity of the system is that they are here chiefly paid in kind. The labourer receives a cottage, keep for a cow and a pig, so much potato ground, and a fixed allowance of wheat, barley, oats, and peas. His coals are drawn for him, and he receives besides £5 or £6 in cash. It is computed that the whole value of his receipts represents about 14s. 6d. a week.† But, in

* Cf. Chap. x.

† According to Tables pp. 21-2, they are much higher now—1887.

addition to this, he has the earnings of his children and unmarried daughters, at an average rate of 10*d.* a day for one, and 1*s.* 6*d.* a day for the other, so that on the whole the general rate of incomes may be taken to be a pound a week.* According to Mr. Henley's Report, the dietary of a Northumbrian peasant would make a poor man's mouth water in many other parts of England, though we are bound to add that in many he would turn up his nose at it. That, indeed, which is stated by Mr. Henley to be by far the more invigorating diet of the two which are in use in Northumberland would furnish a very undesirable banquet in the eyes of a Leicestershire or Northamptonshire ploughman: porridge, barley cakes, brown bread, milk, cheese, butter, and bacon. Oddly enough, there seems an irresistible amount of evidence to show that where this diet has been superseded by tea, coffee, and butcher's meat there is a marked deterioration in the physical energies of the people. The midland counties man's ideal of a dinner, "a piece of beef as big as a brick,"† is evidently the growth of a grazing country unacquainted with the virtue of oatmeal. But, nevertheless, this same ideal is beginning to permeate the dales and make itself manifest, as aforesaid, in degenerated thews and sinews. The abundance of fuel enables every cottager to keep a glorious fire burning, and, what is most important to health, he always has a hot dinner. There are certain drawbacks to the system of payment in kind, which are these:—The

* A higher class of servants, ploughmen, shepherds, &c., get a good deal more.

† Very seldom realized at this date.

labourer is, to some extent, at the mercy of his employer; in a bad season he may get bad wheat and bad potatoes; he has little ready money for clothes and other necessaries, so that he is often driven to sell his allowances, doubtless at considerable disadvantage; and he is obliged to take any cottage that is offered to him, however miserable it may be.

Payment in kind seems to operate very differently in different parts of England. In the Northern Counties it appears to suit the habits of the people, and, in the opinion both of the farmers and the Commissioners, to produce more good than harm. In the west and south-west, on the contrary, it is generally considered to work badly.* One reason for this distinction is, that whereas in the Northern Counties the system extends to articles of food in general, in the south it is limited to drink. And one evil of the last-mentioned practice is most glaring; and that is, that wherever it prevails it is generally compulsory,† that is to say, it is Farmer A or Farmer B's custom to pay so much to his labourers in cash and so much in beer or cider. The labourer has no option. He may be a teetotaller, and want no cider; or an abstemious man, and not want so much; but he can't get money instead of it. This is a crying grievance, which we trust, however, is gradually ceasing to exist without legislative interference. The effects of this system on the morality of the population are both good and bad. It may implant a taste for drink where none existed before. On the other hand, the man having had all he wants during his work is less likely to go out to the public-house when he returns home. From an economical point of view the preponderance of

* But see page 54.

† Not now—1887.

opinion seems to be decidedly against it. The proportion of wages absorbed by the allowance of drink is too large, and deducts too much from the general household fund. Many farmers, however, object to the whole system upon principle, and not merely as regards the particular item of liquor. "If paid altogether in money," says one of the correspondents I have already quoted, "a saving, careful man and his wife can, without doubt, do more with it than they can with mixed wages." Of course, he adds, there may be here and there a careless couple, "who, the more money they have, the worse muddle they get into." But this is not confined to any rank in life.

Before quitting the subject of wages we may notice one vicious custom of which there cannot well be two opinions. We mean the system of payment at long intervals, and often irregularly. Even a large income is less useful when received in such a manner. From the labourer's income it deducts a heavy percentage. It drives him into debt; debt keeps him under the thumb of the village shopkeeper; and any attempt at a more economical disposition of his earnings is made impossible.

Upon the whole, the average rate of wages throughout the counties visited by the Commissioners seems to vary from about 15s. to 11s. These, in each case, are supplemented by the earnings of the women and children; for where these last do not work in the field they work at some in-door employment. The average weekly cash earnings of an average English labourer and his family may be set down probably at 18s. a week, exclusive of "allowances," and, if harvest money

is added, at £1; but when the wife works at the stocking-frame and the younger children at "seaming," it is probably, one year with another, a good deal more. A clergyman near Doncaster says it is the rule, and not the exception, for a labourer to leave at his death from £50 to £150. In Wiltshire they reckon that a man in regular employment makes his 12s. a week on the average. Mr. Norman, indeed, treats this merely as a farmer's statement; but the present writer has received the same assurance from labourers who had certainly no interest in exaggerating the rate of wages. The peasantry, however, do not seem to be so well fed or clothed as in the Northern and Midland Counties. We have seen how they live in Northumberland. Mr. Stanhope says that a Lincolnshire labourer has meat three times a day, and a Leicestershire labourer once.* We rather doubt both these statements, unless by meat is meant bacon. But, after all deductions are made, we still have a much more satisfactory scale of diet than where meat once a month is a good deal nearer the mark than meat once a day. In Dorsetshire, vegetables flavoured with bacon fat, or bread and cheese; in Somersetshire, bread and butter, or bread dipped in cider; in Cheshire, potatoes, or gruel thickened with treacle, were found to be the commonest articles of food. In Staffordshire, Mr. Stanhope found a village where even bacon was unknown. But what the poor feel most is the dearness of milk, and, of course, where milk is dear, cheese and butter are the same; and at St. Giles's, in Dorsetshire, "a parish cow" has been established, by the advice of

* This was certainly not true in 1867, though it is now—1887.

Lord Shaftesbury, to supply the cottagers with milk. But even in Wiltshire and Dorsetshire the poor have money in the savings-banks, and if they choose to deny themselves in point of diet, it is rather to their credit than otherwise.

One thing, indeed, seems beyond dispute—that a steady labourer with three or four boys, between the age of leaving school and going to service, may earn upon the whole a yearly income which ought to place him not only far above want, but in a condition of affluence. In support of this assertion, which many of our readers will doubtless receive with incredulity, we subjoin evidence extracted direct from the Report, and also some that we have obtained from private sources. The first is a table of earnings supplied to Mr. Norman by a farmer near Market Harborough; and this is not the highest rate upon his farm.

Head of Family, JOHN LEE, about 48 years of age.

Father's Earnings.

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
46 weeks at 12s.	27	12	0			
4 weeks, harvest	6	0	0			
2 weeks, hay	1	15	0			
Extra 10 weeks' piecework	3	0	0			
„ 20 days' threshing and chaff cutting by steam!... ..	0	10	0			
	<hr/>			38	17	0

MANNING LEE, eldest son, 19 years.

52 weeks at 10s.	26	0	0			
Extra for harvest	4	0	0			
„ hay	0	9	0			
„ piecework, 10 weeks	1	0	0			
„ overtime	0	5	0			
	<hr/>			31	14	0

					£	s.	d.
Brought forward					...	70	11 0
TOM LEE, second son, 16 years.							
52 weeks at 8s...	...	...	...	...	20	16	0
Extra for harvest	...	...	...	...	1	0	0
„ hay	...	...	...	...	0	9	0
„ overtime	...	...	...	...	0	5	0
					22 10 0		
JOB LEE, third son, 14 years.							
52 weeks at 4s...	...	...	...	...	...	10	8 0
Total earnings of family					..	...	£103 9 0

My waggoner and his two sons, engaged with horses, earn more; shepherd and two sons, ditto; and another ordinary labourer nearly £90.

The following table was furnished to the present writer by a farmer in Hampshire, on the borders of Wiltshire, a district not hitherto associated with the most favourable ideas of the condition of the agricultural labourer:—

MICHAELMAS 1866 TO 1867.

					£	s.	d.
Man, 3 weeks at 11s.	...	...	...	...	1	13	0
„ 26 „ 12s.	...	..	...	...	15	12	0
„ 23 „ 13s.	...	...	...	...	14	19	0
1st boy, 3 weeks at 5s. 6d.	...	...	...	...	0	16	6
„ 49 „ 6s.	...	...	...	...	14	14	0
2nd boy, 52 „ 4s.	...	...	...	...	10	8	0
3rd „ 29 „ 2s. 6d.	...	...	...	...	3	12	6
„ „ 23 „ 3s.	...	...	...	...	3	9	0
4th „ 35 „ 2s. 6d.	...	...	...	...	4	7	6
Wife at Harvest Work	...	...	...	...	2	3	4½
Money instead of beer, for all	...	...	...	...	1	5	1¼
House and garden free, worth	...	...	...	...	4	0	0
Wood or Coal...	...	...	...	...	1	4	0
1d. each for all lambs weaned	...	...	...	...	1	7	0
Man, Michaelmas money	...	...	...	...	4	0	0
1st boy, „	...	...	...	...	2	0	0
2nd „ „	...	...	...	...	0	16	0
3rd „ „	...	..	...	...	0	10	0
					£86 17 0		

MICHAELMAS 1867 TO 1868.

	£	s.	d.
Man, 52 weeks at 13s.	33	16	0
1st boy, 52 ,, 7s.	18	4	0
2nd ,, ,, 4s.	10	8	0
3rd ,, ,, 3s.	7	16	0
4th ,, 43 ,, 2s. 6d.	5	9	2
Money instead of beer, for all	1	8	5
House... ..	4	0	0
Wood or coal... ..	1	4	0
1d. each for lambs weaned	1	6	6
Man, Michaelmas money	4	0	0
1st boy ,,	2	0	0
2nd ,, ,,	1	5	0
3rd ,, ,,	1	0	0
	<hr/>		
	£91	17	1

The man here was shepherd, and therefore making rather more than the ordinary day labourer, who, with an equal number of children in employ, would get probably between £70 and £80 a year. But it is not easy to calculate how much these last may earn by piece-work. The same gentleman says:—

“I think there can be no doubt but that agricultural labourers and country mechanics are in much better circumstances than they were twenty or twenty-five years ago in every way: better wages, better dwellings, better food and clothing, and more comforts. The bricklayers and carpenters had then about 15s. a week, now from 18s. to 21s., and upwards.”

Yet it is curious that in the subjoined table of weekly wages in this part of England, there seems to have been no rise during the last quarter of a century to account for this improvement.

LABOURER'S WEEKLY WAGES.

	s.
1845	9
1846 9s., and part of year	10
1847 10s., ,,	9
1848	9
1849 9s., and part of year	8
1850 8s., ,, ..	7
1851 7s., ,, ..	8
1852 7s., ,,	8
1853 9s., ,,	10
1854 10s., ,,	11
1855	10
1856	10
1857	9
1858	9
1859	9
1860 9s., and part of year	10
1861	10
1862 10s., and part of year	9
1863	9
1864	9
1865	9
1866 9s., and part of year	10
1867 10s., ,,	11
1868 11s., ,,	10
1869 10s., ,,	9

“This statement,” says the writer, “only relates to weekly wages, and not to piece-work at all; but I think that the average for the year would be about 4s. or 4s. 6d. a week above the weekly wages.”

A communication I have received from Suffolk is to the same effect.

“You will, I know, excuse my not writing before, as I have been very busy. I shall give the account of

wages year by year without including the corn or hay harvest.

CORN LAWS REPEALED, 1849.

Average of wages in 1846 11s. per week.

“	”	1847 10s.	”
“	”	1848 10s.	”
“	”	1850 9s.	”
“	”	1851 8s. 6d.	”
“	”	1852 9s.	”
“	”	1853 10s.	”
“	”	1869 11s.	”

Now, 1870, only 10s. per week.

“N.B.—The wages in this, the eastern part of Suffolk, rise or fall according to the price of wheat, and now we have an abundant supply of labour. In 1848 and 1849 the harvest wages were £4 10s. per month; and in 1869 last I gave eight men £50 for a month and three days. During the hay harvest the men would get 3s. per day for cutting grass or clover. In the corn harvest the men have five pints of ale and an unlimited supply of table-beer per day. In the hay harvest, three pints and table-beer as above.”

From Leicestershire* the following note has been sent me by an old friend:—

“March 4, 1870.

“To the best of my recollection, labourers’ wages did not fall after the repeal of the Corn Laws. Wages are now higher than they were at that time: at the present time, the wages of a good labourer, fit to send to any work upon a farm, are at least 12s. per week,

* Through the greater part of this county the women and children earn a great deal by the stocking manufacture.

with ale ; lower class of men, only fit for rough work, are having 12s. without beer. In fact, you can't get an able-bodied man under 2s. a day. For ten weeks in harvest time, for the last year or two, good men have had 15s. per week, with lots of beer, or 18s. or 19s. per week without beer, except on carrying days, when they usually expect some drink. Extra hands during harvest time want 2s. 6d. per day and some beer. To the best of my belief, this information is correct as far as this neighbourhood is concerned."

But, from the present writer's own recollection, he would be disposed to doubt whether the rise here referred to can exceed a shilling a week at the outside.

It is remarkable that the farmers complain, in many places, that they cannot get the same amount of work out of their men as their fathers used to get ;* and they add that they must have machinery to compensate for the falling off in human thews and sinews. If this complaint be only one other note of the regular agricultural growl, we may dismiss it from consideration ; but if there be any element of truth in it, the assertion becomes extremely interesting ; for to what does it point ? It must point to one of two things : either that the labourer will not work as he used, or that he cannot. But that sudden rebellion against toil—that determination not to "slave to death," which is at the bottom of the "won't"—is generally found only in men whose hearts have waxed fat with plenty, and not in men situated as many of our peasantry are.† We cannot imagine, then, that the inferiority complained

* Cf. Cap. iv., pp. 63-65.

† See p. 15.

of is the wilful and deliberate doing of the workmen themselves in the majority of our rural districts, though it may be so in some. If, then, we fall back upon the other alternative, and suppose that their strength is really less, how are we to account for that? That the present generation of English peasantry are worse off than the last—that they get, that is, smaller supplies of nourishing food, less warmth, and worse clothing—is a proposition abundantly refuted by the evidence above given. For the last two or three years meat has been extremely dear, but the dearness has not lasted long enough to have permanently affected any large class of the community, while at the same time it has been to a large extent neutralised by the cheapness of other articles of food. Many people think that the quantity of tea which they now drink is hurtful to them. And they certainly do get a very inferior quality of beer to what they could obtain formerly. Others throw the blame upon allotments. On the whole, however, we are disposed to doubt the fact, or to consider it, at all events, a specimen of agricultural exaggeration. That there was a time when the peasantry were better off we *do* believe. That, however, was not the time of our fathers, nor scarcely of our grandfathers. If the condition of the labourer has declined during the last hundred years, it has risen during the last fifty. Before the American war it was better than it is at present. About the beginning of the French war it was much the same. After the peace it was a great deal worse.* When we are told,

* On the condition of the labourers between 1790 and 1820 a good deal of light is thrown by Crabbe's Poems.

as the present writer has been told, that no traditions still survive among the poor of a time when they were better off, the only explanation of it is, that material prosperity is not one of those things which affect the imagination. At the accession of George III. meat was $3\frac{1}{2}d.$ a pound, cheese the same, butter $6d.$, wheat under $30s.$ a quarter, cottage rent from $20s.$ to $25s.$, and the cottager had his share of the common for cow, pig, poultry, and fuel. In 1792 the commons had mostly disappeared; meat was $6d.$ a pound, butter $9d.$, wheat $40s.$ a quarter, and rent about $\pounds 1$ $15s.$ per annum. In the former period the labourer had, on an average, $7s.$ a week, and $10s.$ a week at harvest. In the latter he had, on an average, $8s.$ a week, and $18s.$ a week in harvest. Thus, while the increase in the cost of living was more than one-third, the increase in weekly wages was only one-eighth; and the supplemental source of income afforded by the commons had been cut off. On the whole it seems certain that up to the last quarter of the eighteenth century the condition of the labourer was generally rather better, and never at all worse, than it has been since. There has been, however, an intermediate period during which it reached its nadir of degradation, and to the other side of that dismal swamp rural tradition is not able to pierce. The improvement during the last thirty years has been marked and rapid, and we can hardly, therefore, attribute the alleged inferiority of the present generation to any physical declension. Two Scotch labourers, it is said, are worth three English, because they are better fed and better taught. (Rep. I., p. 160.) But the English peasant of to-day is better

fed and better taught than his father was. Why, therefore, this degeneracy?

[Unhappily there is no mystery about the matter now. The heart of the agricultural labourer *has* “waxed fat with plenty”; and the inferiority of his work is only part of the rebellion against his general position which the last few years have witnessed.—T. E. K., 1887.]

CHAPTER II.

WAGES—*continued.*

1887.

SCARCELY had this volume been issued from the Press in 1870 than agricultural wages began to rise; and though they fell again with the agricultural depression which soon afterwards set in, they have not yet in every part of England receded to their original level. In the north of England the rise was due to the competition of rival industries, little being known of Mr. Arch higher up than Lincolnshire. But in the southern and eastern counties the Agricultural Union, which flourished from 1872 to 1874, achieved a certain measure of success, as the farmers themselves are perfectly willing to admit. Even so far off as Hampshire the influence of Mr. Arch was felt. In the Eastern Counties they all agree that his exertions on behalf of his fellow-labourers were not altogether barren; and yet it seems to be in the Eastern Counties that the advance of 1873-4 has been less generally maintained than elsewhere. Two correspondents from Essex both say that wages have now fallen back to where they stood in 1870, if not to a still lower point. Mr. Clare Sewell Read tells me that, in Norfolk, wages which rose with the Union from 12s. a week to 15s.,

have now fallen again to 10s. in the winter, lower than they have been since 1851. Generally speaking, however, I think it will be found that wages are still a shilling or sixpence in excess of what they were before the strike ; while I had better, perhaps, warn my readers in advance that of the general progress of the agricultural labourer during the last seventeen years the evidence afforded by the rate of wages alone is a wholly insufficient test.

I will now take the table of agricultural wages drawn up by Mr. Druce from the Reports of the Duke of Richmond's Assistant Commissioners in 1880, which he places alongside of another one compiled from various sources, representing the rate of wages in 1870-1, which I have examined in the previous chapter. My own calculation in the first Edition, like Mr. Druce's later one, is founded exclusively on the Reports of the Commissioners, those, that is, of 1867-8, and according to these the average rate of weekly wages throughout the counties visited by the Commissioners, seems, as I have just stated, to have varied from 11s. to 15s. a week.*

* See p. 5.

RATE OF MONEY WAGES OF ORDINARY
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE YEARS
1870-71 AND 1880-81.

Name of County.	1870-71. Per Week.	1880-81. Per Week.
Beds	10/- to 11/-	12/- to 13/-
Berks	10/-	11/- ,, 13/-
Bucks	11/- ,, 13/-	{ 13/- ,, 14/- winter 14/- ,, 15/- summer
Cambs	10/- ,, 12/-	14/- ,, 15/-
Chester	12/- ,, 15/-	No general return
Cornwall	11/-	14/- to 15/-
Cumberland	15/- or 9/-	18/-
Derby	14/-	15/- ,, 18/-
Devon	8/6 to 12/-	11/- ,, 15/-
Dorset	8/6 ,, 11/6	10/- ,, 12/-
Durham	15/- ,, 17/-	17/6 ,, 18/-
Essex	10/- ,, 12/-	12/- ,, 13/-
Gloster	9/6 ,, 12/-	12/- ,, 15/-
Hants	10/- ,, 11/-	11/- ,, 13/-
Hereford	9/- ,, 10/-	12/- ,, 14/-
Herts	10/9 ,, 11/3	12/- ,, 15/-
Hunts	11/-	12/-
Kent (extra-Metropolitan)	13/- ,, 15/-	15/- ,, 18/-
Lancaster	15/- or 7/-	17/- ,, 18/-
Leicester	12/- to 14/-	{ 11/- ,, 12/- ordinary districts 14/- ,, 15/- ironstone ,,
Lincoln	13/6	13/6 ,, 15/-
Middlesex	No return	15/- ,, 16/-
Monmouth	11/- to 16/6	12/-
Norfolk	10/-	12/- ,, 13/-
Northants	11/- to 12/-	13/- ,, 14/-
Northumberland	15/- ,, 18/-	15/- ,, 18/-
Notts	12/- ,, 14/-	{ 13/- ,, 15/- ordinary 18/- ,, 20/- colliery district
Oxon	10/- ,, 13/-	11/- ,, 15/6
Rutland	12/-	No return
Salop	10/- ,, 12/-	12/- to 14/-
Somerset	10/- ,, 11/-	11/- ,, 15/-
Stafford	13/-	12/- ,, 15/-
Suffolk	10/- ,, 12/-	12/- ,, 13/-
Surrey (extra-Metropoln.)	13/- ,, 14/-	14/- ,, 16/-
Sussex	11/- ,, 13/-	12/- ,, 15/-

RATE OF MONEY WAGES—*continued.*

Name of County.	1870-71. Per Week.	1880-81. Per Week.
Warwick	11/- to 12/-	12/- to 16/-
Westmoreland	14/- „ 17/-	18/-
Wilts	9/6 „ 11/-	11/- „ 13/-
Worcester	10/- „ 12/-	13/6
York, E.R.	No return	15/-
„ N.R.	12/- „ 15/-	16/- „ 17/-
„ W.R.	13/6 „ 17/-	15/- „ 18/-

“So far as possible,” says Mr. Druce, “I have taken the ordinary money wages only, and have not added anything for harvest-money, for the value of cottage or garden, or allotment, or for beer or other allowances, which, or some of which, must be added to the ordinary money wages if we wish to arrive at the actual payment that the agricultural labourer receives for the work that he does.” In the previous chapter the reader will find these items accounted for; and in considering the state of wages at the present moment I shall revert to them. Meantime “the table shows that the agricultural labourer in every or nearly every county in England received higher money wages in 1881 than he did in 1871.” For my own particular purpose general results are all that is necessary. Mr. Druce puts us on our guard against possible inaccuracies in some of his returns. But they cannot be of any great importance. The figures tally with all that I can learn from private sources, and from men, too, who have worked as day labourers themselves. I claim, therefore, for the figures that

appear in this volume a moral and essential accuracy on which we may safely rely for the purpose of an inquiry like the present.

I have carefully gone through the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners on the Duke of Richmond's Commission, 1880, which contain a great deal of valuable information independently of wages. For the present it is sufficient to say that they establish the one fact that between the years 1870 and 1880 wages had risen appreciably. If we allow for perquisites in proportion, according to the tables in the last chapter, and to those which I am about to give in the following pages, we shall get nearer the exact earnings as they were seven years ago. Let us now see how they stand in 1887, or rather during the winter of 1886-87.

In Northumberland wages seem to have risen considerably during the last twenty years. Mr. Druce's calculation of 15s. to 18s. a week exclusive of perquisites seems to me rather too high for 1870; but it appears correct upon the whole for 1880, and including perquisites, is equivalent to about £56 a-year. Now, however, in some parts of the county the rate is a good deal higher. The two following tables have been furnished to me by tenants of Sir Mathew White Ridley. It will be seen that in this part of the country the carter is the day labourer and the day labourer the carter.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By perquisites Faggots, Coal, and Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	12s. to 14s. with cow kept. House and garden rent free.* Coals led: 1,000 yards potatoe drill: sometimes seed found.		None.	None.	22s. to 24s.	Up country, when paid with stock, they have a few bolls of corn, and keep of fifteen to eighty sheep, and two cows.
Carter ...	15s. to 16s., with house and garden; Coals led. 1,000 yards potatoe drill; engaged for one year; if by the day, 2s. 6d. to 3s., and for harvest, 4s.		...	None.	20s. to 21s.	This is in all cases from May-day, for one year, and employer takes risk of health; full wages paid, except in case of death.
Day Labourer						
Women ...	1s. 3d. in Winter. 1s. 6d. in Summer. 3s. for twenty days in harvest.		...	...	...	For each house one woman worker is found at this wage, and must have work or be paid, except in bad weather.
Boys ...	8d. to 2s. per day.		...	...	...	Scarcely any piecework in any part of this county.

* Average value in Northumberland, £4 0s 11d. Government Return, p. 20, 1887.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

	By Week.	By Harvest.	By perquisites, Faggots, Coal, Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	12s. to 14s., with cow kept; house and garden rent free; coals carted. 1,000 yards potatoes planted, & sometimes seed found.	None.	None.	22s. to 24s.	In the hill country shepherds have sometimes sheep and two cows kept, and a few bolls of corn instead of wages in money.
Carter ...	15s. to 16s., with house and garden; coals carted. 1,000 yards potatoes; engaged for year.	...	None.	...	If by the day, 2s. 6d. to 3s., and for harvest, 4s. When engaged by the year, full wages in case of illness.
Day Labourer					
Women ...	1s 3d. to 1s. 6d. Summer day; 3s for twenty days in harvest.	...	None.	...	For each cottage on farm, one woman worker is found by occupier, and must have work or be paid, except in bad weather.
Boys ...	8d. to 2s. a day	...	None.	...	Little or no piecework done by regular agricultural (farm) servants in this county.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.
WESTMORELAND.

	By Week.	By Piece	By Harvest.	By Perquisites. Beer, Faggots, Coal.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	12s. to 13s., with house-rent free*	No piece work.	Wheat harvest makes no difference here.	Cow kept for him	£1 1s. on average	Or lives with Master, and gets £14 or £15 for the half year, sometimes rather more. Hiring half-yearly. Labourer hired by day, so depends on weather.
Carter ...	12s.		Hay harvest men get £5 to £8 per month, with beer and food.	Keep.	Difficult to say.	
Day Labourer	15s.		...	With keep.		
Women...	1s. 6d.		...	Keep.		
Boys ...	£3 to £5 half-year.		...	Keep.		

* Average rent in Westmoreland, £4 16s. 5d.

Sir Mathew Ridley himself on his own farm pays 16s. a week, besides the above perquisites. All are hired from May-day to May-day, and paid alike both in sickness and health.

From Kirky Stephen, in Westmoreland, I have received the enclosed. There wages are now much what they were in 1870, a slight rise having occurred in the interval owing to there being work.

Keeping down the West side of England we come to Cheshire.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—JANUARY, 1885, TO JANUARY, 1886.

	By Week.	By Piece Work.	By Harvest Money.	By Perquisites, Beer, Coal, and Faggots.	Remarks.
Shepherd .. .. .	..			
Carter	10s. a week and victuals.				
Day Labourer	10s. a week and victuals.				
Women	6s a week and victuals.				
Boys... .. .	From 3s. a week upwards and victuals.				
		There is very little piece-work done here, except the getting up of potatoes, which is done at the rate of 1½d. a score yards up one drill.	3d. to 4d. an hour is sometimes paid for overtime during the harvests, but not very often.	8d. to 1s. a day allowed for beer, but as a rule about two quarts of beer is allowed, and not beer money.	The agricultural labourers as a rule live in the farm house.

Wages.

The next county on my list is North Shropshire, where my informant says that wages have fallen down two shillings a week since 1880; the present rate being :—

Ordinary labourers	...	12s. to 14s. a week ;	piece-work, £4.
Shepherds	}	...	14s. ,, 15s., with cottage free ;* piece-work, £4 = £4 9s. 1d.
Carters			
Stockmen			
Boys	...	£6 ,, £10 per annum,	with board and lodging in harvest.

On threshing days beer and dinner are given, or extra money instead. All alike can earn at piecework, including harvest, some £4 a year above their ordinary wages, which would give the day-labourer, without earnings of family, from £38 to £40 a year.

From Hampshire a large farmer writes :—“ Arch’s agitation caused us to pay higher wages, and they have never gone so low since as they were previously. We pay boys and men higher than ever to keep them on the land ; all flock into the towns.” As will presently be seen this is a general complaint. His table is not filled up quite so clearly as some others. But I have throughout printed the returns exactly as I received them, so that the farmers might tell their own tale. The Wiltshire table which follows is much more satisfactory.

* Average rent in Shropshire, £4 9s. 1d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

HAMPSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites. Beer, Tail Corn, Faggots, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	11s.	...	£3 wages.	Cottage,* Rent free.		With £1 worth of wood and coal; on large farms more. 1d. for each lamb tailed.
Carter ...	11s.	...	£3.	Cottage, rent free; £1 for coal; 9d. per day for beer in hay and harvest work.		6d. every time out with corn for sale; beer in hay and corn harvest. Wife at piece-work in harvest.
Day Labourer ...	10s.	...	...	Extra for hay and corn harvest, hoeing and general piece-work; the larger the farm the more they earn.		
Women ...	5s. or 6s.	...	Work with husband.			1s. 6d. per day in harvest; with 4½d. for beer and piece-work in harvest.
Boys ...	4s. to 7s.	...	...	From £2 to £5.		

* Average value in Hampshire, £4 10s. 9d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886:

WILTSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Effect of Education Act.	Remarks.
Shepherd	11s. or 12s.	1d. or 2d. each lamb weaned, amounting to about 50s.	£4 (Michaelmas money).	House and garden* and potatoe ground, rent free. Ton of coal at Christmas and faggots; other small perquisites; small beer.	About £14.		Agricultural labourer far better off than he has been before in the living memory, both as to time and severity of labour.
Carter ...	11s. or 12s.	...	£4 (Michaelmas).	House and garden rent free; faggots & coal; 1s. or 1s. 6d. for load of corn taken out and sold; beer or beer money.	Do.		Young men especially will not work their best, even at piece-work.
Day Labourer	10s.	At least half as much as his weekly wages, in some cases more	Included in piece work, as estimated before.		£32.		Men in former days, say 20 or 30 years ago, would mow 1½ acres in a day. They will not mow 1 acre now.
Women...	4s. 6d. to 5s.	..					Farmers disheartened by the comparatively poor quality of the labour, and think it much too highly paid in comparison with the results.
Boys ...	3s. 6d. to 6s.	None.	£1 to £3.				

* Average value in Wiltshire, £3 15s. 8d.

I subjoin an extract from a letter from a Wiltshire clergyman whom I have known for five-and-twenty years as a strong Liberal, and who has always sympathized with the labourers:—

“ It is even harder to get these facts from labourers than from farmers. If you were to ask my gardener what he got a week you would find him fence with the question, or probably leave you under a wrong impression. The best wages are earned by those who undertake a dairy and making cheese—a man and a woman like this getting from 25s. to 30s. a week. There can be no doubt at all as to the vast improvement in the material condition of the Wiltshire farm labourer, and it is equally certain that never was he so thoroughly discontented or so averse to work—never willing to do the smallest thing to oblige his master at a pinch without extra pay. We had a fire here lately, and the first question the men asked was what they were to get for their additional work—several would not do a stroke of work hardly, and looked on with their hands in their pockets. Things were very different—much better—years ago. Compulsory education has worked badly—here the compulsion practically is dropped.”

Making a detour into the cider counties we get the following statements from Somersetshire, Worcester, Herefordshire, and Gloucestershire:—

AGRICULTURAL WAGES, DEC. 1885, TO DEC. 1886.—SOMERSETSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coal, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
	Ordinary wages paid weekly in money,	Would proba- bly add to his daily earnings for the year,	Would earn what may be computed as a daily increase for the year,	By Cider, value per week,		There is now little or no barn work as formerly. A good drainer will earn by the piece—so long as the work lasts—20s. a week; so will a good fencer.
Shepherd ...	15s.	1s.	1s.	2s.	19s.	Reaping and mowing are per- formed by machine as a rule;
Carter ...	15s.	1s.	1s.	2s.	19s.	where small areas are cut by hand
Day Labourer	14s.	1s. 6d.	1s. 6d.	2s.	19s.	14s. per acre is paid for reaping and binding, and 5s. per acre for mowing, with large allowances of cider gratis.
Women ...	do not work in the fields in Somersetshire as a rule. When it may happen they would get ...	...	...	...	10s.	
Boys ...	7s.	...	1s.	1s.	9s.	Sheep are shorn at 4s. 6d. a score.

Cottage and other accommodation.—Every transaction between the farmer and the labourer, except in very remote and obscure parts of the county, is made a matter of simple contract, based upon purely commercial principles. The old relations between them no longer exist. Forty years ago masters gave cottage accommodation, potatoe ground, tail corn, skim-milk, and skim-milk cheese, and were called upon to discuss how the labourer's family should be employed and the sick nursed so as to avoid parish relief. *All this is changed.* With the present rate of wages the farmer offers, and the labourer asks, no favours. Where there are cottages on a farm the farmer demands and the labourer pays a rent commercially assessed: the fact of the cottage being near the man's work is met by the fact that the work is thus brought near to the man's cottage, making the benefit mutual and equal.

ROB. L. JONES,

For 25 years the Managing Trustee of the Pyitt Estates in Somerset-archism; the farmer and labourer stand upon their respective rights, and neither now-a-days hears a labourer speak of "our" herds and "our" flocks, and "our" fields. Alas!

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	14s.	Nil.	20s. a week for about five weeks.	9 gallons of ale at lambing time; 2 quarts of cider a day; $\frac{1}{2}$ ton coals.	16s. 7d. a week.	Besides house* and garden 2s. a week, equivalent to 1s. a wk. perquisite.
Carter ...	14s.	Nil.	25s.	2 quarts of cider a day in winter, 3 in summer. Occasionally an extra shilling if out late or early. House and garden at 2s. a week, worth 3s.	16s. 5d. a week.	Ditto.
Day Labourer ...	11s.	11s. to 15s.	About 18s.	2 quarts of cider from March to October; none in winter. An extra pint sometimes in hay-time or harvest.	13s. a week.	Ditto.
Women ...	5s.	...	...	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pints of cider at hay-making.	...	...
Boys ...	11s. 10s. 7s. 5s.	Under carter.	15s. 12s. 6d.	} All get cider	Average. 12s. 0d. 11s. 6d. 8s. 0d. 6s. 0d.	All big enough to plough and manage a pair of horses.

* Average value in Gloucestershire, £4 10s. 3d. But in many parts of Gloucestershire the cottage gardens are exceptionally large, and the two together would be worth 3s. a week.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

HEREFORDSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Coals, Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	12s.	...	15s.	{ 2s. 2s. }	16s.	Exclusive of cottage* and sundry perquisites.
Carter ...	12s.	...	15s.	4s.	16s.	Do. do.
Day Labourer ...	10s.	...	12s. 6d.	...	...	May have cottage in addi- tion, but few perquisites.
Women ...	4s. 6d. for regular, and for casual 1s. a day.					
Boys ...	3s. to 5s. according to age and capability.				...	
Informant tells me that far too little account is taken by men (as a rule) of the value of their perquisites, even when looked at from a weekly wages point of view.						

* Average value in Herefordshire, £5 1s. 7d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

WORCESTERSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Beer, Coal.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	15s.	For lambing, £1.	£2.	£2.	£ s. d. 44 0 0	
Carter ...	15s.	...	£2.	£2.	43 0 0	
Day Labourer ...	12s.	...	£4.	£2.	37 4 0	
Women...	6s.	...	12s. per week.	...	...	Only partially employed.
Boys ...	4s. to 5s.	...	10s.	£1.	14 0 0	

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.

WEST KENT, NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SEVENOAKS AND TONBRIDGE.

Returning to the South Coast, I have the two following tables from Kent, one from West Kent kindly supplied to me by Lord Stanhope. Here it will be seen that almost everything is paid in hard cash.

Wages.

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	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coal, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	20s.	...	...	From 20s. to 40s. extra for extra attention in lambing season.	About £54.	
Carter ...	18s., including Sunday attendance on horses.	...	...	Beer in harvest, with perhaps 15s.	About £47 10s.	
Day Labourer	15s.	...	...	None.	£39	Farmers have lately rather lowered wages in the district.
Women ...	7s. 6d.	...	...	...	...	Women and children go out hopping, in August, from the district villages.
Boys ...	7s.					
Allotments, general, in neighbourhood; from 20 to 30 perches; at 3d. to 4d. a perch: let by the landlord directly.						

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

SOUTH-WEST KENT.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Har- vest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Coals, Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	16s.	...	...	Rent and Fuel, £5	Annual, £40 12s.	
Carter ...	16s.	...	...	£5	Do.	Annually.
Day Labourer ...	12s.	2s. 6d.	5s.	...	About £36	These earn, say, half the year, 2s. 6d. per week over their day wages.
Women ...	1s.	...	...	..	...	Women earn, say, 2s. per week (say £5 4s. per year) hop-tying and pick- ing hops.
Boys ...	8d. to 1s.	...	...	...	..

The East Kent wages appear to be somewhat lower.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES, DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.
SUSSEX.

	By the Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Effect of the Education Act.	Remarks.
Shepherd.	18s.	Nothing.	Nothing.	*House; keep him a cow; keeps what poultry he likes; half the geese; all the fat in dead sheep; keep him a horse to ride.			This man has sole charge of 350 acres, all grass, and grazed, has a boy to help him at 9s. a week. Shearing done by men who take the job.
Carter No. 1, and his boy	16s. 7s.	} Nothing.	Nothing.	Nothing.			These men's wages were all 2s. per week more before last Michaelmas. The boys' or mates', so here called, have not lowered.
No. 2 ...	14s.		Do.	Do.			
No. 3 ...	14s.		Do.	Do.	Do.		
Day Labourers.	per day.	This includes harvest.					The day labourers were lowered 3d. per day at Michaelmas, 1885, when wages were 2s. 6d. per day, and at Michaelmas, 1886, per day 3d. again lower, were in proportion. Stockmen lowered 2s. per week.
Best man, 1	2s.		£17.				
do. 2	2s.		£19 3s.				
do. 3	2s.		£12 15s.				
do. 4	2s.		£14 18s.				
do. 5	1s. 9d.		£15 10s.				
do. 6	1s. 6d.		£5 2s.				

* Average rent of cottage in Sussex, £5 6s. 3d.

SUSSEX—continued.

	By the Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Effect of the Education Act.	Remarks.
Women ...	per day 1s. for ordinary work. 1s. 3d. for ladder tying	hops.					A lot of the piece work is in hop land. All piece work lowered about 2d. in the shilling.
Do., hop tying by the acre.	11s. to 14s.						Hop tying lowered about 2s. per acre.
Hop picking ...							This is rather a difficult case, as children, perhaps, do half or more of the work. I see two pickers at a bin last year earn as below:—
Boys.	Week.	Hop picking					
No. 1 ...	7s.	£1 15s.					
No. 2 ...	6s.	Nothing.					
No. 3 ...	5s.	Hop picking					
No. 4 ...	3s.	Hop picking					
							£ s. d. £ s. d. 5 19 0 6 6 0 8 0 6 5 18 0 8 14 0 7 14 0 6 8 0 5 9 0 6 2 0 7 0 6 5 1 0 5 12 0 6 8 0 6 3 6 6 13 0 for about 4 weeks.

If now we turn northwards again, and cross the River Thames, we shall find that in the three typical East Anglian counties, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk, the rise and fall in wages has been very marked. They rose from 10s. a week to 12s. after 1870, and have now fallen back again to 10s., minus the shilling a week for beer, which was given down to the end of last winter.* The following comes from a farm some few miles north of Bishop Stortford.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.

ESSEX.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest	By Perquisites, Beer, Tail Corn, Faggots, &c.	Total	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	About 12s. and house.	...	£5 to £6	...		This is, I believe, about the wages; some are allowed to keep a few sheep; I have no sheep.
Carter ...	12s.	...	£6 to	1s. instead of small or table beer.		Comes 4.30 A.M. to feed his horses; also on Sundays; other men at 6 A.M.
Horsekeeper						
whogenerally ploughs from 6 till 2 P.M.)						
Day Labourer	10s.	11s. to 12s.	£5 to £7	1s.		Now 10s., without beer—wages having been reduced 1s. the last winter.
Women ...	9d. a day. 6d. to 8d. a day.	...	...	Gleanings 4 or 5 bushels of corn.		Not many women or girls go to field labour, and only in fine weather.
Girls						
Boys						
13 to 16	2s. 6d. to 6s. or 7s.	...	...	...		In some small villages 1s. to 1s. 6d. per week more. A large farmer living 5 or 6 miles from here told me last week he could only get one boy about twelve, at 4s. per week, and had to set men leading his horses, at dungcart, &c.

* The fall, however, can only be regarded as temporary.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.

ESSEX.

	By Week.	By Piece.	Harvest.	Perquisites, Beer, Coals, Faggots, Tail- corn, &c., &c.	Total	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	13s.	Principally all threshed by machin- ery.	£8 per man.	Not any.		I think wages in general are 1s. per week, on the average, more than in 1870.
Carter ...	13s.					
Day Labourer...	11s.					I think wages rose 1s. per week on account of Arch and the Union. On ac- count of the great depression in agri- culture now the labourers are tak- ing 1s. per week less.
Women ...	4s.		2s. per day.			
Boys ...	From 3s. 6d. to 6s.					

The farmer who sent me the above table accom-
panied it with a very interesting letter on the condition
of the labourers in general, the substance of which will
be given hereafter. From another village in the same
neighbourhood I have received the enclosed, which
shows a slightly higher scale, but not much.

From South Suffolk comes the following:—

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.

SOUTH SUFFOLK.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	12s.	...	...	House & garden free; malt* and firing free; 6d. for each lamb.	2Cs.	And certain other advantages.
Carter ...	12s. and 11s.	...	£8 10s. for about 1 month.	Malt free; house rent, 1s. 6d.†	17s. 6d. and 16s. 6d.	Firing for beating oven for baking bread, &c.
Day Labourer	11s. and 10s.	Many kinds of work too numerous to specify.	£8 10s.	Rough firing in harvest.	17s. & 16s.	
Women .	8d. to 10d. a day.					
Boys ...	4s. to 7s. a week, according to age.					

In the following return from the same county the reader will see that faggots figure largely among the perquisites. Cobbett remarks on the superior comforts of the peasantry in a woodland district; and wherever there is much wood-felling going on the woodcutters always get a nice lot of brushwood to carry home. Here, too, they are allowed firewood when fencing, that is, hedging. The reader must note this where he sees so much put down for piecework, it

* The Suffolk labourers brew at home.

† The cottages and gardens in this part of England are particularly good. See Clifford's "Agricultural Lookout," cap. viii. He reckons cottages let at 1s. 6d. as well worth 3s. 6d. But the average rent is only £4 1s. 6d.

means that for so many weeks out of the fifty-two the man receives this extra amount. Piecework, *i.e.*, turnip hoeing, pulling, draining, and hedging, varies very greatly in different districts. Here it seems to be worth about 4s. a week extra for eleven weeks in the year. This table is drawn up for 1885, and a shilling a week must be deducted from weekly wages for 1886.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—JAN., 1885, TO JAN., 1886.

SUFFOLK.

	By Week.	By Piece.	Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total.
Shepherd ...	13s.	6d. a head for rearing 298 lambs, £7 6s. 6d. Clipping, 33s.	£ s. d. 2 0 0	Cottage* Rent-free & faggots.	£ s. d. 44 15 6
Carter ...	13s.	Hay sell, 10s.	7 5 0	Rent-free & faggots.	38 19 0
Day Labourer	11s.	Do. & hoeing. About 15s. from 10 to 12 weeks.	7 5 0	Obtain faggots by fencing.	35 13 0
Women ...	Not much employed in this neighbourhood; 10d. a day; picking			when weeding, &c., 9d. or stones 1d. per bushel.	
Boys ...	From 2s. 6d. to 7s. or 8s.		In proportion to men.		

* Average rent, £4 1s. 6d.

The following account has been sent to me in a letter by an eminent agriculturist in Norfolk :—

“ Our carters are generally paid from 2*s.* to 2*s.* 6*d.* a week above day labourers. Sometimes a cottage, rent free, and less wages ; all take their share in harvest, which may range from £6 to £8. The time is usually under a month, sometimes less than three weeks. Shepherds have the usual pay of stockmen, whose Sundays are employed ; that is, 1*s.* or 1*s.* 6*d.* above day labourers, and 6*d.* a head for all lambs weaned. Day labourers are paid from 10*s.* to 12*s.* a week. They have extra harvest wages and extra pay in hay-time, with piecework all through the summer. At turnip-hoeing a man should always earn half-a-crown a day ; and task work is generally put out so that he may be able to earn that sum.

“ Wages rose with the leaps and bounds of our prosperity among the agricultural labourers ; and were no doubt also put up by the Union and the strikes. They had been as high as 12*s.* previously, but the Agricultural Union could not keep up wages when agricultural distress set in.”

With a few more figures from the Midland Counties our inquiry into the existing rate of wages may be brought to a conclusion. I may take this opportunity of pointing out that wherever it is stated that wages have fallen a shilling during the past winter we must remember that they will not remain at that level all through the current year, and that many of the tables which I have given represent only the sums paid during the three or four darkest and least busy months in the whole calendar.

From North Northamptonshire Mr. Albert Pell, of Haslebeach, late M.P. for South Leicestershire, sends me the following statement of the rate of wages in his own district. He says that skilled labour has not fallen at all in the last five years, and is now perhaps rising, but that common unskilled labour is lower than it was.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Coal, Faggots.	Total for the year.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	20s.	...	...	Beer, house, 30s. £4*	£57 10s.	Rate of wages keeps up.
Carter ...	18s.	...	...	load money, 20s. 10s.	£48 6s.	Do. perhaps rises.
Day Labourer ...	13s.	22 weeks, 16s.	4 weeks, 26s.	haytime, 15s.	£40 15s.	Weekly wages lower now by about 1s.
Women...	7s. 6d.	...	...	...	...	Hardly any women em- ployed now.
Boys ...	6s.	...	12s.	10s.	£17 6s.	Wages rising.

* Average rent in Northamptonshire, £4 13s. 11d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

CENTRAL OXFORDSHIRE.

From central Oxfordshire I have been supplied with the following table:—

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coal, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	£36 8s. 6d. 14s. per week.	£5 in the year; shearing at 4s. a score—can do a score a day.	£5 10s. extra.	Cottage and garden.*	£46 18s. 6d. in the year.	Cowmen 13s. per week, with cottage and garden; also extras for piece- work, hay- time, and harvest.
Carter	£35 10s. 6d. 13s. per week.	£7 in the year; manure cart filling, &c., at about 2s. 6d. per day.	£5 2s. 6d. extra.	Cottage; £1 for beer in harvest; 8d. per day extra in haytime.	£47 13s.	
Day Labourer	£31 1s. 11d. 11s. per week.	£6 14s. 6d in the year; at about 2s. 6d. a day.	£2 5s. 6d. extra.	...	£40 1s. 3d.	
Women ... ..	...	...	...	...	..	I never em- ploy women, they gossip so.
Boys	£13 10s. 5s. a week.	...	Extra 10s. 6d. at 7s. 6d. a wk.	...	£14 in the year.	

* Average rent, £3 19s. 6d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

LEICESTERSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Beer, Tall Corn, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	18s. winter. 21s. for 10 weeks in summer.	besides shearing, when 30s. a week is earned, and lambing time 20s. extra for the job.	No harvest work for this man.	House and garden free = £6 a year.	£55 16s.	} Reckoning the garden and cot- tage as worth £6 a year.
Carter...	18s. winter. 21s. summer.	None.	None.	House and garden free.	About £53 16s.	
Day Labourer	14s. winter. 19s. summer.	The best men earn 20s. a week at draining in win- ter, and hedge- cutting 18s. a week, and in summer 24s. to 30s. a week har- vesting, but only the best men.		Beer after 6 o'clock when carrying.	About £44 16s.	Allowing four weeks' draining, and four weeks' hedging in the 19s. summer wages; turnip hoeing by the piece is included.
Women...	None employed.	Get 6s. to	9s. a week	at seaming ho siery.		
Boys ...	4s. to 6s.	None.	1s. 6d. a week extra for 10 weeks.	None.		

Mr. Jonathan Glover, of Kilby Lodge, agent to Sir Henry Halford, of Wistow Hall, Leicestershire, and President of the Leicestershire Chamber of Agriculture, is my next informant.

The following letter will explain the above statement:—

“DEAR MR. KEBBEL,—Our year of labour is divided into two sections—ten weeks (summer wages) and forty-two weeks winter. During the former the best men get 19s. a week when not cutting harvest, which lasts, say, a month. During this month they are on by the piece; their 19s., of course, ceases, and they get from 30s. to 35s. a week during the month, which makes, say, 25s. per week average for ten weeks summer. Then, as to winter, they have 14s. a week for a week of six days (1s. extra for Sunday men). During this time the best men get three months’ piece work—draining, hedging, &c.—for which they get 18s. a week, averaging, for forty-two weeks, 15s. a week.”

The account given of the Lincolnshire labourers by Mr. Little for the year 1877* represents the culminating point in the fortunes of the agricultural labourer between 1867 and 1887. One man in the Fen districts in the above-mentioned year cleared £22 11s. 3½*d.* by harvest work alone; and his total receipts for the year amounted to £62 8s. 3½*d.* This is clearly an exceptional district. But Mr. Little declares that “even in the lower wage districts a good working man at the present day takes his fair share of the produce of the soil; and I can scarcely imagine that without capital he could in any other capacity turn his labour to more profitable account in the tillage of the land.” If he

* *Royal Agricultural Society's Journal*, 1878, p. 509.

gets a smaller return now the farmer gets a smaller one still; and, in proportion to the gain of the other agricultural classes, the labourer gets his "fair share" now as truly as he did ten years ago, if he does not indeed get more. But what I want particularly to call attention to in this paper is the account of the young single men on a Lincolnshire farm. "The young men in question lodge with the steward of the farm, and pay him the sum of 2s. a week for the uses, say, accommodation, and for flour for puddings, pepper, salt, mustard, and the cooking of their food. They are hired by the year, and draw weekly wages of about 12s. each, a considerable sum being retained until the end of their term.

	s.	d.
Lodging, cooking, salt, &c.	2	0
2½ 4-lb. loaves at 7d.	1	5½
2 lb. sugar at 3½d.	0	7
2 oz. tea at 2d.	0	4
½ lb. butter at 1s. 6d.	0	9
6 lb. meat at 8d.	4	0
Herrings	0	6
2 oz. tobacco	0	6
	<hr/>	
	10	1½

It will be seen at once that these men live not only well, but extravagantly, allowing themselves nearly a pound of butcher's meat a day, and also the extra indulgence of a considerable allowance of tobacco." The same class draw rather less wages now, but the difference is more than made up by the fall in the price of provisions. Tea, sugar, butter, and butcher's meat, are from 20 to 50 per cent. cheaper at the present day than they are in the above table. I don't think it can

very well be said, then, that the young men among the peasantry are driven out of the villages by the hardships and privations they would have to endure as labourers.

I have received the accompanying statement of Lincolnshire wages from the neighbourhood of Louth, from which it will be seen how greatly wages vary in different parts of the county, for the fall since 1877 would not account for the whole difference between Mr. Little's table and my informants.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

LINCOLNSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total about.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	11s.		For harvest, £3	House & garden,* 1s. 6d. ; 30 stone pork at 6s., £9; 1 rood potatoes, 10s. ; 60 faggots, 12s.	£45 12s.	Lincolnshire system of payment of yearly men is to give them in lieu of wages so many stones (14 lb.) of pork.
Carter ...	10s.		Is able to earn by task work about £3 0s. 6d.	House and garden ; 30 stone bacon	£41 18s.	As a rule, in Lincolnshire, the carters, known here as wag- goners, are single men, and have so much per annum, and their board and lodgings found.
Day Labourer	12s. to 13s. 6d.	17s. 6d. or 18s.	Can earn for a month in har- vest about £8.	Have coals fetched for them when required.	£40 14s.	The last two years the daily la- bourer has been in receipt of 2s. for winter six months, and 2s. 3d. summer do. per day.
Women ...	None employed, ex- cept in gangs, from chiefly Irish, and earn about 1s. 2d. per day.					
Boys ...	3s. to 8s.		Have their wages doubled in har- vest for a month, in lieu of task work, generally.			

* Average value in Lincolnshire, £4 11s. 4d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest,	By Perquisites, Faggots, Beer, Coal, Milk, &c.	Total	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	15s.				£ s. 55 18	Wages not reduced more than 1s. 6d. since 1878.
	General custom to give the shepherd, in addition to weekly wages of 15s., sufficient potatoes, wood for kindling for use of his household, 20 stones of bacon or its equivalent in money (for his harvest), house and garden* rent free, and a sum (usually 2d.) for each lamb when taken from ewe in the autumn. Not customary to have milk found.					
Day Labourer	13s.	1s. 9d. week (average).	£5 to £8	...	£ s. 42 7	A most difficult question to answer as here set; some <i>skilled</i> labourers earn, on an average, 21s. a week. Usually fully employed in South Lincoln, and comfortably housed, fed, and looked after.
Carter— Single Men	12s.	From £12 to weekly wages.	£14 a year No extras.	in addition to		Very few single carters or horsemen now live in their master's house; they live with yearly men, who are married, and work on farm.
Married Men	15s.	Same terms	as shepherd.			
Women ...	9s.	...	18s. week for one month.	1 pint beer per day in haytime and harvest.		Very few now employed; the class of women, far more respectable and better educated than those of 1867—field (women) labourers—are fast disappearing— <i>most proper, too.</i>
Boys ...	6s. to 9s.	...	12s. week for one month.	1 pint beer per day in haytime and harvest.		A very great scarcity of boys now exists, and great outcry, at times, against the cause, viz., <i>Compulsory Education.</i> Pay very good; strong boys better paid than I remember.

* Average rent, £4 11s. 4d.

From South Lincolnshire, near Stamford:—

WARWICKSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coals, Milk, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	14s.	3d. a head for each lamb reared; 3s. 6d. per score for shearing; 18s. for haymaking time.	Takes share with other men, which would amount to about £8 10s. for the harvest time, at 12s. an acre, more or less, according to circumstances, beer included, for cutting, carting, stacking and covering.	No charge made, and nil.	About £52.	Cottage and plenty of potatoe ground free.*
Carter...	14s.	2d. an acre for all corn drilled well; 3d. a load for corn delivered; 6d. an acre for mowing grass with machine; 18s. for hay-making time.	The same as above.	The same as above.		Ditto.
Day Labourer	12s.	Hay-making, 18s.; hoeing corn and roots by the piece, which would amount to 18s. a week for three months.	The same as above.	The same as above.	£44 4s.	
Women	10l. per day.	Turnip cleaning by the acre; hay-making, 1s. 6d. per day, with a tea at 5 o'clock.	Generally do a bit by the acre, say 10s., for reaping, per acre.			
Boys	5s. to 6s. per wk.	9s. for hay-making.	Double wages for harvest.			

* Average rent of cottage and garden, £4 15s. 5d. Some have both garden and potatoe ground.

The next estimate with which I shall trouble the reader is from the neighbourhood of Stratford-on-Avon. Another, which I have received from the neighbourhood of Leamington, does not differ very materially.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

The last I have received, at the eleventh hour, is from Cambridge, but apparently incomplete.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coal, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	15s.	No piecework.	No harvest.	None.		This is the average wage, taking into consideration what the shepherd receives for lambs and shearing.
Horse-keeper Carter Stock or Yard Woman ... }	13s.	...	From £8 10s. to £10.	1s. a week for beer, and sometimes 2s. a wk. for cottagerent.		
Day Labourer	11s.	17s. a week could be earned.	£8 10s.	None.		Very little piecework is done in these parts, except in hay harvest.
Women ...	6s.	...	...	..		Very few women go in the fields hereabouts; in this parish only two or three at the most.
Boys	6s. average.	...	Double wages and beer.	...		N.B.—The above particulars refer to really good workmen only. There is a large class of men who will only take work by the job, and, rather than be in regular employment, will stand idle for a few days after earning a few shillings.

The above tables will, I think, present the reader with a tolerably accurate bird's-eye view of the pecuniary position of the labourer at the present moment. On the whole I should say that the yearly earnings of shepherds, waggoners, stockmen, and superior servants of this class average about £50 a-year, and those of day-labourers nearly £40. It is clear that in spite of the Education Act a good deal of juvenile labour is still employed, so that boys still contribute *something*, though not what they used to do, to the common purse. When women do not work in the fields they often earn money by some indoor industry at home. But as the number of boys at work for the same family must necessarily vary very greatly, and as neither women nor children are employed regularly, we have no data on which to base any general estimate of what they add to the weekly wages received by the head of the family.*

Before quitting the subject of wages I may add a few words to what I have already said in a previous chapter on the subject of payment in kind. As, except in a very few counties, payment in kind means practically payment in drink, it is to this that I shall confine my remarks. To compel the labourers to accept their wages in this form, whether they like it or not, is a practice which cannot be condemned too strongly. I see no harm, however, but on the contrary a great deal of good, in a custom which enables the workman to get a better article for his money than he could other-

* But see above, pages 7-9. Here we see the maximum that could be earned by children before the passing of the Education Act. The average addition to the family wages by juvenile labour may even now, I think, be reckoned at £15 to £20 a year—perhaps more.

wise procure. In some parts of the country, for instance, every man at harvest may, if he likes, have an eighteen-gallon cask of beer provided for him by the farmer at his own cottage, which is accounted for at the harvest settlement. By this plan the man obtains much better beer for 1s. a gallon than he could get from the public-house at 2s. He has it at his own cottage, where his wife and family can share in it, and he is spared the temptation of going to the "Pig and Whistle," and drinking the well-doctored stuff which is sold there at 6d. a quart. If the labouring men are to drink beer at all I really do not see under what better conditions they can drink it. And as I am myself a great believer in the virtue of malt and hops I trust it will be a very long time before they do cease to drink it.

Of the effect of the Education Act upon the general position and prospects of the agricultural labourer I shall speak more at length presently. That the labourer must experience some loss by the withdrawal of his children from field work up to twelve or thirteen years of age is undeniable. But to judge from the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners in 1880, it is only a small minority of the labourers who complain of it. The loss, whatever it may be, has been more than made up to them by the greater increased purchasing power of their own wages, and they may not therefore *miss* the children's earnings as much as they might have done formerly. The farmer suffers because he has to pay men for doing children's work. But the great point for my present argument is, that the labourers, as a rule, do not seem to grumble

at the Education Act. If it has affected their wages either, owing to the causes I have mentioned, they do not feel it, or they think that the education of their children is worth the loss which it involves. From the farmer's point of view, and I may add from a public point of view, the operation of the Education Act is of all the influences which have begun to tell on the condition of the agricultural peasantry within the last seventeen years the one most pregnant with matter for grave and anxious consideration. On the receivers of wages it appears to have fallen lightly. But on the payers of wages its effect has certainly been injurious. It is asserted, indeed, by some among the farmers, that the only reason why the Education Act is hurtful either to employer or employed, is that it is administered too laxly; were it rigidly enforced they say, the great majority of children would be free from school by eleven years of age. They are wanted, however, for some kinds of work even younger than that. The farmers having an influential voice in the District School Boards, should be able to pass bye-laws which would mitigate to some extent the inconvenience to which they are exposed. But that remedy would be only partial: and it is clear that in many parts of England the Act, however carried out, must inflict more or less loss on the employer.

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL PROSPERITY.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been said of the fluctuation of wages, and the different opinions entertained among the farmers on a variety of questions affecting the agricultural labourer, there is but one opinion on this point, namely, that he was never so well off as he is now. From Northumberland to Wiltshire, from Essex to Yorkshire, this is the uniform report. Take all the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners in 1880, and all the Returns, some thirty in number, which I have collected for myself in this year 1887, and the tale is still the same—never so well off as he is now. Nor is this only the farmers' version of the story; labourers in the Midlands will tell you that from a diet of "turnip stodge" (boiled turnips thickened with bread and flavoured with herring fat), on which many of them lived twenty years ago, they have now advanced to butchers' meat nearly every day in the week. A joint of meat weighing six or seven pounds, with a Yorkshire pudding of goodly dimensions underneath it, goes from the cottage to the bakehouse every Sunday; and more than once during the week the larder is replenished. Broiled ham, which can be bought for 6*d.* a pound, figures on

the breakfast table, and reappears at supper. When the labourer's tea is taken out to him in the hayfield by his wife she often carries with it a tin of preserved salmon. The labourer's clothes are different. He wears broadcloth instead of fustian, and would as soon think of wrapping himself in a cow's hide as of putting on a smock frock. His hours of labour are shorter; machinery has made it lighter; and everything around him speaks of a change in his tastes and habits, which, if not in all respects for the better, bears witness at least to the improvement in his physical condition.

The fact is that the fall in the price of commodities within the last fifteen or twenty years, accompanied as it has been by a rise, however slight, in the rate of wages, has brought within his reach an altogether different style of living; and has converted into articles of daily consumption what were formerly but occasional luxuries. Perhaps some of my readers may be surprised to hear the extent to which the labourers' have benefited by the abolition of toll-gates. Large vans now travel through the country villages laden with grocery and chandlery, which are brought to the cottager's door at a much lower price than he would pay for them at the village shop. In the days of turnpikes it would not have remunerated the shopkeepers in the large towns to carry on this traffic. Now it does; and though the smaller local dealers may suffer from it, the labourers are immense gainers. Where, however, the village shops still flourish they too bear witness to the change I have described. Among their wares are now to be seen tinned meats, soups,

sardines, and other delicacies of the same description, of which seventeen years ago the labourer had not heard the name. I will here quote from one or two letters which I have received illustrative of the great strides which he has made in material well-being within the last seventeen years. In Essex, where the labourers are not so well off as they are in the Midland Counties, their condition still contrasts most favourably with what it was a few years ago.

“The labourers, from the cheap food, are much better off than they were fifteen to twenty years back. Pigs could not be too fat, and shopkeepers had a difficulty to get rid of the lean; now some have their tubs full of fat, which they have a trouble to get rid of.* Many will have beef or mutton in the summer and harvest. (A farmer occupying over 60 acres told me some months back he had not had a piece of butchers’ meat in his house for six months. Very few labourers could say that.) They also dress very differently; the old smock frock is a rarity; but they do not work as well by one-third; they used to do half as much again on lower wages.” (Clavering, Essex.)

“The Leicestershire labourer,” writes Mr. Glover, “with his cottage, garden, and pig-stye at 1s. a week, his allotment at 12s. a rood, and the purchasing power of a sovereign nearly 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. more than it was fifteen years ago, is better off than any class. I have known,” he adds, “a family making £5 a week, and living in a house at 1s. a week.”

* The meaning of which is, that the labourers will not eat fat bacon as they used to do, when it served to relish their potatoes and cabbages, which was all they got for dinner.

A Norfolk farmer; "who gives his men potato ground in his own field, besides their allotment, says that many of them will not take the trouble to keep the land clean; and one man last autumn left a good crop of potatoes to rot in the ground, "rather than lose half a day to get them up." From Hampshire the report is that "the labourers are better off than ever they were." From Suffolk: "In my opinion the labourers are better off now than they were five years ago, when wages were a shilling a week more." From another part of Essex: "Labourers were never so well off as they are at the present time." I need scarcely refer my readers to the Reports of Mr. Coleman, Mr. Doyle, Mr. Druce, and the other Assistant Commissioners in 1880, who all produce evidence to the same effect, because here I have it under the hand of equally competent witnesses seven years later. Much of my information, I repeat, has been derived from labourers, and some of it directly from one who has worked as a day labourer himself in the Midland Counties within the last three years. What confirms me more than anything else in the belief that this picture of the peasantry is a correct one, is the fact already mentioned, that they have acquiesced so quietly in the effects of the Education Act. Had they during the last six or seven or eight years been feeling the pinch of poverty they would not have accepted the loss of their children's earnings as cheerfully as they do. Among all the labouring men examined by the Assistant Commissioners on the Duke of Richmond's Commission only a very few said anything against the Act; and from what I know of the English peasantry myself, I am inclined to believe

that no better proof could be required of the truth of what has here been stated. Some, no doubt, complain. But in the Reports of 1880 I can only find two instances in which labourers, personally interrogated on the subject, gave unfavourable answers. One is at p. 179 in the Appendix to Mr. Coleman's Report: "George Cook, general labourer . . . considers that compulsory school attendance has lessened his means of living." The other is at p. 203, *ibid*: "Robert Clarke, shepherd, says that compulsory education has lessened his income by 6s. a week." But on the whole Mr. Doyle probably hits the nail on the head when he says that the parents look for something better for their children than farm labour; and for the sake of this endure a diminution of income, which otherwise they would bitterly resent.

As so much has been said of the fall in the price of commodities I subjoin a short list of articles, with the difference between the cost of them in 1870 and 1886. The estimate is only a rough one, but I think it will be sufficient for the purpose. It is taken from a Midland county about ninety miles from London. But when farmers in Norfolk, Essex, Hampshire, Shropshire, and Leicestershire all alike dilate on the greater cheapness of provisions, we may fairly presume that they are referring to some similar reductions.

		1870.			1886.	
		s.	d.		s.	d.
Breast of Mutton	... about	7	lb.	... about	4½	lb.
Leg of Mutton	... ,,	10	,,	... ,,	8	,,
Bacon	... ,,	9	,,	... ,,	6	,,
Cheese	... ,,	9	,,	... ,,	1	,,
Tea	... ,,	2	6	... ,,	2	0
Sugar	... ,,	3½	,,	... ,,	2	,,

		1870.		1886.	
		s.	d.	s.	d.
Butter	... ..	about 1	9 lb.	... ..	about 9 lb.
*Boots	... ..	„	17 0	... ..	„ 14 0
Coals	... ..	...	...	... ..	4s. a ton cheaper.

Bread, of course a great deal cheaper, but the price varies very greatly.

On the subject of the fall in prices I have found but one dissentient voice. Curiously enough, a Devonshire labourer told Mr. Little that the labourers were not so well off as they used to be when wages were lower, because “meat, tools, clothing, and boots” were all dearer—“remembered when mutton was 3*d.* a pound, and bacon from 4*d.* to 6*d.*” † I must leave this solitary exception to take care of itself; if it has any real significance in connection with our present inquiry I have been unable to discover it. It is to be observed that some of the witnesses, while admitting that the labourers are paid more, work less, and get their necessaries cheaper than they used to do, end by saying that they are still not much better off. This, of course, only means that they have in some cases lost their old habits of thrift and industry, and spend more money at the public. The fact that they are none the better for being better off is only one of those seeming paradoxes which do not confront us only among the agricultural labourers.

* Good nailed boots that will turn the wet, and last out the twelve months.

† Appendix to Report, 429.

CHAPTER IV.

LABOUR.

“Squalent abductis arva colonis.”

THE following sentence, from a letter already quoted, only strikes the key-note of the general chorus of complaint which rises up from all quarters, runs through all the Reports of the last Agricultural Commission, and is repeated with more or less emphasis by the majority of my own correspondents.

“The labourer’s chief aim is to obtain the greatest wage for the least possible amount of the worst possible work.”*

These are melancholy words, but I am sorry to say they are confirmed by an overwhelming weight of evidence, which leaves no room for doubt. The evil may be more pronounced in one county than in another. Of the several causes which contribute to it one may preponderate here and another there. Discontent and ill-will towards the farmers may mingle more largely with indolence and incompetence in the eastern counties than in the western. But the result is the same all round. The fact stares us in the face, and as Mr

* Letter from Norfolk, March, 1887.

Druce well says: "Is one of the least satisfactory features in the farmer's prospects." Skilled labour is growing more and more scarce, and the younger class of skilled labourers are growing less and less skilful. The rising generation of the peasantry take no interest in agricultural work. In many villages the men who can cut a hedge, drain a field, or thatch a rick may be counted on the fingers of one hand; and they are old men. Many whom the farmer is obliged to employ cannot even hoe turnips. The best boys from the schools all set their faces towards the town, and scorn the plough. Those who remain get higher wages, but they neither know their work nor care to know it. They refuse, in fact, to learn it. They cannot be trusted with horses as they could be formerly. They treat them roughly or neglect them. Slowly but surely the old breed of labourers is dying out, and those who should supply their place are leaving the land. In another generation, if English arable farming is not extinguished by competition, it is likely to perish for want of men to till the soil.

Every one of my own correspondents, and every one of the Duke of Richmond's Assistant Commissioners, say the same on this point. Mr. Coleman, in his Report on Yorkshire, quotes the following evidence:— At page 192: "The labourer, though much better off, is not so industrious or so clever at his work; he cannot hedge, or drain, or turn his hand to any farm work as his father could, though he knows more about stock." This last, however, is a very exceptional exception. At page 198: "Work not so well done." Page 199:

“Deficient in quality.” Page 257—from Westmoreland: “Men receive 50 per cent. more wages, and do 30 per cent. less work than they did twenty-five years ago.” From Staffordshire—page 270—Mr. Doyle reports among the causes of agricultural depression: “The inferior workmanship of the present class of labourers.” From Oxfordshire—page 273: “Less efficient labour.” From Warwickshire—page 318: “Plenty of men, but quality very inferior;” “when the old men die off we shall be quite without men able to cut a hedge properly, thatch a rick, shear a sheep, or any such work.” From Gloucestershire—page 319: “Quality middling;” “quality bad;” “quantity per diem not what it was ten years ago.” Shropshire—*ibid*: “Quality fast deteriorating;” “difficult to find young men who are good hedgers, stackers, or thatchers.” Herefordshire—page 320: “Quality very bad.” Mr. Druce reports from Buckinghamshire (Supplementary Report, page 11) that “There are few really good workmen.” From Cambridge—page 17: “All my informants complain of the quality of the labour.” From Hertfordshire—page 35: “The quality of the labour is not so good as formerly.” From Huntingdonshire—page 42: “It takes five men now to do the work that four did formerly.” From Leicestershire—page 48: “Quality of labour most indifferent, and depreciating.” From Lincolnshire—page 54: “General opinion throughout the county that the labourers do not work so hard or do their work so well as formerly.” From Norfolk—page 67: “Universal complaint that the quality of the labour had deteriorated and was det^{er}iorating.” From Northamptonshire—

page 73: "Labourer does less work than formerly." From Nottinghamshire—page 81: "Plenty of labour, but inferior quality." From Suffolk—page 94: "Work not done so well as it used to be." Mr. Little reports from Devonshire—page 428: "Quality of labour has much deteriorated." From Berkshire and Wiltshire—page 444: "Supply of labour bad in quality." "Labourers sufficient in number, but their efficiency is not what it used to be." From Sussex—page 453: "Labourers receive more money, but are morally worse than ten or fifteen years ago." "Good men are scarce." I need not prolong these references. Of course the evidence is not all on one side. There are a certain number of witnesses who assert that labour in their own districts is not below the average. But the overwhelming mass of testimony is the other way. And I find it completely confirmed by the accounts which I have received from many of the same counties in the present year 1887, from Hampshire, Wiltshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Rutland, and Lincolnshire.

At the same time it is important to remember that although the deterioration of labour has now assumed such serious dimensions, and forms so prominent a feature in the agricultural question of the day, the complaint is no new one. We have only to turn to the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834 to find sentences that might have been taken word for word from the Report of 1880—"much degenerated," "not such good workmen as formerly," "twelve men now only do the work that nine did," "workmen are generally not equal to

their fathers." And when I had occasion to make enquiries on the same subject in 1870 I found the farmers saying much the same.* The difference, however, between the three periods is this, that in 1834 and 1870 the inferior work complained of was due rather to want of will than to want of skill on the labourer's part. Now it is due to both. Then the skilled workmen were still there, now they are not. Then there was no exodus from the soil. Now there is. This it is which makes the phenomena in question so much more serious now than they were either seventeen years ago or fifty-three years ago. It is further to be noted that the complaint is not confined to England. In Mr. Jenkins' "Report on Belgium," p. 789, we find several of his informants speaking in just the same terms of the Belgian agricultural labourer.

* *Vide supra*, p. 12.

CHAPTER IV.

EDUCATION.

THE farmers protest most vehemently, though here, too, there are a few scattered exceptions, against the working of the Education Act. The labourers, as I have already stated, seem to accept it more contentedly; though the farmers say that they, too, are dissatisfied with the loss of their children's earnings. The truth seems to be, that the labourer's feeling on the subject is that of the man who wants to eat his cake and have it; that they wish their children to enjoy the higher education, while grumbling at their detention in school when they might be earning money in the field. The farmers find fault with the Education Act on two grounds. In the first place, it deprives them of juvenile labour; in the second place, it inspires the rising generation with a distaste for agricultural work, and sends all the most intelligent youths of the village, the stuff out of which the old class of skilled labourers were made, to seek their fortunes elsewhere. A few survive, and are highly paid and much respected; but the less intelligent and industrious of the younger men—those, that is, who remain at home—form the class of day-labourers of whom such general complaints are

heard, and whom, in default of better, the farmers are driven to employ, in spite of the slovenly and imperfect fashion in which their work is executed.

It is difficult to say which of the two wants the farmers seem to think the more injurious, the want of skilled adults, or the want of boys and girls, making it necessary to employ men to do children's work; the increase in the cost of labour which is thus created being assigned as one of the principal causes of agricultural distress by nineteen farmers out of twenty. A farmer in Lincolnshire told Mr. Druce that he had suffered nearly as much by the working of the Education Act as by all the bad seasons put together.* The farmers still say what they said in the Report of 1867-8, that unless children begin to learn farm-work and the management of animals before they are fourteen they never learn it at all. But the chief grievance is that boys are kept at school when they could do useful work in the field at boy's wages, and that when they leave school they do not care to turn to farm-work at any price. Thus the farmers are obliged to use adult labour when juvenile labour at half the money† would do just as well, and are at the same time deprived of their former supply of good, serviceable men fit for all kinds of farm-work the whole year round. One remarkable symptom is pointed out by Mr. Read, who says that among the present class of labourers there is a growing dislike of piecework. They all desire to be paid alike; the worst the same as the best. This is a doctrine which has crept into the country from the towns, and I never remember hearing of it among the

* Supplementary Report, p. 55.

† Cf. *supra*, p. 54.

agricultural labourers till the present time. The notion, of course, is a serious impediment to the development of skilled labour, and there is some justice in the farmers' complaint of *sic vos non vobis*. While they pay the education rate, the improved labour in which they were to find an equivalent for it eludes their grasp, and the intelligence developed at their expense goes to benefit the adjoining towns.

The references which I have given to the Reports of the Commissioners on the subject of the deterioration of labour will serve to illustrate the farmer's views on education. The two are so closely connected together that they are generally named together. But I should advise the reader to look more particularly to the answers returned to Mr. Doyle's circular* in the counties of Oxford, Warwick, Stafford, Gloucester, Hereford, and Monmouth. The questions asked were these:—"Are children regularly and frequently employed, and if so, at what work and wages? Have the Education Acts made any difference in this respect, and if so, how has such difference affected (a) the farmer; (b) the labourer; (c) the children?" In the answers given he will find every one of the statements here made supported by a long succession of witnesses, and illustrated in every possible way which a practical knowledge of farming can suggest.† Boys cannot be procured for picking stones, minding pigs, scaring birds, tenting or weeding, and the crops suffer in consequence.‡ Men instead of boys must be employed to drive the horses at plough, and when the best boys

* P. 330.

† Cf., particularly evidence at pp. 333, 334.

‡ Report, p. 306.

leave school they turn up their noses at agriculture, and leave only the refuse for the farmer. These partly from dulness, partly from sharing the discontent of the cleverer ones, whom, however, they are not sharp enough to emulate, are wholly uninterested in field work and refuse to be instructed. "Only the lowest drones are left," says a Warwickshire farmer, "and there are no young men left who care to learn the skilled work at the farm. This is a very serious question for the future." * It is fair to the farmers to say that they are not hostile to education as such. They allow that where the best boys do by any chance take to field work they make far better servants than the others. The other boys who stay at home "are stronger, and seem happier and more intelligent, but not so useful with horses and cattle." The evidence is always given in a very fair spirit. But the general tendency of the answers is all one way. I might give in detail the results to be gathered on the same subject from Mr. Coleman, Mr. Druce, and Mr. Little, in the Northern counties, and in Bedfordshire, Bucks, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northampton, Notts, Rutland, Suffolk, Kent, Sussex, Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Somersetshire, and Devonshire. But I can assure my readers that they are all alike, nor has the lapse of seven years apparently made any difference.

It will be asked, no doubt, how it is that if the labourers have lost so much by the exclusion of their children from field work since the passing of the Edu-

* Doyle, p. 332.

cation Act they are so much better off than they were before the Act was passed. The rise in wages and the cheapness of necessaries may have made up the difference, but would, one would suppose, have done no more. Yet, they certainly live in a very much better style, and with many more comforts round them than they were formerly accustomed to. The explanation I suppose is that the pinch is only for a short time; that their children are not all at school at once, and that when the older ones leave the village they cease also to live at home, where their earnings, except for a brief period, would do no more than keep them, if they did that. If we turn back to the Report of 1867-8, which was specially directed to the employment of children in agriculture, we shall find some reason to doubt whether children's labour—however valuable to the farmer—is quite so profitable to the parents as at first sight it might appear. It was constantly stated in that report that the earnings of children under ten years of age barely equalled the difference between the expense of keeping them at home and the expense of keeping them at work, with the extra food and clothes which they then require. Still, there are three years at least during which their labour is remunerative, which are now in great part lost to the parents and lost to the farmers; and though I am assured that a remedy is to be found in the more stringent administration of the Act, it seems strange that the farmers should for so many years have either failed to discover it or made no effort to apply it.

According to the bye-laws which are very generally adopted in the rural districts “(a) A child between ten

and thirteen years of age shall not be required to attend school if such child has received a certificate from one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools that it has reached the *Fourth Standard* prescribed by the Code of 1876. (b) A child between ten and thirteen years of age shown to the satisfaction of the Local Authority to be beneficially and necessarily employed shall not be required to attend school for more than 150 attendances in each year if such child has received a certificate from one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools that it has reached the *Third Standard* prescribed by the Code of 1876." It is asserted by one of my correspondents, a clergyman in the South-West, that wherever these bye-laws are in force, 99 per cent. of the boys could be free from school at eleven years of age, or sooner, if the Act were only properly carried out. Mr. Pell is of the same opinion, and a few of the farmers who replied to the Commissioners of 1880 thought so too. But as I have already stated, more than once, the majority who either ignore this view of the case, or hold it to be unfounded, are in the proportion of fifty to one. The question of course turns entirely on the ability of children under eleven years of age to pass the *Fourth Standard*, which will necessarily vary with the amount of skill, patience and perseverance exhibited by the master. Assuming, however, that 99 per cent.—surely a rather large allowance—are capable of passing it by the age specified, the question does not end there. Several of my own correspondents point out that the smarter boys are kept back by the stupid ones; that two or three stupid boys in a class compel the whole

number to proceed at their own pace and prevent them from passing the necessary standard as soon as they otherwise might have done. Practically, therefore, even if attendances were enforced with greater regularity, it is doubtful if anything approaching to 99 per cent. of the children would be ready to pass the standard at the time specified. And how to remove this obstruction out of the way of the more intelligent pupils is a question which it is difficult to answer. A clergyman from Cambridgeshire says that there is a class of boys whose presence in the school is felt after a time to be a farce, and that the master's labour is entirely thrown away upon them. But he adds "if their attendance were excused, it would not be possible to enforce the general attendance of other boys who are getting on well, but whom their parents would withdraw at once if permission were given them to do so." Here, then, we see that the desire on the part of parents for the wages which their children could earn is stronger than their desire to procure them a superior education. It is evident indeed, in spite of what I have written elsewhere, that a great many parents do dislike the Act, and that the lapse of seven years has not reconciled them to it, or made them understand it better.

Some have suggested that agricultural classes formed for the purpose of teaching elementary natural history, and the rudiments of farm work might have a good effect, and that boys who cannot master the history of the Plantagenets might be induced to take some interest in lectures upon grass and corn, bees and birds, and the management of pigs, sheep and cattle.

This would be an excellent thing no doubt. But it has been asked very pertinently who is to teach them. On the whole I am inclined to think that the best solution of the difficulty would be the dismissal of the unteachable boys to farm work as soon as their incapacity became manifest; and the retention of the others by such prizes awarded for early proficiency as would reconcile the parents to the continuance of their children at school.

Another difficulty in the way of such rapid progress as might perhaps otherwise be achieved is created by the "half-timers," who are allowed to make their 150 attendances at their own time, so that the master never knows when to expect them. "They drop in for a few days, or perhaps weeks, and then disappear for a time, learning therefore little or nothing that is of use, but giving much trouble to the master on account of the increased attention they require," and contributing doubtless to the general delays which help to prolong the school time of bad and good alike.

Among those who are in favour of natural history and agricultural classes are Professor Buckman and Mr. Bailey Denton. The former complains that in Dorsetshire the children know nothing of these things. They believe that three dragon-flies will sting a horse to death; that a cow sickens at once if a mouse creeps over her, and have other superstitions of an equally absurd kind. The daily dose of reading, writing and arithmetic might be beneficially varied in his opinion with an occasional lesson on birds, beasts, and fishes, which would possess the incalculable advantage of constant practical illustration. Mr. Bailey Denton (*Agri-*

cultural Labourer, No. 2, p. 54) is of the same opinion, and contends that it is of much more importance for rural schoolmasters to know something of natural history than to have at their fingers' ends Magna Charta, the Bill of Rights, and the difference between the Gallican and Alexandrian liturgies.

It will hardly be disputed that early familiarity with the details of any kind of work is a very great advantage to the man whose lot it is to live by it. In some kinds of work it may be said to be indispensable; and the farmers contend that agriculture is one of these. They say, for instance, that boys can never learn the management of horses unless they begin very young. And we are quite prepared to believe it, since it is observable that a thorough insight into the nature of animals is seldom possessed but by those who have played with them as children. And we must recollect, too, that an intelligent boy is being educated, in a way, all the time he is at work. He learns

“*Ventos et varium cœli prædiscere morem,
Et quid quæque ferat regio, et quid quæque recuset.*”

It is by exercising his powers of observation on these and kindred subjects that he rises to the top of his profession, and is revered like old Kester Bale in “*Adam Bede*,” who “knew the natur of all farming work” better than any man in the three parishes. It is men of this stamp who do well on little farms of their own, if they are ever lucky enough to get them. And it is questionable what equivalent for this untaught wisdom the majority of boys obtain by being kept at school till they are twelve. The mind is

more open to receive deep and lasting impressions from outward things in early childhood than during the years which immediately succeed it. It seems at first sight hard for the Legislature to step in and prohibit prompt initiation into these Saturnian mysteries. Certainly City men would think it very hard if they were forbidden to send their sons to the counting-house or the solicitor's office at any age they liked. Fancy, it may be said, Parliament enacting that no lad should go to business under, say, eighteen years of age, lest his intellect should be cramped by professional studies before it had been properly cultivated by a due course of the "higher education." At the same time there are arguments to be adduced on the other side. It is urged that if children go to farm work very young they are liable to physical injury, which will do more to damage their prospects than physical training to advance them; that purely technical training must be accompanied by some of that general intelligence which a certain degree of schooling is required to develop; and that this is especially true in these days, when agriculture is becoming a highly scientific industry, and machinery, demanding skilled labour, is being introduced into almost every operation. Still we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by either of these arguments. There is abundant evidence to show that the physical injury which young children are said to sustain has been greatly exaggerated; while it seems probable that much of the machine work which the labourers now have to conduct is as purely mechanical as anything else upon a farm, and often, indeed, requires less intelligence

and, less knowledge than the old methods of agriculture.

After the lapse of seventeen years it is, perhaps, too late to expect any relaxation of the existing system; and the evidence we have been considering suggests several questions of various degrees of importance, and one of supreme and momentous interest. . In the first place, *can* the parents live in comfort without their children's earnings? In the second place, can the farmers afford to cultivate the land properly, without juvenile labour? In the third place, how can the tendency be counteracted which year by year leads the flower of the rural population to quit the land? And, fourthly, if it cannot be arrested, what is to be the future of agriculture? To the first of these questions an answer is to be found in the preceding chapters. The parents *do* live comfortably without at least so much of their children's wages as the Education Act cuts off. *Solvitur ambulando*. They would live still better with them. But in the teeth of the evidence which is producible on this head it is impossible to charge the Education Act with having caused the parents to be worse off than they were before. To the second question the vast majority of the farmers make the same reply. Much necessary work goes undone for want of children to do it; and the increased cost of labour necessitates imperfect tillage. Even Mr. Read, who is favourable to the Education Act, says;—"The days of neat farming are at an end. We don't pick stones, or weed corn as we did. The women must not work in the fields nowadays, and the children are at school. So the work is not done, and we are glad of the *excuse* to curtail any

expense, however injurious it may prove to be hereafter." We fear, therefore, that in arable districts the answer to question No. 2 must be in the negative; and that the land does suffer, and will continue to suffer, from the absence of juvenile labour. The two last questions, however, are the most important of all, and must be dealt with in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

COTTAGE ACCOMMODATION.

EVEN more important than the scarcity of juvenile labour is the decline and deterioration of adult labour in the rural districts. That is the real difficulty of the future. We are confronted, with the serious fact, that the most intelligent and energetic of the English peasantry are, year by year, turning their backs upon the soil, and departing to seek their fortunes in more populous centres of industry. Labour is leaving the land. Only those remain behind who have not sufficient enterprise to follow the same path, or sufficient confidence in their own power of adapting themselves to new conditions of life. Some say that we have nothing to do but to elevate the condition of the labourer to a certain point, and then the runaways will stay at home. I have no faith in any such remedies: not, at least, at present. A reaction may set in hereafter, but the immediate cause of the great movement towards the towns is not to be reached by such remedies as are now proposed. The imagination of these lads has been stirred by what they have learned at school; and they would not give a fig for anything that their native villages can offer them. They talk of Africa

and golden joys. Don't tell me that three acres and a cow, or allotments, or small holdings would keep them back. They know well enough that with three acres, or with six, with one cow or with two, they would still be peasants; and peasants they are resolved to be no longer. That is the real secret of this so-called agricultural exodus. Education has filled the rising generation with new tastes and new ambitions; has suggested to them infinite possibilities in that life beyond the fields of which every newspaper tells them something, and every letter they receive from friends or relatives who have gone before paints a glowing picture. And with these novel yearnings at their hearts and these alluring visions in their heads, is it likely that they will be detained at home by any mere change in the accidents of their lot in life, while the essence of it remains untouched? No; the schoolmaster has done for them what Cobbett tells us that his first visit to Portsmouth did for him: "I returned once more to the plough, but I was spoiled for a farmer. I had, before my Portsmouth adventure, never known any other ambition than that of surpassing my brothers in the different labours of the field, but it was quite otherwise now. I sighed for a sight of the world; the little island of Britain seemed too small for me. The things in which I had taken the most delight were neglected; the singing of the birds grew insipid, and even the heart-cheering cry of the hounds, after which I formerly used to fly from my work, bound over the fields, and dash through brake and coppice, was heard with the most torpid indifference." No doubt there are plenty of agricultural lads who never did care either

for the song of the birds or the cry of the hounds, but the change which has come over the class of which I am now speaking is analogous to that of which Cobbett here describes so vividly the effect upon himself. They sigh for new worlds and new experiences. They do not desert agriculture because it does not give them the comforts or luxuries they require, but because it does not give them the excitement; and who shall say that they are to blame? Certainly not I. Their ambition is a perfectly natural and healthy one—the inevitable consequence of enlarged conceptions and cultivated intelligence. It would be as stupid as it is useless to complain of it. The only question to be considered is how far the raw material which they leave behind is capable of being improved and developed; how far a new class of skilled labourers may be reared in time to fill the gap that is fast being created; and that interest in farm work re-awakened which for the present seems to have died out.

Mr. Doyle lays the greatest stress on improved cottage accommodation. He thinks it is the want of this which disgusts the labourer with his lot more than any other single circumstance in his life. But then, on Mr. Doyle's own showing,* bad accommodation is now quite the exception. The improvement had begun when the first edition of this book was published; and since that time has steadily progressed. Far better cottages are now being generally provided, and still, as before, at rents representing little more than 2 per cent. interest on the outlay.

It is calculated that the minimum cost at which a

* Report, p. 311.

decent cottage can be built, at least out of ordinary materials, is £120; while those which fulfil the conditions required by the Enclosure Commissioners cost £143. Now, as 6 per cent. is the lowest remunerative return upon house property, it is obvious that cottage building cannot, at the present rate of wages, be carried on without some loss. It is computed that one-seventh of the labourer's income is what he ought to spend in rent; and as 6 per cent. on £120 a year is £7, it is not till we get up to earnings of £1 a week that the allotted proportion comes up to the required sum. Thus we find that the labourer in receipt of the average class of income is only just able to afford the lowest class of cottage. No labourer with a less income can afford a decent one at all. But it is clear from the foregoing chapter that there must be a very considerable number of agricultural families, in various parts of the kingdom, whose collective earnings greatly exceed the average, for whose cases the experiment suggested in the following extract might be tried with some confidence. The speech from which it is taken was delivered before the Dorset Chamber of Agriculture by Professor Buckman. And it will be seen that his view of the cottage question is a novel and courageous one.

“ Looking around you and seeing cottages built at the cost of £100 apiece, the sum of 1s. weekly being received as rent, can it be possible for the landlords to care about improving them? What inducement is there in this country for landlords to spend money on cottages? There is no margin for profit nor common interest. Suppose a landlord has money in the funds,

and takes £1,000 out to improve his cottage property. He pays no poor-rate on that money as long as it remains in the funds; but as soon as he invests it in cottages the poor-rates are 10 or 12 per cent. Can it be possible to expect that a man will improve his cottages under these circumstances? But if poor-rates were properly arranged, so that all property should bear its fair proportion, $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 per cent., instead of 12 per cent., would cover the whole. If the charge of 12 per cent. taxes were reduced by 9 per cent. it would be an incitement for landlords to attend to their cottage property, and build better cottages than they do at present. Under existing circumstances I am convinced there is no inducement to build. Any landed proprietor who builds cottages which the improved circumstances require must be a loser by the transaction, unless he can make it up in other ways by the general improvement of his property. So far as cottages are concerned, they really cost so much money to build that, at the present price at which cottages in this county are let—lower than in any other county—the landlord must lose if he spend any considerable amount of money upon his property. Therefore it is quite evident that it does not pay to improve cottage property. My own notion is simply this: If I owned one of these parishes, as I find many gentlemen in Dorsetshire do, I should at once double the rent of every cottage. Whether I should get the money I don't know, but I would double the rent, and I would ask my farmers to double the rent of every cottage they let to their labourers. I would take care I made the cottages doubly as good as they are at present. You would thus have better labourers, and I believe it would

be worth your while—I know it would be worth my while—to add another shilling a week to the labour list, with the idea that it should be paid with reference to improved cottages. This improvement would lower the rates very considerably, there would be less sickness, less illness, fewer illegitimate children, less unpleasant concomitants with reference to our parishes.”

The last part of this extract, which is thoroughly practical and sensible, seems in some degree to answer the first. Build better cottages, and you will effect thereby that heavy reduction in the rates which is now said to be indispensable before better cottages can be built. It shows, moreover, that in the opinion of the speaker wages either are, or might easily be made, adequate to the payment of a higher rent than is now exacted. Finally, the question arises whether it is better that cottages should be let to the labourer by the farmer, the landlord, or by some third person. Here, again, there are many conflicting considerations. When we speak of cottages being rented from the farmer, we are now referring only to cottages attached to the farm, and let exclusively to his own labourers. Then the system cuts both ways. On the one hand, the cottage is likely to be kept in better condition, and perhaps let for lower rent, because it is to the farmer's interest to keep his labourers, if good ones, as long as possible, and a good house and garden are of course a great inducement. The farmer, too, is always on the spot to see that repairs are executed. On the other hand, the cottager himself is less free, under this system, to carry his labour to the best market, being entirely at his master's mercy, and liable to “eviction”

at any time—a serious disaster to a poor man where cottages are not very abundant. The labourers are said to prefer renting from an indifferent person, and thereby keeping themselves free, although perhaps they have to pay more money for a worse house. Cottage house property not being a good investment, people who own them without farms look merely for the best interest they can get, not caring much about the condition of the house. But held from either the landlord or the clergyman of the parish, they are free from both these objections. And there seems a great concurrence of opinion in favour of cottages as well as of allotments being as much as possible in the hands of the clergyman or the squire. Some people, indeed, will tell you that there ought to be no business relations between the parson and his parishioners. This seems fanciful. But at all events no such objection can be raised to the lay proprietor.

Before noticing a plan by which it is hoped that the cost of cottage building may be greatly lessened without any sacrifice of convenience, we must advert to the rules laid down by the Enclosure Commissioners,* which are said to be so stringent (Mr. Henley, 187,) that few landowners have availed themselves of their assistance in borrowing money for the purpose. The Commissioners are understood to require—firstly, three bedrooms; secondly, that no part of the walls of an old cottage be used in the construction of a new one; thirdly, that the money borrowed shall not be used merely for converting and improving; and, fourthly, that the timber supports used shall be of a certain given strength. Mr. Henley thinks there is some misunder-

* Commission of 1869.

standing about the second and third of these provisions, and that, properly construed, they would throw no unreasonable impediment in the way of repairs and restorations. As to the first there can hardly be two opinions. But there seems to be a general agreement upon these two points, namely, that the Lands Improvement Act requires amendment, and that the Labourers' Dwelling-house Act, at present applicable only to towns, might with advantage be extended to the country.

From page lv. to lx. of the Report will be found a very interesting account of the latest improvements and suggestions in the matter of cottage building, from which it appears that by means of a new kind of material introduced by Mr. Benjamin Nichol, sufficiently commodious cottages may be erected at a cost of £85. This process is far too complicated a one to be described here. We may state briefly that the walls would be composed of slabs consisting of a kind of straw mattress enclosed in an iron frame, and coated over with Portland cement, a new kind of concrete, on which the highest expectations have been founded. These cottages, being "proof against fire and impervious to damp," would cost very little in repairs, so that it is calculated that 5 per cent. would be a sufficiently remunerative return. According to this estimate, therefore, they could be let out to the poor at a little over 1s. 6d. a week; and the cottage difficulty might be considered to be almost solved. The properties of the new cement, however, seem not yet to have been sufficiently tested to justify any positive assertions; while, on the other hand, it is alleged by the architects to the Board of Works that Mr. Nichol has underrated

the cost, and that the expense of his patent apparatus, an adaptation of the sewing machine, with which the mattresses are made up, would swell the whole outlay to a much higher sum than he has named, except where a large number of cottages were to be erected at the same time.

The Commissioners express a hope that it will be found possible to consult the convenience of the poor in one matter of great importance, even though it does enhance the cost of building. The poor themselves prefer to have all their rooms on the ground floor, because, where there are either babies or sick persons, the wife cannot look after them, and attend to her house duties at the same time, nearly so well if she has to be always on the staircase. Such cottages cover more ground, and the roof, of course, is more expensive. But the superior comfort of them is so manifest that many landowners, we understand, are returning to the system, which was once general, in spite of the increased cost.

Mr. Tremeneere, fortified by the testimony of the Assistant Commissioners, attributes the defective state of our cottages in a great measure to the embarrassed circumstances of the landowners, who, succeeding to encumbered estates, have really no money to spend upon cottage improvements. He thinks that "an absolute power given to every one who succeeds to an encumbered estate of selling as much of it as is required to pay off the encumbrances would have a strong tendency to keep settlements within 'reasonable and proper bounds,' and would prevent their being exceeded for any length of time to the injury of the public."

(Rep. II., p. xli.) This is a vigorous remedy. But the worst of it is that, until the labourer appreciates a good cottage, it is waste of money to build one for him. Education will make him conscious of new wants; and when he shall have become so, neither gentleman nor farmer will be able for long to disregard them. But one great difficulty in the way of introducing greater decency into the domestic arrangements of the poor the Commissioners have barely noticed, and that is the system of taking in lodgers. For it is manifest that you may go on enlarging cottages till they are as spacious as the Grosvenor Hotel without doing any good, if the labourer continues to huddle up his own family into one corner, and let the remainder. Stringent regulations to provide against this abuse are usually imposed by landlords; but it is one not easily detected, and, when detected, not easily removed. It is further encouraged by the great change which has taken place in the domestic habits of the farmer. The polite couple who drink claret, read the magazines, and dress like the gentry, find the old system of boarding and lodging their unmarried workmen an unmitigated nuisance, and would as soon think of sitting down to dinner with them, after the fashion of Mr. and Mrs. Poyser, as of riding to market on horseback one behind the other. The result, of course, has been that single men and lads, expelled from the farmhouse, have been driven perforce into the cottage. And, in considering the question of cottage accommodation in general, too little allowance, we think, has hitherto been made for the exigencies thus created.

To obtain, however, at all a comprehensive view of

the all-important question of cottage accommodation we must have recourse to the Report of Dr. Hunter, presented to the Privy Council in 1864. The first point that stares us in the face is this fact—as the labouring population has increased the number of cottages has diminished. Dr. Hunter found this to be the case at least in 821 villages; the average proportion being a diminution of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., against an increase of $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. This increase, however, is but partial; for though it is a doubtful point* whether the actual number of agricultural labourers in England has fallen off during the last thirty years, of those who live in villages the number has certainly declined; and the above figures are given by Dr. Hunter only to illustrate that disregard of the labourer's necessities which it is his main object to expose. At the time of his tour of inspection, as it is to a great extent still, the country was divided into close villages and open villages, the former being the property of one, or very few large landowners, the latter of small proprietors and speculative builders. Partly to lower the rates, partly for the sake of order, and partly for the sake of appearances, the population of the former had been gradually weeded of the inferior class of labourers, till none were left but those who could afford to live in "model cottages," the remainder being compelled to take refuge either in the open villages or the small towns adjoining, where they herded together in indescribable squalor and misery. But even when the destruction of cottages had long been carried on the cottagers would cling to their native place if there was

It is not doubtful now (1887).

no one to prevent them, and the same system of crowding would be found as in the free and uncivilised rookeries. The Union Chargeability Bill, however, has impaired the most powerful of the above motives for the suppression of cottages; while sounder views with regard to the proper construction of them may enable the landowner to make his money go a good deal further, and to do much more real good to the class which he desires to benefit. To build houses for the peasantry which are good enough for the curate or the doctor is almost as bad as not to build them at all, because sooner or later they are sure to fall into the hands of that class to whose means they are naturally adapted. "Without presuming," says Dr. Hunter, "to question the calculations of professional men, it is submitted that they have started from a wrong idea of the labourer's wants; that in providing him with a third bedroom they have only filled his house with lodgers; that in such matters as porches, windows, and chimneys they have consulted the landlord's taste rather than the tenant's comfort; and that by making cottage building dear they have deterred gentlemen who wished to relieve the grosser scandals with which their estates were charged." He reckons that out of forty-one families only three would require three bedrooms, ten one bedroom, and twenty-eight two bedrooms. And this is the proportion, he says, in which gentlemen should plan their cottages. Dr. Hunter, moreover, affords no countenance whatever to the view adopted by the Commissioners with regard to the necessary cost of building. He says that sufficiently good cottages, *built in a row*, need cost no more than £50 apiece.

In saying that it is mere mockery to talk of the law of supply and demand as regulating this question, Dr. Hunter perhaps goes too far; for it is not so, strictly speaking, except where cottages are the property of the farmer, who can compel his men to take them. Instances in which the village publican or the village grocer is the owner of cottages, and forces his tenants to be his customers, are surely very rare. But altogether Dr. Hunter's evidence goes a long way to confirm what has here been said of the expediency of keeping as many of the cottages as possible in the hands of the landlord or the clergyman. He bears constant testimony to the great good which is effected by the influence of a wealthy resident proprietor, so much so as to make us wonder at his words when, in giving an account of Somersetshire, he says, "It is a matter of great advantage to the inhabitants that it is very free from great estates." The destruction of cottages, at all events, has gone on as rapidly in that county as anywhere else. Nor is the Doctor's sentiment at all in accordance with the evidence supplied by Mr. Boyle, who inspected Somersetshire in 1868-69. He complains much of the state of cottage accommodation; but what does he say?—"The worst cottages are generally the small freeholds, inhabited by the persons who own them, and who, being unable to make more money than absolutely necessary for their immediate wants, are too poor to afford repairs of any kind. Next to those, the worst class of buildings are generally those belonging to small proprietors, such as tradesmen in towns, who have invested in them as a money speculation, and to make it pay are forced to charge a high rent and

spend little in repairs. The best cottages are usually those belonging to the larger proprietors, most of whom, from a wish either to see the estate present a flourishing appearance, or to see their people well off, charge a rent far too small to repay them for their outlay." Both Mr. Boyle and Dr. Hunter come to the same conclusion finally, "that the cottage ought to be considered in the light of farm buildings, from which the landlord expects no return, except in the shape of part of the rent of the farm." (Mr. Boyle, par. 39. Cf. Dr. Hunter, p. 133.) No doubt this cuts the knot. But we fail to see on what principle any rent at all could be charged from this point of view. And we own what we should prefer would be to see remunerative rents made possible by augmented wages.*

Dr. Hunter seems to think it hard that a whole family should be packed off into the open village because one girl has had a child, and he truly says it is not the way to reform them. Still the owner has a duty to the rest of his dependents which he is bound to discharge; and if what Dr. Hunter reports elsewhere, and appears to believe, is true, namely, that the immorality of the peasantry is *not* produced by the crowded condition of their cottages, there is less reason why the landlord should look over it. In two or three cases Dr. Hunter is both unjust and ill-informed. For instance, when he predicts that the poor man will soon be robbed of his cottage-garden, he casts an imputation on other people which we are sure was wholly undeserved six years ago. Twenty years have proved it to be monstrous. And when he says that game-

* These, however, are commonly underrated. Cf. Chap. II.

preservers like to get rid of the population, he is evidently unaware that the worst kind of poachers are those who haunt the back slums of country towns.

We may here add the later evidence of Mr. Doyle and Mr. Little, confirmatory of all which I had written on the subject in 1870 :—

“ The dwellings of the agricultural labourers in this district may be thus classified* :—(1.) Those which belong to large landowners and are occupied by their own labourers, or are rented directly from the owners. (2.) Those which are let with the farm and are let in part payment of wages. (3.) Those which have been built by speculators, or belong to small tradespeople, or to the labourers themselves. Between those classes of cottages a marked difference may be observed. With some few and glaring exceptions those for the condition of which the large owners are directly responsible are good. There is not a county in the portion of this district of which I am now writing which does not furnish many examples of the most liberal and careful attention to the condition of labourers' dwellings. It is not that ‘ model ’ cottages are ostentatiously clustered or dotted about almost within view of the residence ; they are scattered amongst the farms in reasonable proportion to the labour employed, and very fair progress may be observed in correcting the most serious evils of the laws of Settlement and Removal, those which resulted from ‘ close ’ parishes. Employers are becoming gradually alive to the fact that if labourers are to be retained for farm service, they will require suitable house accommodation not too distant from their work.

* Doyle, p. 311.

Although on many large properties this want is liberally cared for, there are estates in every county the owners of which are not in a position to effect necessary building improvements, and upon these the condition of labourers' dwellings is most unsatisfactory. This is especially the case when cottages are let with the farms and sublet by the occupying tenant. But the worst class of cottages are those which have been run up by speculators who seek a high interest for their outlay. Such hovels still continue to be the only refuge of a very large class* of agricultural labourers, driven to them from close parishes. How bad these are, and how great is the need of improvement is, I fear, but very imperfectly known."

If we turn to Mr. Little, who is himself a practical farmer, and has a wider knowledge of the cottage question, perhaps, than Mr. Doyle, we find still more decisive testimony to the improvement of cottages and the liberality of landlords. In 1878, two years before Mr. Doyle's report, Mr. Little published some plans of cottages in the Royal Agricultural Society's Journal, which, as he says himself, are all that the labourers can desire. "I must now turn," † he says, "to the domestic life of the labourer, and first to the important subject of cottage accommodation. Many reproaches have been levelled at English farmers on the subject of the dwellings of the poor; and, indeed, there was, until recently, too much to grieve the mind of a philanthropist in the condition of many of our

* Not such a very large class.

† *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, Second Series, Vol. XIV., Part II., No. XXVIII., 1878, p. 512.

cottages. But in nothing has a greater improvement been evident than in this within the past thirty years. It is perfectly true that on some estates may still be seen squalid, dirty, and dilapidated dwellings, sometimes even unfit for the decent accommodation of human beings, or affording a poor protection against a fickle climate. But, happily, these have now become most rare exceptions. A great awakening has recently taken place as to the duties and responsibilities of the ownership of property."

"The present state, then, of the cottage accommodation for labourers is daily becoming a subject of greater satisfaction." He here gives the designs of which I have spoken, and proceeds: "It will be observed that in each there are three bedrooms and two sitting-rooms, and that they contain all needful and proper accommodation for the decencies of life as well as the comfort of their inmates. . . . Thousands of such cottages as these may now be found scattered over every part of England; and, besides the comfort afforded by the English modern cottages, the labouring men who are their occupants are in almost every case provided with a piece of garden ground adjoining, or with an allotment in close proximity to their dwellings. By this means they are not only enabled to grow a sufficiency of garden-stuff for the use of their families, but also to sell some portion of the produce. This garden, moreover, affords them the means of keeping a pig (the almost invariable accompaniment of a well-to-do labourer's occupation), and there are few cottagers at the present day who have not the satisfaction of occa-

sionally killing a porker of their own feeding for the use of their household. The necessary straw for this purpose is generally given by the master, and it afterwards provides a useful supply of manure for the garden. The quantity of land so occupied varies considerably; but it is seldom less than about a fourth of an acre, and is sometimes (though rarely) as much as half an acre in extent. The rent paid for a cottage of this kind varies very much. It is sometimes not more than one shilling per week, and occasionally as much, when occupied with a rood of land, as £5 per annum. Now, as it would be impossible to build such a pair of cottages at the present day for less than £280 to £300, it is obvious that so small a rental leaves the owner with a loss, and that he has to recoup himself for his outlay from the rent paid by the farmer. This positive advantage to the labourer must not be lost sight of in considering his position. It is, indeed, equivalent to the addition of extra wages, and must so be considered. It is an anomalous state of things; but the farmer finds a certain advantage in having his men on the farm and handy for their work."

"My observations with regard to cottages have principally relation to those situated on the farm and under the direct charge and control of the landlord or his tenant. These, it will be gathered, are generally now sufficient for all ordinary requirements, and on many large properties they are models of neatness and of comfort. It cannot be expected, in villages where every kind of property exists—from the hut of the squatter, filched in days gone by from the roadside common, to

the cheaply run-up tenements of the speculator—that such a satisfactory state of things should exist; but powers have lately been conferred upon the local authorities by certain Sanitary Acts of Parliament which give them considerable control even over such dwellings as these; and in cases where cottages become, from decay or any similar cause, unfit for habitation, they can be closed. It is also the duty of such authorities to provide safeguards against contagion and disorders, and against the nuisances by which such disorders are propagated. Not only, therefore, has the sanitary state of such villages improved, but habits of cleanliness have been enforced, and if the condition of their inhabitants will not compare with those I have above described, it is at least improving and hopeful.”—*Ib.* p. 787.

This exactly tallies with Mr. Doyle's statement already quoted, and with the evidence of Mr. Boyle, one of the Assistant Commissioners in 1868, quoted at page 91. I do not think, upon the whole, therefore, that want of proper house accommodation can any longer be alleged as one of the grievances which drives the peasantry into the towns, where they are certainly very much worse lodged, and that at a much higher rate.

The truth is, however, that in many parts of England the cottage question is solving itself. The population of the villages is deserting them, and cottages are standing empty. The exodus of the stocking makers in some counties has left a plentiful supply of cottages for the labourers; and I know one village in which a cottage with two sitting-rooms, three or four

bedrooms, and from a quarter to half a rood of garden is let for 1s. 6d. a week. Formerly this cottage would have been let in two, now it is knocked into one; and though the cause cannot be regarded without great uneasiness and anxiety, the fact itself is, of course, highly beneficial to those who are left upon the spot.

CHAPTER VII.

ALLOTMENTS.

1867-70.

ONE of the most interesting passages in the Report of the Commissioners of 1867-8 is the one that gives a short history of the connection of the peasantry with the land from the earliest time down to the present date, which, though I do not think it is in every particular correct, affords a strong presumption that there have been periods in England when the labouring man was better off than he is now.* Without taking our readers all the way back to the fourteenth century it may be sufficient to report that in Acts of Parliament passed in the reign of Edward VI. and Elizabeth the claim of the peasantry to have a certain quantity of land attached to their cottages is clearly recognized. At the same time they were privileged to pasture their cattle, and to cut their firewood on the lord's wastes; and it is obvious that the condition of comfort to which they were raised by these combined advantages is only fairly described as one of "rude abundance." During the Wars of the Roses the condition of the peasant had

* *i.e.* 1870. This statement must be received with caution in 1887. Cf. p. 56.

declined, and the Acts referred to were intended to revive his prosperity. Whether by means of them, or in spite of them, his prosperity did revive, till, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, he was as well off as he had been in the fourteenth. He languished again during the Civil War and under the Protectorate, but experienced a second *renaissance* after the Revolution; and for the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century he enjoyed a kind of golden age. At the end of that time two events occurred, almost simultaneously, which had a marked effect on the condition of the English peasantry—the Enclosure Acts, which were passed between 1760 and 1774; and the American war, which broke out the year afterwards. The first curtailed his means; the second, by raising prices, increased his expenditure. Such, at least, is the account given by the Commissioners.* But Tooke, in his “History of Prices,” denies that war, *per se*, has any tendency to raise them. The price of wheat, in fact, did not rise during the first years of the American war, and from 1742 to 1748, the war of the Austrian succession, the average price was much below that of the ensuing six years. The great expansion of the population after the Peace of Paris (1763), followed by a long succession of very bad seasons, produced a great rise in prices *before* the American war; but from 1771 to 1791 there was little difference. Of course, when we happen to be at war with a great grain-producing country like Russia, or when the ports of the Continent are shut against us, as in the last French war, the case is very different.

* To the accuracy of which, however, I do not pledge myself.

By an Act of Parliament passed in the thirty-first year of Queen Elizabeth it was enacted that no cottage should be erected without having four acres of land attached to it. And in 1648 special attention was called to this Act by the judge at York assizes. It is probable, however, that, as land grew more valuable and cottages more numerous, it was found impossible to comply literally with this enactment. By the accession of George III. the ordinary labourer had probably ceased, as a rule, to be a cultivator of the soil on his own account; but he still enjoyed to the full his rights of common. And these, combined with a rate of wages high in proportion to the cost of necessaries, enabled him to live in great comfort. But when, almost at one and the same moment, the rights of common were abolished and the cost of living was increased, a rapid revolution took place. Those who had small freeholds were obliged to sell them. Those who had derived from their daily labour, and from the cow, the pig, and the poultry which roamed over the adjoining common, a comfortable and substantial livelihood, found themselves reduced to penury. The yeoman sank into a peasant, and the peasant sank into a pauper. From that time to this, in spite of the efforts of philanthropic individuals, charitable societies, and even Acts of Parliament, the position of the agricultural labourer had never till quite recently recovered itself. A society was set on foot in 1796, by Mr. Wilberforce and Sir Thomas Bernard, for improving the condition of the cottager and renewing his connection with the land, and in that association lay the germs of the allotment system. And Sir Frederick Eden reports (vol. i., p. 569) that

in 1795, in the neighbourhood of Mount Sorrel, in Leicestershire, the poor in some parishes had "four or five acres each assigned them for a garden at a very moderate rent." This, however, must have been a very exceptional state of things: and such a quantity of land as this, supplying the occupiers as it did "with cheese, butter, and milk," is altogether different in kind from the modern allotment.*

In 1801 and in 1845 Acts of Parliament were passed intended to protect the rights of "commoners" in any subsequent enclosures. But of course these Acts were not retrospective, and could not undo the wrong which had been done already; while even in those cases to which they were applicable they seem to have been strangely ineffective. The rapid rise in poor-rates which followed the Enclosure Acts, though it sometimes punished those who were the chief gainers by them, was but cold comfort to those who were the chief losers. And even now, we repeat, but little has been done, compared with what it seems reasonable to suppose might have been done, towards carrying out the intention of the Legislature, and preventing such mistakes in future. The Act of 1845 provided that out of every enclosed waste a proportion of land should be set aside for the use of cottagers, in lieu of their rights of common, subject, however, to the discretion of the Enclosure Commissioners, of which these gentlemen seem to have availed themselves very largely. The land was to be vested in trustees, to be called the "Allotment Wardens," who should receive the rents and devote them to parochial purposes. But out of

* Cf. Stanhope, II., 175—179.

nearly 500,000 acres which have been enclosed since the date of this Act only about 2,000 acres have been so assigned. [This fact, combined with the great extension of allotments by private individuals during the last ten years, confirms the now prevalent opinion that it is a mistake to entrust the disposal of them to public bodies.] But the truth is that allotments are not the proper compensation for the loss of common rights. Land requiring cultivation is no equivalent for land requiring none: the logical equivalent is higher wages, the natural result of more ground being cultivated.

In the Report presented to Parliament in 1869 by the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the working of the Enclosure Act of 1845 is to be found all the latest information on this subject; and the result of it has been the Government Enclosure Act of the present session (1870). The tendency of the Report is to modify to some extent the language of the Agricultural Commissioners. For instance, it is asserted that the enclosure of commons has done more good, by the extinction of the predatory population which they foster, than it has done harm by the loss inflicted on the cottagers; and it is shown that the proportion of land set out for allotments by the Enclosure Commissioners was in accordance with the intention of the Act of Parliament, and that those gentlemen are in nowise amenable to blame for it. Furthermore, it is recommended that these allotments be not limited to a quarter of an acre, and that a definite rule be laid down by Parliament as to the proportion of each common to be so allotted. The Bill of 1870* accordingly provides that land equal in

* Now withdrawn (July 7, 1870). Another Bill was passed by Lord

value to one-tenth shall be set aside for this purpose out of every common that is enclosed, and that such reservation shall be compulsory. It likewise gives discretion to the Commissioners to allot as much as half an acre to an individual, when it can be spared without injury to others. And it contains some important provisions for securing rights of way. But since the allotment system, on a large scale, must always depend rather on the liberality of private persons than on the gleanings from future enclosures, there is no reason for troubling the reader with any further remarks on this head.

Of the practical utility of the allotment system, apart from its justice in some places, and its moral benefit in all, doubts are still entertained;* but the preponderance of opinion is in favour of it. One cannot, however, shut one's eyes to the fact that the system is no longer an experiment. Though little has been done in the way of public allotments, private allotments have been steadily on the increase for nearly forty years, till they are now, we should think, no longer the exception, but the rule.† And it is only fair to inquire how far they have succeeded in enriching the agricultural labourer. To this inquiry, however, we find no satisfactory answer in this Report. The system is recommended as a probable cure for an acknowledged evil, almost as though it was a new discovery, and had not already been in operation for nearly half a century. It certainly does not *seem* to

Beaconsfield's Government in 1876. But allotments of this kind are not generally a success.—Poor Law Report (1834), 192.

* None are entertained now, 1887.

† Almost universal now, 1887.

have produced any effect upon the employment of women and children; but this is just one of those questions on which we want further information. The Commissioners tell us that the average loss to the labourer by the withdrawal of children under ten from field work would be £4 or £5 a year, and that the profits of a rood of ground come to just about the same sum. Well, the natural question to ask is at once this: Do we find that the occupation of this rood of land *does* induce the labourer to forego the earnings of his children? There can be no want of opportunities for investigating this question. But our own impression decidedly is, that it has had at present no such effect.

Again, there is the wife's labour to be taken into account, and that can hardly be less than £10 a year. If the allotment system is in time to lead to the abolition of female work, it must clearly be conducted on a scale that will bring the labourer a much higher annual return than £5. The Commissioners say that if he could be advantageously trusted with two roods he would be in a position to do what is required of him. But then, on their own showing, it is just this quantity of land that he cannot advantageously be trusted with. Then, too, there is the question of the effect of allotments upon wages. The Commissioners assure us that this is purely imaginary, and they quote in support of their opinion the evidence given before the Committee in 1843. We confess we are not satisfied on this point. Whether or no the allotment system has actually lowered wages is a point capable of proof, and so far we need not hesitate to accept this evidence. But whether or no it may not

have prevented them from rising is another question altogether, which it is much less easy to decide. Farmers, at least, always take allotments into account in discussing the subject. If you say the rate of wages is low, the invariable answer is, "Ah! but you see they have their gardens." And this not in those cases where the garden is part of the wages, but where the labourer rents it independently. [It is pointed out by Major Craigie in his paper (*Agricultural Holdings in England and abroad*), read before the Royal Statistical Society, on the 15th February, 1887, "that the counties in which allotments are least numerous are, as a rule, those where the highest agricultural wages prevail." But how far the two circumstances can be connected together as cause and effect, I am uncertain.—1887.]

On the first introduction of the allotment system, early in the present century, it met with the most violent opposition, not only from the farmers, but also from the clergy and landlords, though it is only fair to say that some of its earliest and most ardent supporters were clergymen.* The farmers feared that they would no longer get the same amount of work out of their men if these had their own ground to cultivate. It was thought probable that they would be tempted to steal seed corn, straw, and potatoes, and that they would always be in arrears of rent. None of these apprehensions appear to have been verified. Farmers do, indeed, complain that their men do not work as the last generation of labourers used to work; and

* A clergyman, the father of the present writer, was one of the first, if not the very first, to introduce it in Leicestershire.

there are others who still contend that allotments lying apart from the village are "an excuse and cover for poaching, and other kinds of thieving and prowling." There may be truth in this, but there is not enough in it to justify our dwelling on the argument. On the whole, we may say that if all the good which the system is thought capable of effecting has not yet been realised, little of the evil which was predicted has yet ensued; while if, setting aside for a moment its purely economical aspect, we look only to its moral effect, the picture seems without a drawback. While cultivating his potatoes, his turnips, and his wheat, to say nothing of fruit and flowers, the labourer is merged in the husbandman, and begins to understand, for the first time, what is meant by the dignity of industry. The plot of ground, too, is the source of a common interest to the whole family, and the pride they take in it sheds a humanizing influence on the otherwise cheerless tenor of their lives. That the garden is a formidable rival to the public-house is a point in its favour which none can be so ignorant as to question; while the dread of losing it by misconduct has been found to convert the most lawless populations to habits of industry and order. So that, whatever the pecuniary success of the system may be assumed to be, its advantages of another kind are so great and so indisputable that the Commissioners are abundantly justified in all they have said in its behalf.

One rood* is said to be the average quantity of land which a labourer can cultivate to advantage without

* Poor Law Report, 1834, 182—192; and Agricultural Commissioners, *passim*.

neglecting his master's work, though there are peculiar cases in which an acre or more may be let to him with equal safety. These, however, are few and far between; and it is agreed that the line should be drawn at that point above which the labourer becomes a little farmer. An allotment of two or three acres seems to work badly for all parties. Mr. Fraser found an estate in Gloucestershire where the allotments ranged from three to ten acres. No wonder that both the schoolmaster and the farmer condemn them. They take his scholars from the one and his workmen from the other. An allotment of this size can only be worked by the whole strength of the labourer's family, who are thus kept away from school; and he himself cannot do justice to both his own ground and his master's. Mr. Fraser thinks that the material welfare of the peasantry is promoted by the system. But his opinion is not borne out by the evidence of practical men.* In fact, for a day labourer to farm an allotment ground of several acres is to try to do two things at once, and must generally, we should think, lead to the proverbial consequences.

Another point in connection with allotments is whether the occupants should be allowed to grow corn, or be restricted to vegetables and fruit. The propriety of this restriction was much upheld at one time, but we should think it is declining now. It is said that the labourer cannot possibly give that attention to his wheat crop which is necessary to make it answer; and that his pig, for the sake of which he grows barley, is

* *Vide*, among others, evidence of Mr. Bolam, the agent of Lord Ailesbury, in Wiltshire. Cf. p. 215.

always a mistake, and frequently a nuisance. The old apprehension that such a man would steal wheat and barley for seed, as we have already said, has not been realized. But with regard to the other two questions, I should be disposed to say the labourer is the best judge, and that he is not so sentimentally greedy of land as to value his allotment for anything but what it will bring. How far the allotment system upon the whole does answer, from a strictly pecuniary point of view, is perhaps doubtful. But we think it may be left to the labourers themselves to turn it to the best account.

There is one kind of allotment, peculiar to a few counties, which we have not yet noticed, and which is an exception to some of the above rules. We mean the "cow run," or grass allotment, which is to be met with in the north of England, in Derbyshire, Shropshire, and Cheshire. In these more or less pastoral districts it is quite common for an ordinary day labourer to rent as much grass as will enable him to keep one or two cows, and he is unanimously considered to be much better off than the small farmer. These grass grounds extend from four or five to as much as ten, twelve, or even twenty acres. But one of more than ten acres defeats its own object. It converts the labourer into a farmer, and usually ruins him. One man who was reduced from twenty acres to ten told the agent that he had "made a gentleman of him." The cow, moreover, interferes in no way with the labourer's daily work. His wife can manage her, and her annual value to the labourer is about £12. It is strongly recommended that these plots of land should always be rented direct from the proprietor of the soil—the squire or the

clergyman, that is—and not from the farmers,* who have a propensity to exact monstrous rents in return for the accommodation, not less sometimes than four-fold the rent of their own farms. Although the produce of an acre of land, cultivated by spade husbandry, may be greater in proportion† than the produce of a large farm, yet it is properly maintained by the Commissioners that the labourer should not be charged any higher rent for it on that account, as he is entitled to the benefit of his own better tillage, which if he does not get, the object of the system is defeated.

1887.—Since the above was written the allotment system has risen into the front rank of public questions; and something has now to be added with reference to current opinions and what I would venture to call current misconceptions on the subject.

In the first place, it cannot be insisted on too strongly that allotments and small holdings are two essentially distinct things. To compare one with the other, or treat them in any way as if they stood upon the same footing, is to blunder on the very threshold of the question. If we choose to convert a certain proportion of agricultural labourers into small farmers, so be it; but that the same man can be a small farmer and an agricultural labourer at the same time I hold to be impossible. Neither is an allotment the same thing as a cottage garden. Men must have cottages, but they are not obliged to have allotments. An allot-

* Still less from parish authorities or public bodies. Cf. Poor Law Report, 1834, pp. 192-4.

† This, however, is a moot point.

ment is a plot of ground, detached from the cottage, which the labourer and his family can cultivate in their spare time without trenching in the slightest degree on the regular working hours which earn the weekly wages. The size varies from a rood to an acre, the latter being, as a rule, the most on which an ordinary day labourer can bestow the necessary care. Allotments have hitherto been looked upon rather as incentives to industry and good conduct than as representing any share in the occupation of the soil to which the peasantry have a legal claim. I should very much prefer to see them remain on this footing: let by the farmers, the gentry, and the clergy to the most deserving class of labourers, while their alleged right to the Elizabethan four acres is recognised, if possible,* by the extension of small holdings. These, if an economical mistake, have a good deal to say for themselves from a moral point of view. But with the allotment system as it now exists, I think it would be a grievous mistake to interfere. To declare that every agricultural labourer is entitled to an allotment, and that we have no right to annex any conditions to his tenancy which we do not equally annex to the tenancy of a regular farmer, is to change the whole character of the system, and to rob it, in my opinion, of three-fourths of its utility.† Why throw away so valuable an instrument for good in the hands of employers and landowners when the object for the sake of which it is proposed to make this great sacrifice can be so much more effectually secured by another process?

I should like to see any number of small farmers

* Cf. p. 142.

† Appendix IV. p. 254.

in this country if their existence could be reconciled with the working of economic laws. Let them be made as independent as possible, with every security which the Agricultural Holdings Act supplies for tenant farmers in general. But it would be an entire misapplication of the purpose of that Act to bring allotments within its operation. Let the labourer, while he is a labourer, have his allotment on the reasonable condition that he exhibits those virtues which will qualify him hereafter for the position of a small farmer. This is his true road to independence. Let him rise from one class to the other according as his own exertions shall enable him to do so. Let every facility exist for his translation to a higher sphere; but, while he remains an agricultural labourer, let him be an agricultural labourer. We have seen what are his deficiencies at the present day.* He is ignorant of his duties, and unwilling to be taught them. The consciousness that a good working character from his master is the condition on which he holds his allotment, may be made, perhaps, to serve as a corrective, and to lead him to acquire by degrees that more general knowledge of farming operations which he is now too indolent to learn. If such has been the effect of the allotment system in past times,† how much more beneficial are we likely to find it in the future? If only half of what is alleged by the most competent witnesses on the subject is to be believed, one of the most urgent agricultural necessities of the present day is the restoration of that supply of skilled labour which is every year becoming scarcer, and for

* Cap. IV.

† N.r. Doyle's Report, p. 312. Also *supra*, 107.

want of which so many farms in England are condemned to imperfect cultivation. It seems to me that the allotment system, rightly used, might be made largely subservient to this object; while, at the same time, it would help to make the labouring man more fit* for the position which he covets—a position to which, in the present state of his professional attainments, he seems totally unequal. To put such men as those who form the great bulk of the agricultural “residuum” into farms of four or five acres would be to consign them to certain ruin. One of the first conditions of success in such a holding is that the occupier shall be able to do great part of the necessary labour with his own hands. It follows, then, that he must become a skilled workman before he can have the slightest chance of succeeding as a small farmer.

What I wish to see, then, is a system which, while offering a future to the agricultural labourer, and a position of independence to which he can look forward as the reward of his own exertions, shall interfere with none of those conditions which afford a means of influencing his character while he continues to be a labourer. Such influence will benefit himself by contributing to the formation of habits and the development of intelligence essential to his prosperity in any wider sphere of industry; it will benefit the farmer by giving him a better class of servants; and it will benefit the public by removing one of the causes which tend to impoverish the soil, and diminish its productive powers.

If there is any doubt whether allotments do or do not

* Cf. 152.

come under the Agricultural Holdings Act the sooner it is removed the better. On this question the lawyers disagree, though the majority incline to the opinion that a large class of allotments are not excluded from the operation of the Act.* The history of the question in Parliament is briefly as follows:—By the Act of 1875 and by the Bill of 1883, as it originally stood, all holdings of less than two acres were exempted from it. This reservation was thrown out in Committee, at the instance of Mr. Jesse Collings, apparently for the very purpose of bringing allotments within the clutches of the Bill. Before it left the House of Commons Mr. Edward Stanhope said “it was now found out that those who let allotments were to be liable to all the provisions of the Bill.” When it went up to the House of Lords Lord Salisbury declared that, under the clause as it stood, “allotments would be doomed.” And amendments were introduced by Lords Henniker and Camperdown for the purpose of restoring the exemption which the House of Commons had expunged. The amendment, however, was not accepted by the Commons, and was not insisted on by the Lords; so that the clause still stands as it did when Mr. Stanhope and Lord Salisbury placed the aforesaid construction on it; and apparently exempts only such allotments as are let by employers to their servants. The Lord Chancellor, on the 22nd of August, seemed to be of opinion that such would be its effect; and the fact that two days afterwards he said that the clause would not apply to cottage gardens does not seem

* Hall's “Law of Allotments,” p. 135; Lely and Pearse, Part III. p. 131; Willis Bund, Part III. p. 281; Jeurwine, Part III. p. 43; Corrie Grant, Part III. p. 49.

to me conclusive.* By the clause, as I understand it, allotments let by employers to their own servants are exempt; and, according to Lord Selborne, cottage gardens are exempt. But the great majority of allotments are neither cottage gardens, nor let by employers to their servants.

If the meaning of the Act is that both allotments and cottage gardens shall be exempt from its operation on the ground that in each case the produce is grown by the labourer for his own use and not for sale, a construction of the clause favoured by the words "or not cultivated as a market garden," it is a great pity that this was not distinctly stated. And I only hope that words will be inserted in the Government Allotment Bill to place the point beyond a doubt. Private individuals will certainly not continue to let allotments if they are hedged round with all these vexatious restrictions; and if they fall exclusively into the hands of public bodies, they will simply become a smaller class of small holdings, and liable, at the same time, to all the objections which have been urged against this mode of letting by practical and experienced agriculturists. A public body such as is here contemplated has no interest in its tenantry: is, comparatively speaking, unaffected by their failures or successes; while, as to its exercising any kind of moral influence, that, of course, is wholly out of the question.

On the supply of allotments a great deal has been done since 1883 to open the eyes of the public to the real truth. The admirable little book published about

* Cottage gardens are not really allotments at all. But for convenience sake I sometimes speak of them as such.

a year ago by Lord Onslow,* entitled "Landlords and Allotments," is sufficient by itself to put to rout a great deal of the nonsense that has been talked and written on the subject. But the latest information of all is to be derived from the Government returns collected in 1886, and published in the present year.† From these it appears that the total number of agricultural allotments, and holdings wrongly classed as allotments, in England and Wales were, in June, 1886, 389,067; of these only 35,246 range from one acre to four. The remaining 353,821 are what I venture to call allotments proper, consisting of various sub-divisions of an acre, from half a rood upwards. The whole 389,000 are allotments detached from cottages, exclusive of all such as are granted by railway companies to their servants, of all cow runs and potato grounds allowed by farmers to their labourers, and of all cottage gardens. According to the census returns of 1881 the *bona fide* agricultural labourers of England and Wales numbered 807,608, and including some 20,000 shepherds, for some reason or other not included in the return of 1886 among farm servants, they amount altogether to 827,608: giving an allotment for more than every third adult male; and when cottage gardens, potato grounds and cow runs have been taken into account, I think the reader will agree with me that there is very little need of legislation for the compulsory extension of allotments, whatever there may be for the extension of small holdings. It was urged in the debates of 1883 that something ought to be done for the protection of allotment holders, because the large majority of them were weekly

* Appendix Ix.

† February, 1887.

tenants, and liable to eviction at a week's notice. We learn from the Government return that of the whole 389,067 allotments in England and Wales only 41,667 are not let by the year. So much for the authority of experts!

What a cow run is the reader already understands. Potato ground is a strip of land in one of the farmer's own fields, which is assigned to the labourer for the growth of potatoes, and usually figures among his perquisites. From 15 to 20 poles, something under half a rood, is the usual size of these strips, which it is needless to say must never be confounded with allotments, as they are given always by the farmer to his own labourers as an addition to their wages. The number of these potato plots in England and Wales are 93,308; the number of cow runs which are peculiar to the grass districts,* 4,493; total, 97,801. The number of cottage gardens, absurdly called garden allotments in the Government return, varying from half a rood upwards, are, in England and Wales, 257,468.† Of these a certain proportion are let rent free to shepherds and some times waggoners; but for the great majority some rent is paid. It is stated in the return that the average rent (cottage and garden together) is, in England, £4 14s. 7d. per annum, and in Wales £3 19s. 3d. But it must be remembered that these cottages are often let for less than their real value, and that the difference is regarded as so much

* Page 109. There is another kind of cow run which consists merely in permission to the labourer to turn out a cow upon the farm. Including these, cow runs are much more numerous than stated in the text. But I omit them as not partaking in any sense of the nature of an allotment.

† These are not all. Cf. Major Craigie's Paper just referred to, p. 20.

added on to the weekly wages. To give a single instance: in the Government return, cottage rent in Leicestershire is put down at £5. My own informant, Mr. Glover, whose testimony I am sure is perfectly trustworthy, says* that a good cottage, garden, and pigsty is to be had in his neighbourhood for a shilling a week. In the appendix to Mr. Doyle's report there is abundant corroboration of this: "Few agricultural labourers pay more than a shilling a week for a cottage with three bedrooms and a good garden." (Gloucestershire.) For a cottage "with living room, kitchen, washhouse, three bedrooms, and a rood of garden, say, £3 10s." (Oxfordshire); that is less than 1s. 6d. a week. Of the total, 257,468, more than half, namely, 135,802, are let by the year; 54,480 by the half-year or by the quarter; 18,393 by the month; 42,248 by the week, and 6,545 "under other conditions." The total number of all put together is as follows:—

Allotments	...	...	...	...	...	389,067
Potato grounds	...	...	...	...	...	93,308
Cow runs	...	...	...	...	...	4,493
Cottage gardens	.	...	...	...	...	257,468
						<hr/> 744,336
If from this we deduct the potato grounds,						
which stand upon a different footing	...				...	93,308
we still have	...	..	...	...	...	<hr/>654,028

as the number of pieces of ground cultivated by agricultural labourers on their own account, and let, as a general rule, at the ordinary agricultural rent of the district. The Government returns do not give the rent. But Lord Onslow gives returns from 248 large land-

* See page 58.

owners in all parts of the country, and of these we find that 64 return allotment rents as higher than the rate of farm rents, 18 as lower, and the remaining 166 as equal. From my own experience, I should say that this is a very fair representation of the country at large. And it may be added that where the rents are higher the landlord pays all the rates, &c., and keeps the fences in repair.

It should be added that in some parts of the country there are more allotments than there are labourers to take them; that many are vacant, and no applicants. In the Midland Counties a good many used to be occupied by the stockingers, who have now gone into the towns, which accounts for the vacant allotments, though not for their remaining vacant.

We are not to suppose, of course, that for every allotment, every cottage garden and every cow run there is a separate occupier. Some agricultural labourers have both allotments and cottage gardens, and some allotment holders are not agricultural labourers; but making every allowance for pluralists and others, it may still, I think, be maintained that the further demand for allotments, a demand by-the-by which has fallen off of late years, is well within the reach of private individuals, and requires no assistance from the Government; a species of assistance which has always been deprecated by the most competent authorities, except in the very last extremity, and when allotments were obtainable on no other terms. On this point the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834 gives no uncertain sound.*

“If letting land to the poor, though beneficial to

* Pages 192-4.

the occupier, required a sacrifice on the part of the lessor, it is clear that it could not prevail extensively, unless it were effected at the expense of the public. And that, if such system were adopted, as the land applicable to that purpose, or indeed to any other purpose, is limited, and the number of applicants is rapidly augmenting, every year would increase the difficulty of supplying fresh allotments, and diminish their efficiency in reducing the increasing mass of pauperism, until the arrival of a crisis when it would be necessary either to give up the system, resume the land, and clear it as we could of its inhabitants, or abandon the whole country to a helpless and desperate population. Still the immediate advantages of allotments are so great, that if there were no other mode of supplying them, we think it might be worth while, as a temporary measure, as a means of smoothing the road to improvement, to propose some general plan for providing them.

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“But since it appears that land may be let to labourers on profitable terms, the necessity for any public inquiry on these points seems to be at an end. A practice which is beneficial to both parties, and is known to be so, may be left to the care of their own self-interest. The evidence shows that it is rapidly extending; and we have no doubt that as its utility is perceived it will spread still more rapidly.”

The prophecy of the Commissioners has been fulfilled; and I for one readily accept the inference which naturally flows from it: namely, that for the promotion of village allotments legislation is utterly superfluous.

If a measure like Sir Edmund Birkbeck's* is wanted at all, it is wanted in the interest of the urban or suburban population; and to these it should be limited. Among this class there is a large demand for allotments, and it is possible that they may require some protection against arbitrary evictions. In the case of small orchards or fruit gardens, there may be something to be said for it; but in the case of ordinary allotment grounds, nothing. Instead of protecting, it would annihilate them. Fancy giving an agricultural labourer compensation for unexhausted improvements, when nine times out of ten his employer gives him the manure, and very often ploughs his land; and when he pays even a lower rent for it than the agricultural rent of the district! The notion is preposterous. Besides which, turning a man out of his allotment is not the same thing as turning a man out of his farm. The allotment is only the resource of his leisure hours, a slight addition to his income perhaps, but not that by which he lives. The farm is his livelihood.

Before quitting the subject I may refer to one or two passages in the Reports of 1880, in confirmation of the above statements. All agree that there is no scarcity of allotments; that where they do not exist cottage gardens are so large that they are not wanted; and all agree likewise that, as with cottages, so with allotments, it is always better that they should be held directly from the landlords, be these laymen or clergymen. The majority are so held; and are, of course, only in a very few instances let to the landlords' servants. I see, however, that all the Commissioners of 1880 are

* "Allotments and Cottage Gardens Compensation Bill." Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, February 14, 1887.

very fond of quoting the authority of the Commissioners of 1867, on which my first edition was based; so that a good deal of what they say is anticipated in a previous chapter. I would refer, however, more particularly to Mr. Druce's Supplementary Report, p. 36; to Mr. Doyle's Report, pp. 312 and 345; and to Mr. Little's, pp. 447 and 453.

A good deal has been said of the proper situation of allotments; and it has been represented as a grievance that the labourer cannot always have them close to his own door. No one, however, who knows the ordinary arrangement of an average English country village will be guilty of so foolish a complaint. The nearer the better, no doubt; that is obvious. But the land which lies at the backs of the farm-houses and cottages is almost always in the occupation of farmers, and is to them an absolute necessity. The home close on which the farm-yard opens could not be taken away without inflicting intolerable inconvenience on the tenant; and it is almost indispensable that he should have a certain amount of grazing ground within easy reach of his cow-sheds and rick yards, so that cows and beasts can readily be foddered or sheltered in severe weather.

To talk of land of this description being taken for allotments is rubbish. But that all reasonable care is taken to consult the labourers' comfort in this respect may be seen from the Government Returns, according to which of the 389,067 allotments in England and Wales, 318,405 are within half a mile of the village, 56,758 within a mile, and only 13,904 beyond that distance.

CHAPTER VIII.

SMALL FARMS, AND PEASANT PROPRIETORS.

1870.

THERE is hardly a question in political economy, said Mr. Mill some years ago, which is more hotly contested than the comparative merits of large farms and small. And what was true then seems equally true now. Nor are we acquainted with any work upon the subject which has gone thoroughly to the bottom of it; that is to say, which has *fairly* contrasted the produce of any two given tracts of land composed of the same kind of soil, and subject to the same climate, under the two systems of *la grande culture* and *la petite*. There is abundant evidence to show that under certain exceptional conditions small farmers can thrive; but what it is sought to establish at the present day is that these conditions are not exceptional: and that large farmers do not thrive better.

The chief points to be borne in mind, while considering this subject, are, first, that small proprietors and small tenants are two different things; secondly, that what is thought a large farm in one place may be thought a small farm in another; thirdly, that the value of what is called garden husbandry rises and falls in proportion to the demand for those crops which are the most

advantageously produced by it; fourthly, that, after we have drawn our conclusions on purely economic grounds, we have not exhausted the subject, which is intersected by other social questions of at least equal importance; and fifthly, that we must be on our guard, above all things, against assuming too readily that what answers in one country will necessarily answer in another, as there are many people who, though they might be the first to acknowledge this truth when put as a general proposition, are in the constant habit of ignoring it when dealing with particular questions.

It is gratifying to reflect that on this point at least there need be no political differences. The advocates of small farms and small proprietors are chiefly, it is true, to be found among the Liberal party; but if they are condemned by Conservatives it is not because either of them is hostile to the landed interest. On the contrary, the influence of the country gentlemen would be largely increased by the restoration of a system which was originally called into existence for the service of their ancestors. The opposition which landlords now encounter on their own estates from the rich and independent holder of six or seven hundred acres they would never experience from the class of petty cultivators who are now under consideration. A gentleman with an estate of three or four thousand acres, on which no one farm exceeded two hundred, while a majority of the freeholders in his villages were peasant proprietors, would be monarch of all he surveyed. Let nobody, therefore, suppose that opposition to the views in question proceeding from Conservatives is necessarily founded on what are called Conservative principles. We do not

mean to say it is wholly a disinterested opposition; but such as it is, it rests on a commercial, not a political basis. Country gentlemen, who have excellent means of judging, think, rightly or wrongly, that a system of large farms pays better; that the rent is safer, and some would say higher; that the soil is much better cultivated; and that all the trouble and distress of getting rid of poverty-stricken tenants, who are ruining the soil without benefiting themselves, is avoided by it. But if it came to the question of political and social influence, there cannot be a doubt to which side they would incline.

The genuine peasant proprietor has now almost disappeared from England. Something like him still survives among the hills and valleys of the North, though how far the "Statesmen" of Cumberland and Westmoreland would be allowed as illustrations of the system by its present advocates we cannot say. Mr. Mill, indeed, quoted them in proof of its excellence years ago. But he seems to have been quite satisfied with the testimony of Wordsworth, and not to have suspected that underneath the patriarchal exterior which delighted the poet the seeds of decay had long been silently germinating. On this head the report of Mr. H. Tremenheere is most interesting:—

"The whole class of statesmen has been gradually declining in prosperity during the last hundred years, but the poorer members of the class—those, namely, with from twenty to fifty acres—can keep above water no longer.

"Many causes have contributed to bring about their gradual decline. Railways and free trade introduced

new ideas and new principles into this district, for which these primitive holders of the soil were unprepared, but the process of extinction had commenced at a much earlier period. Pringle, in his 'General View of the Agriculture of Westmoreland,' published in 1805, attributes their steady decrease to the turnpike roads, which, he says, had brought the manners of the capital to the extremity of the kingdom, destroyed the simplicity of ancient times, and caused finer clothes, better dwellings, and more expensive viands to be sought after by all. The small estates, he adds, were being everywhere sold, and many a statesman had been reduced to the necessity of working as a labourer on those fields which he and his ancestors had for many generations cultivated as their own. The diminution in the number of small estates has certainly been continuous for more than a century, and those which remain are generally heavily burthened with debts. Children have to be maintained out of the estate after the owner's death, and the land is frequently charged with portions larger than its value can bear, and after struggling in vain with accumulated difficulties the inheritor of a small estate is at last obliged to sell; or if he succeeds in retaining the patrimonial property, and in transmitting it to his heir, he leaves him only to continue the same unceasing conflict between industry and want in which his predecessor, and a long line of predecessors before him, lived and died.

“The increased competition for land, and the generally high price it commands, have operated in the same direction, and many small proprietors have been tempted to part with their paternal property, and to seek their fortune in emigration.

“ Excepting on the land of some of the larger proprietors the farming of the statesman is generally bad. There is little spirit of improvement in the class. If they possess a little money they prefer hoarding in their oaken chests to laying out on the land. ‘ Would you not,’ was inquired of an old statesman, ‘ expend a shilling on your property, if it would eventually return you five shillings?’ ‘ No; I would rather button it up in my breeches pocket. It would be safer there,’ was the reply. The roads leading to their homesteads are generally so bad that it has been said that the only safe mode of reaching them would be in a balloon. The midden, or dung-pile, is close to the door of the dwelling-house. The land, generally undrained, is prolific of rushes, and the whole appearance of the property denotes poverty, slovenliness, and neglect. Bailey and Culley, when they visited Cumberland early in the present century, were struck with the impoverished condition of the small statesmen; and the condemnation they pronounced on their management I have seen nothing to induce me to consider as inapplicable to the present day. ‘ These men,’ they say, ‘ seem to inherit with the estates of their ancestors their notions of cultivating them, and are almost as much attached to the one as to the other.’

“ The effect of these small properties on the children of their owners is not favourable, for they are often kept away from school for months to assist in the work of the farm. On inquiring of one at what age his children began to assist him in farm work, ‘ As soon as they can crawl,’ was the reply. And I believe I am correct in stating that, as a rule, the children of the

smaller proprietors feel the disadvantage of a neglected education through life, and do not prosper in the world so well as those of the agricultural labourers.

“If it is important that the soil should be cultivated with the maximum effect, the small statesmen of these counties certainly do not satisfy that desideratum: half shepherds, half husbandmen, they are deficient in the spirit and enterprise which agriculture requires, and they are without either capital or skill. In the districts where tillage prevails they are singularly out of place. In small sheep and dairy farms they have a more legitimate occupation; and they will probably linger long in the secluded mountain dales, a remnant of that community of small proprietors whose simple manners and sturdy independence have long given to this part of England one of its most marked characteristics.”

Such was the account in 1869 of a class of men which in 1857 Mr. Mill had cited as living proofs of the value of a peasant proprietary.

That the evidence is conclusive against peasant proprietorship we do not assert; and this for two reasons. The farms are too large, and the owners are too ignorant, to give the system fair play. And it may be that if the farms were smaller and the owners sharper the result might be different. Such, however, does not seem to be Mr. Tremenhoe's own opinion. And now let us turn to another district, where a very different class of small freeholders are found to exist—the Fen districts of Lincolnshire. The condition of this class is reported by Mr. Stanhope:—

“The Isle of Axholme, with the Carr district around

it, in the north-eastern corner of the county, is composed of very rich land, especially suited for garden cultivation. It is mainly owned by small freeholders, cultivating their own land with the help of their families, and employing but little hired labour. Where the amount of land occupied by them is sufficient to employ fully a man's labour throughout the year, or where it is only four or five acres, and the owners will consent to hire themselves out whenever their own land does not require their labour, the small freeholders appear to be prosperous, in spite of the heavy incubus of debt under which they often live. At Billingham some are paying 3 and 4 per cent. for borrowed money. (Evid. 266.) But the ownership of land seems to beget a sort of independence, which is not consistent with hiring themselves out to others. Sometimes they will help each other, either in person or by lending their horse, if they have one. Their children are worked earlier, and have less schooling, than those of hired labourers. They are a class in many cases very little raised above the hired labourer, and more hardly worked and less well fed and housed. They are very numerous in many parts of the Fens."

Now here we have the real conditions of peasant proprietorship: an exceptionally fertile soil, which repays garden cultivation, and estates within the power of one man and his family to cultivate. Yet what is the verdict here? They "appear to be prosperous." But what sort of prosperity is that which causes them to be worse fed, worse housed, worse educated, and harder worked than the hired labourer?

If we now turn to the pages of Mr. Mill, and

to the essays upon Land Tenure lately published by the Cobden Club, we still find nothing that conclusively establishes the superiority of the *petite culture*. In France and Belgium it seems to depend upon circumstances. Where there is a large demand for vegetables, fruit, eggs, poultry, &c., the peasant proprietor is in clover; where the soil is rich and deep spade husbandry is employed to great advantage; and where it is thin and stony only the "magic of property" will cause it to be cultivated at all. Under any of these conditions the system is doubtless a success. It answers for the market gardener, it answers on the barren rock, and it answers on the fat loam; but for regular farming on intermediate soils, such as the great bulk of all countries must be supposed to consist of, it is almost admitted by Mr. Cliffe Leslie that a system of cultivation is required which nothing but capital can supply. He says, indeed, that the peasant proprietors are gradually amassing capital, and that, by means of the co-operative principle, they are slowly acquiring possession of machinery. But we must remember that his whole argument is coloured by a negation of what he calls the "machinery-doctrine of most produce at least labour," and by the affirmation of a quite distinct one—namely, that "machinery was made for man, and not man for machinery." We have no objection to the doctrine. But the intrusion of social or moral considerations into a purely economic argument has a tendency to mystify the reader. The two ought to be kept distinct. And we can only conjecture Mr. Cliffe Leslie to mean

this, that even if peasant proprietorship is inferior in productiveness it has other advantages which more than make up for the defect.* We shall consider presently whether, if the English system be in any respects inferior to the continental, it may not also be defended on analogous grounds.†

But it is another of these writers, M. Laveleye, who goes nearest to the point on which Englishmen desire information, when he frankly admits that what writers on France, Belgium, and Holland have to say in favour of *la petite culture* is but remotely applicable to England. "It is," says he, "*the glory of England to have remained free from the consequences usually attending the large property system. Great Britain possesses a class of landowners and tenants alive to the requirements of agriculture; and her gigantic commerce has provided employment for the small freeholders whose farms have been swallowed up.*" It is evidently M. Laveleye's opinion that agriculture is pursued to most advantage under these conditions, and that it is the want of them which prolongs the continental system of husbandry and land tenure. To introduce this system into England because it flourishes in France would be, in his eyes, to throw away the favours of fortune, to abdicate our own superiority, and to commit a mistake analogous to that which would solve the perplexities of civilization by a return to barbarism. The following assertion, too, from a competent witness, is worth volumes of specu-

* But this position, if we examine it, will be found, at bottom, to rest on the principle of protection. Cf. p. 157.

† Cf. p. 143, 144.

lation. Large farms in Holland and Belgium are not, he tells us, so well cultivated as small, because men who have capital for the former despise agriculture, while those who have capital enough for the latter are just the class which is devoted to it.

Another French authority, who is usually mentioned with respect by all English writers on this subject, and is often cited as an advocate of *la petite culture*, M. De Lavergne, records his judgment in favour of middle-sized properties, such as exist chiefly in Maine and Anjou, in the following terms:—"La petite culture ne réussit que dans des conditions déterminées; la grande aboutit presque toujours au luxe et à l'absentéisme qui la dévorent; la moyenne présente à la fois plus de ressources que la première, et moins d'entrainements que la seconde." ("Economie Rurale de la France.") And he speaks most favourably of the class of proprietors, which in France represents the smaller class of English gentry, who habitually reside on their estates.

The same writer, in his "Rural Economy of Great Britain," speaks still more strongly to the same effect, and has anticipated many of the remarks of M. Laveleye. He states that the conditions of property in England are more favourable to agriculture than those of France; that it is a matter of regret that large aristocratic estates no longer exist in that country, but that Frenchmen must make the best they can of a bad bargain; that farming in France is not, as it is in England, a profession by which men seek to make money, but merely a condition of life in which they are content to exist; that this is due in great

part to the want of markets, which causes the small proprietor to live on the produce of his soil, without much thought beyond it; that in spite of all these causes *la petite culture* is not upon the increase in France; that for many years past the increase in the number of large properties has been greater than in that of small; and he ventures to predict that the small French proprietors will go the way of English yeomen, and gradually subside into tenants. Both very large farms and very small farms, he thinks, are on the decrease in both France and England; while farms of three or four hundred acres are likely to become the general rule. Exceptions will prevail in certain districts—in large sheep-feeding districts, for instance—such as the Wiltshire Down country; but on the whole it is beginning to be understood that one man cannot possibly do justice to more than a given number of acres of arable land.

In the last number* of the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society* may be seen the testimony of another “intelligent foreigner,” Dr. Voeleker, to the merits of petty culture in Flanders, which may be summed up as follows:—In Flanders farms of twenty acres yield more than farms of ten, and farms of fifty more than farms of twenty; the first prize for cultivation was awarded, at the last meeting of the Flemish Agricultural Society, to a farm of a hundred and five acres; high rents and low wages are the characteristics of *la petite culture*, and high wages and low rents of *la grande*; the large farm system is more conducive to national prosperity, because it sets labour free for

* No. XI. Vol. VI. Part 1, 1870.

other industries; when a railway is opened in the Walloon country, the agricultural labourers, who can travel a hundred miles for half-a-crown, flocking to the manufacturing districts, and in three months causing the rate of wages to have risen twenty per cent.; where the only employment for the people is agriculture large farms are impossible; but such a state of things is "a political and commercial disease." The opinion of this gentleman clearly is, that to throw more of the population into agriculture than is necessary to get the highest amount of produce out of it is a waste of power, and that this, where it cannot be helped, points to some radical defect in the national system. Thus in Ireland, where there are few manufactures, such waste may be inevitable. To introduce it where we have manufactures would be sheer infatuation. Such seems to be the opinion of M. De Lavergne, M. Laveleye, and Dr. Voelcker, who are certainly competent, and probably unprejudiced, witnesses. And it is a curious reflection that while Englishmen are engaged in extolling the French system, French writers should be engaged at the same time in extolling the English.

Neither Mr. Leslie's last work upon the subject, nor Mr. Mill's recent review of it,* seems to prove much more than is proved by the Cobden Essays as to the intrinsic merits of the two systems. But they prove this—how grievously the enemies of *la petite culture* have erred by allowing themselves to overstate their case. By contending that the system is a failure where it can be shown to answer, they strengthen the belief that it would answer where it is almost certain

* *Fortnightly Review*, June 1870.

to be a failure. Their use of the terms of political economy has been likewise injudicious, Mr. Mill and Mr. Leslie very naturally refusing to be bound by them. Political economy may be understood in two senses. There is the sense in which the ancients would probably have used it, meaning the whole science of national well-being, of which what we call political economy is only a part; and there is that part, the modern sense, namely, in which it relates only to a particular department of well-being. The first of these two should, of course, always be supreme. But the second must take its place alongside of other considerations to which it will occasionally have to yield. What can be more important than health? The laws of health are certain and indisputable. Yet society can only push them to a certain point. The only result of pushing them to their logical extremes would be a relapse into chaos. So with the political economist—he properly objects to being required to bind himself by certain formulæ; to apply doctrines to one set of circumstances which are applicable only to another; or to set up the laws of his own science as paramount to all other considerations. If they are occasionally incompatible with the highest moral results he would give the preference to these.* Even if small farms and small properties do produce a little less materially, still if they produced a great deal more morally than large ones, he would be bound to prefer the former. It is of the highest importance to bear this argument in mind, because it cuts both ways, and may be used in favour

* He must be something more than a political economist, if he does. See page 157.—T. E. K., 1887.

of our own system as well as in favour of the continental.

We have hitherto quoted the opinions of the Commissioners solely as to small proprietors. What they say of these applies *à fortiori* to small farmers. And we find throughout the Reports a singular unanimity on this head. They regret the disappearance of small farms, which held out a prospect of independence to the labouring class. But they look forward hopefully to a substitute for them more accordant with the spirit of the age, in the higher wages and increased comforts which the demand for skilled labour created by the spread of machinery* is certain to produce. The Commissioners, however, have not placed the subject of land tenure in the front of their Report, and it is only one of them—Mr. H. Tremenheere—who has gone at any length into the question. His experience is derived in great part from the Netherby estate, to which the late Sir J. Graham succeeded in 1819. And from the present steward he received the following account:—

“ When the late Sir James Graham succeeded to the estate, in the year 1819, it was in a most ruinous condition. The good land, which had been exhausted by repeated corn crops, was chiefly divided into small farms of from forty to one hundred acres in extent. The estate was overburdened with an excessive population; a great portion of it remained unenclosed; the farm buildings, with few exceptions, were very

* Cf. introduction to 2nd Edition. See also Enclosure Committee Report (1869), pp. 1328–1338, which entirely confirms this view. See also Duke of Richmond's Report, 1880.

bad, being chiefly formed of clay or mud walls, and thatched ; whilst three-fourths of the estate was completely saturated with water, and a great excess of moss and cold pasture land on that account alone remained uncultivated. The public roads were also in a most wretched state, and quite insufficient for the purposes of occupation.

“ The first step towards the improvement of the estate was the amalgamation of many of the small possessions into suitably-sized farms of from one hundred to five hundred acres in extent ; the erection of good and substantial farm-buildings ; the division of the land into proper enclosures by quick fences ; making proper occupation roads where necessary ; granting nineteen years’ leases to the tenantry, with improving clauses inserted therein, binding them to follow out the most approved system of modern husbandry ; and lastly, establishing two tile-kilns upon the estate, to furnish tiles for the use of the tenantry.

“ By these means, under able and skilful direction, and with the cordial co-operation and support of a most industrious and persevering body of tenantry, the estate has been brought into its present high state of cultivation, whilst hardly an acre capable of improvement remains unbroken up.”

In 1835 there were on this estate 315 tenants. The number is now reduced to 115, with an increase of thirty per cent. to the rental. It was the opinion of the steward that eighty acres was the smallest amount of land which any man could cultivate to advantage, and that “ only on inferior soils, where

labour and industry constitute the greatest part of the capital employed." He further considers that a man occupying from twenty to fifty acres of poor land is much worse off than an agricultural labourer on a good farm. But how if the land is *not* poor? We suppose the steward means that good land would not be entrusted to him in such small parcels. Mr. Tremenheere goes on to observe: "*It is obvious by what very small error in judgment a small capital may be impaired, rendered unproductive, or totally lost; and certainly nothing can be more wretched than the average farming of a man who, from a labourer, with the aid of his own and a little borrowed capital, has become a farmer on his own account. He buys a plough, a team of horses, and a few implements; he reaps his first crop of stunted oats; and when its straw has been converted, by a few calves and half-starved yearlings, into what can scarcely be called manure, he carts it out into his fields, after it has been drenched by winter rains, and is disheartened at the miserable results. To enable him to pay his rent he is generally obliged to part with his grain, whatever may be its price, and his stock before it has attained its maximum value; and before the first two years of his tenancy have expired he has too often cause to regret the day on which he was tempted to exchange the safe position of a comfortable farm-servant for the anxieties and hardships of a tenant-farmer.*" He also quotes the opinion of the Rev. Mr. Patterson, a gentleman thoroughly acquainted with the social state of Cumberland, to the effect that "the condition of a day labourer is far better than that of a small farmer with

little capital. The day of small farms is over. They will die a lingering death. But their day is over."

Mr. Culley is another of the Commissioners who has enlarged a little upon this point, and his experience in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire led him to just the same conclusion. The consolidation of small farms into large ones was complained of in his district as throwing labourers out of work; but on examination he found this was not the case, and that one farm of six hundred acres employed as many men as three farms of two hundred. And so, in turn, I am assured by a practical farmer in the Midland Counties that one farm of two hundred acres will employ many more men than the same amount of land broken up into farms of forty or fifty acres.* If the readers of this little book, should there be any, will not believe these statements, there is no more to be said. The evidence of practical professional men is always open to the suspicion of partiality. But the ignorance of the outsider is just as bad; and if we want to be quite sure of not being misled, we must simply shut our ears and eyes, and abandon every species of investigation. As to the other objections against large farms, Mr. Culley says:—"For one man who is induced to

* Cf. evidence taken before Select Committee on Enclosure Act, 1832. "If you have, we will say, any given area covered with small occupiers, of course agricultural improvements will doubtless tend to displace a number of those small occupiers. If that given area is all cultivated as one holding, supposing it to be badly cultivated, there will be a smaller proportion of labourers than before; but if it is highly cultivated you will have a larger proportion on that land, and therefore the higher the cultivation the greater the relative number of persons employed."

be provident by the hope of reaching the grade of a farmer through the agency of a small farm, *ten, I feel sure, will be benefited by the increase in wages which the use of machinery offers to intelligent men,** and the whole class encouraged to make more use of their brains."

The present writer has made inquiries on his own account in various other counties, and has received letters from Cheshire,† Suffolk, Leicestershire, Hampshire, and Wiltshire, and all more or less confirming the above views, but still allowing that the exceptionally industrious man (Mr. Culley's one in ten), with the adequate capital, on a little farm of just the right size, may prosper and make money. There seems little difference of opinion as to the amount of capital that is required. Small farms require more capital per acre than large ones, and in three out of the four counties mentioned £10 an acre is held to be the proper sum; in Cheshire £7 was named. But in all four cases the writers were agreed on this point—that the men who took small farms seldom or never *had* the requisite amount; and, as one of them says, "he *may* succeed, but it will be out of his own bones, and for some years he will work harder and fare worse than any day labourer." As to the proper size of such farms, this will differ according to the nature of the soil, the situation of the land, and the proportion of arable to pasture; and we must remember, too, that

* This, however, is perhaps an open question.

† My Cheshire informant was the late Mr. George Latham, who will not be suspected of any Conservative prejudices in favour of our existing land system.

in speaking of "small farms" we are speaking of a distinct kind of farm, not merely of one that is below the average extent in any given neighbourhood, or which is small in comparison with the holdings in other parts of England. Three hundred acres is a very small farm on some estates, while one hundred is scarcely thought so on another. The "small farm," however, which we are now thinking of, is something quite different from these. These all imply the existence of the "regular" farmer, with whom we are familiar. At present we are considering the prospects of a class who belong essentially to the peasantry, and inquiring what sized farms they can occupy to most advantage. Now, whatever the exact acreage, everybody seems agreed that it should not exceed what a man can cultivate properly by himself, and that is generally from seven to twelve acres. When it is larger than this, the result is that "the occupiers try to do all the work themselves; consequently part of it is not done at the time when it would be most effective, and some of it does not get done at all." Farms of from twenty to thirty acres seem generally condemned. It is just the size "where the necessary horse eats up all the profits." In dairy countries farms of forty and fifty acres answer very well, for the holder of such a farm can keep his ten or twelve cows, but in the corn-growing districts they are among the worst of all. The farm of ten acres is the reward of the best kind of labourer. The farm of thirty acres is the refuge of the worse kind of farmer.

We quite agree with Mr. Culley that the consolida-

tion of farms can be carried too far. We should think that farms varying from two to six hundred acres would be quite large enough under any circumstances. And why should not the larger landowners—the smaller ones we could hardly expect to do so—set aside bits of their estates for small holdings such as we have described, from five to fifteen acres, to be the reward exclusively of intelligent and frugal labourers* who have saved the required amount of capital—and the whole argument for such farms presupposes that they *can* save it—in which case we should get rid of half the evil and retain all the good of *la petite culture*?

On the whole, then, the weight of evidence seems decidedly against the policy of resuscitating the system of small farming, though it is not unfavourable to a larger admixture of small farmers. But a wider question still remains to be answered: Is the revival of them as a class *possible*? The presumption of differing from such men as Mr. Mill and Mr. Leslie cannot well be overrated. But is there no reason for supposing that the gradual disappearance of small farmers, small proprietors, and small gentry is due to the operation of a natural law which no legislation could reverse? No man of taste or imagination can think of England as she was, without a sigh for those social changes which have robbed rural life of much of its picturesqueness, and, it may be, of some of its happiness. But can these changes be undone? We regret these extinct classes, as we regret the beautiful woods and wild heaths which have disappeared with them. But would they now, if artificially restored, bear any resemblance to

* *Vide* evidence of Mr. Bolam, agent to the Marquis of Ailesbury (1870).

the original? Would they not rather be exotics, and no longer racy of the soil? England once produced wine; but nobody dreams now of reconverting Kent into a vineyard.

The practical genius of the English people would seem to have discovered for itself the best way of utilising the resources of the country, and the method which most readily encourages the dedication of capital to the soil. Our system, no doubt, has its own abuses. Both estates and farms are occasionally too large. But that is no reason for rushing into the opposite extreme, unless better testimonies to its superiority than have yet been forthcoming are produced; except, indeed, on the supposition that a political object is to be gained by it, and that the object of our land reformers is not so much the creation of a peasant proprietary as the extinction of a territorial aristocracy. But that is an hypothesis which we have no right to entertain,* nor any inclination to discuss. Directly connected with it, however, is what we may call our rural system, in which the gap created by the substitution of *la petite culture* for *la grande* would be most severely felt, if we may not go so far as to say that under present circumstances it would be intolerable.

In a previous chapter we have glanced at this difficulty, and it is one that requires to be approached with a serious frankness not always to be relied upon in disputations of this nature. The average tenant-farmer has his faults. So has the average City alderman, and so has the average manufacturer. But he is neither above nor below the average level of the middle class, by whom

* Many things have happened since 1870. We understand a good deal now which we did not understand then.—T. E. K., 1887.

so much of the administration of this country is conducted, and who constitute an element of stability the want of which has been severely felt elsewhere, though here, where we have always had it, we seem scarcely conscious of its value. At all events, this much may be said without fear of contradiction—that if we have no tenant-farmers to fill parochial offices the want of them must be supplied by Government officials, since peasant proprietors would certainly be unequal to such duties, and that thus our whole system of local self-government would be destroyed at a blow. In the second place, the position of the clergyman in parishes where there was no rank of population between the peasantry and the gentry would be extremely difficult. The farmers and their families can help him in a thousand ways, and they form a link between himself and the cottagers of inestimable practical utility. Thirdly, consider the effect of withdrawing from every village in England the presence of its six or eight men of capital and intelligence, who now rent the land. We ought to be very sure of our ground before we advocate changes which involve such contingencies as this. Of course, if it could be shown that *la petite culture* was so immeasurably superior to the other in its material results as to make it worth while, for the sake of them, to abandon the ancient rural system of England, we could say no more. But so far from that, it seems to be a moot point whether it is not even inferior. If we turn our eyes to the political and social results of the two systems we certainly see nothing in the condition of the Continent to reassure us: nothing to compensate for the absence of those social elements which foreigners so admire in ourselves. The peasant

proprietors of France set us no such example of political knowledge and independence as should make us crave to import them into England. Our tenant-farmers are becoming every day more independent, and our landlords more alive to the duty of leaving every man to think for himself. It seems, therefore, that whether we compare the material, the social, or the political results of the two systems, the balance is in favour of our own. We feel justified, at all events, in saying to the advocates of small farming, that their case, up to the present time, is "not proven," and that they have failed to show us an equivalent for what we should be called on to surrender. [The conditions of the question, however, have been very much altered by the Reform Bill of 1885.—T. E. K.]

A vast manufacturing and commercial industry continually draining off the population of the country into the large towns, and at the same time favouring the rapid accumulation of great fortunes which are returned into the country, seems to provide so naturally for the maintenance of the present system that we have no anticipation of any speedy interference with it. And when we find that the system of *la petite culture* is said to be on the decline even in France, and that large proprietors are slowly but surely absorbing* the small, ought we not to feel a strong suspicion that those are in error who think the system suitable to the age, and that the exceptional conditions which plead for it in particular quarters are what Dr. Voelcker calls them, "a political and commercial disease?"

* But see next chapter, on M. de Foville, p. 150.

CHAPTER IX.

SMALL FARMS—*continued.*

1887.

ALTHOUGH so much that is new has been written on this subject since 1870, and such searching comparisons instituted between English and Continental agriculture, I have found little to modify the conclusions arrived at in the previous chapter. The Report of Dr. Voelcker therein referred to was immediately followed by an Essay on the Land System of Belgium and Holland, written by M. Laveleye, and published among the Cobden Club Essays. An elaborate Report on the Agriculture of Belgium was presented to the International Agricultural Congress at Paris, in 1878, by the same writer, to which the Report of Mr. Jenkins, Assistant Commissioner to the Duke of Richmond, on the Agriculture of the Netherlands and Belgium, was in some sort intended to be an answer. Some of Mr. Jenkins' statements have been challenged by Professor Beaujon (see Major Craigie's Paper already quoted,* p. 38); but they do not very much affect the question discussed in this volume; and,

* *Supra*, 106.

lastly, there are the Reports of the other Assistant Commissioners in 1880, to which I have so frequently referred, and who on this question of small holdings do but reproduce the evidence and echo the opinions to be found in the former Reports of 1867-9, on which my original estimate was based. Besides these, there are many other writers who have travelled over the same ground since I last explored it: Mr. Richardson, Lady Verney, Mr. Broderick, M. de Foville,* and the various compilers of foreign agricultural statistics. The essence of them all is to be found in Major Craigie's Paper; and I do not find that they have advanced the question very much beyond the point at which I left it.

To begin with M. Laveleye's Essay, this gentleman starts with a preliminary error of some magnitude when he says that, in comparing *la petite culture* and *la grande*, Englishmen are accustomed to compare the farming of their own country with that of Ireland. The opinions which prevail on this subject in England have, I venture to say, been founded on no such comparison. They are founded on a comparison of the two systems as they exist side by side in England itself. It is from the difference between English small farms and English large farms that the great majority of persons who have any opinions at all upon the subject have derived them; and, to judge from what he says about England, it is fairly to be inferred, as I have inferred in the previous chapter, that M. Laveleye himself does not consider that his own arguments in favour of the *petite culture* are applicable to our own country. And combining his statements with those

* President of the Statistical Society of Paris.

of other competent authorities, I might almost be justified in saying no more of Continental agriculture in a book dealing exclusively with English, on the ground that it is totally impossible to argue from the one to the other.

However, let us see what M. Laveleye has to say in his Essay. At page 457 we read, "In fact, however, both England and Ireland are exceptions, one on the right, the other on the wrong side. In England there exists a class of well-to-do and intelligent tenant farmers *such as are not to be found anywhere else.*" England, then, differs in her agricultural conditions from all other countries with which M. Laveleye is acquainted, and differs for the better. At page 475 he writes, "No parallel can be drawn between the Belgian and the English landowner. The latter, I believe, acts on considerations unknown to the Continent, and no inference can, therefore, be drawn from so exceptional a case." Here, again, we find our rural system to be an exception to that of all other countries; and a favourable exception, because English landlords possess much larger estates, and are able to be indulgent to their tenantry. Introduce the Dutch or Belgian system here, and tenant farmers would soon find the difference. "It is important," he adds, "to bear in mind, in comparing the condition of the agricultural population in Flanders and England, that the small Flemish farmer, who cultivates the land with his own hands, corresponds, not to the English tenant farmer, but to the English farm labourer, than whom he is very much worse off."—Cf. i., pp. 473 and 476. No parallel, therefore, can be drawn between the Belgian small

farmer and the English small farmer. It is evident, from many other passages, that no parallel can be drawn between the agricultural labourer of this part of Europe and of England; and, consequently, if we cannot compare either the landlords, the tenants, or the labourers, it seems pretty clear that we cannot compare the two systems at all.

The Essay from which the above passages are quoted was meant to correct some of the conclusions unfavourable to *la petite culture* which had been drawn from the "Economie Rurale de la Belgique." Yet the Author repeats in it, without alteration, the passage from that work which I have given at page 131, and which appeared in my first edition: "It is the glory of England to have remained free from the consequences usually attending the large property system. Great Britain possesses a class of landowners and tenants alive to the requirements of agriculture. . . . But, on the Continent, the case is very different," &c., &c. Not the good luck of England, or the position of England, or the accident of England, but the "glory" of England. If it is the *glory* of England to have escaped the consequences of the large property system, it can only be because that system has numerous and substantial advantages which England has been able to secure without those drawbacks by which they are elsewhere counteracted, and this is evidently M. Laveleye's meaning. He suggests that a larger admixture of small farmers with large ones might be beneficial even in England, and perhaps it might; but on that point he says that he does not feel competent to speak, and even if he did, that is a totally distinct question.

Mr. Laveleye contradicts the assertion of Dr. Voelcker, quoted at p. 203 of the first edition, that in Flanders large farms produce more than small ones, and quotes Lavergne to show that the richest and most productive parts of France are those in which small farmers are the most numerous. What, however, M. de Lavergne does say* is this: that small farmers are most numerous where the soil is the most fertile,—a widely different position,—and this because it is only on such soils that they can thrive. M. de Foville shows, however, that the statement of M. Lavergne (*ib.* p. 202), to the effect that the *petite culture* was not on the increase in France, and that small properties were being gradually swallowed up by large ones, is not true of France generally.† But if we may judge from the evidence collected by Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Sutherland, both in France, Holland, and Belgium, there is far from that consensus in favour of *la petite culture* among the agriculturists of those countries which Englishmen often suppose there is. In the Netherlands Mr. Jenkins (see Report of 1880) received 22 answers in reply to his inquiry into the condition of farms and farmers. Of these 11 did not offer any direct comparisons between the two systems, and of the remaining 11 six were in favour of large farms and five in favour of small. In Belgium he received 28 answers, out of which 12 were in favour of large farms and six only in favour of small. Of the remaining 10 answers some insisted on the superiority of medium-sized farms, and might really be quoted as against *la*

* "Economie Rurale de la France," 4th edit., 1877, page 379.

† "Le Morcellement," cap. vi.-x., especially pages 65 and 112.

petite culture. Some say that small farms answer well as market gardens; some that proprietors make the best farmers, but that in the case of very small holdings there is no difference between proprietor and tenant. All agree that the small men are deeply in debt; and thus if the larger farmers are still more embarrassed they have resources to fall back upon, and can bear it better. "On the first reverse," says M. Lippens, East Flanders, who is a friend to *petite culture*, "the small farmer falls back into the day labourer." But the most noteworthy evidence is given by Professor Piret, of the State Agricultural College, Gembloux:—"The small farmers are not ordinarily mere cultivators, that is to say, they are also engaged in commerce or industry. * Most often they are proprietors of part of the land which they occupy. Very generally, their method of farming leaves much to be desired; they use very little artificial manure or auxiliary feeding stuffs, and the manure that they make on their farms is quite insufficient to bring it to a high state of fertility. They pay higher rents than the large farmers; their profits are at a minimum, but not counting as anything their labour and their trouble, they live parsimoniously and save a little money. The cultivation of the small proprietor-farmer is not much more perfect or more active than that of the small tenant. Both devote an insufficient capital to their farming; they are generally guided in their daily operations by the local routine; the small extent of their farms does not permit them to have recourse to improved implements and machines; their cattle are faulty, and not always properly cared

* Appendix IV., pp. 257, 264.

for ; in short, their farms are not productive. The small proprietor-farmer, however, not having any rent to pay, and doing most of the work without employing* hired labour, should be in easy circumstances. But a passion rules him. He wants to increase the extent of his farm, and to arrive at this end he lives with parsimony, and he often buys land without having available the sum necessary to pay for it, so that he is nearly always in debt and in embarrassed circumstances."

"It will have been remembered also," says Mr. Jenkins in his Summary (p. 760), "by those who have read the portions of this report which relate to small farming, that only those small proprietor-farmers are successful who possess a combination of qualities† which require the exercise of a great amount of self-control. The absence of greed for more land may be placed in the front rank, but great industry and ceaseless economy are also necessities, while it is generally found that even with the exercise of these virtues the small proprietor-farmer makes a very poor living unless he remains single, or, if married, has only a small family. It may well be questioned if any of the agricultural labourers of Great Britain and Ireland would, under any circumstances, exert such self-denial as would enable them to imitate their Belgian fellow, even to the extent of purchasing their cottage and garden. In fact, the history of the colony of Lommel (pp. 753 to 757) shows that even in Belgium peasant proprietors cannot be made by the most generous and considerate Act of Parliament."

The colony of Lommel was an attempt on the part of the Belgian Government to establish peasant pro-

* Cf. p. 113.

† Cf. Cap. VII., 112, 113.

prietorship by State aid, and the following is the history of it given by M. Keelhoff, who is now the owner of the estate:—

“The agricultural colony of Lommel has not belonged to the State since 1861, and the official documents relating to this establishment have not been preserved; and it is only by great efforts that I have been able to procure you the conditions of letting and sale that are appended hereto.

“You will see that the conditions were very advantageous to the farmers, but, notwithstanding that, the undertaking failed most completely.

“The principal cause of this want of success was the fact of the State being the proprietor, and, secondly, an epizootic (cattle disease), which at the outset destroyed a large number of beasts. All the cattle lost by the farmer were replaced by the Government, therefore the epizootic caused no loss to them, especially as they also received manure to replace that which their own cattle would have made if they had not been carried off by disease. But, in my opinion, the great cause of the failure of the colony was that the Government was too generous in its subsidies to the farmers. These people regarded themselves as state-pensioners, so they became idle and sold their manure and even the cattle that the State had made them a present of in order to sustain and encourage them under the circumstances.

“In fact, the farmers never paid a penny of their rent, and in ten years, from 1851 to 1861, they received under the forms of manure, forage, and cattle subsidies from the State amounting to £2,120.

“ The establishment of this colony cost the State 247,000 francs (£9,880). In 1861 it was sold by public auction, and I purchased the property for 51,500 francs (£2,060). As soon as I became proprietor everything changed as if by enchantment. I retained the same farmers, but knowing that they had no more subsidies to expect, they all worked, paid their rents regularly and became good farmers, earning their livelihood and bringing up their children, many of whom eventually replaced their parents as tenants of the farms. And it is to be remarked that I keep in my own hands the irrigated meadows which were formerly attached to the farms, and that farmers are now obliged to buy the forage which previously as farmers under the State they obtained for nothing.

“ All this proves the absolute incompetence of the State to occupy itself with such agricultural questions as private interest can alone conduct to a successful end.”

It remains only to revert very briefly to the question of comparative productiveness, and here England, with her large farm and large property system easily bears away the palm. In England we produce 83 lbs. of meat per head of the population, or at the rate of 62 lbs. per acre, against only 40 lbs. in Belgium. Our flocks of sheep represent just ten times those of Belgium* on the same area, and ten times those of France on the same area, and nearly four times those of Germany on the same area. We outnumber them largely in oxen; and though Holland, Belgium, and Germany have more cows, our own more than make up

* Sheep have decreased in Belgium concurrently with the increase of petty holdings.

in quality for what they want in quantity. In grain and potatoes our superiority is equally marked. In fact, as a stock-rearing and grain-growing community England holds the first place.*

But when due consideration has been given to the evidence supplied by foreign countries, the case for and against *la petite culture* in England must depend on the evidence which is to be found within the four corners of England herself; and on this subject I find, as I have said, no difference of opinion between the Reports of the Agricultural Commissions of 1879-80 and those of its predecessors in 1867-9. To the same effect are the interesting letters† which appeared in the *Times* during the autumn of 1885. All alike agree that wherever peasant farmers or peasant proprietors are found in England now their farming is bad, their mode of life miserable, and their debts crushing. There are bright exceptions to the rule, no doubt, and sufficiently numerous to show that the exceptionally skilful, industrious, and frugal labourer may succeed upon a small holding.‡ But the compulsory establishment of such cultivation on a large scale with the help of public money is a scheme to which I hope "the party of common sense," as Mr. Goschen says, will never stand committed. In the second generation they would all be paupers, and their land a prey to thorns and thistles.

Three very searching and comprehensive inquiries into

* Size and distribution of Agricultural Holdings. Major Craigie, pp. 42, 43.

† Cf. Appendix IV., p. 257.

‡ Major Craigie, p. 22.

the condition of the agricultural classes have taken place within the last half century—one in 1834, another in 1867, and a third in 1880 ; and the Report is the same in each case. The following passage from the Report of 1834 may stand for all the rest :—“ If the labourer ceases to rely on his wages ; if he becomes, in fact, a petty farmer before he has accumulated a capital sufficient to meet not merely the current expenses, but the casualties of that hazardous trade ; if he has to encounter the accidents of the seasons instead of feeling them at second-hand after their force has been broken on the higher classes, his ultimate ruin seems to be almost certain.”—Report 1834, p. 192. The Duke of Richmond’s Commissioners have gone over the same ground as the Commission of 1867. They, too, have examined the small freeholders in the North of England and in the Isle of Axholme, their two strongholds in this country, and the tale which they tell* in 1880 tallies word for word with the tale that was told in 1870, except where it differs from it in drawing a still darker picture of the peasant proprietor’s condition than was painted then. He is steadily declining in prosperity ; nor can I hear of any exceptions to the rule other than those which depend on the personal character of the tenant. Exceptional qualities produce exceptional results. Lord Wantage’s experiment at Lambourne is too recent to afford any trustworthy testimony to the permanent value of the system ; and several of his small holders have

* Coleman, 176, 179, 190, 192, 207, 229, 255 ; Doyle, 261, 267 ; Druce, 383, 389, 390 ; Little, 447. In the South and West of England peasant proprietors have almost ceased to exist.

some other occupation besides farming which takes them out of the category of relevant witnesses.*

It has been stated in a previous chapter that small holdings, if materially disadvantageous, may nevertheless be morally beneficial; that is to say, that however unfavourable to production, they may exert a healthy influence upon character. They can only do so, however, when the tenant, though incapable of extracting from the soil the utmost which it is capable of yielding, is able to live with a certain degree of comfort, decency and respectability. Even from this point of view, the system savours strongly of protection.† M. de Laveleye puts the case in this way. Suppose the produce of a given area to be represented by 1,000, and this to be unequally distributed among sixteen persons, so that one gets 200, another 100, and the remaining fourteen at the rate of 50 each: or suppose the produce to be only 960, divided equally in shares of 60, among the whole 16, which state of things should we prefer; and he decides in favour of the latter; that is to say, he would diminish the food supply of the entire community for the benefit of a particular class.

It is very questionable whether the people of this country, if they really understood the question, would consent to any legislation, of which the ultimate effect would be to reduce production and increase prices. But if any Government chooses to run the risk, and repeat on a large scale the experiment which failed so disas-

* Appendix IV., p. 264. See also evidence of Professor Piret just quoted, p. 151.

† Cf. p. 131.

trously in a neighbouring kingdom, will the moral effect upon the peasantry be a *quid pro quo*? To this question only one answer can be given, except on the hypothesis that the system of petty culture is capable of being revived in England on a durable and practical basis, not as a plaything for philanthropists, nor yet only as a provision for exceptional cases of superior intelligence and industry, but as a system capable of offering a livelihood to the average labourer, and calculated to become an integral and permanent organ of our rural economy. That a sufficient number of small farms should exist in every county, and on every estate, for the benefit of such labourers as are really qualified to succeed on them, and who care to have them, is universally admitted. I will allow that these, if necessary, may be promoted by Act of Parliament;* though here, too, it must be remembered that the number of small farms already in existence is much greater than is commonly supposed. Controversy begins only when we come to consider the scale on which the system should be extended, and its adaptability to the labouring class in general. I entirely sympathize with the labourer's feelings on the subject. What Arthur Young said nearly a hundred years ago is, no doubt, equally true now, viz., that the sense of independence acquired by the peasant, either as a small farmer, or still more as a small proprietor, would reconcile him to a multitude of hardships; and that, though he had to live much harder than he does as a labourer,

* In saying this I have not forgotten Mr. Goschen's arguments against the compulsory extension of allotments by Act of Parliament in his speech on Mr. J. Collings's Bill, Jan. 26, 1836. See Appendix IV., 261.

he would still think himself better off, and be better satisfied than he is with the social conditions which surround him. Now that he is invested with political power this consideration acquires tenfold weight. It is this conviction which made me say just now that I should like to see any number of small farmers in this country. But if this happy state of things "would not wash"; if it could last only for a few years; and if the ultimate effect of it was to create only an impoverished and miserable class of squatters, overloaded with debt, and wholly unable to cultivate their land properly, I say the final consequence would be too high a price to pay for the immediate benefit; and that the moral effect on the peasantry, limited to a single generation, would be no equivalent for the risk encountered by the Government. If we are only to damage agriculture without permanently benefiting the labourer, we had better leave matters as they are. It would neither be for the public good, nor for the good of the peasantry themselves, to introduce a change which should lead to such results as these.

Now the weight of evidence against the policy of reviving *la petite culture* in the corn-growing districts of England seems simply overwhelming. And it is still weightier than it was twenty years ago, by reason of the agricultural exodus which has set in since, and drains the peasantry every year of the very class of men best calculated to succeed in it. If it would have been a mistake then, when the best men still remained upon the land, it must be a much greater mistake now when they are fast leaving it. It is thought, perhaps, that they might be tempted to stay if land were brought more within their reach. But I have already given my

reasons for rejecting this argument; and I believe that the amelioration of the labourer's lot which is anticipated from the extension of petty culture must be left to the operation of natural laws, which are even now coming into operation.

The number of small farms seems to me to have declined with the extension of arable land. May it not be that their revival will be a natural consequence of the restoration of this land to grass? I think this is worth waiting for; and that any legislation would be premature till the probable extent of the change which is already in progress can be first calculated. Against small grass farms there is nothing to be said; everything is in their favour; and where they exist as they do in our grazing and dairy districts, the tenants, as a rule, are prosperous. I may be mistaken, but it appears to me that a solution of our present difficulties connected with the labourer and the land is approaching us from that direction. To manage six or seven acres of grass land does not require that degree of agricultural skill which is necessary for the same amount of arable; nor are bad seasons so fatal to the small grazier as they are to the small farmer. In fact, no argument is wanted at this time of day to show that a man can thrive on a small grass farm, who would starve on a small corn farm.

That much of the arable land of England is being converted into pasture is a fact known to every one interested in agriculture. Stock may not pay so well as it did, but on suitable soils it pays better than corn; while the very dearness of labour,* to which I have so often referred, is accelerating a process which

* Little, p. 407.

the state of the market first suggested. Should it continue for any length of time, as appears highly probable, the question of "re-connecting the labourer with the land," of which we hear so much from a certain school of politicians, will answer itself without the aid of Parliament. None of the objections which seem fatal to small arable farms apply with equal force, if they apply at all, to small dairy or grazing farms. I take the evidence of experts as I find it. I have referred, I hope, to its sources with sufficient clearness, and among practical men I cannot discover two opinions. Finally, it must, of course, be borne in mind that if the great body of English tenant farmers are on the verge of ruin, and that if our whole agricultural system is tottering to its fall, the conditions will shortly disappear, which, in the estimation of foreigners, distinguish us so favourably from themselves, and the entire question will be open to reconsideration.

I have spoken in a previous chapter* of the alleged "right" of the peasantry to the land. But according to the doctrine that the land is the property of the State, no class can have an absolute right to it, and the State is justified in regulating the ownership or occupation of the soil on such principles as are most conducive to the interests of the entire community. This consideration would scarcely lead us in the direction of peasant farming. On the other hand, if we reject the doctrine of State right, we can only fall back upon prescriptive right; and neither the one nor the other can justify the claim which certain political philosophers have set up on behalf of the agricultural labourer.

* *Supra*, p. 118.

CHAPTER X.

HIRING.

SHOULD Parliament at any future time seek to improve the condition of the agricultural labourer by direct legislative interference, it will encounter the fact that of the majority of agricultural customs the advantages and disadvantages are so evenly balanced, that no popular assembly could ever determine which preponderated. That is eminently the case with the subject of this chapter. Whether we consider the length of time for which, the mode by which, or the principle on which farm labourers, both male and female, are engaged, we shall find hardly any one practice with such a marked superiority over all the others as to justify its uniform establishment.

The practice of yearly hiring for a certain class of servants still prevails generally in England, and in some districts all kinds of servants are hired for a term. Servants who have skilled labour to dispose of, and are required for special departments of industry, such as carters, ploughmen, and shepherds, are almost everywhere, though not invariably, hired by the year. In the North of England all alike, as a rule, are hired for a term of six months. Women are hired either by the day, if out-of-door servants, or by the year or

half-year if in-door. With these exceptions the English agricultural labourer is hired from week to week.

There seems to be a general agreement that the whole system of hiring is at present on a bad footing. The practice of yearly hiring is looked upon by the farmers as their only security against something worse; that is to say, being left in the lurch by their men at critical seasons of the year. Mr. Fraser thinks this security illusory. "The only security that can guarantee good treatment to a servant, or good service to a master, is the security of mutual confidence and mutual regard. I cannot see what good it can possibly be to a farmer to be tied to, and unable to rid himself of, a worthless servant for a year. If the man is good for anything, the master can always make it worth his while to stay. The mere settlement of him in his cottage is a sort of 'lien upon his continuance.'" These are plausible generalizations, no doubt. And if men were either perfect, or else mere machines, they would be unanswerable. But suppose a man hears at harvest time that a higher rate of wages is being paid in a particular locality, neither "confidence" nor "regard" will restrain an average specimen of agricultural humanity from trying to "better himself." And, secondly, the relations between master and servant are not governed exclusively by pecuniary considerations. A man may quarrel with his master about his work, when one perhaps is as much in the wrong as the other; or conceive a spite against him for any one of the hundred and odd reasons by which ignorant people will be

actuated. Those who know the poor best, know best the extraordinary motives which occasionally prompt them to act in defiance of their own interests, and the impossibility of making them hear reason when once a prejudice has seized upon them. We can fully believe, therefore, that the farmers do find the yearly hiring some kind of security, though it may be less substantial than it seems. On the other hand, as it provides security of labour to the master, it brings certainty of employment to the men—a certainty of employment during the whole year, with maintenance during sickness; and, where the men board with the farmer, better food than they could get in their own cottages. The moral effect of the latter system, as it was practised in former days, is commended by Mr. Norman, though others speak less favourably of it. “In consequence of this change the farmhouses which are now being built are not generally provided with the accommodation necessary for boarding labourers, and however much the science of agriculture may have advanced while this change has been going on, the friends of labourers must, I think, regret the abandonment of a system which supplied farm lads with good food, and subjected them, in many cases, to wholesome control at a time when they particularly required it, and relieved the overcrowded cottages in the villages of some portion of their inhabitants.” Mr. Fraser writes to the same effect. But the evidence in favour of this “wholesome control” having been exercised either now or at any former time is rather slight, while the evils which arise from the mixture of male and female servants in the same house are beyond dispute. However, this is

beside the mark. The two great drawbacks upon yearly hiring are, first, the corresponding yearly change which seems to be inseparable from it; and, secondly, the vagrant population which it has a tendency to generate. The periodical recurrence of the hiring season suggests to the peasant mind the necessity of being hired. Besides, there is the irresistible attraction of the "statty;"* and yet why is he to go there unless he goes to get another master? Under the influence of these combined stimulants, men change their masters every year who have no earthly complaint to make against them, and who might otherwise have lived and died in the same service. "No sooner do the master and the servant get into the knowledge of each other's ways, and the latter to understand the master's methods and his land, than Michaelmas comes round and unsettles all again, and the same thing generally occurs year after year."† The second objection to the practice is even more serious. The day labourer is generally a native of the parish, and a constant resident therein. He and his family feel the full effect of all those local influences which contribute so much to the character of English rural life. They are in continual contact with the clergyman. They have an hereditary respect for the squire. They take a pride in the village. And they have, in fact, all the habits and instincts which are created by a settled life, and the action upon each individual of a local public opinion. The reverse is the case with the labourer who revolves.

* Statute fair. *Vide infra*, p. 179.

† Evidence of Mr. Frampton in Mr. Fraser's Report.

from master to master through a circle of villages, and has no permanent connection with any of them. He becomes like the gipsy,

Αφρήτωρ, αθέμιστος, ἀφέστιος.

“ Many of the clergy complain that the greater part of their parishioners change every year. A kind of vagrant population is created, who lose all home ties ” (*see Stanhope, II., 196*); and it is impossible to expect from young men of this description a higher degree of morality and respectability than they generally exhibit. They grow up mere animals. In their demeanour they are rude, coarse, and insolent, and are at the bottom of half the evil which goes on in country parishes. These are the choice spirits among the Sunday loungers who constitute so prominent a feature of village life. They are to be seen, for the most part, gathering together in the street on Sunday afternoons, with their hands in their pockets, and occasionally short pipes in their mouths, and setting up a horse-laugh at nothing as the respectable inhabitants go by. The above, by-the-bye, is a singular moral phenomenon which human naturalists have not yet adequately explained. These knots of loutish lads, who regularly assemble at the same hour under some favourite wall or sheltered corner, never seem engaged in talk. There they stand, like the cows, apparently finding pleasure in the company of their fellows, and possibly communicating with each other through some organs which, to ordinary mortals, are unintelligible; but to all appearance they are as dumb as the brute creation, from continued contact with which they may perhaps have acquired these mysterious powers. If

it is asked, Would they not be just as bad though hired by the week? the answer is, that they would not leave home for an engagement of a week's duration. Where carters and shepherds are hired by the week, they are taken from among the residents, who are more amenable to humanizing influences.

In the North of England, which, by-the-bye, supplies exceptions to most of the general rules to be collected from the Commissioners' Reports, the system seems to work well in some important respects. Coupled with the system of boarding, it checks early marriages, and prevents a redundant population, though at a considerable cost to morality. And the men are so well paid that they know, if they are frugal and remain single for a certain time, they can save enough to take a small farm, the *ne plus ultra* of their hopes. To such an extent, indeed, have these considerations prevailed, that the labour market in Cumberland and Westmoreland is now understocked. Still, that is the lesser evil of the two. Small farms, indeed, are not upon the whole, desirable. Still, the hope of obtaining them tends to thrift, sobriety, and steadiness.

Finally, and taking England on the whole, we must remember that this system of yearly hiring tends to circulate the population, and to infuse new blood into the rural communities. The carter or ploughman who takes a place at some distance from his native village chooses a wife among the strangers, and settles down there, perhaps, for the rest of his life. At all events, he has done better physiologically than if he had remained at home and married a relation. And the love of change, and desire to see more of his little world

than is open to him in one village, which prompts the young rustic to take service at a distance rather than in his native place, is far from being censurable in itself. The "vagrant population" aforesaid is a considerable evil; but it has its compensating advantages.

The advantages and disadvantages of the weekly system are obviously the reverse. There being no regularly recurring period for weekly hirings, there is nothing to suggest to the labourer the idea of change; and it is common to find men who have worked for the same master, or at least upon the same farm, from week to week, for twenty, thirty, or even forty years. In some parts of England—in Bedfordshire, for instance, and Herts—no other custom is known; and throughout the midland counties it prevails extensively. Its disadvantages are, first, that the labourer is less certain of employment; and secondly, that the farmer, as is alleged, is obliged to pay the same wages to good and bad workmen alike. The first objection is raised by Mr. Fraser, who says that weekly wages would seem to imply continuous weekly employment, but that this, in fact, is not so; men being always liable to be sent back on a wet morning, "or if there happen to be no directly remunerative job which he can be set to do." Mr. Fraser admits that a great many farmers would always try to find or even to make work for their men; but he thinks there are many who would not, and that these are answerable "for that race of shifty labourers who have no regard for their employers' interests, of which the farmers in many places so bitterly complain." Yet, after all, it must be considered that if the farmer was not at liberty to adjust the supply of labour to the

demand, and was obliged to pay his men whether he wanted them or not, the average of wages would be lower. Still the poor, doubtless, would prefer a lower rate with a certainty to a higher one without it.

The second disadvantage is one which is explained at some length by Mr. Frampton, a farmer near Newbury. He says that payment by the day has a tendency to bring down the best workman to a level with the worst. His evidence is worth quoting:—“*For instance, we have three men, A., B., C. A. is an able-bodied, industrious, trusty, persevering man, with a good head upon his shoulders, able and willing to turn his hand to anything, not given to eye-service (by which I mean working hard when the master is in sight, but very different when absent); in short, he is a man that tries to do his duty. We pay him, say, 2s. per day. B. is a man with equal powers and ability with A., but with an unwilling mind; can do anything, but would as soon not; rather given to eye-service, and does not see it necessary to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. We pay him also 2s. per day. C. is a man with very little ability; in fact, requires educating all over and all day long; one that it matters but little how he goes through his day, and what he does, whether it is right or wrong. We pay him also 2s. per day. Now is this justice? and what are its effects? Naturally to bring down the best gradually to the level of the worst; and what can it be but a degrading system? If A. does not care to see it, B. and C. will soon prove to him that they get as well paid as he does; and if A. at first conscientiously objects, yet the natural bias of*

his human nature, combined with the taunts of his fellow-workmen, will gradually bring him down. This I consider a system the very reverse of the one we want to instil, and one that must have a great tendency to keep down the price of labour, because rendering it of so little worth. We want a system that will cause emulation, a striving each one to do his best, with a knowledge that his efforts will be rewarded. But how is this to be attained? Some, the uninitiated may say, 'Turn off B. and C., that is, the bad men, and get some more A.'s.' But where are they to be found? Are you sure of getting any A.'s? And will the demand for labour allow it? I confess I know not the remedy. Individually, I believe nothing can be done except in exceptional cases, and collectively it must be a great undertaking. Could any kind of class system be introduced? I am fully aware that the opposition to any great change would be great, but I most sincerely wish some system better than the present might be found."

But it can hardly be that the system of hiring by the week is solely accountable for this state of things. Does the servant who is hired for a year, or for a month (if he ever is hired for a month), afford any greater facilities for paying him according to his merits? Must not the average rate of wages in the district be given to all alike, in the one case as well as in the other? The true remedy seems to be the one suggested at the latter end of the above extract—a classification of labourers. It is true that this does exist practically even now, and that the spirit of emulation is by no means left without fuel because the exact daily wage of

good and bad is the same. Workmen, as we have just noticed, are already divided into those who can and those who cannot, command regular employment. And this distinction *ought* to be sufficient to obviate that demoralization of the better class which Mr. Frampton complains of. But it might be better, in the interest of all parties, if some classification could be agreed upon, so as, at one and the same time, to save the farmer from paying more than its value for inferior labour, and the labourer from all the miseries of a precarious income. The difficulties in the way of such a scheme seem, indeed, insuperable; as, for instance, who would have to determine to which class an individual belonged? and would not the decision be found ultimately to depend upon the plenty or scarcity of labour? Still, such a scheme, if practicable, would doubtless be the solution of a difficulty which presses hard on both employer and employed.

Both Mr. Fraser and the gentleman from whom we have just quoted, Mr. Frampton, seem to think that a monthly hiring, with a month's notice, would be preferable to either the weekly or the yearly system; but the latter contends that it would not secure the farmer from being deserted by his men just, perhaps, when he wanted them most. The monthly hiring would, doubtless, relieve the workman from a good deal of uncertainty; and it would possess the still greater advantage of being unconnected with a system which is a standing provocation to a change of situations, the statute fair; but it certainly would be open to the objection raised by Mr. Frampton. It would be too short a term for the indispensable men, the carter, ploughman, &c.,

where these have been used to yearly hiring; and though to the ordinary day labourer it would give greater certainty of employment, one does not see that it would in any way facilitate classification.

Piece-work is applicable to only certain kinds of agricultural labour, and at certain seasons of the year. If several men are employed upon the same job they are all paid the sum agreed upon when it is finished, though some of them may have worked a great deal harder at it than others. The "shirker," therefore, gets his advantage out of it as much as out of day-work. And it is not conducive to the domestic economy of the cottager to have lump sums coming in at irregular periods, instead of the fixed weekly wages. On the other hand, it enables the farmer to apply his labour most advantageously to himself, to get work done quickly, and, *on the whole*, it is more capable than the day system of giving its reward to merit. Mr. Culley thinks that piece-work entails physical injury upon men ignorant of the laws of health, and how to exert their strength to the best advantage.

The general conclusion seems to be that, of all the existing customs which are capable of general adoption, the weekly system is open to the fewest objections. The evils which belong to it do not seem so inherent and ineradicable as those which belong to the yearly system; while the good which is effected by the latter is more than counterbalanced by the mischief. Of the monthly system we have at present too little experience to speak with confidence. And the piece-work system must always continue to be exceptional.

A departure from the system of yearly or half-yearly

hiring would likewise have the good effect of abolishing the statute fair, which is now the recognized labour mart for all but day labourers. For though yearly hiring can exist without statute fairs, statute fairs could not exist without yearly hiring. These institutions have still their advocates; and it is certainly possible that by stricter supervision a different character might be imparted to them, and that they might in time become as innocent festivities as the village feast. Some efforts have already been made in this direction; but hitherto they have been few and far between, and the "statty," upon the whole, we should fear, with less of its original utility, retains most of its original licence. To lovers of old customs, however, who can for the moment put morals in the background, these scenes are not without a certain charm. All along the roads in the vicinity of the market town appointed for the ceremony, the young men and women of the neighbourhood are to be seen trooping along in their best clothes, and congregating eventually in the market-place, where they stand for hire like the labourers in the parable. The candidates indicate by a badge the peculiar service which they seek. The shepherd decorates his cap with a bunch of wool; the carter with a bit of whipcord; the housemaid with a sprig of broom; and both sexes alike, when they have been hired, pin a knot of bright-coloured ribbons on the breast or shoulder, just as if they were "agoing for soldiers." When the business of the day is over, the evening is devoted to amusement—in other words, dancing and drinking, which produce their natural results, and are to a large extent accountable for that low standard of female honour which,

according to Mr. Fraser, is characteristic of the English peasantry. The servants like the system, of course, because it gives them, at all events, one good outing in the year. The farmers like it, because, as they say, "they get a lot to pick from," and can compare the thews and sinews of a great many candidates for service before finally engaging one. We do not mean, of course, that they feel them over as they would a horse, or as their wives would thumb a couple of fowls; but they scan them critically, as the slave merchant would have scanned a negro, and naturally regard them in no other light than that of animals. It must be understood, however, that we are speaking only of one class of farmers who stick to the old road. We are aware that there are many others of a wholly distinct character, who dislike the system as much as any one can, and would willingly abolish it could they find any practicable substitute.

This, however, is what it is very difficult to find. Mr. Portman, in Yorkshire, heard the system generally condemned as the source of much immorality, but observed that it was so deeply rooted that it would take many years and much trouble to establish anything in its place. Mr. Stanhope, on the contrary, insists that the statute fair is no necessary part of the system of yearly hiring; and that in Cheshire, where the system is universal, the fairs have been abolished. Mr. Henley, Mr. H. Tremenheere, and Mr. Portman seem to look with hope to some intermediate course, namely, the reformation of the system, and its subjection to more refining influences. In many towns rooms have been provided to insure the separation of the sexes. In one town

the clergyman tried the experiment of providing tea and coffee for the girls, but they declined to come in without the men; and both alike seemed to prefer the open air. The most efficacious reformer of the "statty" promises to be the railway, as the men and women are gradually falling into the habit of going and returning by train; in which case half the mischief of the evening revel, and all the dangers of the walk home through dark lanes and lonely fields, are averted. On the degrading effect of men and women standing to be looked at like cattle, and selected only upon physical grounds, the Commissioners are not all agreed. Mr. Norman and Mr. Stanhope condemn it strongly. Mr. Henley and Mr. H. Tremenheere see less harm in it. The former quotes the opinion of Sir C. Anderson, to the effect that there is nothing more degrading in the practice than in the examination of recruits for the army, or the selection of men for a racing boat. Where physical strength and activity are required, such inspection he considers indispensable.

Both Mr. Henley's and Mr. Tremenheere's experience is drawn, however, from the northern counties, which seem, as we have said, to supply exceptions to all rules. But what Mr. Henley says himself upon the subject is undoubtedly of much weight.

"Hiring fairs in Northumberland and Durham are of two kinds, for hinds and single servants; the former are hired for the year, the latter for six months. The hiring fairs for hinds usually take place about March, the service commencing on the 12th of May.

"Nothing can be more important to a man than

hiring himself for a year. He must ascertain the house he will be compelled to occupy with his family, the character of master and steward, and what the wages are to be for himself and family. He is more likely to ascertain this in an open market, where he sells his only produce, his labour, than in any other way. The labour of every member of his family must also be taken into account. No register office would supply the information of an open market."

This view of the case is strongly corroborated by Mr. Tremeneere. In the open market the labourer meets his "master," and the characters of the various masters form the subject of free discussion. An amusing instance of this is given by the last-named Commissioner. "I shall inquire into your character," said a farmer to a man who offered himself for hire, "and you shall know my decision in the afternoon." At the appointed hour the man reappeared, and addressing the farmer who desired to engage him, said, "Since I saw you this morning I have inquired into *your* character, and my decision is to have nothing more to do with you." But the fact is, to repeat it for the third or fourth time, the condition of the North is exceptional. The demand for labour exceeds the supply; and the consequence is that the labourer is master of the position. It is curiously illustrative of this condition, that what the labourer looks to first in the farmer with whom he is in treaty is not what wages he gives, but whether he is good-tempered, and keeps "a liberal table."

Moreover, the two last-named Commissioners evidently look with an indulgent eye on the statute fair, as one of the few opportunities of amusement which

the poor possess, and of which we ought not too hastily to deprive them. "Personal observation at several fairs," says Mr. Henley, "did not impress me with anything objectionable; but the usual enjoyments of race-meetings, flower-shows, &c., were making many very happy faces." Well, this is kindly said; and we honour Mr. Henley for his sympathy with these poor people, "whose long life of labour is so seldom cheered up with a gleam of sunshine." Still, these relaxations may be bought at too high a price; and whatever be the case in Cumberland, where the women, it seems, have little to lose, there can be no doubt that the price is a high one elsewhere. There is more force in the argument, that where there's a will there's a way; that is to say, that if they don't have their statute fair, the young men and women will devise some equivalent for it. They would come to the market-place on market-day, it is said, and that would be just as bad. They would not do this, however, if yearly and half-yearly hirings were abolished; and though there is no necessary link between the two, we suspect that wherever the one exists the other will be found also, in some shape or another.

The passion for dress and dancing, which prevails to an extraordinary extent among the canny daughters of the North, goes some way to explain the attachment of the peasantry to the "mop." Incredible as it may sound to Southern ears, a day labourer in Cumberland, who calls himself too poor to pay the school pence for the education of his children, would feel himself disgraced if he neglected his contribution to the itinerant dancing master. The young ladies themselves carry

their savings on their backs ; and the result of a year's pinching is seen at the "statty" ball, when a girl, whose ordinary attire is wooden clogs and a serge petticoat, turns out in white muslin, a wreath of flowers, and white kid boots and gloves. It seems, too, from the customs which prevail in the North, that *there*, at all events, the abolition of the mop or statute fair would have no influence upon morals. At the expiration of every engagement, chiefly, we suppose, the half-yearly ones, occurs what is called "a term"—that is, a week at Whitsuntide and Martinmas, when "there is an almost total suspension of agricultural labour throughout these counties." At present, it is in these weeks that the statute fairs are held ; but if these were abolished, the holiday would still remain ; prizes for athletic sports would continue to be given by enterprising publicans, and the morning's performance would, as now, be followed by "the ball."

Against the combination of the *utile* and the *dulce* which the "statty" thus presents, register offices have as yet waged an ineffectual war. The best suggestion on the subject which has yet been made appears in the Report of Mr. Portman, wherein it is suggested that the schoolmaster in every village should keep the register. Such a system, however, presupposes that the young people in each village are willing to remain at home, which even, *cæteris paribus*, we don't believe to be the case, though in the case of district schools, such as we may have in future, the scheme would probably be successful. Mr. Thomas, the clergyman of Warmsworth, near Doncaster, says that he had himself extemporized a kind of registry which answered very well

indeed. He used to leave lists of boys and girls wanting places at the principal shops in Doncaster, so that the farmers from the whole neighbourhood used to apply to him. But how many clergymen could afford time for this? He adds, that if you did it solely for the girls it would be sufficient, as the young men at the "statties," without the women, "behave tolerably steadily." We can believe it; but the effectual and permanent separation of the two is beyond the power of authority.

There is a general complaint that, in the engagement of their servants, the farmers do not pay sufficient attention to character. Mr. Stanhope thinks it grievous that cheese, rather than chastity, should be looked to in a Cheshire dairymaid. Mr. H. Tremeneere thinks the farmers less particular than they ought to be. Mr. Portman says that they seem unaware that they are in duty bound to take some interest in the moral condition of their servants. In hiring them they look exclusively to physical considerations. He adds that, in this respect, things have got much worse than they used to be. It seems that twenty-five years ago, in parts of Yorkshire, the farmers used to hire their lads on the understanding that they were to go to church, but the custom has completely died out; and this because of the resistance of the boys, over whom, it seems, their masters have, year by year, possessed less and less influence and authority. At this point, however, the question divides itself into two parts—the extent to which character should be taken into consideration at the time of hiring, and the extent to which good conduct ought to be enforced afterwards. The

latter question, no doubt, is one which every farmer must answer according to his conscience. But it is easy to see that his material interests suffer by his not requiring some testimony to character from the servant whom he hires at a fair. For instance, take the evidence of Mr. Frampton, to which we owe so much already. "Last Michaelmas," says he, "I hired a carter by the month. He stayed till the days got out, made some frivolous excuse, and gave me notice. I said, 'What, throw yourself out of a place, and me out of a servant!' 'Oh,' he said, 'I have a better place, and more money.'" Now it is evident that this man could never have behaved in this way if every employer made a point of demanding a written character from the last place. The tendency of servants "to better themselves," as they call it, without the slightest regard to the interest of their masters, of which farmers so bitterly complain, would be effectually restrained by this practice—a practice, too, which it is in their own power to set in action to-morrow. As to requiring testimonials to morality, we don't exactly see how these could work. It is the business of a dairymaid to make cheese, as it is of a ploughman to make furrows. And the farmer, who has to live by his cows or by his corn, can hardly be expected not to make proficiency in those arts his primary object. We should be sorry to treat so serious a subject with anything like levity or ridicule, but the complaint about the dairymaids reminds us irresistibly of the advertisements for a pious lodger, or a Christian butler, which one occasionally sees in the *Times*. At the same time, if masters would combine together, so that girls who had met with "misfortunes" found

themselves experiencing every year greater difficulties in getting employed, it cannot be doubted that vice would be materially checked, though at some hardship to individuals. It is questionable, however, whether the morality of female farm-servants is so very much below that of others, as we should be led to infer from these Reports. Ladies have no time to make searching inquiries into the past life of every housemaid they engage. If anything improper comes to the knowledge of the mistress while the girl is in her service, the former is bound, of course, to take notice of it in any character which she may hereafter be called upon to give her. But even if we suppose that this obligation is always respected, it is certain that a good deal of immorality does prevail among domestic servants which eludes the knowledge of their employers, even where "misfortunes" follow. And if an inferior master takes less trouble about the character of a servant who is not a family servant than a superior master takes about the character of one who is, that is, perhaps, the whole of the difference.

The conclusion seems to be that if the whole system of yearly hiring and boarding could be abolished in favour of either a monthly or weekly system, it would be better for all parties, though to do so would require a great increase of cottage accommodation; while one result of it would be to check that social circulation which is not without its good effects. But it would, of course, *pari passu*, extinguish that perpetual thirst for change which the farmers find so great a nuisance, while it would strike at the root of statute fairs, with all their alleged abominations. In the second place,

it appears that if this cannot be done, statute fairs might possibly be reformed, much in the same way in which, in many parts of England, village feasts and harvest-homes have been reformed. These festivals were at one time scenes of great excess, and the former of them, at least, one of great profligacy. But through the exertions of the clergy and other well-disposed persons, both have lost their worst features, and have become, the one a decent, the other even a pious institution. If statute fairs we still must have, why should not some regular and respectable entertainment be provided for the youngsters, and the evening dance be held under the auspices of the parish clergyman? Another generation would soon grow up to whom the rough romping and swinish merriment of the present system would seem as abominable as the spectacle of half-a-dozen gentlemen of birth under the dining-room table would seem to us. Lastly, although the conditions of agricultural service make it less the interest of the farmer to inquire into the character of his servants, yet to do so to a certain extent is manifestly to his own advantage; while he ought not to object to being told that of the young people living under his own roof he is bound by every tie which binds society together to consult both the moral and religious welfare. If he regards his servants only as so many "hands," like the workpeople in a factory, he is violating, certainly, no law of political economy, but he is throwing away the advantages of the situation in which Providence has placed him, and neglecting to do the good which he *can* do, and which the majority of mill-owners cannot.

CHAPTER XI.

INJURIOUS INFLUENCES.—THE PUBLIC-HOUSE.—
POACHING.

A VICE which is condemned by public opinion, and exposed, whenever it shows itself, to either unfeigned ridicule or unfeigned indignation, is, we may be sure, a doomed vice; for very few natures are really callous to the opinion of the world, and still fewer are strong enough to maintain a course of steady hypocrisy, so as to conceal their defiance of it. But, unhappily, there are two kinds of public opinion, one of which is the result of a deep moral conviction, while the other is only, as it were, an opinion *de convenance*—a kind of general understanding in the interest of social decorum. The influence of the latter is of course only superficial, and confined to those circles whose comfort it is found to promote. The influence of the former is felt everywhere, and extends to the abstract evil of vicious habits as well as to the public inconvenience of them. The one kind of opinion, however, is frequently mistaken for the other; and we are not sure that this is not sometimes the case when the vice of drunkenness is discussed. Drinking to excess is now discountenanced in good society, and to enter a drawing-room drunk

would be as bad as to enter it naked. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we shall confess it is very doubtful if this general unanimity on the subject springs from any deeper disapproval of sensuality in the abstract than was entertained by our forefathers. It is simply a matter of good taste. The spectacle of intoxication has become unpleasant; a better educated and more accomplished generation has other resources than the bottle; health is thought a great deal more of. But it would be rash to assert, dogmatically, that, if less coarse in our lives than was the generation which preceded us, we are not at least equally voluptuous. Now those classes in society who have not made the like progress in refinement have an instinctive perception of this truth. They are not to be taken in. Sobriety, they see, is the fashion; and those who aspire to be fashionable endeavour to be sober. But we greatly doubt if the feeling goes deeper than this. And as soon as we come down to a class which is wholly unaffected by such considerations we see the vice as rampant as ever. If it is a little on the decline in some places, it has gained ground in others. And the difficulty of dealing with it by any other means alone makes the improved education of the poor a matter of paramount importance. But we hope we shall give no offence by saying that, even *with* an improved system of education, the labouring classes will scarcely be weaned from this habit as long as the class just above them continues to indulge it. With a certain class of farmers and tradesmen the brandy-bottle is still in daily requisition, and they are seldom seen absolutely sober after dinner. Their men overhear

them joking each other on the subject ; and if one of them has tumbled into the ditch coming home from market, or met with any other humorous incident of the same kind under the influence of Bacchus, he is the hero of the hour. The labouring man may see that drinking is a bad game—that it impoverishes his family and impairs his strength ; but he will never entertain that rooted aversion to it which is necessary to any real reformation while he sees his betters either continue to practise it themselves, or to regard it only as an amiable weakness in their neighbours.

And here it may be as well to state that there is much in the private lives, as well as in the business, of both farmers and tradespeople, which Commissioners and clergymen do not very readily get at. The former, as a rule, come in contact with only the better class of farmers. From the latter, of course, excesses are to some extent concealed. It would be absurd to deny that there is a very numerous and growing class of tenant-farmers who might be trusted to drink with a bishop, and are as much alive to the grossness of the vice of intoxication as the greatest gentleman in St. James's. But it is equally undeniable that between these and the labourers there is another very large class of whom as much cannot certainly be said, who continue to look upon drunkenness as a way that men have, and one of those ambiguous habits which, as they cannot be suppressed, ought to be made to yield as much fun as possible. A great allowance, therefore, should be made for the English labourer. Everything is against him : tradition, example, the proximity of the beer-shop, the custom of the country, all drag him

one way, and conduct him with very little resistance to the bright hearth and social circle which await him at the "Dragon."

Mr. Fraser attributes a great increase in drunkenness to the new Excise Licences, which were introduced in 1863. Before that time, every keeper of a beershop, as distinct from a 'public-house, was under some restraint—not much, perhaps, but some. Before obtaining his licence from the Commissioners of Excise, he was bound to produce a certificate of good conduct signed by six respectable inhabitants of the parish. That the law was often practically evaded may be true, but it was better than no law at all. Now, in 1863 it was enacted that whoever took out a wholesale beer licence—that is, a licence to sell not less than four and a half gallons not to be drunk on the premises—was also entitled, if he chose, to a retail licence to sell beer not to be drunk on the premises, without any certificate or other guarantee of his fitness. The upshot of this has been an immense increase in the number of beer-shops, kept often by the worst characters, who easily evade the restriction as to drinking on the premises, and whose locality is the haunt of all the bad characters in the neighbourhood.

We have no doubt of the truth of this view. And the mischief which these houses generate spreads beyond intoxication. These are the haunts of poachers and other wild characters of the district, who "corrupt the youth," and sometimes familiarize them with costlier game than hares, and more

dangerous implements than nets. But these are not the places to which the married man in good employment is drawn after his day's work, instead of going home to his cottage. They are very demoralizing agencies in a country neighbourhood, but they don't do the particular kind of harm we are concerned with at the present moment. To effect this, the public-house must be in the village, and houses such as the above usually stand on the outskirts. The respectable paterfamilias desires to meet his coevals, and to discuss the news of the village, and perhaps a bit of politics, in quite a decent and quiet fashion. But even in doing this he spends more than he can afford, and drinks more than he can bear. Little by little he gets behindhand in the world, runs in debt at the chandler's, injures his health, and at last falls an easy prey to the first illness that attacks him; whereas the money spent at the public-house, laid out upon warm clothes and more substantial food, would have enabled him, with an unimpaired constitution, to weather any ordinary disease. No doubt these habits of tippling are encouraged by the multiplication of public-houses, for the more competition there is, the more important a personage does each customer become. But it would probably be impossible at the present day to effect any such reduction in the number of beer-shops as would make an appreciable impression upon the vice of drunkenness. Mr. Stanhope calls attention "to the feeling which everywhere exists as to the necessity of limiting the number of beer-houses,

obtaining more control over them, and of transferring their supervision to some more competent authority ; ” but adds—“ For my own part, I look with far more confidence to the effect which will be produced by an improvement in the condition of the cottages, in enabling them to compete in attractiveness with the warm and well-lighted public-house. I say their condition, because some believe that this object can best be achieved by a change in their situation ; that is by placing them on the farms, where the man is further removed from temptation. In the same way other landowners have endeavoured to check the evil by not permitting any public-house to be opened in the village of which they are sole proprietors. I cannot speak very highly of the success of these attempts. A drunkard will drink in spite of the trifling obstacle of distance ; and considerable injustice is caused to others, who are charged an exorbitant price for the poisonous liquor which is sold to them as beer.”

We quite agree with this opinion ; but at the same time we think some reduction might be made in the number of *public-houses*, and that shops for the sale of beer, in any quantity, not to be drunk on the premises, might advantageously be substituted for them, if the law were strictly carried out, as we see no reason why it should not be. It is not an uncommon thing nowadays to see two public-houses, or veritable inns, in a village of four hundred people. They cannot both be wanted. They never could have been in villages which lie among the lanes remote from the chief lines of traffic ; while even in those which lie on turnpike roads

they cannot be required now, whatever they might have been once. Before the introduction of railways, when goods were still conveyed by waggou, and still earlier, when journeys were performed on horseback, the village inn, with the great elm-tree and horse-trough in front of it, and the rambling old stables in the rear, was not merely a picturesque antiquity, but one of the necessaries of life. Nowadays, the only useful purpose which it serves is to accommodate the village club at its annual dinner and its monthly meetings, or to pick up a stray guest when the parsonage happens to be full. At all events, if it does more than this, *two* such houses are not wanted in any one rural parish. Accordingly, if in each village there was only one place where people could meet and drink together, while, for the sake of competition, shops were licensed to sell beer exclusively for home consumption, and vigilantly watched by the police to see that this condition was observed, one great step would have been taken towards the diminution of drunkenness.

The next is the improvement of cottages. But, as this point has been discussed already, we shall pass on to the third—the quality of beer sold. The only one of the Commissioners who has made a point of this is Mr. Norman, but it yields in importance to none of the influences by which the sobriety of the labourer is affected. The abominable mixtures which are sold for beer in many village inns not only stimulate instead of quenching thirst, but are so concocted as to produce immediate stupefaction. The peasant who goes in for his half-pint of beer on his way home—no very heinous crime surely—feels, when he has

swallowed it, just as if he had been drugged, sits down helplessly in a corner, and continues to drink almost mechanically—with what result may be imagined; or even if he does not do that, the small quantity he has taken has such an effect upon him, that if his master or the clergyman meets him between the public-house and his cottage, he fancies him intoxicated, and forthwith registers him as drunkard. The natural result of giving the dog a bad name ensues, and one more character is gone.

The keepers of these houses have been known to lament the necessity which compelled them to vend such stuff. But they have no choice. The house is a close house; that is to say, it belongs to some small brewer in the neighbouring market town, and the publican is little more than his agent. In London we believe the adulteration of beer mostly begins in the public-house; elsewhere it is completed in the brewery. Mr. Norman says that any new Act of Parliament, of which the object is to check intemperance, should deal with the article sold as well as with the person selling it. And even now it is difficult to understand why the adulteration of beer cannot be detected and punished as easily as the adulteration of bread. The fact, however, remains that little or no effort ever is made to bring home this offence to the perpetrator. And in default of any enactment to facilitate the punishment of the criminal, we should say the only way to help the poor is to destroy the profits of the crime. To save them from drinking bad beer we must provide them with the means of getting better. Such was the opinion of Mr. Culley (Rep. II., 93):—"I do

Injurious Influences.

not for a moment desire that the labourer should be denied every facility for quenching his thirst in beer; on the contrary, I should like to see beer sold across every counter with as little restriction as bread and butter, save only that it should not be drunk on the premises. I would confine the licence to sell beer to be drunk on the premises to that class of houses which are also licensed to sell spirits. Under such a system a man would probably take home to his family only so much beer as he could conveniently pay for, and as they could consume without injury, and he would be robbed of the temptations to excess which it is the business of the beer-house keeper to provide."

A fourth suggestion is, that the poor should be encouraged to brew at home. But to waive all questions of economy, and all questions of Excise, we, in common with most persons who know the poor well, are convinced they would never take the trouble.* They have got used to the beer-shop, and they will never go back to the brew-house. We have no doubt that if they could be persuaded to do it, it would be attended with the most beneficial consequences, as plenty of middle-aged men, who remember the system in operation, are ready to demonstrate. A farmer in the South, not more than five-and-forty years of age, assured the present writer that when he was a lad of seventeen there was not a public-house in his native village, or within some miles of it; that every family down the village street brewed their barrel of beer periodically; and that the

* Since this was written I have seen some reason to modify this opinion.—T. E. K., 1887.

inhabitants used to meet at each cottage in turn, from six to eight o'clock in the evening, and play at cards for apples till the cask was emptied, when they went on to the next house. Drunkenness, he said, was unknown on these occasions; and, from an intimate knowledge of the man, I am sure that he was not romancing. But this Arcadian state of innocence has passed away never to return. The knowledge of good and evil has come in the form of a public-house; and Eden cannot be recovered. We don't believe, then, that even if the malt-tax were repealed the poor could be induced to brew at home, and we dismiss the suggestion as impracticable.

The four suggestions then, by compliance with which intoxication, it is hoped, might be diminished, are as follows:—The requisition of a certificate for all licences; the reduction of the number of houses where liquor is drunk on the premises; the encouragement of others where it is not, under strict securities for the observance of the law; the improvement of cottages, so as to give the peasant all his comforts at home; and, finally, if possible, the rigorous enforcement of the penalties laid down by law against all adulteration of beer.

The other encouragements to drunkenness which are independent of the public-house are chiefly urged by Mr. Fraser, though none of his colleagues contradict him. The harvest-home and the largesse are particularly obnoxious to this charge. At the former the farmer's hospitality is impeached if the men do not get "well on." He admits, however, that even the farmers are in many places endeavouring to correct the abuse; and in various parts of England we fancy the harvest-

home is now carried on with much decorum. Some attempts which have been made to conduct it on a new system, we are aware, have been failures, but not all. Mr. Fraser mentions particularly the failure of Lord Albemarle at Banham, who tried to substitute a monster tea-meeting, attended by two or three thousand people, to whom suitable speeches were addressed. But the experiment was never repeated; and of the attempt Mr. Fraser says very sensibly—"A monster meeting is not the remedy for a social evil. The mere conflux of a crowd is what Roman Catholic divines call *fomes peccati*." But he admits that in his own parish general harvest-homes have been conducted without drunkenness, and apparently to the satisfaction of everybody. Many employers, we are told, have substituted a fixed money payment for the old harvest supper. But Mr. Fraser does not approve of this. "These old English customs, however degraded, point to a time when the relation between master and man was ennobled by a higher sentiment than the greed of gain; and in this nineteenth century anything that breaks down the distinctions of caste, and gives an opportunity for the effusion of the feelings of good fellowship and true hospitality, is a link in our social system not lightly to be snapped in twain." This gentleman evidently believes that the harvest-home is capable of being brought into harmony with modern ideas, and that there is no necessity for abolishing it. We ourselves have no doubt that a master who really took pains could, in a very short time, make his own men ashamed of getting drunk in his presence. And this step gained, the rest would gradually follow. Not so, how-

ever, with another custom, which seems thoroughly bad, and happily is far from universal, and that is "largesse," a sort of supplement to the harvest-home, which licks up whatever crumbs of sobriety were left by the preceding entertainment. The custom, as described by a Norfolk rector, is as follows:—

"The harvest ended, the master sometimes gives his men a supper at his own house, but that is the exception; he more generally gives a sum to be spent by them in supper at a public-house. After this supper, which is sometimes attended by persons of both sexes, and at which the language, the songs, the utter absence of decorum, the drunkenness and riot, surpass, I believe, all and more than we can conceive to be possible amongst a society calling themselves Christians, the harvest party, half stupefied by the debauch of the previous night, start 'begging largesse.' This largesse gathering is not confined to their own parish, but is extended from house to house throughout the district, wherever a friend or tradesman of their employer is to be found. At some places they get beer, at others they collect money, stopping at all the public-houses on their way; and the sum so collected, if sufficient, is spent in another supper, but more often expended wholly in beer. Respectable men, who at other times never enter a public-house, are frequently thus seen disgracing themselves, and speak with bitterness of the tyrant custom."

The present writer is not aware that any custom of the same kind prevails in either the midland, the southern, or the western counties; and it must be admitted that, for some reason or other, the

peasantry of the eastern counties do seem a grosser race than is to be met with in other parts of England.

All the Commissioners alike, however, comment on the well-known fact that no business can be transacted in the country without beer. Every bargain must be wetted, and all sorts of odd jobs are just as often remunerated in liquor as in cash. If you want a lad to run an errand, "Tom or Jack 'll do it, sir, for a pint o' beer, I dare say," is the answer to your inquiry. And so strong is the tradition that, even if he didn't spend the threepence in liquor, he would still call it "a pint o' beer." Generally speaking, however, he would scorn to spend it on anything else, whether he was thirsty or not. It is this general belief in drink as the *τὸ ἀριστον* which it is so exceedingly difficult to eradicate from the working class. A holiday with them means drink; a legacy with them means more and better drink. A gentleman is one who can always get the best to drink; a lady is one who gracefully asks you if you want drink. All festivals are failures without drink. When a groom has carried a message, or a keeper delivered some game, he is instantly asked, on his return, did he drink? In fact, the idea of drink is interwoven with every action of their lives, and follows them from their cradle to their grave like a religion. This genial superstition is not to be uprooted in a day; nor will it even be shaken among the peasantry until it has disappeared among the farmers. As long as it meets with any kind of recognition, either at their hands or at the hands of a class yet above them, it will continue to flourish like an evergreen.

From public-houses to poaching the transition is a very simple one. The exact amount of demoralization among the English peasantry with which poaching is chargeable it is not very easy to calculate; but the most demoralizing form of it is directly encouraged by the beer-shop. Roughly speaking, poachers may be divided into three kinds: the starving peasant, who steals a rabbit to provide his family with a meal; the professional gang, who supply the poulterer and fishmonger, and who, in the great lottery of crime, have simply drawn hares and pheasants, instead of bank-notes and jewels; and, thirdly, the idle scamp, who is to be found in all villages, who snares and shoots on the sly, and drinks out his booty at the public-house. Now, the first of these is a simple myth, notwithstanding the sympathy which has been showered upon him by philanthropists whose zeal outruns their knowledge. The second are not peculiar to the country; and, indeed, the larger and more formidable gangs are usually recruited from the towns. But of course they use the country public-houses of the worst sort, such as have thriven since 1863, which frequently combine together to form a kind of fund from which the poachers' expenses, in the way of fines, loss of implements, &c., are defrayed. Here, of course, they come in contact with the village population, and naturally with the worst effects. But, after all, we have reason to believe it is the facilities for disposing of a single hare or pheasant afforded by these houses, which are the greatest incentives to poaching among the agricultural poor, and teach many a lad to poach who would never have thought of it otherwise. Excessive preservation is not essential

to this kind of poaching, and yet of all kinds it is the most demoralizing. Egg-stealing is one form of poaching which has, no doubt, a bad effect on rustic morals, but we doubt if it be so wide-spread an evil as the pursuit of game. On carefully-preserved estates every nest is watched, and if the eggs are taken, the theft is sure to be known, and the thief is sure to be suspected. Labourers may steal eggs on outlying or non-preserved farms; but if they do it where the farmer himself shoots they run a greater risk than they do even from the gamekeeper. So that, after all, the field of operations open to the egg-stealer is considerably narrowed, and the demoralization which attends him must be very partial.

As to the general effects of excessive preservation, we cordially agree with Mr. Fraser in thinking it a grievous blunder. But it is a farmer's question, not a labourer's. As for saying that game is a temptation to the peasantry, the fallacy involved in the assertion is so obvious, and yet so generally accepted, that it may be worth while to examine it with some care. The thesis is that the Game Laws are injurious to the morals of the people; therefore they ought to be abolished. This bare statement, however, implies the existence of a syllogism of which the major premiss is this—that all things which are injurious to the morals of the people ought to be abolished. It is plain either that this cannot be the case, or that the principle of property is a vicious one. For all property is a temptation, and all temptations are injurious to the morals of the people. By the common consent of mankind, therefore, we may assume that our major premiss is to be negatived. We

then descend to a particular affirmative—some things which are injurious to the morals of the people ought to be abolished. Very good ; but what things ? Generally we may say that all things which are both immoral in themselves, and exist only for the sake of immorality, ought to be abolished. In this list would come gambling-houses and brothels. Then we come to things which are immoral in themselves, but of which the object or final cause is not immoral, such as bribery at elections ; for there is no immorality in being a Member of Parliament. And, thirdly, we may come to things which, though not immoral in themselves, do nevertheless conduce to immorality, such as public-houses. Now it is clear that Game Laws come under neither of the first two heads. They are not immoral in the abstract. We have to consider them, then, as they come under the third—things which, in themselves innocent, conduce in their effects to vice.

But we now find ourselves face to face with a very simple formula which it is common to apply to such cases ; we mean the use and the abuse of things. And we set the one against the other. As De Quincey points out, the much-maligned science of casuistry is nevertheless in universal operation in the affairs of the world. We are always obliged to make cases. Now, in this instance, we can lay down no principle. We can only say that, wherever the abuse exceeds the use, palpably, grossly, and to such an extent as almost to override and extinguish it, then such things should be abolished. Common sense is the only tribunal by which this point can be determined. We consider that in this respect the public-house question is closely analogous to the

Game-Law question. Both are temptations to vice. But, on the other hand, it is contended that both serve other purposes, which are not only innocent, but in the one case necessary, and in the other salutary; of which the evil they do by the temptations they hold out is not great enough to justify the stoppage. On broad grounds it may added that, as all classes of mankind are exposed to their particular temptations in the path of life, the poor must expect to have theirs; and that this system of removing all temptations *because they are* temptations is inconsistent with the theory of moral discipline, and the formation of virtuous habits.

It is pretty clear that no such effectual extinguisher could be placed upon poaching as a legislative enactment which should cut away his market from the poacher. At present it is beyond dispute that the source and root of all the evil is in the fishmonger's back parlour. It is obvious that for more than a century and a half this truth has been apparent to Government, and that they have been fruitlessly endeavouring to act upon it. But hitherto every attempt to check unlawful traffic in game has been a practical failure. The twenty-eighth clause of the 1st and 2nd William IV., which we have already cited, has remained a dead letter. Poulterers and fishmongers continue their dealings with the poacher in almost absolute security, and have been known to joke even a county Member about the pheasants which they had from his preserves. The difficulty of detection seems almost insuperable. Yet, until the "fence" can be got at, we shall do very little with the thief. The Act of 1862, which empowered the police to stop and search carts or

suspicious-looking jacket-pockets, and apprehend the owners if they were found to contain game, has worked well. But, after all, it has but thrown one additional difficulty in the poacher's path: it has caused more poachers to be caught, but it hasn't diminished poaching. Neither will anything have that effect till a blow can be struck at the trade; till the poacher's profits are affected; till the springs which feed the stream begin to fail. Till that can be done we may throw obstacles in the poacher's way, but they will no more kill poaching than dams will dry up a river.

If all game-preservers were forced to take out a separate licence for selling game, it would have one of two effects: either they would pay the licence, and in that case sell a great deal more game, or they would not pay it, and in that case would preserve a good deal less. Either alternative would be attended by other good results. In the first place, the more game the dealers got from gentlemen, the less they would require from poachers. In the second place, the payment of this sum would form an additional contribution to the revenue, and would *pro tanto* diminish the odium of preserving, and proportionably the sympathy with poaching. On the second hypothesis, excessive preserving would be got rid of, the complaints of the farmer would be stopped, and the profits of poaching much reduced. We cannot help thinking that if this suggestion were adopted, means might still be found of bringing home offences to the game-dealers, and of making their trade with poachers much more dangerous and precarious than it is at present. Moreover, there is no reason why gentlemen should not make a trade

of rearing and selling game as of rearing and selling sheep. And if the system were regularly established and recognized, it is possible that a feeling would gradually spring up among the dealers adverse to buying from the poacher. There is many a butcher now who wouldn't buy stolen sheep, though he knew he shouldn't be detected. And we sincerely believe that, if poaching were more generally exhibited in its true light, and robbed of that mystery and romance which at present shroud it, such a feeling would become very common.

A word or two, in conclusion, of what is called "Justices' justice" in its relation to poaching. We constantly see convictions which have been obtained before country magistrates made the subject of very severe animadversion in the London press, and there are two observations which we desire to make upon the subject. One is this—that there is a border-land between the professional poacher and the honest labourer, if not so wide as it used to be, still much wider than skirts any other criminal profession; and that the existence of this border-land is a source of great perplexity to magistrates. If a man is caught picking a pocket, or breaking into a house, or swindling by an assumed name, or anything of that kind, he is pretty sure to be a regular professional criminal. But the man who snares a rabbit is not equally sure to be a professional poacher. He is on the high road to become one; that is certain. But he may have done it for the fun of the thing; or from an idea of its cleverness; or merely from a lawless disposition in

general. But there is very great difficulty in distinguishing between a man of this class and a confirmed offender; and probably hardly any one can do it but those who live upon the spot, and have constant opportunities of observing him. This is one reason why the evidence of gamekeepers and the decision of local magistrates have often more in them than meets the eye of the general public. This is a point in their favour. There is, secondly, one that tells against them in just about an equal degree. Between gamekeepers and poachers, and especially such poachers as oftenest come before the magistrates, there is a much more bitter feeling than exists between officers of justice in general and criminals in general. They are pitted against each other in a much more personal way; and the game which the poacher takes is what the keeper regards almost as his own. He has reared it and tended it early and late, and has an interest in it which it is quite impossible a policeman should feel for the stock-in-trade of a goldsmith or a watchmaker. Then, again, the policeman is one of a numerous and disciplined force, the lustre of whose exploits is reflected upon each member of it, whether he has done anything himself or not. But a keeper has his *own* reputation either to make or to maintain. What keepers in general may do affects not him. *He* would be thought none the better of, though a keeper in the next county had taken twenty poachers single-handed. Consequently, there is generally a tendency, kept in check, or developed, according to the character of the master, on the part of keepers to make business, and to demon-

strate their own activity. Gentlemen should always be upon their guard against this very natural weakness of human nature ; for sure we are that in the feuds upon the subject of game which agitate most rural districts it plays a most important part, and is at the bottom of many of the crimes which are mostly charged against the Game Laws.

CHAPTER XII.

AIDS TO THE LABOURER.—BENEFIT SOCIETIES.—
CO-OPERATIVE FARMS.—STORES.

THAT benefit societies are frequently the reverse of beneficial to the unfortunate labourers who belong to them is what every one is now aware of. But still the principle itself seems sound enough, and, if the machinery were amended, they would be properly included among the ameliorating circumstances of agricultural life. At the present time they seem to have gone altogether wrong. They do that which they ought not to do, and leave undone that which they ought to do; they squander their money upon beer, and repudiate their just debts; they lead a jolly life for a few years, and as soon as the necessity of meeting their original engagements begins to threaten them, they are dissolved, and the funds evenly divided. The young members join another club. But what becomes of the old men, who had pinched themselves for many years to secure a provision for their old age? This selfish and dishonest practice is so general throughout the country as to have caused the Commissioners to report most unfavourably of the operation of benefit societies.

The Commissioners differ, however, a good deal in regard to the details of these institutions. Some think that the annual celebration, with its procession, its banners, its sermon, and its dinner, simply entails drunkenness and waste of funds, and that it ought to be abolished. Mr. Stanhope thinks, on the contrary, that these things are so great an attraction, and form so strong an inducement to the labourer to join a club, that, if we think it good for him to do so, we ought not to discourage them. We must say we think it doubtful how far the advocates of the opposite view come into court with clean hands. The intimate connection which exists in England between charity and conviviality is so old a joke that we can now refer to it without joking; and if rich people, whose life is one long holiday, or men of business, whose evenings are devoted to enjoyment, find it necessary to keep up the system of public dinners, and so forth, we scarcely know what to say to the clubbists of a country village. Their annual dinners are not very expensive, and are usually tolerably decorous. And when we consider that to the majority of the members roast veal and batter pudding are viands too delicious almost to be realized, which they only taste once a year, and which they are actually paying for with their own money, we may easily forgive them a little boisterousness of animal spirits. And surely, if such dinners must be eaten, it is better that the clergyman of the parish should preside at them than that he shouldn't. Mr. Stanhope, while allowing the good policy of the dinner, apparently condemns the practice of its being preceded by a sermon, and being shared in by the preacher. He says that the club

threaten the clergyman that they will go to the Dissenting chapel if he won't give them a service in the church, and that very few can "resist this pressure." But why *should* they resist it? If the whole ceremonial of which the sermon is a part meets with Mr. Stanhope's approval, why should the clergy require any pressure? He is, however, perhaps right in saying that before lending their countenance to the meeting of the club, they ought to know something of its circumstances, and not to give the prestige of their attendance to a rotten or fraudulent concern. At the same time, this is easier said than done. Such bodies are very jealous of interference; and unless the club has been founded by the clergyman or the squire in person, it would be difficult to obtain the necessary information.

The connection between clubs and public-houses is not, however, confined to the annual dinner, which usually takes place on Whit-Monday; it is kept up throughout the year by monthly meetings, in favour of which nothing can be said. These meetings are held for the purpose of receiving subscriptions; and every member, on payment of his monthly 1s. 6d., is entitled to a pint of beer out of the club funds. But, in some cases, the practice goes much beyond this—as many pints of beer being drawn as there are members of the club, and the members present being entitled to consume it all. At a club in Bedfordshire, conducted upon this system, it was stated to Mr. Culley that the average monthly expenditure on beer alone was £1 7s. 8d. One rule of this club was attended by a comic result. A considerable sum of club money was always left in charge of the landlord for the purpose of

paying the sick members, &c. On one occasion the box was missing, and, after a search, was found in one of the landlord's fields, with all the money gone, but the papers all safe, and among them the guarantee given by the landlord for the safety of the cash. Whether he was obliged to make it good or not doesn't appear. At the same club the proceedings at club funerals were so scandalous that it became necessary at last to limit the attendance to the stewards.

Several causes, however, seem combining to extinguish this system. Young men are beginning to find out the superior advantages of larger societies—such as Odd Fellows, Foresters, &c.—and the old public-house club is growing daily less popular. Landowners, too, are beginning to take them into their own hands, and to compel the observance of better rules; while, “as the present Government have undertaken to bring in a Bill to enable the Post Office to grant insurances on life for £5, there is now, I think, no need of a burial fund, or, still better, of burial societies; and as the Post Office Savings Bank and Government annuities are everywhere at hand to give a good account of the investment of a labourer's savings, there remains only the need of a sickness club.” (Culley, Rep. II., p. 92.)

But wherever clubs are still kept up it seems most desirable that they should supply the labourer with the means of making provision for his family after his own death. At present, as a rule, they secure him a weekly allowance during sickness, and after he is past work; they cheapen his doctor's bill, and they pay for his funeral. But there they stop. And, as Mr.

Portman well puts it, "Take the case of a man who never had a day's illness in his life; he makes the monthly payment to his club for many years, and at his death there is a sum given for his funeral, but all the hard-earned savings of his life, having been paid into the club, are lost to his family." Of course it is these men who pay for the others, and all take their chance alike when they join the club. But this does not make it any better for the particular sufferers; and several associations are now in existence whose object it is to meet this objection, and to secure a fund for the benefit of widows and children of deceased members. Some of these have been started by private individuals—as the Wiltshire Friendly Society, started by Mr. Sotheron Estcourt; the North Warwickshire, by Sir C. Adderley; and a society in Oxfordshire, by Captain Dashwood. Besides these, the Commissioners mention many other societies, in various parts of England, which carry out the same principle by grafting on to the ordinary business of benefit societies the system of deposits—*e.g.*, the Hampshire Friendly Society, whose rules about deposits are as follows:—

"1. The members receive back annually to their own private account or deposit, also called their Rest, whatever sums remain over from the common sick fund, after providing for the above objects, of sick, old age, and medical allowance; and they thus have all the advantages of a sharing club, without its risks.

"2. They may pay in to their own deposit or Rest any further sum they please, as into a savings-bank.

“ 3. They may withdraw any sum they please from their deposit, as from a savings-bank.

“ 4. Deposits receive interest, as in the Post Office Savings Bank.

“ 5. The balance of the deposit remaining at a member's death is paid to whomsoever he appoints.”

The mere fact that labouring men are able to belong to these clubs and at the same time to pay 3*d.* or 4*d.* a week to the village Clothing Club, shows that after all they cannot be in that condition of abject poverty which is too commonly supposed to be their lot. Several of the Commissioners appear to think that they would use these clubs even more than they do if it were not for the influence of the Poor Law. Many deserving and industrious labourers, says Mr. Stanhope, appear to be discouraged from making the effort to secure independence by self-help from the fear of losing their presumed right to relief from the poor-rate; and the guardians have no fixed rule by which to determine such cases. Sometimes they do consider the receipt of club allowances a bar to parochial relief, and sometimes they don't. Uniformity of custom should surely be established upon this point. Mr. Norman wonders that the poor ever do practise self-denial for the sake of a maintenance in old age, when the Poor Law will give it them without, and feels sure that “this has a direct tendency to weaken those feelings of self-reliance and independence among the labouring classes, on the development of which qualities the amelioration of that class must necessarily depend.” Mr. Portman (p. 165) writes to the same effect. But the problem which is raised by all three seems almost insoluble,

except by abolishing the system of out-door relief altogether. As for going into the "House," the poor have not grown indifferent to that humiliation, and would still make sacrifices to avert it. But we don't see how it is possible to disconnect parish relief and improvidence. To tell a man to starve in the streets because he has not had sufficient self-denial to provide for his old age is to defeat the very object of the Poor Law. To say you will relieve none but those who have been provident is simply to say that you will relieve none except those who don't want it. Our own experience goes to show that by a very large class of our English peasantry the shame of "coming on the parish," in any shape, is still felt. With the better education, better wages, and the better position altogether, which we trust are in store for them, this feeling may be trusted to increase. But we fear that for those who *are* capable of looking forward to parish relief with equanimity, and of making it an excuse for doing nothing to assist themselves, there is no help. As they make their bed they must lie upon it.

Several interesting experiments have been tried of late years in various parts of England, in the shape of Co-operative Farms, which are said to be a great success. Mr. Gurdon, of Assington Hall, in Suffolk, was the bold innovator who first conceived this idea; and finding ourselves recently within a few miles of his estate, we resolved to pay it a visit and judge of the system for ourselves. The farm was visited by Mr. Fraser in the course of his official investigations three years ago, and to him we are indebted for our first knowledge of the establishment. But the part of his

Report which relates to it has not been generally noticed, and even if it had been, it does not exhaust the subject. It must be premised that, as it is no easy matter to extort from any ordinary farmer a truthful account of his gains and losses, so in this case we found a similar indisposition to come to close quarters on the subject. And here, too, the reticence of the farmer is aggravated by the suspiciousness of the peasant; nor could we help being amused at the obvious struggle which was going on in the mind of our chief informant between his eagerness to represent the institution in as favourable a light as possible, and his reluctance to admit that the members made a great deal by it. However, the collation of different statements, and of hostile with friendly criticism, enabled us to make a pretty good guess at the financial merits of the system. But, before proceeding to discuss them, it will be better to explain to our readers exactly what the system is. It is wholly unconnected either with the small farm system or the allotment system. The members form an agricultural company, but the land is not divided among them so as to give each one a piece to himself, and, in fact, they have no more to do with its cultivation than the shareholders in a railway company have to do with its traffic. The profits are divided among them every year, and are supposed to be paid partly in money and partly in kind; but for all they have to do with the actual tillage of the land they might as well live a hundred miles off, or have their money in the Crystal Palace. Here at once is a highly important distinction between this method of improving the position of the labourer,

and all those which depend upon making him an actual cultivator on his own account.

This, then, is the first point to be borne in mind. The "co-operative farm is not intended to be a means of turning the labourer into a farmer; nor is it, except in point of money, any substitute for the allotment. The members continue what they ever were, ordinary day labourers, who work for the farmers of the parish at the ordinary weekly wages; as, indeed, they may work under their own manager on the same terms if they choose, and if out of employment they have a preferential claim upon him. But that is all. The only farmer in the case is the paid manager, and he is little, if at all, above the rank of an ordinary peasant. He receives twelve shillings a week, and he is assisted by two other officials, elected annually, who play the part of directors. The manager occupies what corresponds to the farmhouse upon the farm, and he and his colleagues are supposed to meet in council once a week, when questions of cropping, manuring, and what not, are, if necessary, put to the vote; but, practically, the whole working of the machine is in the hands of the one man, who stands in the place of the ordinary tenant-farmer. All the members are obliged to be agricultural labourers, except, as we were told, three—but, as Mr. Fraser was informed, six—these being, according to one account, a blacksmith, a wheelwright, and a miller; according to the other, a shoemaker and two carpenters besides; so that the little settlement, aided as it is by a co-operative store, is complete within itself. No member is allowed to live more than three miles from the parish, to accept parish relief, or

to retain his share if convicted of a felonious offence. All are obliged to belong to an approved benefit club, and the widow of a member may retain her husband's share during her own lifetime.

Assington is a pretty little retired village some distance from any railway, and lying in a thickly-wooded but rather flat country between Colchester and Sudbury. Mr. Gurdon, the representative of an old family and owner of nearly all the parish, died last November,* but he had not been resident for many years ; and, as Mr. Fraser very truly says, the success of his scheme is due to no artificial petting or coddling. He began it as long ago as 1830, and at the present time there are two farms on the property, cultivated by two different companies—one of 133 acres and 21 members, the other of 213 acres and 36 members. The latter farm, which is the one we saw most of, lies rather exposed, and a good deal of the land was till quite recently wood. As this company, which started in 1854 with only 70 acres, has been continually taking in new land, and as the expense of grubbing up the rough land has been considerable, we were not surprised to learn that the dividend at present was a small one. It was explained to us, moreover, that the roots which remained embedded in the soil made it impossible to use the steam-plough in fields which, from their size and flatness, were otherwise admirably adapted to it, and that it would not be till the stumps had rotted that the soil could be cultivated to the greatest advantage. But the land looked very clean, and the crops healthy, nor was there anything at all

* 1870.

of a poverty-stricken air about the whole place. The older farm, which is now fairly on its legs, is of course doing much better.

In each case the company was formed by means of a loan from the landlord, supplementing the subscriptions of the members. In each case the loan was the same—namely, £400 ; but in the first company the subscriptions were £3 apiece, and in the second £3 10s. Both the size of the farms and the number of members have gone on increasing till they have reached the figures above given. The value of each share in the larger farm is estimated by the sum which the holder would receive if the whole stock were sold off, and that is calculated at about £30. The shares on the smaller farm, as they yield a larger income, are worth nearly £50. When a labourer buys a share he has to pay not less than £5 down, and he surrenders his proportion of the profits till the balance is discharged. The rent paid is about 30s. an acre, which is something below the average rental of the neighbourhood. These societies started, on the whole, then, under favourable circumstances. It is true that the original capital in each case was rather below the amount which is thought desirable for farming in general ; but still it seems to have been about £7 an acre ; and no interest was charged them for the money advanced. In the next place, their expenses were and are limited entirely to the necessary expenses of cultivation. There is no establishment to keep up. There is no “black-coated man,” as the local phrase runs, who has a station to maintain or luxuries to purchase. The farmer or manager lives like a peasant, and nothing

goes on unproductive expenditure. Under these circumstances one is naturally very curious to know what the profits are, and how much each member really receives per annum. But this is just the point on which a good deal of secrecy is preserved. Every member gets a ton of coals, a certain number of sacks of potatoes, and one, if not two fat pigs every year. But how much money is divided between them we could not discover with exactness. The manager of the newer and larger farm, which has not yet paid its debts, gave us to understand that the money dividend from that farm was at present something inappreciable. But, on being pressed, he seemed willing to allow us to suppose that as soon as encumbrances were cleared off, and the land got into good condition, each member's receipts would go near to constitute a livelihood. We found, too, that the general opinion in the village among non-members was that a share in the old farm was worth, in money and goods, from £20 to £30 a year. These accounts, therefore, correspond pretty closely, and the inference would be that the system returns nearly three times the profits which are ordinarily assigned to agriculture. For instance, it is commonly supposed that a farmer ought to make three rents. The rent of the farm in question is £200, so that the gross receipts ought to amount to £600. But if twenty-one members receive £25 apiece, they divide no less a sum than £525, and the gross receipts ought to be £1,575, or nearly eight rents instead of three. Nor does the absence of carriages and hunters explain this difference; for these cannot affect the actual produce of the soil. Nor would farmers, generally speaking, who had only

130 acres, ever indulge in such luxuries if they had not private property besides. Now, by all we could learn, the land, though well enough cultivated, was not cultivated above the average standard, so as to yield a higher profit than ordinary; while, of course, many of the farmers would say it was rather below it than above it. On the whole, therefore, we should be disposed to think that the profits of the concern have been rather magnified than diminished by the admiring peasantry of the neighbourhood, and to doubt whether, after all, the benefits of the system do more than counteract its disadvantages. Its pecuniary benefits are not, perhaps, greatly in excess of what a judicious development of the allotment system is calculated to confer. It promotes integrity by the rule already mentioned, according to which a conviction before a magistrate entails forfeiture of the share. But the allotment system is capable of being worked in this way too. It keeps down the rates. But then, under the present system, that is only a modified boon to the ratepayers, who are assessed, not by parishes, but districts. And were it generally carried out so as to equalize the rates, it would tend to the extinction of a class of men who, with all their faults, fill a place in our rural economy which we should find it very difficult to fill up—namely, the tenant-farmers. The peasantry, of course, are enraptured with the system. But it was commenced at a time when probably the allotment system was unknown in this part of England; and they contend that the dislike of it entertained by the farmer proceeds wholly from the greater independence with which it imbues the labourer. Those who participate in its benefits

“won’t stand being swore at, like those who don’t,” said one of our informants, an intelligent young fellow, who doubtless had grounds for what he said. But it is probable that the main cause of their hostility lies much deeper than this—in the instinct, namely, of self-preservation, which tells them that any general adoption of the principle would be fatal to their own class. Our own conclusion, accordingly, is much the same as Mr. Fraser’s. Within moderate limits, on a scale which shall not interfere with the general system of the country, it may safely be commended. If it lacks some of the advantages of the allotment or the garden which the labourer tills with his own hands,* it may be true that it gives him a more permanent interest in the soil; while, if this be desirable, “it no doubt promotes the reappearance of small farms without the reappearance of small farmers.”

There is likewise at Assington a Co-operative Store, which is found to answer very well. It has at present about seventy members; and we did not find that any one spoke ill of this, except, of course, the small tradespeople in the place. The innkeeper complained that it interfered with his trade; so, doubtless, would the shopkeeper who is licensed to sell “tea, coffee, pepper, snuff, vinegar, and tobacco;” so, also, would the modern class of shops which have sprung up in villages of late, and sell clothes, boots, brushes, stationery, and so forth. But still, while vested interests should be respected—and the system should, if possible, be so gradually introduced as to avoid becoming the ruin of honest and industrious tradespeople—still

* *Vide supra*, p. 107.

there is no objection to these stores founded on any inherent evil tendency belonging to them; and if they can provide either better or cheaper, or better and cheaper, goods for the poor, than the ordinary village shop, the latter must be allowed to die out. Besides, there is one great evil connected with these shops, and that is the facilities which they offer for running into debt, to the great injury of both buyer and seller. One of the Commissioners, Mr. Fraser, has noticed this point, and one only; but it is an evil which lies at the root of much domestic misery, even when it leads to nothing worse. The peasant's wife runs in debt without the knowledge of her husband, as if she was a fashionable lady; and the scenes which ensue upon discovery may easily be imagined. Now, by these co-operative stores, which of course are not peculiar to Assington, non-members are not trusted at all, and members are only trusted to the value of their shares; so that it is placed beyond their power to mortgage their weekly wages. On the other hand, as the village shopkeeper is exactly in the same position as the West-end tradesman, obliged to make his good debts pay for his bad ones, the prices which he is obliged to charge are exorbitant, and the consequence is that the poor man's wages do not go half so far as they might easily be made to go under a better system. Besides the actual profit on the business, the money dividend is no inconsiderable addition to the poor man's income. On the whole, therefore, we believe that the extension of co-operative stores throughout the rural districts cannot be too highly recommended.

Mr. Stanhope alone mentions the occurrence of

“strikes” among the agricultural labourers. One that he heard of was in Lincolnshire, for the purpose of obtaining a reduction in the hours of labour on account of the long distance which men had to walk to and fro. This was a failure. The other was in Kent, which achieved a temporary success, and may be described in Mr. Stanhope’s own words :—

“In May, 1866, the Kent Agricultural Labourers’ Protection Association was formed in order ‘to organize the agricultural labourers with the view to the amelioration of their social condition and moral elevation, and to endeavour to mitigate the evils of their serfdom.’ At that time labour was scarce, and the first effort of the association was directed to obtaining an increase of wages; and, in fact, it was mainly by means of this organization that a general rise was shortly afterwards effected. As labour again became more abundant, the employers obtained more control over their men, and the result has been that the association has ceased to have any influence whatever. It is difficult to ascertain what were regarded by it as the principal steps in the amelioration of their condition. But, curiously enough, the one thing especially desired for them by every one who takes an interest in them—that is, the improvement of their cottages—was not an object of this association, because they all felt that improved cottages enabled the employer to obtain more control over his men.”

To these instances may be added one that took place in Leicestershire some five or six years ago, when the men on strike got seven shillings a week from their club for a considerable time, and used to be seen hang-

ing about the fields with their hands in their pockets, or sitting upon gates smoking, in the enjoyment of a delicious idleness. How it ended I have forgotten, but the materials for such combinations do not as yet exist in the rural districts, where labour by itself cannot cope successfully with capital. [Eight years afterwards the attempt was made—with what success has been already stated.]

CHAPTER XIII.

SUMMARY.

1870.

ON a general retrospect of the ground we have now travelled over, the conclusion seems to be that the condition of the agricultural labourer is slowly but surely on the rise.* If we look first to the conditions under which his labour is performed, we see that during the last few years the public gang system has received its death-blow, and that women have been gradually emancipating themselves from the more injurious and debasing kinds of work, while an Act of Parliament has been passed which will have the effect, in the long run, of restoring the homes of the peasantry to the villages in which they are employed. We see, too, that the nation has been awakened to a sense of its duties towards the children of the country as well as towards the children of the town, and that protective legislation will not long be wanted where the necessity for it can be shown to exist, though it is gratifying to learn that the children stand in much less need of it than it has recently been the fashion to suppose. The

* This prophecy, it is needless to say, has been abundantly confirmed.
—T. E. K., 1887.

greatest limitations upon juvenile labour which any of the Commissioners recommend are comparatively slight; one of the ablest of them recommends the least of all; and the general impression seems to be, that were it not for the sake of education, the labour of young boys might safely be left to itself. The labour of girls is different. On this subject the preponderance of opinion seems to be, that they should be kept from work till sixteen years of age. For reasons already given I consider this age a mistake. On the score of morality it is too young. On the score of health and education it is unnecessarily old.

Wages.—On the subject of wages it is more difficult to ascertain the exact truth than in any other branch of the inquiry. The practice of payment in kind, with all its perplexing ramifications, opposes an obstacle to the inquirer which it is impossible to overcome without a patient and minute investigation of the system in all its phases—a task, it is needless to add, which the constant work of several years would be no more than sufficient to execute. But one or two facts which it seems impossible to dispute evolve themselves out of all this entanglement. There is a large class of labourers who, including the earnings of their families, are receiving, in cash and kind, upwards of £100 a year.* There is a very large class who are receiving from £70 to £80. Secondly, in all parts of England the peasantry have money in the savings-banks. Thirdly, their personal appearance is not that of half-starved, down-trodden men. One is told this is all on the surface, and that though a life in the open air gives them a

* Cf. cap. I.

healthy look, they succumb to the first serious illness. But is this so? I greatly doubt it. I have seen numerous cases of ordinary day labourers recovering from very serious illness. Fourthly, there is a better test than all—their longevity. But if we have some reason for suspecting that the present remuneration of the agricultural labourer has been underrated, we have likewise ground to hope that his future remuneration is likely to be much higher. The large majority of competent witnesses appear to be of opinion that as the extension of scientific agriculture, combined with the use of machinery, extorts a larger produce from the soil, the labourer will, by a natural law, get his share of it in the form of increased wages. I would here call particular attention to the evidence given by Mr. Tremenhoe before the Enclosure Committee last year, and to Mr. Denton's Letters on Agricultural Labour which appeared originally in the *Daily News*. The first thinks that under a higher state of cultivation the land will support many more labourers.* The second contends that nothing is required to insure them higher wages but to make them better workmen;† and to this end he recommends that after a course of that more practical instruction in the schoolroom which has been already referred to (p. 82), each boy, on going to farm work, should be placed under some special instructor, such as the shepherd, the carter, or the thatcher, and serve a term of apprenticeship to some particular department of labour. A system of examination and prizes might be instituted, he thinks, to

* Cf. p. 146.

† They have got worse and worse. See chapter III.

stimulate both master and pupil; and he makes no doubt that the result of it would soon be seen in the higher wages which farmers would gladly pay in return for the savings they would effect by the employment of skilled labour.*

Cottages.—On the subject of cottages it seems only necessary to add that the Union Chargeability Bill has destroyed the principal motive which prompted the village ratepayer to destroy them; and that it seems to be admitted that the cottage accommodation of the poor, partly, perhaps, owing to this cause, partly to the Report of Dr. Hunter, has greatly improved throughout the country during the last few years. (*Vide* evidence before the Enclosure Committee, 1025—1027.) Allotments and cottage gardens, though not yet everywhere provided, are almost everywhere acknowledged to be necessary; while the legislation promised to us on the subject of future “Enclosures,” which with proper reservations will be highly beneficial in itself, is pretty sure at the same time to encourage the extension of the system by private individuals. [All these expectations have now been more than realized.—1887.]

Education.—The education of the agricultural labourer is a question which has not yet run itself entirely clear of all perplexities, as it still seems a moot point among persons interested in the subject whether we are to look to higher wages as a condition of better education, or to better education as a condition of higher wages. According to the one view we have no right to expect the agricultural labourer to be an exception to general rules. Our physical necessities have a primary claim

* Cf. pp. 73-76.

upon us, and it is not until these are satisfied that higher wants begin even to be felt. The next stage is the desire of decency and comfort; and after this comes the craving for mental cultivation. According to others it is only education which can produce the desire for education, and it must be forced upon the agricultural labourer, whether he wishes it or not. The common-sense view of the question lies, probably, between the two. The peasant appreciates education for his children as a means of bettering their condition even now. And if it can be brought home to him, as it might be by Mr. Denton's plan, that a different education would better their condition still more, he would not shrink from the cost of it. By taking advantage of this feeling the next generation might be brought to value it for its own sake. But there is little necessity to dwell upon this branch of the subject in the present chapter; for whatever else may be said of the condition of the English labourer, it cannot at all events be denied that his educational prospects are brightening, and that, if he has anything to fear on this head, it is rather from excess of zeal than from defect. [This expectation also has been completely realized. 1887.] The preponderating opinion at present is, that his children should be sent to school regularly up to ten years of age, and intermittently up to twelve or thirteen.

Hiring.—The existing systems of hiring seem productive of great dissatisfaction, but hitherto all attempts at substitutes have been failures. The statute fair seems to be on the decline. But there is no reason to suppose that as yet it is moribund; and it is worth consideration whether it is not susceptible of being brought

under humanizing influences, and converted into a harmless festival, seeing that the labouring classes do not certainly have too many holidays in their lives. The Register Office * for agricultural labourers has not been found to answer; and though, in some parts of England, servants are hired through the medium of newspaper advertisements, the system does not seem likely to become general. Yearly hiring can, of course, be managed without the *statuté* fair. But the objection to it is that it encourages constant change, and creates a vagrant population. A man hired by the week cannot change every week, and so very often does not change at all. But the man hired for a year feels himself bound, somehow or other, to change at the end of it. The disadvantages of the weekly system are that the labourers are less certain of employment, and always liable to be thrown out of their incomes by sickness. This last objection must always, to some extent, remain in force. But the former need not, for the best workman will always be secure against the caprice or stinginess of the farmer; and if a classification could be organized, by which inferior ones got less wages, they might feel almost equally safe.

The Public House.—Of all the evils with which the agricultural labourer is called on to contend, the public-house is not only the worst, but infinitely the most difficult to deal with; a powerful trading interest is enlisted in support of it; a powerful political party is jealous of the local influences by which alone it can be moderated; while a third would be sure to use all its influence against that substitute, without which reforms would

* "The schoolmaster" system (*vide* page 184) might, perhaps, be worth a further trial.

be impossible. The country brewers, in the first place; the enemies of local self-government, and especially of aristocratic or clerical self-government, in the second; and those who wage a general war against all alcoholic drink, in the third place, would probably join together against the only feasible plan for the removal of this nuisance. Free beer-sellers, to be licensed by the local magistrates, and effectually prevented from allowing it to be drunk on the premises, would interpose between the cottager and the temptations of the public-house; while unrestricted competition would relieve from the necessity of dosing himself with poisoned beer. But they would be doing for one indulgence very much what the Contagious Diseases Act has done for another. They would be undermining a lucrative monopoly. And they would bring additional influence into the hands of a class whose power it is thought desirable in some quarters rather to curtail than to augment.

It is, however, to be remembered at the same time, that the vice of drinking, which we are apt to flatter ourselves survives only among the poorer classes of society, is not yet extinct among the upper. Among many of the outward conformers to a better creed the pagan worship still lingers. The rites are different, but the idol is the same. And here we would quote a curious testimony to the truth of this opinion from the pen of a great novelist, whose acquaintance with English society will not be disputed, which I met with after writing the above.

“And then there are the shades of black which come from conviviality,—which we may call table

blackness,—as to which there is an opinion constantly disseminated by the moral newspapers of the day, that there has come to be altogether an end of any such blackness among sheep who are gentlemen. To make up for this, indeed, there has been expressed by the piquant newspapers of the day an opinion that ladies are taking up the game which gentlemen no longer care to play. It may be doubted whether either expression has in it much of truth. We do not see ladies drunk, certainly, and we do not see gentlemen tumbling about as they used to do, because their fashion of drinking is not that of their grandfathers. But the love of wine has not gone out from among men; and men now are as prone as ever to indulge their loves. Our black sheep was very fond of wine,—and also of brandy, though he was wolf enough to hide his taste when occasion required it.”—(Mr. A. Trollope, *Macmillan's Magazine* for June.)

There is no doubt that, although habitual intemperance is now a vice rather for derision than imitation, and that to get drunk before women would be visited with social ostracism, yet that among men an occasional transgression is still regarded as a joke, and that as we descend in the scale of society we shall find it less occasional. The influence of this fact upon the working class is seen far and wide; and the example in a country neighbourhood of a single farmer or gentleman who is occasionally seen in what Baron Bradwardine calls the “predicament of intoxication,” to say nothing of the many others who show, by their jests upon the failing, that they regard it with a lenient eye, will neutralize all the efforts of those who exert themselves to reclaim the labourer to sobriety. In

fact, the whole tone of society at large must change on this subject before any very great improvement can be looked for. At present there is a sort of tacit understanding, an ingenuous hypocrisy, as it were, among men of the world in relation to this particular infirmity which permeates the whole community, opposing that kind of yielding resistance to the rebukes of the moralist which is the most difficult of all to be overcome.

Game.—Among the peculiar sources of demoralization to which the English peasant is exposed, the preservation of game is often cited as the worst. This is a very great mistake. Nobody knows better than the poacher the real character of game. If his apologists like to shelter him behind a wholly mistaken conception of it, of course he will avail himself of their kindness. But as for supposing that the poacher himself is led away by the delusion that pheasants are wild animals in which nobody has any right of property, it is one of those fond inventions which only personal acquaintance with a single member of the profession is required to dispel. Game is no more a temptation to dishonesty than other luxuries; and whatever is to be said against the Game Laws is to be said against them rather as a farmer's grievance than a labourer's.

Benefit Societies.—The chief evils which vitiate a certain class of Benefit Societies are, first, the unrestricted power which they enjoy of squandering the club funds at public-houses; secondly, the facilities which the younger members possess for repudiating their obligations to the elder; and thirdly, the absence of any machinery by which the benefit of a man's savings may be secured to his widow and children, should he

die without having had any occasion to draw upon the club funds. We are told, however, that the class of societies which are chiefly affected by these evils are gradually on the wane; that the peasantry themselves are fully alive to the disadvantages of them; and that leading men in various counties are exerting themselves either to extend or to introduce a better system. In regard to this subject, we are sometimes encountered by the assertion that the agricultural labourer will never derive all the advantages which he might derive from such institutions as long as he has the parish to fall back upon. That this prospect may weaken his motive for self-denial is not to be disputed; but it seems impossible to banish it. The receipt even of out-door relief is not, upon the whole, a boon to which the poor look forward with complacency. Seclusion in the "Bastile" itself they contemplate with horror. In the next generation these feelings, we may hope will be still stronger than they are now; and to these we must trust for counteracting the bad effects of a system which, wholly to dispense with, would be almost to abolish the Poor Law.

Co-operative Farming.—A novelty which some people recommend with great confidence as a mode of mending the condition of the labourer is the plan which has been described in operation on Mr. Gurdon's estate in Suffolk—the plan of co-operative farming. The system has much to recommend it. It betters the condition of the labourer, and gives him an interest in the land. And as it is capable of being conducted on a large scale, it is free from some of the objections which attach to small farms. But though it gives the peasantry an interest in the soil, it does not give them that *kind* of interest

which it is most desirable to encourage—the interest inspired by the allotment or the garden which they cultivate with their own hands. And secondly, one of the main points on which its prosperity is represented as depending, avoidance, namely, of all the expenses which are incidental to the position of an ordinary tenant-farmer, by the employment of a paid manager at twelve shillings a week, means, of course, the supercession of a very valuable element in our rural system by one which, for every other purpose than that, is confessedly inferior. No such objections, however, attach to the establishment of co-operative stores, which seem an unmitigated benefit to country villages, and cannot, in our opinion, be too widely spread throughout the kingdom.

Allotments.—The three points of controversy in connection with allotments are: whether the letting of them should be entrusted by statute to parish authorities; whether these should be empowered to seize land for the purpose when the owners are not willing to let it; and whether the occupiers should be placed under the conditions of the Agricultural Holdings Act. My own inclination is to answer all three questions in the negative (1887).

Small Farms.—The question of small farms *versus* large seems to turn on three considerations; namely, which is the better for the labourer, which is the better for the land, and which is the better for the interests of the nation at large. And these three questions do not necessarily run into each other, as it is conceivable that some sacrifice of material produce might be worth making for the sake of ulterior advantages.* As regards

* Cf. cap. VII. 164, 5.

the individual, it is clear that what he cannot do as a small proprietor he will not be able to do as a small farmer. Now, as to the prosperity of even small proprietors, the evidence collected by the Commission of 1867, is very unsatisfactory,* and we might, therefore, be justified in reasoning *à fortiori* against that of small farmers. But, independently of this argument, there is abundance of evidence to show that the advantages of small farming and large are at least evenly balanced; that much depends upon the character of the population, the construction of society, the existence of rival industries, and finally, on the nature of the soil, by which also must be determined their comparative effects upon the land. If, with these conditions before us, we ask ourselves which of the two is, *on the whole*, the better suited to England, we shall find the balance incline perceptibly in favour of our present system. We say on the whole, because we readily admit that it is desirable to keep in hand a certain proportion of small farms to serve particular purposes. But all things considered—the future as well as the present of agricultural labour, the soil and climate† of England, the existence of our immense commercial industry—the conclusion seems to stand out quite clearly that a general exchange of large farms for small would not, in the long run, either improve the condition of the peasantry or increase the produce of our agriculture. Is there any other reason, then, which should weigh with us in favour of a general redistribution of farms and properties? On the con-

* The evidence in the Duke of Richmond's Reports, 1880, is all against it.

† Medium character of the one, variable character of the other.

trary, the evidence on non-material grounds is all against it. We might sacrifice our rural system for the sake of small farming, were this proved to be of paramount importance. But to introduce small farming for the sake of destroying our rural system would seem to be simple infatuation, except on political grounds. The conclusion is, then, that other considerations being assumed to be equal, social considerations turn the scale in favour of our own method as a general national principle.

Having thus briefly recapitulated the several topics on which I have tried to throw some light in the foregoing chapters, I have only to repeat that I lay no claim to any merit beyond that of bringing within a narrow compass the chief questions which arise out of the condition of the agricultural labourer, and of calling attention to the salient points in each. I have stated a certain number of conclusions to which a great mass of evidence appears to tend ; but I have always done my best to give their full weight to all modifying considerations. I know of no question, if we except religious ones, which requires to be approached with a mind so attuned to impartiality as this one of the agricultural labourer. On the one hand is his life of silent, secluded, uncomplaining toil, always suggestive of the *qui laborat orat*; his undeniable privations, his honesty, his simplicity, his helplessness, so unlike the self-assertion and pugnacity of the city artisan ; all prepossessing us in his favour, all imbuing us with the idea that a system which does not do more for him must be radically indefensible.* On the other hand we see in him but

* Since this was written much of his primitive simplicity has departed from him, and a great deal more has been done for him.—T. E. K., 1887.

one link in a great social chain which has endured for centuries, the origin of which was noble and generous, and the continuation of which has been secured from age to age by the accumulative force of kindly traditions and immemorial sympathies. If we fail to give its full value to every reflection which is suggested by either side of the shield we shall infallibly draw wrong conclusions; and it is the certainty of this which should make us so cautious of dogmatizing. But I am happy in believing that the more the question is studied, the more it will be seen that the highest interests of the landlord, the tenant, and the labourer harmonize with each other, and that in a logical development of, rather than a total departure from, the ancient social system of England, lies our best hope for the future.

It seemed to me unnecessary to re-write the above chapter, though in some respects it has ceased to be applicable to the present condition of the labourer. His fortunes have improved so greatly within the last few years, that much as he may deserve our sympathy and assistance, he no longer stands in need of our compassion. But many of his habits and customs, his temptations and his difficulties, still remain the same; nor does the public know more of them now, if I can trust my own observation, than it knew when the book was first written. I am in hopes, therefore, that even those parts of it which, to such as have studied the question, shall seem out of date, may still be useful to others who are comparatively unacquainted with it; and help them to judge for themselves during the important agrarian discussions of which we are now upon the threshold.

APPENDIX I.

WAGES.

The following Tables of Wages were too late for the body of the book, but are too instructive to be omitted.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

OXFORDSHIRE (ON THE BORDERS OF BERKSHIRE).

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coals, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Age. Shepherds:— G. B. 45	15s.	Extra lambs reared above the number of ewes, 1s. per head = 50s.	£2 10s. harvest wages.	Cottage and garden, rent free.	£ s. d. 55 19 7	G. B. is a very hard-working man, he will be at his sheepfold when corn cutting is in progress at 4 o'clock in the morning, and, having finished his shepherd's work, is ready to start fagging by 9 or 10 o'clock, and earn 5s. or 10s. a day extra.

OXFORDSHIRE (ON THE BORDERS OF BERKSHIRE)—Continued.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coals, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Age- Shepherds :—					£ s. d.	
H. L. 33	16s.	Shearing, 4s. per score ; taking sheep to market, 6d.	£6 harvest wages.	Cottage and garden, rent free.	58 13 1½	H. L. is a specialist, and the fact that his cot- tage is one mile from any hard road, entitles him to 1s. per week extra.
Carters :—						
T. H. 55	15s.	Drilling or broad casting seed, 1s. ; carting corn to mar- ket, 6d. ; rear- ing foals, 10s. ; grass mowing with machine, 1s.	£4 2s.	Cottage and garden, rent free.	48 0 1½	
A. E. 55	15s.		£5 1s.	Cottage and garden, rent free.	48 14 9½	
R. P. 35	15s.		£4 2s.	Cottage and garden, rent free.	43 14 3	
Day Labourers:						
C. B. 40	14s. for ¼ year 13s. for ½ year	Hoing, cutting corn, root har- vest, ditch- ing, manure	Can earn by piece work, cutting corn from 5s. to	Pay rent for cottages, at 1s. to 2s. 6d. per week ;	51 12 5 57 18 2	No beer given ; all ex- tra work, such as stack- ing hay, 1d. each hour extra ; overtime paid
W. H. 40	14s. for ¼ year 13s. for ½ year					

OXFORDSHIRE (ON THE BORDERS OF BERKSHIRE)—Continued.

R. S.	Age. 65	14s. for $\frac{1}{2}$ year 12s. for $\frac{3}{4}$ year	spreading, potato lifting	10s. a day ; lifting potato es, about 5s. a day ; hoe- ing, 2s. 6d. to 4s. a day.	mostly with small gardens attached ; rates are paid for them.	£ s. d. 46 3 0	for at 3d. + 1d. = 4d. per hour. Stacking corn is paid for at 4d. per hour.
C. C.	70	14s. for $\frac{1}{2}$ year 12s. for $\frac{3}{4}$ year		46 11 4 $\frac{1}{2}$			
Women ...		5s. 6d.	Only married women are employed, or widows, and these must be free from young children.	Can earn, cutting corn, from 3s. to 5s. a day.	About	15 0 0	Raking after cart, $\frac{1}{2}$ d. each hour extra ; over- time paid at the rate of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per hour.
Boys :—		No piecework.					
	13	3s.	£1 } Wages are paid at Old Mi- chaelmas the end of the yearly agree- ment.	Extra instead of beer, 13s.	9 9 0	25 7 0	
	15	5s.		£2 } Extra instead of beer, 13s.	15 13 0		
	17	8s.		£3 } Extra instead of beer, 31s.	25 7 0		
	20	10s.		£4 } Extra instead of beer, 31s.	31 11 0		

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

EAST SUSSEX.

	By the Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Effect of the Education Act.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	16s.	Lambing extra, £1	£1 15s.	Cottage and garden, worth 1s. 6d. a week, and perhaps occasional fuel.	£44 7s.	The result of the present process of education is, in too many cases, that they are rendered unfit for agricultural work. Many boys are unreasonably prevented from doing a little farm work, though, in the hop-growing districts, they are excused, as a matter of course, during the actual "picking."	The average amount which men, women, or boys can earn in a hop-growing district must vary in proportion to the acreage of land under hop cultivation, and the amount of hops produced per acre.
Carter ...	17s.	...	...	Extra, in lieu of pork, 30s., and cottage and garden at 1s. 6d. per week.	£45 14s.
Day Labourer	12s.	From 3s. to 6s. a day; pork extra.	...	Cottage and garden at 1s. 6d. per week.	£40 4s.		
Women ...	From 5s. to 6s., £2 10s.	£4.	...	Day work for year :— = about £2 10s.	£6 10s.		
Boys (when working)*	From 4s. to 6s.	...	...	Hop-picking (say), £2 10s. Hop-tying (say), £1 10s.	

* This work is necessarily precarious.

APPENDIX II.

GENERAL CONDITION OF LABOURER.

THE following remarks by an old East Anglian clergyman are very interesting :—

I do not think that the Education Acts have as yet made much impression on the more retired rural parishes, excepting that they now enable the young men to get away more readily from their own parishes into situations on the railway and in the police force with a sufficient knowledge of reading and writing to qualify them for the lower grades.

As regards *Milk*, after an experience of forty years of a retired country clergymen, I think it is much more easily procurable now than it used to be in the early part of my time in the country. Here, *e.g.*, it is fetched by the children from small “occupations” or “farms” which allow the keeping of a cow or two.

The farmers, the larger ones, are giving up keeping cows, owing to their wives’ difficulty in finding girls who will undertake dairywork. Having heard from old people of a former generation of the positive hardships endured by dairy servants in the earlier half of this century, I cannot be surprised.

Persons—now middle-aged farmers—used to sell to *their own people skimmed milk* (not much good to the in-

fants—or the pigs?) at four pints a penny. Many that I knew in early days gave all their spare milk to the pigs, and did not *sell* to the *poor*.

I do not see milk tins for transit to the towns at the stations here on Waveney Valley Line, excepting possibly at Beccles. Large supplies are thrown into Norwich from dairy farms at no great distance, as within two and four miles; indeed, from dairy *farms* long before there were dairy *firms* and companies.

Speaking for the years about the time of the Crimean War (1854, and later), I know that agricultural labourers were receiving at Bedingham (men with wives and many little children), only 8s. a week; and possibly at that very time the farmers were making, if war time, 80s. a quarter for wheat, and certainly 60s. a quarter in time of peace. Retribution has fallen upon them.

In matters of *Food* and *Dress*, the condition of the labourer is far better than it used to be.

The butchers' carts now stop regularly at the cottage doors, *once a week at least*, whereas formerly *butcher's* meat was an almost unheard-of luxury. Pork was then the only accessible meat; and I doubt whether much pork is eaten now by the cottagers. It's not a matter I should like to inquire curiously about.

As regards *Dress*, it is not merely that owing to the improvements in manufacture and the cheapening of raw material, they can get cheaper clothes; but they are of better material, better cut, better put on, and in better taste, and, with the exception of a gay feather or topknot or colour, the dress is *quieter* and more genteel.

APPENDIX III.

EDUCATION.

THE reader may be interested in seeing the views on the education of the peasantry expressed by the Assistant Commissioners of 1867-9. I have transferred the following passage from the first edition of the book :—

With regard to the employment of boy labour, the chief or only question is how to reconcile the claims of education with the pressure of agricultural demands, and with the necessity of an early initiation into all the mysteries of their craft. The whole subject presents four questions for solution. First, up to what age, if any, children may be legitimately debarred from field work, and kept to school altogether? Secondly, to what extent they can be expected to attend school afterwards? Thirdly, shall attendance, either before or after the period aforesaid, be compulsory? Fourthly, if compulsory, how shall it be enforced? Upon the first point there seems a general concurrence of opinion among Her Majesty's Commissioners. Mr. Tremenheere alone, whose scheme we shall discuss presently, is against all limitations upon labour for any purpose whatsoever. The rest all think that ten years of age is a reasonable limit to fix within which children shall be kept away from farm work. It seems to have struck all the Commissioners that this was a question which must be finally settled by a compromise—a compromise in which the interests of the farmer, the parents, and the child must all be more

or less consulted. Juvenile labour is exceedingly valuable to the farmer; but under ten years of age it is not indispensable. The earnings of the children are extremely useful to the parents; but children under ten frequently do no more than pay for the extra food and clothes which they require when at work. Education is very valuable to the children; but by the time they are ten years of age they may have learned as much as it is reasonable or practical to expect. This, upon the whole, seems to be the gist of the Reports on this question. It is thought that every child attending school two hundred days in the year, from five to ten years of age, would come up to Standard Five of the Revised Code, which exacts an adequate knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. And then comes the second of the four questions—How are we to provide against their forgetting all they have learned, which it is feared they will do if at ten years old their education is finally concluded?

For the continued education of boys after they have once been hired three plans have been suggested—namely, half-days, alternate whole days, or a certain amount of attendance during the six months preceding each successive hiring;* the last of course taking for granted that boys are only required continuously for six months out of the twelve. It will probably turn out that each of these methods will have its own particular fitness for particular localities. Where the boys live a long way from their work the first plan is impracticable. Where the population is thin and every pair of hands is wanted at particular seasons both the first and second are impracticable. Where the work of children is wanted through the whole year the last is impracticable. But if there is no district which combines all these adverse circumstances in itself, there is none, we should hope,

* Cf. p. 95.

that may not avail itself of one or other of the plans proposed. We ourselves should be inclined to think that the third-mentioned plan will be found the most generally useful, though it must be made to work with great elasticity. Mr. Henley suggests eighty-eight attendances during the six months preceding any regular engagement* as what might be safely exacted. But one of the clergy in his district thought that even an every-day attendance was not too much to require. The season of the year in which boys are most in request varies in different places; but it seems to be generally admitted that everywhere there is *some* season in which boys up to twelve or thirteen could continue to get a little schooling after they had begun work. Night schools are admitted to be very useful supplements, but they are not so well fitted for children as for adults, the former being too tired and sleepy after their day's work to profit by them. This, we say, is the general conclusion to be collected from the Reports of the Commissioners. But it is not to be supposed that there is not a strong counter-current of evidence. Competent witnesses think that after boys have once been sent to field work they would become unmanageable in the school; and also that there would be considerable difficulty in dovetailing them into the classes. And at p. 19 of the second Report of Mr. Stanhope is to be found a very forcible statement of the reasons which make it unlikely that night schools should ever be very serviceable to children who have left the day school.

On the third point, the necessity for compulsion, the Commissioners express themselves with less decision. But then we must remember that it was not their primary business to inquire into the subject of education. Nor is it the primary business of the present writer. We can

* Cf. p. 95.

only consider the compulsory principle in connection with the general question of the agricultural labourer, and the particular recommendations contained in this Report. In the abstract it is only one form out of many in which "paternal government" exhibits itself. As for comparing it with compulsory vaccination, or with the legal obligation of a father to support his child, the argument can impose on no one who is content with the light of common sense. Society has always drawn a marked line of demarcation between what is directly injurious to life and property and what is only indirectly so. Ignorance may lead to crime, and so may extravagance and dissipation; but ignorance is not crime, any more than either of these. Neglect of vaccination or refusal to support a child is directly injurious to life, and is rightly punished as criminal. But if we punished everything which had only a tendency to be so the world would be simply uninhabitable.

But this much does seem certain, that if you debar young children from going to work without making them go to school they are pretty sure to get into mischief. It may be said, of course, that if it was a mere question between idling about the village and going to school all parents would send their children to school. And where the parents of the child are intelligent and thrifty, and appreciate education, there might be no difficulty. But though a great many of our agricultural poor correspond to this description, a great many do not, and, considering the interference of the law as an unmitigated act of oppression, would endeavour to discredit it by every means in their power. And there are many ways in which a child of nine years old in a country village can earn a few pence besides regular farm work. By running errands, by opening gates, by mushrooming, by acorning, by stick-picking, to say nothing of more questionable pursuits, to

which, under the circumstances supposed, the temptation would be unusually strong, a sharp boy of that age can earn some considerable addition to the family fund. Apples, gooseberries, and plums still grow in unprotected situations; hens still lay their eggs where the prowling urchin has a much better chance of getting hold of them than the rightful owner; while the pig-tub and the wood-house are always at hand to stimulate his youthful energies.

On the supposition, therefore, that the recommendation of the Commissioners with regard to the limitation of juvenile labour is adopted, it seems desirable that attendance at school should be made compulsory at least up to ten years of age. And then we come to the fourth question—On whom is the responsibility to rest, the employer or the employed, the farmer or the labourer? We are well aware of the great difficulty in which this part of the question is involved. Mr. Tremenheere, in his separate Report, adopted one view, and Mr. Forster, in his Education Bill, another. But, before comparing them together, it may be convenient to consider Mr. Tremenheere's particular proposal.

We have stated that, in the opinion of the Commissioners, children under *eleven* years of age should be exempted from some kinds of farm work (*e.g.*, stable work), and children under ten from all. It is on this latter point that Mr. Tremenheere joins issue with his colleagues. He contends, first of all, that the earnings of children under ten are often indispensable to the parents, while in many of the most important agricultural counties there is an "imperious demand" for their labour. He denies that their earnings are more than absorbed by the extra food which they require, and the extra wear and tear of clothes which ensue when they are at work;* and he scorns the notion that, with

* Cf. p. 18.

the exception of horse work, young children are put to any kind of agricultural labour which is physically injurious to them. He draws a very clear distinction between the farm and the factory. "In a factory or a workshop a child is liable to work in a close and heated atmosphere; and when working in connection with machinery its attention is ever on the stretch, and its movements are often rapid and continuous for various periods of time together. The effect of such a mode of employment upon the very young was shown to be physically injurious to them, and therefore to justify legislative measures for their protection. But it has been seen that employment in the healthy occupations of agriculture cannot be shown to be attended with physical injury, even to the very young, with the exception which has been pointed out above, and for which the interposition of the Legislature has been suggested.

"Another marked difference, also, between employment in a factory or workshop and employment in agriculture consists in the fact that, when once a child begins to be of use in earning wages in manufacturing employment, it is liable to be so employed continuously. From the effects, therefore, of such continuous occupation at too early an age the factory legislation very properly interposes to shield the child entirely until the age of eight years, and then only permits it for the half of every day, or for every alternate day. But the necessities of agricultural employment do not demand the continuous employment of children below the age of eight, or even, except in the particular cases which have been noticed above as justifying legislation on their behalf, below the age of ten or eleven years; and the periods of demand for the labour of very young children are separated from each other by others when there is no demand for it, and which, consequently, are to them periods of entire rest."

Appendix.

There being, therefore, such very strong grounds, on the score both of domestic economy and agricultural requirements, for permitting the use of juvenile labour below a certain age, and no adequate grounds on the score of health for prohibiting it, is there any *other* reason to justify the intervention of the Legislature? Such a reason, of course, is to be found in the necessity of insuring a sufficiency of education to the children of the poor. And here we are confronted by Mr. Tremenheere with his strong point. You may, he says, in fact, either forbid the child to go to work, or compel him to go to school; but you cannot *do both*. You cannot deprive the father of his child's earnings with one hand while you add to his expenses with the other. There seems great common sense in this view, it must be admitted. And certainly, if we have to choose between relief from farm work without schooling, and schooling without relief from farm work, for the reasons we have already assigned, if for no other, we should unhesitatingly prefer the latter. In the belief that these are the two alternatives which we *shall* have to choose between, Mr. Tremenheere has devised a scheme for carrying out the last-mentioned one, which, if a little intricate at first sight, would not, we think, be found so in practice.

There is to be no limitation upon labour at all. But every child, until it attains the age of twelve years, must complete 160 school attendances in every year, beginning from the time when its first period of labour expires—a period of labour to be defined to be seventy-two days in the year, either continuous or intermittent. To complete the above number of attendances would take four months. If any child after the age of nine can pass an examination in the Fourth Standard of the Revised Code the number of attendances required will be reduced to sixty, which will occupy only six weeks; and it is proposed

that night-school attendances may reckon among them. "It is acknowledged on all hands that when once a child has been able to satisfy the requirements of the Fourth Standard it does not readily forget what it has learned, and that a moderate amount of after application is sufficient to keep up and extend it." This is an important admission. Thirdly, Mr. Tremenheere would allow the obligation of further school attendance to drop altogether in the case of every child who, at eleven years old, could pass in Standard Five.

This plan has the obvious advantage of reconciling, to an appreciable extent, the claims of education with the necessities of agriculture, and also of making farm work a direct stimulus to school work. And these—especially the latter—are most important points gained. The only doubt is, whether four months' schooling in the year would be enough to give any chance to proposals two and three of ever coming into play. Of all the children who got eight months' schooling between seven and nine years of age how many would be able, at the end of it, to write from dictation, or to do a sum in compound division? It is perhaps worth notice, also, that a child who was nine years old in March would have a manifest advantage over one whose birthday happened in November. For the latter would have to apply for his certificate immediately after a period of field work, and the former after a period of school work. We cannot quite follow Mr. Tremenheere in his estimate of the pecuniary results of this system (108-112). But, without his assistance, it is easy to see that if a child earns 1s. 6d. a week for six months; which comes to £1 19s., the deduction of 2d. a week for four months will be no very monstrous oppression. The fact is, that the processes of earning and learning must for a time go on together. The first, without the second, is injurious to the child;

the second, without the first, is intolerable to the parents.

The penalty of evading the law Mr. Tremenhcere proposes to distribute between parents and employers. When the child has either passed in the Fourth Standard, or has begun to get "permanent" employment—that is, employment extending through six months out of the twelve—the employer is to become liable; previously to those events the penalty would fall upon the parent. Mr. Tremenhcere thinks that it would be too much to demand of the former that he should make himself acquainted with the history of every young child to whom he gives a chance job; whereas, when he takes a boy into regular work, he is naturally the proper person to be held responsible. And this point carries us direct to Mr. Forster's Bill. As that stands at present, the adoption of the compulsory system is left to the discretion of the local School Boards, who may, if they like, enact bye-laws to give effect to it; though even then, on an address being presented to Her Majesty in deprecation of such bye-laws, they are liable to be abrogated. The powers conferred upon the Board enable it to enforce the attendance at school of all children between five and twelve years of age; to determine how many attendances shall be sufficient; to accept or reject excuses for non-attendance; to pay the school fee where the parents can show that they are too poor to pay it themselves; and, finally, to inflict a fine, not exceeding five shillings, upon those parents who, in the absence of any reasonable cause, violate the bye-law. This, as will be seen, is the very mildest possible form in which the compulsory principle can be administered; while those variations in the conditions of agriculture to which we have before adverted, instead of being subject to the operations of one uniform law, which could not fail to be injurious in a large pro-

portion of cases, will, by this Bill, be left to the consideration of men who are sure to take due care that educational arrangements are accommodated to local circumstances. This last arrangement is admirable, and we trust will be retained through all the chances and changes to which Bills are subject. The dispensing power which it is proposed to lodge in these Boards is, perhaps, less entirely satisfactory. Mr. Tremenheere protests against "imposing on the magistrates the difficult, invidious, and undesirable task of granting dispensations from the requirements of an Act of Parliament." And the objection applies equally to a School Board. The suspicions of favouritism, and the facilities for deception which the system must inevitably involve, seem to us heavy drawbacks on its utility. At the same time, it is exceedingly difficult to see how in every case the delinquent could be made to pay. Those who keep their children from school would be those generally who stood most in need of their earnings; and thus the penalty would be most frequently incurred by those who could afford it least. As long as the penalty is made to fall upon the parents this result seems to be inevitable. And the only escape from it is by shifting it wholly to the employer, since Mr. Tremenheere's compromise would only transfer the liability to the farmer in a comparatively small number of cases. We do not think the hardship of making the farmer find out what the child's position is, before he gives it even a chance job, so great as Mr. Tremenheere seems to think. The parents would hardly venture to deceive him, and he could always learn the truth from the schoolmaster. We believe, therefore, that in every case the penalty should be levied exclusively on the farmer; and this provision would relieve the dispensing power of the District Boards from its most invidious feature.

Mr. Tuffnell, the other Chief Commissioner, appears to have little faith in any such plan as Mr. Tremeneere's. He thinks that the difficulties in the way of examining the children would be insuperable, that the clergy would refuse the responsibility, and that the schoolmasters would be exposed to pressure from the children's parents. His other objections, however, do not apply to Mr. Tremeneere's particular proposal, by which, on the contrary, they are to some extent overcome. He is in favour of the prohibition upon farm work in the case of children under ten, but considers that it *must* be accompanied by a "general system of education."

APPENDIX IV.

ALLOTMENTS AND SMALL HOLDINGS.

I HERE reprint, in their chronological order, some articles on these subjects, written since 1883, in the *St. James's Gazette* :—

LABOURERS' ALLOTMENTS AND THE TENANTS' COMPENSATION
BILL.

August 17, 1883.

The English Tenants' Compensation Bill has been read a third time in the House of Lords after having been largely modified in committee by a series of amendments, most of which it will be time enough to consider when they come under the notice of the House of Commons. There is one, however, on which we should like to say a few words before that time arrives; and that is the amendment to the 53rd Clause, moved by Lord Camperdown, and only feebly resisted by the Government; who, indeed, cannot have much to say against it as it was originally their own proposal. In the Bill as sent up to the House of Lords the clause ran as follows :—“ Nothing in the Act shall apply to a holding that is not either wholly agricultural or wholly pastoral, or in part agricultural and as to the residue pastoral, or in whole or in part cultivated as a market-garden.” But in the Bill introduced into the House of Commons nothing was said

about market-gardens; and after the words "as to the residue pastoral" came the words "or to any holding that is of less extent than two acres." This was the first idea of the Government; but they abandoned it at the instance of Mr. Jesse Collings, who succeeded in obtaining for market-gardeners an equal claim to compensation with regular farmers. The honourable member for Ipswich, indeed, wished to go still further, and to make the Bill applicable to all tenancies, whether weekly or yearly, including, of course, cottage gardens. Mr. Dodson declined to accede to this proposal, and consented to do away with the limit of extent only on condition that the limit of time should be retained. In this form the clause went up to the other House, when Lord Camperdown carried the amendment we have mentioned restoring the limit of two acres, but saving the rights of the market-gardeners which the House of Commons had recognized. Lord Kimberley suggested that the limit of one acre would meet the requirements of the case; and it is quite possible that this may be the ultimate arrangement.

Some limit of this kind appears to us absolutely necessary if the Bill is not to exercise a very injurious effect upon the allotment system. There may be holders of allotments who are tenants at will, and others who are weekly tenants; but many, if not the great majority, are yearly tenants, and would come under the operation of the Act unless expressly exempted from it. It is possible that some confusion may have arisen from the fact that in those parts of England where cottage gardens are uncommon the allotments are often called gardens: a name which may also be derived from the purpose for which they were originally intended—the growth of fruit and vegetables, and not of corn. Be this as it may, however, many agricultural labourers are yearly tenants

of their rood or two roods of ground; and to place them in the position which the present Bill contemplates for the regular tenant-farmer would defeat one of the principal objects for the sake of which the allotment system deserves to be encouraged. That object is the promotion of orderly and thrifty habits among the agricultural poor. An allotment is not let to an agricultural labourer as a farm is let to a farmer, that he may live by it and make the cultivation of it his business. His business remains what it was: he is a carter, or ploughman, or shepherd, or hedger and ditcher, or general labourer, as the case may be; and by the wages so earned he supports himself and his family. The allotment is a *πάρεργον*, something at which he can labour when his proper day's work is over, and which adds a few pounds, perhaps as much as four or five, to his yearly income; but it is not what he mainly depends upon, the loss of which would be the loss of his livelihood. Here is a wide difference between a farmer and the holder of an allotment which the House of Commons should bear in mind. To deprive a man of his allotment is not the serious thing which it is to deprive him of his farm, be it small or large—three acres, thirty acres, or three hundred acres. The allotment is mainly useful as a constant incentive to and guarantee for good conduct. It is a small benefit over and above the returns of the "regular branch of industry" pursued by the agricultural labourer, and may most legitimately be made use of for the promotion of sobriety and morality. As it is, the system is found to be a most efficient instrument for good in the hands of those who now administer it. But change the nature of an allotment—make the holder of it as independent of his landlord as the tenant of an ordinary farm is meant to be by this Bill—and this salutary influence of the system is destroyed.

So much the better, we think we hear our Radical philanthropists exclaim. Virtuous habits, if men are indebted for them to the parson and the squire, are as degrading as vicious ones. They are poisoned at the source. Neat cottages, well-clad children, empty public-houses, full churches may be good things in their way, perhaps; but they are purchased at an awful price if they come of feudal and ecclesiastical influence. Better far the scowling brow, the slovenly dress, the drink, the blasphemy, and the brutality, if they denote independence of mind and a contempt for the patronage of gentlefolk. With this argument against the moral benefits of the allotment system we confess ourselves incapable of coping. But, if the enthusiasts who rely on it can condescend to mere ordinary common sense they will see that it is only a system of promotion by merit which ought not surely to be condemned by them. The allotment system works on that principle; and to revolutionize it as it will be revolutionized, unless Lord Camperdown's amendment, or Lord Kimberley's compromise be adopted, will be to make it at once so vexatious and so useless that we are persuaded it would soon be abandoned.

PEASANT FARMING.

September 2, 1885.

THE value of peasant farming, like so many other important questions which occupy the attention of reformers, depends on both moral and material considerations. If the results of the system are shown to be unfavourable to agriculture, we cannot dismiss the subject till we have considered its influence on character; nor can we

rest satisfied with this till we have ascertained exactly at what price it is purchased in the shape of diminished production. Now, there can be no doubt, we think, that there is an overwhelming preponderance of evidence against the purely material advantages of peasant farming. It is not as if it were an experiment about to be tried in England for the first time. It has already existed in this country on a large scale, and died away, no doubt, before the progress of social conditions unfavourable to its continuance. What is more, survivals of it are still to be met with in sufficient numbers to enable us to form some opinion of what the state of English agriculture would be, should it ever again become the rule, as it was formerly, instead of the exception. In the north of England, and in the eastern counties (districts certainly not peopled by an inferior race of peasantry), in the dales of Cumberland and the Fen districts of Lincolnshire, peasant proprietors are to be found in considerable numbers: with one uniform result, if we may judge from evidence which there is no ground for suspecting of partiality. Bad farming, slovenly habits, ignorance, poverty, and debt are their prevailing characteristics. In the Isle of Axholme, with an exceptionally fertile soil exactly suitable for spade husbandry, the proprietors are all in debt, at the mercy of the nearest lawyer who holds mortgages on their land, and are obliged to do *his* bidding at all events, whatever they may say to the country gentlemen. "They appear to be prosperous," says Mr. Stanhope, one of the Commissioners for inquiring into the employment of women and children on agriculture; "but they are more hardly worked and less well fed and housed than the hired labourer." To whatever quarter of England the inquirer may turn, he will receive nearly the same answer from every competent witness whose opinion he may ask.

The statements which have recently appeared in a series of letters in the *Times* show that the conditions of the question are the same now as they were when this evidence was given. Nothing has occurred in the meantime to improve the prospects of peasant farming, and a good deal, we should say, to make them worse. Nor does it strengthen the argument on their behalf to appeal to the example of other countries. But what says a correspondent of the *Times*, M. Antoine Salmon, of the Swiss system? He says that the cultivators of very small farms in Switzerland "are as a rule prosperous and well-to-do people." What he means is the converse—namely, that prosperous and well-to-do people are the cultivators of small farms. For what does he add? "But"—and there is a world in this *but*—"such small proprietors have usually some extra occupation." Of course they have, or they would not be prosperous and well-to-do. Go into any ordinary country village in England, and you will always find that the man who is doing well with a few acres of ground is the publican, the butcher, or the shopkeeper—the man who in a bad year has other resources to fall back upon. Further letters in the *Times* tell us the same thing of the peasantry of the Auvergne and the Tyrol; and the solitary witness in favour of the French peasantry does not say what part of France he refers to, and whether to corn-farming or market-gardening. There are exceptional circumstances and conditions under which little farms may be cultivated to considerable advantage. That is not denied for one moment. The question is, what is the general rule with regard to this system of agriculture?

Such being its material aspects, what have its advocates to say for it from a moral point of view to counteract the heavy drawbacks which the political economist detects in it? They will tell us that it fosters independence.

This is Mr. Hall's assertion in a recent letter to the *Times*. He contrasts the erect and independent bearing of the French peasant with "the slouching gait" of the English agricultural labourer. But this is rather a slender foundation on which to rear so considerable a superstructure. The English peasant in his movements is certainly not a model of grace. We have no "gay grandsires skilled in gestic lore," it is true; but we very much doubt whether the gait of the agricultural labourer is the result of servility or timidity. But, to let that pass, what does this cry of independence really come to? To begin with, the peasant-proprietor in England, if not under the thumb of a landlord, would be under the thumb of a mortgagee, and not a bit more independent really than the ordinary labourer. Supposing the worst to be true that is said of the country gentleman, the peasant would only have exchanged one kind of coercion for another: the pressure of the squire for the pressure of the lawyer; the influence of a neighbour for the influence of a stranger; and, in our opinion, he would find the little finger of the latter heavier than the loins of the former. In the second place, the cry involves nothing less than this: that, as all service is detrimental to independence, all service ought to be abolished; for agricultural service is no worse than any other. But service is one of the conditions of modern society which nobody proposes to abolish; and why therefore supersede it in favour of a particular class, at the cost of deranging our whole agricultural system and diminishing "the food of the people"? We are strongly in favour of a certain number of small farms being reserved on every extensive estate, for the occupation of deserving labourers who have succeeded in life by means of the same virtues as are needful to success in every other sphere. But this is a very different thing from "cutting England into

ribbons" to be distributed among the peasantry at large.

LANDLORDS AND ALLOTMENTS.*

March 19, 1886.

This is the title of a book, very opportunely published, by the Earl of Onslow, with the assistance on the more purely legal parts of the subject of Mr. Hall Hall, of Lincoln's Inn. The object of it is to show not only what has already been done by the landlords of England and Wales, but also what they are prepared to do towards the provision of allotment grounds for the peasantry, and to disprove that necessity for compulsory legislation which the Radicals insist upon. The present volume is only an instalment of the full and complete treatise which we are shortly to expect; but it contains so much important matter that a short summary of the principal points brought out in it will be welcome, we are sure, to all who take an interest in the subject.

Lord Onslow has begun by collecting information from all landlords with whom he was personally acquainted; but he limited himself to the owners of estates of not less than 3,000 acres, and the results of his inquiry do not include any of the allotments which are let by clergymen or farmers. We therefore find in his pages only a small proportion of what has really been done in this direction during the present century. But even within

* "Landlords and Allotments: the History and Present Condition of the Allotment System." By the Earl of Onslow. And a Treatise on the Law relating to Allotments of Land, &c., &c. By T. Hall Hall, M.A., of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-Law. (London: Longmans and Co. 1886.)

these narrow limits are counted no fewer than 248 owners of large estates, situated in all quarters of the kingdom, who have either long ago provided allotments for the labourers, or are ready to do so if required; and as there is no reason to suppose that the particular friends of Lord Onslow are either more or less in favour of the system than landlords in general, we may fairly conclude that the great majority of landowners have acted in the same manner.

But what is perhaps still more interesting at the present moment is the conclusive evidence to be found in this volume of the unwillingness of labourers in many cases to accept allotments when offered to them at the ordinary rent of the district. No fewer than twenty-two proprietors state that in their own neighbourhoods the supply exceeds the demand. And these reports come from the following counties: Sussex, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Yorkshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire. In the second place, we have here abundant proof that the labourers rather shrink from "small holdings," and greatly prefer allotments which they can cultivate without losing their wages. Lord Dormer, in particular, whose estates lie in Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire, states that "two or three of the allotment-holders applied for each vacant one till they made up to seven or eight acres. Result was heavy loss when bad times came; discouragement to occupy more than one allotment. Three or four labourers have had holdings of from three to four acres each. When young and active they lived very hard lives, and when old sank into extreme poverty." Mr. Parker Jervis says of the labourers in Staffordshire and Warwickshire, that they "do not care to have large allotments;" and Lady Brooke, writing of Essex, Leicestershire, North-

amptonshire, Cambridgeshire, and Middlesex, says that the labourers in these counties would not take more than from an eighth to a quarter of an acre. The fact is they all know that holders of three, four, and five acres, unless under very exceptional circumstances, are sure to go the way of Lord Dormer's small occupiers: they prefer regular wages and no risk. The reader may see, too, from the tables given by Lord Onslow, what is the rent which is usually asked for allotments. Of the 248 returns, about 70 give the rent of allotments as rather higher than the ordinary farms; but this is only to cover the various expenses, including rates and taxes, which fall upon the landlord. In 19 cases the rents are much lower than the ordinary agricultural rent, and in the remaining 157 cases they are exactly the same.

There is an excellent chapter on voluntary *versus* compulsory allotments, in which we are reminded of Mr. Goschen's speech of last January, objecting to Mr. Collings's Bill because it would undermine the sense of duty on the landlord's part. But that is just what the Radicals desire. Mr. Everett, whose remarks we quoted in our columns the other day, says that the object of Mr. Collings and his confederates is to destroy property in land. Doubtless this is the object of a great many of them; but there are more far-sighted ones, who see that the surest way of attaining the great object of their ambition is to destroy the whole moral influence of the landlords—an influence depending on the discharge of local duties and the exercise of administrative functions, the abolition of which is the most certain means of destroying their hold upon the people. Mr. Gladstone himself has told us how admirably those duties are discharged. And Lord Onslow's little book will show that for nearly the last hundred years they have been promoting a system which Mr. Collings and others describe as a novel experiment, if not, indeed, as quite a new discovery.

SMALL HOLDINGS.

August 16, 1886.

The first general meeting of the shareholders of "The Small Farm and Labourers' Land Company" was held last week at the Westminster Palace Hotel. The company has only been in existence one year, and the Report presented by the directors deals only with the estate at Lambourne, in Berkshire, which was presented to the company by Lord Wantage, though accepted on the understanding that it will be paid for if the company succeeds. More than half the estate, which was not suitable for the company's purposes, has been sold, and the remaining portion is now valued at a sum equal to that which Lord Wantage gave for the whole. This sum, however, amounting to £4,110, is placed to the company's liabilities and credited to their "reserve fund." The net profit on the working of the estate between May, 1885, and June, 1886, is £774 17s.; and it is out of this that the dividend of 5 per cent. advised by the directors will be paid. The shareholders' capital consists of 100,000 shares of £1 each, and of this amount £5,722 is paid up. So far, therefore, the experiment has been conducted on sound business principles, and no attempt has been made to throw dust in the eyes of the public by paying dividend out of capital. The balance-sheet represents what it is possible for a landowner to do who devotes his own land to this purpose. If the land had previously to be bought, and especially if bought upon compulsion, the result very often would be different.

The estate now in the hands of the company is a little under 200 acres. The soil, on the whole, appears to be of average quality, not fit for wheat, but growing excellent

crops of oats, barley, and potatoes. It is not suitable for steam operations, as the land is too hilly and the water supply is insufficient. If farmed in the ordinary manner it would require about ten horses; but as a good deal is cultivated by the spade, some saving is effected in that respect. It is now let out in farms ranging in size from thirteen to thirty-five acres, at an average rental of 28s. an acre; the tenants having the option of purchase. Only one farm, however, has as yet been sold, and of this particular purchaser Lord Wantage gave an interesting account. He is a man who came from the north of England, where he seems to have saved money as an agricultural labourer. He has got seventeen acres, and is able to pay a good rent and redeem his land gradually at the same time. He has built his own house at a cost of £75, a cow-house and a shed besides, and has fenced in his little property, which now bears four acres of good barley and four of oats; there being grass enough for a dairy and a stock of poultry, which bring him in £1 a week. He will sell his corn for £50 or £60, and in his spare time he works on the road for 12s. a week. It is necessary to point out, however, that this said "spare time" cannot be a great deal; and that the care of seventeen acres of land, even when half of it is grass, is quite incompatible with regular farm-work and the receipt of regular wages as an agricultural labourer. Even, however, without this addition to his income he would be comfortably off; and we have never had any doubt at all that small holdings which one man can cultivate for himself without the expense of a horse, if acquired in a legitimate manner, *would* answer. Here, we see, is a man who has been sufficiently thrifty and skilful to save money for himself, thereby giving evidence of the possession of those qualities which enable a man to succeed in life wherever he is placed, and would certainly enable any English

peasant to make a good living on a small farm. These are the men for whom such holdings should be reserved. But this is a vastly different thing from placing land acquired with borrowed money at the disposal of the agricultural labourers indiscriminately, and proposing that when they cannot pay the rent it should be made good out of the rates. It is just because the voluntary system must necessarily be regulated by this distinction that it is so infinitely preferable to the compulsory system. The peasant who acquires a farm by means of his own savings, amassed by years of industry and self-denial, acquires it by a natural and self-acting law, which is almost a guarantee for his prosperity, and must always be at the bottom of all healthy and permanent prosperity. To try to force by legislation what can only be really lasting and beneficial if allowed to grow naturally and spontaneously, is a mistake characteristic of the age we live in, but a most deep and disastrous one for all that.

The directors desire, very properly, to set the brighter side of their undertaking before the public; and it is clear that as far as it has gone it promises to be a genuine success. But two or three points still remain to be considered before we can accept the evidence even of the Lambourne Estate as conclusive proof of the policy of introducing the system of small holdings on a large scale. We may take it for granted that none of the Lambourne tenants continue to work as *bonâ fide* agricultural labourers. They may, of course, be occasional labourers, and eke out the profits of their land by a few weeks' wages in the year. But no more. What, however, we should like to know is this: namely, how many of them are farmers, and nothing else; and whether we should not find on inquiry that the majority of them combined some other calling with agriculture. The village carrier, the butcher, the publican, can always do well with fifteen

or twenty acres of land. It is the man who trusts to his twenty acres, and his twenty acres alone, by whose success the experiment must be judged. It is being tried, we think, at Lambourne under fair conditions, where arable and pasture land are mixed together in about equal proportions, and where no great town is sufficiently near at hand to enable the farmer to be a market-gardener. When either this is the case, or so much of the land is grass that all farms are virtually dairy-farms, the conditions are exceptional; and it is impossible to argue from the results so obtained to the probable results of the same system in all parts of England. If these small farmers, being small farmers and nothing else, are found to thrive at Lambourne for one or two generations, the event will go far to establish the soundness of the principle in general. But this brings us to the second consideration which it is necessary to take into account before making up our minds upon the subject; and this is that it is far too soon as yet to pronounce on the working of the Lambourne system. The first occupiers of the new farms are almost sure to be men of exceptional qualifications, who have brought some capital to the business and have spent it on improving the land. We must wait a little while to see how long this can be kept up, and how far the tenant's profits will enable him to renew the fertility of the soil when the effect of his first outlay shall begin to be exhausted. We must not be satisfied with the success of two or three individuals. We must wait to see how the land prospers. No one can have studied the Report of the Commissioners for Inquiry into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1867-70) without being struck with the overwhelming amount of evidence which it contains against the working of *la petite culture*—evidence derived from the condition of those districts where it has long prevailed

and has had time to develop all the seeds of good and evil which it contains. We do not mean to say that even this evidence is conclusive; but it cannot be set aside in deference to a few experiments in which all is *couleur de rose* at the commencement, but which have still to run the risks of bad seasons, falling prices, and a gradually impoverished soil, all combining to weigh down to the ground the small cultivator whose little capital has long since been exhausted and who has nothing but his profits to depend upon.

All honour to the liberality and generosity of those landowners who are resolved to give the experiment a fair chance; for if it succeeds, the blessings they will have conferred, not only on the labourers but on all classes connected with the land and rural society in general, cannot be over-estimated. To restore the old cheerfulness, loyalty, and contentment of the English peasantry, wherever these qualities have been temporarily obscured, is, in fact, to solve one of the great political problems of the present day, and to reconcile democracy with the permanence of existing institutions. We most earnestly hope that all the efforts which have been made in this direction will meet with the success which they deserve. But, unfortunately, there are still two sides to the picture; and unless we look firmly upon the dark side as well as the light, we run the risk not only of disappointing ourselves, but all whom we have led to believe in the practicability of a scheme which does not bear the test of experience. We have to remember, however, that even a partial failure, which we trust may not occur, docs not necessarily mean a universal failure; and that the small-holding system may succeed admirably in some districts though it is not suitable for all. In conclusion, we will merely point out that this is totally distinct from the allotment system, which stands upon

its own merits, and is liable to none of the difficulties attaching to the general adoption of the process now on trial in Berkshire.

THE LAW OF ALLOTMENTS.*

September, 1886.

This is a work that has been long wanted. It brings together within a portable compass not only the whole law upon the subject of allotments embodied in the various Acts of Parliament which have been enacted from the reign of Elizabeth down to the present time, and which are all printed in full; but also a complete list of all other Acts of Parliament, Bills, reports, and papers which bear directly or indirectly on the question. It is intended, says the author, as "a handbook for landlords, glebe-owners, parish officers, allotment wardens, trustees of charities, and others who let allotments, as well as for their tenants and advisers;" and was originally meant to form part of Lord Onslow's work upon allotments. It was found, however, that the two together would make too bulky a volume, so that it has been necessary to publish them separately.

The interest of such a work for the public at large lies not in those legal details which must be mastered by all lessors and managers of allotments, so much as in the general principles to which the author calls attention, and in those elementary questions connected with the

* "The Law of Allotments; Being a Treatise on the Law Relating to the Allotment of Land for the Labouring Poor. With the Statutes and Notes and a Collection of Forms and Precedents." By T. Hall Hall, M.A. (London: Longman, Green, and Co. 1886.)

whole system which every one must be presumed capable of understanding who has given any serious thought to it. In the first place, then, what is an "allotment"? It may mean, of course, any piece of land allotted to anybody; and technically, says Mr. Hall, it applies only to pieces of land appropriated under an enclosure award; but he uses it throughout in its popular sense, namely, "as a small piece of land let to a person to be cultivated by him as an aid to his sustenance, but not in substitution for his labour for wages." The allotment proper is such a plot of ground as the agricultural labourer can cultivate at his spare moments, with such help as his own family may be able to afford him, and in no way trenching on the Saturday night's wages. "When the land," says Mr. Hall, "is large enough to become the main object of the tenant's labour, it is, in the phrase of the day, called a small holding rather than an allotment." It is important, he adds, to distinguish the two things, "as their political and social import differ widely, though in point of law there is not much difference." He also reminds us of another distinction which it is perhaps equally necessary to bear in mind; and that is, that an allotment is a piece of land detached from the labourer's cottage, and that when it is close to it it is a cottage-garden. The latter, he says truly, is usually considered a much better thing for the tenant; and the allotment is only a substitute for it. There is, however, another term in use which is perhaps the best description of an allotment, as something which is neither a cottage-garden nor a small holding, and that is "field-garden," which exactly expresses what an allotment is intended to be—namely, a small plot to be cultivated as a garden, but lying in the fields at a little distance from the village. When people talk of the necessity of having allotments close to the labourer's cottage they are confounding two different

things—an allotment and a cottage-garden. In the Enclosure Acts what we call an allotment is always, if we understand Mr. Hall, called a field-garden.

With regard to the size of allotments, the different opinions which exist are due solely to the different agricultural conditions which prevail in different parts of the country; but on an average it will be found that half an acre is quite large enough. Evidence to this effect may be found in the Report of the Commission for Inquiry into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, which is mentioned by Mr. Hall as a store-house of valuable information, and also in the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834. Both of these reports embrace the whole of England and Wales, and are free from the slightest suspicion of bias one way or the other. Mr. Hall would have done well to quote the concluding paragraph of this part of their Report: “Since it appears that land may be let to labourers on profitable terms, the necessity for any public inquiry on these points seems to be at an end. A practice which is beneficial to both parties, and is known to be so, may be left to the care of their own self-interest. The evidence shows that it is rapidly extending; and we have no doubt that as its utility is perceived it will spread still more rapidly, and that experience will show, if it has not already shown, on what mutual stipulations it can best be effected.” Experience has abundantly fulfilled this prophecy.

With regard to the comparative advantages of the voluntary and compulsory systems Mr. Hall himself speaks strongly:—

The allotments let voluntarily by private landowners are probably twenty times as numerous as those let under special Acts of Parliament. Moreover, the voluntary system is capable of indefinite expansion in the mode most calculated to suit local convenience; while a statutory

system must always be cramped in practice by the ponderous machinery and restrictive provisions required to fit it for general use, even if its success be not altogether marred by the characteristic apathy of the public bodies which have to work it without feeling the personal interest of a landlord in the welfare of his tenants, and it may be without that willing assent and co-operation which alone give vigour to the law.

On the subject of the relations which ought to exist between the tenants of allotments and their landlords some diversity of opinion, though only what might have been expected, showed itself in the debates on the Agricultural Holdings Act of 1883. The Act of 1875 contained a clause which excluded allotments from the operation of it, and a similar clause was originally contained in the Bill of 1883. It was struck out, however, after a smart struggle; and the tenant of an allotment now stands on precisely the same footing as the tenant of 500 acres.* On some grounds this is certainly to be regretted. For one advantage of the allotment system is the opportunity which it affords to the landowners in every parish of rewarding good conduct and discouraging bad. And the knowledge that he is liable to lose his allotment for drunkenness, dishonesty, or systematic misconduct supplies a powerful motive for the agricultural labourer to take heed unto his ways. But if the landlord, before he can turn him out, is to be worried by all the complicated provisions of the Agricultural Holdings Act, nine men out of ten will leave the tenant to his own devices: and thus the good moral influence of the system is entirely destroyed. Mr. Hall, however, is of opinion that an allotment, when devoted to the cultivation of vegetables and fruit only for the labourer's own use (even though some might be occasionally sold), and not sown with corn or turned into a regular market-garden, is exempt from the operation of the Act. Such, no doubt,

* This is a doubtful point.

was the original intention with which allotments were introduced; but corn is now so generally grown upon them that the prohibition of it would be regarded as a hardship. The meal keeps the pig, and the pig pays the rent; and a garden in which he could not grow his bit of barley would lose more than half its value in the eyes of any ordinary labourer. But we have always thought it a great mistake to place allotments on the same footing as farms, and, from what he says at page 71, Mr. Hall seems to think so too.