THE FARM LABOURER

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CHAPTER I

THE CREATION OF THE PROBLEMS

(1) Introduction.

"An' I mean as the King 'ull put a stop to 't, for them say it as knows it, as there's to be a Rinform." So said Dagley, a tiller of the soil in the early half of the last century. He knew that all was not well with himself and his fellows, but was as incapable of laying his finger on the cause of their wretchedness and discontent as he was of prescribing the remedy. But "there's them i' Middlemarch knows what the Rinform is," he added. This was hopeful indeed, for a remedy for the labourer's case had been a crying need for a hundred years. But Dagley had drunk his pot of beer, and was unduly optimistic. Far from there being a reform, the evils from which he and his kind suffered were allowed to drag on down to our own day.

They had come into being about 1760. It was then that economic changes set in which, with the assistance of an ignorant ruling class, transformed a prosperous and vigorous peasantry into a mere proletariat, ever on the verge of pauperism. Before that date, the labourer had possessed a fair measure of independence, and had lived in considerable comfort, owing to the opportunities of farming on his own account. It is true that his independent husbandry was on a small scale, but it had at least supplied him with an abundance of cheap food, and had prevented him from being wholly dependent on wages and a master. Above all, the possibility of working for himself gave a zest to life, and the career thus open even to the poorest fostered a thrifty, hard-working and self-respecting class. The subsequent depression, though induced by various causes, was due primarily to the agricultural revolution. The loss of the commons by enclosure and the absorption of small holdings and farms into the large units necessary to the now profitable corn-growing spelt ruin for the small man. Changes in the industrial economy of the nation, together with bad legislation, aggravated his difficulties. Even by the close of the eighteenth century, or but thirty or forty years after the depression set in, the land problem, the housing problem,

and the wages problem, with which we are grappling to-day, were in being; while the rural exodus, which in itself reveals the unsatisfactory conditions of rural life and work, was becoming a cause of anxiety to many social observers.

From the first, philanthropists exerted themselves on the labourer's behalf, and reformers within the House of Commons impelled the Legislature to take action. But they were much in the position of Dagley. They knew that the economic condition of the labourer was unsound and that his social condition was far from satisfactory, and they wanted "Rinform." But lack of experience in social legislation led more than once to the remedies they adopted being anything but reforms. And they were handicapped in other ways. Economic tendencies were against them. The condition of the market required the extensive cultivation of corn, which necessarily involves large farming. Consequently, though philanthropists of the early nineteenth century desired to see the revival of peasant proprietorship, which in itself would have solved many of the labourer's difficulties, their socially good intentions were powerless against economic considerations of land owners. Further, political power lay with landed capitalists who were sus-

picious of changes which might affect their interests, and with industrial capitalists who were indifferent to agricultural questions. It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that these two obstacles were removed, by a change in the market conditions on the one hand, and on the other by the extension of the franchise. This change coincided with an acceleration in rural migration, which the labourer had adopted on his own account as a means of improving his condition. The effect upon the town population of this influx of country workmen brought it home to the industrial classes that rural difficulties were not a matter of indifference to themselves. The opinion grew that rural problems had an industrial and, in the depletion of the countryside, even a national significance. Thus, at one and the same time, the power and the incentive to take action were increased. With general interests threatened, the public realised that palliatives for the labourer's problem must be laid aside. Attempts to find a radical remedy now began. What that remedy should be is hardly to be found in the history of the previous search for it, but that story of blunders and hesitation must be the starting point for future action. It shows at least in what directions experiments have been made; it reveals what are the real difficulties

connected with agricultural labour, and what are merely the difficulties artificially created by misguided efforts at reform ; and it is suggestive as to the obstacles that may lie in the way of even the best advised method of settling the question.

The story of the labourer in these pages is a dark one, but it is not so dark as the story told in Parliamentary reports and by contemporary observers upon which this account is based. For it must be remembered, and it has been remembered here, that much of human happiness lies in personal relationships, and even in the worst times the labourer had that source of happiness open to him. In the words of an old Suffolk woman, who married in the Corn Law days, and eked out her husband's earnings of seven to eight shillings a week by her own labour, in the midst of bearing and rearing a family of ten : " Yes, I was happy ; I had a good father and a good husband." To us the tragedy of her life reaches its culminating point in the pauper allowance which for so long was the outward reward of her hard-working life. But to her its tragedies lie in the failure of a Sunday visit from a daughter sixty years old, living three or four miles away, and in the neglect of grandchildren scattered over the world.

(2) Before the Problems.[1]

Farmers and labourers had undoubtedly had their difficulties long before the eighteenth century, when the modern problems of agricultural labour came into being. Yet in the early half of that century the English peasant was, speaking generally, prosperous and contented. Then about the year 1760, agricultural and industrial changes set in which led to the economic degradation of the labourer. His moral degradation inevitably followed. Although neither the agricultural nor the industrial changes were completed throughout England at one and the same time, and were not felt in every locality to the same extent, by 1790 their ill-effects upon the labourer were obvious enough to call for Government action, while in the early nineteenth century the problems of agricultural labour were widespread and acute. The fifty years prior to 1760 then appeared as a halcyon period. Its chief feature from our point of view was the existence of a vigorous peasantry, ill-housed certainly according to modern standards, and living a strenuous, hard-working life; but for all that prosperous and well-to-do, and possessed of ample means of bettering their

[1] Hasbach, "History of the English Agricultural Labourer"; Levy, H., "Large and Small Holdings"; Prothero, "British Farming, Past and Present"; Curtler, "English Agriculture."

condition. Even the poorest of their number had a career before them, and meanwhile were well fed, well clad, and well warmed. Conditions such as these, so unlike anything known in the memory of living man, are worth a little attention, more especially as both of late years and in the days of the deepest degradation of the labourer in the nineteenth century, efforts have been made to restore him to an approximation to his old position by reviving one or more of the earlier features of agricultural life.

There were three primary elements in the prosperity of the labourer at that date. First, there was the existence of wide areas of common pasture land; secondly, he possessed various openings for his labour, and consequently various sources of income; and thirdly, there was a great multiplicity in the sizes of agricultural holdings, which involved an equally great variety in social grades, and gave the labourer his opportunity of rising in life. It is impossible to place one before the other in importance to the peasant; each was a vital factor in his well-being.

The common pasturage consisted partly of land termed "wastes," though it was often as good land as the cultivated fields. On the wastes, one and all cut their firing and grazed their stock—geese, goats, cows, horses, and sheep.

In addition, there were rights of pasturage upon the common fields. For agriculture was still carried on by the old medieval method of the three field system. The three large unenclosed fields were divided into some dozens of strips, separated from each other by balks of grass, these strips being apportioned amongst cottagers and farmers large and small in such number as they had a right to.[1] But after the crops were cut, the stock of large and small cultivators alike was turned on to the land, where they grazed at their own sweet will, regardless of "strips" and their ownership. Rights to this common pasturage, whether on wastes or on the common fields, were the basis of the cottager's independent husbandry. For the possession of these privileges gave him the opportunity of carrying on stock-farming, which paid well, even when conducted upon a small scale.[2] The garden or land attached to his cottage or, when he possessed it even, his strip in the common fields, formed too small an area for profitable arable farming. He might grow enough wheat to provide bread for his family for the year or for part of it, but the smallest men would never have a surplus for the market, and

[1] For a full account of the various rights of cottagers, see Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 89—96.

[2] Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 f.

the larger peasant proprietors would have very little, and that probably only in good years. But both the largest and the least of the small holders would have an appreciable surplus of eggs, butter and milk, fruit and vegetables, poultry, bacon, and possibly mutton ; and even the landless cottagers, who had to depend entirely on commons and wastes for the support of their stock, would have lesser supplies of pigs, milk and eggs to dispose of. Corn-growing was, therefore, only a secondary feature of their husbandry, but in live-stock one and all sank their capital, the farm-servant his savings, and the day labourer his wages. Their success in these lesser branches of agriculture was due to the open field system and the existence of waste lands. Had they been dependent for their grazing upon land of which they were sole proprietors, not one in a hundred of them could have made stock-keeping pay. As things were, it was the most advantageous branch of agriculture that they could have adopted. At that date industries and manufactures were scattered throughout the whole country, and districts which are to-day purely rural then possessed a considerable industrial population.[1] Thus the small holder had a good market at his door for the surplus

[1] See Prothero, "English Farming," pp. 308—312, for the distribution and nature of local industries.

produce of his live-stock and fruit trees. Meat, fruit, vegetables and dairy produce found a steady demand.[1] From this point of view alone, the common pastures were of vital importance to the labourer, and they had a value as great, if not greater, in supplying him with cheap food. Thanks to the commons, even men who could raise nothing for the market could produce some food for home consumption.

As important a factor in the peasant's prosperity were the various openings for his labour, one of which has already been considered in connection with his rights of pasturage. The sale of his surplus produce was one of three main sources of income upon which the peasant had power to draw. A second and perhaps more important source was wages for labour rendered to others. The essential labour on the large farm, which was to be found in most parishes, and on farms which, though comparatively small, required paid labour, was performed by farm servants, who were boarded and lodged in the farm houses, receiving in addition a small money wage. It was they who were the shepherds, carters, ploughmen, ploughboys and dairymaids. But extra labour for seasonal work was employed in varying amounts, and seasonal work then was more regular than it is now, for

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

even when harvest was over, threshing and work in the woods offered employment in the winter. The farm servants were recruited from the sons and daughters of the peasantry. But the wages for seasonal work were drawn by the cottagers themselves. According to the size of a man's holding and its power to support him, he would work less or more for wages. The majority of cottagers did so work either regularly or occasionally. Their wives and children also worked at times upon the farms, but their employment was slight except in harvest. Their time was generally fully occupied in looking after the live-stock and in the pursuit of by-industries at home.

The prevalence of home crafts was a great asset to the labourer, and the earnings gained from such work constituted his third main source of income. In those days there was hardly a district which had not several flourishing industrial centres, the existence of which gave the peasant's family the opportunity for practising home industries. Work was given out from these centres, and in them the goods manufactured in the cottages found a market. The lesser branches of the woollen trade were the most widely practised of the domestic crafts. Throughout England spinning and some weaving were universal by-employments for women and girls. But there was

domestic work in other trades also. Cowper, writing in 1739, declared that in most open field parishes the inhabitants "besides their employment in husbandry" carried on large branches of the linen as well as the woollen manufacture.[1] Lace-making was practised in the cottage homes of certain districts of Devonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Straw work, chiefly plaiting, was common in Bedfordshire and extended into Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The glove trade of Worcester was carried on not only in the city itself, but gloves were also given out to cottagers to be sewn at home. So, too, with the stocking trade in Nottinghamshire.[2]

We have lastly to consider the prospects which agricultural work offered to the peasant. Those prospects were peculiarly bright. At that date the work of farming rested in the hands of small men, for though the large farm, whether pasture or arable, was to be found in every district, the small farm, tenant or proprietory as the case might be, and the small holding, were still the dominant agricultural units.[3] Small holdings varied in size from a mere plot to several acres. The squatters on the wastes generally had some

[1] John Cowper. Inclosing commons and common field lands is contrary to the interest of the nation.

[2] Prothero, *op. cit.*, pp. 308 f.

[3] Hasbach, "English Agricultural Labourer," p. 82.

scrap of land which they had unlawfully enclosed as a garden patch, while cottages in the village had almost without exception some land attached or adjacent. An Act of Elizabeth's reign had made compulsory the provision of four acres of land with every cottage, and though it is unlikely that this Act was universally observed,[1] it yet is clear from contemporary writers that cottagers quite commonly rented two, three, and as much as five acres of land. This multiplicity in the sizes and grades of holdings provided a "practicable ladder" up which a man could climb from the small plot to the small farm, and from the small farm possibly to the large. Even the ploughboy had prospects. For his small money wage could be saved against the day when he should marry and set up for himself, leasing a cottage with but a scrap of land perhaps, and keeping a goat on the common if he could not purchase a cow, but with the surety of rising in life through steady work and thrifty management.

Thus the economic and material conditions of the peasant were sound. He and his family possessed various sources of income; and since they were not dependent on agricultural wages, slackness in employment could be met with equanimity. The produce of their own holdings

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

and earnings from home work tided them over bad times.

A few words are necessary as to their moral condition. Bad housing is, of course, one of the chief factors in moral degradation. And their housing undoubtedly was bad. The cottages were frequently ill-built, and were often little but hovels. Many were constructed of mud and straw, and sanitation and a good water supply were unknown luxuries. Overcrowding was not uncommon. In Northumberland the cottages contained often but one long low room, which had to accommodate its inhabitants for all purposes in life. In short, although there was little crowding together of dwellings at this date, and the air and space around the worst hovel mitigated to some extent the evils of bad accommodation within, the labourer's housing was such as to suggest the worst possible results. But as a matter of fact compensation was made for bad housing by other conditions of his life. Bad food was not added to an uncomfortable dwelling to drive him to drink. Even the smallest cottager had a sufficient supply of milk, eggs and bacon; the better-to-do produced their own meat and a part of their bread corn, and one and all had their own vegetables and fruit. Although they sold their surplus produce in the local towns, they had

no need to stint their own tables in order to raise money for rent and for goods they could not make themselves. For, as we have seen, they had other sources of money earnings. And they had not to pay middleman's prices for the food they were unable to produce at home. Corn, which was their chief article of purchase, not only was cheap in this period, but could be bought direct from the small farmer. Meat, too, he was very ready to retail locally to those who did not rear and kill their own beasts.

Yet another factor in maintaining the character of the peasantry was that village government for matters agricultural which the common-fields system of cultivation made necessary. The peasant proprietor, and the day labourer whose cottage entitled him to some share in the land, had a voice with the large farmer in deciding the rotation of crops and other matters. In most villages, annual meetings were held of farmers and common-right owners to consider such questions and settle disputes, while there were officers appointed by themselves to supervise the allocation of strips.[1] Another minor but important influence in the labourer's life was the common practice of carrying on the regular work of a

[1] Slater, "Enclosure of Common Fields," p. 87; Hammond, B. and J., "The Village Labourer," p. 103.

farm by means of indoor farm-servants. The prevalence of work under good conditions for single men and women set a premium upon later marriages, and encouraged prudence and thrift. But, above all, the certainty of rising in life by hard work and economy fostered an industrious, thrifty, independent, and wide-awake labouring class, whose virtues were loudly acclaimed and fully appreciated at the close of the century when the change in the labourer's condition had led to their loss.

(3) The Creation of the Problems.

This change set in about 1760. First, the labourer lost the commons which had been a mainstay of his existence; then he lost his home manufactures. He became a member of a mere proletariat, dependent upon wages which, as we shall see, did not rise sufficiently to compensate him for the loss of his other sources of income.

(*a*) *The Agricultural Revolution. Enclosures.*

The radical cause of the labourer's troubles was the rise in the price of corn in the middle of the century, due in the first place to bad harvests, and secondly, to the increase of population just when the bad years were reducing the amount of wheat which could be put upon the market.

The nineties saw a yet further rise. The outbreak of the French war in 1793 would in itself have kept prices high ; but the scarcity was aggravated and prices were driven yet higher by continued bad harvests, by Napoleon's Continental System, which checked the import of corn, and by a yet more rapid increase in population.[1] The new prices gave a great impetus to corn-growing. But extensive corn-growing was hampered by the methods upon which land was cultivated. In almost every parish, although there might be one large compact farm, most of the land, as we have seen, was farmed in strips, which had to be cultivated by a rotation of crops agreed upon by the majority of owners. Such a system was extravagant in time and labour, since a man's strips might be scattered throughout the length and breadth of the parish. Moreover, it prevented the adoption by better farmers of new and improved methods of cultivation, and it prevented the extensive growth of corn which could be profitably produced only in wider areas. Thus with the rise in corn prices there were many farmers ready

[1] Levy, " Large and Small Holdings," p. 11 : " The population increased by 3,000,000 persons in the twenty years from 1790 to 1811." *Ib.*, p. 10 : " The average price of corn was 34*s.* 11*d.* in the period 1715 to 1765 ; 45*s.* 7*d.* during 1760 to 1790 ; and 55*s.* 11*d.* in the next decade. From 1805 to 1813 the annual average price was never below 73*s.* and often over 100*s.* In 1812 it reached 122*s.* 8*d.*"

and eager to sink capital in the land. But although landlords had already thrown small farms into one wherever they had the power to do so in order to meet the needs of large pasture farmers, there were still not large farms enough to meet the new demand of corn-growers. Spurred on now by the inducement of increasing their rents, they therefore resorted to stronger measures. The engrossing of farms had injured small farmers, for many tenant farmers were driven out of their business when the holdings they had cultivated were consolidated; and others, whether tenant or proprietary, were crushed out of existence by the competition of larger rivals and by higher rents. But the peasantry was as yet little affected by the agricultural changes. Their turn came now. For it was the wastes and unenclosed fields which landowners sought to acquire for corn-growing. The unenclosed fields, extravagantly cut up in strips, and the waste lands or commons, large areas of which were excellent farming land, obviously would become much more productive if enclosed. While the desire to increase their incomes was the motive force with landlords, it could be urged, and was so urged by the chief agricultural writers of the day, that enclosure was economically advantageous for the country. Only by enclosure, it was stated, could the best methods

of husbandry be adopted, and the best use be made of the land. The farmer's prosperity would be reflected in the greater prosperity of the labouring classes, there would be more employment, and the population would increase. The waste lands were worse than valueless to the peasant ; they merely encouraged him in idleness and vice, and prevented his putting forth his best labour by rendering him independent of wages. Though landlords might reap the greater profits of enclosure, it was pointed out by Arthur Young that the higher rents rose, the better it would be for the farmer, since it would compel him to adopt improved methods of cultivation.[1] The rising price of corn made it possible to regard enclosure, which was the necessary preliminary to arable farming, as a national duty. Landlords, then, had the bulk of educated public opinion behind them in their work of transformation. And they had the power to achieve their ends, " since they were almost always the chief owners of land and chief holders of common rights in any given parish, or at any rate by purchasing land, they could become so."[2] The work went on apace. Between 1702 and 1760 the enclosure of about 400,000 acres had been effected by 246 Acts of Parliament ;

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 and 147 f.
[2] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

while in George III.'s reign, 3,554 Acts were passed and 5,686,400 acres were enclosed.[1] Before the century was out enclosure had taken place to a greater or less extent in every part of the country, though there was less enclosing in the hilly north than in the eastern counties and those districts where both the soil and the formation of the land were more favourable to corn-growing. Enclosures varied in their nature, but as a rule they involved both the disappearance of the common fields through the consolidation of strips, and the division of the waste lands. Sometimes, however, only the consolidation of strips took place, or the waste lands were enclosed where the strips had been already consolidated. In a few cases, as in the Isle of Axholme, while the wastes were enclosed, the strip system of the old arable fields was preserved; but this was rare.

Much has been written upon the rights and wrongs of enclosure, but there can be no doubt that the strip system of cultivation was completely out of date, and was a barrier to the introduction of better methods of farming which the growth of scientific knowledge now made possible. It may also be urged that the extensive growth of corn was the right course to adopt not only from the farmer's but from the national point

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

of view, for only by enclosure and the extension of corn-growing could the nation be fed during the great war. On the other hand, it is clear that landlords pressed forward enclosures in order to increase their rents, and that this desire blinded them to the elements of justice in the small man's opposition. They set it all down as stupidity and blindness, which, if it could not be removed by fair means, should, in the common interest, be beaten down by more effective means. That the small man was so beaten down and disregarded cannot be denied. "A landlord proposing to make an enclosure," says Dr. Hasbach, "would, in the first place, buy up as much land as possible in those parishes which were possessed of common pastures, and get all the manors, supposing more than one was concerned, into his own hands. Next he would have a Bill drafted, of course providing for his own interests, and nominate surveyors and commissioners. So far he would proceed quietly. After that, such landowners as were by reason of class or sex more or less ignorant people would be prevailed on to put their names to a petition in favour of the Bill, the hearts of the more obdurate being softened by a good dinner, with significant threats to follow if that failed. Then a circular would inform the remaining persons concerned that the

more important owners of property had agreed to join the great man in laying a Petition before Parliament. Here again the pill would be sugared to begin with, but in the last resort the landlord threatened the refractory with all the evils in his power 'as a magistrate, as a lord of the manor, as an appropriator of tythes.' Few would have the courage to stand in opposition, and to claim that the majority, though their names might be subscribed to the petition, were, in fact, against the proposal. Even if some one were found with the requisite spirit, how were the very considerable expenses of the Bill to be provided? And the whole matter was regarded as one of private concern only. No member of Parliament not directly interested would take any notice of the Bill in its passage through the Houses. The Crown, now become the servant of the governing classes, had no longer even the wish to interfere. So the Commissioners of Enclosure would get to work, and their decision would be practically final. If appeal were made to Quarter Sessions, the prime mover, against whom the appeal was directed, would be on the bench, and even if he did not vote on this particular question the complainant's chance of an impartial decision would be remote. The Commissioners were, as a rule, attorneys, nominated by the man or men

most interested in the measure. They had to take an oath, but it was too general in its terms to withhold them from prejudicing the weaker parties in face of the interests they had in obliging their patron. The appointment was a profitable one, and if they gave satisfaction they might hope to be recommended for similar employment in the future. And the Bill would go through its stages practically unregarded."[1]

Yet another German writer on English agriculture states: "There was an actual persecution of small owners, whose land was often practically stolen from them. The Commissioners of Enclosure well understood how to manage matters in the interests of the great landlords so, for instance, that the land allotted to the small proprietors should lie as far as possible from their houses and farm buildings. The consequent increased expenses of cultivation did away with their small margin of profit. The little yeomen knew very well what enclosure meant to them. But all their efforts to oppose it were frustrated by the power of the great landlord or the large farmers, who only saw in the abolition of the small proprietors an opportunity for increasing the land in their own hands."[2]

[1] Hasbach, "English Agricultural Labourer," p. 61.
[2] Levy, "Large and Small Holdings," p. 27.

Few indeed would be able to preserve their interests against this combination of forces. "Coaxing, bribing, threatening, together with many other arts, which superiors make use of," says a contemporary writer, "will very often induce the inferiors to consent to things which they are convinced will be to their future disadvantage."[1] In the district known as the Isle of Axholme, near Doncaster, the small men were numerous enough and sturdy enough to withstand both bribes and threats. An attempt to enclose was made by "educated and influential people" in 1795, but the cottagers opposed it so successfully that the "strip" lands of the open fields were untouched, and only waste lands were enclosed which it was to the advantage of the whole community to have drained.[2] The Annual Register of 1767 testifies to like sturdiness in a Middlesex parish, the small farmers of which came up to London and withstood a Bill for enclosing the common, "which, if carried into execution, might have been the ruin of a great number of families."[3] But as a rule opposition was broken down in the early stages of the Bill and none was offered to its passage through the House.

[1] "A Political Enquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands," 1785, p. 108.

[2] Slater, "Enclosure of Common Fields," p. 57.

[3] Hammond, "Village Labourer," p. 55.

The effects of enclosure, good and bad alike, were instantaneous. The landlords and the large farmers rolled money into their pockets and corn into their granaries; the small holders were degraded to the status of labourers, and the labourer's status now was but little removed from that of the pauper. Contemporary writers in the later eighteenth century, and the General Report on Enclosures in 1808, bear evidence to the degradation of the less substantial classes of the agricultural community, evidence which is the more impressive because in many cases the writers gave it despite their bias in favour of the new methods of farming.

An enclosure might in more than one way deal a heavy blow at the small men of the village. First, the expenses of the Bill itself, and the subsequent charges of the Commissioners for their work of division, were heavy. Secondly, the cost of fencing was considerable. Both lawyers' charges and the fencing expenses fell upon all who established their rights to any plot, however small, or to any right of pasturage, within the area enclosed; and in many cases a man's share exceeded the value of the plot assigned to him, and he was obliged to sell, sometimes even before he had taken possession. The General Report on Enclosures admits that "in many cases the

poor had unquestionably been injured . . . the cottagers could not pay the expenses of the measure, and were forced to sell their allotments." Even the better off among the small men suffered in this way. "When their fields are enclosed, not a few of these small proprietors are obliged to sell their land, because they have no money to enclose it."[1] Arthur Young, who was an ardent supporter of enclosures, gives evidence to the same effect.[2] Even of those who for the moment survived these expenses, many did so only by borrowing money or mortgaging, and in the bad times for small holders could not, thus crippled, carry on the struggle for any length of time. They, too, were forced to sell.[3]

In the third place, enclosure injured the small holders and landed cottagers quite apart from the expenses in which it involved them. In exchange for their rights of tillage strips on the arable fields and of pasturage on the meadow and stubble land, they received a few poles of land, an acre, or two or three acres, according as they were smaller or less small men, over which they now had complete proprietorship. But even where the awards were not definitely unjust, such

[1] Report, 1808, pp. 12 f.
[2] Young, "Annals of Agriculture," XXXVI. 566.
[3] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

allotments were not an equivalent to their old rights. The privilege of keeping two cows and three sheep on common land was not compensated by the sole possession of one acre which would not support them.[1] The General Report admitted the hardship involved in the exchange of wide general rights for sole proprietorship over a narrow area. "Many, indeed most, who have allotments have not more than one acre, which, being insufficient for the man's cow, both cow and land are usually sold to the opulent farmers."

Fourthly, the enclosure of the common wastes cut at the root of village prosperity. The entire class of small agriculturists was injured; the peasant proprietor or small yeoman who had possessed rights in the common fields, the tenant cottager whose cottage gave him rights on the common, and the squatter who assumed such rights, had all alike depended largely on their live-stock as a source of income and of home supply. Pasturage and cow-run were now lost to them; so, too, was their right to cut firing. The impossibility of carrying on their stock-farming in the face of this loss of pasturage drove many of the medium-sized men out of the ranks of farmers. The small tenant farmer sold his stock and gave up his farm; yeomen, who before the enclosures

[1] Young, *op. cit.*, XXXVI. 513.

had been in a fairly substantial position, sold their holdings. For those who could raise sufficient money, trade or emigration offered new openings. "Many of the small farmers who have been deprived of their livelihood have sold their stock in trade and have raised from £50 to £100, with which they have procured themselves, their families, and money, a passage to America." Some of those who could not raise sufficient money "actually sold themselves for three years to supply that deficiency." [1] Others who had been independent men, though in a smaller way of life, now were reduced to the level of day labourers. "Thousands of families," says Davies, "which formerly gained an independent livelihood on those separate farms, have been gradually reduced to the class of day labourers." [2] One writer estimates the number of farmers or small holders so reduced at 250,000, a figure which "though not statistically accurate, shows the impression made upon a capable judge." [3]

If the men who had been more or less independent thus suffered, it is not to be wondered at if the circumstances of their inferiors were correspondingly reduced. Davies declared that "an

[1] "Cursory Remarks on Inclosure by a Country Farmer," 1786, p. 5.

[2] Davies, "The Case of Labourers in Husbandry," 1795, p. 55.

[3] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 108, n. 2.

amazing number of people have been reduced from a comfortable state of independence to the precarious condition of mere hirelings, who when out of work immediately came on the parish." There was a general complaint of the increase of pauperism. Lord Winchelsea wrote in 1746: "Whoever travels through the midland counties, and will take the trouble of inquiring, will generally receive for answer, that formerly there were a great many cottagers who kept cows, but the land is now thrown to the farmers; and if he inquires still further, he will find that in those parishes the poor rates have increased in an amazing degree more than according to the average rise throughout England." [1] The squatters in many cases were not only injured, but ruined by the enclosures, and had little choice but to come on the parish. Those who could not prove their claim to be left undisturbed were evicted and their cottages were pulled down, and the land they had cleared was included in the area to be divided. The greater number of them were thus driven off the commons.[2]

The eviction of the squatter from his dwelling must have made housing something of a problem in the enclosed districts. The housing of the agricultural labourers as a whole was in fact

[1] Young, "Annals of Agriculture," XXVI. 243.
[2] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

deteriorating at this date, not so much in the quality of the buildings, for squatter dwellings and those of peasant proprietors were often ill-built, but in accommodation. Greed for land and eagerness to consolidate on the part of the ruling classes led to the repeal, in 1775, of the Elizabethan Act, requiring a cottage to be provided with four acres of land. This opened the door to overcrowding, while the engrossing of small tenant farms into large, and the sales of small holdings brought about by the expenses of enclosure, led to the destruction of many cottage homes. The policy now adopted was to crowd two or more families together in the old farm houses or better cottages, the gardens of which were often absorbed by the large farms. The ample space for out-buildings and rubbish heaps around his dwelling, and the comparative roominess within which had compensated the peasant for poor construction and even poorer sanitation, were now too often lost to him.

Although enclosures did not take place in every part of the country at the same date, wherever a parish was enclosed the effects were immediate, and only thirty years after the acceleration in the movement set in, the impoverishment and wretchedness of the rural labouring classes was sufficiently marked and general as to excite the

attention of writers, philanthropists and politicians.

(*b*) *The Industrial Revolution.*

Unfortunately for the labourer at the very time he was passing through his agricultural crisis, the industrial revolution was depriving him of the support he had hitherto drawn from local industries. The development of machinery drew manufactures away from the country towns, and concentrated them around water power and in the coal and iron area of the North. Thus the labourer lost his local centres of industry. And still worse, hand-work now had to compete against machine-work. Consequently, earnings for home-work fell to the level of factory rates, and industry ceased to be a substantial source of income for the peasant. Eden gives an interesting description of the change that took place in the Wiltshire villages. "Unfortunately, since the introduction of machinery, which lately took place, hand-spinning has fallen into disuse, and for these two reasons; the clothier no longer depends on the poor for the yarn which they formerly spun for him at their own homes, as he finds that 50 persons, (to speak within comparison), with the help of machines, will do as much work as 500 without them; and the poor, from the great

reduction in the price of spinning, scarcely have the heart to earn the little that is obtained by it. For what they used to receive 1*s.* and 1*s.* 2*d.* the pound for spinning before the application of machinery, they now are allowed only 5*d.*, so that a woman in a good state of health, and not encumbered with a family can only earn 2*s.* 6*d.* a week, which is at the rate of one pound of spinning-work the day, and is the utmost that can be done: but if she has a family, she cannot earn more than 2*d.* a day or 1*s.* a week, or spin more than two pounds and a half a week: the consequence is that their maintenance must chiefly depend on the exertions of the man, (whose wages have not increased in proportion to this defalcation from the woman's earnings)."[1] The introduction of machinery into other trades brought about similar results in the other cottage industries. Where wife and children still engaged in home crafts it was at sweated rates, in competition with machinery, to eke out the husband's wage, upon which, as Eden says, the labourer and his family now must depend.

(*c*) *Inadequacy of Wages.*

In itself the labourer's dependence on wages, or, in other words, the loss of opportunities of

[1] Eden, "State of the Poor," III. 796.

working and earning as his own master, was a change for the worse. But his troubles were aggravated. The fact that he had formerly possessed a choice of occupations affected him injuriously now. The agricultural wages system had been constructed to suit an age in which the labourer divided his time between various employments. With some exceptions, engagements were for short terms, daily hirings for a daily wage being most general. This had been to the interest both of farmer and labourer, for the one could offer employment and the other accept it, just as it suited them. But when the labourer became dependent upon wages, the advantages of the system were no longer equal. The peasant suffered from a system which left him unemployed and wageless on wet days or in seasonal slackness. Labourers hired for the year or half-year and regular farm servants escaped this evil, but the long hirings were usual only in certain districts in the North, and the custom of taking indoor servants, which had been universal, was rapidly dying out. Even the chief servants on the farm were now in increasing numbers engaged for short terms. This short hire system in itself would not have been injurious if wages had risen sufficiently to allow of saving against unemployment, which now could not be tided over by private

work. A slight rise there was, but not enough to meet all the new demands which now were made upon wages. Whereas the rate of daily wages had been about 10*d.* to 1*s.* up to 1767, it was only about 1*s.* to 14*d.* from 1767 to 1792.[1] This can be fairly taken as an estimate of the general movement.[2]

This was not a rise sufficient to compensate the labourer in full employment for the loss of his former home supply of a large portion of his food. It certainly could not cover periodical unemployment. Lack of work, even for a few days, through illness or bad weather, must have meant a serious

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

[2] Young's tours, the Agricultural Surveys, and the writings of Eden, Davies and other contemporary investigators, give a large amount of information as to wages. A detailed comparison and consideration of wages is, however, outside the scope of the present work, for the information is almost sufficient to form a book of itself, and to deal briefly with the figures opens the way to misconception. For rates of wages in themselves afford only a rough indication of comparative wages. Rates vary according to seasons and to grades of labour, but there is often no indication in the eighteenth-century figures upon what data they are based. Moreover, the value of allowances given in kind, the steadiness of employment, and the prices of provisions, vary in different districts, and at different dates, and these must all be considered in any estimate of real wages. Following Arthur Young, and bearing in mind the figures of other writers, Dr. Hasbach concludes that the "average wage between 1767 and 1770, leaving out of account the neighbourhood of London and the extreme east and west of the country, was about fourteen pence a day. In the neighbourhood of the capital it was sometimes considerably higher; and in the more distant parts of the country it fell to one shilling and even less. Further, Young seems to be right when he says in another place that there was no change in the price of agricultural labour between 1767 and 1793" (*ib.*, p. 119).

depression in the standard of living, while a more prolonged period of unemployment involved recourse to the poor rates.[1] The advocates of enclosure had prophesied that the labourer would be better off, he would work less hard, for better wages, and have more employment.[2] The prophecy was not fulfilled. The better farming which followed the engrossing of farms and enclosure of wastes encourages the supposition that more labour would be employed. But, actually, farming on a large scale, just as businesses on a large scale, allowed of economy in labour.[3] The amount of unemployment, especially winter unemployment, increased.[4] As early as 1788 a Bill was proposed for the relief of agricultural labourers in the winter. This, and the high poor rates throughout the country, bear witness to the gravity of the problem. Wages, then, were not sufficient to cover periodical unemployment. And they were now required to do more than this. The labourer had to face a serious rise in prices. They rose gradually from about 1760, but from

[1] Davies, "Case of the Labourers," p. 55.

[2] Arbuthnot, "An Enquiry into the Connection between the Present Price of Provisions and the Size of Farms," 1772, p. 128.

[3] This is urged in a pamphlet of 1772 on "Advantages and Disadvantages of Enclosure," and in a tract of 1786, "Thoughts on Enclosures by a Country Farmer." See also Slater, "Enclosure of Common Fields," pp. 97—100.

[4] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 135, deals with some of the minor causes which differed in different districts.

1793 the rate of increase became rapid. Corn rose in the nineties from an average of 45*s.* 7*d.* the quarter to an average of 55*s.* 11*d.* The rise continued in the early nineteenth century, and from 1805 to 1812 it was never less than 73*s.*, and in some years it rose to over 100*s.*[1] The enormous growth of the population combined with a period of war, heavy indirect taxes,[2] and inadequate imports to drive up prices of provisions generally. Wages perforce rose, but not proportionately. While the prices of provisions rose between 1760 and 1805 " by from 50 to 100 per cent., and in the more distant parts of the country even by several hundreds per cent.," wages in the same period rose only 60 per cent.[3]

Taking England as a whole, the labourer had to purchase provisions the price of which had trebled out of wages which had only doubled. A more adequate rise was prevented by that sufficiency, and more than sufficiency, of workmen, due in part to economy of labour on the large farms, and partly to the influx into the wage-earning class of

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[2] Howlett, writing in 1783, puts the increased cost of articles affected by indirect taxes, soap, salt, leather, candles, spirits, at one-fifth their former price. (" The insufficiency of the causes to which the increase of our poor and of the poor's rates have been commonly ascribed," p. 53.) See also Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 117—131.

[3] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

small farmers and small holders who had been ruined by the enclosures. Contemporary writers are unanimous as to the inequality in the rise of wages and of prices, and are agreed as to the hardship inflicted thereby on the labouring classes. They recognised that the shortage had to be met by a reduction in the standard of living. This was inevitable when not only goods which had always been bought became more expensive, but when enclosures forced the labourer to buy also the bulk of his food at the new enhanced prices. It is in this period that the standard diet of the labourer became bread, cheese, tea and kettlebroth. It is now, too, that the costliness of firing brought about dependence on the bake-house oven, and a decline in household craft. And now also begins that dependence for supplies on the village shopkeeper which increased the difficulty of stretching wages to meet prices. Hitherto, the peasant had purchased much of what he could not supply himself at cost price or a low price from the local farmers. But at this date farmers were adopting wholesale methods of disposing of their produce. Davies, writing in 1795, describes the disadvantages in which the new wholesale system involved the labourer,[1] and similar evidence comes from other quarters. Kent, in discussing this point in 1775,

[1] "Case of the Labourer," pp. 34 f.

said: "Formerly they could buy milk, butter, and many other small articles in every parish, in whatever quantity they wanted. But since small farms have decreased in number, no such articles are to be had: for the great farmers have no idea of retailing such small commodities, and those who do retail them carry them all to towns. A farmer is even unwilling to sell the labourer who works for him a bushel of wheat which he might get ground for three or four pence a bushel. For want of this advantage, he has to go to the meal-man, or baker, who, in the ordinary course of their profit, get at least 10 per cent. of them on this principal article of their consumption."[1] Milk was unprocurable: the cottagers had lost their cows, and the farmers, who had contracts with middlemen and retailers in the towns, would not sell it. Meat was too expensive for the general run of labourers, and pigs were no longer generally kept: the cottagers had not sufficient garden room, and could not procure the bran and other feeding stuffs upon which to fatten them. Eden says that meat once a week was considered a sign of unusual comfort. This fall in the standard of living was common to the country as a whole

[1] "Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property." The question of food supplies and prices is dealt with by Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 120—131, with full references to contemporary authorities, which cannot be given here.

south of the coal fields, though there were exceptions. In Kent, for instance, many cottagers had good gardens and some kept cows.[1] In other districts where, as at Soham, the commons had been preserved, the labourers were better off. In the North the standard of living was kept up by the competition of factories and mines for labour. Payment in kind continued to be usual, and cow-runs were common, so that the North Country labourer was not greatly affected by the rise in prices, and was preserved from physical and moral deterioration due to bad food. The reports of the middle of the nineteenth century speak of him as though he was of a different breed from the labourer in the South, whereas in the eighteenth century, before the inequality in conditions of life and labour had worked their effect, there was no such adulation of the North countryman.[2] Marshall, a Yorkshireman, had praised the Norfolk labourer of the seventies, hereafter to be amongst the most depressed and degraded, as the best of their class.[3]

(4) The New Labourer.

The land problem, the wages problem, and the housing problem were now in being. The rural

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 147, quoting Boys' "Agriculture of Kent," 1813, Board of Agriculture Survey.

[2] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

[3] "Rural Economy of Norfolk," 1787, I. 41.

exodus had begun, though as yet in a very slight way, as a result of the loss of prospects and hope in agricultural work. And the moral degradation of the labourer, consequent upon the change in his conditions, was already affecting the farmer and causing concern amongst social observers.

The new class of farmers had desired to have at their command labour which was wholly dependent on wages, and available, therefore, in greater or less supplies whenever required. Lord Winchelsea observed that the generality of farmers had a dislike to seeing labourers rent any land, in part because they desired the land for themselves, and partly because " they rather wish to have the labourers more dependent upon them ; for which reasons they are always desirous of hiring the land and house occupied by a labourer, under pretence that by that means the landlord will be secure of his rent, and that they will keep the house in repair." [1] Marshall, in 1810, wrote of the farmers,

[1] Letter in Young's " Annals of Agriculture," XXVI. 242. See also Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 100, 132, 136 ; and Levy, " Large and Small Holdings," p. 36 : " The reasons why the large farmers and their friendly landlords objected to labourers holding any land are not difficult to discover. The old-fashioned small farmers had found it convenient to have the labour of the cotters at their disposal during harvest and on other like occasions, as by this arrangement they were free from any necessity of keeping labourers all the year through. The large farmer's interest was to the exact contrary. He was simply the manager of the farm, and he needed a supply of labour permanently at his disposal. He needed besides labourers who would not be hampered in their

" they, like manufacturers, require constant labourers, men who have no other means of support than their daily labour, men whom they can depend upon."

The combination of agricultural or industrial changes had certainly now created an agricultural class which had no other means of self-support than wages. The value of the change, however, was not so great as the farmer had expected. For the quality of labour was reduced. The incidental results of enclosure were, as we have seen, the labourer's loss of prospects, overcrowding, and a deterioration in the quality and abundance of his food. Only in the North, where wages, whether in money or kind, were sufficiently high to make good feeding, thrift, and a future possible, did labour maintain its character. It is difficult to gauge the physical deterioration elsewhere, but the moral degradation was both great and immediate. Complaints were universal of the vice, idleness, drunkenness and thriftlessness of the labouring class. Some observers saw no further than this: all blame rested with the poor themselves; let there be moral regeneration amongst them, and they would once more be happy and

work for him by consideration of the needs of their own holdings, and he wanted his men to be as dependent as possible upon their employer, and consequently to depend for their livelihood on their wages."

prosperous. Others saw further. Amongst them was Arthur Young, who had been a champion of enclosure, but now was quite open as to the evils it had brought upon the labouring class. He and others realised that the radical cause of the peasant's degradation lay in his material conditions. "Whatever their vice and immorality," wrote Howlett as early as 1787, "I must again maintain it has not originally been the cause of their extreme indigence, but the consequence, and therefore should only be an additional motive to an eager concurrence in any wise and judicious plan for bettering and improving their condition. This accomplished, everything else will follow."[1] The labourer's degradation was, in fact, inevitable. Driven to depend on a wage which could not support him when in health and work, it was impossible for him to save against sickness and old age, and he lost all sense of moral obligation to do so. His independence and self-esteem were broken by unavoidable appeals to the parish; poor feeding, which undermined his physique, led him to rejoice when he could scamp his work. Deprived of all means of rising in life, he lost the ambition to rise. There were only the ale-houses to dispel the greyness of life, to soothe the cravings of his underfed body, and to blot out the sight of

[1] Cf. Hasbach, *op. cit.* pp. 147—170.

the workhouse whither he was tending. "Go," wrote the champion of enclosure in a well-known passage in the "Annals of Agriculture," "Go to an ale-house kitchen of an old enclosed country, and there you will see the origin of poverty and the poor rates. For whom are they to be sober? For whom are they to save? (Such are their questions.) For the parish? If I am diligent, shall I have leave to build a cottage? If I am sober, shall I have land for a cow? If I am frugal, shall I have half an acre of potatoes? You offer no motives; you have nothing but a parish officer and a workhouse. Bring me another pot." [1]

[1] "Annals of Agriculture," XXXVI. 508.

CHAPTER II

ATTEMPTS AT SOLUTION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE problems of agricultural labour were now in being, and were firmly established in the very bedrock of rural and agricultural economy. From this time onwards, the history of the labourer is little more than an account of the efforts made to undo evils created in the eighteenth century and aggravated subsequently by many of those efforts themselves.

So rapid and so general was the decline in the labourer's prosperity, that he himself as well as the ruling classes were forced to seek for remedies, even before the agricultural and industrial changes of the eighteenth century were completed.

(1) THE LABOURER'S REMEDIES. MIGRATION.

The labourer's contributions to the solution of his problem at this time were drunkenness and migration. So far as immediate results were concerned, it is doubtful whether drink were not the better solution of the two: there was at least oblivion and some measure of happiness in the pot,

whereas migration at this date appears to have been too slight to effect much improvement in the condition of those who remained on the land. Still, this early migration marks the beginning of an important policy and deserves consideration.

It would appear that the fall of the standard in comfort and the loss of hopes and possibilities of rising in life had the immediate effect of driving the labourer from the land. At any rate, the labourer's loss of his cow and common rights coincides with a considerable rural migration. It is, however, difficult to estimate the exact part played by dissatisfaction with the new conditions, for then, as now, the causes of the rural exodus were mixed. Certainly discontent was one factor, but not the only one. To a certain extent migration was forced upon the rural population. Many small farmers, as we know, were driven off the land by enclosures, and betook themselves to the towns or to America. Labourers, too, were driven away, whether they would or no. In spite of the better farming on large farms, less labour was required for the cultivation of the land after engrossing than had profitably been put into it before. The large farms allowed of economy of labour through better organisation, and though more corn was grown, much of the land was still kept in pasture, and remained in pasture until the much higher

prices of the war period set in, so that from 1760 to 1790 or later, the possible economy in labour was not neutralised by a greater demand for work upon the corn land. That there was not employment enough at sufficient wages to support a rural population bereft of its former independent employments is clear from the complaints of winter slackness and the rise in poor rates. Deficiency in house accommodation was added to lack of employment to compel migration. The large farmer, who threw perhaps half a dozen farms together, pulled down many of the cottages, or allowed them to fall into ruin, maintaining only sufficient house room for his own labourers, whom he frequently crowded into the old farm houses. Such a policy enabled him to throw the land attached to cottages into his farm, reduced the expenses of repairs, and saved him in poor rates. The rise in poor rates, consequent upon the loss of the labourer's stock and common rights, played a very important part in the new deficiency of housing. So heavy were they, that the opportunity of saving expense in rates by decreasing the number of possible paupers was a real inducement upon landlords to pull down or shut up cottages.[1] The first result was overcrowding, a striking example of which is given in the "Annals of Agriculture," where forty-five

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 112, n., 129.

persons are spoken of as having been crowded into three small farm houses which formerly had been occupied by fifteen.[1] The second result was migration, owing, of course, partly to discomfort, but also in part to the needs of young people who upon marriage could find no dwelling locally.

On the other hand, it has to be remembered that a part at any rate of the rural migration may have been purely voluntary. The first half of the eighteenth century saw a great expansion in trade and commerce, so that even before the industrial revolution set in, manufactures were offering increasingly good employment. The numerous manufacturing centres to be found throughout the length and breadth of England in the little country towns made it comparatively easy for the enterprising of the agricultural classes to transfer themselves to industrial work; they could more easily acquire knowledge as to its conditions and the available openings now than they could when manufactures were localised mainly in the great industrial areas of the North, and the migration in itself was not so great an undertaking. Moreover, the eighteenth century saw an improvement in the means of transport. By this date, too, the Elizabethan law making a seven years' apprenticeship compulsory upon all who engaged in a trade

[1] "Annals of Agriculture," XXXVI. 115.

or handicraft was not strictly observed, and in the more rural districts was probably no great deterrent to the influx of adults into industrial occupations.[1] That there was some immigration of labour from the country to the towns at this time is clear from the complaints of the legally apprenticed craftsmen, who considered that competition of the newcomers was injurious to themselves.[2] But it is not possible to estimate the extent to which it occurred, nor how far the labourer was attracted to the towns by the increasing lucrativeness of trade, or was being driven into industrial work by the wretchedness of his agricultural life. All that can be said is that it is unfair to assume that every desertion of the field for the workshop was due to bad conditions in the former. There were other motives for the change.

Migration may, too, have been willingly entered upon owing to a preference for town rather than country life. Arthur Young attacked the increasing migration as being due to mere pleasure-loving. " Young men and women in the country fix their eye on London, as the last stage of their hope ; they enter into service in the country for little else but to raise money enough to go to

[1] Dunlop, " English Apprenticeship," pp. 223 f.
[2] *Ib.*, pp. 233 f.

London, which was no such easy matter, when a stage coach was four or five days creeping an hundred miles; the fare and the expenses ran high. But now! a country fellow, one hundred miles from London, jumps on to a coachbox in the morning and for eight or ten shillings gets to town by night; which makes a material difference, besides rendering the going up and down so easy that the numbers who have seen London are increased tenfold, and, of course, ten times the boasts are sounded in the ears of country fools, to induce them to quit their healthy, clean fields for a region of dirt, stink and noise."[1] No doubt mere idle ambition and a love of excitement played its part in this movement of the young people to the towns, but this eagerness for the new life reveals the unsatisfactoriness of the old.

As to the number who for one reason or other now left the countryside, we have unfortunately no trustworthy figures. In a pamphlet of 1786 it is said that of several hundred villages which forty years before contained between four and five hundred inhabitants, very few now had half that number.[2] The instance is given of a typical parish with eighty-two houses, twenty of which

[1] Young, "Farmers' Letters," pp. 353 f. See also Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 38, and notes.

[2] "Cursory Remarks on Enclosures by a Country Farmer," 1786.

were small farms, and forty-two were cottages. The twenty farms were now consolidated into four; sixty cottages had been pulled down or allowed to fall into ruins; and the work of the whole area, hitherto performed by eighty-two persons and their families, was now said to be done by four herds and eight maidservants.[1] It is possible that there is some exaggeration in these figures. Another writer, in 1776,[2] speaks of the thousands that were emigrating yearly. Yet another observer, writing in 1772, declares that " In the counties of Leicester and Northampton, where inclosing has lately prevailed, the decrease of inhabitants in almost all the inclosed villages . . . cannot but give every true friend of the country a most sensible concern. The ruins of former dwelling-houses, barns, stables, etc., show everyone who passes through them that they were once much more extensive and better inhabited." [3] These and similar observations by contemporary writers are too vague to allow of any estimate of the numbers of migrants, but the movement evidently had obtained considerable dimensions, and this even in the seventies, only ten years after the acceleration in enclosure had set in.

[1] See Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

[2] Peters, " Agriculture," 1776, p. 171.

[3] Addington, " An Enquiry into the Reasons for and against Inclosing Common Fields," 1772, p. 43.

The rate of migration appears to have been maintained even after 1793, when the vast extension of arable farming led to an increased demand for labour. At any rate it could be said at the turn of the century, "the agricultural system has depopulated, and is depopulating the shires wherein it prevails."[1] The truth is that the rise in wages, which did at last take place in the nineties, was not commensurate with the rise in prices, and still less, therefore, was it sufficient to make up the shortage in the labourer's budget caused by the loss of common lands. Consequently, industrial work, although its wage was not so high relatively to agricultural wages as it had been,[2] continued to draw the peasant from the land. The substitution of the shuttle for the spade was said to have led to an actual scarcity of labour in the North.[3] The development of the new industrial centres in the coal and iron area, of course, gave peculiar facilities for migration to

[1] Chalmers, "An Estimate of the Comparative Strength of Great Britain," 1802, p. 318.

[2] See Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 137. At the end of the seventeenth century the pay of the industrial worker was supposed to be twice as much as that of the agricultural labourer; at the close of the eighteenth, industrial wages were still ahead of agriculture, but not by so much. Dr. Hasbach attributes this to the influx of labourers from the country, and the competition of child labour on the new machines, both of which tended to keep wages down.

[3] Marshall, "Review of the Reports to the Board of Agriculture from the Northern Department of England," 1808, p. 257.

the surrounding rural districts. But migration everywhere was favoured by a cessation in the efforts of boroughs and the old handicraft companies to enforce their monopolies,[1] and by the relaxation in 1795 of the law of settlement. The Settlement Act had probably not been very greatly observed for some years past; certainly it was not strictly enforced. Still, a potential barrier against migration was demolished by the new policy which allowed the poor man to travel without a certificate and delayed the removal of strangers to their own parishes until they were actually on the rates. Enlistment during the war aided in the depopulation of the countryside, for recruiting for the army and navy was enormous during the twenty years of the struggle.

Yet when all is said and done, the results achieved by the rural migration were not great from the labourer's point of view. In the North it was sufficiently extensive to compel the maintenance of good conditions of employment, but in the country as a whole the supply of labour was still large enough to meet the requirements of the new farming, and the rise in wages was too small to effect any real improvement in the labourer's condition. Individuals may have benefited by their change in occupation, but those

[1] Dunlop, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

who were left behind were little affected, and helped to negative such improvement as the exodus brought about by rearing large families with the recklessness ever bred of wretched conditions. It is not in its results, but in certain attendant circumstances, that the interest of the eighteenth-century migration lies. Immediately upon the deterioration in the conditions of agricultural life, the labourer began to forsake the countryside; he preferred industrial work, despite its laboriousness and accompanying "dirt, stink and noise," to labour without prospects in clean fields. At once, too, we find that an exodus, for which agricultural conditions were at any rate largely to blame, is charged to the account of the pleasure-loving, idle-minded, younger generation. Lastly, the peculiar difficulty in the agricultural world of effecting improvements in conditions of labour by a shortage in its supply at once appears. The farmer is a manufacturer who perhaps more than any other can change his line of business, and we find the Northern farmers, threatened by a scarcity of labour, escaping from the perils of higher wages by acting as graziers instead of corn producers.[1]

[1] Marshall, "Review of the Reports to the Board of Agriculture from the Northern Department of England," 1808, p. 257; Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 135, n.

(2) Public Effort.

(a) *Diet; Benefit Societies; Allotments; Poor Law.*

Meanwhile, the upper classes had been awakened to the dangers of wretchedness and discontent in the masses, and were discussing the remedies which could be applied. From 1787 onwards, various schemes were suggested. It is interesting to find amongst them, even though it came to nothing, a scheme for compulsory insurance. According to this scheme, which was devised by Haweis, a clergyman, friendly societies were to be established throughout the country, and every man or woman who laboured for hire and earned three shillings or more a week was to contribute each week from a twenty-fourth to a twenty-sixth of their earnings. Every occupier of lands and tenements was to pay in place of poor rates one-twentieth of the rent of such lands or tenements into the insurance fund.[1]

A more popular subject of discussion was reform in the labourer's diet. His condition would be vastly improved, so it was said, if he would abandon his extravagant habit of eating wheaten bread; potatoes he could use more largely if he were not too stubborn; while milk would form no bad substitute for other animal foods, if only he

[1] Eden, "State of the Poor," I. 398.

could be prevailed upon to drink it instead of the tea which obviously must have a bad effect upon his physique. As Davies pointed out, the labourers would be ready enough to drink milk if they could get it, but it was not to be obtained; they would gladly grow potatoes if they had the land; while wheaten bread was the only substitute they had for their former staple foods.[1] But his common-sense arguments were not accepted as final, and the discussion continued.[2] The same idea that the labourer could effect his own salvation led to the promotion of benefit societies and savings banks. But the labourer had too little to save for the banks to be of any use to him,[3] while the benefit societies were for the most part so ill-managed and unsound that they were a curse rather than a blessing.

The movement to supply allotments showed a greater understanding of the labourer's case. This early movement, though it attained no great results, is important as laying the foundation of a policy which was to play a big part in the future.

[1] "Case of the Labourer," pp. 31 f.

[2] Hammond, J. L. and B., "Village Labourer," pp. 123 f., on contemporary opinion on diet.

[3] "Report on Labourers' Wages," 1824, p. 40: "There are scarcely any agricultural labourers who deposit in the savings banks; deposits seem to be confined, in general, to domestic servants, to journeymen and to little annuitants." Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 171: "The savings banks were too thinly scattered over the country to be of much service to the labourer."

Kent, in 1775, had urged upon landlords the importance of supplying cottages with half an acre of garden land, and of allowing "a small portion of pasture land, of about three acres" to the better-class labourers, "to enable them to support a cow."[1] His suggestion was taken up by Davies in 1795, and by Lord Winchilsea in 1796, whose scheme appeared in the "Annals of Agriculture."[2] That same year saw the foundation by Wilberforce and Thomas Barnard of the Society for Bettering the Conditions and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor, which included in its policy the increase of allotments. The combined efforts of the Society and of Young, Davies and others who had made the labourer's condition their concern, had some effect in inducing landlords to institute allotments upon their estates. Lord Winchelsea himself, of course, was one, and Lord Carrington and others philanthropically minded adopted the suggestion. They were rewarded with at least some measure of success. The "General Report on Enclosures" of 1808 bears witness to the superior condition of cottagers in parishes where, upon enclosure, cow plots had been reserved for them,[3] while in villages where the allotment system was adopted

[1] "Hints to Gentlemen," p. 231.
[2] XXVI. 235 f.
[3] "General Report," p. 156.

by philanthropic landlords the labourer preserved his character.[1] But the evidence tendered by such localities and by those districts in the North, where it was still customary for farmers to provide their labourers with cow plots and potato ground, did not avail to carry the new movement far. There was no compulsion behind it ; the majority of landlords were indifferent, and the labourers affected were but the favoured few.

The years 1795 and 1796 also saw a reform in the poor law. The Act of 1795, which modified the law of settlement, was a measure of labour organisation rather than of poor relief, its object being to increase the mobility of labour. The Act of 1796, on the contrary, was definitely a poor law, and does not strictly come into any consideration of the remedies proposed for the agricultural labour problem. But the policy it inaugurated had so much influence on the wages question and upon labour generally, that it must be briefly noticed. This Act made it obligatory upon parishes to relieve the able-bodied outside the workhouse. Most parishes naturally sought to lighten this obligation by finding work for their unemployed. As a rule they were sent round the parish to solicit work, and only what they could

[1] Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 158 ; Slater, " Enclosure of Common Fields," pp. 52 *f.*

not earn in wages was made up out of the rates. Sometimes they were employed upon parish work, and sometimes again they were put up to auction and were sent to work for the farmer who offered the highest price. These last two methods were probably only exceptionally used in the period to 1815, but the first-mentioned form of the roundsman system was common. For, as we have seen, although the great extension of corn-growing from 1795 to 1815 meant more and steadier employment, most parishes suffered from unemployment, especially in the winter. The roundsman system, combined with aids out of the rates in relief of wages, was thus firmly established. It was ready to hand when the farmer, in the days of his adversity, sought to reduce working expenses by employing only rate-aided labour; and it was there as a well-established system upon which could be engrafted all too easily a minimum wage scheme of the worst type, the origin of which has now to be considered.

(*b*) *Minimum Wage Scheme.*

The chief interest of the movement for improvement in the nineties centres in the efforts to increase wages. Kent had pressed for a rise of wages in 1775. Taking the average wage as 1*s.* 2*d.* a day, he declared for an increase of 4*d.*

A daily wage of 1*s.* 6*d.*, he urged, would enable labourers to meet the rise in prices, clothe themselves decently, and enjoy perhaps eight or ten pounds of meat to which they were surely entitled by " the laws of Nature and the ties of humanity." [1] This, however, was merely an appeal to the sense of true economy in farmers. It bore no fruit. But the accentuation of the agricultural problem in the eighties led to the institution of a national policy in respect to wages. Gilbert, in 1782, succeeded in passing an Act to allow parishes to maintain the able-bodied unemployed outside the workhouse. Parish officers were to find them work and were to receive their wages. If a living wage were not paid, it might be supplemented out of the poor rates. The wages clauses were, however, optional. Sir William Young sought to introduce a wider scheme on the same lines in 1788; according to his Bill, vestries were to be empowered to settle a rate of winter wages, and to distribute the unemployed amongst parishioners in proportion to the rates the latter paid. Two-thirds of the wages were to be paid by the employer, and one-third was to come from the rates.[2] This Bill, had it been adopted, might have brought fewer evils in its train, bad though its principles

[1] Kent, " Hints to Gentlemen," pp. 273 f.
[2] Eden, " State of the Poor," I. 397.

were, than did Gilbert's scheme, since it fixed the minimum which employers might pay. But it was not passed into law.

These Bills were avowedly limited in their intentions. They sought to relieve the unemployed but did not attempt to touch low wages, which were largely the cause of the labourer's instantaneous recourse to the parish in periods of slackness. In 1795, the more drastic remedy was attempted. At the close of the year, Mr. Whitbread, junior, brought in a Bill the purpose of which was to establish a minimum wage for agricultural labourers.[1] The Bill was read a second time on February 12th, 1796. Whitbread urged upon the House the necessity of a public regulation of wages for agricultural labour; voluntary adjustment was a failure, for though wages had been raised, they had not been increased proportionately to the rise in the price of bread and other articles. The result was that the labouring classes were in a condition truly deplorable, and their misery was increasing while the poor rates had risen by an enormous amount. According to his scheme, the daily wage of the labourer was to

[1] "House of Commons Journals," LI. 111, 205. November 25th, leave given to bring in a Bill to explain and amend so much of the Act of Elizabeth, c. 4, as empowers justices of the peace to regulate the wages of labourers. December 9th, first reading.

be regulated, the justices of the peace in every district acting as a wages board. Pitt himself replied. He was not prepared to support the Bill, and side-tracked it by a lengthy speech on poor law reform. Such reform would do more for the poor, he urged, than the adoption of a minimum wage which, devised to meet the requirements of a man with an average family, would prove no assistance to those whose families were above the average. He spoke, too, on an extension of the schools of industry and the advantages of early employment of children; their more general instruction and employment would increase family wages and the comfort of the working class.[1] The lack of statesmanship which, according to modern ideas, underlies this suggestion needs no comment; but the proposal was in accordance with ideas of the day, and Whitbread, replying to Pitt's speech as a whole, remarked merely that poor law reform and the increased labour of children lay in the future and supplied no remedy for present suffering. But the Bill was rejected. Howlett, who was in favour of the minimum wage, attacked Pitt for his lack of support.[2] But the Bill had really no chance of success, even if it had been taken up and improved by the Government.

[1] "Parliamentary History of England," XXXII. cols. 705 f.

[2] "Examination of Mr. Pitt's Speech in the House of Commons . . . Relative to the Condition of the Poor."

It is impossible to estimate how far opposition to its principles was due to hostility of employers of labour within the House.[1] Certainly the landlord and farmer interest was strongly represented. But apart from all private interests, the House was totally opposed to the regulation of wages and the interference of the Legislature with labour. The doctrines of *Laissez Faire* had a firm hold. In itself, too, the working of a minimum wage would have been difficult. The magistrates of the county of Chester, in their petition against the Bill, urged that it would tend to the oppression of labourers and prevent their being employed by the day, while it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to carry it into effect, owing especially to the difficulty "in determining as to the extent of the abilities of old and infirm persons to work as labourers in husbandry." They declared that the Bill would in many instances be the means of depriving such labourers of employment.[2] This is an objection which can be urged against almost any legislation that has for its object improvement in the condition of labour. It is not insurmountable, but the temper of the times did not allow of any effort to surmount it.

[1] It was on this account that others who spoke against the Bill opposed it: "Parliamentary History of England," XXXII. cols. 710 f.

[2] "House of Commons Journal," LI. 383.

Having failed in their efforts to oblige employers to pay a minimum wage, those who desired to effect improvement by higher wages in the condition of the poor now fell back upon devices for achieving the same end out of public monies. In 1795, Davies wrote in favour of a minimum wage, which was to be regulated in accordance either with the needs of a married man with a family or with the price of bread. "The properest way of making up the deficiency of their earnings," he wrote, "is by an allowance out of the poor rate."[1] This suggestion was put into practice in Berkshire that same year. Acting under the powers given them by Gilbert's Act, magistrates met at Speenhamland, by the name of which place the system was afterwards known, and drew up a wages scale based upon the size of a man's family and the price of bread. If the wage paid by the employers fell short of the wage set out in the scale, the deficiency was to be made up by an allowance from the rates. Thus the principle of a minimum wage was actually brought into practice, but, as time was to show, the scheme adopted was the worst possible. For the time, however, the Speenhamland system was limited to the place of its origin and a few districts which copied the Berkshire model.

[1] "Case of the Labourer," p. 119.

In judging the remedies attempted in the nineties, allowance must be made for the lack of experience in social legislation and the strain of a Continental war under which the ruling classes laboured. Yet it cannot but be recognised that their monopoly of political power and the security of their position deadened capitalists and landlords to the national needs. The wretched condition of the poor was not sufficient spur to action. All that the ruling class contributed towards the solution of the social problem was tolerance for such schemes of the humanitarians as they believed to be innocuous to themselves. The full strength of British statesmanship was not applied to the problem, and Gilbert's experimental Act was allowed to become the chief contribution of the House of Commons to the labourer's relief. This remedy created evils almost greater than it sought to remove, and the chief result of the eighteenth-century reform movement was to plunge the labourer, whose degradation might seem to have been complete in the nineties, into even deeper depths.

CHAPTER III

REMEDIES FROM 1814 TO 1834

THE story of the English agricultural labourer from 1814 to 1834 is a pauper's story. For the chief feature of these years is the payment of doles out of the poor rates to supplement his inadequate wages. Such a policy had a depressing effect upon wages, and they became so inadequate that labourers throughout the country were forced to become recipients of parish allowances. But though the prevalence of the allowance system is the outstanding and distinguishing feature of this period, it saw on the one hand a continuance of the movement for allotments and benefit societies which began in former years, and the continuance, too, in the problems of housing and rural migration. And on the other hand, in this period begins an emigration policy in which the year 1834 forms no special landmark, whilst the labourer instituted certain methods of self-assistance, chiefly along the lines of crime.

(1) THE ALLOWANCE SYSTEM.

The year 1814 saw the beginning of an agricultural depression which plunged the farmer into

heavy losses and the labourer into unemployment. Both were compelled to utilise to its fullest the contrivance of rate-aided wages, until the power to do so ended with the reform of the Poor Law in 1834. Although the system of parish allowances had been devised in the nineties, its use had not been general before 1814. For until that year farmers prospered, and the labourer, though his condition was that of a sweated worker, managed to struggle along, thanks to the enormous extension of arable farming which brought both more and steadier employment. But with the close of the war the farmer entered upon bad times, and the labourer was, of course, the first to suffer from the agricultural depression.

It was the prosperous days of farming up to 1814 which dug about the feet of the farmer the pit into which he was to fall. There were few good harvests from 1795; 1804 and 1811 were particularly bad years, and this, combined with the war, rendered the price of corn very high. Landlords and farmers, however, failed to take into account the special causes of the high prices, and based their calculations upon the permanency of factors that were purely temporary. Farmers readily took farms, the rents of which were increased as much as fivefold upon the rents of 1790. Landlords shortsightedly allowed the

ploughing up of pasture land which had been perfected only in the course of centuries. Huge sums were sunk in the land and in improvements. Land speculation and jobbing were rife, the land being sold sometimes for as much as forty years' purchase, and many estates were mortgaged at high rates of interest which in the good days seemed no burden.

In 1814, with the close of the war, came the collapse. Not even the high duties on imported corn availed the farmer. He required still higher prices than they created to protect him from the evils inherent in the one-sided development of arable farming. As early as 1816, the clamour of distress was so great that the Board of Agriculture instituted an inquiry into the state of agriculture. It was found that already there had been an average fall in rent of 25 per cent., while farmers who had their farms on long leases and could not obtain a reduction in rent had in many cases failed completely. Indeed, many farmers had become parish paupers ; others threw up their tenancies ; and landlords, who were already financially embarrassed by the agricultural collapse, were often quite unable to carry on the work of farming themselves. Thousands of acres were allowed to fall out of cultivation, and became a mass of thistles, weeds, and coarse grass, which

was too poor to support stock—even had the farmers possessed the capital to substitute pasture farming for corn growing. In 1815, 3,000 acres in one small district in Huntingdonshire were left uncultivated, and in the Isle of Ely, nineteen farms were left vacant.[1] Pasture farmers suffered with arable farmers, for the commercial and industrial depression, consequent upon the revival of Continental manufactures after the war, led to a decreased demand for their produce by the town population. The figures of bankruptcies, seizures and arrests rise with a leap in 1815. The return to cash payments in 1819 led to a great rise in the value of gold; and the consequent decline in the price of goods generally, including agricultural produce, combined with the good harvests and the wet season of 1822 to prevent a recovery. Petitions and complaints continued to pour into the House of Commons. The House responded by keeping up the Corn Duties, which really only aggravated the evils, and by appointing Select Committees in 1820, 1821, 1822, 1833 and 1836, to consider matters agricultural. Meanwhile, in the country, thistles took the place of corn, sheriffs' officers the place of live stock. At the best the farmer struggled through by exhausting his capital, reducing his wages bill, and gathering in what he

[1] "Prothero, "English Farming," p. 322.

could from land which was exhausted from excessive croppings, and was under-cultivated, both in respect to labour and to manure.[1]

As would be expected, the labourer suffered. Wages were reduced either directly or indirectly through inconstant employment : while the reduction in the staff of those farmers who could keep their heads above water, and the diminution in the area under cultivation, increased the number of the unemployed. The general fall in prices in 1819 was of little assistance to a labourer who had no money with which to purchase. There was, however, one remedy available, the system of parish allowances devised in the nineties. This was now generally applied. Men, women and children were sent upon the rounds, were put up to auction, or were billeted upon farmers in proportion to the rates at which the latter were assessed, and their insufficient wages were supplemented by the parish. This was the usual method of meeting distress, although sometimes the unemployed were set to work upon parish work. But whatever the system, allowances out of the rates was the common feature. Until 1817 or 1818, few parishes appear to have had a definite standard for allowances, but after that date the

[1] Prothero, *op. cit.*, pp. 322 f. Cf. Curtler, " History of English Agriculture," Hasbach and Levy, *op. cit.*

Speenhamland system of fixing allowances according to the size of the family and the price of bread was commonly adopted. The results of this "remedy" were disastrous, morally and economically. The labourer's independence was finally and completely undermined; however hard he might be willing to work in order to keep himself and his family off the rates, upon the rates he must go or work he would not have. For farmers, driven by the bad times to reduce all possible expenses, practically refused to employ any but rate-aided labour. The Report of 1824 on labourers' wages states that "Men have been discharged as supernumerary or superfluous, and have been ordered to receive a certain sum (perhaps 10*d.* or 1*s.* a day) from the Poor Book. Some of the farmers have then taken them into employ and given them plenty of work."[1] Farmers thus effected great reductions in their wages bills at the expense of their neighbours, landlords, small farmers and tradesmen, who employed no labour, but had to contribute to the poor rates. Moreover, high poor rates could be used by farmers as a lever to effect reductions in their rents.[2] As to the labourers, those who had a little property of

[1] "Report from the Select Committee on the Rate of Agricultural Wages; and on the Condition and Morals of Labourers in that Employment, 1824," p. 36.

[2] *Ib.*, p. 57.

their own, a cottage or a bit of land, and were the aristocracy of labour in the parish, had nothing for it but to stand unemployed until they were ruined. When they had lost the last relic of their independence they could get employment as rate-aided workmen, but until then "they could not be employed because persons having property could not be put on the Poor Book." [1] All inducements to thrift and to hard work were lost, for a man was sure of support, however lazy or however idle.

"Under the operation of the scale system idleness, improvidence or extravagance occasion no loss and consequently diligence and economy can afford no gain." So runs the Report of 1834. "In many places the income derived from the parish for easy or nominal work actually exceeds that of the independent labourer . . . In such places, a man who does not possess either some property or an amount of skill which will ensure to him more than the average rate of wages, is of course a loser by preserving his independence." But as the Report points out, "the severest sufferers are those that have become callous to their own degradation," who claimed relief as a right, and gave the least amount possible of work in return for wages which they squandered

[1] *Ib.*, p. 24.

because they had not to be earned.[1] Degraded and pauperised, the labourer was prepared to adopt any method of ameliorating his wretchedness. And he found the method ready to hand in reckless and prolific marriage.[2] With an almost incredible blindness the scale of allowances was so drawn up that it set a premium on early marriage and on unwedded motherhood. The unmarried man received less from the rates than the married man, and the latter's allowance increased with the size of his family. In addition, as the burden of the rates increased, the married men were usually given such work as was available in order that their wages might keep their families to some extent off the rates, and the unmarried man was left to support himself on the 3*s.* allowed by the parish. Thus, a man's one chance of bettering his position was by marriage and the production of a family, while the mother of illegitimate children was offered a better income than the worker in the fields. Such is the picture drawn by the Reports of 1824, 1828, 1831, and 1834.

There were, of course, districts where conditions were not so bad. In the Report of 1831 it was

[1] "Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1834," pp. 77 f.

[2] "Report on Wages, 1824," pp. 34, 42, 48 f.

said no allowances were given in the parish of Alford in Lincolnshire, but the fathers of large families were relieved by having their children put out to cottagers and farmers.[1] And in the Report of 1824, Northumberland, Cumberland, Lincolnshire, most of Yorkshire, some districts in Lancashire and Staffordshire, were said to be free of the worst evils.[2] But in the Report of 1834 only Northumberland and Durham are described as having completely escaped, though, in the North generally rate-aided labour was not so universal as in the South. The system, it was said in 1831, had been adopted during the high prices of the war period, but it was used only as a transitory measure, and did not become permanent as it did in the South.[3]

The moral degradation of the rural population, as to which the Reports are unanimous, was the direct result of the Poor Law solution of the agricultural labour problem. Its indirect results were only less serious. First of these was the yet further aggravation of the housing difficulty. The increasing heaviness of the poor rates led to a yet further demolition of cottages in order to reduce the number of potential paupers, at a

[1] "Report of Lords' Committee on the Poor Laws, 1831," p. 196.
[2] "Report on Wages," p. 4.
[3] "Report of Lords' Committee on the Poor Laws," p. 147.

time when every encouragement was being given to early marriages and large families. The consequent overcrowding contributed yet more to the moral degeneration which was already in full swing. This overcrowding took two forms: on the one hand there was overcrowding within the cottages, now that an increasing population was forced to accommodate itself in a decreasing number of dwellings. On the other hand, the cottages themselves were crowded together without gardens or proper space for outbuildings, and in undue proximity to each other. For the demolition of cottages by large landlords who owned all the property in the parishes, "close" parishes as they were afterwards called, drove the population into "open" parishes, where property was owned by many small men. There the demand for houses was so great that tradesmen, jobbing builders and mere speculators not only saw a safe investment in the acquisition of existing cottages, but built others on such spaces as were available, spaces which had meant gardens, air and health for the original inhabitants of the village. This in itself was bad enough, but the increased rents now demanded complicated the housing problem. The speculators, of course, invested in cottage property for the purpose of making an income, which the large landlords had

never looked for in labourers' dwellings. They charged high rents even for wretched cottages without gardens. In these rents the labourer acquiesced, sometimes because he had no power to resist, but often because he had no inducement to do so. For allowances were often given in kind, in the form of tickets to shops, and also in house room; thus the rent came not out of his pocket but out of the ratepayers'.[1] A customary rent was thus established above the value of the property and above the price a labourer could pay if unassisted by the parish.

Lastly, the allowance system had an injurious effect upon wages, and this not only while it was in vogue, but even after it was abolished. Farmers paid as little as three and five shillings a week to an adult labourer partially supported by the parish, and though a rise in wages necessarily took place when aid from the rates was no longer given, it took time to bring them up to anything approaching sufficiency.

Had the allowance system maintained the material comfort of the labourer through a period of agricultural distress, its promoters might have pleaded that it was justifiable. But it did not even succeed in doing this. In the early years of its existence sufficiently large allowances were

[1] "Report on Labourers' Wages, 1824," p. 47.

given to secure the labourer a certain standard of comfort. But as the system developed, and whole villages were brought upon the rates, and as many small farmers and tradesmen became impoverished under their heavy assessments, the money required to keep up the standard was not forthcoming.[1] The standard of maintenance accepted by the parish in 1816 was below that thought necessary in 1795,[2] and by 1830 it was so inadequate that rioting, bred of wretchedness and discontent, was rife in many districts. Reports refer to a lower standard of diet in many localities:[3] bread was often the chief food, some families being unable to supply themselves even with cheese or potatoes, while tea was drunk "when they could get it." Though some witnesses before the Lords' Committee of 1831 declared there was no change in diet in their districts, so far as they knew, others spoke of a deterioration in the last ten years or so. Moreover the allowances, even where apparently high, were often paid partly in kind and partly in tickets to shops, and the small tradesman knew

[1] "Report on the Depressed State of Agriculture, 1821," p. 95. Difficulty in collecting rates owing to poverty of the farmers at Battle, Sussex.

[2] Hammond, "Village Labourer," p. 184.

[3] "Report on Depressed State of Agriculture, 1821," p. 65; "Report of Lords' Committee on the Poor, 1831," pp. 34, 37, 113: Sussex (cf. p. 44); Northants, where meat is eaten (p. 11); Beds; etc.

well how to make a profit and repay himself with interest for his high rates by supplying poor goods at high prices to the parish paupers. High prices for necessary provisions and high rents ate up the labourer's allowance and small wage, often before he could supply himself and his family with sufficient food. The general result of the allowance system upon rent has been already noted: in some cases rents were so enhanced that they were said to be "one of the chief causes of the agricultural labourers being in a worse state than they ever were." This same witness declared, "I have known many instances where the amount paid by a labourer for a cottage was greater than the amount of relief which he received from the overseer."[1]

Such then were the results of the chief remedy adopted for the agricultural labour problem. The evils it brought in its train were too apparent to escape notice: the Committee of 1824 had urged the ill-consequences of the system of supplementing wages from the rates, and the Committee of 1828 had emphatically declared that it must be abolished. But it was not until 1834, that the allowance system came to an end with the Reform of the Poor Law and the Repeal of the Act of 1796, which had made it compulsory upon parishes to give outdoor relief.

[1] "Report on Labourers' Wages," p. 47.

(2) The Labourer's Remedy. Crime.

The failure from its very outset of the one general remedy that was contrived, prompted the philanthropic to continued efforts on the labourer's behalf, and drove the labourer himself to attempt remedies of his own.

The remedies adopted by the labourer, ignorant and isolated as he was, and blinded by wretchedness, were not, as may be supposed, of a nature really to improve his condition. The local benefit societies which he formed and joined, under the patronage of the village publican, rested too often upon an unsound financial basis, and collapsed when several members came upon the funds in illness or old age, just when a club might have been of service. The attempt to improve his position by early and prolific marriage has been already noticed. His third method of self-help was equally deplorable. Driven by want, fearful that the allowances would be still further reduced, and believing that the adoption of machinery by their employers would work their yet greater ruin, the agricultural labourers of many districts sought to protect themselves by rioting and incendiarism.[1] Machinery was broken up, higher wages were demanded, and those farmers who opposed the new

[1] Hammond, B. and J. L., "Village Labourer," XI., XII.

demands had their ricks fired and received menacing letters from "Captain Swing," containing threats of worse to follow. The rioting began in 1830 and continued for eighteen months, and there was hardly a district east of Dorsetshire and south of Lincoln in which the "Captain" had not his followers. The riots were finally suppressed only by the aid of the military, and by methods which reveal that terror blinded the Govermnent both to its own dignity and to the British reputation for just administration of the law. The most permanent results of the disturbances were a diminution in such good feeling as still remained between employer and employed, and the creation of suspicion towards any movement of agricultural labourers. The immediate result was a rise in wages. Thus, regarding the matter from this point of view only, the labourer may claim a greater measure of success than his rulers. The rise, however, was granted only under pressure, and farmers dropped back to the old rates wherever they felt their position strong enough. A witness before the Committee of the Lords in 1831, while acknowledging that the disturbances had raised wages of 4*s*. to 9*s*. in his district to a general level of 12*s*., prophesied that they would not be kept up.[1]

[1] "Report of Lords' Committee on the Poor," p. 109. (Weston, Sussex.)

Equally opposed to the interests of the ruling classes, but much more effective than rioting from the labourer's point of view, was another method he adopted for the improvement of his condition. He turned to crime to fill his pot and keep a fire on his hearth. "The weekly allowances cannot supply more than food; how then are clothing, firing and rent to be provided?" demanded a clergyman who gave evidence before the Committee on wages. "By robbery and plunder," was his reply. The allowance system "has most rapidly effected the demoralisation of the lower orders; and while the pittance allowed to sustain life has driven those to despair who still cherish the feelings of honesty, it has made those who are more void of principle poachers, thieves and robbers. Were I to detail the melancholy, degrading and ruinous system which has been pursued, with few exceptions, throughout the country, in regard to the unemployed poor, and in the payment of wages of idleness, I should scarcely be credited beyond its confine."[1]

Wood-stealing and poaching were rife in all districts where, as was all too general, no commons and common rights had been preserved to the labourer. Almost every unemployed or casual labourer was a poacher, and in many villages there

[1] "Report on Wages, 1824," p. 57. Cf. p. 35, etc.

were regularly organised gangs who poached and thieved. Not the most brutal Game Laws and the creation of numerous new capital offences, nor the common use of man traps and spring guns,[1] could check the labourer from employing this mode of self-help. How prevalent it was is revealed by the figures of criminal conviction, one in every seven of which in England during the years 1827 to 1830 were convictions under the Game Laws.[2] Thieving was, of course, but one step removed from poaching. One man who gave evidence before the Committee of 1824 said that in many parishes five to forty persons made a living by robbing on the highways and by stealing the corn of the small farmers.[3] The moral results do not need to be pointed out. Yet from the material point of view poaching and crime were as successful as any other method adopted, publicly or privately, for the amelioration of the labourer's lot.

(3) Allotments and Emigration.

The efforts of philanthropists and of the Government in ways other than dole-giving were too slight to effect any general improvement.

[1] Especially from 1817 to 1827, in which year their use was forbidden by statute.
[2] Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
[3] "Report on Agricultural Labourers' Wages," p. 57.

The allotment system was extended, and emigration schemes were instituted, but it was only favoured localities that benefited by them. In 1819 the Government gave official recognition to the value of allotments by a Bill empowering poor law authorities to acquire land up to twenty acres, either by purchase or on lease, for the employment of the poor or for allotments. Twelve years later the area was extended to fifty acres, which might be leased, purchased, or, if Crown or uncultivated land, enclosed by consent of the Crown or the lord of the manor. In 1832 another Act was passed to allow a certain proportion of land to be reserved and let out as allotments in any district where enclosure might be undertaken. The result of this Act was practically *nil*, and the two earlier Acts were of equally little value. For comparatively few parishes took action under the laws of 1819 and 1821. The governing body in the parish was the vestry, then in the hands of farmers, tradesmen and landlords. Farmers were opposed to the allotment system, as they feared it would make the labourer too independent, idle and neglectful of their interests, and they urged that they wanted the land themselves and that the labourer would not pay his rent. Tradesmen had no wish to see the labourer producing food for himself, and voted

with the farmer. And the majority of landlords were ignorant as to the rights and wrongs of the question, and were naturally inclined to accept the views of their best tenants. Moreover their absorption of the economic doctrines of Malthus made them fear that if the labourer's position were improved the opportunity would be given for the reckless multiplication of the population.[1] Though proof lay all the other way, this fact was not yet recognised. Consequently, the promotion of allotments depended on private rather than on public efforts. The interest in the subject was more general now than in the nineties, the benefits of allotments were frequently discussed in periodicals, some of the most interesting contributions to which came from the pen of Denson, a small peasant cultivator of Waterbeach, near Cambridge. Papers such as the *Labourer's Friend*, which was in circulation in the twenties, philanthropists, and societies, as, for example, the Society for the Encouragement of Industry and Reduction of Poor's Rates, nursed the movement. They were rewarded by seeing opinion put into practice by well-disposed landlords, who, though they took action without any ulterior motives, found that their good deeds were not without material reward. Allotments paid, both in rent

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 213 f.

and because the amount of spade labour and intensive culture put into them, wrought great improvement in the land. The rector of Broad Somerford, in Wiltshire, gives a naïve account of the adoption of allotments in his district. In 1820 a neighbouring parish was enclosed by the lord of the manor. "He had some very inferior land, bearing gorse or furze, and brambles; he threw out eight acres for the purpose of benefiting the poor." The following year he enclosed a large common of "very wet, poor land," which was allotted wholly to the poor. It was land of the worst description, "boggy and clayey, and nobody could cross it with a horse." In 1831, thanks to the toil and care of the poor, it was bearing fine crops.[1]

Though the chief obstacle to the extension of allotments lay in the preliminary difficulty of finding the land, there were other hindrances to their establishment, and they did not always prove advantageous to the poor. In the parish of Byfield, Northamptonshire, allotments of quarter and half acres were instituted, but farmers sometimes refused work to men who had allotments.[2] And at Alford, Lincolnshire, where allotments were let under rules and conditions, the labourer hired

[1] "Report of Lords on Poor, 1831," p. 28.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 42.

land only "under great disadvantages."[1] Still, speaking generally, allotments were successful, and improvement in the labourer's condition took place in those localities where they were adopted. The Poor Law Report of 1834 is quite definite as to this, provided the allotment was of not more than half an acre. More than this, the Commission stated, could not be cultivated by a wage-earning labourer; he had neither the time nor the capital to work more. Besides standardising the area of allotments, as to which there had hitherto been discussion and dispute, the Report set the system on a fair way to becoming more popular by emphasising the fact that the labourer did not become idle or over-independent, and that to the landlord there was economic profit in letting land for allotments.[2]

Towards the close of this period a new remedy was adopted in the form of systematic emigration. A Committee of the House of Commons reported on the subject in 1826—7. The Committee was of opinion that emigration would afford relief both to the agricultural and the industrial population, but it was not prepared to adopt any State-aided scheme. It laid down three rules which it urged

[1] "Report of Lords on Poor, 1831," p. 196.

[2] "Report of the Poor Law Commissioners," 1834, pp. 15, 116, 170a, 223, 225, 234, 378, 406, 410, 670.

should be followed:[1] emigration must be voluntary; money should be advanced only as a loan; and only that part of the population which, though healthy, was in a state of permanent pauperism should be pressed to emigrate. Emigration, however, advanced at no great rate. The Committee had expressed its opinion that the poor man would "accept this opportunity of bettering his condition, by laying the foundation for future independence, with eagerness and gratitude, when sufficient time has elapsed, and proper pains been taken to make him understand the true nature and character of the change that is proposed for him." But time it did of course take, and even in districts where distress was great, the people were often unwilling to emigrate;[2] also it required money. Hodges, a member of Parliament for Kent, was instrumental in emigrating a considerable number of persons to America,[3] a policy which effected great reductions in the local rates; and both in his district and in parishes generally, the poor law authorities were alive to the advantages of emigration, even if they should have to contribute to the expenses.[4] But from the Poor Law Report

[1] "Report on Emigration, 1826," p. 5.

[2] As the Rector of Weston, Sussex, told the Lords' Committee, 1831, pp. 106 f.

[3] "Report of Lords on Poor, 1831," p. 17. One hundred and forty-nine persons emigrated in two years.

[4] "Report on Emigration, 1826," p. 5.

of 1834 it is evident that emigration was still on a very small scale; its beneficial effects were checked for want of legal authority to appropriate rates.[1]

(4) The Northern Farmer's Solution of the Labourer's Problem.

From the preceding pages it will be seen that the extreme North of England escaped from the agricultural labour problems in their acutest form. It was in the English counties of the Midlands, the South, the South-West and South-East that wages were lowest, that poor living and drunkenness were most prevalent, and that there was the greatest distress from unemployment. And it was there, too, that the unsuccessful attempts to solve the problem described in this and the previous chapter chiefly took place. Allowances were commonest there; rioting and rick-burning were confined to the southern counties, and the movement for allotments travelled little further North than Lincolnshire. The North, it would appear, had already contrived some solution for the labour problem. The question is, what?

The superiority of conditions of labour in the North over those in the South dates back to the enclosure period. Northumberland, it will be

[1] "Report of Poor Law Commission," Appendix, p. 170.

remembered, had possessed a peculiar system of labour before the acceleration in enclosing set in. In the first place, the chief farm-servants, such as shepherds, stockmen, carters and ploughmen, though hired for a definite term like the indoor farm-servants of the South, did not live in the farm house, but in cottages adjacent to the farm, supplied by their employers. In the second place, the greater part of their wages was paid in kind, in free housing and cow-runs, and in wheat, barley, oats, peas, wool and other farm produce. Thirdly, there was very much less casual labour than in the South. The southern farmer made great use of occasional labour supplied by the numerous class of land-cultivating cottagers. The Northumberland farmer took occasional work into account when organising his regular staff; extra labour might be required in harvest, and some semi-casual labour was supplied by women, whom the regular farm-servants were bound by their contracts to supply when required. But the bulk of all work, regular and casual, was performed by labourers in permanent employment. Much the same system obtained in Westmorland, while in Cumberland, Durham and Wales, payment in kind was prevalent, though the chief labourers were generally indoor farm-servants, as in the South.

In the nineteenth century we find these characteristics were still preserved. This was due partly to sociological differences. But economic reasons also played their part. There was less upheaval from enclosure and corn-growing in the North and Wales than in the rest of England, but enclosing and engrossing did take place there too. What maintained the better conditions of work in these areas was the competition for labour which accompanied the industrial revolution, rather than freedom from the effects of the agricultural revolution. The mines in Wales, and the mines and rapidly expanding industries of the North of England, drew upon the farmers' labour supply, which was already less abundant than in the South. Wages, whether in money or kind, necessarily rose, and rose sufficiently to recompense the labourer for anything he lost by enclosures or by the rise in prices. Higher rates of wages were paid in the North, and higher real wages, for the labourer was not bade to stand off wageless in bad weather or in seasonal slackness. Consequently, though the roundsman system was adopted in the North during the acute distress of the war period, it was never carried to the excesses from which the South suffered. And the labourer was spared, too, the physical and moral evils of unemployment and under-feeding. The

indoor service system of Wales and Cumberland, the long hirings in Northumberland, Westmorland, and parts of Durham and Yorkshire, which were forced upon the farmer by scarcity of labour, preserved the peasant from the privations from which his fellow in the South sought to escape by prolific marriages, poaching, drunkenness and rioting. In short, the Northern farmer in solving the employer's labour problem—scarcity in supply—showed how the labourer's problem also might be solved. Higher wages was the solution for both. With higher wages agricultural work remained a profitable and dignified employment. It was immaterial to the labourer if he were without a holding of his own, " divorced from the land," for he had another basis of independence, other channels for his hopes, other sources of comforts and of sufficient food for himself and his family. Though he might own no plot of soil, he did not need the bribe of " re-union with the land " by means of an allotment to keep him in agricultural work. The problem of a landless labourer was solved by higher wages, while still in the South every solution but higher wages was being desperately tried.

CHAPTER IV

FROM 1834 TO 1870

THE outstanding feature of the period 1834 until the opening of the seventies is the exploitation of the labour of women and children. The allowance system, bad though it was, had ensured the labourer starvation wages, but now this small measure of security was lost. With wages terribly low, with unemployment prevalent, and in the absence of all other aid, he was compelled to adopt any available means of increasing his income. The wage-earning power of his wife and children had to be exploited. The youngest children, who had hitherto brought in 1*s.* 6*d.* a week by their mere existence, were driven by their parents' necessity into the fields to earn what they could by the sweat of their brows. Even had the labourer been less ignorant he was too hard pressed to count the cost of the remedy he now adopted. To tide over the present hour was a struggle; the morrow must look after itself. And on the morrow he found that the competition of his children's labour was keeping his own wages down, and that the total family income tended to be

no higher than that which he had brought in alone in none too prosperous days. Yet again the labourer's attempt to help himself had increased his difficulties. For his insufficient income now was won only by a greater expenditure of labour, food and clothing. Thus the dismal story of wretchedness and privations and of ineffective remedies drags on. Still, there are indications in this period of better things. The tendencies towards combination on the part of labourers grew stronger: co-operative societies may not have been wholly spontaneous, benefit societies may have been often unsound, and the agitations for higher wages may have been small and local; yet these were the seeds which were to bear fruit later. Moreover, at the close of the period the movement for education set in, with all its important effects upon migration and unions.

(1) Exploitation of the Labour of Women and Children.

The utilisation of the wage-earning powers of women and children began almost immediately upon the abolition of the allowance system. During the preceding period the labourer's family had not engaged in agriculture to any extent except in the eastern counties, where the gang

system was in use. These gangs[1] developed early in the century in districts where land hitherto often uncultivated was broken up for arable farming, and where wide areas in the fen country were drained and put down to corn. Both the weeding required on the recently drained land and the regular work on the new isolated farms caused a sudden and large demand for labour. The lack of cottage accommodation on the new farms and the system of close parishes rendered the local supply insufficient and fostered the employment of gangs, composed of men, women and children, who lived in the open parishes and went out to work upon farms where their services were required. Sometimes the farmer himself engaged the gang, but more often he contracted with a public gang-master for the completion of definite pieces of work.

The system suited the farmer, since he paid for his labour only when he required it. And it was not without its advantages to the labourer.[2] The gang-master served as an intermediary between him and farmers at considerable distance from his home, and the labourer found that his employment tended to be more constant, since

[1] "Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1843"; "Sixth Report of the Children's Employment Commission, 1867"; Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 193 f.

[2] "Report, 1843," p. 223.

his gang would go the round of farms in a wide district. This system was firmly established in the parish of Castleacre, in Norfolk, as early as 1826, and it spread into other districts in the thirties.

Although it was known that the labourer there supplemented his income by the earnings of his family, it was not foreseen in 1834 that this method would be generally adopted. The allowance system was regarded as the radical cause of all the labourer's miseries, including inadequate wages, and a rise in wages was expected upon its abolition. The rise, however, did not take place. For two factors which played a primary part in regulating wages were inevitably left untouched by the reform of the poor laws. The excessive surplus population remained, for it needed time before any adjustment between supply and demand could take place. And the agricultural depression continued, and with it the farmer's constant efforts to save expenses and preserve profits by reduction in his wages bill.

It was the Corn Laws which were largely to blame for this continued depression.[1] They propped up belief in high corn prices ; these high prices did not actually occur, but with infinite faith agriculturists continued to expect them,

[1] Levy, " Large and Small Holdings," p. 49.

and farmed by methods which could only pay if they had been in existence. The cultivation of corn to the detriment of other branches of agriculture, large farming, and enclosing, which had promoted the prosperity of the farmer up to 1814, were still carried on from 1814 to 1846. But now these old methods led to bankruptcies rather than to fortunes. We have seen how distressed farmers effected economies in the twenties by employing only rate-aided labour. With the reform of the poor law this opportunity for making others pay his working expenses was lost to the farmer, and though his rates now fell, he was threatened with a disproportionate rise in his wages bill. Some rise he could not avoid, for not infrequently he had paid absolutely *nil* in direct wages. But the surplus population gave him the opportunity of checking the rise at starvation level.

Such were the causes of the labourer's desperate plight in 1834. Married men especially suffered, but, even where a man had not a family to maintain, wages were too low to provide against unemployment, which was now a regular feature of the winter. Fortunately, it was a time of industrial expansion and of railway construction, and many men were able to find employment in the towns or on the new railroads.[1] In other

[1] "Report on Agriculture, 1836," Part I., pp. 441, 455.

districts rioting and rick-burning were resorted to in order to raise wages. But neither the one nor the other device afforded any general relief. In the bad winters of 1837 and 1838 the people were eating nettles and rotten apples, and in 1838 the workhouses were so overcrowded that the guardians were compelled to allow outdoor relief.[1] Then the labourer adopted the scheme of increasing the family income by the earnings of his wife and children. In the Report of 1836 their employment is mentioned as being general only in certain districts; by 1843 it was the exception to find a district where they were not employed. The tremendous increase in the employment of women and children amazed and astonished contemporary observers. And it may well be asked to-day how employment was found for them by the farmer.

The answer is to be found in the Reports of the preceding period. It had been said by witnesses before the Committees of 1821 and 1831 that a great deal more labour could profitably be put into the land, but that farmers could not afford to pay for it,[2] the result being that in many parts of the country farms were grossly under-cultivated.

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

[2] "Report on Depressed State of Agriculture, 1821," pp. 45, 80, 95, etc.; "Report from the Lords on the Poor Laws, 1831," pp. 72, 106, etc.

This was still true, and farmers everywhere readily made full use of the cheap labour now put into the market. There was a quantity of work which was well within the powers of children. Stone picking, bird scaring, potato setting and weeding, were especially suited to their size and strength, and in the fruit and hop districts they could be employed to gather in these crops. In harvest, their work would be more general. Women were employed usually in weeding and hoeing, and in the hop gardens and upon fruit farms. Their labour, however, was extremely varied, and in one district they would be engaged in work which in another was confined to men. Thus, in the South-West women prepared and loaded manure, and in parts of Devon and Somerset they acted as carters. There were, in fact, few branches of agricultural work in which, in one locality or another, women were not employed.[1] Only in one or two districts was there actually no work for women and children. This was so in the dales of the north-west of Yorkshire, where pasture farming and grazing prevailed. Here only a few men were employed in draining, and the rest of the work was done by farm servants. Women and children occupied themselves in knitting stockings,

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1843, pp. 133, 147, 166, etc.

jackets and sailor caps, the work being given out by a local manufactory.[1] And in parts of Devon and Dorset there was apparently no demand for their services, for they were engaged in various forms of home industries, such as button and lace making.[2] But though these were districts where peculiar conditions limited the demand for agricultural work, the labourer as a rule found a voracious market for the labour of his family. Even young children were in demand, boys of nine, ten, or even seven, finding constant employment, while girls became regular day labourers at the age of twelve to sixteen, or in the gang districts at an earlier age.[3]

Yet the relief gained by the family from their combined output of labour was but slight. And the price paid for it was high. The Commissioners spoke of the moral deterioration of girls through their labour in the fields. The moral effects of field work for women and girls were particularly bad in the gang districts. Men and women worked together, tramped long distances together to their place of work, and when this was so far from their homes that the daily journey was impossible, they were lodged together in barns upon

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1843, pp. 286, 295.

[2] *Ib.*, p. 16.

[3] *Ib.*, pp. 40, 150, 217, etc.

the farm.[1] It was not until 1867 that the public gangs were regulated; then, after forty years or more of their existence, the Gangs Act was passed, forbidding the employment of children under eight years old, making compulsory the separation of the sexes into their own gangs, and obliging a gang-master to obtain a licence. The physical evils of agricultural work generally were considered less serious by the Commissioners than the moral,[2] though in the gang districts the children suffered through the long distances they had often to walk in addition to their work. But both boys and girls lost their opportunities for education by the need of contributing very early to the family income.

That income, even when the whole family was in work, remained very low. Women earned from 8*d.* to 1*s.*, according to occupation and locality, for an eight to ten hours' day; more was paid in harvest as a rule, but longer hours were worked. Girls earned from 2*d.* a day in Suffolk, where they were employed very young, to 6*d.* a day at the age of sixteen. Boys earned at the lowest from 2*d.* a day below the age of twelve, to 4*s.* a week at sixteen years old.[3] Thus it is

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1843, p. 224.

[2] *Ib.*, pp. 133, 215, etc.

[3] *Ib.*, pp. 17, 166, 282, etc.

quite true to say that the family earnings played a very important part in the labourer's budget. But the net gain was reduced by the necessarily greater expenditure on clothing.[1] And the competition of his family kept the father's wages low.[2] When Caird made his tour in 1850 the average rate of men's wages in the South was 8*s.* 5*d.*, in the East, 9*s.* 1*d.*, and in the West, 10*s.* In 1853 an agricultural revival set in, due partly to the Crimean war, which checked foreign importation, and partly to improved methods of farming induced by the abolition of the Corn Duties ; but as landlords instantly claimed their share by raising rents, the labourer gained little from this period of prosperity.[3] The rise in the price of corn and other articles during the Crimean and American wars forced on a slight rise in wages. But the employment of women and children was now firmly established, and the farmer, having this supply of cheap labour to hand, had no need to raise wages in proportion to prices. Such were the results of the labourer's attempt to improve his circumstances by calling to his aid the labour of wife and children, admittedly the only aid he then had.

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1843, p. 129.

[2] *Ib.*, p. 138.

[3] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 251. For tables of wages, see Caird, "English Agriculture," p. 512 ; Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 224, 226, 251.

(2) CONDITIONS OF THE LABOURER'S LIFE.

The information as to his mode of life, contained in the Reports of 1843 and the sixties, and in Caird's narrative of his tour, gives a better idea than do mere wages rates of the peasant's lot during the period of family labour. The Com missioners of 1843 gave evidence of considerable underfeeding. Maladies from under-nourishment were common in Wiltshire and Somersetshire.[1] It was the opinion of medical men that the quality of food was not too low so long as the labourer was in good health and the quantity was not deficient.[2] But as there was almost constant unemployment at this date, the quantity could seldom have been sufficient. The Vicar of Colne declared that though much was done by charitable persons to relieve the poor, he "never could make out how they can live with their present earnings."[4] Only from the extreme North came evidence of a sufficiency of wholesome food.[4] Caird had a similar story to tell. Bread, potatoes, cheese occasionally, and hot water poured upon burnt crusts, formed the staple food of the districts where wages were lowest. Still, the fall in the

[1] Report, 1843, pp. 17, 58.
[2] *Ib.*, pp. 18, 58.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 57.
[4] *Ib.*, pp. 284 f., 296, 300. Cf. Unwin, J. Cobden, "Hungry Forties," labourers' own accounts of their condition.
[5] Caird, "English Agriculture," pp. 84, etc.

prices of provisions consequent upon Free Trade was already, Caird thought, making a change for the better. Flour had fallen almost to half the price it had been in 1840; tea was less than half, and sugar almost half.[1] But in 1867, Stanhope, the Commissioner for Dorset, Kent, Chester, Salop, Staffordshire and Rutlandshire, said that in all six counties the greater number of agricultural labourers were sadly underfed; their diet was bread and potatoes, with cheese perhaps in good times; only the really better off had bacon.[2] In the country generally, there was found to be a great difference between the diet of the North and that of the rest of England, the inferiority being all with the latter.[3] Of course both now and in 1843 it was the married man with a young family who suffered most. The noxious system of increasing the family income by the earnings of wife and children rendered his unaided wages totally inadequate for their support. Caird pointed out that the labourer's position improved so soon as the family could go out to work.[4] "We never see such a thing as butcher's meat," said a Somersetshire woman, whose sole source of income was her

[1] Caird, *op. cit.*, p. 518.

[2] Second Report on Children's, Young Persons', and Women's Employment in Agriculture, 1868–9, p. 102.

[3] Report on Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1867, p. 116, etc.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

husband's earnings. "Our food is principally potatoes with bread . . . Sometimes when cheap we buy half a pound of butter a week, but most frequently fat which we use with the potatoes to give them a flavour. . . . We lay out about $2\frac{1}{4}d.$ a week in tea, chiefly to let my husband have a comfortable breakfast on Sunday. . . . Our common drink is burnt crust tea. We also buy about half a pound of sugar a week. We never know what it is to get enough to eat, at the end of the meal the children would always eat more." Their clergyman gave them a little milk a week.[1] What added now as hitherto to the evils of poor quality of food was the impossibility of serving warm meals. The labourer's meagre income obliged him to economise in fuel, and often he had great difficulties in obtaining it, even when he could pay the price, since there was no market for fuel within his reach.[2] Here again the advantage lay with the North where cheap fuel allowed of "such fires" as were "unknown in the South of England." This enabled the labourer to partake of hot meals and preserved the house craft of his wife. And more than this. Cheap fuel meant dry clothing,[3] whereas, in the rest of England, the labourer and his family were obliged to put on in

[1] Report, 1843, p. 68.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 75; Second Report, 1868–9, p. 102.
[3] Report, 1868–9, p. 117.

the morning the wet clothes they had taken off at night. The Commissioners of 1867 were agreed that though there was little physical injury to women and children from agricultural work in itself, their inability to provide themselves with dry clothing constituted a serious evil.[1]

There were other conditions of the labourer's work and life which render the mere rate of wages no true indication of his actual circumstances. In the South-west of England part of his wages were, as in the North, often paid in kind. But the Northern labourer as a rule received fair value, though in bad years the potatoes and corn supplied him would be the worst of the crop; in the South the allowances generally consisted of such produce as was unmarketable and were estimated by the farmer at the market price of his better crops. Secondly, the wages actually earned in the week were frequently less than the weekly rate. For even where there was not actual unemployment, the ordinary labourers on a farm were compelled to stand off in wet weather. In 1867 it was said that about half the men on the farm thus lost time.[2] Lastly, the labourer

[1] Report, 1843, p. 22.

[2] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 10. In Dorset, as in the North, men were hired by the year. But, unlike in the North, there was a supply of surplus labour, and farmers employed the long-hire

suffered through having to make his purchases from a shopkeeper who was free from competition. "All which they buy, therefore, is burdened with the intermediate profits of a petty trader, accumulated upon the town price. Even where there is a disposition to deal fairly with them, general ignorance of prices and an absence of competition to adjust the price offers some temptation to sell at rates inordinately high."[1] The village shops generally charged high prices for inferior goods. Yet the labourer had little choice but to deal with them, for his wife had not the time to undertake marketing at a distance in addition to her agricultural or other work. Not infrequently, moreover, he was under compulsion to give his custom in the village. In some villages in Kent wages were paid partly in cheques on the village shop,[2] and sometimes when small tradesmen were also landlords, their tenants were expected to deal at their shops.[3] Where the labourer had a good garden or an allotment, he could, of course, produce certain articles for himself, and this opportunity of escaping from the extortions of shopkeepers was recognised as one of the advan-

system against the labourers' interests. Wages were as low as 8*s*., and a man lost time in wet weather or illness,which was not the case in the North.

[1] Report, 1843, p. 140.

[2] *Ib*., p. 141.

[3] Report, 1867–8, p. 191.

tages of the allotment system. In a few villages the drawbacks of the local shop were so clearly recognised that landlords and better class labourers had promoted co-operative stores. These were of real value to the labourer where they existed, but their existence was all too rare.

Cottage accommodation struck the Commissioners of 1867 as almost the worst feature of agricultural life. The housing question was unanimously declared by all the investigators to be very serious, and this although considerable sums had been spent by many landlords in recent years.[1] Cottages, as we know, had been destroyed by landlords in order to decrease their poor rates. The Unions Chargeability Act of 1865 equalised rates throughout the Poor Law Union, thus bringing to an end the inducement to limit the number of inhabitants in the close parishes. But the evil had been done. Shortage of house-room had created overcrowding, had sent up rents, and had led to the rise of a new class of small landlords. Speaking generally, the cottages owned by such men were infinitely the worst.[2] They grudged repairs and charged high rents for dwellings which most landowners would not have tolerated upon their estates. And numbers of

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 32.
Report, 1867–8, p. 99.

cottages were owned by this class. Less than half the cottages in Norfolk were held by large owners,[1] and a similar condition obtained in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.[2] Of the rest, the majority belonged to small speculators, though some were owned by their labourer occupiers. Such cottages also were very bad.[3] But even on the estates of large landowners there was considerable cause for complaint. Fraser, afterwards Bishop of Manchester, said that in his district "the majority of the cottages that exist in rural parishes are deficient in almost every requisite that should constitute a home for a Christian family in a civilised community."[4] It is impossible here to follow the Commissioners in detail through their reports of dilapidated cottages, frequently below the level of the ground, and with no proper sanitary arrangements. One or two bedrooms had to accommodate families often consisting of five to ten persons; and where the house was of a better size high rents led the labourer to take in lodgers, so that the overcrowding frequently was as great as in the worst hovels. Even in the North, where the conditions of labour generally were much better than elsewhere, though many of the

[1] Report, 1867–8, pp. 99, 165.
[2] *Ib.*, pp. 184, 191.
[3] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 143.
[4] Report, 1867–8, p. 95.

cottages were good, others were said to be " some of the worst."[1] And the overcrowding was very bad, one long, low room often being the only accommodation for an entire family, in which they must live, cook and sleep. One witness said of conditions in Cambridgeshire that " labourers as a rule are worse lodged than cattle and worse cared for."[2] And the evidence of the Commissioners generally reveals that this, excepting in a few fortunate districts, was true of the country as a whole. It was acknowledged that immorality and the frequenting of beer shops were the inevitable results of overcrowding and discomfort in the home.

The Commissioners recognised that the housing problem was an intricate one. The worst landlords were the small owners of property ; there were no two opinions about that. Yet they alone let their cottages upon business lines, and could make building pay. If their methods were to be ruled out, as clearly they must be, upon what lines were large landowners to build ? And how were their cottages to be let ? The stand could be taken that cottages " ought to be considered as a necessary part of landed property, the adjunct of a farm leased to a tenant for occupation. Viewed

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 125.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 163.

in this light the building of cottages, if built by the landlord, will return a fair interest for his money."[1] The labourer, therefore, would not be expected to pay a fair rent. But if labourers' cottages were to be regarded as part of the farm, it almost necessarily followed that they must be reserved for labourers employed on the farm. In other words, the farmer and not the landlord must have the letting of them. But such sub-letting was opposed to the interests of the labourer. It opened the way to his oppression by the farmer, for he and his family would be bundled out into the street if he ventured to change his employment, or in any way gave offence. On the other hand, what both the labourer and his friends, and the Unionists of a later date, failed to consider was that if the farmer had not control he might be deprived of the power of procuring the labour necessary to carry on his work.[2] Fraser, one of the Assistant Commissioners of 1867, held that property ought to be put upon an economic basis. He hoped to see it become remunerative, "partly by the adoption of a more economical plan of building and partly by an improvement in the circumstances of the labourer enabling him to pay a higher rent."[3] He thought that a

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 98.
[2] *Ib.*, pp. 97, 99.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 98.

rise in wages combined with a rise in rent would materially improve the relations of all parties. Culley, another Assistant Commissioner, thought, on the contrary, that even if the labourer had higher wages he would not be willing to spend more on rent.[1]

However that might be, there were practical difficulties in the way of landlords' effecting building improvements even had they dared to risk putting a better class of dwelling into the market. Where estates were encumbered or entailed, it was hard to raise the necessary money, for a small portion of the estate could not be sold in order to benefit the rest. It was said that "entail is one of the chief causes of bad housing."[2] Again, over much accommodation, as well as too little, brought evils in its train. "The lowest type of rural civilisation," said Fraser, "is to be found in those large over-peopled open parishes in which at the slack season of the year there is always a considerable number out of employment."[3] It was, in fact, no kindness to supply accommodation for more labourers than could find profitable employment in the district, yet as large landlords in many parishes owned only half, or less than half the cottages, it was beyond their power to regulate

[1] Second Report, 1869, p. 168.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 169; Report, 1867–8, p. 165.
[3] Report, 1867–8, p. 97.

the supply. The Duke of Bedford's agent pointed out this difficulty to the Assistant Commissioner for that district. "The landowner, if he erected all his land requires, has no power of pulling down or of restraining others in building, hence the fostering of over-populated districts by inducing young persons to stay in their native place instead of looking for work in the more thinly populated districts, consequently, when the least slackness of work sets in, there is an immediate outcry of over-population."[1] In short, the housing problem was not merely a landowners' question, and though they were largely to blame for the disgraceful condition of rural housing, in fairness to them it has to be said that where building improvements had taken place, it was chiefly on their initiative.

(3) Development of the Old "Remedies."

Whilst the labourer was seeking to stave off starvation and the workhouse by utilising the earning powers of his family, other attempts to improve his condition were being simultaneously carried on. The old remedies for alleviation of his wretchedness, allotments, benefit societies and migration, were still applied. The allotment movement made distinct progress during this

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 172.

period. The Labourers' Friend Society, founded in 1843, and similar Associations, pressed the matter before the notice of Parliament and of landowners; in 1843, a Select Committee was appointed to consider the question, and the Commissions of that year and of 1867 included allotments in their subjects for inquiry. So far as the House of Commons was concerned, the only results were that it threw out three allotment Bills during the forties, and made a feeble attempt to promote the system by recommending in the Enclosure Act of 1845 that a certain amount of land thereafter enclosed should be reserved for the poor. Owing, however, to private efforts, the allotment movement made some progress.[1] It was most extensive in 1843 in Kent, where the farmers were more favourably inclined, but allotments were to be found in most districts in Surrey and Sussex, in many parts of Wiltshire, Dorset and Devonshire, and in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. In 1867 the Assistant Commissioner for Northamptonshire stated that there were few parishes in that county which were without allotments, though the supply was by no means equal to the demand.[2] The system was widely

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children, 1843; Report from the Select Committee on the Labouring Poor (Allotments of Land), 1843.

[2] Report, 1867–8, p. 179.

extended, too, in Dorsetshire and Rutlandshire, but we hear that it prevailed now only on some estates in Kent. This was the case in Staffordshire also.[1] In Shropshire allotments were very rare, but potato ground was supplied instead. In Cheshire allotments were little known.[2] As in 1843, there were scarcely any allotments in the extreme North. There they were not in demand, since most labourers either had good gardens, cow-runs or potato plots, were paid largely in kind, or lived in the farmhouse. Under these conditions they were not required. The labourer in the South welcomed allotments in spite of the extra hours of labour they entailed, because low wages compelled him to increase his income in any way possible. But in the North, where wages whether in money or kind were relatively high, the labourer was "seldom disposed for further work."[2]

The extension of allotments was still blocked by the opposition of many farmers, although others now regarded the scheme with favour. The unreconciled urged as before, that the labourers would shirk their employers' work and steal their corn: that they were put to inconvenience by labourers asking for leave to work on their own

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 100.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 228.

land ;[1] and that they could not get cheap manure, since the men wanted it for themselves.[2] The underlying cause of their objections was, however, the fear that they would be deprived of cheap labour.

Both the Reports of 1843 and those of 1867—9 dealt with the size, rents, and moral advantages of allotments. The Committee of 1843 pointed out that as " the profits of the allotments should be viewed by the holder of it in the light of an aid, and not of a substitute for his ordinary income accruing from wages, and that they should not become an inducement to neglect his usual paid labour, the allotments should be of no greater extent than can be cultivated during the leisure moments of the family." The exact size must therefore depend upon the size of the family and the nature of the soil, but as a rule not more than a quarter of an acre was advisable.[3] Although many allotments were larger than this, and labourers both in 1843 and in 1867 would have been glad to have more land,[4] it was held that in general the labourer had not the time nor the capital to work more ; he became a pseudo small-holder, with no security of income, and was liable

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 180.
[2] Report of Select Committee, 1843, Evidence, qu. 29 f.
[3] *Ib.*, p. iv.
[4] Report, 1867–8, p. 180.

to most pressing want in bad years. In Dorsetshire, even the half-acre allotments, on which ploughing was permitted, led to irregular work on the part of the labourers, and increased the employment of young children and the tendency of the labourer to depend on his potato crop.[1] Spade culture, and an area small enough for spade culture, were the general recommendations.

Intensive culture by hand labour increased enormously the productivity of the soil. This led to difficulties as to rent. Although the new value of the land was entirely due to the labourers' exertions, farmers sought to get a share of the profits by charging high rents. The Committee enunciated the principle that, "though the land will yield larger profits under this mode of cultivation, than under the usual method of tillage, the proprietor who wishes to benefit the poor man should not exact more rent than he should expect to receive if he let it out to be farmed in the ordinary way."[2] Unfortunately, allotment ground was often land sub-let by farmers, and they ignored the justice of this axiom. Exorbitant rents for allotments and potato plots were complained of in Dorsetshire and Shropshire in 1867;[3]

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 100.
[2] Report of Select Committee, 1843, p. iv.
[3] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 100.

and except where allotments were entirely in the hands of philanthropic landlords, rents everywhere were higher than were required by the ordinary rental value of the land, the charges on it, and the cost of fencing.

The material value of allotments was pointed out by the Committee. It was estimated that an allotment was worth about 2*s.* a week to its cultivator,[1] and the average net profit was reckoned at £4 a year ;[2] the produce of a quarter of an acre being sufficient to feed a man with a large family for thirteen weeks.[3] The moral value was equally emphasized. Allotments encouraged thrift and kept men from the public houses ; it was said after thirty-seven years' experience of allotments at Kingwell, near Bath, that convictions for crime were almost *nil* amongst allotment-holders.[4]

A few words only are required as to the progress of the movement for benefit clubs and societies. It had originated at the same date as the allotment movement, but had not met with the same measure of success. There were charitable coal and clothing clubs in several of the villages, supported partly by labourers' subscriptions, and

[1] Report from Select Committee, 1843, Evidence, qu. 344.
[2] *Ib.*, qu. 18, 19, 20.
[3] *Ib.*, qu. 1657, 1659.
[4] Second Report, 1868–9, pp. 199—206.

partly by the philanthropic.[1] They were never popular. There was probably in their management too much of that demand for respect to superiors and for regular Church attendance, which we hear of at a later date in connection with such clubs. The benefit societies were generally unassisted, and were free from these drawbacks. Yet it was said that when uncontrolled by superiors they were apt to degenerate into opportunities for convivial meetings, yearly banks or a kind of lottery; which was "little wonder considering the lack of education, temptations, and little intercourse and no convivialities in daily life."[2] Such clubs varied in their nature and methods. Usually they gave benefits in sickness or at death. They so frequently failed through ill-management that they were of doubtful value to their supporters, and whereas in their early years they had been extremely popular, they later were regarded with a considerable measure of distrust. In 1843 it was said that though in parts of the country many clubs were in a flourishing condition the number had been reduced by half within the last five or six years.[3] Stanhope, in 1867, spoke of the rottenness of most friendly societies in his district.

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children, 1843, p. 22.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 144.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 144.

Sometimes the treasurer absconded; sometimes through ill-management the money was spent on the annual feast; or the monthly payment was not, and never could be, sufficient to provide the promised benefits, so that owing to miscalculations the labourer's sacrifice had been useless from the first. "In hundreds of cases after years of patient self-denial and saving against the day of trouble, the poor labourer has been sent on the parish, because there is nothing 'in the box of his club,' or because as he and others were getting old and were likely to come upon its funds the younger members of his club have dissolved it and reconstituted it without him."[1] Naturally, "the confidence of the poor has been to a great extent shaken by the failure of the club on which they or their fathers have relied."[2] The young men, if they joined a club at all, tended to join the large societies, such as the Oddfellows, and the old local clubs, which in some districts had existed to the number of two to the parish, died out.[3]

The policy of migration and emigration continued through this period. Migration was the most effective weapon the labourer possessed against the farmer, but he required intelligence and courage to use it. He was often so completely

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 105.
[2] *Ib.*, *ib.*
[3] Report, 1867–8, pp. 194—209.

ignorant of conditions elsewhere that he hesitated to quit the way of life he knew, miserable though it might be. A considerable migration took place, however, immediately upon the abolition of allowances. The towns of the Midlands and the North drew labour from the land in those hard times, and the railways were of the very greatest assistance to the agricultural labourer, since they passed through the rural districts and offered him work not far remote from his old home. And from the Census Reports of 1861 and 1871 it is clear that the rural exodus was increasing, due partly to the continuance of wretched conditions, and in part to the adoption of machinery in farm work which tended to displace labour, though the displacement was not so great as is sometimes imagined. In 1861 the total number of labourers, farm servants and shepherds in England and Wales was 1,188,786. In 1871 it was 980,178,[1] a decrease of 208,608. The emigration figures are also suggestive during this period. The number of English emigrants only from 1853 to 1860 was 454,422, and rose to 605,165 or, at a re-estimate, 649,742, between the years 1861 and 1870. The rural districts must have contributed their quota, though emigration was ever more difficult to the labourer than migration.

[1] Or 962,348, if 2 per cent. are subtracted as incapable of work.

The most striking feature of the migration movement in this period is the work of Canon Girdlestone, an account of which was written in 1874 by Mr. Francis Heath, who visited North Devon and met and knew the Canon personally. From Lancashire, where the conditions of the working classes were good, Girdlestone went, in 1866, to North Devon as vicar of the parish of Halberton. He could not but be struck by the wretched state of the peasantry there. Wages were as low as *7s.* and seldom more than *8s.* a week for the ordinary day labourer, with an allowance of three pints to two quarts of inferior cider. For this poor wage the men gave nine hours of work, exclusive of meals, and were often kept overtime, while in harvest they worked until nine or ten at night, generally receiving their supper but no extra wages. The women were paid *7d.* or *8d.* a day. There was a good deal of oppression, peasants often being forbidden to keep pigs or hens in case they stole food; potato land was let only at high rents, which were sometimes four or five times the value of the land. Bread, burnt crust tea, skim milk and cheese formed the staple diet. The labourers were "crippled up" by forty-five or fifty through rheumatism, due to the damp clothing which the insufficiency of their

fuel rendered inevitable. And the lack of nourishing food made them at all times feeble and prone to disease. Such were the conditions which Girdlestone met with, not only in his own parish but in North Devon generally. In March of 1866, Girdlestone sounded the trumpet of revolt, and set the whole parish by the ears. The district was suffering from a cattle plague, and Girdlestone, giving out as his text, "Behold the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle," demanded of the farmers in the presence of their labourers whether they did not think that God had sent the plague as a judgment upon them for the manner in which they treated their men. A storm of abuse broke round him, and he and his church and his family were ostracised by the local gentry and farmers. But he found at least some measure of public support. He sent a letter to the *Times*, giving an account of local conditions, and received replies from all parts of England and Ireland, and letters from farmers offering good wages and comfortable homes for such men in his district as would accept them. Some remitted the money to pay expenses, and subscriptions from philanthropic persons were sent to the vicar for the assistance of his parishioners. He now organised a regular system of migration, faced always with two difficulties, the opposition of local farmers and the "home

sickness" of the labourers. From October 1866 until June 1872, the work was systematically carried on; four to five hundred men, many of them with families, were removed to Lancashire, Yorkshire, Durham, Kent, Sussex and other counties. A number were sent to the Manchester and the West Riding Police Forces. All met with a rise of from 5*s*. to 14*s*. on their old pittance of 8*s*. Those who prospered in their new homes found situations for friends and relations, and thus the Canon's work became the centre of a great system, while the movement in Devonshire stirred the stagnation of the neighbouring counties of Dorset, Wiltshire and Somersetshire.[1]

(4) New Influences.

Two new factors in the amelioration of the labourer's lot appear during this period. One was the furtherance of education; the other, and the most hopeful feature of the times, was the combination of labourers over wider areas than hitherto, and for more ambitious objects than the supply of coal and clothing. Their entrance into societies such as the Oddfellows is one indication of the new spirit, and this period saw, too, the beginning of movements for co-operation and for raising wages. It must be said at the outset, that

[1] Heath, F., "English Peasantry," pp. 138—156.

no one of these three developments effected any general improvement in the labourer's position during this period; that he was indebted to the industrial population of the towns for example and inspiration; and that such improvements as were locally achieved were due to the help he received from those who were socially and intellectually above him. The larger societies, which he was now beginning to join, were either managed and largely supported by the industrial classes, or were based upon principles which their leaders had laid down. The repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824 had stimulated the recognition of the common cause and common needs of the working classes, and not merely had allowed the growth of Trade Unions, but had fostered united action generally. The isolation of the agricultural labourer delayed a similar awakening in rural districts, but some labourers at least shared in the benefits created by the new spirit in the towns. The rural co-operative movement was also prompted from above, and was as yet narrowly localised. A co-operative store at Assington in Suffolk, promoted by a landowner there, is spoken of warmly by Fraser in 1867;[1] there was another at Tortworth; and in Northamptonshire there were successful stores in many parts of the county, the most prosperous

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 108.

being the Self-Assistance Industrial Society of Long Buckley.[1] Assington had, too, a co-operative farm, started by the same landowner in 1830. The success of this experiment led to his establishment of a second in 1854.[2] But these rural co-operation societies were but pioneers in a movement the very existence of which was as yet hardly known in other parts of the country. Combined attempts to raise wages were equally localised and isolated. The first orderly attempt, rick burning and rioting being not here considered, was made in 1831, in the village of Tolpuddle in Dorsetshire. There some labourers requested a rise in wages; they were perfectly orderly and well-behaved, and were given to understand their request would be granted. But the only change in wages was a reduction from 9*s.* to 7*s.* a week. Loveless, one of the labourers concerned, gives the account of what followed. "The labouring men consulted together what had better be done, as they knew it was impossible to live honestly on such scanty means. I had seen at different times accounts of Trade Societies; I told them of this, and they willingly consented to form a friendly society among the labourers, having sufficiently learnt that it would be vain to seek redress either of

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 181.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 107.

employers, magistrates or parsons. I inquired of a brother to get information how to proceed, and shortly after two delegates from a Trade Society paid us a visit, formed a Friendly Society among the labourers, and gave us directions how to proceed. This was about the latter end of October, 1833. Nothing particular occurred from this time to February 21st, 1834, when placards were posted up at the most conspicuous places, purporting to be cautions from the magistrates, threatening to punish with seven years' transportation any man who should join the Union." Shortly after, Loveless and his companions were arrested and taken to prison to await trial. There they were visited by their parson, who told them that the labourer was better off than his master, which Loveless replied he found hard to believe considering the number of horses kept for no other purpose than to chase the hare and the fox. The Combination Acts had been repealed ten years before, so that the men had a right to form a society or union, and there was no evidence of ill-conduct forthcoming against the men. But " when nothing whatever could be raked together, the unjust and cruel judge, Williams, ordered us to be tried for mutiny and conspiracy, under an Act 37 Geo. III., c. 123, for the suppression of mutiny amongst the marines and seamen, a

number of years ago, at the Nore." The trial appears to have been unfairly conducted. A charge was trumped up against the men for having administered illegal oaths, and the judge passed sentence, saying, " that not for any thing that we had done, or, as he could prove, we intended to do, but for an example to others, he considered it his duty to pass the sentence of seven years' transportation across His Majesty's high seas upon each and every one of us." On the way back to prison, Loveless tossed to the crowd a scrap of paper on which he had written the following lines :—

" God is our guide! from field, from wave,
From plough, from anvil, and from loom;
We come, our country's right to save,
And speak a tyrant faction's doom.
We raise the watchword liberty,
We will, we will, we will be free!

" God is our guide! no swords we draw,
We kindle not war's battle fires;
By reason, union, justice, law,
We claim the birthright of our sires.
We raise the watchword liberty,
We will, we will, we will be free!" [1]

In spite of the outcry raised by Trade Unionists, who stigmatised the act as one of unmitigated tyranny, the men were shipped off to Botany Bay. Though a pardon was eventually secured for them, this was not until 1836.

[1] Loveless, " Victims of Whiggery," pp. 1 f.

The violence with which this harmless effort at self-help was suppressed is perhaps partly responsible for the fact that nothing is heard of similar combinations for many years to come, although in the towns Trade Unionism was everywhere increasing and higher wages were being won by united action. In 1866 an Agricultural Labourers' Protection Association was formed in Kent, "to organise the agricultural labourers with a view to the amelioration of their social condition and moral elevation, and to endeavour to mitigate the evils of their serfdom." The first step was to raise wages, and as labour was then scarce this was achieved without much difficulty. The result was that migration was checked, labour became more abundant, and employers thus getting the upper hand again, reduced their wages. When the Assistant Commissioner, Stanhope, visited the county in 1867—8, the Association had ceased to have any influence.[1] Stanhope further reported that when machinery was first introduced into farm operations, labourers' combinations were formed to resist it, but without much success. Yet even in the sixties, strikes for an increase of wages were not uncommon in Lincolnshire at busy times of threshing. In the heath districts south of Lincoln, where bad conditions of work

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 105.

were aggravated by lack of cottage accommodation near the farm, Unions were formed and supported by subscriptions for several months. Their object was to reduce the hours of work, since the man had to spend so much time in tramping from his home. But the Union came to an end before it had effected its purpose.[1]

There can be no doubt that the furtherance of education amongst agricultural labourers gave an impetus both to migration and to combinations for definite ends. A movement for the education of the poor had been consistently, if slowly, carried on since the foundation of the National Society in 1812. In 1843, however, education was still very poor except where the labourer made arrangements himself for the education of his children. This was in certain Northern districts. In Northumberland education was both good and general. "No greater stigma," it was said, "can attach to parents than that of leaving their children without the means of ordinary education, every nerve is strained to procure it." Almost every village had its school, where the children were taught reading, writing and arithmetic, and where night classes were often held for young men, while in sparsely populated districts shepherds often hired a schoolmaster for their

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 105.

children.[1] In Yorkshire[2] and in the South of England education was poor both in quantity and quality. In Kent, Surrey and Sussex, where the early employment of girls was not usual, their education was not much interfered with,[3] but boys, both in these counties and in Wiltshire, Dorset and Somersetshire, were taken from school so soon as they could earn anything.[4] In Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire, the universal employment of young children caused neglect of education.[5] The Report in 1860 on the Educational Condition of the Poor, and those of 1867—9 on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, reveal that the voluntary system was still ineffective. The schools were inadequate and the teaching supplied was often poor, while even where good schools existed attendance was irregular, and the children left as young as eight or nine to work in the fields.[6] With a view to overcoming these obstacles, a Bill for compulsory part-time education for agricultural children was introduced in the House of Commons in 1867.[7]

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children, 1843, pp. 122, 292.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 292.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 150.
[4] *Ib.*, pp. 40—42, 152.
[5] *Ib.*, p. 217.
[6] Report, 1867–8, pp. 72 f., 79 f., 84, 185, 189; Second Report, 1869, p. 80.
[7] Hansard, vol. 189, 437 f.

But the House was to be opposed to the compulsory principle for yet another decade, and the Bill had to be dropped. As in 1843, education was still most advanced in the North.[1] Further South, in Bedfordshire, 34 per cent. of the women could not sign their names, and in Cornwall 42 per cent., in Nottinghamshire 43 per cent., and in Lancashire 49 per cent. were thus illiterate.[2] Yet girls almost always had longer at school than the boys. Nevertheless, education was making headway sufficient to cause uneasiness in the breasts of farmers. Poor though it was, it gave a stimulus to migration. The Dorsetshire farmers were "especially suspicious of education," for they found that all the young men who were sufficiently well-educated to find work elsewhere fled the low wages on their farms.[3] Of the Somersetshire farmers it was said that they "do not see the good of what they call over-education; it raises a man above his work, he thinks himself fit for higher employment, and goes away to the towns or railways, consequently there is a scarcity of labour, and men who stay behind are less fit for their work than those who migrate, and require

[1] Report, 1867–8, pp. 158, 159.

[2] Quoted in the course of the 1867 debate from a paper on Mortality and Marriages (Hansard, *op. cit.*).

[3] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 80.

the same, nay even higher wages."[1] And again we hear that farmers consider that "more than a little [education] is very much too much; they are afraid that labourers will be spoiled for field work. . . . Their object is to keep the school down and not to let it rise beyond a certain level, and in consequence of this their contributions to the school funds often amount to a small sum."[2] It was admitted that "the object of the labouring class in seeking [education] is not to make their children better agricultural labourers, but to enable them to rise to a higher sphere in life."[3]

Those who have followed the story of the degradation of the labourer will feel with Mr. Fawcett that one of the chief virtues of education was the encouragement it would give to migration. "If the labourers of Dorset and Wiltshire were educated and knew what was going on in other parts of the country," he declared in a fine speech during the debate of 1867, "they would acquire a spirit of enterprise and energy. They would never be content with the miserable wages of ten shillings a week, but would betake themselves to localities where they would receive a higher amount of compensation."[4] Education was,

[1] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 200.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 68.
[3] *Ib.*, *ib.*
[4] Hansard, vol. 189, 487.

indeed, and was partially seen by the labourer to be, one of the best means of reducing that surplus supply of labour which placed him at the mercy of the farmer, and compelled him to adopt remedies which but increased his wretchedness. Farmers in the North had no need to fear education, for they had eliminated the danger of shortage in supply by paying fair wages. The same means lay to the hands of the Southern farmer. But he preferred to try to "keep the school down." And many of his social superiors shared this point of view. Onslow could say in the House, in the debate on the Education Bill of 1870, which made compulsory the provision of public elementary schools, that he trusted "there would be no attempt to establish a very high class of education in our rural schools, as over-education would have the effect of driving away manual labour from the country."[1] The ignorance and apathy, which is not contentment, of the rural working classes should be tenderly preserved, it would seem, in order that they might be willing to labour as the beasts of the field. This is a view which has not wholly disappeared even amongst educated people in the year of grace 1913.

[1] Hansard, vol. 229, col. 1930.

(5) Difficulties and Incidental Dangers of Action Taken and Proposed.

In conclusion, one word must be said as to the effects generally of the various solutions which were applied to the agricultural labour problem. In the North it had been an employers' problem and, as we saw in the preceding chapter, it had been solved by higher wages. Wages were higher both in actual rates and, owing to the long hire system, in total amount. The long hire system had its disadvantages, as was pointed out by the Assistant Commissioner, for the labourer, when once his contract was made, was at the mercy of a bad master or steward.[1] But the advantage of receiving his wage in sickness and bad weather recognisedly outweighed the drawbacks of the system. The result was that in the North the labourer's problem was practically non-existent; consequently, the employment of very young children was rare, education was not sacrificed, and low feeding had not to be resorted to in order to escape the workhouse. In the South, the problem was one of the very existence of the labourer, and it would appear that most of the attempts to solve it but led to its accentuation. Allowances and family labour certainly did so. Charity in aid of wages, whether it took the form

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 112.

of doles or of clothing and coal clubs, was of doubtful benefit. A country clergyman, who knew well the difficulties of the poor, declared that in parishes where help from charitable persons was forthcoming, the labourer's rent was raised or his wages were reduced.[1] One of the Assistant Commissioners of 1867 was of the same opinion as to charitable support of schools. He considered that in parishes where the labourer was assisted in this way the imposition of low fees had a tendency to keep down wages.[2] This, of course, is not an objection which could be raised against completely free education, since under the free system conditions are alike in all districts. He considered also that it was a mistaken kindness for landlords to charge low rent, since this, too, prevented wages from rising. Wages would necessarily rise if rents rose, as was the case in the neighbourhood of London.[3] Whether allotments kept wages down is a more difficult question. They were certainly most general in the district where wages were lowest, but this is not in itself a proof that they were the cause of low wages. A Northamptonshire clergyman considered they did have the effect of preventing wages from

[1] Report on Employment of Women and Children, 1843, p. 76.
[2] Second Report, 1868–9, p. 138.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 148.

rising.[1] But the Assistant Commissioner for that county could find no information leading to this conclusion. He admitted, however, that "if a farmer knew that his labourer is in the habit of spending a portion of his strength upon his own land, he will be unwilling to pay him as much as he would if he knew that the whole of his strength is given in return for his wages. Probably, too, if a labourer knows he can make something by his allotment he will be willing to accept less from his employer than he otherwise would." But he pointed out that wages had risen within the last thirty years although allotments had increased. This fact is not, however, of much weight, for the rise in prices and the increase in migration must be taken into account. There can be very little doubt that where wages were raised it was due chiefly to migration or to a shortage of labour from some other cause. Any device, therefore, which had the effect of reconciling the labourer to his lot tended to prevent a rise in wages. At this date, however, the Commissioner seems to have been right in saying that the men who held allotments were too few, and the amount of land held was too small to have any appreciable effect on wages.[2]

[1] Report, 1867–8, p. 693.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 180.

The Commissioners of 1867 were well aware that wages both were at the root of rural difficulties and were sensitive to every change in the other conditions of the labourer's life. They constantly laid stress on the higher wages and better conditions of the North. Yet, as one of their number pointed out, "to say 'raise the wages,' is easy; but it is very difficult for the farmer to do so. There is pressure brought to bear upon him from above and below. Everyone, except perhaps the farmer himself, wishes to see the wages raised. Nay, he would be willing to raise wages if he could do so without impoverishing himself; but with the present great demand for land the rents paid by the farmers are gradually rising, and it is impossible for them to pay higher rents and higher wages at the same time. At more than one meeting of Guardians that I attended it was stated that the wages could never be raised till rents were lowered, and that as long as rents continued to rise, the least that could be expected is that wages shall not fall. It is equally difficult to expect the landlord to lower his rent in the face of a rapidly increasing demand for land and to expect the occupier to raise wages in face of an increasing demand for rent." Rents, of course, fell only when agriculture was depressed and the farmer was no more inclined to pay higher wages then than in the

good years when his rent was being raised. It was always one thing or the other. Meanwhile, so long as there was no compulsion upon landlords and farmers to come to some adjustment, the labourer must suffer. In the next period the labourer attempted to apply that compulsion by combined action with his fellows, with what success we shall see.

CHAPTER V

THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS' UNIONS

THE wages question was recognised by the Commissioners of 1867 as the radical cause of the agricultural labourers' problem. The year 1872 saw the engineering of the best organised and most direct effort which had yet been made to raise wages. The action of some Warwickshire labourers inspired a movement for agricultural unions which was destined to spread through the whole country and agitate the wages rates. But the Union men found that in tackling the wages question they were confronted with innumerable difficulties. The labourers whom they were attempting to combine were ignorant, socially depressed, politically insignificant, lacking in wholesome ambition. High wages might secure for them the social weight which would bring with it respect and political power; the better housing, which in itself would be uplifting; the release of their children from toil which hindered education; the means of rising in life, which would foster self-esteem and hope. But it was hard with conditions as they were either to unite the labourers

in a common cause or to win them higher wages. The temptation to fight by flank movements and indirect fire was great. And, almost from the first, this was the policy of the Unions. While they still carried on the main struggle against low wages and long hours, they sought to impose allotments and benefit societies between the labourer and the pauperism which rendered him useless as a Unionist, and they strove to win the political power which would lessen the opposition to his right to combine, and might even win by its own means the chief object of that combination. It cannot be said that they were wrong. Although the Trade Unions concentrated for many years upon improvement in the conditions of work, the labourer's case was different, and deductions as to the wisdom of their policy cannot be drawn from the greater ultimate success of the Trade Unionists and the less success of the agricultural. Still it has to be admitted that the strength of the new unions was deflected from what originally was their main object, and though on their collapse much was achieved, the labourer's problems had not been solved.

(1) The Early Unions.

Labourers' Unions had been attempted before, as we know. Omitting the Tolpuddle effort,

which was too long ago to have any influence in the seventies, there were Unions in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire in the late sixties, while Unions supported by contributions and working by means of strikes had been formed in Lincolnshire. And in 1871 an extensive Union had been set on foot in Herefordshire. Starting in the village of Leintwardine, where it had been urged on by the rector, it spread through six counties, and enrolled 30,000 members. Its objects were those of Girdlestone, whose work no doubt inspired it. Wages were raised through the creation of a scarcity of labour by means of migration and emigration. The surplus labour was sent to Yorkshire, Lancashire and Staffordshire, while about forty men were emigrated to America. The result was a rise in wages by 2*s.* a week in Herefordshire itself, where wages had been often as low as 7*s.*, and in other counties where the Union took hold, improvements were also effected.[1] The Herefordshire Union probably had an influence in Warwickshire, but as in 1831, the chief impetus came from the Trade Union boom amongst industrial workers. There was a widespread revival in Unionism throughout England in 1871—2. The success of a strike in

[1] "Joseph Arch: the Story of His Life. Told by Himself," p. 110.

Newcastle led to others in all the principal towns, the reports of which spread into rural districts. Here the questions of shorter hours and better wages could be more intelligently discussed than hitherto, for cheap newspapers were now available, while in most villages there were " some men who at one time or other in their lives had worked in towns and had some knowledge of Trade Unions and their practices."[1] Some such men perhaps it was who, in the village of Westerton-under-Weatherley, near Leamington, wrote to a local newspaper describing the hardship of their lives. This was read by fellow labourers in Charlcote, near Wellesbourne, one of whom had been in the Black Country, and they resolved to make an effort to improve their equally wretched conditions by combining for higher wages. On February 7th, 1872, they held an open air meeting at Wellesbourne, which was reported in the *Leamington Chronicle*,[2] the movement thus having the assistance of advertisement in the Press from the first. But they needed a leader and bethought them of Joseph Arch, the son of a peasant proprietor, with something of a local reputation as a labourer who had travelled, and had made his way in the agricultural world by the acquisition of skill in

[1] *Fraser's Magazine*, 1872. " The Agricultural Strike."
[2] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, December 20th.

hedging and other special branches of farm work. He was also a Primitive Methodist preacher, and had thus developed a power of oratory. He agreed to speak for them on February 13th. The news spread from farm to farm by word of mouth, and when the night came the size of the meeting astonished its promoters. A thousand persons were gathered under the chestnut tree which spread its branches over the village green; to them Arch made a simple but inspiring speech during a breathless silence, and when he had finished, the names of those who wished to join the new Union poured in so rapidly that the secretary could hardly write them down.[1] A letter was then sent round to employers requesting *2s. 2d.* a day, and the limitation of the working day to the hours of 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a half day ending at 3 p.m. on Saturday.[2] The letter was treated with contempt, and on March 11th, 200 Wellesbourne men struck work. Unlike most strikes, this attracted a fair measure of public interest and sympathy; Matthew Vincent, the editor of the *Leamington Chronicle,* was throughout a good friend to the movement, and the labourers owed a great deal to the favourable light in which he placed it before the public. The

[1] Heath, F., "The English Peasant," p. 52.
[2] *The Congregationalist,* 1872. "Labourers in Council."

Daily News also was of service ; Archibald Forbes, the war correspondent, was sent to Warwickshire and wrote a series of special articles,[1] which reached a wider public than that of the Leamington journal. Meanwhile, Henry Taylor, a carpenter, who was the secretary of the new Union, issued appeals to the Trade Unions throughout the country, and general public subscriptions began to come in. The Union movement spread through the country and when, on March 29th, the Warwickshire Union was finally inaugurated, there were sixty-four branches containing some 5,000 members. The meeting was presided over by Auberon Herbert, M.P., and was supported by other of the labourers' friends ; a donation of £100 was received, and letters of six members of Parliament were read at the meeting.[2] The news was now spreading further afield than Warwickshire, and Unions were formed all over the country. Such action on the part of mere field labourers was regarded as insolence by all too many of the farmers, landlords and clergy ; it was said that the men were ruining the " good relations between employers and employed," and destroying the feelings of " generosity " on the part of masters towards their men. The Unions were accused of

[1] Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[2] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, December 20th. Calendar.

being the work of paid agitators. But though there is no doubt that the movement received great aid from Trade Union men, the skilled trades furnishing many of the new Union officials, the labourers' desire to combine was genuine and spontaneous. The lead given by Warwickshire gave them courage to try. In April a meeting of labourers at Shoreham spontaneously resolved to form a Union in Kent, on the same basis as that of Warwickshire,[1] and a few days later the Agricultural Labourers' Union for Kent was formed with Maidstone as its centre.[2] Though wages there were nominally 13*s.* a week, the compulsory abstinence from work in rain or frost reduced the average earnings to 10*s.* or 11*s.* for sixty-three hours' work.[2] In the hamlet of Horcutt, in Gloucester, the men formed a Union "in a rough sort of fashion by themselves without any external assistance from more experienced agitators." Their objects were a minimum wage of 15*s.* a week, and the exclusion of married women from field work, which "they considered injures their own chances as women are paid at the lower rate and set to work which men ought to do."[3] In South Devon more than a hundred men and boys of Buckland Monachoum formed a Union to raise their wages

[1] *Times*, 1872, April 20th, 26th.
[2] *Ib.*, April 30th.
[3] *Ib.*, April 29th.

of 9s. to 11s. a week to an average of 15s. all the year round, and appointed a committee to draw up rules.[1] Meanwhile in the Midlands, Unionists were striving to form the labourers of Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire into a Union of 30,000 members, and nightly meetings were held. Such a one took place one moonlight night in an orchard, in a district which the Commissioners of 1867 had reported to be one of the most wretched.[2] On the side of the hill where the meeting was held lay a tract of common land covered with gorse and heather, and studded with cottages which were mere hovels, and in which the greatest poverty prevailed. It was the ill-paid, ill-housed, ignorant men spoken of by the Commissioners in this district who met under the moonlit fruit trees, and with a new hope in their hearts pledged themselves to union. To such small Unions throughout the country the Warwickshire Committee sent a circular letter inviting them to join in forming a National Union. A Congress of Delegates from Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent, Dorset, Yorkshire and other counties was held at Leamington on April 30th. William Morrison, M.P., presided, and other friends of the labourer were present, among them Girdlestone, Jesse

[1] *Times*, 1872, April 30th.
[2] *Ib.*

Collings, Auberon Herbert, George Howell, Lloyd Jones, and Charles Trevelyan, as well as Arch and Strange, the secretary of the old Herefordshire Union.[1] Many of the delegates spoke of their sufferings, and with eloquence and ability, though they prefaced their remarks with apologies for no learning. Their frequent use of preachers' phrases revealed the indebtedness of the new movement to the Methodist revival. The tone of the speeches was temperate; the men repudiated all idea of coercion or of "serving masters out," and declared their willingness "to let bygones be bygones." One or two men from the towns whose speeches were fiery were called to order.[2] In the evening a public meeting of 3,000 persons inaugurated the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, with Arch as president, Henry Taylor as secretary, and Matthew Vincent as treasurer.

It is not possible here to follow the growth of the National Union night by night and week by week, nor that of the other Unions which worked outside its fold. For the next two years the work went on quietly. Arch, Taylor, George Shipton, the secretary of the London Trade Council, and other delegates from the Central bodies, gave up their

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, December 20th: Calendar; *Congregationalist*, 1872: "Labourers in Council."

[2] *Congregationalist, op. cit.*

whole time to the widening and strengthening of the movement, and together with the local secretaries held constant meetings. "Night by night during seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, in barns, cottages and 'conventicles,' in public rooms, in 'pounds,' and in sheepfolds, in market places, on village greens and by the roadside, meetings have been held, addresses have been given, members have been enrolled 'in union,' 'branches' have been formed." Gala days there were, too, when the members and their wives and daughters, who gave real assistance by their keenness for the movement, paraded the street with brass bands, flags, banners, and "suitable mottoes." Meetings followed at which the men were urged to keep strong "in union," to keep their wives and daughters at home, and to have ever an eye for Canada. Such a meeting was held at Wicken, where 800 marched to the village green and sat down to tea at tables lent by the vicar and spread with the good things provided by three labourers.[1] Even the small branches had their festivals. At Garford, near Newbury, where there were twenty-six members, they and their families met under the elm trees, ornamented with wreaths of flowers made by the school children, while a Union flag was put

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, August 2nd.

in the stump of an old tree. At six o'clock they sat down to "nice cake and tea" provided by labourers' wives. "After tea speeches, songs, and about to do accounts, when a friend came in and put five shillings on our books, wishing us every success."[1] Songs were very popular at these meetings :—

> "Ours are the voices that for ages were unheard,
> Ours are the voices of a future long deferred;
> Cry all together, we shall speak the final word,
> Let the cause go marching on!"

Such were the refrains that stirred the heart of the peasant from end to end of England. For there were few districts between the Humber and the Channel in which Unionism was unrepresented, the local societies being affiliated to one of the four or five central organisations, of which the National Agricultural Labourers' was the chief.[2]

Small strikes took place in some districts,[3] and in Oxfordshire a good deal of indignation was aroused in 1872 against the Government by its permitting the employment of soldiers in harvest work to break the strike.[4] But striking was not encouraged except as a last resort. Farmers,

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, June 21st.

[2] *Congregationalist*, 1876: "Agricultural Labourers' Movement."

[3] *Times* 1872, June 11th, October 18th; *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1872, onwards.

[4] *Times*, August 20th, 22nd, 30th, September 16th.

especially during haymaking and harvest, granted some rise before such pressure was brought to bear. The National Union claimed to have raised wages by 1*s.* to 4*s.* a week. Wages were, however, by no means the only question with which the Unions concerned themselves. Shorter hours, better housing, exclusion of married women from field work, migration and emigration, were all subjects both considered by the Union leaders and discussed in local meetings. And other matters than the conditions of labour were included from the first in the National Union's platform. At the inaugural meeting Jesse Collings spoke of rural education, Sir Baldwin Leighton on allotments and cow-lots, the Rev. J. W. Leigh on co-operative farming. The land laws and land monopoly were discussed at the mass meeting of labourers and their friends at Exeter Hall, in December of the same year. In small village meetings, too, enclosures, education and other subjects were considered. The *Labourers' Union Chronicle* had been started in June, with Matthew Vincent as editor, and did much to educate the labourer in all the political, economic, social and agricultural questions of the day. From 1873 the extension of the franchise and the disendowment of the Church received considerable attention in its pages, and interest thus awakened in the

franchise question is reflected in the speeches of labourers at insignificant little village meetings.

It is doubtful whether the inclusion of these wider objects in the Union programme was not a cause of weakness. Arch, looking back at the work of the Union, regretted " the cart of agricultural reforms stuck before the Union horse." The mistake, if mistake it were, was largely due to the union of politicians with labourers. The politicians, though their support was invaluable to the labourers, underestimated the difficulties of righting mere conditions of labour, and eager for their own reforms, loaded them too early into the cart. The Trade Unions, though they had been in existence long before, did not enter the political field until 1878.[1] And Trade Unions had far more of the elements of strength than had the agricultural. Their members were better able to pay subscriptions, and the constant intercourse with each other kept them firm in their common objects.

(2) Difficulties of the Unions. Collapse.

The agricultural Unions had to meet all the usual difficulties inherent in forming and preserving combinations of workmen, and were beset as well by special difficulties. Their members could not

[1] Howell, " Conflicts of Capital and Labour, 1878," p. 174.

contribute at Trade Union rates, yet the cost of forming and preserving Labourers' Unions was greater. Constant meetings were necessary to keep the movement strong amongst men who were scattered and who were so much at the mercy of their employers. Acts of petty tyranny were constantly being practised, and with the greatest success, for men threatened with the loss of their allotments, or with loss of work if they joined the Union, dared not stand firm by it. The system of letting cottages with farms now appeared as a greater grievance than ever before. Labourers complained at their meetings that the sub-letting of cottages by farmers enabled them not merely to discharge their men, but to turn them and their families from their homes.[1] In the Cirencester district farmers gave the men notice to quit their cottages, and resolved to let in the future only by the week, in order that any Union man might be easily evicted.[2] Landowners and clergy united with the farmers in the persecution of Unionists. As landlords, as magistrates, as poor law guardians, as the dispensers of charities, they had great powers of oppression. Cases of tyranny were constantly reported by the local secretaries, a few instances only of which must

[1] *Times*, 1872, June 27th.
[2] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, September 13th.

here suffice to show what the labourer had to meet. Not infrequently landowners and farmers in their capacity of magistrates refused to allow open-air meetings to be held, on the plea of obstruction of the highways. A test case was fought out over a meeting held by Arch and Mr. J. C. Cox in 1873. They were charged at Farringdon Petty Sessions, a Bench which had fined several Union delegates before, but in this case Queen's Counsel was employed by the defendants, and the local justices dared not confirm the charge.[1] But the magistrates still had great powers of persecution left them. They avoided giving police protection to labourers' meetings,[2] which were not infrequently disturbed by employers. In the Brampton district an innkeeper was threatened with the loss of his licence if he permitted meetings to be held on his premises.[3] Unionists were constantly summoned for trivial offences, or for leaving their work at the end of the week. As they were paid by the week they had really a right to do so, but not infrequently they were fined. Yet when the Union tried a case against a farmer in the Swaffham district, where several men had been so fined, for

[1] Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[2] Hansard, 1873, ccxvii. 805; *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, October 4th.

[3] *Ib.*, 1873, June 14th.

discharging his men without notice, the case was dismissed.[1] "In serving summonses for such cases they send them about two days before they have to appear before the Bench, so there is no time to get a solicitor to defend the cases, and if the parties summoned want to adjourn the case they will not allow them."[2] In a trumped-up case at Compton Abbas, two men were taken into custody and kept in prison nine days before they were tried. One employer was heard to remark, "They are Union men, give it them." Nothing could be proved against the men, and they had to be dismissed.[3] This sort of thing was so common that Auberon Herbert, in the House of Commons, moved to appoint a Commission to inquire into the powers of county magistrates, "with special reference to their repeated convictions of labourers for trivial offences, or for no offence at all." But he was counted out. In the committal of some labourers' wives to prison on a charge of impeding strike-breakers, the Oxfordshire magistrates went too far. Public indignation was aroused, and the Chipping Norton case became proverbial for the "justice" of county magistrates.[4] The landed interest also

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, August 2nd.
[2] *Ib.*
[3] *Ib.*, 1873, August 2nd; cf. *Times*, 1872, July 2nd, 26th.
[4] Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

used its power as Poor Law Guardians to victimise Unionists. One man was refused relief or a ticket for the house in Warwickshire; another, in Hampshire, was refused a coffin for his child. It was alleged that guardians were strict where Unionists were concerned in forcing them to contribute to the support of aged parents.[1] As trustees of charities, the gentry and clergy also abused their powers. In Clopton, Suffolk, the churchwarden gave notice that "the society calling itself the National Agricultural Union having ordered strikes in a portion of the county of Suffolk, all members of the same in this parish have notice to give up their allotments, and will be struck off the list of parochial and bread charities."[2] In a parish near Aylesbury, charities were withheld, but the men here had enough spirit to open a correspondence with the Charity Commissioners.[3] The clergy, for the most part, sided with squire and farmer. It was two clergymen magistrates who were to blame in the Chipping Norton affair, and oppressive guardians and untrustworthy trustees numbered clergy in their ranks. The country vicars were not above the pettiest acts of oppression; two young women

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, August 2nd.
[2] *Ib.*, 1874, April 18th.
[3] *Ib.*, 1873, June 7th.

were turned out of the choir of a Buckinghamshire church because they spoke at labourers' meetings ;[1] one old Suffolk woman was threatened by the parson with the loss of her allotment if she allowed her barn to be used for a meeting,[2] and another Suffolk parson gave the Unionists notice to quit the glebe allotments.[3] "The Church has once more shown itself not the Church of the Nation but the Church of a class," wrote in 1874 a prominent statesman of the present day.[4] The labourers had many excellent friends amongst the clergy, such as the Bishop of Manchester, Girdlestone, Attenborough and others ; and lesser men whose names are now forgotten subscribed to the labourers' funds, took the chair or spoke at meetings, and lent the church field for the accommodation of the speakers and their audiences.[5] But the little acts of tyranny by less enlightened parsons aroused a feeling of severance between labourers and the Church. So, too, with landowners ; the majority perhaps were opposed, but many were sympathetic, they raised wages unasked, and spoke up at dinners of agricultural societies for the Unions and for moderation and

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, July 19th.
[2] *Ib.*, 1873, July 5th.
[3] *Ib.*, 1874, April 18th.
[4] *Ib.*, 1874, March 21st.
[5] *Ib.*, 1873, June 7th, July 5th, 26th, October 11th, etc., etc.

justice on the part of farmers and landlords.[1] The landowner's position was a complicated one, for those who were willing to act fairly by the labourer yet had duties to the farmer too. The Duke of Bedford was a "good friend of the labourers,"[2] yet he held that farmers must have the right to evict labourers from their cottages; his cottages were built "for the accommodation of those who work upon the farms, and their appropriation must follow that arrangement."[3] Lord Denbigh issued a circular to all the labourers on his estate, saying he had never opposed the Union and would not support tenant farmers in any attempt to impose unfair conditions of work or wages. But cottages were for the men who worked upon the estate, and he would not restrain farmers who gave notice to their tenants.[4] Thus the housing difficulty comes up again. Both the landowner's frequent good-will and his difficulties were, however, put into the shade by the ill-will of the many, and whereas the Union movement had opened with every disposition on the men's part to good feelings and moderation towards

[1] *Times*, 1872, April 30th, May 28th, December 10th, etc.; *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, June 21st, 28th, etc.; cf. June 14th, etc., *re* friendly farmers.

[2] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1872, August 2nd.

[3] *Ib.*, 1874, April 11th.

[4] *Ib.*, 1873, June 21st.

those above them,[1] a feeling of class distrust and of isolation was created, and the Union movement became more bitter. The bitterness of that date, the grudging spirit and suspicion so often found to-day, were not the work of demagogues and paid agitators, but of the farmers, clergy and gentry of the seventies and eighties. The labourer has more time than the townsman to chew the cud of memory.

The lump of prejudice and injustice in the Church and the landed interest would have been leavened in time by the more enlightened of their numbers, but there was a difficulty which the Unions had to meet less hopeful of removal. This was one which had always beset the labourer, the difficulty of limiting the supply of labour. In such limitation lay the best chance of raising wages. But the farmer had great powers of self-protection. He could alter his methods of cultivation, almost his line of business. He could put down crops which required less labour, or allow the land to lie idle for a time. Thus, and by the use of machinery, he was able to economise in labour whenever he felt the pinch. And the pinch he felt but slowly, for he possessed wide sources of supply in the general labourers, the casual workers of the towns and immigrants

[1] *Times*, 1872, April 20th, May 16th, December 5th, 11th.

from Ireland. By the use of such outside labour he constantly evaded the men's demands. In 1872 soldiers were employed in several districts to gather in the harvest;[1] next year, when the outcry raised against the authorities had compelled them to forbid such use of the military, the farmers obtained an ample supply of labour from Ireland and the towns, by issuing, it was said, false reports as to wages.[2] Those who were compelled to raise wages in haymaking and harvest, or during the busy season on pasture farms, were able to reduce them again as soon as the winter set in. This occurred both in 1872 and 1873, and many Unionists were dismissed even though they were prepared to accept lower wages.[3] In 1872, so soon as harvest was over, many Dorsetshire farmers lowered the wages of their men, in some cases by as much as five shillings a week.[4] They also reduced the amount of work put into the land to a minimum; men were dismissed and others were locked out until they accepted their employer's terms.[5] The land of course suffered, but that was the landowner's and

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1872, August 22nd, etc.

[2] *Ib.*, 1873, August 30th, September 13th.

[3] *Ib.*, 1872, June 11th; 1873, July 12th, September 20th, October 4th, etc.; *Times*, 1872, October 18th.

[4] *Times*, 1872, September 30th.

[5] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, October 25th; 1874, January 25th, February 7th.

the nation's loss rather than the tenant farmers; even as early as 1873 the harvest revealed the under-cultivation of the land.[1] In Suffolk, farmers combined together and borrowed labour from each other.[2] And they employed women and children, presumably the families of non-Union men, to replace Unionist labour. This gang system was "a great curse to the labourers," and it was said the farmers were "acting as bad as locking out."[3] But as was pointed out at a labourers' meeting, "as long as we live in their cottages they will force us to send our boys out to work."[4] The evil system of raising wages in harvest time instead of paying a fair wage throughout the year was also denounced by the labourers. It was but in the nature of things that farmers should introduce foreign labour from the towns, Ireland and elsewhere, and that they should form their own unions, such as the Oxfordshire and Adjoining Counties Association of Agriculturalists, started in 1872, the Farmers Protection Society in Dorsetshire, and the National Federation of Employers, formed at the close of the year 1873. That any Union would have to expect. But the peculiar powers of self-protection which

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, September 20th.
[2] *Ib.*, 1873, September 27th.
[3] *Ib.*, 1873, June 7th.
[4] *Ib.*, 1873, July 5th.

farmers possessed placed special difficulties in the way of Agricultural Unions.

The results were that the Unions always had some hundreds of names on their relief list, and that very early in their career recourse had to be had to emigration. Joseph Arch had been at first opposed to it, as emigration robbed the nation of its best men, and he recognised that there was really no surplus of good labour on the land.[1] But migration did not give sufficient relief, and as early as September, 1872, the National Union was compelled to adopt definite emigration schemes.[2] There was still reluctance among the men to leave their homes, but constant articles in the *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, and persuasion by delegates at village meetings, overcame this to a great extent. All the year through men were emigrated, largely by the aid of public subscription, and the numbers rose to hundreds regularly every winter.[3] In July, 1873, Arch went to Canada to prospect, and made excellent arrangements with the Canadian

[1] *Times*, 1872, December 10th.

[2] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873: Calendar. Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 40, says lack of education was a difficulty both in migration and emigration. Men could not write, and dared not leave home.

[3] *Times*, 1872, September 30th, October 18th, December 10th; *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, September 13th, 20th, October 11th, etc. July 13th, Arch announced at a meeting that in five months 7,000 men had been engaged to make railroads in New Zealand alone.

Government for the financial assistance and reception of his members.

All the difficulties inherent in Agricultural Unions became apparent in the great struggle of 1874. A small Suffolk branch asked, in "moderate and conciliatory language," for a rise in wages of 1*s*.[1] The farmers replied by locking them out at the end of February. By the close of March the lock-out had spread into the neighbouring counties and into Hampshire, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, and 2,000 men were out. The number rose to over 8,000 by the beginning of May, and eventually the total number reached 10,000.[2] Some were locked out because they had asked for a rise in wages, but others, and "by far the greatest number," merely because they were Union men.[3] The expenditure in relief was inevitably immense; £21,365 was paid for strikes by the National Union alone in 1874—5. The public supported liberally. Contributions came in from gentry and clergy,[4] and labourers throughout the country collected their pence at village meetings. But by far the greatest support came from the Trade Unionists and the general working-class population of the towns. Demonstrations were held to express

[1] *Times*, 1874, August 22nd.
[2] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 285.
[3] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1874, March 21st.
[4] *Ib.*, May 9th, 16th, 23rd.

sympathy with the labourers in many of the manufacturing cities,[1] such as that in Manchester, where there was a procession of 300,000 through the city, followed by a meeting addressed by Arch. There £192 13*s.* 3*d.* was collected "chiefly in pence during the procession through the streets."[2] A hundred labourers from the Newmarket district were sent on a march through England, holding demonstrations and collecting subscriptions.[3] "Men of England, you, the toilers in mines and at forge and loom, and you their generous employers, remember this *is not* simply a *peasant's question*, it is a *condition of England question.*" Such had been the appeal of the National Union to the trades.[4] And they responded nobly. They recognised clearly, of course, the advantages to themselves of Agricultural Unions. The wretched conditions of the field labourer were pulling down conditions of work in the towns, where the immigration of numbers of first-rate men from the country was increasing competition. They realised that improvement in the status of the industrial classes must go side by side with improvement in the conditions of rural labour.

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1874, May 9th (Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds), April 28th (Manchester), April 29th (Bolton), May 5th (Liverpool), May 6th (Wigan), May 9th (Halifax), May 11th (Bury), etc.

[2] *Ib.*, 1874, June 27th.

[3] *Ib.*, 1874, July 4th, 11th, 18th, August 8th.

[4] *Ib.*, May 9th.

The first must be ephemeral unless the second also were achieved. But none the less generous was their sympathetic response to the new Unions' appeals. The money was spent in relief of the locked out men and in emigrating and migrating all for whom the openings or the money could be found. Week by week the National Union Executive Committee reported the removal of men in twenties and thirties from district after district. All too often, however, the fresh men locked out equalled the number of those who were now off the relief lists. Every effort was made by the labourers' friends to mediate. Samuel Morley, M.P., and George Dixon, M.P., were in close touch with the two parties at Newmarket and Leamington. Arbitration succeeded in the case of the Lincolnshire Labour League. The farmers against whom it was opposed recognised the men's right to unite, and the League withdrew certain of its rules.[1] But the mediation elsewhere was unsuccessful. The men did not show themselves unreasonable but, as was the general opinion of the press and the disinterested public, the employers did. They were out, the *Times* correspondent as well as Arch averred, not to protect their wages bills, but to break down the combination of the men.[2]

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1874, May 30th.
[2] *Ib.*, 1874, April 4th; *Times*, 1874, August 9th.

Dr. Fraser, the Bishop of Manchester, one of the Commissioners of 1867, declared in an article in April, that the result of the farmers' obstinacy was that the seed was not sown and the land was being grossly neglected, while labour was driven from the country.[1] Again we see how the farmer, from the very nature of his work, possessed a peculiar strength. The *Times* correspondent wrote that "the farmers affect to be able to do without the labour of the men, but the fact that at Chippenham (near Newmarket) half-a-dozen girls have been prevailed upon to do the ordinary work of farm labourers, such as hoeing in the fields, by the presentation of dresses, etc., indicates that the employers are really suffering inconvenience." In spite of this and though the Union delegate was making conciliatory proposals, the farmers refused to take back their men unless they gave up the Union.[2] Newmarket was the centre of the disturbed districts, and there weekly meetings were held on the Severals in order to keep a good heart in the men, who flocked into the town from surrounding villages. They formed in procession, men, women and children, wearing blue favours, and marched through the town, headed by a brass band and flags, to the Heath. There

[1] "Are the Farmers of England going mad."
[2] *Times*, 1874, April 7th.

they were addressed from wagons by the Union delegates and by emigration agents, who took down the names of the men who wished to emigrate.[1] But in June, the numbers at the weekly meeting were falling off. At the end of July the blow fell. The financial resources of the National Union were nearly exhausted,[2] and at the usual meeting on the Severals it was announced that the Union could no longer support the men, and they must find work, but not give up their tickets, "which they promised not to do."[3] The failure was regarded by those who knew not as a defeat, but as a temporary check. The *Times* correspondent declared that there was no sense of total defeat amongst the labourers. And the farmers had failed just as much. They were no more united than the labourers, and throughout the struggle half the Union labourers in Suffolk had been kept in employment.[4] If at the end of the lock-out neither side appeared to be victorious, "the sequel proved that the men conquered. At this moment (1876) they are receiving the higher wages which they demanded; they are maintaining the Union which their employers conspired to destroy, and are extending it on every side. The

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1874, April 11th.
[2] *Ib.*, August 8th.
[3] *Ib.*, July 25th.
[4] *Times*, August 29th.

Suffolk district instead of being one of the weakest is now both in men and funds the strongest in the Union, and is enlisting recruits at the rate of several hundreds per month." [1] Though the lock-out revealed the difficulties of the Agricultural Union movement, and tried its strength severely, it was really other causes which brought about its decline.

There had never been complete union within the Unionist ranks. Various organisations had stood outside the National's fold, not approving either of its policy or its political tendencies. The National Union believed in centralisation; local secretaries there were, but the branch societies were not autonomous; they took their policy and their direction from the Central Executive Committee, and to it forwarded the greater part of their subscriptions. Other Unions, the majority of which hung together in the Federal Union of Agricultural and General Labourers, held aloof from what they considered this autocratic government. They were also not in agreement with the political views of the National Union, which even in 1873 was strongly Liberal, nor did they consider that work for political objects was advisable. Then, in the autumn of 1875, came a

[1] *Congregationalist*, 1876: "Agricultural Labourers' Movement."

split within the National Union itself. Matthew Vincent and others, feeling perhaps the failure of 1874, agreed that the labour problem was not to be solved through the raising of wages by Trade Union methods, but through the re-instatement of the labourer on the land. Allotments were regarded as the first step, and the revival of the class of small farmers and the institution of co-operative farms were to follow.

The National Union Executive opposed the policy, a part of which had already been tried without great success, and the rest of which could very doubtfully be carried into effect. Vincent and his followers thereupon formed the National Farm Labourers' Union. Its members contributed a penny a week to a Land Fund; small farms were eventually to be bought; and all possible pressure brought to bear upon the Government in order to acquire Crown lands for small farms.[1]

In addition to dis-union amongst the labourers' leaders, the year 1875 saw the beginning of an agricultural depression. The American Civil War and the Franco-German war had for the time kept up corn prices, and delayed the general adoption of new methods of farming, and those farmers who had not altered their agricultural economy upon

[1] *Labourers' Chronicle and Industrial Pioneer*, 1876, January 1st.

the introduction of Free Trade suffered severely when the general peace allowed the full effects of Free Trade to be felt. The cheapening and quickening of transport which took place at the same time increased the English farmer's predicament.[1] The depression lasted until agriculturalists generally substituted those branches of farming in which there was little or no foreign competition, for the traditional branches of English agriculture. The acceleration did not set in until 1880.[2] Meanwhile farmers were hard pressed, owing to the high rents fixed in the period of prosperity of 1850 onwards, the fall in the prices of their produce, and the demand of their men for higher wages. Consequently, many farms were given up, and land everywhere was under-cultivated, growing weeds rather than crops, as the farmers again sought to save expenses by reducing their wages bill.[3] With many men standing unemployed through this reduction in the demand for labour, the Unions could not oppose that reduction in the wages of those who were employed to which the driven farmer now took recourse. When in district after district wages were reduced, the Union leaders could but advise the

[1] Levy, "Large and Small Holdings," pp. 75 f.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 78.
[3] Arch, *op. cit.*, pp. 303 f.

men to submit. Emigration was continued, but in the face of the great economy in labour it was ineffective in maintaining the wages of those who remained on the land. They fell by 1s. to 3s. Naturally the Unions could not retain their members.[1] Not only could the men little afford subscriptions from their lower wages, but they were unwilling to contribute to an organisation which brought them, apparently, no material advantages. Added to this, the stalwarts in most districts, who might have kept the Union spirit alive, had been emigrated. Further, the Agricultural Unions had always largely depended on the contributions of the better-paid artizans in the towns, but in 1879 there was a general depression from which the Trade Unions suffered acutely,[2] and financial assistance was no longer forthcoming for agricultural labourers. The membership of the National Union which had been 71,835 on April 30th, 1873, and 86,214 the following year,[3] sank to 55,000 in 1877, 24,000 in 1878, and about 20,000 in 1879 and 1880. There was a revival, especially in Norfolk and Suffolk,[4] during 1883, but in 1889 the Union had only 4,254 members. Meanwhile, many of the smaller Unions had disappeared altogether, though the Kent and Sussex

[1] Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 300.
[2] Webb, "Trade Unions," p. 319.
[3] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1874, June 13th.
[4] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1884, January 5th

Union was said to have over 10,000 members. But both it and the National Union were now living upon their capital.[1] Joseph Arch attributes the marked decline of the National Union to the fact that its work had been largely achieved. In 1884 the franchise was extended, and the men now thought that they could get what they wanted by the vote.[2] The sick benefit society, which had been formed in the Union in 1877, was, in his opinion, also largely responsible for the decline. In 1888 it was "pulling the Union to the ground."[3]

(3) Revival in the Nineties.

In 1890 the Agricultural Unions saw a revival. Again the industrial population gave the impetus. The success of the Trade Unions of unskilled workers, culminating in the victory of the dockers, aroused the Union spirit in farm labourers. And the dockers took active measures to stimulate it. It had been brought home to them very forcibly by their frequent defeats that the cause of the working class, whether rural or urban, was one. The existence of a mass of ill-paid labourers in the country placed the unskilled workers in the towns at the mercy of their employers. The strike of the employees of the South Metropolitan Gas Company

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 296.
[2] Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 376
[3] Arch, p. 380.

had failed owing to the ease with which its managers had obtained blackleg labour; the Dockers' strike a few months later succeeded only owing to the fact that it took place at hay and harvest time.[1] The Dockers' delegates at the Trade Union Congress were instructed to urge upon the meeting the need of organising agricultural labourers, since most of the blacklegs were drawn from their ranks "owing to their scanty and unorganised condition."[2] Delegates from the Dockers' Union were active in Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire in 1890.[3] Many new Unions were formed and some of the old now revived. The old Kent and Sussex Labourers' Union was reorganised under the name of the London and Counties Labour League, and extended its branches through the south-eastern counties. The Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labour Union was established in that county, while in Suffolk, the Eastern Counties Labour Federation, founded in May, 1890, soon had 3,000 members in the villages around Ipswich, and by 1892 spread into Essex and Cambridgeshire, and had 174 branches containing 10,000 members.[4] Its success stimulated the activity of the National Agricul-

[1] *Congregationalist*, 1891, X. p. 35.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 34.
[3] *Church Reformer*, XI. p. 112.
[4] *Ib.*, 1891, X. p. 131; Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

tural Labourers' Union in those parts of the eastern counties where it was still a power. Its membership rose from 4,254 in 1889, to 14,000 in 1890.[1] In Norfolk alone it had 12,000 members in 1891, and in Essex, 1,335, while in Suffolk many new branches were formed,[2] and in 1892 the work was extended into Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire.[3] But the "distrust left in men's minds by the breakdown of the old Union" was said to be a very real and serious hindrance to its reorganisation. Hence the need for the new Unions and their greater success.[4]

The Land Restoration League assisted in the work of revival. Its red vans with literature and speakers were sent from village to village in Suffolk in 1891, and to Berkshire, Bedfordshire, Somersetshire, Herefordshire and Yorkshire in 1892 and 1893. In the six months' campaign in 1891 the League claimed to have trebled the number of members.[5] In 1893 the Wiltshire Agricultural and General Labourers' Union was organised, and though at first the work seemed hopeless, by Whitsuntide it had forty-two branches and 1,400 members.[6] But though the revival thus spread

[1] Hasbach, p. 298.
[2] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1892, January 2nd.
[3] *Ib.*, January 16th, March 4th.
[4] *Church Reformer*, XI. 1892: "The Agricultural Labourer."
[5] *Ib.*
[6] *Ib.*, XII. p. 137.

to the South-west of England and to Herefordshire and Warwickshire, Unionism had little force beyond the south-eastern counties. The new Unionists met with some opposition,[1] the Red Van agitators especially, their political views being peculiarly obnoxious to the landed interest, and they and their van were liable to be overturned or pitched into the river.[2] But nothing like the hostility of the seventies was shown.

The new Unions differed from the old in that general labourers everywhere were encouraged to enrol; secondly, the attempt to organise labourers from a distant centre was given up, even by the National Union itself. Experience had taught Unionists that "constant and watchful help of experienced leaders" was necessary if the scattered members of a rural Union were to be held together. It was impossible to keep enthusiasm alive, or to get the men to pay subscriptions regularly, when their leaders were a central executive somewhere in the distance.[3] Thirdly, the new organisations did not attempt to combine Union work with that of sick benefit societies. The wages of labourers were recognisedly too small to bear both charges, yet since migration might still play a

[1] *Church Reformer*, XI. pp. 142, 161; *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, January 7th, 28th, April 15th.

[2] *Ib.*, XII. p. 212.

[3] *Ib.*, XI. p. 112.

prominent part in Union work, sick benefits could not be paid unless the subscriptions were very high. "It is the best lives in the actuarial sense which are being drawn from the villages," and the old and feeble remained on the land and in the Union in disproportionate numbers. Sick benefits had given rise to serious trouble in the National Union, and more lately a severe epidemic of influenza had so heavily taxed the resources of the London and Counties Labour League as to give rise to a serious financial crisis in that body. "The moment the pinch comes and the ready payment in full claims for sick pay and burial money becomes impossible, the younger men refuse to go on paying their subscriptions, and only the old members remain."[1] Lastly, the new Unions trusted to the power of the vote rather than to that of strikes.[2] They did not, however, abandon the old policy of combining political aims with the attainment of better conditions of work. Again this was due largely to outside influence, for the assistance of the Land Restoration League naturally led to the inclusion of wider objects.

The new movement had considerable success in raising wages in those localities where the Unions

[1] *Church Reformer*, p. 113.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 114.

were strong, and even managed to prevent reductions in the winter.[1] But the area of its influence was distinctly limited. And it was but short lived. The drought of 1893 brought a poor harvest, less work during harvest for the men, and less profits for the farmer. To meet the agricultural crisis he reduced wages and his labour power as soon as the harvest was in. In Norfolk there were so many men out of employment through the changing of farms, and other farms doing with as few men as possible, that the men were losing heart and becoming disorganised.[2] They dropped away from their Unions, or left them upon migration. The winter was peculiarly severe, and with unemployment rife and wages lowered, the men could not afford their subscriptions, and still more of them dropped away. In 1894 nine Unions were still in existence; in 1897 there were six, with a membership of 3,879. Ten years later, only two remained, one in Norfolk and the other in Dorset.[3]

The second collapse, in 1894, discredited the employment of industrial methods in the solution

[1] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1892, January 2nd, 9th; 1893, March 4th; *Church Reformer*, 1892, XI. p. 112; XII. 1893, p. 137; Millin, "Life in our Villages," p. 32.

[2] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, August 19th, October 11th, December 30th.

[3] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, pp. 302, 359.

of agricultural problems, both with the labourer and his friends. Centralised and local Unions had both been tried. Unions freed from the burden of sick benefits, and Unions offering that added attraction, had each had their day. But the insufficient wages of the rural labourer, the ease with which the farmers could obtain general, casual or industrial blacklegs, or could reduce their demand for labour by the use of mechanical contrivances and changes in their methods of farming, the isolation of the labourer, and the loss of home which followed loss of work, had allowed of the permanent success of neither. Added to these obstacles was the impossibility of winning any fight without weakening the Union. The surplus supply of labour had to be reduced by migration and emigration; both depleted the ranks of the most determined men, and left the countryside without its natural stalwarts. In the first nine years of its existence the National Union alone is said to have been responsible for the emigration of 700,000 persons.[1]

(4) Results of the Union Movement. Wages Question.

Still, the Unions had done much. By their weekly papers and in their nightly meetings they

[1] Prothero, "English Farming," p. 411.

had educated the labourer in a variety of social, economic and political subjects; they had awakened him to his true condition; given him an outlook, given him ideas, and given him a spirit which the English peasantry had not known for a hundred years. Such bitterness as was instilled into him—and there was bitterness—was not primarily the fault of the Unions. Their educational value was real, and it was lasting. The Unions had been, too, of real assistance to the labourers' friends in their passage of the Education Bill of 1876, the Allotments Acts of 1882 and 1887, and the Small Holdings Bills of 1892 and 1894. The work of Jesse Collings and other indefatigable champions of the labourer would have been carried on without the assistance of the Unions. But the very existence of organised bodies of labourers awoke others less devoted and discerning to the need for action, and the Unions may well claim to have hastened the passage of these measures into law. How far they really affected the extension of the franchise is another question. The agricultural labourers formed but a small section of the classes enfranchised in 1884, and it is hardly possible that they could have been left out if an extension was to be made at all. Still, they took their share in the fight. There was hardly a village meeting which

did not express itself in favour of the suffrage, not a mass demonstration in which the labourer was unrepresented.

With respect to the main object of the fight, the increase of wages, the Unions had achieved temporary successes. Wages had been raised in the summer, and more permanently in those districts where the surplus labour had been most successfully reduced. But frequently there had been reductions again in the winter. And rises were effected, of course, largely because the seasons were good. This was acknowledged even in the *Labourers' Chronicle;* the better wages of 1873 were admittedly due "largely to the prosperous year and heavy crops of fruit and hops."[1] The agricultural crisis of 1893 saw a fall in wages, in some districts to rates lower than they had been for many years; in one parish in Essex, 8*s.* was accepted.[2] Finally, we have to notice a belief that obtained amongst some of the Unionists themselves, namely, that even where the rate of wages had been raised by the Unions, real wages had not risen, or at any rate not to the same extent. They considered that prices rose with the rise in the rates of wages, and that they were therefore in no better a position than

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1874, January 17th.
[2] *Ib.*, 1893, December 30th.

formerly.[1] How far they were right it is hard to say. We know, however, that it had been maintained previously by educated people that the local shopkeeper and others put up their prices whenever the labourer's financial position was improved, whether by low rents or by charitable doles and assistance. It was pointed out in respect to the dockers that the rise they had effected in wages was a tempting source of exploitation to their landlords, and that there was a serious risk of a large part of their gain in wages going to increased rents.[2] In the country an increment in wages was far more exposed to the greed of landlords, for there was infinitely less competition amongst them, and infinitely less choice of dwellings for the labourer in the country than there was in the town. Further, the labourer's wages, far more than those of the artisan, were at the mercy of the business propensities of the village shopkeeper, who, except in a few favoured districts, had no competitors. Perhaps one of the lessons to be learnt from the Union movement is that higher wages in themselves may be of little value to the labourer. Though prices naturally rise with the increased

[1] *Labourers' Union Chronicle*, 1873, August 2nd.

[2] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1889, September 8th; *Church Reformer*, 1889, VIII. p. 232.

demand that follows widespread and general prosperity, an unnatural and artificial rise is liable to take place locally upon improvements in the financial position of the rural labourer, and unless fair rents and opportunities of fair marketing can be secured for him, the higher wages may be of little value.

CHAPTER VI

FARMER AND LABOURER, 1880 TO 1913

THE disappointed Unionists and their friends found solace in the various social and political measures which, undoubtedly hastened by their movement, promised amelioration in the labourer's lot. There was an augury of better things in another direction, namely, the improvement in the general conditions of agriculture, and an improvement in a special condition, the relations of employer and employed. But the latter was as yet too slight to be appreciated, while it was not sufficiently recognised that the interests of farmer and labourer are fundamentally identical for the former to afford much consolation. Nevertheless, developments along these lines constitute one of the more promising signs of the period.

(1) THE AGRICULTURAL REVIVAL.[1]

The changes which were taking place in agriculture, by strengthening the foundations of the farmer's prosperity, were destined favourably to affect the labourer's position. The depression of

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, Chapters III. and IV., full account.

English agriculture had been mainly due to the continuance of methods of farming which were suited only to periods of high corn prices. Large farming and extensive corn-growing had made the fortunes of farmers during the war. But it was the fortunes then made which were largely responsible for the depression of the succeeding thirty years. The rise in rents, the breaking up of valuable pasture, and the enclosure of much poor land, the working of which required a large expenditure of capital, were not features of agricultural economy which could be changed all at once. As compared with those of to-day, corn prices were high under the Corn Laws and remained at much the same level for thirty years, in spite of Free Trade. But they were not high enough to suit the war period methods of farming, and, save in some exceptional years, the arable farmer was none too prosperous. It is therefore somewhat surprising to find that although in 1846 the fear of a fall in corn prices led to some revival of stock-farming and to other changes for the better, agriculturalists for the most part continued to farm upon the old lines until the eighties. The truth is that the profits to be made from other branches of farming were not great enough to overcome the conservatism of English farmers and the difficulties in the way of

transference from one branch of agriculture to another. Here again, corn prices were responsible; though they injured the arable farmer by being too low, from the consumer's point of view they were high, and he could not offer any great demand for other farm produce. In the eighties the case was altered. The fall in the price of corn, due to the cheapening and quickening of transport, brought about the yet greater depression of arable farmers. On the other hand, it led to the increased purchasing powers of the industrial population, and there was a corresponding increase in the demand for fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs and poultry. The market for such produce was yet further enlarged in the nineties by the importation of frozen meat. Farmers now had a double inducement to abandon corn growing in favour of dairying, market-gardening, and stock-farming, which was profitable in spite of the importation of frozen meat if carried on for the production of first-class meat and for breeding. The change took time, of course. Although the men who were already established in these branches of farming were obviously prospering, corn-growing had become second-nature to the farmer, and he tended to be averse to any change. And there were economic as well as psychological obstacles in its way. Poor arable land could not be trans-

formed into pasture, and new methods of farming could not be introduced, without a considerable expenditure of time and money. "Unreasonable complaints were made against the obstinate conservatism of agriculturalists, because they were unable to effect a costly change of front as easily as a man turns in his bed. The aims and methods of farming were gradually adapted to meet the changed conditions. As wheat, barley and oats declined towards the lowest prices of the century, increased attention was paid to grazing, dairying, and such minor products as vegetables, fruit and poultry. The corn area of England and Wales shrank from 8,244,392 acres in 1871, to 5,886,052 acres in 1901. Between the same years the area of permanent pasture increased from 11,367,298 acres to 15,399,025 acres."[1] The change to the more productive branches of farming was meanwhile assisted by the reversion of landowners to small farms, which were generally speaking much better suited to those branches than were large farms. Consequently, landlords found that large tenant farmers were not forthcoming, while there were numerous applicants for the medium-sized and smaller holdings; and in spite of increased cost of buildings, economic considerations led to the division of the larger units.

[1] Prothero, "English Farming," p. 378.

Between the years 1885 and 1895, farms of 50 to 300 acres increased from 104,073 to 106,955, while those of 300 to 1,000 acres and over decreased from 16,148 to 15,578.[1] Unfortunately, this tendency, so well suited to the agricultural needs of the day, and so necessary now to the prosperity of English farming, was hampered by the non-economic preference of landowners for large farms. The social and political motives of their landownership, and their sports and game preserving, which will have to be considered in connection with the small-holding movement, stood in the way of agricultural reform. In spite of this, however, the promise held in the development of the lesser branches of agriculture was great enough to give a tremendous impetus to the acquisition of technical skill. Marvellous technical progress was made in stock-breeding, dairying, market-gardening and poultry-farming,[2] and with the aid of new scientific knowledge the farmer drove ahead. The improvement in his position which was thus taking place was furthered by the action of the Legislature in his interests. A series of Acts, starting with the Ground Game Act of 1880, were passed for his assistance, chief amongst them being those which relieved him from the burden of tithes, protected

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
[2] Prothero, *op. cit.*, pp. 384, etc.

him from adulteration, secured him compensation for improvements, and safeguarded his stock, so far as was possible, from contagious diseases. Equally valuable was the Government's assistance in the realm of education, whether by the distribution of leaflets through the Board of Agriculture, grants in support of technical instruction, or County Council classes. From this combination of causes, the changes in the market and in agricultural production, and the new encouragement and protection given to the farmer, agriculture saw a marked revival towards the close of the nineties.

(2) Recognition of Common Interests.

(*a*) *The Labourer.*

Labourers, however, were far from appreciating their interest in the farmer's prosperity, and, as we have said, found no cause for self-congratulation in his increased stability. Events within the memory of many of them might have shown that the labourer could not prosper, and never had prospered, when the farmer was depressed. Whether the causes of his depression were high rents, bad harvests, low prices or high wages, or their combination, the result so far as the labourer was concerned was the same—less employment. But superficially it seemed as though their

interests were opposed. The labourer wanted low prices and high wages, the farmer exactly the reverse. Arch had always maintained that this opposition was apparent only, and had championed the tenant-farmer in respect both to compensation for improvements and for damage by game. Other of the early Union leaders followed in his footsteps. But although the Union journals and meetings had disseminated economic and general agricultural knowledge, the rank and file of labourers were still far from the wider point of view to which Arch and his seconds-in-command had attained. Indeed, the immediate effect of Unionism was the clouding of the horizon. When the hard-won increase in wages was lost in 1875 and 1893, labourers tended to regard the reduction as due to the farmer's inherent wickedness and lack of good faith ; they overlooked the pressure laid upon him by the agricultural crises of those years. The Unions, in fact, incidentally fostered a distrust and hostility on the part of the labourer towards his employer which has not completely disappeared to-day. The offers of membership in the Chambers of Agriculture had been repulsed with suspicion in the seventies and later ; and Lord Winchelsea's attempt, in 1893, to form a Union of all agriculturalists, landowners and labourers included, met with a

poor response from the labourers. In fairness to them, however, it must be admitted that this was largely due to the fear that, although Lord Winchelsea wished politics to be omitted from the Union, protection would be its eventual object. For this reason the Union leaders stood aloof and encouraged the rank and file to abstain from joining.[1] As to class feeling generally, the labourers had not met with that treatment from their employers which would render them quick to appreciate their common interests. When Winchelsea asked Lord Salisbury what he thought as to the chance of the ultimate adoption of his scheme, the latter replied: "You will find the difficulty chiefly in the older generation of labourers, who remember that when times were good they were badly treated, and who look therefore with a good deal of suspicion upon any overture made to them by the other two classes."[2] In Mr. Prothero's words, "Slow-witted as Hodge proverbially is, his memory is singularly tenacious. Deeply hidden in the recesses of his intricate mind lurk vague theories of lost rights and more distinct traditions of past wrongs."[3] On both rights and wrongs from the time of the enclosures

[1] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, January 7th, 14th, 28th, etc.

[2] *Ib.*, 1893, May 13th.

[3] "Pioneers and Progress of English Farming."

onward, the labourer had been instructed by his *Chronicle*. Only time and continuous good treatment could remove that suspicion of employers which was to be found in almost every village, and is clearly revealed in all the later articles in the labourers' weekly journals.

(*b*) *The Farmer's Awakening—Its cause.*

On the farmer's side the perception of mutual interests was only now palely dawning. Hitherto such a sufficiency of labour had been at his command that he had regarded the welfare of his employees as a matter immaterial to himself. But a change of attitude was being forced upon him which, though not complete to-day, and but slight in the eighties and nineties, is one of the more hopeful features of that period. It was the deterioration in his labour supply, both quantitatively and qualitatively, which forced him to the new point of view. The land would not yield its best, he learnt, if labour was grudging or, through the flight of men from the land, even lacking. The report on agriculture of the Royal Commission on Labour, which appeared in 1893, bore witness to a shortage of labour and an inferiority in that still available. The best of the men were leaving the land, and the labour of those that remained was poor, either because they were old

or because they were half-hearted in their work. Complaints were most frequent in Norfolk and Suffolk; but with a few exceptions they were heard in every district.[1] Men were not to be had for the really skilled work, and everywhere there was a difficulty in obtaining men to look after the stock, which made itself especially felt in the pasture counties. Though such work meant regular employment and better pay, it entailed longer hours. Mr. Rider Haggard, who made a tour through England in 1901 and 1902, found that one of the chief difficulties against which English farming had to contend was this lack of labour. His evidence as to complaints in the decline, both in quality and quantity, is identical with that of the Commission; even where there was not an actual deficiency there was a decline in efficiency.[2] Although farmers employed more machinery where the work allowed of it, while in the West some had given up dairying and taken to grazing, farming was carried on often under great difficulties.[3] In some districts it was said that there was not half enough labour.[4] The decline in quality was attributed by farmers to

[1] Part I., Bear's Report, p. 18; Part III., Wilson Fox, pp. 33, 56, 66, 102, 103.

[2] Haggard, "Rural England," pp. 23, 29, 141, etc.

[3] *Ib.*, pp. 28, 30, 149, etc.

[4] *Ib.*, p. 29.

education, which prevented a boy's thorough apprenticeship in his work;[1] to the migration of the younger and best men to the towns, leaving only the old and unfit on the land;[2] and to the shortage in supply, which rendered the men fearless of dismissal.[3] The Commissioners pointed out that additional causes were the unwillingness of men to learn the skilled work, as, for example, stock-tending, and the supersession of much of the old skilled work by machinery.[4] Further, the decrease in the number of all-round skilled men on the farms was due to the tendency of such men to leave the ranks of daily labourers and set up for themselves as independent jobbers. "These men, while finding work in the neighbourhood during busy seasons, take jobs all over the country at other times, and often remain idle rather than accept the wages paid to unskilled labour."[5] The labourer's own explanation of the decline in efficiency was probably as true as any of the reasons adduced by his employers. "A constant perseverance in sweating processes," said the *Chronicle*, commenting on the Report

[1] Haggard, "Rural England," pp. 23, 141.

[2] *Ib.*, pp. 22, 141; Haggard, "Farmer's Year," pp. 338, 408; Report of Royal Commission, 1893, p. 18, etc.

[3] "Rural England," p. 23.

[4] Part II., Chapman, pp. 17, 50; Part VI., Wilkinson, pp. 13, 21.

[5] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part IV., Richard's Report, p. 77.

of the Commissioners, " will be met by a resolution on the part of the workman to give no more labour than that for which he is paid. Poor pay will produce poor work. It has often been pointed out that the farm labourer, like all other workmen, can accommodate his services to the scale of his wages. He can give a half-crown's worth of work in a day if he receives half-a-crown for it, or two shillings' worth if that be the wages paid him. To talk of skilled workmen in a department of a great national industry that yields comparatively bad wages, and no material or social improvement, is to speak of that which no reasonable person has a right to expect. Under such circumstances, spiritless and indifferent labour is all that the workman is paid for. Good work is certain to be produced by good pay ; bad work by bad pay. It is useless to blame the men."[1] But this was a view not held by employers, except perhaps in the extreme North.

The decline in the quantity of labour was due partly to the compulsory education, which prevented the employment of children. Many farmers complained of the difficulty of obtaining boys. And in part it was due to the disinclination of women to engage in farm work. Women were very generally employed in many Norfolk parishes

[1] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, June 24th.

pulling and cleaning roots, stone-picking, weeding corn and singling turnips. Both here and in the district of Witchford, in Cambridgeshire, gangs were common. The Norfolk gangs were composed chiefly of girls and widows, the farmer contracting for their services with the gang-master. In the Glendale district of Northumberland the hind still agreed to supply so many women workers and generally employed his own daughters. But though women's labour was a definite feature of agricultural economy in these districts, and was to be found in other parts of the country also, it had decreased almost by half since the last report. In 1881 the number of women engaged in agriculture had been 40,346; by 1891 it had fallen to 24,150. This reduction is to be explained partly by the Gangs Acts and Education Acts which by rendering children unavailable for the gangs, led to their decline. Where the gang disappeared women's employment tended to disappear; women had been useful in a body, but were not so useful if they had to be engaged and employed singly. Further, the whole influence of the Unions had been directed against women's labour, and even where, as in Norfolk, their employment was still common, there was said to be an increasing objection to it on the part of fathers and husbands; it spoilt their own labour

market, and, moreover, they liked their wives to look after the home.[1] Public opinion also was becoming increasingly opposed to women's labour in the fields, and the influence of parson and squire was exerted to prevent it. In the village of Tuddenham, near Bury St. Edmunds, the incumbency of one clergyman of the eighties saw the agricultural labour of women transformed from the universal rule to a thing almost unknown. There, and in other parishes throughout the country, the flow of women's labour was diverted from agriculture into domestic service. The change probably would not have taken place if economic and social conditions had not given the opportunity. But public opinion ripened just when a general rise in the standard of living increased the demand for servants and contracted the sources of former supply; the daughters of small tradesmen, farmers and artisans now became clerks, shop assistants, or entered upon other work which was considered higher in the social scale. Better education gave them the chance to do so, just as it gave the labourer's daughters that notion of manners and refinement which opened the door for them into private houses.

Above all else, however, the farmer's labour

[1] Report of Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part III., Wilson Fox, p. 68.

problem was caused by the rural migration That migration had begun, as we know, from the moment when the decline in the conditions of labour set in, and had received a tremendous impetus from the Union movement, which was brought into being by the continuance of bad conditions. But now a change for the better was taking place in the labourer's fortunes, and it might have been supposed that migration would diminish.

(3) CONDITIONS OF THE LABOURER 1880 TO 1911.

The improvement which took place during the ten years from the rise of the Unions was perhaps not sufficient to check the migration. The Royal Commissioners on the depressed condition of the agricultural interest speak of a marked change for the better in the labourer's position in 1881 ; but as we know, the increase in wages won by the Unions was but ephemeral, while unemployment was rife and prices remained at much the same level as in the seventies. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, published in 1885, reveals that rural housing was far from satisfactory, and, indeed, that there had been but little improvement since 1867. In the next ten years, however, there was an essential change for the better in conditions generally, and Mr. Rider Haggard found this

change still in progress in the following decade. The Commissioners of 1893 found that superiority still lay with the North. There, rates of wages were higher and employment was more regular, the hirings still being for longer periods than in the South. Northumberland still preserved its peculiar system of labour, Cumberland still had its indoor farm-servants, while the married men both in that county and in Lancashire, though nominally engaged by the week, were in fact regarded as part of the permanent staff. Similar conditions prevailed in Wales. Wages were comparatively high owing to the competition of mining and manufactures, and this same cause, combined with the prevalence of pasture farming, led to long hirings and regular employment. Hours tended to be longer than in England, but the chief grievance of the labourer was bad lodging and board in the farmhouses. In the rest of the country, conditions had certainly improved. In the South, rates of wages were only slightly higher than in 1870, and lower than in 1881, and the labourer's total income tended to be lower than in 1867, since wife and children now contributed less or nothing at all. The rate of wages was as low as 10*s.* in the districts visited by the Commissioners in Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, 10*s.* 6*d.* to 12*s.* in Hampshire, Sussex, Berkshire,

Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, and in Somerset, Gloucestershire, Worcester, and Warwickshire.[1] But real wages had risen. In the first place, the hours of work were shorter, and in the second, prices of provisions were lower. Thirdly, there was an increasing tendency to pay in money rather than in kind. Lastly, employment was more regular. The increasing difficulty of obtaining labour had compelled farmers to make sure of a definite supply, and even those men who were nominally daily or weekly labourers were now, many of them, as permanently engaged as in the North. Mr. Chapman reported that in the districts visited by him in Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Devon, Cornwall and Shropshire, "the majority of farmers, in order to prevent their labour supply running short in spring or summer, and to keep the men on good terms, make a point of employing as many as possible all through the year."[2] And in Wiltshire many farmers were keeping on their men "wet or dry, in order to have a sufficient supply of labour in the busy season."[3] Thus the labourer's position was improved by an increase in real wages.

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

[2] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part II., Chapman's Report pp. 20, 59.

[3] *Ib.*, Part V., Spencer's Report, pp. 8, 13.

He now also possessed greater powers of supplementing those wages. By 1892 the majority of labourers in the low wage districts had allotments where they had not gardens. Mr. Prothero, writing in 1888, said that "few cases remain in which the want is not supplied." He estimated that three-fourths of the agricultural labourers, farm servants and cottagers in England and Wales had potato grounds, cow-runs, or field or garden allotments, and that a considerable number of those who were without were lodgers or sons living with parents.[1] The Commissioners of 1893 found that allotments were unusual in the North, since there, as before, the comparatively high wages of the labourer freed him from the necessity of supplementing his income by extra work. And in those districts which were visited in Devon and Shropshire there was no demand for allotments as the labourers mostly had good gardens.[2] But in districts where there was a demand for them there was generally a sufficient supply. And their value to the labourer had increased, both because continuous intensive culture had rendered the soil more productive, and because the curtailment of hours of work gave him more time to spend upon his allotment. The average size was a quarter of

[1] "Pioneers and Progress," p. 232.
[2] Report of Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part II., p. 36.

an acre, the annual value to the labourer being reckoned at £1 to 30*s.*;[1] but the amount of produce raised would of course tend to vary with the nature of the soil. Canon Stubbs, who kept some of the land he let for allotments in his own hands, states that the average value of his allotments during the years 1878 to 1882 was 17*s.* 2½*d.*, per quarter acre, but he allowed for the cost of labour in his estimate of expenses.[2] George Cadbury, on the other hand, gives a higher estimate, for he values the produce of one-eighth of an acre at 7*s.* 6*d.* a week where fruit and vegetables were grown.[3]

The question arose again in the nineties as to whether the increase of income from allotments kept wages down. Millin, who made a short tour through some of the southern counties for the *Daily News* in 1891, stated that, much against his will, he was obliged to believe that this was the case. "The competitive principle in its action is as certain as the law of gravitation, and it tends gradually to bring down their wages to the point at which they can subsist only by the help of their allotments." He added, however, that of course if the young men leave, labour would rise in price, "but allotments tend to make them more con-

[1] Report of Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part II., p. 36.
[2] Stubb's "Land and the Labourer," p. 14.
[3] Millin, "Village Problems," p. 42.

tented and to keep them on the land." [1] In short, he concluded from what he had seen and heard that allotments might have a depressing effect if migration ceased, or was checked by their economic value or social attractiveness. The Commissioners touched upon this question in 1893. Mr. Chapman disputed the idea that if a man had an allotment the farmer was justified in paying lower wages. "It is a fallacy to speak of allotments as if they were a part of a man's earnings which are to go to the credit of the farmer. That is not the case. They are a means by which the labourer turns his leisure to account and enables him to live upon less than he would otherwise find it necessary to demand." [2] Mr. Bear more directly deals with the question. That wages were lowered by allotments, he said, "is obviously true up to a certain point where their possession prevents labour from becoming scarce in a district. But if the point which farmers can afford to pay for such labour as they can obtain is reached, the lack of allotments would not make them pay more. They would throw all their land down to grass, and do with hardly any labour. The question of rent comes in here, of course, but land all in grass would command as much rent as land partly arable."

[1] Millin, "Village Problems," p. 24. Cf. Millin, "Life in our Villages," pp. 63 f.

[2] *Op. cit.*, Part II., p. 36.

Allotments, in his opinion, then, would lower wages only if they checked migration, and this he said emphatically they did not do. He added, "Besides, even if allotments tend to lower wages, it is because they make men too comfortable to migrate excessively. There is every reason to believe, too, that the value of allotments to labourers is a great deal more than any increase in wages which they would obtain by the painful method of making themselves scarce if they gave up their plots of land." [1]

Improvements in other conditions of the labourer's life had also taken place by 1893. Housing was better, though as we shall see, there was still some shortage in supply and still many very bad cottages. There were better opportunities for insurance; the old village clubs had died out, and men now joined the larger and sounder societies. And drunkenness had decreased amongst the men, though there was said to be a slight increase amongst the women.

Turning now to a matter with which the Commissioners did not deal, the labourer's social position, we find that again progress had been made. This was due largely to a change in the labourer himself. The work of the Unions had been valuable in inspiring him with a new self-

[1] *Ib.*, Part I., p. 24.

respect, and that spirit had been strengthened by education and the grant of the franchise. The new generation of labourers had grown up under the Education Act of 1876, and better education, however much our system may be criticised, made a difference in the labourer, which led naturally to a change in the attitude towards him of his social superiors. His leaders recognised the change; they perceived with satisfaction the diminution of that autocratic and overbearing spirit of parson and squire towards the labourer, which had been keenly felt and resented, whether by those who dared to voice their feelings, or by those who preferred others to speak for them. They set the change down to the self-interest of parliamentary vote-catchers.[1] There is no doubt that the extension of the franchise, whatever its value politically to the labourer, had a great social value. Politically, he now was a member of the farmer's and landowner's world, and no longer in some underworld of his own; he was a man not a thing, and the new consideration which had to be paid him during elections automatically extended itself into daily life, and influenced the every-day manner and conduct of his superiors towards him. But the Union leaders' explanation of the change was hardly fair; there is no doubt that the

[1] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, January 7th, 10th, etc.

extension of more liberal ideas amongst farmers and landlords was also due to improvement in the labourer himself, through education and other influences.

The upward tendencies, economic and social, which were apparent in 1893, continued in the following decade, as Mr. Rider Haggard found in his tour at the opening of the new century. This being the case, it may well be asked why the labourer was leaving the land. It is probable that more improvement had taken place in the decade of 1880 to 1890 than in the whole course of the previous eighty years, and that the rate of progress though slower in the next ten years was still considerable. But the rate of migration did not slacken. It was not so great as it had been in the decade of 1861 to 1871, but migration then was explainable by lack of employment. This did not appear to be the main reason now for farmers were complaining of shortage of labour.

(4) Causes of the Rural Migration.

The Census Report of 1871 lays stress on the attraction of the towns and the comparative monotony of agricultural life as causes of the rural exodus. And the farmers blamed education for the loss of their labourers; it unfitted a lad for farm life, made him discontented, and encouraged

him to seek a more lively career in the towns. There is no doubt that both played a part in migration. Better education gave the young men a chance of obtaining work elsewhere, and almost everyone had some relative in the towns whose life there contrasted brightly with his own. But, as Dr. Hasbach points out, " it was a very superficial view which attributed the exodus solely to the neighbourhood of the railways and the pleasures of the great towns. . . . The labourers did not depart where good allotments could be obtained, where good houses could be had at a fair rent, where, as on Lord Tollemache's estates, three acres of pasture were provided with every cottage, or where they had a good hope of becoming independent. This was repeatedly remarked in Cumberland and Lancashire. There much arable land had been turned into pasture, and mines, and great manufacturing towns with their pleasures were in the neighbourhood, but nevertheless the labourers migrated very little: the farm-servants received high wages and saved so that they might some day be able to rent a small farm." There was some evidence given to the Commissioners of a desire for a less dull and less monotonous life, but it was " infrequent, and probably relates rather to the women than the men ; and secondly, it does not appear whether

the motive was not rather the shorter hours of the industrial workers, together with the possibility of independence during leisure. One of the Assistant Commissioners expresses this view without any qualification; and it is supported by the fact that there was a special difficulty in keeping unmarried cowmen and married stablemen." [1]

Pleasure-seeking was not the real reason for the rural exodus: the causes were social and economic. The lack of freedom in village life was undoubtedly felt irksome by the younger generation, as is clear from the labourers' journals. The "old semi-feudal, patronising relationship" still lingered on in many villages. The labourer resented the fact that "nine-tenths of the population in the country parish have at this moment not merely less share in local government than belongs to French peasants, but less than belonged to French peasants during the eighteenth century monarchy. The humblest member of a Presbyterian congregation in Scotland is made to realise that he is a citizen, but the ordinary English farm labourer, accustomed to depend on the clergyman in spiritual matters, has to depend on the squire for his cottage, and on the farmer for his wages, and does not feel himself a citizen." [2] Much the same

[1] Hasbach, *Op. cit.*, pp. 344, 345.

[2] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, March 25th. Article by George Broderick.

complaint came from two parsons who attacked the feudal character of rural life. Not tidy foot-paths and gabled roofs, but progressive freedom was the village need.[1] The town offered that progressive freedom and the chance of rising in the social scale.

Bad housing was another cause of migration. There had been much improvement since 1867, but the actual condition of the cottages was very far from satisfactory; sub-letting by farmers and the consequent insecurity of tenure was a serious cause of dissatisfaction; rents were often high for very poor cottages; while actual deficiency of house-room led to migration even when the other conditions were not bad. In the Western district there was some deficiency, as more old cottages had been pulled down than new rebuilt. The structural condition was generally good, but in Harlington some were "more like inferior stables and lofts than human dwellings."[2] In Suffolk the lack of surplus cottages kept up rents. There was a great difference between the cottages in close parishes where they were owned by large landlords and those in open parishes where

[1] Fry, F. C., "Social Policy for Churchmen," in *Economic Review*, 1892. Cf. Taylor, A. D., "Hodge and His Parson," in *Nineteenth Century*, 1892.

[2] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part I., Bear's Report, p. 21.

the owners were small men. In the former, all conditions, including water supply and rentals, were generally good. But the cottages owned by small tradesmen and speculators were often in a deplorable condition, with low ceilings, only $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet high in parts, and with windows but a foot or two square. In such cottages as had two bedrooms, many were "little better than a passage," and had no window.[1] Similar conditions prevailed in Norfolk. Yet the rent of such cottages was often as high as £5, while large landowners, for better cottages, were charging about half that sum.[2] In Cambridgeshire the housing was "the worst feature." Most cottages were owned by small proprietors. The opinion of the medical officer of one district was that few were fit for habitation.[3] Both in this county and in Berkshire, where again many cottages were owned by small men, a single bedroom was usual, the rooms were often as low as 5 or $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and with few exceptions they were "absolutely neglected with regard to repairs." Cottages which were above the average were those of landowner and squire. The high rents charged by small landlords led the labourer to take in lodgers, without whose presence it is easy to see there

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part III., p. 35.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 70.
[3] *Ib.*, Part II., pp. 81, 67.

could have been ample overcrowding.[1] Sons who might have found work on the land were naturally influenced to leave it by the discomfort of such homes, in which perhaps a tribe of younger children were growing up. The general verdict of the Commissioners was that in spite of the real progress which had been made by large landlords, housing conditions were still often very bad.

Economic considerations were, however, the main cause of the rural exodus. Farmers would have liked to have at their command a surplus supply of labour upon which to draw for occasional work. But irregular wages, which was all that the surplus supply could count on, were not sufficient, even with the aid of allotments, to support a man all the year through. The Commissioners of 1893 found that regularity of employment had increased, but this meant that casual workers were leaving the land. Men turned off after harvest were compelled " to drift into the towns or the workhouse," [2] and sons living at home and working as daily labourers, then as now, when a period of slackness came, joined the police or enlisted rather than be " kept " by their parents, although in a month or two perhaps there would be another job for them. Even where

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part II., p. 82.
[2] Millin, " Life in our Villages," p. 23.

work was regular, economic considerations drove men from the land. Rates of wages were, as we have seen, still very low in many counties in 1893. It is a favourite defence of farmers that earnings are much higher than rates owing to perquisites and to extra payment for overtime, piece work and harvest work ; but according to the labourer, the increase of wages by these means is not so great as at first sight might appear. Mr. Bear worked out the earnings of a skilled day labourer in the Woburn district, who was in regular employment, though he did not receive wages in illness. His average weekly earnings, including piece work and harvest payments, was 15*s.* a week, this being 2*s.* more than the weekly rate of wages.[1] The average wages of other and ordinary day labourers in the same district, whose earnings were similarly examined, he found to be 14*s.* 7*d.*, including harvest money and the value of the beer allowed them.[2] Shepherds and stockmen earned on the average 1*s.* 6*d.* extra a week, or had free cottages. But labourers very well knew, and the Commissioners also recognised, that many men could not count upon such averages. The tendency towards regular employment was increasing, but Mr. Wilson Fox found that in Norfolk and

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part I., p. 21.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 20.

Suffolk many men lost time in bad weather. On large farms jobs were often found for them if the rain prevented field work, but he "constantly came across men who had to lose time." In this respect these counties were the worst, for the men might be sent home in the middle of the day if the weather turned bad, in which case they received only the half day's wage. This is still customary on small farms in Suffolk, whatever may be the case in Norfolk. The labourers whom Mr. Wilson Fox questioned considered that they lost a shilling a week on the average by the wet and dry system.[1] In Mr. Chapman's district one-fourth of the men were employed on the wet and dry system;[2] and Mr. Bear found that in his district most day labourers lost time in wet weather, "though farmers say they always find something for the men to do."[3] A Sussex man maintained that what the ordinary labourer lost in wet weather was more than what he gained at harvest.[4] The ordinary weekly wage of many labourers was thus diminished, and extra payments were, as the labourers pointed out, payments for extra work. Thus Suffolk horsekeepers and stockmen worked from 4.30 or 6 a.m.

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part III., p. 34.
[2] *Ib.*, Part II., pp. 20, 59.
[3] *Ib.*, Part I., p. 9.
[4] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, June 17th.

to 6 or 7 p.m. in summer, the longer day being most usual, and from 5 or 6 a.m. to 5 or 6 p.m. in winter, and they had Sunday work. Generally speaking, they had a 13 or 14 hours' day in place of the $8\frac{1}{2}$ or $10\frac{1}{2}$ hours worked by ordinary labourers.[1] For harvest work, Suffolk men usually received a lump sum of £7 to £9, and took their chance of being delayed in wet weather, in which case the weekly average might fall very low. This system obtained elsewhere, and the opinion of labourers as to harvest work generally was that wages for it did no more than pay for the extra labour; the wages were earned ten times over, some said; and, at any rate, since a nine day week was often put in during harvest, and more food was of course necessary, labourers objected that harvest earnings should not be estimated in full in computing weekly averages.[2] It is true that the men handled the extra money, but seeing that it was earned only by extra and severe labour it is not a matter for much surprise if they thought themselves better off in the towns, where an equal or greater sum could be earned for an eight or ten hours' day. It was exactly the same in the case of allotments, from which

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part III., p. 34. Cf. Part I., p. 9, etc.

[2] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1884, January 12th, etc.; 1893, June 17th, 24th.

an increase of income was secured only by extra labour. Moreover, that increase was not always obtainable. The Commissioners found that allotments were generally, but not invariably, obtainable, and that in some districts they were not provided under those conditions which alone, the Commissioners agreed, rendered them of value, namely, fair rental, suitable soil, proximity to village, and absence of hampering rules. Thus Mr. Chapman said of his district that the supply was not equal to the demand,[1] and that at North Witchford, in Cambridgeshire, allotment land was in the hands of speculators who were letting it at the rate of £13 an acre. Rentals in Mr. Spencer's district, Dorsetshire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Surrey, Essex, Kent and Worcestershire, varied from £1, a rent no more than the farmer paid, to as much as £8 an acre.[2] In Norfolk and Suffolk some of the allotments were so far from the villages that the men would not take them.[3] In the Ascot district the soil was unsuitable, and their tenants gave them up.[4] That labourers did not find the allotment system satisfactory is clear from the

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part II., p. 55.
[2] *Ib.*, Part V., p. 17.
[3] *Ib.*, Part III., pp. 37, 71.
[4] *Ib.*, Part II., p. 55.

criticism by Union leaders of the Commissioners' Report.[1]

Allotments had, at any rate, some influence in keeping men on the land. "I have no doubt," wrote Mr. Spencer, "from what I have heard and seen, that allotments tend to make labourers contented, help them to eke out a livelihood when the wages are small, and tend to keep men on the land."[2] Mr. Bear, on the other hand, said that allotments did not prevent migration, but did keep some on the land who without that power to supplement wages might have been forced to go.[3] But the value of allotments with respect to the rural exodus lay largely in the interest they added to rural life; and there were many who were not to be won to remain by their tie with the soil when their economic condition could be bettered in the police force or army, or in the towns.

For after all, agricultural work offered a young man 11*s.* to 15*s.* a week, and he had no prospect of earning more, however long his service. Nor had he much prospect of saving against old age. "The pauper allowances which reward the most industrious career," said Mr. Prothero, in 1888, constitute one of the worst aspects of rural

[1] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, June 24th.
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
[3] *Ib.*, Part I., p. 24.

life.[1] The Commissioners of 1893 also give the desire for higher wages or the prospect of provision for old age as the main cause of migration; Mr. Bear stated that all the men he questioned said that this was so, and he was sure it was correct.[2] "Young men constantly seek service," wrote Mr. Chapman, "in the police force, the post office, or railways, or in tramway companies, where the pay is often small, but the rise is certain and a pension probable."[3] Mr. Rider Haggard urged that the migration was purely economic; the labourer left the land because the land could not pay him sufficient; there was no lack of applicants for the post of groom, keeper, under-gardener, in which the work was comparatively light and the pay a few shillings a week better. Maltsters also could find plenty of labour, and of the very best class. Better housing, education and holidays would not suffice if the labourer was getting 12*s.* or 13*s.* a week and thought he could get 20*s.* or 25*s.* by going to the town.[4] And this was now becoming the general opinion.[5]

Not only were rates of wages higher in the towns

[1] "Pioneers and Progress," p. 224.
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
[3] *Op. cit.*, Part II., p. 12.
[4] "Farmers' Year," p. 464.
[5] *Ib.*, p. 462, Correspondence; Millin, "Village Problems"; Prothero, *op. cit.*; *Wiltshire Times*, 1893, February 4th.

but real wages also were higher. More, it is true, had to be paid for rent, but provisions were no dearer than at the village shops, and country produce, eggs, milk, butter, far from being cheaper in the country, was often unobtainable. In spite of the general improvement which had taken place by 1893, it still had to be admitted by the Commissioners that, "It is only necessary to compare the weekly budgets with the weekly earnings to realise that the large majority of labourers earn but a bare subsistence, and are unable to save anything for their old age or for times when they are out of work. An immense number of them live in a chronic state of debt and anxiety, and depend to a lamentable extent upon charity."[1] "The great majority of agricultural labourers who outlive their power of work have no resource for the support of their old age, except the poor law."[2] Or again, "The general condition . . . judged by appearances, has greatly improved. His standard of life is higher, he dresses better, he eats more butcher's meat, he travels more, he reads more, and he drinks less. . . . All these things combined are of considerable importance, but they give an impression of pros-

[1] *Op. cit.*, Chapman, pp. 12, 17, on Berks, Bucks, Cambs, Devon, Herts, Oxon, Salop, Cornwall.

[2] *Ib.*, Spencer, p. 70, Dorset, Essex, Wilts, Somerset, Kent, Surrey.

perity which is hardly borne out by the facts when they are carefully examined."[1] The labourer's son knew the facts from the inside, and he migrated.

(5) Farmers' Solutions for the Mutual Problem.

The agricultural labourer's problem thus became the farmer's problem. While making all allowance for the facts that he desired a surplus supply and that, even if he had possessed that supply, he would still have complained if the best and strongest men deserted the land, there is yet no doubt that he was really feeling the pinch. Consequently, he began to see that his interests and those of the labourer were not opposed, and for the sake of solving his own problem he did what he could to solve the labourer's. Opposition to allotments died down. "The best farmers are beginning to realise," wrote Mr. Chapman, "that the supply of labour is maintained by such opportunities afforded to the labourer of working a bit of land for himself; and that a man who is pleased with his allotment is a better man to work with than one who is wholly discontented."[2] Hours of

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, p. 44, quoted Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

[2] *Ib.*, Part II., p. 37.

work were shortened and defined. Piece work was increasingly offered by many farmers where it was found that the men appreciated it. In Suffolk many farmers extended the system to the satisfaction of their men, who considered they could earn 2*s.* 6*d.* a day under it.[1] Mr. Wilson Fox thought that much improvement could be effected if it were generally adopted,[2] but some farmers were opposed as they considered that the men scamped the work, and others found it more difficult to organise.[3] On the other hand, in many districts the men were opposed, since it tended to increase unemployment, and they considered that the farmer set too low a price ; while, where the ground was in a bad condition through years of insufficient cultivation, they did not find it profitable.[4] Meanwhile, farmers were coming to the opinion that weekly wages lay at the root of the matter. The labour and wages questions were the chief topics of conversation in Hertfordshire.[5] The Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture listened, in 1899, to what would have been regarded as heresies in earlier years, and discussed the better methods of remunerating skilled agricul-

[1] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Part III., p. 34.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 69.
[3] *Ib.*, p. 34.
[4] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 335, from the Report, 1893.
[5] Haggard, " Farmers' Year," p. 462.

tural labour.[1] One farmer went so far as to propose a Wages Board.[2] And by 1901 many farmers had raised their wages.[3] "The point which I hope farmers will remember is that high wages do not necessarily mean dear labour. In Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and the North generally wages are much higher than in the southern counties, yet labour is no dearer, for the labourer is a better man owing to his better food, clothing, etc., and more than repays by his intelligence and capacity the extra amount given him in wages."[4] So wrote Mr. Turner in 1911. This was in essence what the Union leaders had pointed out since 1872; and it was a point which farmers were beginning to see, though it was as yet far from being generally recognised.

Yet, although it is obvious that farmers might have the power both to improve immediate material conditions and to make of agricultural work something of a career by raising wages, their profits might not always allow of a rise sufficiently attractive. In Kent, where single men could earn £1 a week, and married men £2 with the aid of wife and children, there was a shortage in labour

[1] Haggard, "Farmer's Year," p. 464.
[2] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1893, January 21st.
[3] Haggard, "Rural England," pp. 28, 30, etc.; "Farmers' Year," p. 462.
[4] "Land Problems," p. 132.

in 1901, and Mr. Rider Haggard came to the opinion that no wage that the employers could pay seemed to be sufficient to induce the men to stop.[1] In North Wiltshire the farmers had raised wages and still the men were leaving, and their employers declared that a further rise was economically impossible.[2] Farmers not infrequently make such statements ; still it did not follow that unless rents were considerably reduced the South Country farmer could afford the wages given on farms which had been consistently well-cultivated, and where their occupiers had at their command labour with a good tradition behind it. Nor could all soils allow of wages which would enable the farmer to compete for labour against other employers, and except through wages he had little control of the conditions of rural life. Housing improvements were not within his power and often not within that of his landlord. He had little influence over the social conditions of village life, and he could not offer the labourer a career by giving him access to the land. The farmer's power to solve his problem and that of the labourer was therefore limited. The State, however, was now coming to the aid of both. That migration, which was the result of the labourer's problem

[1] " Rural England," pp. 149, 174.
[2] *Ib.*, pp. 28 f.

and the cause of the farmer's, had attained a magnitude where it ceased to be a matter only of agricultural concern; it had assumed a national significance and become a national problem.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATION AND THE LABOURER.

(I) "BACK TO THE LAND."

IF the recognition of the identity of farmer's and labourer's interests was but slowly dawning at the opening of the twentieth century, the national significance of the labourer's problem was already a commonplace. The industrial classes of the towns had realised in the eighties that the cause of agricultural and industrial workers was one and the same. The danger to themselves of masses of ill-paid labour in the country, the great rural immigration into the towns, the contraction of what should have been the best market for home manufacturers, had forced upon them the fact that the two great industries of agriculture and manufactures must prosper or suffer together. Social reformers of urban conditions were also keenly alive to the significance of rural conditions. "In recent years," wrote Lord Carrington, "they have come to see that the solution of many problems of the town is to be found in the country, and increasing attention is being paid to the causes of

the rural exodus and the best means by which it can be arrested." [1] Meanwhile, the general public was alarming itself over the matter.

The Census figures revealed a decrease in the rural population which created general concern; the number of agricultural labourers in England and Wales had fallen from 962,348 in 1871 to 870,098 in 1881; [2] while the number of males, including farmers and others, engaged in agriculture was only 13·8 per cent. of the total male, population in 1881, whereas it had been 16·8 in 1871, and 21·2 in 1861; a fall by half, therefore, took place in twenty years.[3] The increase in gamekeepers and other employees in private rural work was far too slight to afford any consolation to those who saw a national danger in the decline of the rural population. Moreover, the Census figures showed an actual decrease of population in many of the mainly agricultural counties, while as a whole the rural population had increased in a much smaller proportion than had the urban. There was no change in these tendencies during the next twenty years. The number of agricultural labourers fell to 780,777 in 1891 and to 732,927 in 1901. The total number of males engaged in agriculture had again declined,

[1] Introduction to Slater's "Enclosure of Common Fields."
[2] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 296.
[3] Porter, ed. Hirst, "Progress of the Nation," p. 40.

and again the mainly rural counties were showing either an actual decrease in population or a lower rate of increase than the urban districts.

A Parliamentary Report of 1890 voiced the general opinion that this depopulation of the countryside was a serious national danger. "All agree," the Committee stated, "that the existence of a numerous and prosperous peasantry is a condition of national safety, and that the more general distribution of ownership in land would lead to the security of property, and to the contentment of the population. . . . The prospect of improvement for the thrifty and industrious labourer is a matter of the highest social importance. It is the chief means by which a remedy can be found for that migration from the country into the towns, which has to some extent depopulated the rural districts, and has, at the same time, intensified the competition for employment in the manufacturing towns."[1]

Thus the idea gained hold that efforts must be made to effect a re-settlement upon the land. That idea had a force behind it which no desire to assist the labourer had ever before possessed. It lay in his vote, and in the common bonds between him and the new class of industrial

[1] Report from Select Committee on Small Holdings, 1890, p. iii.

voters, who had been amongst the first to see the connection between agricultural and industrial problems. The franchise was extended in 1884, and instantly there was a distinct briskening up in legislation, which became also more ambitious. The labourer's friends within the House no longer addressed empty benches. There was a different tone there on agricultural matters, and only five years after the labourer was enfranchised the Government took up a Bill which was in essence one of Jesse Collings'. The organised labourers had realised that the good intentions of busy legislators would be transformed into action when the vote was won, and they had consistently worked for it since 1872. Subsequent years proved how right they were.

The earlier movement for the restoration of the labourers to the soil had been prompted by philanthropic feeling towards the half-starved peasant, and was promoted chiefly by private societies for the furtherance of the allotment system; the new movement at the close of the century received its impetus from the recognition of national needs and was promoted by the Legislature. And its objects were more ambitious. Although the allotment system was strengthened, attempts were now made to recreate the class of peasant proprietors and cultivators. Acts of

Parliament are dull reading, but it is necessary to follow the course of legislation step by step, since after the labourer was enfranchised reform emanated from Parliament.

(2) Extension of Allotments.

The new movement took place first in efforts to improve the allotment system. Although the Commissioners of 1867 had found allotments in most districts, they admitted that the supply was not always equal to the demand. Between 1867 and 1881 many of the allotments which had been created had disappeared. They had been granted "only by the friendly disposition of landowners," and if the land were asked for by their larger tenants the extension of the labourer's lease might be refused. Much land, which the labourers' intensive culture had rendered more valuable, thus fell back into farmers' hands.[1] Moreover, the Commissioners of 1867 had pointed out that allotments were not always satisfactory even where they existed, either because of exorbitant rents or distance from the village. Their tenants were also not infrequently subjected to hampering rules and conditions of tenancy. The Unions had strongly resented the allotment holder's dependence on the good will of the landlord,

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

farmer and parson, and had striven to obtain a supply of allotments free from objectionable restraints. They petitioned the Charity Commissioners to compel the use of trust land for their purpose, but without success. Their failure, together with the shortcomings of the allotment system as it then stood, explains the efforts of Mr. Jesse Collings and others to persuade the Legislature to come to the labourer's assistance. For many years, however, Parliament proved no very effective champion. Mr. Collings succeeded in obtaining the Allotments Extension Act of 1882, which marks a new and important departure in the movement ; it contained compulsory clauses with regard to the letting of certain charitable trust land, the trustees of which were to give the labourers every year the option of hiring it in allotments of one acre and under. Mr. Collings had intended that appeals for its use should be directed to the County Court. The House of Lords greatly reduced the value of the Bill by replacing the County Court by the Charity Commissioners, who had already proved themselves unsympathetic, and by a clause giving to the trustees power to refuse to let " unsuitable " land. The Act thus allowed of considerable evasion by unfavourable trustees, who demanded that rents should be paid in advance and placed

other obstacles in the way of intending tenants.[1] The only remedy the labourers had in such situations was to "appeal to a permanent body sitting in London whose actions made the Bill a necessity, and whose hostility to the principle of the Bill was openly avowed."[2] An Allotments Extension Association was formed in order to fight the trustees and Commissioners.[3] But the clumsy machinery of the Act gave all the advantages in the contest to its hostile administrators.

So far as Jesse Collings and his friends were concerned, the only result of this opposition was to drive them to go further, and it was only because the Government felt obliged to bring in a measure of their own that Jesse Collings did not push on with a Bill which he introduced in 1887. The Government Act of that year followed along its lines. The compulsory system was extended, for it had been made clear that compulsion was necessary. Six parliamentary electors might petition the Sanitary Authority to provide allotments, and that authority was given powers to rent or buy land, compulsorily if necessary, for the provision of allotments not exceeding one acre for any one person. So far all was well. But

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 307; Report on Charitable Trusts Act, 1884; *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1884, March 29th, etc.

[2] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1884, June 28th.

[3] *Ib.*, 1884, January 19th.

the Sanitary Authority was left to decide whether there was a sufficient demand for allotments. Thus the Act of 1887, like that of 1882, opened the door to evasion. "The labourers were entirely dependent on the good will of the Sanitary Authority; the authority might demand the rent in advance, the rent must be sufficiently high to cover all expenses, in which, of course, the high fees of the necessary legal proceedings were included. If the authority resolved on compulsory purchase landowners could demand 10 per cent. above the value of their land "for disturbance," and 15 per cent. "for severance," *i.e.*, for the loss of a part of their estate.[1]

The Allotments Act, of 1890, attempted to overcome some of these difficulties by giving a right of appeal from the Sanitary Authority to the County Court, which was empowered to take over the duties of the former if it failed to take action. The Rural Labourers' League, at a meeting presided over by Mr. Joseph Chamberlain in 1892, claimed that 100,000 labourers had been able to secure allotments under these Acts, but the *Labourers' Chronicle* pointed out that the tenants of these allotments were many of them tradesmen and artisans, they were by no means

[1] Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

all agricultural labourers.[1] And the Commissioners of 1893 found that the demand for allotments in rural districts still exceeded the supply. This was not entirely the fault of the Sanitary Authorities. Though it is true that only 56 out of 518 authorities had taken action by 1893,[2] it was the mechanism of the Act that was largely at fault. Mr. Chapman declared that "there is good reason for the complaint constantly made, that with every desire on the part of the authorities to supply the want, there is so much trouble involved in putting the law in motion that the Allotment Act seems really useless except as a means of stimulating public opinion."[3] In this respect, namely the impulse it gave to landowners to provide allotments voluntarily, the Act was generally admitted to have been of service. Many Sanitary Authorities had no need to take action because by private effort the work had been done.[4] By 1890 the labourer undoubtedly

[1] *English Labourers' Chronicle*, 1892, February 27th.

[2] *Contemporary Review*, Wilkinson, J. F., "Pages in the History of Allotments."

[3] Royal Commission, etc., 1893, Chapman's Report, p. 55.

[4] Returns of the cases in which Rural Sanitary Authorities, under the Allotments Act, 1887, and County Councils, under the Allotments Acts, 1887 and 1890, have acquired land by compulsory purchase, purchase by agreement, and hire by agreement . . . giving also the reasons where rural authorities have not provided land, 1892. ("No application" and "Privately supplied in sufficient quantity," are the general reasons. Similar returns, 1895, 1898).

had greater facilities than ever before for obtaining a plot of land,[1] and though the Commissioners found that conditions of tenancy were by no means always favourable, the Cottage Gardens Compensation for Crops Act, of 1887, at least ensured him compensation if he were ejected. Thus progress had certainly been made. But the allotment system was still not wholly satisfactory, whether because the administrative authorities failed to provide a sufficient supply of land, or because too many of the allotments were rented highly owing to the difficulty of procuring land, or depended for their existence on the good will of landowners. By the Local Government Act of 1894 an attempt was made to set these matters right. The compulsory hire of land which this Act allowed gave the opportunity for offering allotments at a lower rent than where the land had to be purchased. And this power of compulsory hire was put into the hands of the new democratic parish councils. The parish councils, however, proved not so democratic as might have been hoped, and again the good intentions of the Legislature were foiled by bad administration. By 1906 very few parish councils had taken action.[2] Consequently, in 1907, allot-

[1] Returns of Allotments and Small Holdings, 1890.
[2] Jebb, L., "Small Holdings of England," p. 44.

ments were included in the Act of that year for small holdings, the development of which must now be considered.

(3) Small Holdings.

The question of small holdings and peasant proprietorship had been agitated at various times, but it was not until the eighties that, owing to the realisation of the national significance of the rural exodus, any action was taken. In 1888 and 1889 Jesse Collings succeeded in getting Select Committees appointed to consider the question of small holdings. The Committees realised that even the larger allotments of several acres in extent would not suffice to build up the rural population. They were, therefore, ready to adopt some scheme of small holdings. But they were not prepared to allow powers of compulsory purchase, and were in favour of peasant proprietorship rather than of tenancies. When, therefore, a Bill was passed in 1892, the main principles of Jesse Collings' scheme were either omitted or not emphasised. There was no clause for compulsory purchase, and though the ostensible object of the Act was the creation of small proprietors, small tenant farmers and agricultural societies for co-operative production, it was facilities for properties, not tenancies, which really

were given. Small holders who could not purchase their land might take it on lease, but the area was in their case limited to fifteen acres, and its value to a rental of £15 per annum. Moreover, the County Councils, with whom lay the administration of the Act, were to take action upon the petition of one or more electors only after an inquiry as to whether there was sufficient demand: the decision lay with them, and they were not inclined to favour tenancies. Nor were the purchasing clauses of the Act very easy for small men. A purchaser had to pay on the spot one-fifth of the money. Of the remainder, one quarter might remain as a permanent charge on the land, but the rest had to be paid off in half-yearly instalments of interest and capital. The capital for the preliminary purchase of land, whether for properties or tenancies, was lent by the State at a low rate of interest; the County Councils, therefore, were able to secure the necessary money. But they made little use of their powers, and between 1892 and 1906 only 170 acres had been acquired, although labourers were in favour of the scheme and there was a keen demand for holdings.[1] The failure of the Act, however, though due partly to the indifference and laxity of local authorities, which were less progressive

[1] Small Holdings Report, 1906, Index, pp. 444 and 445.

than any section in the House of Commons, was primarily due to causes over which the best of them had no control. Experience in the case of allotments might have shown that the power compulsorily to acquire land was a necessary adjunct to the success of the scheme; but the lesson had not been learnt, and the consequent difficulty of obtaining land at a price small holders could afford was a serious obstacle in the path of small holdings. It is a commonplace that land has a social value apart from its economic value. "In no country is the possession of land so much desired for social and political reasons as in England," writes a German student of English agriculture. "Land-ownership gives the rich man social standing and very often the possibility of a political career." [1] This social value of land both limited the amount that came into the market and rendered the price of such land as was to be sold higher than its economic value for agricultural purposes. It will be remembered that although good rents could be had for small farms, and there were numerous applications for them, many landowners preferred to lower the rents of large farms, which without this assistance could find no tenant, rather than cut them up into smaller units for which there was a demand.

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

Small holdings were even less desirable from the landlord's point of view, since to a greater extent they lowered the sporting value of estates and reduced the select privacy and general amenities of the neighbourhood. The law of entail also had the effect of keeping land out of the market, or of raising its price above the economic value, since sellers had to prove their right to alienate the land in question, and the legal expenses were naturally added to the cost price.[1]

The second of the chief reasons for the failure of the Act was that it offered the labourer what in most cases he did not want, namely, ownership. At a mass meeting in London in December, 1891, which was attended largely by labourers, a resolution was passed in favour of tenancy; ownership was not desired. Even the better class labourers too often had not the capital to pay down one-fifth of the price of the land and building and still have sufficient working capital for the cultivation of their holdings. Dr. Levy reckoned the amount necessary at £400 for a holding of thirty acres, and after this was paid the small holder would still have to meet the yearly payments of the remainder of the purchase-money.[2] The *English Labourers' Chronicle*, the chief organ now of the Unionists,

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 118—124.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 133.

pointed out these difficulties, and from the first expressed doubts as to the practicability of the scheme.[1] Arch's opinion of the Act after a year's trial was that it was a farce ; " the reason it does not work is because it has a purchasing clause. That clause means keeping the labourer off the land . . . To make a man purchase the land was to put a mill-stone round his neck."[2] Unfortunately, the question of ownership and tenancy was now dragged into the realm of party politics. The Conservatives supported the former policy, the Liberals the latter, and included compulsory purchase in their programme. Consequently, the Act of 1892 was left unamended for fourteen years.

Meanwhile, the small holdings movement was carried on by large landowners who appreciated the national value of the reform, Lord Carrington being one of the foremost. The success of the small holders whom they created, and of such men as were able to get on to the land under the Act of 1892, strengthened the movement by showing that small holdings economically, as well as socially, were a sound departure. Although small holdings for fruit and vegetable growing did best, it no longer could be urged that they were suited only

[1] 1892, February 27th, and 1893, April 29th, etc.
[2] *Ib.*, 1893, October 14th.

to very limited districts, and to horticulture. If the cultivator abstained from corn growing and arable farming, which were not suitable for small areas, he had every chance of success. Small farmers who carried on mixed farming had a struggling existence, owing chiefly to their inability to borrow capital upon reasonable terms.[1] Many of the small holders, it is true, added to their income by engaging in occasional work for the farmer, or had some other trade to fall back upon, such as carrier work; while others were principally tradesmen and combined the cultivation of a holding with their work as butchers or shopkeepers. Nevertheless, the economic soundness of small holdings was established. If the small holder could not cultivate by intensive capital, he could and did farm by intensive labour, and therein lay the chief cause of his success. The labour which he expended upon his holding was ungrudging, and the land responded. The small holding produced more per acre than the large farm, while on spade-cultivated allotments the gross produce was 25 per cent. greater than that of land farmed by the usual methods.[2]

While the practical work of small holders was

[1] Wilkins, L. (Jebb), "Small Holdings Controversy," p. 19.

[2] Ashby and Bolton King, "Statistics of some Midland Villages," in *Journal of Royal Economic Society*, 1893; Hasbach, *op. cit.*, p. 349; Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 101 f.

thus doing its share to promote the scheme, opinion was becoming more definite as to the foundations upon which that scheme must rest. It was increasingly recognised that the creation of properties rather than tenancies, even had it been favoured by the labourer, was not the method best suited to advance the social motives of the Act. "The small freeholder, helped on to a holding at agricultural prices by State aid, is at the mercy of temptations to part with it owing to the enhanced value offered by neighbouring landowners with game preserves to be kept quiet, retired tradesmen, week-enders." [1] There was also a danger that small cultivators might purchase their holdings by money raised on mortgage during an agricultural boom, "only to find themselves ruined when the wave of depression set in." [2] In either case the State would have to do its work of reviving the peasantry all over again.

The new Small Holdings Act, introduced in 1907, aimed at overcoming the difficulties of the acquisition of land, the laxness of County Councils, and the burden and danger of purchase, which had rendered the preceding Act unsatisfactory. The Councils were now given powers of compulsory purchase and compulsory hire, the interests of

[1] Wilkins, L. (Jebb), *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[2] *Ib.*, p. 20.

landowners being safeguarded by a number of clauses. It had been proved in the case of allotments that the possession in itself of compulsory powers led to voluntary agreements, so that compulsion not often had to be used. It was expected that this would be the case with small holdings, but it was clear that the principle of compulsion must be contained in the Bill. To ensure that action should be taken by the County Councils the Board of Agriculture was constituted the final administrative authority. Its Small Holdings Commissioners were to ascertain the demand for holdings, and if the County Councils in districts where there was a demand had not taken action, and continued to refuse to do so, the Commissioners were to take over the work, the expenses of which were to fall on the local authority. Tenancies were now placed upon as favourable a footing as properties; the financial arrangements were made easy for the tenant, and he was secured from disturbance provided he fulfilled the terms of his lease, while compensation for improvements were of course ensured. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act, 1907, came into force on January 1st, 1908, and during the years 1908 and 1909 County Councils acquired 60,889 acres for the purposes of the Act,[1] whereas under the earlier

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

Bill only 790 acres had been acquired in fourteen years. Of the land acquired under the later Act, 34,234 acres were purchased, and at a price fair to landowners and small holders alike. But the applications for holdings greatly exceeded the number created, and the administration of the Act has been considerably criticised.[1] The fact that administration rests in the hands of a body of permanent officials and of councils upon which landlord and sporting interests predominate was felt to be a danger by the more ardent supporters of the movement, and in 1909 a Land Club League was formed, its aim being to watch over the working of the Act. The success of the movement from 1907 onwards was largely due to the adoption of co-operation among small holders. Agricultural Co-operative Associations had been strongly favoured by the Act of 1907, and in 1909 there were fifteen small holdings societies, cultivating 1,893 acres. The Small Holdings Commissioners, in their report of 1910, stated that "the experience of the last two years has strengthened our conviction that the method of establishing [small holdings] with the best prospect of success is to acquire an area of land and to let it to a properly constituted Co-operative Association." [2]

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
[2] "Annual Report on Small Holdings," 1910, p. 14.

"It is nevertheless necessary," writes Dr. Levy, "to beware of ascribing such an extension of small holdings as has yet been achieved either to voluntary reforming zeal or to the Small Holdings Acts. Neither has been in any sense a main cause, of the progress shown by the statistics. Even so far as they have been effective, it has not been because their aim was socially justified, but because it was economically possible. . . . If the branches of agriculture which form the proper domain of the small farmer were still unprofitable, all attempts artificially to create small holdings would be unsuccessful."[1] It was, in fact, that change in the market which rendered corn growing unprofitable and the lesser branches of agriculture remunerative which made possible the social policy. A change back in the market does not seem probable, but the small holder would not remain on the land if economic changes should render his work unprofitable. Whatever his love of the land, the small man obviously cannot afford to indulge it at the expense of economic considerations.

[1] Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

CONCLUSION

THERE can be little doubt that the worst of the labourer's troubles now are ended, never to return. In the future it is possible that English agriculture may see another revolution ; the cheap corn that Canada and foreign countries can now put into our market owing to their possession of huge areas of virgin soil, their lower taxation, or, as in Russia, cheaper labour, may from changes in these conditions so rise in price as to give an impetus to English corn growing once again. A new movement towards large farming then might occur ; but the extreme depression of English agricultural labour in the early nineteenth century was due not merely to a more violent economic and social revolution than any future changes in the market can possibly bring about ; it was aggravated by the Poor Law policy of allowances, which depressed wages, morally injured the labourer, and increased competition in the agricultural labour market by the stimulus it gave to the rural birth rate. Then the sudden abolition of the system forced the labourer to adopt a method of self-help, namely. the utilisation of the

wage-earning powers of his family, which led to identical results. The slow recovery has been due to the curtailment of the farmer's labour supply both by the decrease in women's and children's employment, and the flight of male labour from the land; to changes in the market which, on the one hand, have allowed the farmer to develop new and more profitable branches of agriculture, and on the other, have opened the door to the labourer's return to the land as an independent cultivator; and lastly, to more enlightened legislation. The institution of Old Age Pensions has remedied one of the worst evils of agricultural life, and State Insurance promises mitigation of the penalties of illness from which the labourer and his family have hitherto suffered great hardship, and even permanent ill-effects, by reductions in their already low standard of living.

Yet agricultural life still has its unsatisfactory features. Though education and the vote have done much to improve the social position of the labourer, the worst elements of the old feudal village life still obtain in many parishes. There are still landowners and still parsons who virtually deny the labourer's right to a mind and a soul of his own, and if the undue influences which they bring to bear upon the labourer are often hard to define, they are none the less real and resented.

In this respect urban life has a great advantage over rural life, and until progressive freedom is allowed to the village it cannot be a matter for surprise if the younger generation quits the countryside.[1] This is not a point which it is worth while to emphasise here ; it is one which can best be verified by personal inquiries, and no written word will convince those who have no knowledge of rural conditions of the extent to which this petty tyranny still prevails. As to local government, generally speaking it is undemocratic, since the classes below the rank of shopkeepers and farmers are rarely represented on the County and Rural District Councils, and fear of increasing the rates of the classes they do represent tends to encourage local administrators to shelve matters which might involve heavy expenditure, such as housing, small holdings, and allotments, matters which closely affect the labourer. Turning now from the social to the economic aspect of the labourer's case, housing remains an acute problem. Between 1884 and

[1] The Preliminary Report of the Census, 1911, shows that the increase in the population is again less in rural than in urban districts, but the disproportion is not so great as it was ; and that in twelve English and three Welsh counties the rate of increase has actually risen since 1901, a fact which may be due merely to growth of suburbs, etc. But between 1891 and 1911 there has been a serious fall in population in several counties.

1907, sanitation improved, but shortage of dwellings increased, and the structural condition of many cottages became worse; cottages could not be built in accordance with the increasingly stringent sanitary and building regulations at a rent the labourer could afford; few local authorities took action under the optional Housing Acts of 1890 and 1900, for action meant increasing the rates; and if reformers forced the condemnation of cottages, the inmates had nowhere to go. The Select Committee of 1908 found that local authorities did not do their duty under the Sanitary and Housing Acts, and that those who tried to do so were met by every possible obstacle. The new Act of 1909 was therefore made compulsory. It enforces periodical inspection and the closing of dwellings unfit for habitation. Further pressure is brought to bear by the Insurance Act, 1911: if it is proved that excessive illness in any locality is due to bad housing, and that the local council has not applied the Housing Acts satisfactorily, the council is liable to be charged with the extra financial burden thus placed on the Insurance Fund. Thus a chief obstacle to reform, local reluctance to increase the rates, has been overcome. But the outlook is still not very bright; the rent that the labourer can afford is too low to make private building profitable, and public building is

proceeding at a far slower rate than the closing of cottages under the Acts. The memorandum of the Local Government Board on the results of the last Act from 1909 to 1912, reveals that while 312 cottages have been built, 1,453 have been closed; thus the dearth has been increased by 1,141 dwellings. There is a danger that while the standard of such cottages as exist will rise, the combined forces of the Housing and Insurance Acts will increase the shortage and aggravate the housing problem in one of its most serious aspects. Unless the labourer's wages are raised, or unless the State finances the building of cottages to be let at unremunerative rents, the rural exodus must continue, if for no other reason than lack of dwellings.[1] As to wages, the latest official return, that of 1907, gives 17*s.* 6*d.* as the average weekly earnings for the whole country. But many labourers receive only 12*s.* to 15*s.* a week; and even with the aid of allotments, family earnings and payment for piecework and harvest, their income is too low to permit a wholesome standard of living and housing. "There was not an important industry in which those engaged in it were so miserably paid," said the Chancellor of the Exchequer in reply to a question in the House of Commons. "Their

[1] For full account, cf. Aronson, "Our Village Homes," Chapters VI. and VII.

wages and their housing conditions were a perfect scandal, . . . Land was not cultivated in a good many districts owing to the scarcity of labour, because the conditions were not attractive enough to induce men to remain there."[1] These statements were affirmed by the Solicitor-General,[2] and the Agricultural Wages Boards Bills,[3] introduced on May 7th and 27th, by members of the Conservative and Labour parties respectively, reveal the concurrence of opinion as to the unsatisfactory condition of agricultural workers. Their condition, in fact, calls for a continuance in efforts for reform.

Small holdings alone cannot solve the labourer's problem, though its every aspect must be affected by their sound development. The labourer may see his old dignity return to him when, with a holding as his goal, he becomes in truth a journeyman farmer. Hope, prospects, a career, will no longer lie only in the towns. A practicable ladder will be reconstructed from plot to a few acres, and from the few to the more, by allotments and small holdings on tenancy, which allow to a greater extent than properties the possibility of movement. Mounting up the ladder, he will rise not only economically, but socially. So far as the farmer

[1] *Standard*, May 9th, 1913.
[2] *Times*, June 2nd, 1913.
[3] *Ib.*, May 8th and 28th, 1913.

is concerned, the greater the extension of small holdings, the less should be his labour problem. For the sons of small holders, with the prospect of independence before them on the land, and no longer despised as at the bottom of the social scale, a sore point now, will not need to seek betterment in the towns. The townsman's evils, too—overcrowding and competition—will therefore be decreased. Meanwhile, the nation will be reconstituting that independent peasantry which it has come to desire. At present, however, the small holding movement affects only the few, and its extension is blocked by the continuance of unsatisfactory conditions of life and work which prevent those labourers who most need a change in their circumstances from bringing that change about by making a start as independent cultivators. The problem of the labourer proper, therefore, still remains, and the question how to increase his wages still has to be answered.

That increase could take the form of a rise in his rate of wages or of an increase in their purchasing power. Co-operative stores would be of the greatest value in the latter respect. They have existed for many years in certain districts, but speaking generally, the labourer's shopping is still mainly carried on with the small privately owned village store, or with the slightly larger shop in

the neighbouring market town. The village shopkeeper, who sells only in small quantities and runs the risk of bad debts, necessarily charges a higher price for his commodities than are charged in town shops which have a wider trade and are supported partly by the large orders of the better-to-do classes. But there are obvious difficulties in the way of any general extension of co-operative stores, while there is always the possibility that an increase in real wages by such means might keep rates of wages low, as was said to be the case in the past in parishes where philanthropic assistance was given to the labourer, or where, so it was sometimes averred, he could eke out low wages by means of allotments. As to rates of wages, the agricultural history of the last two centuries shows how inadequate have been the rises voluntarily granted, and how of the three chief economic factors in the farmer's profits, prices, rent and wages bill, it is the latter over which he has most control, and the latter which has been the first to be altered in bad years.

The old Unions were not strong enough to prevent reductions in wages, and although there has recently been a revival of Unionism, not only in the eastern counties, where the movement never quite died out, but in the Midlands also, the difficulty of raising rural wages by collective

bargaining is as great to-day as it was in the nineties. Rural Unions, the members of which are not merely ill-paid, but are also isolated and scattered, are faced with peculiar obstacles. Wage Boards and the institution of a minimum wage would be of more value than Unions to the agricultural labourer. Against State interference and compulsory raising of wages, which any scheme for a minimum wage would involve, it can be urged, and is probably true, that the worse paid labourers, the South countrymen, are not worth more than they now receive. But in criticising the labourer it has to be remembered that for several generations the conditions of agricultural work have driven the best and most intelligent labour from the land; that inconsiderate treatment in the past has not been conducive to whole-hearted, ungrudging work in those that remained, and that this and poor wages and poor feeding are responsible for the lower value of labour in the South. Superiority has not always rested with the North, as we have seen; before the Agricultural Revolution the Norfolk peasant was considered by a competent judge to be the best of his kind. There is every reason to believe that better wages would not merely keep some of the best men on the land, but would also improve the quality of the labour now at the farmer's command. The usual objec-

tions to a fixed minimum wage are that it would inflict great hardship on the old men, who would find their services dispensed with; and secondly, that if wages are raised above what the industry will bear as carried on at present the farmer must change his industry; he would decrease his arable land, and there would consequently be less employment. But any scheme for a minimum wage could be made sufficiently elastic to allow of varying rates for different grades of workers, as well as for local variations in living expenses. In neither of the Wages Bills, introduced in May, 1913, was it proposed to establish a "flat" rate. The conversion of arable to pasture might be a temptation to the incompetent farmer, but one object of the agricultural education scheme now on foot will be to encourage the disappearance of the farmer who makes a profit of 7*s.* 6*d.* per acre, when £2 3*s.* can be made.[1] The value of the land laid down to grass in the last thirty years in the Midlands, is not such as to encourage the intelligent farmer to adopt this device wholesale. Stock farming on bad land is an expensive pursuit; either the farmer must pay for large quantities of other foodstuffs, or be content with poor profits for poor stock. Leicestershire pastureland, which fattens stock without the assistance of other feeding, is not to be created at

[1] See Appendix.

will. There are, however, other difficulties in connection with raising rates of wages. Real wages do not necessarily rise in proportion. Experience goes to prove that the value of a rise in rates of wages may be negatived by that artificial rise in rents and in the price of commodities which the absence of competition amongst landlords and shopkeepers in the country-side makes all too easy. A really high minimum wage would render the labourer indifferent to artificial rises in prices. But to enforce a minimum wage such as would be practicable, without ensuring that the rise in wages should be real, might be of little value to the labourer, while it imposed upon the farmer a financial burden uncompensated by the better labour which higher real wages presumably would create. Thus, while an increase of real wages by opportunities for co-operative purchase might keep rates low, an increase in rates of wages might bring little or no increase in real wages. Thus much does the history of the labourer suggest.

The last chapters of his story have still to be written, for the final solution of the labourer's problem lies in the future. It is to be hoped that the next attempt at a remedy may, through the united efforts of all parties and of all classes, prove to be this final solution. If aid be not given him,

the labourer must continue to solve his problem by methods of his own, which have not been in the past, and in the future are not likely to be, conducive to the general prosperity of the nation.

APPENDIX

A NOTE ON SOME MATTERS CONCERNING FARMERS AND SMALL HOLDERS, 1913.

Agricultural Education; Co-operation; Sportsmen and Farmers; Credit Banks.

Two schemes which are now on foot, though not directly affecting the labourer, promise ultimately to be of service to him. The one is an extensive system of agricultural education designed for the assistance of farmers and small holders; the other is the promotion of credit societies for the benefit of the latter class.

The prosperity of the labourer must depend largely, as it has done in the past, on the prosperity of his employer. At present, although great technical progress has been made of recent years in agriculture, there are many farmers who lag behind the times. Mr. Christopher Turner, one of the foremost authorities on agricultural subjects, is emphatic as to the difference between the show men, the " star " farmers, and the average farmer. He made an interesting comparison of fifty-six farms, as alike as possible in soil, buildings and market facilities, and found that on some the gross yield of foodstuffs was £12 per acre and on others only from £7 to £3 or less. At the time of

his inquiry the average yield per acre of land under cultivation in Great Britain was a little under £4, " a low yield considering the richness of our soil." [1] As Mr. Turner points out, the English farmer met foreign competition by cutting down expenditure ; he reduced his labour bill, reduced his tillage, ploughed four inches deep instead of six, neglected his hedges and ditches and drains. To the labourer such poor farming and the consequent limitation of his employer's profits is of real moment. But the matter has also a national aspect, for the land is not yielding as much as it could. Fortunately the interests of the nation and the labourer fundamentally coincide with those of the farmer, for from his point of view starving the land is false economy ; whereas under scientific farming, an acre can yield a net profit of £3, poor farming can bring profits as low as 7*s.* 6*d.* an acre.[2] Here the dissemination of agricultural knowledge can be of aid, and at last the nation is awakening to the fact that education is the basis of agricultural reform.

The projected scheme is for a graduated organisation ranging from advanced research work to elementary education. Research institutes, to which £30,000 a year will be devoted from the Development and Roads Improvement Funds, will have for their object the study of different sections of agricultural sciences. Technical advice

[1] " Land Problems," 1911, pp. 55 f.
[2] *Ib.*, pp. 80 f.

to farmers, to which £12,999 a year has been assigned, will be provided by " scientific workers stationed at collegiate centres serving groups of counties. These workers will make a special study of the needs of particular localities." Agricultural education, for which £325,999 has been granted for the period ending March 31st, 1916, will be supplied by lecturers in universities and colleges, by teachers employed at farm schools to instruct pupils whose circumstances and previous education prevent their attending college courses, and by peripatetic teachers whose work will lie amongst those who cannot attend the schools. Winter short-courses will be provided at the farm schools for those who have had practical experience on the land since leaving the elementary schools, while summer courses will be provided if required by local conditions. They will be open to the sons and daughters of farmers and small holders. So well graded a scheme is a great advance upon anything we have known before ; hitherto the local authorities have been left to cope with agricultural education, and have spent about £80,000 a year.

This better education and the new facilities for research must, amongst other things, promote the industrialising of agriculture. A start has already been made, the cultivation of sugar beet and of tobacco being two of the most notable experiments. Under the auspices of the National Sugar Beet Association, the cultivation of beet is prospering in Norfolk and Essex, while experiments in

tobacco are being made in Norfolk, Suffolk, Hampshire, Surrey, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Carnarvon and Kirkcudbrightshire. The research institutes should be of value in developing other subsidiary industries.

Apart from its direct advantages the new system of education will necessarily have an influence in promoting co-operation, which, in Mr. Turner's words, "would do more for the immediate benefit of agriculture than anything else." While the large farmer can act as his own co-operator, both medium and small farmers and small holders work under unfavourable conditions, both in purchasing and in distribution. The small or comparatively small man purchases at a disadvantage, for his orders for seed and other raw material of his business are not large enough to secure him wholesale terms. He also labours under a disadvantage in distribution. He cannot market his produce either in the bulk or with the regularity which fairly enough secures for the foreigner those cheap rates as to which there is sometimes complaint at home. Thus he is often unable to compete with the foreigner in his own market. Both for purchasing and distribution difficulties co-operation is the solution, and has proved its success wherever tried. But the English character and English social organisation render the extension of co-operation slow and uncertain. "In little village communities," writes Dr. Levy, "the ground is prepared for co-operative action. . . . But England is the land of capitalist agriculture.

Neighbours are not known to one another as they are in the village community. They live outside, more as in the Celtic type of settlement, and this in itself prevents the intimate and friendly relationships to be found among the true villagers. The English countryman can hardly be defended from the charge of being extraordinarily suspicious. He does not trust his neighbours, and would rather go alone than in company. Moreover, the whole idea of association is much more strange to him than to the peasantry of a country where the village community is still a reality. In the village community any number of things are already done in common." The English farmer has to be " entirely re-converted to the co-operative mind."[1] This re-conversion cannot but be assisted by the extension of better education.

Education may have, too, an effect in limiting sports, especially game preserving, in agricultural districts. At present the tendency is all the other way, since new men, bankers, merchants and tradesmen are buying up estates for the social prestige they confer and are putting more and more money into preserving. It can, of course, be claimed that the farmer receives compensation for damage inflicted, and that the existence of hunting or shooting is taken into consideration when his rent is fixed ; sports bring money into the country-side, some of which is spent in the country, while fox-hunting gives general pleasure and increases the social amenities of the neighbourhood for more

[1] Levy, " Large and Small Holdings," p. 198.

than the subscribers to the hunt: the classes which indulge in these sports have been and are of service to the nation in local administrative work and in local work generally, and the nation would lose more by their going abroad for their pastimes than it would gain in the increase of gross produce per acre which might follow if their sports were curtailed. From the agricultural point of view it can be urged that the economic loss to the nation is considerable owing to the best agricultural use not being made of the land; that the farmer does not avail himself of the right to compensation, whether because of the difficulty of estimating it, because he dare not be a troublesome tenant, or because no material damage is inflicted, he suffers simply because he fears to incur it: he does not put down the crop best suited to his land and his stock because last year it was devoured by game; he gives up keeping a good breed of hens because he will get a bad name if he asks for more than the price of a common fowl for those devoured by the fox. There is thus a divergence of opinion on the matter, due probably not merely to self-interest, but to poor farming. The man who farms for low profits can obtain those profits in spite of sports. When the weeds of technical backwardness and lack of co-operation are cleared from the land, such damage as is inflicted by hunting and shooting will become more evident, and though it might prove a difficult matter for legislation to deal with, landowners, or at any rate landowners of the old class, who have already supplied pioneers for the

various movements of agricultural reform, may give the lead again.

Whilst every advance in the farmer's prosperity is of vital importance to the labourer, the establishment of small holders on a sounder footing is also of concern to him. At present their prosperity and therefore their multiplication is hampered by various circumstances. Lack of co-operation and its possible extension have already been considered. Where small holdings are concentrated in a more or less narrow district, co-operation is succeeding well, but where they are scattered amid farms of various sizes, combination is difficult until the farmers are ready to join in.

The other chief difficulty in connection with the small holding is that its cultivator has little or no credit and has great trouble in obtaining capital. Consequently, he lives from hand to mouth, and economic waste is forced upon him even though he may know the best course to pursue. Germany possesses a vast system of co-operative credit ; at the close of 1911, there were 14,506 credit societies affiliated to thirty-seven central banks. Loans are granted by the local societies generally on the personal pledge only of one or two friends of the applicant, in other words, character is accepted as security. A scheme is now on foot in England which should give the small holder here some of those facilities for obtaining capital which are as necessary to him as to his German counterpart. A number of leading joint stock banks are prepared to offer advances to rural credit banks for

the assistance of small holders and allotment holders. The scheme, which is at present regarded as experimental, is to be worked through the registered co-operative credit societies, at present about forty in number, whose operations with agriculturalists generally are already extensive. No one is to be admitted as a member to the local society unless he lives within a certain circumscribed area and is personally known to most of his fellow members, and he must be approved by the committee as a man of good character. Loans to members are to be granted only on approved security, and must be utilised for a specific purpose, while no member will be permitted to take out on loan more than £50 at one time. The proposed scheme is, therefore, not so favourable to the small holder as is the German, but it should nevertheless be of real value.

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