SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY

EDITED BY H. DE B. GIBBINS, M.A.

THE RURAL EXODUS

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THE RURAL EXODUS

THE PROBLEM OF THE VILLAGE AND THE TOWN

BY

P. ANDERSON GRAHAM

AUTHOR OF "NATURE IN BOOKS"

Methuen & Co.

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PREFACE.

If I were to write a list of the authorities consulted for the making of this little volume it would not consist of the names of books and of writers, but of obscure men who, in the rural districts of England, are doing their work and living their lives. For several years back, having been deeply impressed with the magnitude and importance of the migration to town, it has been my habit to discuss the question with all sorts and conditions of countrymen. The study, if I may dignify it with a term so austere, began in a semi-depopulated district that I have known since childhood. It was needless to ask questions there. Hardly has one family left without my knowing why, when, and whither it went. The knowledge thus acquired served as a basis of more. In any new district it was but natural to ask if the same conditions prevailed, or what other influences came into operation. And as I have wandered in most of the English shires, conversing freely alike with the landlord and the tenant, Anglican and Dissenter, the hind at his plough, the ratcatcher working ditches with ferret and terrier, the Agrarian lecturer, the village atheist, the poacher, the grocer, and doctor and land agent, it is my own blame if I have not obtained a tolerably correct notion of the ideas and aspirations of the English villager. My chief regret is, that I possess no equally intimate knowledge of foreign countries in order to determine how far a movement, world-wide in operation, is world-wide in its causes.

A conclusion I arrived at is that the problem is difficult, almost impossible, to be understood by any mere study of statistics. Many influences are at work that cannot be expressed in figures, and that is why I have devoted so much space to an attempt to realise the atmosphere in which the peasant lives. The talk he hears at the public house is, in determining his conduct, as important a factor as the condition of his cottage or the rent of his allotment. If symptoms of merriment crop up now and then, I hope it will be remembered that there is a difference between interviewing Hodge and driving a hearse; and that a good-humoured non-partizan is after all quite as likely to get at the truth as a solemn Tory or serious Radical.

It remains to be added that although I have frequently touched on this theme when contributing out-of-door articles to the *National Observer*, and in 1891 when I made a tour among the worst districts and wrote a series of letters to the *St. James' Gazette*, I have not reproduced any of those essays; for the very simple reason that doing so did not fit in with the general plan of the book. Furthermore, it may be useful to add that what I have written either to the journals mentioned or to others has invariably been from a perfectly independent point of view. It is no custom of mine before praising or blaming any scheme to stop and consider which political party is responsible for it. Whether a measure be Whig or Tory is of infinitely less consequence than the effect it is likely to have. It is the more necessary to keep this in mind because in the excitement of bidding against each other for the labourer's vote both political parties are in danger of rushing into some very foolish legislative experiments.

P. A. G.

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CHAPTER I.

TOWN AND COUNTRY.

Among the difficult problems of modern life, none causes a deeper anxiety than the increasing tendency of populations to mass themselves in a few great centres. It is not an exclusively English question. In Germany, and on the Continent generally, in Colorado and in Queensland, signs are manifest that the average rustic is eager to forsake field and hamlet for the city. Nor has the difficulty arisen only in our time. It used to concern Rome as it now concerns London, and Lord Clarendon thought of it equally with Lord Salisbury. But here in England, and now at the end of the nineteenth century, it is assuming a graver aspect than ever it wore elsewhere or at any other time. Our towns are already large beyond precedent, and yet they continue to grow at an alarming rate. Nevertheless, the indigent rural poor, if they move at all, finding an ever-colder welcome abroad, are almost bound to drift into them. And their doing so is, in regard to the social questions of the day, like a rush of steam into the pipes of a boiler. Directly, or indirectly, it acts on all the great controversies of the hour. The dispute between capital

and labour is influenced by it; agrarian reform, which bulks so largely in modern politics, is deriving a new impetus from this source; all attempts to deal with the "submerged tenth" must be futile as long as the indigent rustic drifts into the place of the rescued townsman; even the question of Disestablishment, as will presently be shown, is forced to the front by the agitation to which the exodus from the fields has given rise. It is, therefore, of the first importance to get some clear idea of the extent of the movement, the forces which are believed to cause it, and those remedies which hold out some prospect either of arresting or ameliorating it. At all events, some progress will have been made if we are able to sift the conflicting evidence, and present it in an orderly form and in an impartial spirit.

It is hardly necessary to show at the outset that a regular and natural overflow from the village into the city is the reverse of an evil. When the vigorous, enterprising countryman, finding no adequate outlet for his energy and ambition at the ploughtail, comes to push his fortune in town, he is not doing harm, but good. Save for the interfusion of new blood, the urban population would languish and become enfeebled. Trade and commerce are the stronger for their country recruits. But the evil arises from the fact that it is no longer only the choice few, the cream of the rural youths, the one clever boy or girl of a family, who come to town. The movement has outgrown all proportion, and those who are adapted for the struggles of town life, as well as those who are not so, are laying down the implements of agriculture and hastening to compete for places at desk and counter, in the dockyard and the railway station, in the public-house bar and the police force.

To express the extent of the migration in figures is much

more difficult than it looks. From the census returns, however, is is proved beyond all question that the rural population does not increase at the same rate as the urban. The following figures show the comparative rate of progress since 1861 :—

Census year	1861.	1871.	1881.	1891.
Urban population..	12,696,520	14,929,283	17,636,646	20,802,770
Rural „ ..	7,369,704	7,782,983	8,337,793	8,198,248
Total	20,006,224	22,712,266	25,974,439	29,001,018

These figures require some explanation. Between urban and rural districts no rigid line is drawn. For our present purpose, however, it is enough to note that a rearrangement of the urban and rural districts has affected the population for 1891. The general bearing of the figures is pointed out in the following extract from the report of the Registrar-General: "The population in 1881 of these 1006 urban districts, a certain number of which, however, were not urban at that date, was 18,046,174, so that the increase in these urban districts in the course of the decennium amounted to 15·3 per cent., while the increase among the inhabitants of the rest of the country was only 3·4 per cent.; and these figures may be taken as representing with sufficiently approximate accuracy the respective increases in the urban and the rural populations. The urban population increases, then, very much more rapidly than the rural population. And not only so, but the larger, or rather the more populous, the urban district, and the more decided therefore its urban character, the higher, speaking generally, and with many individual exceptions, is its rate of growth." That the exodus, therefore, is no passing and ephemeral phase of our social life, but a strong movement, gathering strength

as it goes, must be taken as a hard fact, and no mere observer's impression.

The most effectual way of showing the extent to which the country is being exchanged as a place of residence for the town is to take a typical agricultural district and go over it parish by parish. Many reasons combine to make Northumberland a suitable example. According to the most trustworthy authorities the peasant is better off there than elsewhere. Wages are higher, engagements are made for a year "in rain and shine, in sickness and in health," and the calling of agriculture wears its most engaging aspect. In the whole county there is no better district for our purpose than the fertile valley through which the Till passes from Wooler down to Etal and thence to Tillmouth. Husbandry is the main occupation of the people. No special causes seem to exist to account for any migration. There never were any factories or village industries to fail and throw the people out of work. Nor has there ever been any agitation to increase their discontent. Strikes are practically unknown. Mr. Joseph Arch, whose presence in a rural district is a sure sign that with or without reason the farm-servants believe themselves aggrieved, is seldom heard of in it. Mr. Albert Grey, whose "co-operative" farm of East Learmouth just borders on the selected district, would certainly bear me out in the assertion that twenty-one shillings is no unfair estimate of a labourer's weekly wage, which is paid at the rate of fifteen shillings in money and the rest in kind. Nevertheless, the following figures speak for themselves, and appear to show conclusively that for the average working man country life at its best has ceased to hold any charm. This is the more remarkable if it be taken into account that it is not unusual there to find tenants of large

farms who were either day labourers themselves or were the sons of day labourers. Northumberland, it is necessary to point out, has increased its population by 16·7 per cent. during the last ten years—an increase surpassed in only six other counties—viz., Essex, Glamorgan, Surrey, Monmouth, Durham, and Kent. But all the rural districts, that is to say those in which agriculture is the main occupation of the people, fall away. Hexham and Haltwhistle, Bellingham, Alnwick, Belford, and Berwick, Glendale and Rothbury are going back. In the agricultural valley of Glendale the following were the census figures at the numeration of 1881 :—

Census.	1871.	1881.
Wooler Parish	1610	1529 – 81
Chatton Parish	1538	1302 – 236
Chillingham Parish . . .	325	334 + 9
Ford Parish	1841	1585 – 257
Branxton Parish	234	221 – 13
Kirknewton Parish . . .	1402	1259 – 143

The detailed figures of the last census have, while this is being written, not yet been published, but that the depopulation is going on at an increased rate is proved from the fact that both of the registration sub-districts into which the ward is divided show a decrease—Ford of 488 and Wooler of 289.[1]

It may be useful to add a few notes about the larger parishes. Wooler is the market town of the district, and its tradesmen live by supplying the needs of the neighbouring agriculturists ; it flourishes when they flourish, it languishes when they have bad times, and its shrinkage is sympathetic with their desertion of the fields. Chatton is interesting,

[1] See Preliminary Census Report, 1891.

because there for many a day the cottager has had not three but four acres and a cow. He greatly prizes the privilege, and seldom is a cottage and allotment vacant. I was told on the spot that the decrease of population simply arises from this, that the large families are continually making townward. A cow is a greatly prized adjunct to a labourer's wage, but where, as at Chatton, there is practically no sale for milk, it is not so considerable as to counterbalance the influences that lead to migration. The parish of Doddington again has a very instructive history. Long ago the village was such a group of freehold properties as were to be found in many English counties—in Lincolnshire, Wiltshire, Cheshire, and Norfolk, to select a few at random. A story is still told of forty of these "sma' lairds riding in an imposing procession at the funeral of a neighbouring landowner". But the tragedy of the petty freeholder, as it has been enacted in nearly every corner of England, took place here too—the story is one of terrible labour and privation, of grinding poverty and borrowing, of debt and sale, bankruptcy or death. Locally, the decay of Doddington is still regarded as a warning against the creation of small freeholds. Of the other parishes it is unnecessary to say more than that Ford, which nearly all belongs now to the Marquis of Waterford, was under the late Marchioness one of the most benevolently conducted estates in the kingdom. For many generations it has been customary hereabouts to let an allotment of a quarter of an acre, half an acre, or an acre, with each of the village cottages. No one need ask twice what has become of the people. It may be said broadly that the large majority have gone to Newcastle. For reasons which it will be our aim to investigate, they would rather work on the railway or the wharf, rather be porters in a goods

store or tapsters in a tavern, than pursue the calling of agriculture. In 1881 Newcastle-upon-Tyne had a population of 145,359; in 1891 this had grown to 186,345, an increase of 28·2 per cent. As the gain per cent. in the population of the whole county was 16·7 in the last ten years, it is a fair deduction that at least 11 per cent. of Newcastle's increase is due to the removal of country people to it.

This is only one striking illustration of a process that is going on in every corner of England. It makes no difference whether the district has a good or an evil reputation for its treatment of labourers. Norfolk is generally accounted the exact opposite of Northumberland in all that regards the well-being of the peasant, and it is being forsaken precisely in the same way. Cromer, Norwich, and other towns swell and grow, but the farming districts, such as Downham and Swaffham and Thetford, do not even stand still, but are being rapidly emptied of inhabitants. Examination shows that the administrative county of Norfolk —probably because it is mainly agricultural in character— has actually fallen away in ten years, diminished in fact from 319,840 to 318,067. The county is divided into fifty-nine sub-districts, of which twenty-two show an increase of population, thirty-seven a decrease. Suffolk, the neighbouring county, has forty-three sub-districts, of which twenty-five are falling off, and eighteen increasing—the growth being almost exclusively confined to the towns. Crossing over to the south-western division of England, we find the decrease still more pronounced. Wiltshire is pre-eminently an agricultural county, and of its thirty-seven sub-districts no fewer than twenty-seven show a decay of population; the only places where the growth is marked being Swindon and Trowbridge and Alderbury.

In Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset the same tendency prevails.

The Midland fields are being forsaken likewise. In Gloucestershire only a very few of the towns are growing; the many rural market centres that depend for their prosperity on the custom of those engaged in agriculture are falling off in the number of their inhabitants. Cirencester—so minutely described as Fleeceborough in *Hodge and his Masters*—Northleach, Stow-on-the-Wold, Winchcomb, Fairford, are all less than they used to be. Herefordshire is very much worse. Four out of its twenty-four sub-districts show in the last census an aggregate increase of 506, the others a decrease of 5703. In Shropshire twelve sub-districts are slightly more populous; of thirty-seven an exactly opposite change has to be noted. In the Potteries, however, this state of things is reversed. West Bromwich, Stoke-upon-Trent, and the other industrial towns of Staffordshire have grown enormously, and in the whole county there are only a few out-of-the-way parishes that are being depopulated. But the agricultural North Midlands, especially the Spalding, Sleaford, Horncastle, Louth, and Spilsby districts of Lincolnshire, are falling off greatly. Industrial Nottingham is growing, and it is worthy of note that the small-farm estates of Cheshire appear to have held the people better than some other kinds of farming; or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that dairy-farming has done so. In Wales the tendency of people to mass themselves is very marked. Although the total population has increased by 11·6 per cent., the growth has been confined to sixty-six of the 180 sub-districts of the Principality; the remaining 114 show a decline.

It is unnecessary to go through the other counties in

detail. Any student of the census returns may add to our examples for himself. He will find that the movement is confined to no one locality, but is to be observed in every agricultural district that lies remote from towns. Nor does it seem to spring from any clear and well-defined cause for discontent on the part of the peasantry. If they have low wages, as in Wiltshire, they leave; but if they have high wages, as in Northumberland, they leave also. Where the farms are small, as in the Sleaford division of Lincolnshire, they go away; and in Norfolk, where, as a rule, they are larger, the process of desertion still proceeds. One of the worst features of the migration is the silence with which it is conducted. Left to himself, the labourer does not grumble or agitate. The uneasiness and anxiety expressed by the recent agitation are urban more than rural. Were the villager eager about reforms, were he to formulate the conditions on which he would remain at home, the country is in a temper to grant him almost anything. But he seems imbued with the despairing belief that there is no future for him on the land, and he quietly lays down his mattock and his hoe and quits it. The devices to re-attract him to agriculture are the invention of philosophers and statesmen and students of social life who foresee grave inconvenience as certain to arise sooner or later from the continual aggregation, and of town workmen who are apprehensive that the stream of new competitors will prove a serious obstacle to their natural efforts to improve their position. It is weakening and undermining their forces in the great battle between labour and capital. A very large growth of industry would be required if employment were to be found for so many new hands.

The anxiety is well-founded. Were the populations of

village and hamlet to remain stationary and only the natural increment to drift into towns the migration would be sufficient to recruit and invigorate urban life; even then the experience of London shows that the townsman, enfeebled by the conditions under which he works, would be put to it to hold his own with the lusty and energetic rural migrant. The country parishes are doing more, however, than merely sending their surplus inhabitants to town—they are being depleted; and it is this feature of the case that demands our attentive consideration. It will be found that the most sanguine reformer does not claim to have discovered an absolute remedy, but many useful suggestions have been made as to steps that may be taken, with a tolerable prospect of so improving the lot and brightening the lives of farm-servants that a proportion of them may be induced not to change their occupation, but to remain on the soil. Before attempting to separate the wise proposals from the unwise, however, it will be necessary to pass in review the various causes to which, rightly or wrongly, the migration has been traced.

CHAPTER II.

AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that in some way or other the rural exodus is connected with the state of agriculture. Of 1995 ex-metropolitan sub districts in England and Wales, dealt with in the Census Report, 945 show a decline of population; and, roughly speaking, these localities constitute the farm land of the country. Were one to take

a map, and enclose with red ink the areas becoming more crowded, the residue would be found to consist of decaying market towns, stagnant villages, small hamlets, and farm steadings; in other words, of the places where the inhabitants either subsist on the custom of the agricultural population or themselves compose it. Northumberland, in which sixteen mining districts have increased enormously, and sixteen agricultural districts have decreased to a corresponding extent, is a typical example. Where a county is nearly all agricultural this balance is not maintained—*e.g.*, forty-seven out of fifty-five Lincolnshire sub-districts are in decay. Glamorgan again is exactly opposite in its characteristics; and all but one of its twenty-six sub-districts show a substantial increase. The change indicated applies to all the country.

An obvious inference is that English agriculture is a failing industry. It is a less profitable calling than it used to be, and, consequently, incapable of maintaining as many workers. Both in statistics and in matters of common observation there is abundant proof that herein lies the chief, though not the entire, explanation of the exodus. Landowners find it extremely difficult to let their property. In the autumn of 1891 you could drive fifteen miles through Norfolk without passing a tenanted farm, and the gradual falling off in the total number of English farmers, with the corresponding growth in the number of bailiffs, is proof positive that the difficulty is no merely local one. The extremely low price of land, the number of country mansions let or closed because the owners are too poor to occupy them in the old style, and the acres allowed to pass out of cultivation, afford evidence of the same kind.

Lord Salisbury, with many other influential statesmen,

traces this result to the influence of Free Trade ; and, without entering into the controversy whether that policy is or is not on the whole advantageous to the nation, it may in a few sentences be shown how the abolition of protective duties has acted on the rural population. It is not without reason that the British farmer complains most bitterly that he is ruined by foreign competition. In the year 1891 we paid £166,403,921 for foreign farm produce ; and, except in the case of comparatively small quantities of maize and cotton-seed cake, these goods all entered into competition with the products of our own agriculture. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the prices obtained by the farmer all have a tendency to fall. Twenty-five years ago he could get 50s. a quarter for his wheat, and now he is often obliged to take as little as 31s. Barley, oats, and wool have not depreciated to such an extent, but they have undergone a very marked fall. Cheese and butter (including margarine), of which we imported well over £22,000,000 worth last year, are worth eighteen or twenty per cent. less than they were twenty years ago. The farmer has also to compete with Chicago in the pork market, and with an increasing import of beef and mutton. I have made very careful inquiries in various parts of the country as to the practical effect of this growing competition, and the answers throw a considerable light on the migration. In a district of Cheshire, where the population shows a slight increase, and the people seem exceptionally comfortable and prosperous, where there is not an unlet farm or an empty cottage, a gentleman, who owns the greater portion of it, and farms on his own account, said : "We have peculiar advantages for our dairy farms here, as Manchester and other Lancashire towns take our milk. But the secret of farming profitably

is to keep down the labour bill. Our work is done with the fewest possible hands. Not a man or woman or child more than is absolutely necessary is employed." He is an extremely kind landlord as far as the aged and those incapacitated for labour are concerned; but he gives the youths to understand that the majority of them, as they grow up, must find employment elsewhere—a system which of itself accounts for a portion of the movement to towns.

A north-country squire's farmer and factor, who altogether has some 4000 acres under his control, and has the name of being an excellent and, as times go, most successful agriculturist, remarked that it was utterly impossible to make money out of land nowadays. He considered himself lucky in so far that none of the farms under his management showed a loss. The speciality of the district used to be the growing of best barley for malting purposes, but it had never been able to command the same price since the alteration in the malt-tax. At the very best, he never reckoned on making more than a landlord's profit—a ten per cent. profit out of the land. The meaning of that was that land held without rent could just pay, but would yield no return that would divide between landlord and tenant. His district is being rapidly depopulated, and labour is scarce—especially female labour. In dairy counties one does not often see women at work in the fields, but in the north a great many out-of-door tasks are performed by them. Latterly, however, they have developed a strong reluctance to weeding and hoeing, "singling" and "quickening". They prefer to be dressmakers or even domestic servants. This aversion was general, and in no wise directed to a particular estate, for the employer is one of the most popular in the north. While all the neighbour-

ing farms have to undergo a change of servants annually, most of his ploughmen were born in his cottages ; but the young men are continually asking him to find places for them in town, and how the agricultural depression influences them is obvious. In more prosperous times the ambitious country youth saw his chance of rising in the world in a farm. Families would combine to earn and pinch and scrape for the purpose of taking and stocking a small holding. But this career has lost its attraction with the fall of profits. At the best it was risky. When a man's whole capital is embarked in cattle and implements, one bad season, or an outbreak of "foot-and-mouth," is enough to ruin him. I have in view an actual case in which a very worthy man was reduced to bankruptcy through the successive deaths by accident of three valuable horses. To stake one's all on such an issue for the off-chance of securing the very smallest profits would be folly. The countryman naturally prefers to work his way upward along the less hazardous paths of trade.

Another direction in which the migration has been swollen by the depression of agriculture is through the landowners. English proprietors, during the long succession of bad years, have averted the troubles with which Ireland has been vexed by, in many cases, voluntarily offering a reduction of rent of from ten to fifty per cent. The very best farmers needed something of the kind. A very typical example comes to my mind. I remember well the shock with which I learned three years ago that Mr. N. was about to leave the holding that he and his father had between them rented for no less than eighty-five years. He himself is an old man now, and no one believed that he could make up his mind to quit the white house on the side of the Down

built for his father, and in which he had dwelt for over threescore years. On the farm there was not a field or tree, not a brook or bush or corner, with which he was not familiar. Moreover, though the family is a very thrifty one, and difficult to bargain with, they are known to be keenly alive to old associations. People who, to make both ends meet, have to be continually on the outlook against waste have to learn a certain niggardliness, kindly and generous as at heart they may be. "Why did you leave the old homestead?" I asked Mr. N. one day in the October of '91. "Over big a rent," he replied tersely. "Well," I went on, for I knew his circumstances perfectly, "that is rather cool. You are a nice person to pose as a broken-down farmer. How much money have you laid out in houses and land since then?" "It is all in the town," he retorted, with a shrewd, satisfied twinkle of his eye. "And they would not have been bought if I had stopped at the Down Farm. We used to pay £2100 a year for it. After father died they knocked off the odd hundred, and for ten years I did not do bad. Then when the low years came it would not pay the rent, so when my lease ran out I offered £1500, and they would have taken £1700. This place, happening to be vacant, I put in for it, and got it for £900, and it suits me fine. Well at last they had to take £1450 for the Down Farm, and I hear the man who has it is going in for another reduction, or is intending to give it up."

It would not be true to say that something like this has taken place everywhere. Some few estates are actually more productive now than they were twenty years ago. A Midland owner showed me with pride that he was actually getting over £200 a year more for his land than his father had. But cases like this are very exceptional. As a rule,

wherever the depopulation is most marked, either many of the farms are vacant or let at a greatly reduced rent.

Now the great impoverishment of the landed gentry has had a very striking effect on the village. Absenteeism is not yet such a grievance in England as it has been in Ireland, but it is a grievance to which the rustic mind is keenly alive. When the squire, perceiving that his shrunken income is no longer sufficient to meet the expenses entailed on a great county family, goes abroad, or to London, or to some cheap watering-place to economise, he naturally lets the hall, and there ensues a great loss of occupation to many humble dependants. The shipbuilder or stockbroker, soap-maker or brewer, who takes the house on a year's or a three-years' tenancy, naturally spends as little upon it as he can. It would be unreasonable to expect him to undertake or carry on improvements or to employ a man more than he can help in garden or stable, field or shrubbery. Generally he brings his own servants with him, and takes them away again. Thus woodmen and stable-boys, gardeners and labourers, are thrown out of work. In many cases several artisans, the blacksmith and the carpenter for example, are practically in the same position. Occasionally when an ancient and historic mansion is advertised to be let in the columns of the *Times* or the *Standard,* it becomes the prey of adventurers, whose doings are a revelation to the innocent country tradespeople. What I mean will be most easily explained by the story of an actual occurrence. The unconcerned reader will probably accept it as comedy; it was not so to the village tradesmen. It took place in what, since the time of Queen Elizabeth, has been the residence of successive generations of one of our very oldest county families, and is situated in a very remote rural district—so remote that the milestone on

the old coach road just at the entrance to the avenue declares that it is 317 miles to London. The owner has gone to live in Florence, and the hall was let to a gentleman, who at first began by winning golden opinions from all sorts of people. His supplies were bought from the neighbouring market town; he employed village labour, and seemed to fill the position of country gentleman as though he had been born to it. But no cheques were forthcoming. "He is not rich, but he is going to marry a very rich wife," was an explanation that kept people from being uneasy. In another country house some hundred miles off a similar play was being acted, but here the tenant was a lady about to be married to a very wealthy husband. As this is not a novel, but an episode in real life, we need not go into details. The couple were united, and then the truth came out that the engagement was arranged by advertisement and that they had cheated one another most effectually, for each had taken a country house to give *vraisemblance* to the thousands per annum with which their advertisements in the matrimonial paper had been garnished. They both disappeared, and probably under other names are pursuing new frauds. What concerns us is that they paid neither rent, nor bills, nor wages, and that several honest labouring men are even, as I write, manfully trying to retrieve themselves from the difficulties into which the incident cast them. The occurrence is admittedly rare, but the carpet-bagger who takes the hall for a season and goes off in debt, "occurs," as the naturalists say, oftener than is desirable. His trickeries, combined with the very low expenditure of the average tenant, have unquestionably helped to create in the villager a distrust of the hall tenant.

Agricultural depression affects not only those who are

directly engaged in husbandry but the mechanics and tradesmen not actually engaged in it. Sometimes its effects are traced in the most unlikely places. Whoever knows English rural districts well is familiar with groups of wayside houses where the roadmen used to live, and there are no figures more familiar than the quarrymen in reddish clothes looking as if soiled with clay, the old man with green eyeshades breaking stones in the *depôt* and his mates who in winter clean the roads, and lay the metal, in summer cut and tidy the footpath. How is it that you will so often now find the cottages they lived in ruined, empty, and crumbling, the men themselves decreased in number? No answer could be simpler. Roads take far less mending nowadays than formerly. When it still was profitable to grow wheat and other grain you could not drive along a country lane without meeting groaning carts and waggons bearing produce to market or railway station, or carrying cake and manure to the farm. But what a distance one may ride to-day without encountering anybody, except perhaps a grocer's boy with a spring cart, a farmer jogging along in his light gig! Doubtless the extension of railways has something to do with this decrease of traffic, but it does not wholly account for it. The farmer makes less use of the roads because he is relinquishing the cultivation of grain for the breeding of cattle and sheep. That is the chief reason why his wains do not make more work for the roadman.

Country masons and carpenters suffer more severely. A glance at any semi-depopulated district is sufficient to prove how much employment they have lost. Building is at an entire standstill. The inference from the facts is so plain it would be superfluous to dwell on it. A few examples, however, will make it plain. In the Liskeard sub-division of

Cornwall where the entire population is only a little over 10,000, spread over an area of 44,911 acres, there were in 1891 no less than 167 fewer inhabited houses than in 1881; in the Dawley sub-district of Shropshire where the population is 7183 to 3576 acres, the inhabited houses have decreased in ten years to the extent of 369. To a greater or less degree the spectacle of dwellings going out of occupation is a common one wherever the depression of agriculture is felt. Where there is a difficulty in finding tenants, cottages which otherwise men would be employed to repair are allowed to get worse and worse till pulling them down is the inevitable end.

Thus the movement having once started grows of itself *crescit eundo* as Ovid says. When a farmer, unable to make a living out of it, quits his holding and the owner unable to find another tenant places a bailiff in charge merely to keep things going as is often done in East Anglia, the mischief gradually spreads. Those broken, unkept fences, fields overgrown with weeds, buildings all out of repair mean, among other things, that the local mechanics and labourers who kept them in repair are out of work or have left the district, that the village shops where their wages would have been partly spent are being ruined by credit and the shrinking of custom, and that even the public-house is suffering.

It is therefore hardly possible to avoid the conclusion that in the depressed state of agriculture we must seek for the great reason of the rural exodus, and the only remedy that by any chance can be effectual must rely mainly upon the revival of this industry. Could any means be found whereby the £160,000,000 we pay annually to the foreigner for farm produce might be directed into the pockets of our own agricultural classes the problem would be solved. Neverthe-

less there are many other influences at work which it will be necessary to analyse before we arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, and to get at them we must begin by clearly understanding the classes of which our rural population is composed.

CHAPTER III.

FARM-SERVANTS.

As there are only a little over 800,000 farm-labourers in all England, it is obvious that the rural migrants are not all of that class. Yet it is chiefly with them that the difficulty lies. When the village grocer or blacksmith closes his shop, it is easy to supply his place—the town provision-merchant being only too glad to send round his cart, and the iron-monger or machinery-maker his men. But the ploughman is indispensable where fields are to be cultivated; and his exodus is causing great inconvenience. "'Only boys, girls, and old-folk are left" is a general complaint of the farmers. In Hertfordshire and other counties near London labour is becoming so scarce that the very school children are regularly employed on Saturdays and holidays. Even in counties like Bedford, Cheshire, and Lincolnshire, where market gardening is a growing industry, its development is checked by the difficulty in finding labour. Women seem to be more averse to field-work than men. Northumbrian farmers pay them what in some parts of Gloucestershire is considered a man's wage—that is to say, a sum of nine shillings a week, with extra in harvest and other perquisites, but they are very difficult to get.

It will be well to ask at the outset why both men and

women have developed the antipathy to out-of-doors' labour that is one strong reason for their forsaking it. The feminine revolt is the easier to explain, and as far as it springs from a general advance in refinement, it is not a thing to be decried. "As coarse as a muckle bondager" is a common term of reproach among those accustomed to see gangs of female field-workers acting under the superintendence of a women steward, who is the lieutenant of the farm-steward. Only the lowest class of country-women follow the occupation. It is, in the first place, very hard and continuous. During winter the women work from dawn to dusk; in summer from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. They gather stones and weeds from the fields; spread manure and soot; plant, hoe and weed potatoes; hoe and single the turnips; cut thistles on the pastures in spring; make the hay in summer; and in autumn help with the harvest, and dig the potatoes. During winter they pull and cut turnips for the cows and oxen. These are a few of their ordinary tasks, but the scarcity of men is often an excuse for setting them to others more unwomanly. At certain seasons of the year it is by no means uncommon, on some English farms, to see girls doing the work of byremen and teamsters, driving carts, filling manure, and attending to the cattle. Rough work induces coarse talk, and the degraded woman is seldom a model of virtue. Statisticians, drawing a sweeping inference from the returns of illegitimate children, sometimes assert that there is as much immorality in the country as in the town. If that is so, it is the female out-workers who are to blame. A "misfortune" is hardly a cause of reproach among them. The woman goes to the workhouse for a month or two and emerges the same as ever. Those with five, six or even seven "bye-blows" are not very uncommon.

Again, there is a practice—growing less frequent I am glad to say—precisely analogous to that prevalent in Whitechapel. It is that of a man and a woman when they take a mutual fancy simply "going together," as they call it, without the intervention of priest or registrar. Sometimes these unions endure very much longer than might be expected. I have known of more than one that have not been dissolved till death. A respectable young hind would, other things being equal, rather marry a domestic servant than a field-worker. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that after twenty-one years of national education the daughters of farm-servants should prefer indoor employment. But there are grounds for believing that they are not so fit for it as their predecessors. The great strong women—such as they were described by Cuthbert Bede, for example—who used to do farm-work in the middle of the century, were stout, red-faced and buxom. But in those days they lived largely on a rough healthy diet of oatmeal porridge. Since flour and tea have become cheap, white bread and bad tea have almost replaced every other kind of food, with the consequence that the red, blowsy, healthy faces have grown white and bloodless, and *physique* generally has deteriorated. At least that is my impression, and it is confirmed by many qualified authorities.

These observations, be it noted, apply exclusively to the rougher kind of female farm-servants, and in no degree to those engaged upon indoor work. I have not found that the Cheshire girls evince the slightest dislike to dairy work, and where the County Councils have arranged for lessons to be given in cheese- and butter-making, women are glad to learn. Where, as in parts of Surrey, poultry-farming is a regular industry, there is no difficulty in finding women who

are delighted to take charge of the fowls. These are feminine occupations of which the popularity seems to increase. Again there are counties—portions of North Wales, for example—wherein hardly any field-work is done by women. Female farm-servants all over the country are decreasing in numbers, and as only about 40,000 are so classified, it may well be that they are altogether ceasing out of the land. At all events, it is quite evident that after a girl has had several years of intelligent schooling she will not be content to earn her livelihood by carting manure and hoeing turnips. She would rather be a domestic servant; though, again, the domestic servant would rather be a dressmaker or a post-office clerk. Ambition has, as it were, fired the entire order of women compelled to work for a livelihood.

It is the same with their fathers and brothers. Few of us have realised yet how effectually the yokel of old has been superseded. He was called a clown, a bumpkin, and a clodpole, and his stupidity was such as to deserve those epithets. Many a time when talking to old, grey-haired peasants done with work and fit for nothing but to sit by the ingle-nook and maunder of youthful days, I have wondered how they managed to retain as much intelligence as they did. Toil began with most of them almost as soon as they left the cradle. In worm-eaten farm books it is common to meet with entries showing how little chaps, who ought to have been at school, were sent to earn a poor threepence a day by scaring wild birds. "I left school at nine," said to me an aged peasant, whose history *mutatis mutandis* was the same as that of hundreds of others. "My father was putting up palings, and I had to hold them while he drove in the nails. It was cold February weather, and I still mind how my fingers tingled. At fifteen I did a woman's

work on the harvest-field, and used to come home so tired I have fallen dead asleep over my porridge." A man like that was not legally *adscriptus glebæ*, but he was fettered to the soil by very strong bonds. Hard and continuous labour dulled and stunted his mental powers. A ten-mile journey was an event that kept him in talk for a life-time. Even at this day I know rustics who live within that distance of the sea and yet have never beheld it. A man who had broken bread in two counties was reckoned to have seen a bit of the world. "My son is a far cleverer man as me," said old George Richardson, the village thatcher, to me once; "he knows three languages—Yorkshire, Scotch and Irish." This stay-at-home tendency was largely due to lack of money, agricultural labourers in the olden time being paid mostly in kind. A man through whose hands not more than six pounds passed in the course of a twelvemonth—and this was a wage actually paid in a good district as late as 1850—had very little to spend on travelling. Moreover, holidays were very scarce—scarcer by far than they seem to have been in the much-abused feudal times. In his *Dite de Hosebonderie* Walter de Henley says: "You know that there are in the year fifty-two weeks. Now take away eight weeks for holidays and other hindrances, then are there forty-four working weeks left." From another treatise, probably of the thirteenth century, the *Seneschaucie*, it is apparent that in addition to these regular off-days the farm-servant would occasionally ask for leave of absence "to go to fairs or markets or wrestling matches or wakes, or to the tavern". But nowadays wherever the labourer has a long engagement he has few holidays; in many cases only Christmas day, and some one local holiday, in addition to the "tryst," "hiring fair," or "statis," as it is called in various parts of the

country, where master and men meet to make their engagements.

The amusement of country youths was—and to a large extent is—courtship, with the result that early marriages used to be the rule. Children came quickly, and every new arrival was an additional hindrance to prevent the father from moving. The care thus entailed, and the early-begun and long-continued toil and suffering acted like stupefying drugs upon the spirits and intelligence of the men. Very seldom did their thoughts travel beyond the homestead, and still more rarely did a member of the class nourish any ambition beyond a humble desire to escape the workhouse. If they had shelter, a crust of bread, and some kind of clothing, they were as happy as, and no happier than, their horses. The great striving, outside world hardly had any real existence for them. And to the average townsman the uncouth figure of Hodge, his awkward gait and ungainly manners, his slow wit and drawled-out *patois*, were the objects of laughter and mockery. To be a clown, a boor, was to be contemptible.

We have changed all that, and not in the sense of Sganarelle. The strongest agencies we could lay hold of have been applied to stimulate the activity of Hodge. Lecturer and propagandist have dinned it into his ears that class and class are not divided by impassable barriers. It is not with men as with horses: where you have your shire breed to pull the heavy drags, and your thorough-bred for beauty, ornament and racing. The schoolmaster has been busy, likewise, kindling the desire of a wider life, and making the ploughman feel that as far as brains go he is the equal of anybody. Upon him the first and most noticeable result has been to create a certain loathing

of farm-work. This finds expression in other ways besides migration. It has been my business to cross-examine hundreds of employers from almost every portion of England on the point, and I find them unanimous in declaring that the best and most intelligent labourers are the first to leave, and that the remnant work very much as if they had no interest in their task except that of earning wages. In agricultural labour there is an art as there is in everything else. To the uninitiated one ploughed field is exactly the same as another, just as to him who cannot read one page of printed matter is exactly like another page—even though one be Shakespeare's and the other the work of a nineteenth-century hack. But the farmer's crops show the difference between the ploughing of a mere eye-servant and that of one who loves to make his furrows straight and clean.

This dwindling of interest is the more surprising because, of all so-called unskilled labour, agriculture is one of the most attractive. Its conditions vary very much, however. There are counties, such as Norfolk, wherein the farm-servant is employed only as a casual worker. On some farms he is merely engaged by the day. If it is wet when he arrives in the morning, or if the farmer has nothing for him to do, he is sent home again. In such places wages, besides being irregular, tend to fall to a *minimum*. These are the districts in which discontent has assumed its most active and aggressive form; nor is it a matter for surprise that the men should have formed themselves into a union and entered into strikes and combinations at the most critical point of the harvest. But on the other hand it is not to be gainsaid that as a rule, if the labourers are wretched, the farmers are earning no profit, and the landlords suffering from a diminished rental. The condition of the wheat-growing

counties illustrates the truth of the rural maxim—that the various classes engaged in cultivating the soil, landlords, tenants, and labourers, usually prosper or suffer together. When I interviewed the aged villagers as to the cause of the migration in that part of East Anglia that lies round Feltwell and Swaffham and Brandon and Methwold, the answer usually was to the effect that those were foolish who remained; they could not earn enough to make themselves comfortable in the present; they had no prospect of rising in the future; and generally my informant would conclude by regretting that he also did not go to town when he was younger—ten, twenty, or thirty years ago, as the case might be. And looking at the depressing landscape, the badly-cultivated soil, and the dilapidated houses, one could find no argument to oppose to this. The men could not be worse paid, worse lodged, or worse fed anywhere. Many of them do not see butcher-meat once a week. Yet there is a certain shiftlessness about them. Land is cheap, either to buy or to rent, and clever townsmen who have settled in the neighbourhood are able to earn a fair livelihood by market-gardening, thanks in some measure to the Great Eastern Railway Company, which has had the sense to make an especially low tariff for carrying fruit and vegetables to London. Upon points like this, however, the labourer suffers greatly from lack of knowledge.

Here you have the farm-servant at his worst. In the great majority of counties, especially those of mixed tillage, he is much better off. While travelling in Wales and the Midlands I never missed an opportunity of dropping in to the farm-house at meal-times in places where the old custom of the employer feeding the men is still prevalent. The result was to show that, as far as his own diet is

concerned, this is an excellent arrangement. Plenty of oatmeal porridge and milk to breakfast; home-fed and home-cured salt-beef or bacon, with plenty of vegetables, to dinner; and tea with bread and butter in the afternoon, leave little to be desired in the shape of food. Working men, when they cater for themselves, even when well paid, do not live so well. Most of them have one extravagant meal the day after pay-night, and for the rest of the week live on scraps and slops. It is notorious that many country-people are inadequately nourished, and but for the healthy life they lead, and the pure air they breathe, the ill effects would be more clearly visible. It is a traditionary habit among them to drink immense quantities of cheap beer—a cask is sometimes part of the payment in kind—and there can be no doubt that, considered as food, it is not worth the money. One does not need to be a teetotaller to see that there is more support for a healthy man in four pennyworths of bread than in a pot of beer at the same price.

The work of an ordinary farm-servant is not more but less monotonous than that of any other labourer in the same sphere of life. On the northern homesteads where each man takes care of his own team alike in field and stable, and especially on those holdings upon which the growing industry of horse-rearing is pursued, the ploughman often takes a pride in the horses. These are mostly young and strong, because the knack of making the business profitable consists in rearing foals and working the farm with them till they are five or six years old—the age at which they are most suitably sold for town work. Again, the charge of horses is itself a guarantee against overwork. A farmer who, as is sometimes the case, is absolutely careless of the

comfort of his men will not neglect his self-interest so much as to disregard the care of his horses, and the ploughman rests when they rest. And many a philosopher has forsaken everything to study the phenomena that come daily under the notice of the husbandman. He must, indeed, be a dullard who finds no pleasure in watching the gradual evolution of the seasons from seed-time to harvest; or who finds no delight in seeing how the crops he has sown sprout and ripen; in noting the first birds and wildflowers that proclaim the advent of spring, or the hurrying autumn migrants that herald the winter. Nothing, however, is more significant of the fading of interest in rural affairs than the decay of weather-lore and plant- and bird-lore among the poor. Richard Jefferies noticed it many years ago. When he wanted to find out the common country names of bird and wildflower he had to seek out the oldest inhabitants of the villages. Names that were familiar among the schoolboys of his own time were quite unknown to the children of the next generation. I refer to the point, not as being of itself one of practical importance, but as evidence that the minds of country people are no longer concerned greatly with their immediate surroundings, and, unless we can make the labourer love the soil, we shall never bring him back to it.

On the other hand, it is no improbable speculation that much of the distaste for rural labour evinced during recent years is of a passing and temporary character. Accompanying it are many signs that people in towns are equally dissatisfied with the life there. For example, it is astonishing how many business people, who have saved a little money, are eager to get back to the country. The vegetarians who started little two-acre fruit-farms in various

localities—Kent, Norfolk, Northumberland, for example—found no great difficulty in getting people who had saved a matter of £400 or so, and who were willing, for the sake of country life, to invest it in that manner. And though the stir and light of towns may to some extent move Hodge just now, it is by no means improbable that, when his ceaseless migration has had the inevitable effect of reducing town wages, he will eventually discover that after all he loved the country best. Indeed, it may almost be said that the only chance of statesmanship doing any good lies in the expedition of this result.

CHAPTER IV.

VILLAGE TRADESMEN AND ARTISANS.

It is a prevalent misapprehension that the majority of rural migrants are directly connected with the tillage of the soil; for in point of fact the shopkeepers and artisans of the village have been compelled to move in even greater numbers than the labourers. When railways began to penetrate the rural districts the hopes of such people were very high. It was imagined that every stagnant little market town would be wakened up into new life and prosperity. The exact contrary happened. No sooner did people get accustomed to trains than they carried their custom to the largest towns. Those who had anything to sell naturally sought the biggest markets. Girls and youths found they could make themselves look smart much more easily at the cheap town store than at the local shop. One can still remember the long array of carriers' carts that used to stand before the "Hen and Chickens" on Saturdays, and the still

more imposing show of gigs and dogcarts drawn up at "The Talbots" in days when squire and farmer never missed a market. But now the grassy streets tell a different tale. It is easier to go twenty miles by rail than to drive five. The grocer's cart and the commercial traveller are ubiquitous, and nearly all the little towns—with population under five thousand say—are in decay if they depend for prosperity on the adjacent country. What is true of them applies still more pointedly to smaller communities.

In the autumn of 1891 I selected a few typical agricultural villages with which I had been very familiar in boyhood, and with the aid of the oldest inhabitants went over the empty houses, one by one, in order to find out what had become of those who were once their tenants, and the reasons for their departure. In the little churchyard near at hand you may see from the tombstones that father and son, mother and daughter, for generation after generation had been in the same neighbourhood. "Of this parish" is lovingly inscribed on nearly all the humble memorials. But what a scattering there has been of their children! Some, whose grandsires harvested here centuries ago, are ploughing the Canadian wheat-fields; others are warring with the rabbits of Australia, or making their way at the Cape or in New Zealand. Still more are potmen or railway porters, labourers or tradesmen, in the English towns.

One or two examples will speak for all the rest. "Where is Snip the tailor?" was usually a first question with me, for Snip used to be a village institution in himself. He did not call himself an artist in trousers, and he kept no fashion-books; his coats were not gracefully cut, and he was not over particular in his measurements. But his thread was strong, his seams were proof against wear and tear, and,

like the good wife in the verse of Burns, he could "gar auld claes look amaist as weel as new". He kept no shop, and he had no price-list, for he did not charge a fixed amount for a vest or a coat, but did his tailoring by the day. "To have the tailor" two or three days once in the half-year or so was a necessity of the household. And it was a pleasant necessity, for his itinerant life made him very fully acquainted with all the gossip of the countryside, and there was no dulness in the kitchen as long as he sat cross-legged on the table plying his needle or using his goose. In one village of about one hundred and fifty inhabitants three such men lived twenty years ago and found plenty of employment in the hamlets and homesteads of the neighbourhood. One is dead, another is in the workhouse, and a third who, as business grew slack, took more and more to drink and poaching has gone away. They have no successors. Those who used to employ them say that it is much cheaper to buy at the ready-made clothes' store in town or to order from the commercial travellers who compete for the custom of the cottages. It is surprising that they should find it remunerative to do so; but to instance one district, the Cotswolds are regularly perambulated, not by "bagmen," but by the merchants themselves, who, in some cases, combine preaching and lecturing with the solicitation of orders. Where tailors or cobblers of the old fashion are left they, like all other country tradespeople, rail bitterly against the cash "emporium" and their own system of credit. The ploughman, wherever you find him, has a habit of spending his ready money in the nearest town and running up a bill with his neighbour. Alone among village tradesmen the publican is able successfully to resist the general outcry for "tick".

He has put away his ancient score and tallies, and no longer uses chalk or slate. Over his taproom mantelpiece he inscribes some such legend as this: "Mr. Trust who kept this house for many a day is dead; the business now is carried on by Ready Cash instead"; and there never was text of Scripture more devoutly put into practice. Indeed "mine host" occasionally takes instead of giving credit. An out-and-out village drunkard (to overreach the wife who would search and empty his pockets) in some instances will hand over the greater portion of his wages to the publican and go on drinking steadily till told—in a surprisingly short time usually—that the sovereign or two is exhausted. Then he makes a disturbance and is pitched neck and crop out of the hostelry. But I think there is much less drinking than there used to be in the villages. One obvious reason is the greatly diminished traffic of the roads. Before the railways came into common use, and when more of the land was arable, most of the farm horses were so much accustomed to stop at wayside beer-houses that they drew up of their own accord. Many such inns have been closed within the last year or two for lack of custom. They have been ruined by the same cause that led to the diminution in the number of roadmen. Even the commercial traveller pops into the village with one train and pops out with the other; it would not pay him to stay all night. But it is when "drouthy neebors neebors meet" that hard drinking takes place. The village publican must, I think, be classed among the rural migrants.

Any trustworthy explanation of the decay of village trade must take into account the love of smartness that is one of the oddest results of modern progress. You may find a curious example of it in the decay of *patois*. An excellent

authority, the Rev. Dr. Atkinson of Danby, says of Yorkshire: "The schoolmaster and the inspector of schools have been the ruin of the so-called dialect," and these words are true of every county of England. "'Ill-gotten gear has nae drith in it,' is not now understood," he goes on to remark in his *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*, "by the very sons and daughters of the good old friend who one day produced the saying for my behoof and edification out on the wild moor." The desire of the countryman to "speak proper" is at once a result of the new craving for gentility, and a partial cause of it. A few examples from my own notebook will make this clear, though in case some sharp critic pounces down upon me for plagiarism, it may be as well to say that I contributed some of them to the *Anti-Jacobin* in the beginning of the present year, 1892. The peasant is as much ashamed of his father's speech as he is of his smock and his velveteen coat with brass buttons. Indeed, his love of "lang nebbit" words occasionally borders on the ridiculous. I once heard a yokel call a badly built haycock "a most egregious blunder," and not long afterwards a teamster referred "to my colleague the cattleman". A humble old man feels that the grandchild who "talks pretty" must be of superior mould. One day while I was conversing with an aged Borderer, he happening to use the words "ettle" and "darn" for yeast and dough, I asked him if country people were not forgetting words like these. "Yes, yes. It's the schoolmaister does it," he replied. "There's wor Alice (meaning his granddaughter), she's learnin' me to talk like a priest. When I come h'ym (I wish I could spell 'home' as it is pronounced north of Tyne) thrae ma wark at the darknin feeling tireder than I'd ha' done forty year back, 'Dear,

dear,' says I, making for the big long-saddle by the fire, 'I'm no sae yebble now as I was yince,' and, 'Oh, gran'-da,' quo' she, 'teacher says *yebble* is not a word. You must call it āble.' My sangs, but she's a scorcher," he concluded in an accent of pride. He reminded me of a certain Lincolnshire peasant, who on being asked if people still said "nobbut," thereabouts replied in the negative, but a few minutes afterwards, in talking of something else said "nobbut" himself. "Why," exclaimed his interrogator, "*you* say 'nobbut'!" "So I do sometimes," he answered, with a look of contrition, "but I am trying not to." The poor old fellow was a class above Alfred Tennyson, when the Laureate attended the village school, and he is now on the verge of ninety, but still anxious to keep up with the times.

It is unnecessary to elaborate the point here, or it might easily be shown that the Dorsetshire milkmaid nowadays needs a glossary to understand William Barnes; the yokels round Somersby no longer speak like "the Northern Farmer," the descendants of Mrs. Poyser talk almost as learnedly as George Eliot herself, and even the patriotic Scot is forgetting the "braid tongue" of Burns. But what has all this to do with the migration of village shopkeepers, asks the reader?

Perhaps it would look like a still more pointless digression, were I to answer with an essay on tall hats. How laughable it used to be long ago when church was coming out on Sundays, to note the wide variety of chimney-pots worn by the rustics. They were family heir-looms most of them. Originally, the object of buying them was for wear at funerals, and in some cases the same hat was tied with crape for grandsire, father and son. Ill-shaped, badly

brushed, and cocked on the side or the top of the head, in a way impossible save with a hat never meant to fit, it was only the associations with them that carried a mournful sort of dignity. They were worn with greased and hob-nailed boots, gaiters, and heavy, clumsy clothes. The women who accompanied the men verged far more on the ridiculous. Most of them apparently "liked none of your gaudy colours, only bonny red and yellow". They had little to spend on clothes, but what they did lay out was all for effect. A field-worker, dressed for church or holiday, touched the highest point of rough, honest, flaunting vulgarity. And if you glanced at the bright-coloured cheap ribbons in the village shop, you could easily see where the finery came from.

Nowadays the village offers no such amusing spectacle. The same feeling that urges the rustic to get rid of his broad landward speech makes him eager to lay aside those articles of dress that are closely associated with his calling. And he has means of learning "what is what" that were not within reach of his ancestors. To realise this fully you need but to spend a day or two in some little country inn, as remote as possible from anywhere else. Sometimes too tired after a very long tramp even to read or write, I have, on an autumn afternoon, found it quite sufficiently amusing to smoke and look out of the window on the village street. It is miles from a station or a town, and yet every now and then there whirls past you a cyclist, dressed as carefully and fashionably as any of those who on Sunday mornings are to be seen hurrying out of London. Tourists and bagmen, equally well got up, come and go to the inn, however remote it may be. And it is very apparent, from the aspect of such members of the community as are

thriving, that each visitor is an object lesson to the rustic. See the prosperous young butcher "Going out," says gossiping Boniface, "to see his sweetheart, the lady's maid at the hall". To a not over critical eye he seems every bit as well dressed as the average city clerk. Looking from the back at his felt hat, his well-cut jacket and trousers, and shining boots, one might take him for a gentleman almost. Facing him, that is not possible. The flashy tie and pin, the very extensive gold watchguard and seals might be forgiven, but the butcher's face——! well, it must always be the face of a butcher. When the fashion is set by men like this, however, it is very obvious that the tastes of the population are likely to undergo a very rapid change, and that this is so the village shopkeeper will be the first to admit. He it is who suffers.

It is by taking the village house by house that one realises how far familiar changes have ramified. Last spring the ploughshare passed for the first time over the site of a house in which the village pedlar lived. Poor old fellow, he used to remind me of those Bewick loved to put in his tail-pieces. Everybody knew him and his wooden box, containing huge chronometers, such as were dear to the simple bucolic heart of those unsophisticated days, and brass-rimmed spectacles, "not precisely gold, marm, but equally as good," he used to assure his customers. The young rustic of to-day, proud of his keyless Waterbury, would blush to be seen taking out the turnip-sized timepiece that bulged the pocket of his grandfather, and when his mother's eyesight begins to fail, it is to the town "optician," not to the wandering pedlar, she goes for glasses. His occupation is gone, and though he was too old to migrate, his children made off almost before they were old enough to take care of themselves.

Another very typical case is that of the cow doctor. For several generations this was a business in the hands of one family. As far back as the memory of the oldest inhabitant goes, there was always an old Adam and a young Adam. The love of animals, and an instinctive knowledge how to treat them, seemed to come natural to every member of the family. Old Adam was an important personage in the village. He killed the pigs, and drenched the cows, and blistered all the horses in the neighbourhood. Did a mysterious illness come upon the sheep, or a favourite dog begin to pine, it was he that was sent for. They were a family of long livers, but when the hearse at last carried the father to his resting-place, "young" Adam, who was already elderly, and hitherto had been shepherd on some neighbouring farm, stepped into his shoes. But the family has been compelled to leave the neighbourhood at last. Our scientific modern farmer will not trust his valuable cattle to the old-fashioned treatment. A regularly qualified veterinary surgeon whose headquarters are in the market town visits the district once a week, and though old fogies grumble at his new-fangled methods, and say his skill "is not a patch upon old Adam's," he has managed quite easily to obtain all the custom.

As well as crushing out the clever quack, science has forced a number of mechanics to leave the village. The grizzly old joiner, who has, as he says, "kept to the bit," though all his sons have left, complains that but for the coffins he would starve. Yet when he was in his prime, he and five stalwart lads, together with the occasional help of a hired man, had more work than they could get through. Of course there is no building now, and that causes a serious diminution of his income, but he attributes the falling off

mainly to the greater use of iron machinery. He used to do the work at some half-dozen large farms in the vicinity; but that was in days when corn was thrashed by water power or by a windmill, and before so many cheap agricultural implements were imported from America or carried from Leeds.

The purchase of ready-made tools and the use of elaborate machinery is a grievance of the smith's also. Once there was work enough to keep two smithies going, but though his rival has gone to town the survivor complains that, except to shoe horses and sharpen plough coulters, there is hardly anything for him to do. Owners of costly reapers and steam ploughs, and steam thrashing machines, will not trust them to the coarse hands of a country blacksmith, but prefer to have repairs done by an expert, that is to say, by (in most cases) a man in the employment of the makers. Needless to add, both his children and those of the carpenter were among the first to migrate. It was no new thing with them, as the rural mechanic, long before the present exodus began, had his eye on the town.

It follows from the argument that various other inhabitants of the village find it increasingly hard to make a living there, and consequently are continually under temptation to migrate. There are fewer mouths to feed, and therefore less custom for the baker and the butcher. Carriers have much less to do than formerly, and it is common to find the houses once occupied by them in ruins. Even the village schoolmaster has fewer pupils, and in more than one village where formerly two schools flourished I have found one of them closed.

Where the people go to is much more difficult to find out. The annual number of emigrants increases rapidly,

and doubtless accounts for a large proportion. Many pursue their old calling in the towns, and of those who have no definite business, some drift into the police force, still more into the bars of town beershops, and no small quantity into the ranks of the unskilled labourers in town, reappearing too frequently as portions of the "submerged tenth".

If to the classes already glanced at in this brief survey we add those who pursued such village industries as straw-plaiting, basket-making, spinning and knitting, it will be abundantly evident that the problem is not wholly an agricultural one. Yet it must be admitted at the same time that many of them are acting precisely under the same influences as those that guide the tillers of the soil or are dependent on them for a livelihood. It is therefore necessary to an understanding of the difficulty to examine as far as we can the alleged hindrances to the prosperity of the farmer, and this we propose to do in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER V.

THE SQUIRE.

It is extremely difficult to be at the same time perfectly frank and strictly impartial in discussing the place of the English country gentleman. Contributors to violently Liberal papers such as the *Daily News* and the *Star* represent him as the bane of the agricultural system. He is a landgrabber who has stolen the poor man's common land; a rackrenter who overcharges the peasant for his allotment; a prodigal who wastes his substance on horses and women, and will not pay his labourers; a sybarite who surrounds himself with luxury, while wretched serfs who till his acres

are scarcely able to afford the barest necessaries of life. He is a selfish monopolist who has prostituted the legislature to obtain laws for his especial protection, and a political tyrant who coerces his subordinates into supporting his Church and party. Nay, his apparent virtues are but vices in disguise. "They (the landlords) are beneficent," says the author of *Life in Our Villages;* "but their beneficence implies the forfeiture of every particle of freedom, and the submission of the people to whatever may be imposed on them." If a landlord is generous with his doles of beef and bread, his Christmas coals and blankets, if he has an outstretched hand for the poor man in difficulties, or the tenant who is behindhand with his rent, he is a pauperising and demoralising agent. Does he stand aloof and, from a purely business point of view, simply demand that the tenant who has made a contract with him shall keep it, then is he but a hard-hearted Shylock who has forgotten that landlordism has its duties as well as its privileges. The plain and straightforward meaning of this is that the whole landowning class has become obnoxious to politicians of a certain type, and they cannot possibly be pleased with the conduct of any individual who belongs to it.

For the opposite side of the picture we can hardly do better than turn to the works of Mr. T. E. Kebbel. He is a Conservative journalist who for many years has been a trusted exponent of the aristocratic view of the Land Question. His picture of the squire in *English Country Life*, though involving a long quotation, I may, perhaps, be pardoned for reproducing :—

> The boys go to Eton, or some other of our leading public schools. In the holidays they learn to ride and shoot; and as soon as they can knock over eleven rabbits out of twelve, and jump their ponies

over anything their own size, they are entered with the partridges, and make their appearance with the hounds. During their novitiate they make acquaintance with the farmers and their sons, who think it a great day when the young squire, at eleven or twelve years of age, first comes out coursing on his Shetland pony, which any of them is proud to lift over the gaps, rider and all, though the little gentleman's dignity sometimes suffers in the process. In the summer evenings he plays cricket with the village club; and in these various ways becomes familiarly known to both the tenants and the labourers in the immediate vicinity of the Hall. He thus acquires an insight into the character of the whole class, and a knowledge of their wants, wishes, and prejudices, which can be obtained by no other kind of teaching. He comes to understand their language, and their peculiar modes of expressing themselves. He grows up in real sympathy with them; and in after life his charities and his benignities lose all the eleemosynary or patronising element, which is sometimes imputed to such favours, in the savour of personal affection and "Auld Lang Syne," which still clings to them. * * * No sophistry can convince us that the relations so established between the owners and cultivators of the soil are not far more conducive to the public good than any which can possibly exist between capital and labour in our great cities. * * * We say that the spectacle presented by a well-ordered English village, with a resident squire and clergyman, such as was all but universal thirty years ago, and is still rather the rule than the exception, is the best rebuke to agrarian agitation and Cockney ignorance that can possibly be administered.

Any student of current politics might, if he wished, fill a folio volume with contrasts similar to that I have presented. Nor is it only among second and third-rate minds among rival journalists and the partisan gladiators of magazine and platform that such contradictions occur. Mr. Kebbel backs up his own praise with that of Sir Robert Peel and the eloquent tribute of Mr. Gladstone; the Radical is free to strengthen his opinion with the sneers of Carlyle and the sayings of Matthew Arnold. For my own part, if asked to adjudicate between antagonisms so marked, I should feel

inclined to steal a leaf from the book of Sir Roger de Coverley, and vow that much was to be said on either side. Party Government is a system with many drawbacks, not the least of which is that it tends to drive both sides into extremes. Fortunately, we are not under any necessity to discuss the question here. What we want to arrive at is simply the part played by the squire in the events that have led up to the rural exodus. It is easy to prove at the outset that he is not responsible for the agricultural depression. In many parts of England large estates have long been in the possession of universities, hospitals, schools and other corporate bodies. Upon them the squire exercises neither a benign nor a malignant influence, and yet they have fallen into a condition as deplorable as that of the property held by individuals. Two examples that are exciting some comment at the moment of writing will serve to prove this assertion. One is that of the land belonging to Oriel College, Oxford, which forms the theme of a most instructive paper read in February to the Royal Statistical Society, the other that of the lands belonging to Guy's Hospital. In 1876-77 the extent of the Oriel College land was 6068 acres, and the rental £10,472; in 1890 it was 6142 acres in extent, and the revenue from it was £7689—a fall of twenty-seven per cent. This reckoning does not take into account certain increments and outlays. The estates held by Guy's Hospital in the counties of Herefordshire, Lincolnshire and Essex show a shrinkage of income from £41,840 in 1875 to £27,550 in 1891, or a fall of thirty per cent.

A detailed examination would be necessary to disclose the full bearing of these figures, but the broad results are similar to those experienced in a greater or lesser degree by nearly every English landlord. It is beyond doubt or

cavil that, owing to causes over which he has no control, the income of the average squire has during recent years been seriously diminished. Rents have fallen in many places twenty-five per cent. or more. Drawbacks that amounted, in a number of instances, to as much as fifty per cent. have had in some years (especially 1879-80) to be given. In not a few counties, Lincolnshire and Essex notably, land has gone altogether out of cultivation. Many estate owners, through lack of tenants, have been obliged to make a shift, either by cultivating the farms themselves, or putting a bailiff in charge. It is impossible to go about in the country without noticing the outward and visible results of these untoward occurrences.

Simultaneously with this decrease in his income, there has been going on a corresponding falling away of the political influence wielded by the landlord. The extension of the franchise has multiplied the rural voters, and the Ballot Act protects an independence fostered by education. A result is that, although a majority of landlords are Conservative in their politics, a majority of the county members are Liberal. English territorial influence, if not a thing of the past, is decidedly on the wane. It follows that the pleasures of squiredom are also being curtailed. Field sports form the natural amusement of country gentlemen, and their chief delight when at home. But the tendency of modern legislation is to contract these. Shooting never has been quite the same since the Ground Game Act was passed. It is not because of the threatened extermination of the hare. Coursing, from time out of mind, has been an amusement for the farmer more than for the lord as far as it is distinguished from meetings got up for the advantage of betting men. The squire was often with the beagles or

harriers, seldom with the greyhounds. Hare shooting again is a matter of no great moment to the keen sportsman. It requires no particular skill, and, though a hare makes a welcome addition to a mixed bag. its presence or absence never makes the difference between a good day's and a bad day's sport. The evil—from a sportsman's point of view—consisted in the legalisation of continuous shooting on the part of the tenant. Unless birds have perfect repose at certain seasons, it is hopeless to expect a good head of game. With the number of guns now on the land continuously, this is not attainable.

The squire knows also that there is a body of public opinion strongly opposed to the Game Laws. He must have a very clear case, indeed, before hoping to prosecute a poacher without incurring the inconveniences of unpopularity. And the aggressive tourist, who has searched out all the prettiest and wildest nooks of England, is for ever seeking the weak spots in his armour. He is constantly on the scent for old rights of way, and considers it a grievance if not allowed to pic-nic in a preserve full of breeding pheasants. He claims a right to walk on the hill and the grass-lands, to fish on river and broad and mere, and to shoot within the tide-mark. Sometimes he is most aggravatingly legal and ingenious. Here is an example. On a certain estate, the sea (which here always reminds me of the verse—

Nec brachia longo
Margine terrarum porrexerat Amphitrite)

flings a long arm up between two wooded shores belonging to a private park. One of these is used as a pheasant preserve by the owner, and even in summer the nesting birds fly over the sea from one plantation to the other. Naturally enough, when disturbed by autumn shooting parties, they

follow the same flight. Sporting visitors to a hotel in the neighbourhood know this, and when there is a shooting party at the castle they go out in boats on the little bay, and drop the pheasants, as with their low heavy flight they attempt to cross. Let me add that each of these birds is reared from purchased eggs.

It is by no means in the way of blaming the tourist that I recount these facts. He is strictly within his rights, and it is very proper and desirable that town merchants, clerks, and artisans should have as much fresh air as they can get. But their enjoyment is, in many cases, fatal to the pleasure and privacy usually associated with the ownership of land. And as long as there are squires, it is desirable that they should be encouraged to shoot. The keenest sporting landlord, when out with his gun, does far more than make a bag. It is his surest way of acquiring an accurate and detailed knowledge of his property. On the stubble or among the roots in the partridge season, it becomes second nature with him to note the results of the tillage of his various tenants. Let him be bogged in pursuit of snipe, or stranded in some miry field, and he will not easily forget where the drains should be. Many a lesson that is both useful and laughable he receives during these tramps. "You don't know anything about beating," said an angry landlord one afternoon to his keeper. "Take my gun. Let us change places, and I will show you how to do your work." The interchange was made, and, sure enough, the amateur beater put up far more game than his servant did—the latter, let me add, being a dead shot, and killing every time. "Now," said the landlord, when they came to the end of the beat, "haven't I given you a lesson? Did you ever put up as many birds as that?" "Beg

pardon, my lord," said the keeper, touching his hat; "but I durst not go on Sir Richard Blank's estate." It was his neighbour's game the landlord had been so successful with. Probably he would not soon forget his "march" again.

After a long walk it is the custom of a "patriarchal" landlord to drop into the house of any tenant who may happen to live conveniently near, and, while the daughter bustles to get him the cup of tea which is so refreshing at that hour, he will very often spend the time in talking with the tenant, or, what serves the same purpose, with the tenant's wife, hearing of many things that would hardly come to his ears save for this habit of familiar intercourse. As a rule farmers take this view of sport. Visiting a group of holdings detached from the central estate and beyond the range of the keeper, I have been surprised to see how carefully the tenants guarded the pheasants and partridges, and put down poaching, that the owner might be tempted to come and shoot there in September. In proof that this care was very thorough and genuine, I was shown a covey of no fewer than thirty-two partridges that just after breakfast one January morning alighted on the red-tiled roof of a cow-shed within a stone's throw of the farm garden—surely a very signal proof of the protection afforded them. Another testimony to the worth of the territorial aristocrat is the apprehension and anxiety with which tenants regard the extensive land sales of recent years. "Life is uncertain" is a maxim often on their lips. The good landlord may die, and the holdings be sold in bits to small owners and commercial speculators, all of whom try to raise rents to the highest point and set their faces against spending money on improvements. For the slow processes of agriculture tend to produce a conservative allegiance to ancient families. When

the old-fashioned Wiltshire tenant on taking a holding planted a little walnut tree in the certain faith that he would be there to cut a gunstock from its branches, he showed himself a man not given to anticipating change. It is the same, but in a different degree, with all husbandmen. They must wait for their gains and work for the years to come—a necessity that makes them prize what is stable and enduring.

So far the squire figures as an object of compassion rather than of blame. He is obliged to retrench his expenditure, to circumscribe his amusements, and to withdraw his claims to influence. The owner of land is at a disadvantage as compared with those who possess other forms of property. He cannot do what he likes with his own. Indeed he might almost be classed as a rural migrant himself. Why then is he exposed to so much abuse? One obvious answer lies in the increasing prevalence of certain doctrines in regard to land, the other that he is slow to accommodate himself to the spirit of the age. My own impressions of the class have been extremely favourable. If in conversing with them I have sometimes recalled Arnold's phrase, "an upper class materialised," it has been to apply the words with a difference. For how elegant, how beautiful is the materialisation! The boorish, insolent squire of old novels has disappeared. His successor may not be a paragon of intelligence—more likely he is the opposite—but Public School and University, though their lore is forgotten, have left a certain respect for letters. The squire does not "think" in the cultured man's sense of the term, but he respects those who do. By a sort of instinct he guesses very nearly what is best in art and letters, and as he is not contented without possessing perfectly bred and well-trained horses and dogs, so also he is anxious

to have the right books on his shelves, the right paintings on his walls. As Carlyle would have put it, he grooms and dresses himself carefully day by day; he is guilty of no verbal naughtiness in presence of ladies, and is a martinet about his dinner-hour. In a word, he has mastered all the beautiful graces of society. If he be a trifle uncouth as compared with the curled and oiled darlings of West End society, or the dandies of the clubs, it is by so little as only to give him a stronger and more masculine appearance. Nor is this mere outward show. He is as kindly as he is polite. His worst enemies admit that he is good and generous to the poor, and for any really deserving case of distress his purse is always open. But there is one point on which he is not amenable to reason. He cannot understand that the poor have their ambitions. Often in talking to a great landed proprietor, who on many points seemed benevolence and good-nature personified, I have seen a cloud come over his brow as soon as I hinted any scheme meant to afford the peasants greater facilities for rising in the world. To a certain passage in the Church Catechism about "doing my duty in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call me" he attaches quite too much importance. This comes out oftener on educational topics than on any other. The squire blames the school for much of the dissatisfaction in rural districts, and thinks the village schoolmaster a vastly overpaid official. It seems to him like red revolution that in the social scale the ascent from the lowest rung ought to be facilitated for the worthy climber, the descent from the highest for the unworthy. Not only the squire, but the journals which support him, shrink timidly from that innocent proposition. They do not quite see that class privilege is doomed, and a thing hopeless to fight for,

while the principle here indicated, rather than enunciated, supplies the only sound basis from which to oppose social and agrarian spoliators.

I by no means insinuate that English country gentlemen all fail in this particular. Of a large number the opposite might be affirmed, but as a class the feeling is nurtured by education, tradition, social intercourse, and all that goes to form prejudice. On the other hand, poor Hodge is being constantly assured that Jack is as good as his master. His cousins in London, when they return for a holiday, think it degrading to salute the squire, and Hodge, without quite knowing why perhaps, grows ashamed of his own bob and his wife's curtsey. The peasant, in other words, is beginning to have a glimmering idea that "the rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man's the gowd for a' that," while the squire still attaches a traditionary importance to rank. Hence the friction between them.

CHAPTER VI.

CHURCH AND PARSON.

It is not at a first glance apparent that the character of the rural clergy has anything to do with rural discontent. Hodge is not a very religious man, and many of our English villagers are absolute heathens, in some cases living their lives without coming under the shadow of the church walls till they are buried there. And yet country people are curiously sensitive to the excitement of revivalism. Let a powerful evangelist go amongst them,- one who can paint heaven and hell in glowing and contrasting colours, and the staid and sober country folk come in great numbers to hear

him. The "conversion" may not last long, but it is a drunken madness while it does, and too frequently leads to absolute insanity. But our theme does not necessitate the discussion of the parson as a religious teacher. A leading Wesleyan has indeed committed himself to the statement that like the crew of the *Mayflower* our rustics are leaving the hamlets in search of religious liberty, but this is a wild and extravagant theory that needs no refutation. It is simply as a factor in village life that we must consider the parson.

In the average rural community there are usually two ministers of religion, one Anglican, the other a Dissenter, and the friction is to be traced to both. They live in very different spheres, and exercise influence in diverse manners. Usually the clergyman is a gentleman by birth, very likely a relative of the squire's, at anyrate a man who has been to Cambridge or Oxford, and by birth, education, and tradition shares the sympathies of "society". The dissenter generally has come from a family lower in the social scale, and is scarcely what one would call a gentleman. Of course I use that term for convenience and in a conventional sense as implying gentle birth. It would be invidious and unjust to apply it in any other way. As far as manners, courage, frankness, and kindliness go, the dissenting minister is in many cases entitled to the "grand old name of gentleman," as much as any one can be. But the difference indicated is a very important one in village social life.

The clergyman depends for moral and material support upon the gentry of the neighbourhood. His friends and visiting acquaintances are in their circle. Even his ideas of amusement are shared with them. University life has implanted a love of athletics in his breast. If there is a cricket or foot-

ball club in the village the chances are ten to one in favour of its having been originated by the curate. The hunting and shooting parson is not so common now as he once was, but still questions relating to game and horses are talked over with zest and knowledge in the rectory. Consequently poaching and kindred offences are there regarded with a very severe eye.

It is otherwise with the Nonconformist. Instead of dining with the squire, he goes out to tea with the tenant. People who would never think of presuming to ask the rector to eat with them will familiarly invite the Minister to take "pot luck" at table. On Sundays you shall find in the church, if not the squire, at anyrate his household, the ladies of it almost certainly, and the servants. Most of the large tenants come too with their dependants. The game-keeper's stalwart figure fills a seat, for though not conversant with doctrines, he and the other officials of the estate take a pride in thus evincing their loyalty to the established order of things. And with these must be numbered a sprinkling of the very poor, who hobble up the aisle, making a fine show of rheumatic pains and not forgetting the prospect of Christmas coals. In the chapel gather "ungenteel" farmers, usually the smaller tenants, artisans, and shopkeepers, with a sprinkling of "free" labourers and farm-servants. The congregation taken in the bulk is worth much less money than that in the parish church, and the dissenting parson is in many ways the same as his hearers. "Oh, we don't mind the minister, he is just like one of ourselves," the cottager will say. Naturally his sympathies are the opposite of the Anglican's. He is almost invariably a keen and aggressive Radical. Of all things possible that which he would most gladly see happen is the disestablishment of the

Church, and to gain that end he helps the party of progress with every other object on their programme. Not being a sportsman, he has a cold eye for all out-of-door diversions, and is inclined to think the game laws iniquitous, and takes a correspondingly lenient view of the village "moucher". Far more than he ought to he feels the difference between him and the rector, judging the advantages to be very unfairly distributed. Should he be philosopher enough to disregard his exclusion from the upper circles of country life, he would still hardly be human if he did not grudge the rector his greater scholarship and his ampler opportunities of performing charitable and other work. Thus between the two there exists an unavowed rivalry and jealousy which of recent years have been intensified. Before dissent became quite so vigorous and self-assertive as it is now, the country parson jogged through very placidly and happily, droning out his prayers and sermons on Sunday, and on week days with the same conventionality performing the other services of the church, laughing good-humouredly over the latest thing in hedge preaching, and living a secure and quite life. But modern controversy, the attacks on the Church, and the growth of Nonconformity have wakened him up to a new activity. The new style of vicar is as much interested as the dissenting parson in all kinds of schemes for interesting and improving the people. Among other discoveries he has made, one is that congregations composed of people compulsorily schooled are more intelligent than those who like "the Northern Farmer" were content to hear the preacher "a-bummin' awaäy loike a buzzard-clock ower my 'eäd".

I had a very amusing experience of the practical outcome of these influences in one of the Western counties. The

rector of a tumble-down, semi-depopulated village asked me, as an old acquaintance, to call upon him and talk over the migration. He is an excellent specimen of his class, a distant relative of one of the best county families, with the manners of a fine gentleman, improved with just a slight addition of ecclesiastical sweetness and ease. He is very charitable, and consequently very popular, but too frank and open to profess the tolerant love of dissent affected by many of his more worldly-wise brethren. "Why, yes," he said, in answer to my questions, "Mr. B—— is not a bad fellow—for a dissenter. There is, I daresay, less cant about him than about the majority. But he does an infinite deal of mischief in the parish. It is the business of his life to make people discontented. You know Wood-End Farm? It has brought three successive tenants to bankruptcy, and the owner is now losing money by trying to cultivate it himself. Well, the people on it are very badly paid, I grant—there is at least one family of six (all the children young) kept on twelve shillings a week. But what can be done? The land yields no profit, and how are you to pay wages out of it? Our dissenting friend never thinks of that. Up he goes to the cottages and 'sympathises' with the tenants *ad libitum*. If they were let alone the people would do very well, far better than their forefathers did, and it is useless to wax sentimental over the plain fact that the drudgery of the world will never be paid at a rate more than sufficient to keep the drudges alive. But our friend must 'waken their ambition,' fire them with animosity to the Church and the Land Laws, and do all sorts of things to produce the sullen dull gloom that is settling on our rural population. Dissenting ministers, in point of fact, are only the permanent officials of the Radical caucus, and will swallow anything

from Home Rule downwards in order to keep in with the party from which they hope for disestablishment. In their chapels they preach politics every week."

Now, as it happened, I knew the dissenting minister also, and at that moment was under an engagement to go for a long walk with him across the moor on the next morning, an engagement which I kept. It was no surprise to me that my companion very soon began to launch out into an exposition of his views on the subject, and the reasons which, as he thought, ought to be assigned for the migration. He placed wages in the very front. "Let the squires and farmers pay the poor men better," he said, "and you will not find so many of them forsaking the soil." When I insinuated that it was difficult to do this, inasmuch as land hardly could be made to yield a profit, he turned upon me in utter scorn. "You forget how many classes land is already supporting!" he cried. "Suppose the money now paid in tithes was to be deducted from the rent, how much by that means might be added to the poor cottagers' income? Land would be cheaper to rent or buy. The labourers would also gain infinitely in spiritual independence and material comfort too, if the village school were not used as a nursery for the Church of England. Look at our case. The conscience clause is practically a dead letter. Children of my communicants are regularly indoctrinated with the teaching of the Church Catechism. The rector is, one may say, the sole manager, for his colleagues are mere ciphers, and he does all he can to keep the people in the old beaten paths and to prevent them expressing any discontent with the miserable income on which they live. A ploughman has reason to envy the fate of the horse he drives. For what does existence come to in his

case? Fifty years of moiling and toiling for the poor pittance that just keeps the flame of life alight, that just procures a cover for his back, a crust for his table; fifty sowings and harvestings for the granary of his master; fifty years of life's vicissitudes, during which he has seen his children pass from the cradle to the sadder stages of his own career, and a few more years of dog's work for worse than dog's wages alleviated by doles of food and fuel till the poor hands that have toiled so long fall helplessly by his side, and the broken worker is led away to the 'house' there to weary away the remainder of his days till kindly death comes to the rescue, and the pauper's grave yawns and shuts again."

My companion, harrowed by his own picture, finished his oration in a tone of such dejected sadness that I was not surprised when, remarking that the October wind was hard on the eyes, he hastily brushed away something that looked like a tear. So I did not argue with him, but gently led the conversation to wider ground, and gradually induced him to admit that a pessimist might in the same gloomy way describe the fate of the human race—"man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward". How few in any position are able to lift themselves! Here and there a man of genius or of some special business aptitude may do so, here and there one benefits from a stroke of luck. But the great majority live and die in the same sphere of life.

My object in reporting the gist of these two conversations is not to endorse either of the views, but to illustrate the antagonism of two currents of thought. Those of my readers who are anxious to study in greater detail the opinions of Nonconformist ministers may be referred to the file of the *British Weekly* for 1891. At the invitation of the editor

many leading Wesleyan and other Dissenting Parsons expatiated at great length on the subject. They are very much interested in it, and so are their congregations, who are for the most part Radical. When under Liberal auspices the famous rural conference was held in London it was a cause of general comment that denunciation of the parson was received with more cheering than that of the squire—a proof, if any were needed, of the close alliance between village Radicalism and dissent. Agrarian reform and disestablishment are being prosecuted hand in hand.

It is not a necessary corollary that the peasant is hostile to the church. The number of ardent Nonconformists in an average village is relatively small as compared with the bulk of inhabitants. As far as my own experience goes, I have not found the rustic mind very much interested in the fate of churches. The assumption that tithes, by adding to the price and rent of land, are at the root of the evil rests on a false hypothesis. If it were true, these labourers would remain where they are really earning good wages. But they will not do so, and the fact shows that there is a stronger reason for their migration. So much may be said without trenching on the theological controversy.

Villagers of the poorer sort are apt to take a somewhat mercenary view of the relative merits of creeds. The best religion in their eyes is that from which they reap the greatest amount of material advantage. When Hodge is young he will ofttimes give full scope to his fancy and go to chapel—if it happen that he likes the preaching—but when age and pain steal upon him he becomes crafty and worships where the loaves are. Nay, I have known instances—and they are neither few nor far between—in which the innocent Hodge was a devout chapel-goer for eleven months of the year, but when

the mummers reminded him that Christmas was coming he turned into a zealous churchman, and till the Yule-tide gifts were distributed was a regular member of the vicar's congregation. It is exceptional to find a labourer whose life's course is guided to any appreciable extent by fine religious scruples. The example of the school cited by my dissenting acquaintance illustrates the case. What makes the Nonconformist minister angry is, that those who pass for devout members of his congregation cannot see the iniquity of allowing their offspring to be led into Anglican ways, but are too lazy or stupid or careless to take any advantage of the conscience clause.

It always seems to me that this indifference to matters of religion is growing all over the country. In the upper classes it is being produced by the dissemination of opinions that are at conflict with belief in revelation, and the scepticism thus engendered trickles down one hardly knows how to the lower strata of society. The squire of to-day is less imperative in demanding that his retainer should be at church, and Hodge—well, Hodge is getting into a very lax way of spending Sunday. He might very well be added to the landscape depicted by the poet of the Sabbath. On the dark ploughland "the limping hare stops on her way and stops and looks at man, her deadliest foe". The tired cart-horse lies down on the green pasture and rolls till his steeled hoofs glitter in the sunlight, and over the five-barred gate leading into the field the driver of it lolls and lounges smoking his short cutty. He is within earshot of the *Magnificat* and the church organ, while at times the faint strains of a Wesleyan hymn are floated to him on the spring breeze. He is to both as oblivious as he is to the lark that, mounted above him and the burgeoning hedges, is from a heaven of

blue raining down a shower of silver melody. He can talk much more glibly than might be imagined about allotments and wages, politics, and the latest newspaper scandal, but the church does not interest him. Still, on the whole, he rather likes the parson. Anglican clergymen as a rule are less insistent on church attendance than the dissenting ministers, who must have a congregation or starve. Nor do they ask the poor for collections. Thus Hodge regards them rather as avenues through which the squire's charity flows than as the custodians of his soul.

But if this view be a correct one, it shows that Disestablishment has about as much to do with the rural exodus as Tenterden Steeple with the Goodwin Sands. In other words, the vituperation of the parson is extraneous matter needlessly dragged into the controversy. Moreover, if it be indulged in to any great extent, the inevitable result will be to draw forth an effective "you're another" from the churchman. The vicar has as good ground for saying that the minister lives upon the poor and is nourished by discontent as the minister has for casting the responsibility upon the vicar. Why it is so absolutely necessary to point this out is because nothing but misunderstanding is likely to ensue from confounding two entirely distinct questions.

English country parsons as a class, including Anglicans and Nonconformists, have admittedly made great advance of recent years. They may not be more intelligent than their predecessors, but their lives are more exemplary and they take a keener and more active interest in their work. To both of them the labouring man looks with gratitude as to kindly neighbours who, often at considerable personal sacrifice, are willing to do him a good turn in the day of his necessity. But this recognition does not involve as much

as a single reflection on his part upon the problem whether spiritual overseers should be State officials or supported by voluntary contribution.

Upon one other aspect of the quarrel I have not touched. The parson has been violently assailed for charging high rents where he has glebe lands to let, and for being a parsimonious employer of labour. But it is absurd to make any such accusation. A clergyman who has farms on hire is so far a landlord pure and simple, and to be judged as a landlord; while, if he till the land on his own account, he is to his labourers a farmer and nothing more. Whether he be a wise and good squire or a harsh and exacting one, whether he be a generous or a niggardly employer, are questions to be determined without reference to his ordination. But for the persistent manner in which these functions have been confused, it might have been thought superfluous to point out the illogicality of treating them as one.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DULNESS OF THE FIELDS.

When the cottager complains that village life is drearily monotonous, it is well to remember that his more affluent neighbours suffer from the same affliction. The doctor and the curate, whose calling necessitates much intercourse, find that many hours drag heavily along; and even the squire admits that existence is not lively in the country. Yet with these the calm flow is frequently interrupted. The proprietor of the hall has the responsibility of a great business on his head, and usually devotes several hours in the morn-

ing to consultation with the factor, the keeper, the butler, and other functionaries. He has appropriate amusements for every season—his angle in spring, his gun in autumn, his hunt in winter. If the house is an old one, it is almost certain to contain a great library, consisting of books collected during the course of generations, and, by its variety, proclaiming how the taste of one owner differed from that of another. Many an hour I have spent among such shelves, trying to reconstruct in my mind the lives and diversions of the dead men whose portraits were hanging on the dining-room walls. One has apparently lolled away the winter hours with novels, for nearly all the fiction carries his book-plate; a second, by a similar token, has been a lover of antiquity; and a third interests me still more. His delight has been in natural history, and it is impossible to take up a White or a Sowerby without tracing his finger. A certain edition of Bewick's *Birds* that belonged to such a one is notebook, museum, and album in one. He has tinted all the wood engraver's pictures most delicately, and evidently from life, since by each illustration he has placed a characteristic feather of the bird, and the profuse annotations give account of rare specimens shot on the demesne.

Other evidence of a charming idleness is abundant. Within a grove of cypress standing in the middle of a wood, through whose interlacing boughs you may (after gusty October has thinned and darkened "the flying gold of the ruin'd woodland") catch the white glitter of the mere, there is a row of dainty tombstones. They were nearly all erected a century ago, and by one whose name is not on many book-plates. He fought the tedium of the hours by amusing himself with dogs, and these are the graves of his pets. You

may read their names—Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, and where, and why they died, and how this was beautiful, and that was kind, for it is all engraven on these stone memorials. Dogginess seems to have grown into a mania with the man, for he has expended treasure upon busts and monuments of his favourites. Some of these are carved so well that my own dog growled at the dogs in marble the first time he saw them.

One might endlessly expand the story of whims and eccentricities, but I have said enough, I think, to justify the humdrum, prosaic and unsentimental reflection that the majority of these "ancestors" must have had great difficulty in killing time. They suffered from a superfluity of leisure; and to this day the resident country gentleman finds life very stale and dull at times. Visitors come and go, it is true, but many are formal relatives and friends, who make life duller rather than enliven it, and there are *longueurs* when nobody comes to stay, and when the casual caller is a godsend. The evenings, in particular, are dreary. It is depressing, indeed, when the ubiquitous maiden aunt and her cousin make a quartette at dinner with the host and the hostess. It is not as if the former could make off to his club or his theatre afterwards, or had the evening papers and town gossip, and a plentiful supply of new books to make shift with. The journals are a day late, Mudie sends the volumes one does not want to read, and were he inclined to talk with a friend he hesitates about taking the horses out on the dark and miry lanes.

The most ardent sportsman will admit that country life, on the whole, is dull. He knows that the red-letter days are few and far between in his calendar. On the fingers of one hand he can count the good runs of a season, and were

he to shoot continuously he would terrify from the estate all the game left alive. Men of genius alone seem to be able to endure the life with equanimity, and I suspect many of them found nature less entertaining than they are willing to admit. Richard Jefferies was oppressed with the dull stagnancy of Coate, Carlyle was glad to escape from the monotony of Craigenputtock, and, if Wordsworth enjoyed from his intercourse with nature as much rapture as he would have us believe, it is surprising that his transcription of it should so frequently be dull and insipid.

But if this be so in the hall, the case is very much worse in the cottage. To realise it one has only to glance at an English agricultural landscape in mid-November. Ere then autumn gales and drenching showers have shorn away the glories of summer. The honeysuckle jessamine and rose that made the meanest dwelling look fit to be a lady's bower are blown and draggled. A few half-withered flowers and vegetables represent all the beauties of the garden. Tree and hedge, field and copse grow doubly black under a sky that is seldom other than sullen. All the alluring foot-paths leading from mead to mead, by stiles at which there was such pleasant dalliance in the August afternoons, are masses of sludge and mire that make even the heavy-booted rustic "hold his breath for a while" ere he attempts to wade them. As you gaze and philosophise, the chances are greatly in favour of a cold, pitiless, misty shower coming over the hill and making the cup of your discomfort over-flow.

There are very few Englishmen, whether living in towns or not, who are unfamiliar with the summer aspects of English rural scenery. They have sat on some ferny eminence, and noted from the isolated smoke wreaths how

straggled and distant from each other are the cottages. Many a thatched or red-tiled dwelling stands absolutely alone, and the peasant has to trudge a mile or two before he sees a neighbour. From May onward to September or so, he does not mind this much. Work is constant and hard. If he has an hour's leisure there is always something to do in the garden or in the allotment. More people are moving about, and nowadays the cottage must be very remote indeed that does not occasionally come under the notice of the tourist. But what a change when the short winter day comes, and the toil-worn cottar is driven home by darkness in what is afternoon rather than evening! A great number of hours intervene between then and bedtime: how is he to employ them? Philanthropic persons say that now is the chance for him to improve his mind and cultivate his intelligence. In point of fact, his inclination does not lie that way, and it is the very last thing he would think of doing. The book-loving rustic is not entirely a myth, but he is a rarity. A weekly newspaper is enough for the average man, and that does not serve him much more than Sunday. The volumes on his rude little bookshelf are, generally speaking, of a very dull and sleep-producing kind, Harvey's *Meditations among the Tombs* and Fox's *Book of Martyrs* being two of the most entertaining. Were his zeal for study ten times what it is, he would find obstacles to reading. Imagine him in the prime of life, and father of five or six children, and the whole family in one room. The rough, untrained boys and girls are alternately quarrelling and laughing, fighting, and chattering over their home-lessons. Younger ones are crawling about the floor, and if the baby is not ruthlessly thrust into his hands it is probably yelling fit to break its heart; for the practical mistress

of the household has no time to coddle and spoil her offspring.

Now Hodge is not a man of delicate nerves. What would drive a brain-worker distracted is no great annoyance to him. Home—even such a home as I have pictured—is a pleasant place to a man who has been ploughing stubble or felling timber, or driving horses under an inclement sky; and the average English labourer is not prone to grumbling about such trifles. He will get baby on his knee, and laugh at its infantile tricks; he tells the school children how much better a chance they are having than ever fell to his own lot, and exhorts them to diligence; and the wife knows well that she may expect plenty of kindly, if rather coarse, banter and jesting from her "man". But at the best, this environment does not seem very favourable to the encouragement of study. One may almost conceive that the ideal paragon of a husband would in time find the repetition of this scene night after night somewhat dull and monotonous. Would it be surprising if once in a while a night with a few cronies in the taproom of the "Dragon" were welcomed as a relief that he would seek oftener but for lack of means?

To a man of high intelligence, existence where toil alternates with squalor would be quite unendurable, but the rustic has a formula for reconciling himself to it. "Well, George," I once asked a young gamekeeper, who not altogether willingly had been obliged to take a partner to his home, "how do you like being married?" "Houts, sir," he answered, "we just hae to put up with it!" and to how many queries has a similar reply been made! Our rustic is "used to" the turmoil of home, "used to" going to bed early in order to save the candle ends, "used to" hard work and poor fare, and a dull weary life. "It's different with townfolk,

but we're 'used to' these things" is a very frequently tendered explanation. He is like the tame mouse or bird that, born within a cage, knows nothing of liberty, and, therefore, does not seek to escape; or, rather, he was so, for latterly he has given unmistakable signs of being in the position of that same creature after it has once tasted of liberty and been recaptured.

When the hind fostered no hope of escaping from his doleful lot, he had many inventions of his own for brightening it. No sooner was the corn stacked and the potato pit dug, than the preparation commenced for a series of simple festivities that gave occasion to weeks of anticipatory and reminiscent talk. The kirn dolly—a tiny sheaf bound in ribbons, and originally, perhaps, emblematic of the god of harvest—was carried merrily home with dance and music. and in the ensuing time of plenty the kindly poor were thoughtful of those in want. Was an aged, respectable widow in need, and fearful how she would get through the winter safely: "Come," said the neighbours, "let us give her a merry night". And this wife would bake a loaf and that a cake, and one bring a pound of tea and a second a lump of butter, till materials were gathered for a regular feast. Then the fiddler was cajoled into coming, and on the appointed moonlight night you might see the neighbours going to tea, each man carrying his mug, each girl with a cup and saucer. As every guest made the old lady a present, a night such as this was not only a pleasant one for the country folk but left something substantial in the poor widow's cupboard and pocket. When two young people wanted to get married, and, in Sir Walter's homely words, had no prospect but that of four bare legs in a bed together, it was usual to get up a quilting party to make patchwork cover-

lets and other necessaries for them. These gatherings were invariably followed by a dance in the barn, and one may fancy the scene—the fiddler on an upturned tub, with a mug of beer beside him, the rafters rendered only half visible by the tallow candles fixed on the walls, the laughter and cries of the jigging couples. Several old and intelligent peasant women have told me that of all the ongoings of their youth none had left memories so bright and innocent as these.

But it was a characteristic of the old-fashioned peasant that he shared in the joys and sorrows of his neighbours more than his successors do. We have seen how he encouraged courtship. At the wedding he "roped" the bride and bridegroom for drink-money; and, when the first baby came, shamed was the mother who had not ready her cheese and her easing cake, shamed the acquaintance who did not welcome the new-comer with a frock, and come to taste the cheer provided for the occasion. And even when a death occurred the friends gathered and helped to expel the first bitter grief of the survivors by encouraging them to drink. It will not be gainsaid by any one who knows the English rustic that he is ceasing to take this lively interest in his neighbours. The lads and lasses court and marry, have children, die, and are forgotten without comment or interference. And this is due to two causes. Firstly, payment in cash has been largely substituted for payment in kind, and people are grown more independent of one another. Secondly, as population has become more migratory, families have ceased to be united by the same bonds of close friendship that used to hold them together. It is evident, however, that be the cause what it may, the obsolescence of such usages cannot fail to add very considerably to the dulness of the fields.

Still more important is the rapid decay of rural sport and pastime. It is, no doubt, well that many of them have gone. Old-fashioned rustics were unquestionably brutal in their amusements. It was the height of enjoyment for them to see a terrier trying to draw a badger from under a bundle of faggots, or a bull-dog worrying an otter. They were fond of cocking, and the rat-pit, and the cockshy. Bewick epitomises the feeling of an entire class when he represents a fat village blacksmith laughing consumedly at a dog flying along the thoroughfare with a tin kettle tied to its tail. Is it not plain, however, that unless substitutes have been found for them, the discontinuance of these cruel diversions must also add greatly to the rural dulness? And far from anything having been found to replace them, their abolition has been accompanied by the curtailment of other and more legitimate rural amusements. Last century, for example, it was much more common than it is now for the villager to possess a gun. One may infer as much from the number of flint-lock fowling pieces that still are to be found in old cottages whose present owners never would dream of burning powder. Those who are anxious for further proof may be referred to a rather curious illustration. Many of my readers will remember that two or three years ago, when the rooks were extremely destructive in Northumberland, a "war" was declared against them. In other words, a price was put upon their heads, and the peasantry were offered a chance of simultaneously obtaining the kind of "sport" they like, and earning a little pocket-money. The campaign was very successful, but not nearly so much so as an exactly similar one carried on in Haddington in the latter part of last century. And the explanation would seem to be that there used to be far more peasants who

could shoot than there are now. Indeed, a cottager nowadays must either have an eye to poaching, or be a born sportsman, before he takes out a gun-licence. It is the same with dogs, which used to provide no small share of the village amusement. The rigour with which the game-laws are enforced, and the vigilance of the Inland Revenue men, render it impossible for Hodge to divert himself with a dog.

We must add to these facts the other, that the rustic holiday has almost become a thing of the past. Some institutions, like the annual dance round the Maypole, have passed away altogether; of others only the ruins are left. In Lincolnshire the peasants on Plough Monday still carry round a coulter decorated with ribbons, and beg money for a supper; children in some portions of the Midlands, in the North, and in Cornwall, go a-"mumming" somewhat in the way their grandfathers did; there are corners of Lancashire in which country folk still perform a mutilated Easter Play as a prelude to asking the Pace or Paschal eggs that once upon a time were sought all over; in Gloucestershire, I am told, there are men living who in boyhood went a-mothering, and one could multiply to an indefinite extent the instances where still there is a survival of the vigorous pastimes that earned for England the name of Merry. But every one is dying out, and that not slowly but swiftly; its going in each instance taking away one more attraction from the fields. Even the local "feasts" and "wakes" and fairs are gradually dying out. And it cannot be said that there are any new amusements coming in their place. Cricket, football, and other games are played less rather than more in the village.

It is, therefore, not without reason that complaint is

made of the gross and palpable dulness of lower class English country life. No other labour is so utterly unrelieved by enjoyment of any kind. And what makes it the more felt is, that at the same time with the removal of these ancient amusements the intelligence of the labourers has been quickened, so that they have a greater zest than their forefathers had for life and excitement, for stir and movement and bustle. The labourer is gradually becoming more alive, his surroundings are not only duller, but in his eyes they seem very much duller than they are. And it is obvious that unless we can in some way enhance the attractions of village life, it is idle to hope that our educated villagers will be content to remain there.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EDUCATION OF HODGE.

It hardly needs to be pointed out at this time of day that schooling is only a very small part of education. What a man has learned to love or to hate, his interests and his aversions, his ambition and even his intelligence, result from influences of which the schoolmaster is only one. Among the others must be reckoned his home and early companions, the conversation to which he listens, his first attempts at work, the amusements not only of himself but of his elders, and last, but not least, his surroundings in solitary and idle moments. These all combine to form the bundle of "prejudices held in check by reason" that ultimately constitute his mind.

If this be granted it follows as an inevitable consequence that the rustic of to-day must in every important aspect

differ most essentially from those who went before him. The little urchin, who is to be seen any morning of the nineteenth as he was in the sixteenth century, "with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school," lives a life widely different from that led seventy years ago by his grandsire, who now sits at the ingle-nook and gossips discursively of the days that are long gone by. There is nothing he likes better than to tell the quiet and sympathetic listener about those happy, old times, for to the eyes of the old, childhood is always happy. Without bitterness or regret the patriarch will talk by the hour of youth that for him has all youth's glory, harsh and cruel though the particulars may appear to us. He has extremely scant memories of school, for he was only there in the winter months of a year or two, and learned absolutely nothing from the cripple who was schoolmaster, but he has not forgotten how they "barred" the master out on the shortest day and got well thrashed for it, or that if there were a meet of the hounds or a coursing match in the neighbourhood, nay, if a caravan or circus, journeying from one town to another, happened to pass the road-end, the male scholars played truant in a body. He might possibly have learned the alphabet and half of the multiplication table in winter, but he forgot it in spring, for no sooner did the sower go forth to sow than the little mite of six, armed with a wooden clapper, was sent out to the wheat-fields to scare the birds. And it was not such easy work as one may fancy, for the rooks and wood-pigeons seemed to know they had no very formidable enemy in the dumpy figure that raised its shrill treble and tried to thunder at them with bits of wood. They merely flew from the side next the pasture to that bordering on the wood or back again, content if they

were beyond range of the stones he was already learning to throw with vigorous and accurate aim. But if his task were neglected, the farmer with a hazel sapling administered a thrashing compared to which the worst beating given by the schoolmaster was a light one.

As he grew older he was gradually entered to more important work, such as picking stones and weeds, and was occasionally employed by the squire as well as the farmer. Sometimes he was sent to rake the autumn leaves lying thick on the gravel walks and grass about the hall; now and then the keeper when short of beaters would send for him to go out with a shooting party. His father and mother, having many mouths to feed and little to do it with, saw that he missed no opportunity of earning a few coppers. He was very poorly fed all the time, but the healthy life, the fresh air and exercise caused him to thrive on black bread and home-made cheese as miraculously as the exiled prophets did on pulse. He still remembers how he used on Monday morning to begin to reckon how many days must elapse before Sunday came round again, bringing the one hot dinner of the week. While he ought yet to have been at school, he had already begun in the loose way common among the last generation of agricultural labourers "to cock his eye" at the girls, and ere he reached his majority was a husband and father, prepared to send his children along the same path he had gone himself.

It was on the whole a stupefying and demoralising course of training, but it had one redeeming feature. The boy was not held so terribly close to his task but that he found time to ramble about the fields, to go birds'-nesting and trout-guddling, and as his ambition such as it was belonged exclusively to the farm, he learned to love the soil with a

passion his grandson never can know. It was no more than the unreflecting affection of the hound for his kennel, of the horse for his stable, some one may say, but it is a great deal if it were no less than that. The feeling with which he regarded his lot can scarcely be described as contentment; rather it was a dull and forced acquiescence, grown into a habit so confirmed that rebellion was not thought of. Seldom did the simple old hearts, the men who tugged their forelocks, the women who deeply curtsied when they met the vicar or the squire, imagine that "the like of we" were in any way equal with the great folks who had their carriages.

How different is the rustic youth of to-day! The legislature has determined that on no account shall he grow up in the same way as preceding generations did. Firstly, it has put an effectual stop to that very early beginning of work which used to prevail. There is no longer any bird-scaring or weeding at six or seven. Until he has attained a certain standard of knowledge, the ploughman's boy is under legal compulsion to attend school. Also, school has assumed a very different meaning to what it did. Instead of being merely a rough kind of shelter or nursery, kept by some cripple, or person otherwise incapacitated for general work, it is an organised seminary presided over by a carefully trained and qualified teacher, who works with the knowledge that what he does must come periodically under the keen and vigilant scrutiny of an expert in testing educational progress. The system has very grave defects, but at its worst it produces a very different kind of youth from the other; *viz.*, a schoolboy who up to the age of eleven or twelve has been allowed to grow not only in body but in mind; who can read almost any kind of book, while his grandfather can

scarcely spell through a local paragraph in the papers; who can write a passable letter instead of having to make his mark, and is able to cipher on paper in place of counting by methods common only among half-civilised tribes.

Yet the system has very serious blemishes. The continual outcry of teachers for increased compulsion seems to show a dislike to it on the part both of parents and scholars —a dislike the importance of which can only be estimated by remembering that interest is of the very essence of effective education, and no really valuable work can be done without it. A boy who finds school life invariably dull and mechanical might just as well be out in the fields. Perhaps this defect may be accounted for by the fact that, taken as a class, country teachers are greatly inferior to those in towns. You cannot blame the best for going where the largest schools and the best salaries are. Schoolmasters are very well aware of the deficiencies of rural teachers, and are the first to admit them. Much evidence on the point could be adduced, but a single reference may do instead of many. It is from a pamphlet on *Technical Education in the Counties*, by Messrs. G. J. Michell and E. H. Smith. They advance the following six reasons to account for their statement that "the rural schools are, as a rule, the class of elementary schools in which the worst work is done":—

"1. The teachers, as a rule, are very badly paid, and, therefore, are not the best to be obtained.

"2. The schools are almost invariably understaffed.

"3. The apparatus and plant are generally very defective.

"4. Inclement weather plays havoc with the attendance.

"5. Children are kept away too much for field work.

"6. The children leave at far too early an age, a very

small proportion of those on the register being in the standards above the fourth."

Now, it always has been a saying of the better type of rustic, that education is the poor man's fortune, and the lack of interest complained of by schoolmasters arises from a consciousness that these schools, in which, as our authorities say, "the worst work is done," offer hardly any useful education. The most diligent search fails to reveal in the curriculum anything calculated in the slightest degree to excite the rustic boy's interest in the work around him. It is not entirely without reason that many Conservatives say in print, and many more in private conversation, that education is at the root of the whole evil; it is doubtful, however, if they will agree with me in thinking that the remedy lies in making it more thorough, suitable, and intelligent.

Let us see if we can bring their somewhat vague criticism into clear and tangible form.

Firstly, it is contended that a smattering of learning serves no other purpose than that of making the labourers dissatisfied. Farm-work is, beyond all question, drudgery. It is toil that the artisan and mechanic look down upon. Consequently, when a man has sufficient schooling to be able to read in the papers that he is contemptuously called Hodge and bumpkin and clodpole by his fellow-men, and that the "bucolic mind" is a butt for scornful though good-humoured banter, he grows ashamed of his calling.

Secondly, the schooling is just sufficient to make the lad of more than average brain power restless, ambitious, and dissatisfied. He comes to hate country life because it affords no scope for his newly-discovered talents. Feeling that he ought to be in the thick of the battle, fighting his way upward, he makes no attempt to cloak a discontent that

is the most infectious of diseases. What the clever man says with a show of truth is echoed by companions who are in reality fit for nothing else than the plough-tail and the suit of hodden grey. There is a percentage of rural children whose education involves what is neither more nor less than sheer waste of money. What they learn in school is speedily forgotten in the fields.

Thirdly, no pains are taken to see that the schoolmaster has any special qualification for teaching country children. He may be, and often is, a townsman, whose acquaintance with lane and field dates from his appointment. Moreover, for the reasons already given, the chances are in favour of his being a stupid townsman, who would have taught in a town school if he had been clever enough to get the offer of a place in one.

If the object of our educational reformers had been to wean the affections of country children from their natural employment, they could scarcely have hit upon a more effective plan. The estrangement is deepened by the new kind of holiday, which has caught the labourers' fancy. By all classes of observers it has been noticed that the one country holiday which has taken up and supplanted all others is the cheap trip to town. The village publican and the shopkeepers grumble continuously at it. For months together the labourer seems to be absolutely without coin. He never pays a bill that can be avoided. If he enter the public-house it is to dawdle over one twopenny mug of beer till the landlord has lost patience. But when the railway company issues its posters announcing a cheap excursion for one, two, or three days to town, Hodge immediately becomes alert. This is the pleasure in which he thinks he can get value for his money. It would be interesting to

know the average cost of one of these expeditions. The fare one can see is very low; and, as every rustic has friends in the city, the other necessary expenses are not high. A young gamekeeper, whose relatives are all ploughmen, tells me that not many would leave home with less than three or four pounds in their pockets, and it is rare that anything is brought back.

But the importance of the cheap trip lies in its educational more than in its economical aspect. From it the rustic learns much that the schoolmaster could not teach him. Landlords of little country hotels where I stayed during the process of these inquiries often volunteered information on the point. Usually, the kitchen in such places is a kind of taproom as well, and, attracted as much as anything by its bright fire, villagers, both young and old, come hither and sit on the cold winter nights, thus escaping the dulness of their own homes. The scene is by no means a Bacchanalian one—far from it. Imagine a number of stolid-looking labourers in caps and corduroy, sitting on wooden chairs, with a tankard of very thin beer between two, and, to complete the picture, fancy a flitch of bacon suspended from the ceiling, and a rough dog or two stretched on the floor. From the conversation that goes on a very fair idea may be obtained of the thoughts occupying the mind of Hodge, and of the extent to which the cheap trip has educated him.

Long ago these men would have talked of country themes. The news they would have discussed would have been the bastardy and poaching cases at the Petty Sessions, the changes in hall and grange, the outlook for turnips and hay, the qualities of horses, and other bucolic themes. It is not that sort of conversation which goes on to-day. The ab-

sorbing topics are reminiscences of the latest trip to town. Hodge has been to the cheap theatres and music-halls, and is a keen critic of actresses and music-hall "artistes," whose merits and demerits he discusses most keenly. With his migrated kinsmen he has made practical acquaintance with beer and skittles in the taverns of Poplar and Shoreditch. He has been a bit of a rake, and recounts where in his roamings he found the most satisfactory bars, where he had the best go of gin for his twopence; nay, he will even, with a leer, describe the blandishments of the strange woman "that lieth in wait at every corner". I do not think he is one that "goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks". His attitude is rather that of curiosity aroused in regard to a new aspect of life. If he fall, it is in his cups, and tales are common of the simpletons who have been fleeced utterly, and sent home penniless, by city women who are quick to discern an easy prey in the raw and witless village youths.

What strikes him most is the contrast between town and country. He looks out of his cottage window when darkness is falling upon lane and tree and meadow, and the candles that are being lit tell the whereabouts of his neighbours. How miry and dismal and forbidding it is all! Were he to venture out he might travel the lane for miles and see nobody. Compare to it the brilliant crowded streets—the light gushing from lamp and shop-window—of which the stir and bustle and excitement form a memory that is like some entrancing vision from dreamland. The public-house where he sits, bright as it may be compared to his own home, is insignificant in comparison with the gorgeous city gin-palaces. And the silence and loneliness of the village—how sober and melancholy they feel to one who knows the

bustle and movement, the manifold diversions and amusements of town life.

To understand all this clearly, we must regard it from the peasant's point of view. Refined and cultivated men are well aware that he is under a gross delusion. The majority of them after an experience—not of the rough, garish, flaunting pleasures described, but of the more exquisite delights of social life—come to the conclusion that the sum of pleasure is greater in a quiet, unperturbed hamlet, with all its stagnant tranquillity and work-a-day tasks, than in the feverish, restless life which has for company "sorrow barricadoed evermore within the walls of cities". But Hodge is no philosopher. The cheap trip has revealed to him a contrast between living and a state of torpor, and he prefers the former. The cheap trip has opened his eyes.

Now the great fault of his school education is that it does nothing, at least nothing of importance, to counteract this tendency. The ground for hope lies in this, that those responsible have recently begun to show a lively consciousness of the defect; and in the attempts to promote a more general agricultural teaching, and in the opportunities afforded the County Councils, we may discern evidence of a very sincere desire to rectify it. But the subject demands a treatment far more radical than any that as yet has been more than dreamt of.

In time the operation of many recently made laws must be to wipe out the kind of peasant who works simply for wages as a town artisan does. Every ploughman is encouraged to hire an allotment to work himself into a small holding, and ultimately by the aid of the State to acquire a property of his own. Thus he is getting to have far more than a mere servant's interest in the cultivation of the soil,

and it is obvious that the prime object of education should be to strengthen that interest and render it more intelligent. If this be so it surely follows that the teaching of agriculture instead of following in the wake of other subjects as a kind of optional *addendum* to them should be elevated into the place of first importance. We cannot do that by means of the refuse of college-trained schoolmasters, who by their own account now staff the rural schools. For a country schoolmaster it will be necessary that the prime qualifications should be a knowledge and love of country pursuits. It is a reform more important than it looks, but the accomplishment of which would not involve much, if any, additional expense. Among the present teachers there must be a percentage fitted by nature and temperament for this kind of work, and the chief business would consist of selecting and fitting them for it.

But there is a change of almost equal importance most urgently needed. Among country children there will always be some whose taste and talents and inclination point to town as the most suitable place for them. No other discontent is so bitter as that of foiled ambition, and while the present barriers remain they always will be centres from which radiates dissatisfaction with the life of the fields. If instead of granting free education, a reform for which there is very little thankfulness and for which there never was an outcry, Lord Salisbury's Government had applied the funds to creating an educational ladder by which it would have been possible for a hamlet child to mount, a real and serious grievance would have been remedied. I cannot but think that the aim of a national system of education should be twofold. Firstly, it fits the citizen for the place he ought to fill; but, secondly, it should be a mechanism helping the individual into the place he is most fitted for.

CHAPTER IX.

VILLAGE POLITICS.

During recent years the political education of Hodge has rapidly advanced, but it would be a mistake to assume that it began with the extension of the household franchise to the counties. The English village always was a miniature duplicate of the English political world, with this difference, that creed seemed to have there a closer association with calling than it has in town. Exceptions there are and must be, but in a general way to know a villager's occupation is to know how he will vote. The vicar and the squire are for Church and State, and grumble only that the Tories are not more rigorously Conservative. The Nonconformist preacher is a Radical Disestablisher, and inclines to complain with Mr. John Morley that the pace of reform is "killingly slow". Most of the independent tradesmen and mechanics are decidedly Radical in their opinions, though the well-to-do butcher, who serves the "quality" and has a bit of land of his own, leans to the aristocratic view of things, but not quite so much so as his crony the publican, who knows that when English beer goes out of fashion through Liberal instrumentality, the glory of this ancient realm will be in decay. Why it should be so I never quite understood, but the sturdy, taciturn and strong blacksmith seems generally to be as Tory as the very gamekeeper. These all remind you of Shakespeare's middle-aged justice, "with eyes severe and beard of formal cut, full of wise saws and modern instances". It is a village expression of the slightly conventional and formal style associated with thorough-bred Conservatism You find it in the teacher's air of superiority and dogmatism

for the system of training now in vogue, though it has changed him in many respects, has not obliterated the characteristics noted by Oliver Goldsmith. No longer can his prowess be celebrated by singing that "Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage, and e'en the story ran that he could gauge," but substitute his Government certificate for the one, and certain "sciences" of South Kensington for the other, and *mutatis mutandis* he is still the old man, the owner of a portentous vocabulary, who in an argument is like the typical Briton and never knows when he is vanquished. In the minds of the butcher, the publican, and the smith a sense of superiority has been developed by quite other causes. They are to some extent men of substance, living well and drinking well, and look down with a certain air of patronage on their poor, struggling neighbours. "You have the impudence to ask me for a pint of beer on credit!" said a publican one day in my hearing to a poor, ill-dressed, shifty-looking wretch. "You damned, miserable, oily-tongued, blood-sucking sponge! Draw him a jug of bitter, Mary. By the eternal fire, he'll need it after I've had a jaw at him"; and certainly, except out of a certain book, and that the one containing the curse of Ernulphus, never did I listen to such an objurgation as he then addressed to the reptile who sat still and unconcernedly sipped his beer. But it was easy to see that vituperation of the individual was edged by contempt of a class.

The most revolutionary spark in the village is the cobbler who sits on his stool all day meditating irefully on the wrongs of the working classes. His face flushes as he tugs at the lingles, for it is hard work pulling the stout waxed ends through the heavy soles of a field labourer's boots, and he often attributes to the sufferings of humanity irritation

really due to the irksomeness of his task, but indignation frames for him many a deadly phrase to be fired off at the more plethoric blacksmith, when the two foregather at night for the "drop o' rum" which is their sleeping cup. He detests the landlord, and would forswear the "Dragon" were he not afflicted with a craving for drink, that ever and anon carries him into the accursed presence. With both the parsons he is at feud, for lying beside his awls, his broad knives, his files, and his paste-pot, is a copy of *The Rights of Man*, which is his Bible. He is the Bradlaugh of his native place, and neighbours whisper that he fears neither God, man, nor devil. It is one of his boasting beliefs that such things as brownies, ghosts, and evil spirits have no existence except in imaginations grossly superstitious, and he proclaims his readiness to remain till twelve among the mouldering tombstones of the old churchyard, or to visit at the same hour any ruined chapel, haunted wood, or other resort of "spooks" in the vicinity. But it has been noticed that he is chary of these vauntings when his enemy the keeper is at hand, and that functionary chuckles cynically when he hears of them. On the summit of a green and grassy hill grows a large-limbed oak on which "the minister's maiden," a girl of nineteen who got into trouble, hanged herself to escape her shame, and of course her ghost comes gibbering and moaning there whenever the wind rises. Now, one night the daring free-thinker ventured there in a fresh breeze and fitful moonlight. The keeper is a prudent man who never by more than a wink indicates what took place, but it is known that he was not far off, and had particular reasons for not wishing to be intruded upon; while it is equally certain that the cobbler fled home with a white, scared face, rushed into his house and carefully barred the

door. Since then he has not had the same weight and influence in the public-house discussions. It is considered that he is no better than a whimsical, viewy, speculative theorist.

What may be described as the steady, conventional, fair-and-square Liberalism of Government or Opposition is represented by the carpenters and other regular artisans. They are in touch with town operatives and greatly in favour of the eight-hours' movement. Sympathy with migrated relatives also induces a keen interest in strikes and other aggressive movements of labour in its continual warfare with capital. It is usual too for the village shopkeepers to be Liberal in politics.

The uncertain element is made up for the most part of those directly engaged in the work of tillage. To get at the real political thoughts and aspirations of the agricultural labourer is extremely difficult. In the first place, he is naturally secretive, and takes full advantage of the Ballot Act. "And how are you going to vote?" asked a candidate's wife in the Midlands of one of her husband's labourers. "My lady," was the unexpected reply, "I've not told my own missis *that*." This was very characteristic of the class. Before Richard Jefferies wrote *Hodge and his Masters* he visited about a dozen agricultural counties, and was in the habit, for the sake of learning exactly what the men were thinking about, of stopping at the little public-houses where they gathered. On these occasions, after a long afternoon walk, and the tea, bacon and eggs that form almost the only repast procurable at such places, he would make his way in among the ploughmen. As he had perfect command of the broad Wiltshire dialect, and a close acquaintance with the details of country life, it was easy

for him, with a change of dress, to be taken for some kind of superior labourer himself, and so hear and gather the intimate opinions of these men. What seems to have impressed his mind was the gusto with which they would dwell on the coming day when it would fall to their lot to plough up this and the other gentleman's "bloody park". But that was in a time of great excitement, when a variety of circumstances combined to inflame their minds. The incident shows how futile it is to hope to obtain any just idea of the rustic's thoughts by means of formal interrogation. Often the awkward clown who scratches his head, and, before a questioner, seems the picture of stupidity, is glib enough among his own cronies.

It must be remembered, too, that at present his ideas are changing and fluctuating. He has not yet had time to settle down to any permanent belief. Evidence of that is afforded by his meetings, many of which I have attended. The favourite season for them is autumn, just when the nights are beginning to lengthen considerably. Little handbills are posted up here and there, announcing that some one —it may be Mr. Joseph Arch, or it may be somebody else —is going to lecture at some village inn, the subject usually being "The Labourers' Union," or some cognate theme, and the time is dusk. Any one who cares to go a little earlier will experience no great difficulty in having a talk with the orator, who usually drives up in a hired cart an hour or so before the meeting commences, and holds a kind of *levee* in the inn parlour. At the appointed hour, a long cart is drawn up in front of the hostelry, and it is used as a platform much in the same way as a similar vehicle is used in Hyde Park on Sundays when there happens to be a demonstration. Hardly any light is employed, because the

great object of those who are present is to escape notice. Nobody knows who is coming. Hodge reads the bill, says it is too far to walk, and does not think he will attend. All the same, he does not forget to dawdle off through the fields, when the evening comes, in a way to let you understand that he is going nowhere in particular. But he keeps up his slouching gait till it eventually brings him to the village, where, in the fading light, he forms one of a dusky group of listeners standing round the cart.

In judging of his demeanour there, it must be taken into account that the slow and almost torpid agricultural mind is peculiarly sensitive to oratorical appeals. Hodge shares with children and primitive peoples a faculty for being easily moved and easily pleased. It has a kinship with the characteristic that allows him to be carried off his feet equally by a wave of revivalism, a wave of abstinence, or a wave of politics. He delightedly wore the badge of Good Templarism or a snippet of blue ribbon, and he willingly accepts a decoration from the Primrose League. These are in succession his toys and playthings. And the lecturer, undoubtedly, knows his men. His qualifications are a loud, sonorous voice, an unlimited command of rough, striking simile, and great power of vituperation. That his aspirates and grammar and pronunciation are the products of an arbitrary selection of his own is of no consequence.

A more cultivated speaker would talk above the comprehension of his hearers, and this one is just sufficiently in advance of them to lead and yet make them look up to him. He has no acquaintance with the Demosthenic axiom, but he enforces his periods with abundant gesture, which, like that of almost all self-made orators, is nearly always natural and appropriate.

The speech is a hotch-potch of current ideas upon land. I have listened to many such addresses with surprise that they should differ so slightly. Beside me are notes of one I heard delivered one September evening, in 1887, in the valley of the Severn—not far from Tewkesbury, in point of fact—and another that I chanced to hear in October, 1891, in a corner of Norfolkshire. It may be added that both are by the same man. They begin by an almost identical passage referring to the low wages paid for agricultural labour, and insinuating that the sons of toil are half-starved in order that the farmer may ride in his gig and the landlord in his carriage : a bit of rhetoric that immediately puts the speaker on good terms with his audience. But the lapse of time, and the changes it has brought, are abundantly evident in what follows. In his early speech the orator was stirring up his hearers to demand allotments ; in the latter he preached to willing ears that the rent asked for them was shamelessly exorbitant. His mind was no longer full of the three-acres-and-a-cow idea suggested by Mr. Jesse Collings, but he warmly advocated the establishment of Parish Councils, and hinted in no vague terms that these would acquire land and let it to the labourers on strictly reasonable terms. Formerly, his mind seemed full of the scheme of Land Nationalisation usually associated with the name of Mr. Henry George, but apparently he had relinquished that in favour of a plan for municipalising it. On both occasions he upbraided his hearers with their lethargy, and urged upon them that the only way to secure what he called their rights was by joining and strengthening the union. He repeated, with emphasis, that their ends were to be accomplished only by means of strikes, and seemed to regard Parliamentary action with contempt. In 1887

there were no County Councils, and in 1891 they were—and not on one occasion only—referred to in terms of withering scorn. So many gentry had been elected, that they could in no wise be regarded as truly democratic institutions.

During the course of a winter, a very great number of lectures, similar to these in tone and substance, are delivered in those rural districts where the men receive the worst wages; and, as they are reinforced by political vans and other agencies, it is no wonder that the trend of political opinion in the counties is at present towards Radicalism. The only exceptions are districts that have escaped the effects of agricultural depression, or which are represented by a member of some peculiarly popular family. After many months of talk with, and observation of, agricultural labourers, I felt more surprised at the number of county seats retained by Conservatives than at the quantity they have lost.

The chief reason for this seems to be that the Liberals have succeeded in driving a wedge into the agricultural interests. Labour and capital are at war here as elsewhere. Far more landlords and farmers than is generally supposed are convinced that the state of the rural districts is due almost exclusively to the English policy of Free Trade, and that the way to salvation lies through the reimposition of a Protective Duty on corn. But the labourer does not see that at all; he is rather inclined to construe it as praise of the dear loaf. He has not suffered from foreign competition in the direct and the palpable way of which his employers complain. Not only have his wages either remained at the same level, or have been increased, but the purchasing power of them has been extended. Necessaries

and luxuries have alike been cheapened. Thus he is deaf to the charming of those who would persuade him to be a Fair Trader. It may possibly be all true and logical that a five-shilling duty would be paid by the foreign exporter, that the revenue thus realised would lighten taxation, and all the rest of it; but the hard fact remains, that if the duty did not result in an advance of prices it would be of no service to the British farmer, and if it did, the consumer would have to pay. Hodge looks with greater favour on the plans of those who promise to advance his material comfort by measures that seem at once speedy, direct, and, as far as he is concerned, costless.

But, on the other hand, Conservative statesmanship is making a strong endeavour to re-knit the temporarily separated interests connected with land. Make every peasant a tenant, and actually, or potentially, an owner of the soil, and he will very soon come to regard all these matters from an entirely different point of view. He is, naturally, the reverse of a revolutionist. Accustomed to work of which the reward is long delayed, patient and long-suffering by temperament, he is also Conservative in his instincts. Not all the fiery oratory breathed into his ears can make a real fanatic of him. Much is rejected by his slow apprehension, much more by his suspicious and incredulous spirit. There is no lecturer paid by the Union, no political speaker, no emissary from the London Docks, who will not admit that to rouse the enthusiasm of the agricultural labourer, or to hammer a new idea into his head, is a task to baffle rhetoricians under whose influence a town audience is as clay in the hands of the potter. After descanting on his love of good speaking, this may seem a self-contradiction, but the paradox is only apparent. Taken

on one side, he is a child ; on another, the impersonification of caution and astuteness—not of quick understanding, but less a dullard than he looks.

It is but natural to ask on what kind of literature the intellect of the villager is nourished, and to satisfy my own curiosity on the subject, I very frequently walked into the newsvendor's shop and asked him what papers he sold most of. Very little is to be gleaned by studying the village reading rooms, which have multiplied vastly of recent years. They never seemed to be thronged with visitors, and the papers hardly represent the taste of the subscribers. One or two of the London dailies and the local papers are purchased, the squire sends down the *Field*, and the parson in many cases presents the *Graphic* or the *Illustrated London News*, but these are usually so clean and innocent of thumb marks they seem to receive only a casual glance.

The newsvendor is generally "the merchant" of the place. His dingy shop has on one side hunks of cheese and tubs of butter side by side with paraffin oil and coils of brown twist ; on the other there are coarse tweeds, childrens' caps, feminine necessaries, and much tape and small ware. He is quite communicative about the sale of the various papers disposed of and the quantity of the "returns". Of the half-dozen or so of journals, local or "county" in character, one is usually first, the rest nowhere. Suppose the *Advertiser* has the run, then the *Chronicle*, *Journal*, *Herald*, *Examiner*, *Mercury*, and *Express* have but four or five subscribers in his district. But in nine cases out of ten I found that a London paper called the *Weekly Budget* was far and away the most popular with country folk. Judging from a casual number or two, it seems concocted largely of hotly-spiced divorce cases, sensational stories by

authors one has not heard of, and answers to correspondents. Politics do not seem to occupy a very prominent position in it. Without desiring in any way to praise or censure the paper, it may be said that the aim of those who direct it does not seem to be the "elevation of the masses". There is a Sheffield publication somewhat similar in character that in some districts is its rival, and in Northumberland the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, a journal of distinctly higher tone, is the most widely read.

Such, briefly and inadequately sketched, are a few of the more important literary and political forces that combine to form the intellectual taste and character of the agricultural labourer. It must be remembered that he is frequently a listener to, and not seldom a participator in, those pot-house discussions of which the character has been indicated. He hearkens respectfully to the knights and dames of the Primrose League, and makes a plaything of the badges they give him. He sidles off to the agitator's meeting, and comes back with the conviction that he is a wronged and down-trodden martyr, yet full of doubts in regard to the advice he has listened to. At home he crams his mind with the gossip of the divorce court and with fiction whose chief interest centres there.

We must not judge him too harshly on account of these things. If you would rescue any one from the mire you must not be afraid of making your own shoes muddy. Agencies that would be demoralising if brought to act on a high type of intelligence may yet have a beneficial effect on a very low one. It is better for Hodge to read silly stories than not to read at all, better to argue in public-houses than go off into torpor, better to be the tool of charlatans than to allow all his interests to be atrophied;

for when his mind is quickened he will speedily shake off these evil influences.

CHAPTER X.

OUR COTTAGE HOMES.

The author of *A History of Prices*, like many other historical writers, takes a very cheerful view of the mediæval ploughman. He was, in comparison with the wages now current, very well paid, and had many privileges that have either grown obsolete altogether or have dwindled into some form of payment in kind. If the amount of fish, flesh, and fowl consumed be accepted as a true criterion, his diet was better. Work was not hard, and there was no lack of holidays and amusements. But it is impossible to show that he was well housed. Many farm-servants had to lodge with the cattle they tended. An old authority says: "Each waggoner shall sleep every night with his horses, and keep such guard as he shall wish to answer for without damage; and so shall the ox-herds sleep in the same way with their oxen". Of the shepherd it is said: "He ought to sleep in the fold, he and his dog". Very stringent regulations were issued against the use of fire. The ploughmen "must not carry fires into the byre for light, or to warm themselves, and have no candle there, or light, unless it be in a lantern and for great need and peril". Similarly it was enjoined with regard to the cow-herd, that "no fire or candle shall be carried into the cow-house". The custom lingers on to this day on a few farms, where the stableman sleeps above his horses, and the unmarried ploughmen couch in the hayloft, but during the last half-century an extraordinary im-

provement has been effected in the housing of the rural working-classes.

It is due to no effort of their own that it has been so. Townsmen occasionally go to country districts and discover, as by a flash of inspiration, why it is that the villages are being forsaken. They see a picturesque cottage, trellis overgrown with eglantine, roses flushing its walls, ivy clambering about the porch, flowers smiling before the door, and it occurs to them to enter. Then, oh horror! what a whited sepulchre the place is! Not an atom of beauty, not a shred of comfort is visible within. The brick floor is as uneven as the Bay of Biscay in a gale, the walls bare and damp, the ceiling low. "Imperial Cæsar dead and turned to clay" (or a woollen rag more likely) is in very great request "to stop a hole to keep the wind away". "In winter," says the presiding dame, "the draughts be horful and no mistake." I know of one "sweet little cottage with a date on it," as the young lady painters exclaim when they come that way sketching, in which the occupiers make themselves cosy in winter, by putting up a canopy of rough calico, being thus literally tent and house dwellers at the same time. The "date" is all very well, but it will not warm them.

When the tourist sees that sort of thing for the first time, he straightway jumps to the conclusion that the rustics are coming to town because of the bad house accommodation in the villages. Some years ago a great deal of attention was given to the matter, and a multitude of books and pamphlets written upon it, in sympathy with Lord Salisbury's endeavour to rouse public interest in artisan's dwellings. Half-an-hour's talk with any landowner who has seriously tried to improve the cottages would dispose of the idea that

Hodge migrates because his house is bad. It is most difficult to instil into his mind the most rudimentary principles of morality and decency in this respect. There are extremely few exceptions to the rule that agricultural labourers never leave a place because of a bad house, never go to one for the sake of a good one. "Ay, there was no room for fancy there," remarked an old woman to Dr. Atkinson when he was making inquiries about her original dwelling—one in which the family had to live, work, cook, and sleep—it being a place eighteen feet square. In that one word "fancy" is summed up the cottager's idea of what the plain dictates of decency mean. Proprietors who have spent a fortune in building model houses—and I refer to districts where men are contented with their wages—have the very greatest difficulty in seeing that the end is achieved. If by any kind of hugger-mugger crowding together an extra bedroom can be spared, the first thing attempted is to secure a lodger, and whoever has any regard for the peasant's morality will agree that at every risk the lodger should be excluded from the cottage home. True, the landlord who lets a house with the condition attached that no boarders are to be taken may be said to court an accusation of being a feudal tyrant, but those who bring any such charge are either extremely insincere or lamentably ignorant of English village life. In "open" villages it is notorious that nearly all the illegitimate children come to the houses where lodgers are kept, and but for the ill-assorted and forced marriages to which they are often a prelude the facts would look even worse than they do.

It may seem contrary to all reason, but no competent authority will dispute the statement that the peasant is singularly indifferent to home comforts that are prized in town.

Many a cottage woman will grumble loudly at being compelled to move from a hovel to a newly-built modern house, even when the same rent is charged. Some of her objections are due to a highly-conservative prejudice in favour of old fashions. Very likely she has baked all her life in a manner still prevalent in North Wales. The dough is placed in an iron pot with an iron cover and heaped over with a mixture of red embers, chaff, sticks, coals, and clay, which goes on smouldering and burning for hours. Early training and long practice have enabled her to bake the most exquisitely light loaves thus, for a clever woman is independent of apparatus, and she has no fancy for a modern oven. Or it may be she likes her big pot for the boiling of clothes, pigs' or cows' potatoes, etc., to be fixed opposite to the oven and cannot get on with the scullery and back kitchen of her new abode. This taste for inconvenient old fashions is temporary and will pass away with the generation. The girls who are at school now will not have learned the predilections of their grandmother.

But there are other "improvements" that the poor countrywoman never will take kindly to. Those who build new cottages seldom realise how desirable it is to bring all the labour of the cottage within the smallest possible area. It has to be done by a woman whose hands are full of work, and who will have still more heaped on her if her husband gets, in the current slang, "rooted to the soil". She has firstly the food of a large family to prepare, their clothes to make or mend, and stockings to knit and darn, besides keeping the house tidy; then she has her pig to feed, and in addition to the amount of boiling and carrying necessitated by that, if she be thrifty she will gather docks and nettles for it in spring, acorns in autumn, and also dig the potatoes

and cut the vegetables for it and the household. What time she can spare from these duties must be given to the allotment—for the most indulgent husband would expect her to weed and rake and hoe and reap for him. Should he become tenant or owner of a small holding these duties will be increased tenfold. In every country where small farming prevails it has been a reproach that the women have to work like slaves.

It should cause no surprise that a woman engaged as has been described—and thousands are so—should have a well-grounded antipathy to upstairs bedrooms. The ascent and descent form a kind of purgatory to her, and she thinks it a grievance that she should have so many places to tidy up—for all the work will fall upon her. The daughter who earns wages will not consent to do housework as well, she stickles at it more than the men. School girls afford some little help, but they are withdrawn and bundled off to a "place" as soon as the law permits. The household is therefore practically under the control and exclusive management of one woman, who is obliged to spend the greater part of her time in the apartment devoted to cooking and other domestic work. In a case of sickness it is beyond her power to be continually trotting up and down stairs attending upon the invalid. When one of her own all too frequent confinements takes place, she could never get on with being relegated to an upper storey, for it must be remembered she has neither servant nor nurse. A mother or a sister may come for a day or two, but it is still more common for her to have no assistance except that of a village crone, who comes in two or three times a day to wash the baby and perform any other little duty that may be necessary. The rustic mother must be up and about long before a fine lady

would have done with the doctor's visits ; for while she is lying cottage work is at a standstill.

Homely considerations such as these account for the fact that many peasant women look upon the interior of a caravan as the ideal house for comfort and easy work. In many parts of Yorkshire, and still more so further north, the interior of the ordinary labourer's dwelling reminds one not distantly of the inside of a house on wheels. There are two rooms, called in Scotland the "but" and the "ben". Most of the work is done in one of them, and were it not so, it would be difficult to discriminate between the kitchen and the sitting-room. Both are fitted with a couple of wooden box beds that take up nearly half of the available space. A patchwork quilt and a pair of coarse blankets lie upon a mattress stuffed with chaff from the barn. The man, his wife, and a baby occupy one of these in the living-room, for he likes a few ruminative puffs from his "cutty" after the "gathering" coal is on and his family are retired, while she must be near the fire in order to pop up at any time and put the kettle on. If there are grown-up out-of-door women workers they most likely occupy the adjoining couch, while the lads and children are in the other room. Since a family of ten or eleven or even twelve—including the father and mother—is by no means unusual, it follows that with four beds—a generous allowance—three must sleep together.

Proportionately with the comfort and thrift of the family will be the demands on space. Under the bed are the year's potatoes, beside it two big chests, one for flour and another full of oatmeal ; from the heavy beams hang flitches of bacon and hams, below the table a pig is in pickle. One of the first things to be bought by the young men and

women when they began to work was a chest for their Sunday finery, and, jealously locked, these boxes serve for side-tables. The remainder of the furniture is scanty, for the hind, who has become an out-and-out nomad, changing annually from farm to farm, knows better than to cumber himself with an overplus of luggage. Work is thus reduced to a *minimum*, and it might be thought comfort is so as well, but a tired and healthy man need not coax himself into sleeping, he will rest as deliciously on his chaff as the delicate-nerved townsman will on down.

Close at hand to such a cottage as I have described there will often be found new and improved dwellings, each with three bedrooms on an upper storey, modern grates, and ovens, a scullery, and a larder They are evidently modelled on the better class of workmen's houses in the suburbs, and, as one would think, are in every way superior to the hovels beside them, and which they are meant to replace. But yet they are not popular with the women-folk. Nor do the men care for them either. I have seen it stated in many places—even in such an excellent work as Mr. Macdonald's edition of Stephen's *Book of the Farm*, that in some counties—Essex for example—the villager pays on an average about five pounds annually for his cottage, but I have found a shilling a week much more common a rent. In some parts of Wales as little as sixpence a week is paid. Obviously a five-roomed house cannot be let for that sum, except as a matter of charity, and the ploughman—particularly if he be prohibited from turning a penny by keeping lodgers—grudges and grumbles at every extra coin extracted from him as hire for stone and mortar.

No sooner does a family come to town, however, than these notions of domestic comfort undergo a complete

revolution. The change of scene effects an entire change of predilections. Country women look upon town as a kind of Eden for them. It is not only that feminine vanity and curiosity will be gratified by gadding about and seeing the smart things in the shop windows, but how much easier a life theirs will be! No more pigs to be fed and tended, no more toil in the garden or on the allotment, hardly any baking to be done; why, it is a lady's life complete. The very water is brought into the house, whereas in the village it had to be carried from a distant well in a pitcher or with two pails and a girdle. The laborious peasant woman is not at all unwilling to undertake the care of several additional rooms when she is relieved of the burden of work that in the village bowed and aged her mother and her kindred before their time. It will be seen why her influence is thrown decidedly into the scale in favour of migration. Moreover, the offer of land is less welcome to her than to her husband. It means a heavy increase to her drudgery, and what might tempt her husband to stay is an additional inducement in her eyes to get away.

In Northumberland the cottages are usually thrown in as part of the wages, and I have asked many farmers if the hinds are particular about them. The almost invariable answer was that they are not at all so. An efficient ploughman on hiring day is an extremely independent personage in these times. Having a choice of masters, he makes very careful inquiry into the nature of the place to which he is asked to go. His perquisites in kind, the quality of the horses he will have to drive, his holidays, his harvest money and the employment to be given his children must all be minutely described and defined ere he will accept the proffered "arles". But the sort of cottage he will have to live

in is a matter of quite minor importance, the subject perhaps of one casual and listless query that is in striking contrast to his eager interrogatories respecting other points. If there are four walls and a roof he will make no objection to the cottage when once he has been satisfied with the wages offered. But in this county the regular ploughmen hardly dream of such a thing as a home, that is to say a home with tender memories and long associations. How should they when they do not reckon to live in it more than a twelve-month? Their interest in the cottage is not much deeper than that of a city tradesman in the sea-side lodgings rented for a month perhaps and never seen again. Furthermore it has to be remembered that the regularly employed agricultural labourer is extremely little in the house. In districts where he is boarded with the farmer he is hardly ever there during daylight unless it be on Sundays. His work-a-day rule is to go out at dawn and not return till dusk. Unlike the mechanic, he has no Saturday afternoon.

The "bothy" system has been often condemned, but, at the risk of appearing ungallantly to depreciate the bucolic woman, I must say that nowhere did I find such perfect cleanliness and tidiness as in the somewhat monastic bothies, several of which I went to see during my tour.

A description of one will give those who do not know it some idea of a plan carried out here and there chiefly on very large farms. It had five inmates, all young, unmarried men ranging in age, to judge by appearance, from eighteen to five or six-and-twenty. The building was old and looked like a disused saddle-room with a loft to it. When I went the family were just about to have tea. No cloth was on the table, but it and the floor were scrubbed as clean as a ship's deck. They told me that the housework was taken

by rotation for a week at a time, he on whom it devolved being for that period the "Bessie" of the household. He had made the tea, cut and buttered the bread, and was boiling the eggs as I entered. The most diligent housewife might have envied the tidy hearth, the shining fender and fire-irons, the well-brushed pot and kettle. Nor did the sturdy labourers show themselves blind to the æsthetic element, though a professed "æsthetician," as the American journalists call Mr. Oscar Wilde, might possibly have laughed at their decorative effects, and yet even he would have admitted the beauty of a great bunch of red and white roses placed on the table. The wall pictures formed a dream of fair women, and apparently had been cut from calendars, cheap newspapers, and advertisement sheets. As these ploughmen Benedicts took their tea, their eyes were feasted on the features of Miss Fortescue and Miss Mary Anderson, Miss Maude Millet and the Alhambra ballet girls, in addition to highly idealised Juliets, Beatrices, and other stock subjects for the illustration "given away with this number".

The beds were up in what had once been a loft, and were the strong iron variety standing on clean-swept, uncovered deal, and looking clean to say the least of it. Until they came together at the preceding term, they had all been strangers to one another the men said. They liked the life "fine," and did not feel at all dull. On winter nights they amused themselves with draughts, and one of their number played the concertina. Occasionally they moved the table out of their living room and managed to get up a dance. "With the house servants as partners?" I suggested, and a general smile seemed to show that they were not without female visitors occasionally. Youths placed as they were are almost certain to indulge in more or less wild "larks,"

which, when the prevailing influence happens to be bad, easily degenerate into absolute vice. But with all its drawbacks the bothy system is an improvement on that which it superseded. Not so very long ago each of these men would have been boarded in a strange family where the chances were distinctly in favour of there being a crowded cottage with grown-up women who would have had to sleep it might be in the same room, but certainly in close proximity to them. It was even worse when a young woman field-worker came into a strange family with full-grown sons. But the more scandalous outrages on decency have now become so rare and are so surely disappearing that it is unnecessary to do more than give them a passing reference.

From a strictly moral and sanitary point of view the cottage question is of the highest importance, and for many a year is likely to occupy the attention of philanthropic statesmen. Despite the Medical Officer of Health and the Inspector of Nuisances, the villager will continue to have his "midden" too near his dwelling, or a cess-pool close to the well. The cottage supply of water is itself a subject demanding the most serious attention. But the dwellings have, as I have tried to show, nothing or almost nothing to do with the rural exodus as far as the agricultural labourer is concerned. The village tradesmen and artisans who usually stay for a much longer period in one place are perhaps the exceptions, but even in their case migration is seldom a result of deficient house accommodation. It has to be remembered that recently many of the dwellings have been vacated, and those who remain have a greater choice, while the very worst buildings are naturally the first allowed to go to ruin. But the circumstance, that so many people associate the exodus with bad houses, is itself a reason why the facts should be looked into.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

CAN WAGES BE RAISED?

We have now glanced at most of the causes which are alleged to make the English villager discontented with his lot, and seen that the problem we have to discuss is a very complicated and difficult one. It is not to be comprehended by the mere perusal of statistics, unless the reader is at the same time able to realise what we may call the village atmosphere. Before resolving to migrate, some such considerations as the following may be supposed to pass through the mind of the capable and intelligent peasant, it being agreed that the best man is the readiest to leave. He lives in a world of grumbling farmers and landlords, and sees for himself that the profits of agriculture have fallen, and are likely still further to decrease. By means of cheap trips, and the improved travelling facilities of our time, he has been enabled to go abroad to town and city, learning there how much more active, stirring, and potential life may be than it is in the stagnant hamlet. He also knows that not only is he becoming awake to the gross dulness and inertia of country life, but year by year, through the fading away of the merry old customs, these are becoming more marked. A village winter at the end of the nineteenth century is both relatively and absolutely much more dismal than

winter was at the end of the eighteenth. The rustic goes to town in part to revive his dying capacity for laughter. He wishes too that his children may have a better chance of getting on in the world than has fallen to his lot, and he finds in the village a very defective educational arrangement. So he is in search of a school also. Moreover, in food, dress, and ways of thinking, he is gradually becoming like the city artisan, thanks to cheap newspapers, cheap town tailors, and other enterprising tradesmen. To blame the peasant for entertaining thoughts like these would be most unreasonable and unjust, since they are the natural products of the many stimulating and educational forces that have been applied to his mind. We formerly had it on our conscience that he was such a dull, contented, plodding blockhead; it would be unfair to complain that, being wakened up out of his lethargy, he turns out to be more stirring, restless, ambitious, and aggressive than could have been calculated.

Those who are thoroughly familiar with the conditions of the problem know that it is neither practicable nor possible under modern conditions to stay this exodus, to root the peasant on the soil, to make him once more in reality if not in name *adscriptus glebæ*. But forasmuch as it is not conducive to the national interests that population should be all massed in a few centres, and since after all it is but a proportion of the villagers who desire to leave, there is every inducement for us to revive and develop the attractions of country life, so that enough may remain to till the soil and recruit the towns. And that this is likely to prove no light or easy task may be inferred from a declaration made in the House of Commons by the Minister for Agriculture on the 22nd February, 1892, to the effect that the agricultural

problem of the future was not going to be the question of foreign competition, but the difficulty of providing labour on the farms. I propose now to deal in succession with the various plans and suggestions made for the advancement of this end from whatever quarter they may happen to have come.

Naturally enough many people are convinced that the only exit from the difficulty lies in an increase of wages. My experience in the village has usually been as follows: The Dissenting parson says: "Let the employers pay the poor men better and they will not leave," and the Liberal lecturer, the newspaper correspondent, and the Trades' Union representative harp on the same theme. But the squire, the vicar, and the farmer traverse the statement. They assert that Hodge has the best of the bargain, and that less than they he has suffered from the fall of prices.

It would be impossible to imagine a task more difficult than that of arriving at the truth of this controversy. The voluminous writing on the subject merely confuses the reader. One author would have you believe the agricultural labourer to be a poor wretch starving on a pittance; another that he is of all unskilled toilers the most comfortable. For this the reason is plain. At one time wages all over the country were nearly uniform, and seldom changed. It is now almost impossible to find two counties, or even two districts of the same county, in which either the methods of payment or the amounts paid are alike. In the same place fluctuation is either periodic or continual. Where the customary engagement is made for twelve months the scale is annually revised at the March hirings; where it is to last for six months the same thing is done bi-annually at the "statis" or statute fairs. But it is inaccurate to talk of a

scale, for the bargains are as a rule individual in character, *i.e.*, each contract is made separately between man and master. Many farmers courteously gave me their wages'-book to inspect for myself when I questioned them, and I found that, especially on large holdings, where say a dozen hands were employed, that scarcely two workmen were paid exactly at the same rate. It was common for the tenants to explain that a good man was worth his weight in gold to them, an inferior man dear at any price.

A single illustration will suffice to show the nature of the innumerable contradictions to which this state of things gives rise. My first quotation will be from *Life in Our Villages* (Cassell & Co., 1891), and I make it without desiring to cast any imputation upon the good faith of the frank and interesting author, despite the fact that his work has a very perceptible political purpose informing it. "In Essex," he says, "so far as I have seen it, I don't think it would be far wrong to put down the income of an able-bodied labourer at from five to ten pounds in harvest, and for the rest of the year ten or eleven shillings a week, *when in work*"—the italics are mine. He had just above, on page 36, quoted a labourer who said: "Many's the time as I've been home with five or six shillings for my week's pay".

Compare this with the following, for which a very able and trustworthy writer on agriculture is responsible—I refer to Mr. James Macdonald of the *Farming World*, under whose editorship a thoroughly revised edition of *The Book of the Farm* appeared in 1891. His account is that: "In Essex a horsekeeper or ploughman is paid as follows:—

Fifty-two weeks at 14s. per week . .	£36	8	0
Extra for hay-making, four weeks . .	1	10	0
Do. in harvesting	3	10	0
Cottage	5	0	0
Firewood, beer money, etc., say . .	1	2	0
Total	£47	10	0

This is the rate for the best men. Ordinary men get about 1s. per week less. In the neighbourhood of London the rate of wages is higher by two or three shillings a week. On the other hand, in counties away from London the rate is lower, 10s., 11s., and 12s. per week, with similar perquisites, being paid in several English counties."

Let us put side by side with these very divergent statements the estimate formed by a leading Tory journalist, Mr. T. E. Kebbel, whose book on *English Country Life* was also published in 1891. To adduce earlier authorities would be to incur the rebuke that the past is being placed in contrast with the present. This is Mr. Kebbel's account: "It appears on the whole that the total yearly income of an ordinary English day labourer, including both wages and perquisites of every kind, ranges from about £50 a year in Northumberland to a little over £30 in Wiltshire and other south-western counties. This gives an average of £40 a year. But it is only the exceptionally low wages paid in a few counties which pulls down the average even so low as this. In the eastern, midland, northern, and south-east counties, it is commoner to find the sum-total rising to £43 and £44 than sinking to £37 or £38. Shepherds, waggoners, and stockmen are paid at a higher rate, and their wages average about £50 a year."

Every one who has impartially studied both sides of the

controversy will admit that the Liberal journalist and the Tory journalist almost invariably arrive at views as antagonistic as these are, even where there is not the slightest reason to suspect wilful misrepresentation, such as is commonly practised in the less respectable party prints. The error is not that of the reporters, but of those who supply them with the information. A Radical journalist on being sent to the villages asks the men themselves how they are paid, and of course is answered so as to make out the worst possible case. The Englishman's right to grumble is not allowed to lapse when the labourer has a chance of putting it into operation, and, depend upon it, he will paint his position in very dark colours if he has the opportunity. He would not be human if he did not. In his struggle for life the smallness of his income is being continually impressed on him. He exaggerates his toil, and minimises the reward of it. And the Radical scribe has no check upon him, for the Dissenting minister and the others who yield him information are also touched with the bias that springs from keen partisanship. Moreover, Radical journalists are under great temptations to make the worst of things, and almost invariably confine their journeys to a few bad districts that are the plague spots of English agriculture. It is the recognised manœuvre for producing the harrowing picture that is in request, for portraying the down-trodden serf in his misery.

But the Tory commissioner is under equally strong temptations to give an unconsciously false view of the situation. He trusts largely to the farmer, the squire, and the parson, and all three of them are inclined to take an exaggerated view of Hodge's income. Were he paid a fixed and definite sum in cash there would be no room for mis-

representation, but the giver of payment in kind is always inclined to value it more highly than the receiver. The servant maintains he has a grievance; the master, whether it be a case of the wish being father to the thought or not, inclines to attribute his discontent to those "pestilent agitators". On the Conservative side political bias is as marked as on the other.

These considerations make me chary of venturing upon any definite statement, though I have devoted much inquiry to this very interesting subject. Of only a very few counties is it possible to state the actual wages being paid and received, and one of the most important of these is Northumberland. There is hardly any room for dispute as regards this county. The ploughman gets his 15s. a week paid fortnightly, his "lot" of potatoes amounting to 1000 or 1200 yards, his cottage rent free, his coals led from the pit, and some minor privileges, such as pasturage for his cow, if he has one, at a very cheap rate. I asked the tenant of a very large farm—one whose regard for his servants' welfare may be judged from the circumstance that the latest comer had been eight years with him and the oldest hind was a patriarch of seventy-five who had been born in the service of my friend's father and had known no other—what was the total money value of the wage. His answer was that he was quite willing to commute the perquisites for a cash payment of 21s. a week and monthly engagements, and he would charge 1s. a week for the cottage. No one acquainted with it will deny that these are the prevalent wages of the district, which all the same is one that has most severely suffered from the exodus.

In the county of Durham there are many farms on which the wages are quite a shilling a week better. Wages have

risen naturally wherever other occupations have come into competition with agriculture in the labour market. It is the great mining industry that in the North of England accounts for the comfort of the farm-servants. Similar causes have been at work in Wales, in Yorkshire and Lancashire, in Cheshire and Stafford and Warwick. Speaking in a general way, the agricultural labourer does not complain in these localities of being underpaid. If he can in his own estimation better himself by migration he goes to town, but his comparative contentment may be measured by the absence of agitation.

Unfortunately there are many large and important areas in which the agricultural labourer hardly receives sufficient to support existence on. I am desirous of writing strictly within the limits of my own knowledge and concerning cases wherein farmer and farm-servant are in such agreement as to the facts that doubt is inadmissible, and the mention of one or two districts by no means implies that there are not others equally as bad. There are householders in Gloucestershire tenanting pleasant cottages whose outlook is upon the "high uneven" Cotswolds, who have not more than 10s. a week in money and perquisites that certainly do not come to 2s. more wherewith themselves and a young family have to be fed and dressed and lodged. How they manage to thrive in health as they do is a mystery. Again, in the neighbouring county of Wilts there is equal hardship. There are many neatly-thatched picturesque dwellings cosily hidden in nooks of the Downs, in dales through which the running water has fretted a channel, where the income is not so large. On the east coast there are even worse cases. Norfolk and Suffolk give me the impression of being at the present moment the most wretched of

agricultural counties, so far as the labourer is concerned. It was only in East Anglia that I found actual cases of able-bodied men keeping their families on a wage of eighteen-pence a day, Sundays not included. Game preservers complain of the amount of poaching that goes on, but one can hardly wonder at it. A man who has not meat to his dinner more than once out of seven times is under strong temptations to fill his pot with the first wild thing he can lay hands on. Yet I could give the addresses of agricultural labourers in Essex, Hertfordshire, and even Berkshire, where the family income is not much in excess of what I have mentioned. The extraordinary contrasts presented by the various shires tend to produce a feeling of scepticism in regard to averages. Sufficient statistics to make them trustworthy have not yet been collected, and it would be a difficult task to do so.

Between admitting that many labourers are underpaid and pointing out how their wages are to be increased there is a vast difference. Parliament is about as likely to "make it felony to drink small beer" as to order that farm-servants shall be paid at a fixed and uniform rate.

The only alternative is combination, but the calling of agriculture is one in which Trades' Unionism works under difficulties. During the last twenty years or so it has achieved some local successes, but these seem to be transitory in character, and the tendency is now for wages to fall back again. In Norfolk and Suffolk I found the more intelligent labourers repentant for having gone out on strike during harvest, they attributing several failures that had taken place to their action. It is quite clear and obvious to them that their employers are not to be classed with those capitalists who have in the past amassed fortunes

by the devices of the sweater. It is apparent to the most casual observer that no considerable profits are at present being made out of agriculture. Whenever I visit a familiar district the same monotonous facts meet my observation. Rich farmers who made money in better times declare that they are living on their savings. Tenants whose forefathers have held the same holding for generations retire from the business altogether, or take a smaller place. And it is very significant that all three branches of the agricultural calling suffer or prosper together. Where the hind is very badly paid, the farmers are usually bordering on bankruptcy, and the quantity of holdings unlet tell their own tale as to the landlord's loss. British farmers have long had a reputation for being long-headed, and it is incredible that they would allow land to go out of cultivation if they saw how to cultivate it to advantage. Moreover, if a farm falls vacant in one of the few districts that have escaped the depression, the competition for it is as keen as it used to be everywhere in the palmy days of agriculture. While I was staying in Cheshire in the December of 1891 such a case actually occurred. A farmer had bought a little estate of his own in Cambridgeshire, and gave up his old holding. "Were there many applicants?" I asked the agent. "So many I got tired of opening them," he said, and he showed me a huge bundle. The farm, it may be said, was one of under a hundred acres, and forms part of the Alderley estate. If wheat land were as profitable as dairy land there would soon be the same rivalry for it. But is it not obvious that if it be not so, if tenants cannot make a livelihood out of holdings adapted for grain, it is simply impossible for combination to be effectual? As the homely Scots proverb says: "You cannot get the breeks aff a Hielanter". For

men to unite to any purpose they must all be earning about the same wage.

Again, the tendency of agricultural change is to reduce the amount of work to be done. Over and over again I have been told by successful farmers of my acquaintance, at times when they never dreamt of my making use of their remarks, that the great secret of earning a profit nowadays is to keep down the labour bill; that the idea is to hire as many acres as you can and employ the smallest possible number of men.

Modern farmers are all in favour of that line of policy. Stock and sheep and horses need fewer workmen than ploughing and sowing and reaping. But the most prominent features of the latest agricultural returns is the enormous increase in pasture land. Roughly speaking, we are turning arable land into permanent grass at the rate of 100,000 acres annually. In the same period the stock of cattle in Great Britain has increased by over a million head, and horses are multiplying—especially mares for breeding—at a proportionate rate. Cows, young cattle, and sheep swell correspondingly in numbers, and there is every prospect of our old-fashioned farmers developing into graziers, whose ideal holding will be a big farm with big fields and hardly any cottages.

In face of these facts, it does not seem worth while to argue against any sanguine belief that wages will rise; they are much more likely to drop. Therefore, it seems a waste of time to moan over the fact and its inevitable consequences. It is much more sensible and practical to ask what other ways lie open for improving the condition of the agricultural labourer.

CHAPTER II.

ALLOTMENTS.

THE leading Liberal of Mid-Oxford, who said to the *Daily News* commissioner: "This talk about the villages being put right by allotments is the sheerest humbug," would command the assent of every practical authority I have consulted. It is common to find, as the correspondent referred to discovered, that "the cheapest cottages, and the most thriving allotments, and the lowest wages" occur simultaneously. The rapid increase of allotments in recent years is beside the question. It is not the agricultural labourer—not even the villager whose income comes indirectly from the land, who is keen after them—but the artisan of the small towns.

To demonstrate this it is only necessary to turn to the very instructive "Return of Allotments and Small Holdings in Great Britain," issued by the Board of Agriculture in 1890. At a first glance the figures appear to be most satisfactory. In 1873 there were 246,398 allotments in Great Britain, but in 1890 the number had risen to 455,005, and, though later statistics are not attainable, the increase is undoubtedly proceeding, and most likely at an accelerated pace. That it should do so is a matter for congratulation. Men who labour in mines and factories and workshops never will find a healthier, wiser, or more profitable amusement for the spare hours which they are bent on having than is to be derived from tilling a little patch of ground. A closer examination shows, however, that the demand for allotments has been much more

vigorously made in the thickly-populated than in the half-deserted districts.

The report says that "the mining counties of Durham and Glamorgan show a remarkable increase since 1886, their allotments appearing to have been more than doubled in the last four years". But the whole population of Wales seems to be concentrating itself in Glamorganshire, its inhabitants having increased by 34·4 per cent. since last census, a rise that places it easily first among the growing ex-metropolitan counties. The inhabitants of Durham have increased by 17·2 per cent., which also is an extraordinary growth, though it looks small as compared with Glamorgan. To go on with the report: "Large increases also appear in Kent and Stafford". Kent has increased in population by 16·8 per cent.; Stafford by 10·4. In only four English counties is a decline apparent. They are Cornwall, Hereford, Northumberland, and the East Riding of Yorkshire. In Cornwall the population has fallen off by 2·4 per cent., and the diminution in the number of allotments is by the collectors ascribed to "the removal of country labourers to more remunerative railway work". The population of Hereford has decreased by 4·3 per cent. Yorkshire (East Riding) has indeed had an addition of population (9·4 per cent.), but the increase is exclusively in the two districts of York and Sculcoates, the others showing a falling off. In Northumberland a similar state of things has prevailed. From the agricultural villages where allotments were once common the people have migrated to the great towns, and the half and quarter acres have either merged into the farms or been taken by the one exceptional cottager who adds rood to rood and is able to make something out of it.

A single example, selected merely because I happen to have a familiar acquaintance with the locality, will illustrate the true bearing of the returns. Of Welsh counties Anglesey is one of the most typically agricultural, and naturally has, therefore, a declining population. It is credited with 652 allotments of less than an acre. But there are 65 rural parishes or townships where there is not a single one. When visiting the farms I was very much struck with this fact, although I had not at the time looked up the official returns, and was constantly inquiring how it came to be so. "The labourers never had asked for anything of the kind," was the invariable answer. They are tolerably well paid, and the district is one where the ancient and patriarchal custom of feeding the men at the farmhouse still prevails. Engagements are made for six months, and of course employment is constant; so that in point of fact a ploughman has not sufficient leisure to dig and tend an allotment. His cottage garden affords a constant supply of vegetables for his table, and it would be of no avail for him to grow them for sale, as his neighbours are as well off as himself. In the little villages, or rather hamlets, therefore, no one wants an allotment.

How different is the case when you come to a little town! Out of the total 652 allotments of under one acre in Anglesey no fewer than 475 are credited to Holyhead. For one of these, if it happens to fall vacant, there is invariably a keen competition, and were the landlord—as he has often been pressed to do—to part with the land for building purposes, great would be the consternation of the tenants. To the working men of a little town an allotment means a substantial addition to income. Most of those at

Holyhead are a sixteenth of an acre in extent only, and the rent charged for that portion of land is 7s. 6d. annually. Several of the artisans who hold them claim to have made over seven pounds in cash last year out of the produce they sold, besides keeping their own tables well supplied with vegetables.

Wherever there is sufficient population to constitute a market there is an eager demand for plots of land, and it is to be hoped that every endeavour will be made to meet it. To a man who, in the stifling atmosphere of a crowded shop or workshop, has all day been engaged on labour that demands care, attention, and nicety of touch, rather than muscular exertion, it must be a very bracing exercise and a most healthy pleasure to work for an hour or two under the open sky among his own plants and berries and with the scent of the newly dug earth rising about him.

But when I endorsed the statement that low wages and thriving allotments usually go together, I did not refer to the market gardening of industrious townsmen. It was of the village allotment I was thinking. Let us try and see what a rood of land means to the average agricultural labourer. It is indisputable that where he is well off otherwise he cares little about it; where he is badly off his land hunger is most ardent. Passing from county to county I have frequently been amazed at the vast difference in the ideas of the rustics. Talk to those of Norfolk or Wilts about allotments and they will listen and talk back with brightness and interest for hours; setting forth their grievances as to situation, rent, and the plans they would like to carry out. Go into Cheshire or to a Durham farm —not to a mining district remember—or to Northumberland,

and it is found that the subject has lost all interest. A land agent on a large scale told me he did not believe that in all the well-tilled district between the Wansbeck and Tweed there had been a single application for allotments, and one kindly owner who insisted on his men each having one was asked to take them back again.

The truth is that an allotment in a purely rural district comes to be neither more nor less than a bad substitute for payment in kind. A labourer who earns only a matter of twelve shillings a week will grasp at it as a means of staving off absolute starvation. Besides, it is a deplorable fact that where wages are lowest employment is least constant. Thus in Essex say a ploughman has days of enforced leisure, when, if he did not work on his allotment, he would be absolutely idle. But a Northumbrian hind with a twelve months' engagement, and hours that last nearly from dawn to dusk, cannot work both for himself and his master. He regards digging even his garden as a most unwelcome addition to his toil. It is not the change to him that it is to the artisan. The arrangement by which he shares in the produce of his master's land is infinitely more satisfactory. Nor is it possible to job off refuse on him, which is the grievance in other counties where there is payment in kind. His crop is his own from the moment it is planted, and, like his master, he takes the luck of the seasons. Were all farm-servants equally well off there would be no demand for allotments on their part.

A piece of ground is, however, an invaluable help to those whose employment is casual or inconstant in character, though even then the benefit is indirect. The idea of cultivating a village plot for the market is too absurd to require examination, and would be so if it were for nothing

save the cost of carriage from any ordinary rural neighbourhood. But to an industrious man, whose hours of work are not very long, the tenancy of a quarter of an acre of land may mean the difference between semi-starvation and comparative comfort. More than this he cannot attend to thoroughly under spade cultivation. If a plough has to be employed, it is better, for the sake of clearness, to consider the plot as a small holding, though there is really no essential difference between them. Over all England there were in 1890 a little over 144,000 holdings of more than one and less than five acres, and a vast majority of these are held by labourers, who cultivate them and carry on some other pursuit as well. I have gone over villages in which the jobbing gardener, the tailor, the shoemaker, the carrier, and their kind had each a holding classified thus. People with single and half acres generally work them on the same plan. Usually the plot is divided into two breaks. One the tenant manures very thoroughly and sets with potatoes, sowing the rest with some kind of grain, the crops being taken year and year about. The object of this simple rotation is plain enough. In his mind's eye the labourer has his pig all the while. He will feed it, and to a great extent his family also, on the roots. The corn provides bedding for it and manure for the land against next seed-time. With cabbages in his garden, a huge pit full of potatoes, and flitches of bacon adorning his kitchen, the peasant may face winter with a bold heart. It is impossible for him to die of want.

But except where the character of the district renders it practicable for a labourer to climb steadily from a small tenancy to a large one, this style of allotment is attended with serious disadvantages. Firstly, there is the worry of

getting a plough. Visionaries have drawn many fancy pictures of the ideal village community, where every householder will have his plot of earth and the cultivation will be accomplished by co-operation. One would possess a harrow, another a plough, number three a cart, number four and number five each a horse, and so on, and they would manage to get on by a system of borrowing and lending. The dreamers of such fantastic dreams as these know extremely little either of English villagers or English agriculture. It is a regrettable feature of humanity that wherever a few people are gathered together, envy, hatred, backbiting, and jealousy exist to an extent unknown in larger communities. The greater a city is the less are these passions manifested. One may fancy a village street on a fine day in April, when the gardener and the tailor both want their "taters" set, and the stubborn carter is bent on going off with the horse for a load of coals.

Again, in our uncertain climate it usually happens that all who are engaged in agriculture want the same implements on the very same day, and the heartburnings that would ensue among the multitude of claimants for the village plough or the co-operative harrow are more easily imagined than described. These ill-feelings would be deepened by the endless disputes sure to arise in regard to breakages and repairs. Hodge is not very careful of other people's property. Mr. Albert Grey, who has had some experience of co-operation, says if the gateposts were a hundred yards apart, he would contrive to run his cart-wheel against one of them.

In villages where there have been acre and half-acre allotments for the last three or four generations the difficulty is usually surmounted in one of three ways, which may be

illustrated from the actual facts of one case. Firstly, there is a man called the "crofter," because in addition to working at his calling of gardener he cultivates a croft of four acres. He can afford neither to keep nor to hire a horse, but as his employment is irregular, he is able to barter his labour for the use of horses and men and implements. He gives so many days' work to a neighbouring farmer, who, in return, does his ploughing and other work. The joiner has only half-an-acre, and, like several other village artisans, manages to coax one of the farmers for whom he works to send him a "draught" for nothing at seed-time. He finds, however, that those who ask favours must not be particular about the manner of the gift, and in the majority of years he is unable to have his plough till the farmers' work is done and the season is almost too advanced for sowing. Finally there are those who have no friendly connections with any farmer, and whose only resource is to hire a man in the village who lives by doing casual work as a carter. They complain that the expense is such a serious inroad upon the profits as to make half-an-acre hardly worth having under the conditions. One finds them continually experimenting, now trying a cottage with, and anon tenanting one without, an allotment. But in no case does an allotment of this kind keep an intending migrant from moving.

The truth of the matter is that this small quantity of land will not under any but the most favourable conditions yield a large profit. Mr. Chaplin says he "knows scores of instances where men with a single acre, and sometimes less, have been able to make a profit of from £5 to £8, and as much even in one case as £10 a year";[1] but such information is of no great

[1] Speech in the House of Commons, 22nd February, 1892.

value unless accompanied by a statement of the time and labour given to the land. He had previously referred to "the constant want of employment to which they (the labourers) have been liable, especially during the winter months". Five pounds profit on half-an-acre is a liberal interpretation of his figures, and this is just about equal to two shillings a week—no very munificent remuneration, if meant as a recompense for toil on days when the labourer would in many parts of England have been earning regular wages. And Mr. Chaplin's estimate seems more applicable to exceptional than to average cases. Sixteen pounds an acre is a very high return for potatoes, and half as much is extremely good for barley; but that would give only £6 for half-an-acre cultivated as has been described. Take off £1 for rent—no unreasonable sum, considering that such crops would be impossible except on the pick of the land—and after deducting another pound for the expenses—seed, threshing, etc.—there remains a net profit of something like £4. Now this sum is more than a guess or an arm-chair calculation; by questioning the most intelligent and successful allotment-holders in many different parts of the country I find that they reckon it a very satisfactory return. It is trivial in comparison with the labour involved, and is liable to be lost through the owner not being able to attend to his crop. Suppose—as happened in many a place during the windy autumn of 1891—a rising gale is threatening to shake every grain out of the ripe corn, can you expect the farmer, instead of mustering all his available hands to save his own wide and yellow acres, to lose his year's increase by granting his men a holiday that each may save his own little patch of corn?

But it is difficult to appraise the annual value of an allot-

ment in money. If the peasant were unable to keep a pig, and had to buy all the butcher meat, all the potatoes, all the meal for his household, the outlay would come to more than £4 a year, and he would never have such a full and comfortable house. The Northumbrian labourer, however, is much better off with his "lot" among the crops of his employer, since the cultivation of it involves no extra trouble and leads to no friction with his master. That is why I repeat that, as far as the agricultural labourer is concerned, a half-acre allotment is only a poor substitute for payment in kind. It must be borne in mind, however, that where such a tenancy is in the nature of a small holding, it is on a different footing, and must be separately considered.

An allotment to be of the highest service to a villager ought to be such that he can work it himself, and its extent ought to depend on the nature of his occupation. No feeling other than intense compassion can be felt for the south-country farm-servant who struggles with an allotment in addition to his ordinary work. He is not over-strong to begin with, for he has been ill-fed all his life, and when young was stinted and hindered in his growth by being set to heavy tasks at too early an age. Common humanity would say that the most advisable thing for him to do, after trudging wearily home from his hard day's work, is to get his supper, and as quickly as may be turn into bed, or, at any-rate, idle about in restfulness till his time for retiring comes. He is in no fit condition to go out on his allotment and engage in the severe and tiresome work of digging for several hours more—work that has no pleasure to him, for all day long he has had enough and to spare of mother Earth and the open air. Only the most wretched and worst-paid

specimens of the class would think of undertaking anything of the kind, and with them the tenancy of an allotment must often mean the heaping of more toil upon the women and children. As to the farm-labourer saving anything out of the proceeds, it is not in the slightest degree likely that he will attempt it. He is at the beginning living too close to the borders of mere subsistence, and would be only too glad to add a little butter to his bread or clothe himself more warmly with the proceeds of this very painful labour. It is not in such circumstances that a man opens a banking account.

But this is no argument whatever against the principle of allotments. In our country villages there are thousands of poor cottagers whose employment is neither so hard nor so regular as that of the farm-servant, and to whom digging is not drudgery, but healthy exercise. Most likely too the artisans and casual labourers of the village, having far more time on their hands, and taking a pleasure in the work, will make more out of their plots than the agricultural labourer could. And if the rural exodus is to be arrested at all, it will be by making all classes more comfortable—the country cobbler as well as the farm-servant.

It is beyond hope of course that the privilege of digging and hoeing a quarter of an acre of land will ever tempt people to stay in the village, or induce the migrants to come back, but in this case every little helps. And at all events the multiplication of allotments wakens a new interest in the soil, from which the working man was in some danger of becoming divorced. Doubtless a proportion of those who, by the new facilities, are led to try their hands at the cultivation of a quillet will develop a taste for agriculture that will

eventually lead them up the agricultural ladder that statesmen are bent on strengthening—from the allotment to the small holding, from the small holding to the moderately-sized farm, from the farm to ownership. At almost any cost it is desirable to strengthen and encourage in country people an interest in and love of tillage. That is the only affection which will worthily replace the taste for the street and the music-hall.

CHAPTER III.

SMALL FARMS.

THERE is a passage in Major Craigie's latest report (issued in the beginning of 1892) on agriculture that is contrary to the impression produced by traversing the rural districts. It is as follows: "The total number of returns from occupiers of land, and of those obtained by estimates where occupiers omitted to return the schedules, . . . is 578,474. This is again a larger total than last year, and compares with 577,841 in 1890, with 574,840 in 1889, 570,206 in 1888, and 563,119 in 1887." On these facts he comments thus: "These totals, after making reasonable allowance for occupiers with more than one holding, and for a possibly more exhaustive collection from the minor holdings, suggest a continued if slight increase in the number of persons occupying land, the collectors again attributing the augmented returns to an extension of the process of sub-divi-

sion of holdings which has been going on in recent years".

Now compare this official statement with that of an observer recording simply what he sees. "Wherever I have been," writes the *Daily News* commissioner, "I have found, as I have repeatedly said, that as a rule almost without exception population has been dwindling and small farms have been consolidating into large ones." Many passages from my own contributions to newspapers might be quoted to the same effect. The growth of large farms by the disappearance of small ones has been a constant theme with many of us.

Before proceeding to deal with what is only an apparent contradiction, it will be useful to bring under the reader's notice a table, compiled by Major Craigie for another return, which shows that the number of occupiers of small tenancies of land is very much larger than is generally supposed. These are the figures:—

Small holdings other than allotments not exceeding fifty acres in extent	409,422
Allotments detached (under one acre)	455,005
Railway allotments detached, under one acre (as returned in 1886)	39,115
Garden allotments of and over one-eighth acre attached to cottages (as returned in 1886)	262,614
Railway allotments of and over one-eighth acre attached to cottages (as returned in 1886)	6,142
Potato ground, cow runs (as returned in 1886)	128,448
Total	1,300,746

Now, to return to the conflicting statements with which we started. The impeccable and official witness says that "the process of sub-division of holdings is going on"; the

independent and unofficial witness that "small farms have been consolidating into large ones". From the figures we are bound to admit that, taking the country as a whole, the number of occupiers small and great is very large, and is steadily increasing; yet it is equally beyond question that in many of the most important agricultural districts the opposite tendency prevails. Hardly any trustworthy writer on the topic has failed to comment on it. The explanation lies in the extreme diversity of districts and the varying conditions of tillage. In some counties the small holding flourishes amain; in many others it is a dead failure.

Let us see from the examination of typical examples where and how small farming succeeds, where and how it is a failure. For the former of these purposes there is no county like Cheshire. It is a local proverb there that nobody can tell where the small farmer begins and the labourer ends. The ladder requires no mending, it is complete already. Nearly every labourer has his little holding, and if he be industrious and prudent it is the landlord's interest to promote him step by step from a larger to a larger one, till he be able to quit service altogether and devote all his energy to his farm. Nor need that be the end of his career. It is not unusual for the farmer to gather and save till he is himself able to buy a little estate and work out his destiny as a landowner.

The constitution of an estate worked on these principles may be exhibited by a typical example. Writing to the *St. James's Gazette* under the date of 8th December, 1891, in confirmation of an account I had published of the Cheshire method of agriculture, Lord Egerton of Tatton gave the following table to show how the farms are graded in size on his Cheshire property:—

Under 2 Acres.	Between 2 and 10.	Between 10 and 20.	Between 20 and 50.	Between 50 and 100.	Between 100 and 150.	Between 150 and 200.	Between 200 and 300.
26	46	23	22	36	24	7	1 = 185

I do not know what is the case on Lord Egerton's estate, but as regards other properties on which I had facilities for full investigation, I found that not a cottage was empty, hardly a tenant was in arrears, and when a vacancy occurred there was a perfect scramble for it. From these facts the inference seemed plain that under certain conditions there is no such thing as rural discontent. Up to a certain point the investigation was the pleasantest I had undertaken. I had been to the North, I had been to the South, I had been to the East, I had been to the West, and was heart-sick and weary of the gloom and discontent that seemed to have permanently settled on the once happy English shires. But here was a peasantry contented, farmers who were making money, landlords not driven into economy by a shrinkage of the rent-roll. The labourer requires no capital save his own good muscle and a brave heart. He takes his acre or his two-acre holding and works and saves till he can exchange it for one of those between two and ten acres. One or two men I found in Cheshire deriving their income exclusively from a farm of eleven or twelve acres, but usually the tenant would scarcely attempt to stand alone until able to hire at least twenty acres. How much more interesting life must be to him than to those less fortunate brethren of his who from year's end to year's end toil on without

daring to entertain a hope that better times will come and the drudgery end, or at least meet with a fitting reward.

The element of sadness creeps in only when one reflects that it would be impossible to reproduce this state of things under other conditions. Small farms do well in Cheshire, because its situation and character are peculiarly adapted to them. A glance at the landscape tells you why. During the season when other districts show wide expanses of grey stubble and dark ploughland the Cheshire heights and hollows still are green. The combined science of all the agricultural colleges in England could not produce on say some of the chalky subsoils of East Anglia, the thick permanent pasture that lies here like a green heavy carpet on the clay. In that lies the explanation of the mystery. The cow has saved Cheshire. For a working man to look after two or three acres of meadow in addition to performing his usual tasks is a very light matter as compared with what it would be to dig or otherwise work a much smaller quantity of arable.

That is one obstacle to the extension of the system, but Lord Egerton does not consider it insuperable. "This subdivision of farms is more easy in a dairy district," he says, "but it is applicable to all parts except the sheep farms in the South and East of England." One cannot easily fall in with this sanguine view. In addition to the suitability of its soil, Cheshire is very favourably placed, inasmuch as it has for neighbour the most populous of the English counties. At the last census there were in Lancashire 3,926,798 inhabitants, a large proportion of whom are customers for whom these small holdings are cultivated. But while pointing out that every county has not like

Cheshire the neighbourhood of great towns, an extremely suitable soil, a long farming tradition and a special fame for dairy work, it ought also to be kept in mind that there is abundant room for the development of this industry. In 1890 we imported £22,086,000 worth of butter, margarine, cheese, and eggs, the total value of these imports being in 1880, £19,468,000, and in 1870, £11,170,000; the quantity has thus been nearly doubled in twenty years. While our own farmers were complaining of semi-starvation, the Canadians discovered in England a market for eggs and sent no fewer than 2,000,000 to our markets in 1890. These facts show that the small dairy farmer has a splendid field before him. Nor is he at a great disadvantage from working on a small scale; rather the opposite. Several organisations are in existence for the collection and sale of his products, and the articles he deals in are those which require very careful superintendence in the making. A large farmer whose work is done by servants is unlikely to produce butter and cheese of excellence equal to that attained where a keenly interested wife or daughter manages her own dairy.

As a contrast to the thriving dairy farms of Cheshire it may be useful to describe one of many wretched holdings in a district where tenancies and estates alike are large and where the cultivator on a small scale is getting rapidly squeezed out of existence. How land is held in the neighbourhood will be shown by excerpts from the estate-books of four adjoining properties. As I am precluded from mentioning the names of the owners, I distinguish the estates by letters of the alphabet. The numbers indicate the acres on each farm :—

	A. Acres.	B. Acres.	C. Acres.	D. Acres.
	947	9	3	9
	586	40	30	10
	295	215	173	21
	514	271	309	31
	330	424	354	45
	60	463	386	60
	537	557	580	72
	1072	558	667	141
	532	618	583	324
	443	625		424
	448	1479		426
	406			
	12			
	565			
	543			
	580			
	730			
	295			
	557			
	14			
	255			
	919			
	314			
	339			
	821			
	942			
	1603			
Total	14,659	5259	3085	1563

It will be noticed that some of these farms are so large, that in Cheshire each would be considered in itself an estate of respectable size, and that even in D, the smallest of the properties, there are holdings of over 400 acres. I can very well remember small farms in the district that gradually have been merged in larger ones, and even a stranger might ascertain from the fact that on a single holding two or even

three sets of farm-buildings exist that the process of consolidation has been going on. In many cases, however, he would not suspect the true state of affairs. Here are corn and hay ricks in the stackyard, carts under the shed, cattle and foals in the yard, pigs, ducks, geese, pigeons, and such "small deer" trotting or flying or swimming everywhere. Smoke is rising from the old-fashioned red-tiled farmhouse, standing in the midst of a garden full of fruit-trees that exhibit no symptoms of neglect, and also from the thatched cottages where the labourers live. The explanation is that when the tenant of the adjacent holding took over this one he saw that it would be convenient to let things stay as near as could be *in statu quo*. He put his bailiff or steward in the farmhouse, and every day on his stout cob comes trotting round to see how things are getting on. But the addition of a matter of twenty or thirty acres to his enormous consolidated farm hardly makes any difference. As to the little peddling survivors, he treats them with a good-natured air of superiority that is half-contemptuous, half-pitying—they are so frequently asking him to do them a good turn in the way of threshing and ploughing, or even of buying and selling. It has often been pointed out that the difference of system is that between the wholesale and the retail trader. When profits are pared to their lowest margin they will still amount to a respectable income if only the turnover be sufficiently large. Suppose the tenant of that 1600-acre farm in estate A were able to make a clear average profit of five shillings per acre, he has earned the respectable income of £400 per annum, which is more than sufficient to maintain his family in the homely though substantial style affected by nearly all tenants of this class who are not "gentleman" farmers—that is, men who farm for amusement rather than

profit, and depend for their main income upon other investments. I have many acquaintances among farmers of this class, and frequently stay for periods of a few days at their houses, so that I know well how they live. You will often find their horses as good as the squire's, but whereas those of the latter are continually "eating their heads off," the tenant is always rearing, buying, and selling, so as both to make a show and turn a penny. There is less elegance but almost as much substantial comfort in the farmhouse as there is in the hall.

If the large farmer compares not unfavourably with his landlord in point of ease and real affluence, he shows to a hundred times more advantage when his position is contrasted with that of the small farmer. Take the tenant in estate A who farms sixty acres, and imagine where he would be if compelled to do with the five shillings an acre profit that yields a comfortable income to the neighbour who has 1600 acres. He could not exist on it. Yet in the competition he is placed at a very serious disadvantage. Having no capital, it is impossible for him to buy in the cheapest market and to sell in the dearest. It frequently happens that, while the man of greater means is able to hold his stock or his crop till prices rise, he is compelled by shortness of cash to get rid of his while they are at their lowest. One is constantly on the look-out for a bargain, and is open to purchase anything from a flock of lambs to a consignment of phosphates whenever he can do so cheaply for cash; the other is compelled either to wait till he has the money or buy on credit at a very high rate. With all these drawbacks, it is beyond his power, by the closest personal attention and the utmost economy, to make a fair livelihood out of his holding.

Let me give the story of a small farm situated amidst the

group of estates referred to. It is no unusual history, but the interesting fact is that four successive tenants were all alive in the autumn of 1891, and I went to each and asked what he thought of the experience he had gained in the little "onstead". It is a very charming place to look at, and must anciently have been the centre of a large farm, for the barn and byre, the stable and piggery are much too large for it now. The house, too, is a big, square, red-tiled erection, with the front door opening on a large kitchen-garden, sheltered and hidden from the road by a tall hawthorn hedge. As is often the case with these small tenements, the fields are not together, though none is more than a quarter of a mile from the dwelling. By the river there are four acres of fine meadow for the cow, and as much arable adjoining them. A few acres are in front of the door, and a clear little brook comes purling down this field. The rest of the land is with the village allotments.

Long ago people said there was money to be made out of the holding, and many were those who kept their eye on it. This ardour has very much abated, and after a talk with the old tenants and the present, there is no further difficulty in understanding why. The first of the lot is now in the workhouse, and I found him sunning himself on a bank protected from the cold wind by a clump of trees. His gaunt figure told of bygone strength that not even the bleary eyes and white beard and nodding head of age altogether belied. He talked freely, but, as must be admitted, with no extraordinary intelligence of his farming experience. He began life as a ploughman, and rose to be steward. By pinching and scraping he had saved enough to take and stock his little holding; but was of opinion that he had made a great mistake in leaving service. Do what he could he had been

unable to make a livelihood out of the farm. Had he ever married things might have been different, for then the wife would have looked after the cow and poultry, while the children would have done the weeding. But he spoke with so much contempt of "them wummin critters," that I fear he must have had a disappointment in youth. "Perhaps," I suggested, "if you had your time to live over again you would get married and rear a family?" His reply was that he would see them somethinged first. So I left him not feeling quite sure his misery did not result from his own obstinacy and bad management.

The man who followed him now conducts the village public-house in a very creditable and respectable manner. He likes agriculture, and has several acres now, which he says are very useful and profitable to him, as he mostly raises oats, which he disposes of to commercial travellers when they come round that way driving, and stop an hour at the inn to bait their horses and have a chop or steak for themselves. Out of the little farm he says he could not make the wages of a common day-labourer, and although he brought forward a great many details, that was the sum and substance of his explanation. About two hundred acres he considered the best size of a farm to rent.

Number three is a wretched old fellow who lost his eyesight through an accident, and is "on the parish". He was an artisan, and drove the village hearse all the time he was a farmer, but it was impossible to get more from him than that it was "a very poor spec". Country life at its best he seemed to think no great catch, but a man whose life is wrecked has an excuse for pessimism.

From the dress of the present occupant, which would not excite the envy of a common tramp, you would hardly

judge that he is a clever, well-informed peasant, who all his life has been a total abstainer, and is in every other respect most frugal and laborious. He can make nothing out of the holding, he says, and has given it up; probably he will be out of it ere this is printed. Apparently he has tried in every possible way to make the business remunerative. The dairy would not do, because it was too far to send the milk; fruit and vegetables cost so much for transit, that the railway bill often came to more than he received from the town merchant. His living, such as it was, had been largely derived from bee-keeping, and for that a rood will do as well as a hundred acres.

It will naturally be asked if I put forward this deplorable story as an average specimen of small farming. The reply is that it undoubtedly is so in remote districts where large farms prevail. Nothing has been recorded for which dozens of parallels are not forthcoming. At the same time there are districts, not given up to dairy-farming, but to mixed tillage, in which the small holdings seem thriving enough. One estate in North Wales I have in my mind as I write, in which the tenancies run to about eighty acres, and which is wonderfully prosperous. In all such cases, however, I have found that there are very special reasons for the success. Some of the most successful Welsh farmers told me they found it cheaper to buy grain for their own consumption than to grow it. The rule in ordinary corn-growing counties is for the large farmer to prosper, the small one to die out; and its effect on the exodus is too obvious to need commenting on.

CHAPTER IV.

PEASANT PROPRIETORS.

In formulating a plan for the multiplication of freehold farms the members of Lord Salisbury's Government spoke in gingerly terms of the benefits likely to ensue. Mr. Chaplin at least could hardly do otherwise. The county of which he represents a division in Parliament, and where he himself possesses an extensive property, is famed for this class of holding. In 1890 Lincolnshire was returned as containing 4092 "small holdings of fifty acres" owned by the occupiers, which is over a thousand more than may be found in any other county of Great Britain. Moreover, as it has 15,921 allotments and over 16,000 small farms, while not even the more considerable tenements are what would be considered large farms in other districts, it may be said that here the labourer has tolerably free access to the soil, here the land is in the hands of the people. If it be true then, as Mr. Chaplin asserted, that the prospect of obtaining a small holding "will be no small inducement to the younger labourers to remain in the country," we have a right to expect that they are not leaving Lincolnshire. But what are the facts of the case? Why, that the poor people are scurrying out of Lincolnshire faster than out of any other rural district in Great Britain. This may not be quite self-evident from the totals, because certain towns, such as Lincoln, Gainsborough, and Great Grimsby, are rapidly growing, but the rural districts are being positively emptied, as any one will see for himself by looking at the following list of districts in which population decreased between 1881 and 1891. For convenience sake I also transcribe the acreage.

District.	Area in Statute Acres.	Population in 1881.	Population in 1891.	Decrease.
Stamford . .	52,858	18,344	17,170	1174
Bourn . . .	90,644	18,918	18,664	254
Spalding . .	86,471	22,961	21,733	1228
Holbeach . .	107,299	19,249	17,813	1436
Boston . .	127,793	39,398	37,766	1632
Sleaford . .	131,777	25,720	23,666	2054
Grantham .	103,939	33,679	32,925	754
Horncastle .	112,458	21,524	20,212	1312
Spilsby . .	140,689	27,882	25,891	1991
Louth . . .	170,708	33,857	31,407	2450

It is important to note that the decrease is most marked in the districts of largest area, viz., Louth, Spilsby and Sleaford, and that the population in each of these cases shows a curious tendency to drop to one inhabitant for five and a half acres. The total acreage under crops in England in 1891 was 25,113,343 and the population 29,001,018. After making very careful inquiries in Lincolnshire, the conclusion I arrived at was certainly not favourable to the increase of petty freeholds. The agricultural returns for 1891 are no doubt satisfactory, but they only go as far as June, and leave out of account the bad harvest that followed and certain later fluctuations in the dead-meat market that told heavily upon that numerous class of tenants who make the fattening of cattle a leading feature in their business.

This state of affairs is not peculiar to one county. Small freeholds have suffered whatever might be their situation. Fewer "statesmen" exist in Cumberland, fewer yeomanry in Wilts, Bucks, or nearly any county that may be mentioned. Lord Salisbury, when acting pioneer to

Mr. Chaplin's measure, pretended no blindness to the lessons of history. He confessed his unbelief in the expectation that the sufferings of the poorer classes would be healed by the creation of small holdings, and quite as frankly remarked: "I do not think that small holdings are the most economical way of cultivating the land".[1] His recommendation of Mr. Chaplin's plan rested on the assumption that "a small proprietary constitutes the strongest bulwark against revolution". But the great problem we have to face is how to get the land cultivated so that our farmers may compete successfully with cheap foreign produce. How are you to do that by a way that is confessedly not economical? I hope the new peasant proprietor is not the *very* "strongest bulwark against revolution" possible to invent.

In point of fact, the difficulty is not to get your freeholder, it is to keep him on his freehold. Small owners come into existence and depart out of it almost annually. And it is notorious that an extraordinary number of them have been created without legislative interference during recent years. When desirous of obtaining trustworthy information on the point I naturally went to the land auctioneers, most of whom keep a list of their transactions, and also to landlords who I knew had sold farms.

I confess to having had no idea beforehand that the traffic in land was so considerable, and that so many tenants were in the habit of bidding for their holdings. One provincial firm—whose operations were practically confined to a single county—gave me a printed list, from which it appeared that in the course of twelve months they had sold 517 parcels of land for prices amounting in all to £332,362.

[1] Speech at Exeter, 3rd February, 1892.

Many—nearly half—of the purchasers of the farms had been formerly tenants.

A gentleman in the same neighbourhood, of whom I made further inquiries, gave me permission to extract from his private account book the following particulars about land he had sold. It is probable that he disposed of the tenements to advantage, because he had no urgent inducement to sell—his only object being to get rid of outlying property, and to buy as much as he could nearer his house. He had actually increased his rent-roll by these operations. Eleven inconveniently-distant holdings, amounting altogether to 227 acres, were sold by private contract, the amount thus realised being £5620. Nine of the buyers were tenants, and it may be useful and interesting to set down the size of each holding and what it was sold for, as it will at once give an idea of the kind of freehold most in demand, and what it is likely to cost in open market: thirteen acres went for £350, twenty-six for £700, twenty-nine for £650, seven for £200, eighteen for £500, twelve for £320, one for £120, five for £230, and twenty-one for £650. They were all situated, it should be remarked, in a small-farm district. One other point deserves to be mentioned, although I shall return to it later on. The total legal expenses incurred by the eleven purchasers amounted to £55 8s., of which no less than £25 12s. 6d. was for stamps and parchment, conveyances costing each two or three guineas. Upon the vendor somewhat heavier costs usually fall. A bill amounting to £136 17s., including the auctioneer's commission, cost of surveying, advertising, etc., was incurred on transactions of the same extent by a landlord resolved to bring the expense down to a minimum. I reproduce the figures for the benefit of those who have dreamt of buying land, but are deterred by a vague idea that the costs are high.

Now the question is: Why did the farmers buy their holdings? Have they been amassing wealth in secret during all the bad years in which they have grumbled? Of the particular purchasers of these farms I cannot speak, but there are many others in the neighbourhood of whom I know the circumstances. Firstly, then, it may be confidently asserted that in nine cases out of ten a farmer who buys his holding does so with borrowed money, for which he not improbably pays something like four per cent. interest. Now the average rent in the district where these sales were made is close upon 15s. 6d. an acre. Roughly speaking, then, the rental of 227 acres would be £175;[1] but the interest on £5620 at three and a half per cent. is slightly more than £196, so that it was decidedly more expensive to be an owner than a tenant.

There are many inducements for a farmer to make a struggle towards the purchase of his holding. With the best landlord in the world he does not feel quite secure. "Life is *very* uncertain," he says in his slow, sententious way. At any moment the plain but kindly old squire may die, and his heir, young Master Spendthrift, step into his shoes, and give his lawyer the command to exact every penny he can from the estate, and not spend a farthing.

Nothing causes the tenant greater uneasiness than to see his farm put up to auction. The new-comer, especially if he have but a small estate, is apt to look on his investment from a purely business point of view, and his chief concern is to obtain as much interest as he can for his capital. He therefore begins by raising the rent to the highest point. In actual practice, too, it is found that the larger the landowner the more likely is he to lay out money on improve-

[1] "The rent was, as a matter of fact," the late proprietor has since written me, "£177 16s. 6d. for 230 acres."

ments. Some are quite extravagant in this respect, looking to the future far more than to the present. There are still in England many estates where the family in the hall is not so very much older than the families on the farms, and where, consequently, all the old ties and traditions are in favour of keeping up the relations that have existed for generations. If these be shattered by the land coming into the market, the tenant is naturally inclined to make a struggle to acquire his holding. But the danger lies in his buying before he is ready. Modern facilities for borrowing have increased so enormously, that the purchase nowadays can be effected with an amount of capital that would have seemed ludicrously small to any one who contemplated making it a century ago. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the evils that ensue. The new owner is handicapped by lack of money. Improvements or additions to his buildings are out of the question. It is with difficulty he can scrape together funds for necessary outlay, and every spell of bad weather or unlucky turn of fortune's wheel ends in an increase of his burdens, till finally the land that was only nominally his passes out of his hands again.

For some time past the temptations to buy land have been very great to those who are sanguine enough to believe in the arrival of better times. The market is glutted with it. Many owners are following the example set by the Duke of Fife in Scotland, and are quietly getting rid of their properties piece by piece. Many of the difficulties that used to stand in the way of thus breaking up properties have been overcome by legislation, and transfer has, as was shown in the case already cited, been greatly cheapened. Comparatively few members of the landed aristocracy have escaped impoverishment through the long-continued agri-

cultural depression, and some have been compelled or are urgently tempted to sell by the necessity of raising money to clear themselves of debt. Estates are handed down from father to son with so many encumbrances, that the heir is often compelled to sell a part that he may have some enjoyment out of the rest. A landlord of strong business instincts sells for the simple reason that he is able to find a far more profitable investment for his cash elsewhere in stocks, shares, or other mercantile business. For the same reason, a man who has made money out of trade is timid about buying land with it. He sees no prospect of its bringing in an adequate return, and a very clear one of its being subjected to exceptional taxation. Much of the *prestige* that used to go with land has now disappeared. The political influence of landlords has been nullified by the creation of large constituencies, a wide electorate, and vote by ballot. Even in "society" it is as advantageous to be a rich brewer as to be a county magnate. My Lord Bareacres is a less desirable match than our old Carlylean friend, "Bobus of Hounsditch," maker of sausages, always assuming that Bobus has piled his shekels to a sufficient magnitude. With many vendors and few buyers, it is no wonder that land has shown a strong tendency to fall in price.

These considerations might very well make even wealthy farmers hesitate to buy land merely because it happens to be cheap, and they ought to weigh still more with those who meditate entering upon the toilsome and embarrassed life of an English peasant proprietor. It is usual for those who deal with the question of their creation to refer to the land systems of the continent, but such comparisons when they are either favourable or adverse must be in the nature

of things fallacious and misleading. Every country has its own soil, its own climate, its own fiscal policy, its own products and methods that may do very well under one set of conditions, but are not unlikely to fail if applied to another. Besides, it is a regrettable fact that countries that have a peasant proprietary are suffering as much as England is from a rural exodus.

When inquiry is made about the peasant proprietors of a county, it is usual to be told that they have all disappeared or that hardly any are left. Of the forty freeholds in Doddington, alluded to in the first chapter, only one remains, and I understand that it belongs to an absentee shopkeeper. Such of them as I had an opportunity of looking over in other parts of England amply confirmed the well-known remarks made some years ago by Mr. Tremenheere in regard to the "statesmen" of Cumberland. By a hundred little signs it is evident that the owner suffers badly from lack of cash. If a landlord owned the place how he would have been dunned to make repairs! The very orchard is stocked with aged trees that ought to have been grubbed up and replaced long ago, and the garden is not half kept, only that is not extraordinary, for it is almost proverbial in the rural districts that the gardens of farmers are the very worst kept in the country side. The old-fashioned house stands as it has stood for generations, every bit of it from the roof to the kitchen grate urgently in need of repairs. Outbuildings and fences are even worse, and it is very evident from the look of the crops and the live stock that a due amount of capital has not been expended either on manure or on food.

The ill-dressed, care-stricken, labour-bent owner affords in his own person proof enough that the place is not doing

well. Once more you have a very extraordinary product of "the resources of civilisation". When hard times crushed the poor man against the wall he borrowed on everything that was worth money, and, let him work harder than any labourer now and live with the utmost frugality, it is hopeless to expect that he will ever be a free man again. Of such an one I have frequently heard visitors and even neighbours from a merely superficial knowledge of the facts speak in terms that conveyed more contempt than compassion. "Look above the door," they will say, "you see by the date on it that the house was built in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and since then the land has always belonged to the same family. As so many generations in the fluctuating English seasons have managed to earn a livelihood there, why should this man fail were it not that he has less capacity than those who went before him? They managed to weather all the storms, including periods of agricultural depression as severe as this." It is a most unfair criticism to make, as even a child might see. After standing still for ages, the science of agriculture has made a most wonderful advance during the last few years. Occasionally even in Essex, and much more frequently in counties more remote from London, you may still see owners of similar little properties who because they possess no capital are still compelled to reap the corn with a sickle and thresh it with flails. Their ploughs and other implements are bad and old. Of scientific farming they know nothing. How are they to compete with neighbours who are able to command every new invention, and apply the latest discoveries of experts? Nothing has struck me more forcibly than the change that has come over the modern farmer's attitude to book learning. It is not very long ago since the easiest

way to ingratiate oneself with a farmer of the old stock was to laugh at such new-fangled notions as that it was advantageous for a husbandman to know something of chemistry and geology and botany. "Ay, ay," he would answer, "I've farmed for fifty year, as my father did afore me, and never troubled about these cranks." Successful farmers do not talk in that way now. They tell you that the man who succeeds best is not the theorist, and not the purely practical man, but he who combines the practical knowledge gained during a boyhood spent on a farm with such an insight into theory as may be gained at an agricultural college. But of course the small freeholder is unable to pay for this kind of training for his children.

In addition to this very important drawback, there is another and still more serious one. The yeoman or small freeholder is in a position to feel far more acutely than the capitalist that paring down of profit which is due to the operation of Free Trade. He cannot with the same crops that his forefathers grew make more than three-fifths of the gross income they did, and that means he is hardly able to clear a margin at all.

Under these circumstances it surely is as plain as anything can be that it is hopeless to expect that people will be re-attracted to the soil by a prospect of becoming small proprietors. Much has been said in praise of the old class of yeomen, and doubtless they had their virtues, but they had their vices as well. At all events it is hopeless to expect to reproduce the antique type under modern conditions. Indeed, if the present efforts to simplify and facilitate the sale of land are crowned with success, it is to be doubted if they would even add to the stability of the country, the example of France notwithstanding. But as the entire agricultural

population of that country is steadily decreasing it is difficult to understand why its example should be so frequently cited by statesmen.

Yet it must be remembered that so far we have only considered one type of small freehold, and for the sake of clearness it may be as well to repeat that these remarks apply exclusively to ordinary English arable land.

There are certain cases in which the acquisition of land will be of the utmost service to those engaged in agriculture. One is in the case where a holding by its soil and situation is adapted for the purposes of dairy-farming, the other is that in which the occupier is going to devote himself to some of those new kinds of tillage that are rapidly coming into fashion. Some of the more important of those will be glanced at in the next chapter. They are on an entirely different footing, and in certain districts have every likelihood of doing well. England offers such diversities of farm that the ownership of land which in one county may be merely a burden, may very possibly in another be an unmixed blessing.

CHAPTER V.

FRUIT FARMS.

Among the most interesting and suggestive of my visits in 1891 must be numbered that to the vegetarian "fruit farm colony" at Methwold. This is no place to discuss the question of diet, and it is best to say at once that a short trial of vegetarianism proved quite as much as I could endure. At the same time I admit most frankly my lack of

qualification to pronounce any opinion as to its suitability for other people. It is a very cheap and cleanly way of living to take it at its worst, and if people can do without meat, and are able to keep up a stock of health and energy on exclusively vegetable food, they will be able to save money while others starve. If it be any satisfaction to them, I do not mind admitting that, having been a carnivorous animal from childhood onwards, my appetite now is too gross and perverted to be satisfied without meat. We will, therefore, dismiss that troublesome controversy from this inquiry.

But the experiment is full of instruction from another point of view. Any thoughtful student will see at once how it might be modified so as really to become a most important addition to rural industries. Nor need its failure—if it were to fail, which I am far from prophesying—discourage those who desire to take a hint from rather than make a model of it. The ambition of its founders has apparently been less to open up a way for distressed country folk than to provide homes for comparatively well-to-do citizens. A brief account of the scheme will explain its advantages and drawbacks even to those who have never heard of it before.

In driving from Stoke Ferry to Methwold many a traveller must have noticed what appears to be an extraordinary expanse of newly-planted orchards, in which several brand-new villas of a somewhat suburban type have sprung into existence, and offer a striking contrast to the tumble-down cottages of the neighbourhood. These are the residences of vegetarians, each of whom has purchased a two-acre lot of "bare agricultural field," and is planting and tilling it. One can hardly congratulate them on the bargains made. Manifestly it is extremely advantageous—

absolutely necessary, one might say—for the fruit farmer to own his holding. Without security of tenure he would not dare to incur the heavy initial cost of planting, for which he can in the nature of things expect no adequate return for a number of years. But for these plots a sum of £35 an acre was paid, a price that immediately takes the operation beyond the range of the ordinary labourer. The land is not of a very fertile description. Where sections of it had been laid bare by the sinking of wells I saw that it consisted of eight or ten inches of light gravelly soil, then several feet of soft chalk and flinty nodules, the whole resting on a bed of hard chalk. Many farms in the vicinity are vacant, and at auctions land equally good has been sold for a third of what the vegetarians paid. It is essential to keep this in mind, because very few working men would dream of laying out £70 on two acres—even if, as Mr. Jesse Collings suggests, all but fifteen per cent. of the purchase money were borrowed—and for fruit culture no smaller area would in ordinary circumstances suffice to provide a fair income.

Secondly, the sort of house erected is larger and more expensive than a cottager would require, the average costs of each being about £200. It certainly looks a risky speculation to build at all on such a very tiny estate, and if these "fruit farms" were to become a matter of "practical politics," for the poor the wisest course would be to select a plot sufficiently near to a dwelling already in existence.

The next item of expense arises out of the preparation and planting of the soil. Here again the labourer would effect a considerable saving. At Methwold the average outlay was about £2 10s. for fences, £14 for trenches, and other £3 10s. (an acre) for manure. If a number of pea-

sants were working the scheme simultaneously they would probably avoid almost the whole of this outlay. On the same principle that farmers unite to give a "ploughing day" in order to help an incoming tenant over his initial difficulties, they could join together to trench the fields by their own labour, and if the refuse from the pigsty were carefully collected for a year beforehand there would not need to be any expenditure for manure.

It would be well to spend what capital was available on the very best fruit trees and bushes procurable. This part of the business has been admirably managed at Methwold. Somewhere about 800 fruit trees—apples mostly—are planted on the two acres, a moiety being half standards on "free" stock, and the others "bush" apple trees on "Paradise" stock. The hardy and heavy-bearing kind last mentioned, if they are "fruiting" trees when purchased, will produce a few apples the year after they are planted, assuming this to be done at the fall of the leaf, and may be expected to carry quite a respectable crop the year after that. If well supplied with manure, they will remain very prolific for about twelve years, and at the end of that time the standards will be in full bearing, and demand the space hitherto occupied by their diminutive neighbours. In addition to the fruit trees, the land will carry about 1500 berry bushes, and there will be vacant corners in abundance for vegetables and ground fruit.

The next question is what income is likely to be derived from the farm on which this outlay has been made. It may be as well to quote from a leaflet given away on the "colony," and, therefore, we may assume, representing the views of the owners, the estimate that has been formed. Not only the paragraph on "produce," but that which

follows under the heading of "markets" and "freight," are worthy of careful consideration :—

"PRODUCE.—From 800 trees planted on two acres there may be expected the first season after planting an average of 3d. worth of fruit from each tree, total £10. Second year, £20 worth. Third year, £30 worth. Fourth year, £40 worth. Fifth year, £50 worth. Sixth year, £60 worth. Seventh year, £70 worth. Eighth year, £80 worth. Ninth year, £90 worth. Tenth year, £100 worth, or £50 per acre. But from the method of planting, it will be seen that these 800 trees do not occupy the whole ground; the berry fruits have still to be reckoned. The two acres may contain, in addition to trees, 1500 bushes or raspberry canes. These ought to produce ½d. worth of fruit each, the first season after planting; total, £3 2s. 2d.; increasing yearly to: second, £6 4s. 4d.; third, £12 8s. 8d.; fourth, £18 13s.; fifth, £24 17s. 4d. These are low estimates. In addition to its produce, the plantation increases in value annually from its own growth. In ten years' time the 800 trees which cost £100 would be worth £300. Many will be glad to step into a "going concern" of the kind by-and-by. The produce of vegetables in addition to all this will be very great during the first years, and depends much on the skill and assiduity of the cultivator.

"MARKETS: FREIGHT.—The prime object of this mode of cultivation is to render the family independent of the outside world and its fluctuating influences, by enabling the colonists to supply their own wants as far as possible. But there is such a very large proportion of the people of this country engaged otherwise than in producing food, that a certain market for all good things may be always depended on. Britain is the best market in the world, and derives its sup-

plies from all parts of the earth. Why then emigrate to countries thousands of miles distant, and have to send the produce all the way back again? The capital expended in these long and hazardous voyages would establish people in a very good way at home. The freight to London per rail is only about 10d. per cwt. for vegetables, and 1s. 3d. per cwt. for fruit, and there is frequent communication with the station at a minimum cost. Vegetarian restaurants would take large quantities of produce direct, and the middleman must be avoided. When the art of preserving and storing fruits and other produce is brought into full operation, the market will be extended and the productiveness increased, by having goods suitable for use in seasons when enhanced prices may be obtained."

Were that calculation to be depended upon, the village problem would be solved. Remember these are no suburban market gardens. Methwold is rather more than three miles from Stoke Ferry Railway Station, and Stoke Ferry is 96 miles from Liverpool Street; not many railway stations are further than that from a market. Why not establish your would-be migrant on a two-acre farm; let him earn two pounds a week, and be happy at home instead of rushing into the *maelström* of London?

Great difficulties, alas, are not so easily overcome. The sceptical reader will remark at once that the figures are only *estimated*. It would be different if our vegetarian friends had been sufficiently long at work to offer them as facts. Had a dozen or so of them actually made £100 a year each out of his plot, the affair would have worn another complexion. But if you consider how much depends on skill, and weather, and market, it will be seen that the forecast is nearly as sanguine as the glowing language of a prospectus.

Yet I do not say it is impossible of fulfilment. On the contrary, there is, at least, one gardener in the neighbourhood who has achieved the *maximum* result. An intelligent peasant might even better it, and that is where the true interest of the experiment lies.

The vegetarians are hampered by their creed; a peasant would not be so. In the budget reproduced, no allowance whatever is made for keeping live stock. No income is set down even to bee-keeping. Yet what that may amount to may be illustrated by a story told by that excellent bee man, the late Mr. William Raith of Beecroft, Blairgowrie. Some farmers had been chaffing him about having "a bee in his bonnet," while their own talk was mostly of shorthorns. "I'll tell you what it is," he exclaimed; "I have a single bee at home that has this year put more money into my purse than the best shorthorn cow you have has put into yours." He referred to the queen-bee of one of his hives, the mother of all its inhabitants, that in a single season had yielded him 130 lbs. of first-class honey in such excellent condition that he took a first prize with it, and then sold it to a dealer for £10 16s. It was an exceptional crop, and the price has fallen since then, but any owner of a two-acre fruit farm might add considerably to his income by bee-keeping, even if every hive did not bring him in a ten-pound note. An old woman at Luffenhall, in Hertfordshire, told me she made £60 last year (1891) out of her bees. The small tenant-farmers in the neighbourhood calculated, they said, to obtain the rent from the same source—say from £15 to £30.

Again, how easy it would be to keep a pig where vegetable refuse must be so plentiful, and that would serve two purposes at once. It would stock the larder and provide

manure, which the colonists obtain with difficulty at 6s. a load. Some of them, indeed, are so much alive to this consideration that they have conquered their scruples so far as to keep a porker or two in a sty hidden away among the bushes. Probably enough they will soon forget their creed if they elect to follow out fruit-farming. The peasant who kept pigs would naturally go in also for ducks, geese, chickens, pigeons, and even rabbits. Surely it is the very reverse of sanguine to reckon that with these auxiliaries a moderately industrious and intelligent man might at least realise what the vegetarians expect to make without them. Both his initial outlay and his farming expenses would be smaller, so that he could afford the piece of butcher-meat that is an accursed thing in the eyes of the other. The following comparison will at a glance show how much cheaper the acquisition might be:—

Vegetarian's outlay (actual).				Peasant's outlay (estimated).			
Two acres of land, .	£ 70	0	0	£ 50	0	0	
Cost of transfer, . .	5	0	0	3	3	0	
Fencing and trenching, ...	16	10	0	1	10	0	nothing for trenching.
Manure, ...	7	0	0	Nil.			
800 young apple trees at 2s. 6d., . . .	100	0	0	100	0	0	
1500 berry bushes, .	20	0	0	20	0	0	
Planting trees, . .	4	0	0	Nil.			
House, ...	200	0	0	Nil.			
Implements, etc., .	10	0	0	10	0	0	
Total, . . .	£422	10	0	£184	13	0	

In very few cases would the peasant make this outlay all at once. We may assume that his plans would have been formed long beforehand, and that he had been accumulating for the purpose. If worth his salt, he would have purchased a few of the best kinds of trees and bushes in anticipation and

propagated slips from them in his garden or allotment, on which, too, he would have gathered a great heap of manure, while he would have laid in a stock of implements and saved his own vegetable seeds. Before granting any loan for the purchase of his holding, it would be right and proper for the local authority to satisfy themselves that he had not only saved the required proportion of the price, but by these no less important preparations given earnest of the qualities likely to ensure success for the venture. The condition of his garden or allotment ought to be as important a consideration as the balance he has in the savings-bank.

Long observation has caused me to realise very fully the great differences that exist in this respect. Some cottagers are apparently born with a capacity for making the most of their surroundings; others have no aptitude that way. In a remote country village with which I am familiar, every householder has a large garden, but there is only one who is able to add to his money income from it. The fact is due to the startling discoveries by him that there is such an institution as the parcel post, and also that a two-line advertisement in a widely circulated daily paper costs very little. His neighbours were not wholly ignorant that such things were. They had read of them, and had talked about them, and even speculated about using them, but it did not dawn on them that a country labourer could improve his position by such means. Like other great inventions, this one was partly the result of an accident. Nearly everybody thereabouts grows leeks, for in winter were it not for leeks, cabbages, and potatoes, there would hardly be any dinner. Two or three summers ago, however, there seemed to be quite a leek famine coming on. The spring-sown beds never came up, and there were no seedlings to transplant. But in

one garden—it might be by luck or skill, it might be owing to a peculiarity of the soil—they sprang up amain, and the owner, whom we may call John Smith for convenience, was besieged for leeks. John had a large bed of them, for he always reckoned on selling a few, and when his neighbours had been satisfied, there were still thousands left. People heard of it at a distance, and one or two wrote, enclosing stamps, with a request that he would forward fifty or a hundred, as the case might be, through the parcel post. Like the apple that fell on Newton's head, that set John a-thinking. "Westerly Grange," thus to me did he describe his musings afterwards, "is four miles from here, and Land's End, I take it, is four hundred, but for sending leeks Land's End is as near as Westerly Grange, for it's only three minutes' walk to the post office, and as far as I am concerned, that is Land's End." The result of these cogitations was that he risked a shilling in advertising in a London daily, and speedily found it come back as "cash with order," if not from Land's End, from places equally remote. John's appetite was whetted with success, and the next year he added cabbage plants, flowers, and other garden produce to his leeks, and thus managed to turn over a nice little sum of money. "A wonderful keen man is John," say the neighbours, but they have not sufficient enterprise to imitate him.

His wife is nearly as clever and quite as thrifty as he is. She cheerfully sacrificed her rhubarb bed and her berry bushes for the uses of his nursery, and yet she is never without a good stock of "preserves," which mostly she prizes for dumplings, but also as a substitute for butter. They are made largely from blackberries gathered from the autumnal thickets by the children, who also collect great bags of crab apples from the trees near the ruined monastery, where long

ages ago the fat monks planted them for the deer. Thousands of mushrooms grow and rot on the old pastures, but her boys and girls save almost enough to pay the rent. She extracts and boils down the juice from them, selling it in its pure state to dealers, who add seasonings, etc., and sell it as their own manufacture; but she always retains a stock as relish for her husband's Sunday dinner, knowing that he has the energetic man's love for "a good blow out". To tell of her mead, and her home-made cottage wines, and how she makes use of the wild sorrel leaves, the dandelion, and the acorn, would lead us astray from the subject in hand. Enough has been said to show with what an excellent prospect of success a family such as I have pictured might be helped into a small holding. They are the kind of people whom we ought to encourage to remain on the soil, because they love and know how to make the most of it. Others there are whose taste runs all to mechanical contrivances, or business, or books, who find no scope in the village, and whose wisest course is to come to town, where their talents will be appreciated. It would be a sin to keep them in the country.

One more aspect of this subject requires a passing notice. Wise legislation will always be directed to the encouragement and development of natural tendencies. If the general inclination is against fruit culture and market gardening, it is hopeless to expect that it can be changed by Act of Parliament. The question to be asked, therefore, is whether a desire for them exists, and this may be very decidedly answered in the affirmative.

The agricultural returns for 1891 contain some very interesting information on the point. In 1881 the ordinary orchard surface in Great Britain was returned at less than

185,000 acres; in ten years it had increased to 210,000 acres. Land used by market gardeners for the growth of vegetables and other garden produce has during the same period extended from 46,604 acres to 81,368 acres. Under small fruit the area was 36,700 acres in 1888, and in 1890 it was 58,700 acres. More encouraging still is the fact that the change is widespread. "The small fruit area," says the report, "has increased in every county of England and Wales, and in some counties by a remarkable percentage, although nearly a third of the English small fruit area is still to be found in Kent." Moreover, an increased consumption more than keeps pace with the supply. Steadily and year by year our bill for foreign produce officially returned among the imports as "fruit (raw), nuts (edible), and vegetables (raw)" continues to grow. In 1881 it was £5,976,106, and in 1890 £7,514,692. To realise the vast consumption of fruit and vegetables in Great Britain there must be added to the quantities thus indicated the incommensurable produce of our own market and private gardens. Probably enough the increase is largely due to the efforts of the vegetarians. Whatever be their position as a semi-religious sect, whether their strict followers are growing or dwindling in number I have not ascertained, but they have accomplished much indirectly—firstly, by extending a knowledge of the best means of preparing vegetables for the table; and, secondly, by inducing people who would never think of foregoing meat to add more fruit, vegetables, and nuts to their diet.

Here, then, we have a useful, pleasant, and fairly lucrative rural industry that is already growing quickly everywhere, and one that might be the means not only of keeping the villagers in the village, but of attracting the towns-

men back to it—one, too, that is eminently calculated to make the earth yield its *maximum* of produce.

One of the most serious obstacles in the way is the great cost of railway carriage, but it ought not to prove insuperable. We have already seen that the Great Eastern Railway carries garden produce from Stoke Ferry to Liverpool Street—a distance of ninety-six miles—at the rate of 10d. a cwt. for vegetables, and 1s. 3d. a cwt. for fruit. Is there any reason why other companies should not follow the example? Most likely they would be glad to do so if sufficient traffic were assured them.

CHAPTER VI.

CO-OPERATIVE FARMING.

One conclusion that we are bound to arrive at from a general consideration of our subject is that no remedy yet mooted will apply to England as a whole. There are some districts in which the labourer's hard lot may be ameliorated by allotments, but these are least acceptable where work is constant and wages comparatively high. In dairy counties the way out of the difficulty seems to be by the multiplication of small tenancies, but these are only a burden where the land is mostly arable. Tiny freeholds devoted to fruit farming have every prospect of being successfully worked if the market is close at hand or the expenses of transit light. When a small holding is worked as ordinary agricultural land it seems usually to involve hard and painful labour and to

end in debt and bankruptcy. Of no proposed remedy can it truthfully be said that it will act with uniform effect upon all the farm land of Great Britain.

The same statement will hold good of co-operation on any extensive scale. Farmers who cannot afford to pay their men except at the lowest rate, and who do not even give them regular employment, are not likely to offer these casual workers a share of profits. All that can be done is to afford them freer access to the land and a chance of showing whether they are not able to make cultivation in small plots more productive than that of large farms. It has been suggested however that in such places the men might themselves co-operate without the help of their employers. How they are to accomplish it does not seem very clear. Let us take an ordinary agricultural village with say something like a hundred inhabitant householders, each of whom has a plot of ground ranging from a quarter of an acre to an acre in extent. Taking the average at half-an-acre, the whole would not make more than a fifty-acre farm. If the cottagers combined to buy implements, and to work this as a consolidated holding growing the ordinary crops, the profits, under the most favourable conditions, would hardly be large enough to stand any division. The only advantage that an allotment has over a large farm is that by receiving the extra labour and assiduous attention and individual care of the tenant its productiveness is increased. If an allotment holder could make no more out of his holding than the average taken from the same quantity of land on neighbouring farms, it would scarcely repay his attention. To put the matter in a nutshell, the ideal allotment is quarter of an acre worked with a spade. In the vast majority of cases the crops grown on it are potatoes, carrots, onions, leeks,

cabbages, celery, and other vegetables to be used on the cottager's table or to feed his pig. Where there is a chance of placing a part of this produce in a good market it will be found both wise and practicable for several to combine and send large quantities. This kind of co-operation already exists to a small extent as far as vegetables are concerned; to a much more considerable one as regards other produce. Many thriving agencies are in existence for collecting and selling direct to the purchaser, without the intervention of the middleman, milk, eggs, poultry, cheese, and other farm products. But the tillage of small plots of ground is most advantageously done by the individual.

In various parts of England other systems of co-operation have been tried, and at least one leading statesman, Mr. A. J. Balfour, has committed himself to the opinion that herein lies our way out of the village difficulty. Among places at which profit-sharing in agriculture may be studied actually in operation I may mention three, situated respectively in Berkshire, Northumberland and Gloucestershire, belonging, the first to Lord Wantage, the second to Mr. Albert Grey, the third to Mr. George Holloway, M.P. But there are many other farms on which during recent years a similar experiment has been made.

It is an objection to most of these schemes that they are tainted with philanthropy, for it would be in the highest degree unreasonable to expect that a large body of business men like the farmers of England would ever consent to manage their affairs on other than commercial principles. The general idea on the subject was expressed to me by the tenant of one of the large farms that adjoin East Learmouth—the Northumbrian profit-sharing farm. "It is all very well for Mr. Albert Grey to try this on," said my infor-

mant, "but what would suit him would never do for me. He is a rich gentleman who can afford to part with his profits and to make the farming of East Learmouth an amusement. It takes me all my time to make any sort of living out of the land. And I'll be hanged," he went on more energetically, "if I can see where the co-operation comes in. He co-operates but his men don't. They get their fifteen shillings a week like mine, their lot of potatoes, their cottages rent free, their coals led, and all the rest, but if he makes a profit he gives them a present once a year. No doubt he does it on a system, and calls it profit-sharing, but it's just a *bonus*. If my hands were coming to me and saying, 'Knock five shillings a week off our wages, and consider that every year we take a £13 share in the farm,' I could see some sense in it, but if they don't put money into the business they don't co-operate." This was the strictly business view of the farmer.

Mr. Grey would be the last to admit that this is a correct view to take. Like other agriculturists, he knows that at present Hodge is suffering from a nausea of farm work. He has lost interest in and does not like it; the problem is how to win back his estranged affections. Mr. Grey's contention is that the employer suffers even more than his servants from the latter's growing dislike to country life. With a set of listless, slovenly and careless labourers it is impossible to get a profit out of the very best holding. No method of farming can possibly be successful if it be carried out by lazy ploughmen, unskilful sowers and wasteful reapers. And with regard to stock the case is ten times worse. Unless the shepherd, the cattleman, and those who have horses in their charge are not only careful but eagerly intent on their duties, the risks of loss are always very great. Yet it

is obvious that the countryman who when he is harrowing or ditching, tending oxen or weaning lambs, driving a valuable mare or building a cornstack, is not thinking how most satisfactorily to achieve these tasks, but is dreaming of town life and scheming how to get into it, is almost bound to perform them badly. If there were culpable negligence redress might be obtained, but we all know something of that lackadaisical style of doing things which hardly affords room for definite fault-finding, and yet is utterly unsatisfactory. It is as if the labourer were to confine himself rigidly to giving the legal minimum of work in return for his wages.

The keen farmer must endeavour to obtain from his men more than he can demand legally if he is to make a profit. Occasionally a master may be found who has a knack of obtaining this merely by his own personal influence. In the very worst districts of England one will occasionally come upon holdings that amid all the prevailing distress are thriving well. The tenant on such a farm will generally be found to be a man of exceptional vigour and skill. He is enthusiastic in his calling, and than enthusiasm there is nothing more catching. Speaking generally, however, there is no surer way of making a servant enthusiastic about his work than by showing him that his extra exertion will be of benefit to himself.

Mr. Grey's idea of co-operation then is that a share of the profits may, from a strictly business point of view, be bestowed on the farm-servant in return for the extra exertion he will thereby be induced to make. The work on East Learmouth is all the better done, because every labourer knows that if it be effectual he will in due season receive his share of the increase. We need not go further into the details, than to say that up to now the plan has resulted in

the farm-servants annually obtaining two or three pounds they would not have got, and of the landlord getting his rent, and also a profit as farmer, two things he hardly expected some years ago when he was confronted with the alternative of either having the farm thrown on his hands or of submitting to a considerable reduction of rent.

The practical question to be asked is whether co-operative farming is sufficiently workable ever to become more than an interesting experiment. Can it be taken up as a general method? Nothing that I have heard or seen induces me to think it will. Public sentiment may perhaps change. Many earnest reformers are convinced that co-operation must eventually "arrive," but at present there is very little indication of it. Out of the particular districts where such plans are being tried nobody seemed to know anything about it. A farmer here and there might remember glancing at some description of, or controversy concerning, it in the agricultural papers; many seemed interested in hearing details of the scheme, but the great majority were ignorant and indifferent. The men themselves appeared to care even less. Co-operation in farming is not yet an idea on which their imaginations have seized. Intelligent labourers who talked politics like a book, and rattled off the arguments in favour of Land Nationalisation as glibly as a schoolboy says the multiplication table, had nothing to say about co-operation. As yet the subject has never been taken up with rousing energy by their leaders or the writers in their favourite newspapers.

One explanation is, that as far as I have been able to learn, the experiment has not yet been made on strict business principles. The majority of the so-called profit-sharing farms are co-operative only in name. It is pos-

sible to sum up the system in a sentence. An owner or occupier says to his men: "You work the very hardest you can for me. Be careful, diligent, and painstaking. Then if your toil bears fruit I will make each of you a present at the end of the year, and its magnitude shall depend on the extent of my gains." That may be an admirable incentive to industry, but it is not co-operation. As far as can be learned, it means an annual present of something between thirty shillings and three pounds to the labourer. It has not, and never can have, any appreciable effect upon the migration to town. The best men leave, be it remembered, because they are ambitious; they would fain be richer themselves, and they desire to put their children into a way of becoming richer still. An uncertain prospect of an extra five-pound note once a year—to put their chance at the highest—is no sufficient answer to their aspirations, though a welcome addition to income. A thrifty and industrious man desires something more than a slight increase of wages; he wants to raise himself above the want brought on by age and sickness, to be gathering and preparing against adversity. Unless co-operative farming yields this he will never be more than a passive friend to it.

The late Lord Hampden tried on his Glynde estate in Sussex a scheme that, but for other objections, would nearly have answered the purpose. His idea was that a frugal labourer might, if he tried, save a matter of two shillings a week out of his wages, and when he had gathered five pounds the proposal of Lord Hampden was that he should invest it in the farm. He guaranteed interest at the *minimum* rate of two and a half per cent. per annum, even when there were no profits, while the labourer was entitled to a full share of such as were realised.

By far the most valuable result of this scheme was that it brought into full light the immense difficulties that stand in the way of agricultural co operation. Firstly, there is the initial difficulty about the labourer's capital. As long as co-operation is merely a benevolent experiment there is not much trouble, but if farmers take it up as an everyday business way of managing they will demand that ere a labourer can claim a portion of the profit he must share the risk. On the low wages now current, however, it is very difficult for a ploughman to lay by a matter of five pounds, and if he accomplish the feat he is likely to do something with it other than make an investment in such an uncertain industry as farming. On the other hand, those who have tried it will agree with me in saying that it is far from easy to induce a wage-earner to forego a portion of his income for the sake of any distant result. I know of at least one farmer who tried to do so in vain. He is both rich and popular, and his servants stay a long time with him. But when infected with a desire to make his men partners he made a proposal of this kind to them, those on the farm gave notice they were going to leave and he could induce no others to take their places. Yet for years back his profits had averaged from 10 to 20 per cent. on his capital; he himself was not only rich, but one of those of whom people say "his word is as good as his bond". It may be that with the advance of education the rustic will come to see the advantage of making a sacrifice in the present for the sake of a future gain, but so far he has shown an invincible repugnance to have anything stopped from his wages. The friend I have alluded to, in order to overcome this prejudice, offered to share profits for the first year in this way: if the ploughman accepted two shillings a week less in wages he was to have interest on

£5 4s. at the end of the year—obviously a very advantageous arrangement for him, but the temptation was of no avail.

Another great objection to the scheme is as follows: It is now generally allowed that there is very little profit to be made out of the tillage of a small arable farm where only the ordinary agricultural crops are raised. Were it otherwise, one could, at least, conceive of such holdings being held and cultivated by a limited liability company, in which the shareholders would nearly all be workmen on it. But on a large farm, one in which the rent itself comes to say something like £1000 a year, the savings of a ploughman, if invested, would form an extremely small fraction of the total amount of capital employed. In other words, the peasant would practically be at the mercy of the tenant, and even if he obtained the full rate of interest, his return would be infinitesimal, for in these times it is notorious that agricultural profits are very small. There could be no assurance of his obtaining even that. Extremely few farmers take the trouble to keep their accounts exactly, and they would not begin to learn book-keeping because the savings of a few hinds were involved.

Thus the ploughman would have no assurance of receiving his full share of the profits. Again, the farmer who worked on strictly commercial principles would certainly not agree that the small shareholders should receive a percentage, even though the large shareholders should get none, as was the case on Lord Hampden's property. In a system of co-operation, not only the gain, but the loss, must be shared. And were this agreed to, the next difficulty that arises is the claim of the petty shareholder for a voice in the management. Even those who have tried the experiment on purely benevolent principles have told me they were

surprised to find how soon a labourer, because he had five pounds involved in a concern wherein many thousands were sunk, began to consider that he ought to have a say in the buying and selling, the reaping, and mowing of the farm. Before these things are done, he should be consulted he says. A good thorough-going farmer is always an autocrat however, and is extremely likely in such circumstances to adopt an arbitrary method of procedure.

These are some of the considerations that help to account for the apathy with which the practical agriculturist regards proposals to establish co-operation in farming. He thinks that friction only can arise from any general adoption of the result.

Yet one cannot help sympathising heartily with such an attempt as Mr. Albert Grey has made at East Learmouth. The farm seems eminently suited to the purpose. It is composed of excellent land that is likely to yield a profitable return in all but the most disastrous years. Moreover, there does not appear to be any other effectual means of helping the agricultural labourers of the district. They greatly prefer an engagement for twelve months and a "lot" among the potatoes of their employer to "broken time" and an allotment to cultivate. Indeed, it is impossible for them to undertake the digging of a quarter of an acre. Small farms again are disappearing from the neighbourhood. They have been proved unremunerative. It is the same with small properties. Mr. Chaplin's measure is likely to be wholly inoperative in the district because it does not meet the aspirations of the people. To give the hind an interest in the farm of his employer, therefore, would seem to be almost the only way in which it is possible to help him, or, at least, to induce him to remain on the soil, and it is a matter for regret that no plan has yet been invented that will generally commend itself.

CHAPTER VII.

PARISH COUNCILS.

Among the many controversies to which the exodus of our rural population has given rise, none has been keener than that which has raged round the proposal to set up—or rather to revive, since the advocates claim that they are old institutions—little councils in every village. It being no part of my purpose to foment political strife or even take part in it, I shall endeavour to confine my remarks strictly to the effect these institutions are likely to bear upon village life.

The first thing that struck me in regard to them was the extraordinary rapidity with which the idea was taken up in the rural districts. It did not originate there. History may perhaps assign to the true inventor the honour of having first made the suggestion, but it never came from the villages. When the plan began to be mooted seriously, I was moving about among the rural districts making inquiries as to grievances, and nobody seemed to have the slightest conception of what the reformers meant, even after these councils had been seriously discussed in the London papers. But all at once the bearing of the proposal seemed to dawn on the villagers of the more disturbed districts. Elsewhere interest never was aroused. The occurrence, however, afforded striking proof of the efficiency of modern appliances for creating opinion. Here was a perfectly novel proposal contrived possibly in a London political resort. On Monday nobody had heard of it, on Saturday night it was in every one's mouth. That was the actual state of affairs

in hamlets lying miles from any town. It was evident that the political lecturers and newspapers had found something very stimulating to say about the smallest parliaments ever dreamt of. The welcome given by the Radicals was promptly met by keen opposition from the Conservatives, who execrated "village" councils and ridiculed "horse-pond parliaments" as vigorously as the others praised them. It was evident that they inspired one set of politicians with hope, the other with dread, and it soon became very interesting to collect opinion on the point.

Parish councils were at first recommended almost exclusively as a means of relieving the monotony and tedium of the village. It was contended that they would add quite a new interest to the peasant's life. They would introduce him to public work, and make him acquainted with the responsible duties of citizenship. No longer would the heaving turf of the village churchyard be piled upon Hampdens and Cromwells, who had possessed no opportunity of exercising their talents. Here was quite a new educational agency that would lead forth the men who had it in them to serve their fellow-men, and here, too, was an institution that would give people something to talk about.

This might be all true; but it did not account for the enthusiasm. Villagers are very proud of the wise "old inhabitant," and express their admiration: "Eh, but he was a deep un—what a grand Parliament man he would have made," they will sometimes say of such a member of their community. But to see this paragon of wisdom, to note his stiff, lumbering gait and stolid, taciturn face, is to feel sure that his style is the brief and sententious one. The idea of creating a "talking shop" for village patriarchs evidently could not account for the interest exhibited. Lord Salis-

bury's characteristic sneer to the effect that, if amusement were aimed at, a circus would be more effective than a village council, was not altogether unwarranted. At any-rate, if village councils were designed only to relieve dulness it is obvious that they would not in the slightest degree affect the exodus from the fields.

When the proposal was so heartily taken up it was on the understanding that the authority of the new bodies would have a far wider scope than is implied by this, and later developments of the original plan have all been towards its enlargement. The scheme still seems inchoate, and will require much discussion ere it be licked into practical shape. Why it has been welcomed already seems due to dissatisfaction with the County Councils. These bodies have failed to answer to the expectations formed of them, and have almost ceased to excite attention. It is not difficult to answer why. A leading man of the Labourers' Union, with whom I was discussing the matter, put the grounds of dissatisfaction into a sentence when he said: "There were too many toffs on them". When they were originated hopes were nursed that they would fatally injure the influence of the squire and the parson by bringing the government of the counties under purely democratic control. Many Conservatives were opposed to their creation, for reasons explained by Mr. Chaplin to the House of Commons in a speech delivered in April, 1888. His contention was that county gentlemen would not care to enter into rivalry with such competitors as were likely to come forward. They falsified his prediction with the result that those who are strongly in favour of democratic government are casting about for machinery that will enable them to wrest this power away. They imagine that parish councils will serve this purpose.

Manifestly a body constituted from the peasants of one rural community would be thoroughly democratic. Not more than one landlord and one parson would be eligible. The other members would consist of trusted inhabitants—trusted it might be because of character, it might be on account of their political views. Suppose there were twelve altogether, we may assume that the representation would be something like this. I notice that the *Spectator* has rather flouted the idea of the squire being elected, but in the majority of cases he has sufficient influence among his tenants to make that secure. Nor would he be exposed to contumely in so doing. As long as he is the largest employer of labour in the village, he will always command respect. The parson too, if he desired it, would be chosen, and likewise the dissenting minister. We may assume, too, the schoolmaster, and a farmer would find no difficulty in getting elected. The remaining seven places would probably be filled by people anxious to obtain allotments; say, two village shopkeepers, two artisans, and three agricultural labourers. Of course twelve is an arbitrary number, and the allocation of the seats imaginary; but it is undeniable that a body so constituted would be fairly representative of English village life. The next question that arises is in regard to the work to be done.

At the outset, it may be fearlessly asserted that, unless the council had authority for dealing with affairs in which the labourer has a direct and tangible interest, it would be a failure. Whoever has attempted to organise a village committee for a reading-room or any similar purpose knows full well how difficult it is to produce any activity in the ordinary type of villager. Partly because he is too tired with his day's work to care for further exertion, but still

more because of his shy habits, Hodge prefers to lounge outside and smoke his pipe till some more adventurous comrade comes out to tell him what has been done. He does not take readily to public life. Would the employment tempt him to overcome this tendency?

Many suggestions have been made. There are, for example, local charities to be looked after. But this is not likely to be what he would himself call a permanent job. When once these funds have been adjusted there is not much more to be done, and in many cases the council would not be a proper body to attend to them. Here is one instance out of many. Certain lands near Methwold, in Norfolk, were left to the village, on condition that they should be let as allotments, and the rent expended in coals and other necessaries for the poor. Now, it would obviously be unfair to the beneficiaries that the rents should be fixed by those who rented the plots. Yet the latter might easily form a majority of the council. The principle is applicable to many charities. Unless we desire to see a repetition in miniature of the scandals that went before the downfall of the Metropolitan Board of Works, it would be unwise to go out of the way in order to create temptation.

It has been said, too, that the council might watch over and determine rights of way, which are causes of much friction. They might also be entrusted with the guardianship of commons, the prevention of illegal enclosure and other matters that lead occasionally to differences of opinion. I do not know that there is any valid objection to this, except that not very forcible one put forward by Lord Salisbury, that their interference would lead to litigation. Where these matters are a cause of dispute, it is certainly advisable on every account that they should be settled in

a court of law. In a law-abiding country such as ours, a judicial decision usually ends a quarrel of that kind. Probably the care of these interests would have a certain educative effect. It is just and proper, that infringements on common lands, or attempts to abolish rights of way, should be withstood, but also that no abuse should be made of these privileges. For there are two sides to the question, and both so reasonable that a moderate-minded man is scarcely able to sympathise with one more than another. One looks at the jealously guarded grounds of an absentee landlord, or one who lives in his country seat three months perhaps out of twelve. They are bounded by a high wall with locked gates. All the paths meandering under the green trees are kept scrupulously neat and tidy. Here in due season the snowdrop peeps out, the blazing daffodils dance under the trees, primrose, violet, and woodbine bloom and fade with none but the resident butler to admire them. How natural it is to feel indignant that this paradise should exist for only one pair of eyes, and that hundreds who could appreciate—oh how ardently!—its changing beauty are excluded. Yes; but change the scene to a park to which the owner freely admits the public, and there are many such in England, what do you find? Too frequently an utter carelessness as to preserving the charm of the spot. Wanton feet have trodden the beds of wild or semi-wild flowers. Noble trees are defaced with rudely carved initials. Breakage, desecration, and mischief show that there is an unruly percentage of the public that misses no opportunity of destruction. An increasing majority take an almost proprietary delight in and care of grounds to which they are admitted, but a reckless minority work such havoc that it is impossible for one who really

loves nature to refrain from regretting that the door has been opened to them.

It is much the same with rights of way. The disputed footpath leading, it may be close past the shrubbery and the pheasant preserves, then on by mead and stile to the rabbit-warren and the fox-cover—I describe an actual one—is an extremely pleasant walk on Sunday afternoons. It is enjoyed by old people and young, patriarchs and sweethearts. But unfortunately it is also frequented by mischievous boys who are able to stand on the walk and stone the pheasants, and, what is worse, no one can hinder poachers from walking along it at any hour of the day or night. Should the gamekeeper or the owner come that way while they are engaged in the cover, a single leap will place them where they have a right to be. The squire contends that the road was a private one originally made for the convenience of his servants, the villagers that it is a right of way by common usage. But if the parties were associated together on the same council, it is more than likely that instead of entering upon a costly litigation they would come to a reasonable understanding. The various classes of English country people prefer to work in harmony if there is a chance of doing so.

The fact is notorious, however, that the enthusiasm for parish councils springs from quite other motives than a desire to look after local charities and protect rights of way. In an advertised programme, called "The future policy of the Liberal party," I find the following reference to the subject :—

"*Rural Politics.*—District or parish councils to bring self-government to the doors of the labouring classes throughout the country, in order to place the rural popula-

tion in nearer relation to the land and to the use and profit of the land, which they have so long tilled for the benefit of others, but to the poverty of themselves and the land also, both being so severely sweated. The hours of labour to able-bodied men are 6 A.M. to 6 P.M., or seventy-two hours per week, for nine or ten shillings. It is high time such a state of affairs should be redressed, and the rural districts made more attractive than the towns for the sons of labour."

Now this is important, because it accurately expresses what I have found to be a general expectation of the work the parish councils will do. In the words of a Liberal writer: "If public credit is to be used for the purchase of land, the purchase should be made by public bodies for the public benefit". The root idea seems to be a scheme known as the municipalisation of land. I have more than once listened while rural lecturers dwelt at great length on the merits of this system. Most unquestionably they have been in the habit of travelling beyond their brief, at all events far beyond the moderate exposition of those who speak with authority, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. John Morley, and Sir William Harcourt for example, and if I refer to them it is only to account for the warm reception given to the offer to create parish councils.

The first point that strikes an ordinary observer in this connection is that there is no precedent to justify the hope that the change would greatly benefit the labourers. It is no new thing for English land to be held by corporate bodies, but as far as my observation has gone—and it is supported by figures already quoted—the estates belonging to universities, charities, and even municipalities are neither better nor worse than those held by private and individual

owners. Wages are no higher nor rents any cheaper, the cottages are not more commodious, nor the land more efficiently tilled. The migration proceeds from the one just as it does from the other.

But it may be said that the parish councils will have exceptional advantages. Those who discuss their future almost always assume that they will have powers of compulsory purchase, and that they will naturally buy land adjacent to the cottages in order to let it to their tenants. It is hoped that in this way the grievance of land being let at more than "an agricultural rent" will be remedied. Many allotment holders and small occupiers complain bitterly that they are in numerous instances charged much more for the land than the larger farmers whose tenements are adjacent. No English Government of either party is, however, at all likely to become responsible for a measure to legalise this. A body made up of a majority of peasants could not, save by violating all principles of justice, be allowed to (what practically amounts to) fix their own rents. Obviously, an outside and disinterested expert is the only possible arbitrator. For it is quite unnecessary to point out that there is no analogy between the average rent paid for say 500 acres and that asked for one acre. I have known a farmer who grumbled at having to pay 15s. an acre for his farm eagerly seek the tenancy of a particular field at £2 10s. an acre, and any one with the slightest knowledge of agriculture is aware that hardly two fields on an average holding are precisely of the same value. When the villages were built it was only natural that the agricultural people who founded them should place the houses, as far as possible, beside the best land; nay, the older of them were planted in the midst of the only cultivable soil. Again, it is unreasonable to expect that the

tenant of an acre, who has no rates or tithes to pay, and no fences to maintain, should be charged no more than he who has all these things to do.

Were the matter to come before Parliament in any practical shape, these considerations would probably deter any Government from causing the power of purchasing and letting land to devolve on the parish council. It would be as unfair as the parallel case in which the selling and letting would be in the hands of a committee of owners. But a very careful watch kept upon the utterances of our leading public men has not been successful in discovering a single utterance of a responsible kind that was fairly open to this interpretation. The writer of the programme from which I have quoted only hints at it, and in these circumstances one cannot help blaming the obscure lecturers who consciously delude their hearers. If the land be ever "municipalised," it is unlikely that parish councils will be the machinery employed. Mr. Gladstone's version of municipalisation seems to depend on the agency of larger corporations.

On the general principle of such a policy it scarcely seems necessary to say anything here. A country as opulent in other industries as England is hardly likely to suffer much from rack-renting, and, in point of fact, the hire of land has fluctuated very much of recent years. The farmer who cannot make money out of agriculture simply looks out for better employment. Except for the regulation of rent, however, there hardly seems to be any reason for changing from private to public ownership. The squire, as landlord, has advantages over a municipality. He is of flesh and blood, a definite object to be banned or blessed, a man to be appealed to, or threatened, or execrated, one

who usually also has bowels of compassion, who can and does lend a hand now and then to a tenant who is down on his luck. But, like a public company, a municipal body, to parody a homely saying, has neither a soul to be saved, nor a place to be kicked on. It must, in the nature of things, be governed by red tape, and were it to show leniency or special kindliness, favouritism and jobbery would spring up at once. Rents would be collected by the same hard and fast rules that taxes are, whether a man were able to pay them or not. The only thing to be said in its favour is, that the average municipality, in its strictly impartial way, would probably be better than the worst squire; it would never act as beneficently as a good one.

But the whole problem of parish councils lies away from our subject, and must continue to do so unless the advocates of these bodies are able to show that the tenancy of village land will, under them, be more attractive and remunerative. How a village is governed is no doubt an important matter, but it is vastly less important than the question how to make it thriving. If agriculture in any form can again be made a remunerative industry, it will possibly be found that parish councils may serve as a useful auxiliary attraction in the villages, and an introduction to public life for the residents. But there does not seem to be any substantial basis for the more extravagant hopes formed in regard to them.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS.

It would be obviously out of place here to enter upon any lengthy or detailed examination of the various pension and national insurance schemes that are being advocated; our task will be the less ambitious one of inquiring what prospect there is of such a provision acting beneficially upon the agricultural districts of England; instead of studying statistics let us look into circumstances and influences.

Most of us are agreed that the grand aim of Government is to offer the citizen every facility and inducement to provide for himself, and make him as far as possible independent and self-reliant, basing his hopes neither on private philanthropy nor on legislative aid, but on his own industry, thrift, and enterprise. Unfortunately, the two diverging classes of mind that account for our rival political parties are continually fretting and undermining this, which is the rock on which national greatness is founded. Your Conservative, in his most "coming-on mood," is inclined to be patronising, and to insist that the poor are dependent on the rich, he does not sufficiently reckon on the pauperising influences of his bounty; your Liberal, on the other hand, with loud professions of independence, flies to the other extreme, and is desperately inclined to make the State my grandmother, acting as though a grown-up man needed help and protection in the discharge of all his duties. The opposing parties are so well balanced, however, that there is always a chance

of victory coming to the moderate non-partisan if he will but hold fast to his anchor.

There is no other question of the day so thoroughly overcharged with false sentiment as this concerning the relief of the aged poor. When a man like Richard Jefferies said in his deepest distress that sooner than accept help from the Royal Literary Fund he would go to the workhouse, it was the expression of a feeling that would have done credit to Isaac Ashford himself. It amounted simply to this, that he who has made a brave and persevering fight may be much too proud to accept charity of any kind, and yet feel that he has a claim upon the country. He may go to the workhouse without humiliation, and woe betide those who think the less of him for it. That asylum has been provided for those who have failed in the world, whether by their fault or their misfortune, and as far as a pension scheme aims only at cloaking this relief in sham respectability, it is not worth even cursory attention.

The case is very different, when men who have not failed in the world, but who, on the contrary, have diligently and well discharged the duties of life, have been so badly paid that when old age with its feebleness and want steals upon them they are unprepared for it. We have already accepted a principle that applies to them. When a writer who has had the misfortune to have worked for insufficient remuneration has enriched our language with useful books, Parliament is entitled to grant him or his widow a modest allowance. Inventors, artists, and others whose services have not been adequately requited are entitled to a similar relief. The roll of these pensioners includes many honoured and honourable names. Also, it is generally conceded that if there is any humiliation involved in the transaction, it

falls not upon the recipient but on the public, whose non-recognition of good work, and lavish expenditure on bad work, renders necessary such a rectification of the balance.

But surely it is work as honourable in itself and as useful to the community to produce corn and meat as it is to write books. We do not send the poor author to the workhouse, because it would be unfair to do so in the case of one who has done his work well though badly paid for it; the poor peasant who has done his own little task well, and has been paid still less satisfactorily for it, is entitled to similar consideration. For the plain facts are that, in some portions of England, agricultural labourers are paid on a scale so wretchedly low that it is utterly impossible for them to save a farthing, or make any provision whatever for the needs of old age. Take even what is reckoned a very fair wage, say fifteen shillings a week, and ask how much of it the sternest economy is able to put into the savings banks. Only at one period of his life has the average ploughman an opportunity of laying by anything, and it consists of the bachelor years preceding his marriage—assuming that he is not so heedlessly improvident as to let himself be entangled in matrimony at a very callow age. And if he lay by nothing then, no reasonable man will greatly blame him. Let the moralist say what he may, youth will have its fling, and if in the early years of his lusty manhood the young single ploughman spends his little surplus in such enjoyment as he appreciates, there is more reason to be glad that his long drudgery has been relieved by a happy lustrum, than to preach at him out of the books on political economy. "It's cheaper to keep two than one," says the poor fellow consolingly, when, his little sowing of wild oats over, he sings: "I ha'e a wife o' my ain, I'll partake wi' naebody". Alas!

it endures not long, this decrease in the cost of living. Children come with alarming rapidity, and for the next twelve or fifteen years saving is out of the question altogether. Ere she clothe and feed and house her family of six or seven, pay the doctor and buy fuel, the mother is more likely to be at her wit's end for sixpence than able to lay by a copper. A little relief comes when the elder ones are able to go out and earn something. "Many littles mak' a mickle," and the housewife finds it easier to get along when several driblets of wages come in, and things gradually improve for another fifteen years or so. By the end of that period, however, coming distress is beginning to give its premonitory signals. Our youthful gallant has now grown elderly; he is accustomed to hear young folk refer to him as "t' ould man," or "old William," and decay, hurried on by continuous labour and insufficient nourishment, begins to work havoc on his once-powerful frame. If he go to the hiring, masters who would have once competed for his services look askance at his scanty grey hairs and bent figure. They scruple about engaging him. A kindly person who offers him two shillings or half-a-crown less than the current rate of wages speaks and feels as if he were performing an act of charity, and the humble labourer is in no position to dispute it. He consoles himself with reflecting that although the income is less there is far less to do with it; but the recurrent bareness of the table is a reminder to the couple that "age, Life's Winter, now is coming on".

For a time the children are very good to the old folk. But they are all away from home, and the prattle that for a quarter of a century has been incessant where the couple were has ceased and made an unaccustomed stillness about them. Girls and boys who have gone to places in town are

at first very attentive in the way of remitting a share of their wages to father and mother. This does not last very long however. They get sweethearts, and eventually husbands or wives of their own, and discover that they need every farthing that can be earned. A proportion go abroad, and very seldom are heard of again. Fortunate the old couple may esteem themselves if there is no daughter with a bastard thrown upon them, no weakly or crippled child who depends on them for support when the others are all keeping themselves. Looking at these things with an experienced eye, how often have I heard a weather-beaten and venerable ploughman deliver himself of the *dictum* that of all plans for meeting old age the most expensive and least trustworthy was that of begetting children when a man was in the prime of life and might be laying by something for a rainy day.

Taken as a whole, agricultural labourers are not very "lasty". Their occupation is healthy, but their feeding is not nourishing, and their work is too early begun, and too laborious. Rheumatism is their bane, and its prevalence is probably due to draughty and damp houses, frequent exposure to all sorts of weather, and a bad and badly-cooked diet. Another point I have noticed, is that a farm-labourer's mind seems, as a rule, to give way sooner than that of a townsman. He exhibits symptoms of dotage and senility at a period earlier than those who exercise their brains more. The mental faculties of men appear to decay much more rapidly than those of women. A village crone keeps up her interest in life and her mental activity to the very last, and for every one who has patience to listen she has a great store of knowledge. But the man passes far more quickly "into second childishness and mere oblivion," far earlier, to use his own idiom, does he "fail in the memory".

These facts make his case all the more pitiable. Nothing could possibly appeal more to the heart of an ordinarily compassionate man than the sight of a respectable workman who has fought a good fight in life, who has been abstemious, frugal, and diligent; crippled with rheumatism, stupefying with age, and slowly drifting to the workhouse. For a lifetime he has been devoted to the service of humanity, growing and cultivating the fruits of the earth, and for a recompense so small that the most exacting could not expect him to save out of it. Moreover, if for nothing but policy, some help, that neither is, nor is esteemed, degrading, ought to be extended to such a man, because when he goes to the "house" it is a scandal all over the country-side. One villager says to another that "it is a crying shame that so-and-so has had to go on the parish. He worked hard all his life, and did the right thing by everybody."

Many landowners have long recognised that there is a certain amount of justice in this view of the case, and have humanely and beneficently started a private pension scheme of their own, paying a weekly sum out of their own pockets. As an example of what, on many estates, I found to be an established custom, the following figures may be useful. The estate to which they refer is one of between three and four thousand acres, and the owner is not a very rich man. I give the Christian name to indicate the sex, but leave out the surname. The amounts were being paid in January, 1892 :—

1. William, S., 5 shillings per week, . . since July, 1889.
2. Martha, R., 5 ,, ,, . . . since March, 1881.
3. Martha, P., 4 ,, ,, and cottage rent free since Jan., 1884.
4. Esther, T., 2 ,, ,, ,, ,, Dec., 1882.
5. Sophia, M., 2 ,, ,, ,, ,, Mar., 1890.

On the estate of at least one rich owner, every peasant who reaches the age of seventy gets seven and sixpence a week; if he be past work before arriving at the threescore and ten, he is paid six shillings. The men grumble heartily when compelled to retire on a pension, because they are paid at a much higher rate as long as they are employed. Old peasants dislike going into idleness so much, that I verily believe the average man among them would sooner work for ten shillings a week than accept a pension of nine and sixpence and enforced idleness. Theoretically, this unsystematic method of helping the aged is hopelessly demoralising and pauperising, but it is not so in actual practice. In the first place, it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. Ere the rustic pensioner has arrived at that stage in the journey, it may be assumed that his character is as well formed as it is ever likely to be. Care, that might possibly enervate and injure the young who still are ductile and pliable, may be lavished on the old without causing the most sensitive conscience to dread that it will have a bad moral effect. It is difficult to see how an owner can possibly hope to obtain anything in the way of political or other influence from caring for the aged poor, especially as it is no unusual thing for the payment to go on for years without anybody knowing except those directly concerned. Virtue is here compelled to be its own reward.

The only serious objection to this way of doing is, that it is like the Nonconformist religion, voluntary in principle, and that to ensure that the worn-out workers of the bad employer are attended to equally with those of the good employer, you must establish and endow philanthropy. In some respects, however, the individual is in this respect more efficient than the corporation. He knows exactly the

position of the recipients of his bounty. For example, the women mentioned above as having cottages rent free would, under a uniform system of State pensions, simply get their five shillings a week, or whatever the sum may be. As it happens, the landowner knows that in each instance there are relatives who will do the rest if only house-room is provided for the old woman. This generally means that they live rent free in her cottage, and, as a return, feed and buy what little clothes she may need.

Without passing any opinion upon the expediency of establishing a general system of pensions, I think something might be done towards brightening the last years of the worst paid class of rural labourer. Any scheme that assumed a contribution from him is doomed to failure, for several reasons. Firstly, although separate articles of consumption have fallen greatly in price during recent years, the agricultural labourer's expenses have increased. We may say he has made a mistake, but that does not mend matters. Hodge has put off his smock, and he will not put it on again, though he have to pinch or go into debt for more expensive clothes. A new and more expensive style of living has come into vogue. New and more expensive amusements are in fashion. Late in life he may be philosopher enough to disregard these trifles, but in youth they run away with his last penny. Age, at the only period when he could make any preparation for it, seems yet afar off, and, to say truth, the prospect of having to keep life in on a pension of five shillings a week is not an alluring one to those who still are young enough to hope. But where it can be proved that a man who is being disabled by age has done his best in the world, and yet has never been able to make more than forty pounds in any one year, the local

authority might be empowered to do something more than offer him admission to the "house". The expense would not be oppressively heavy, for, after all, it is not often in England that the righteous man is forsaken or the son of the just man compelled to beg his bread. But a single case will breed scandal enough to infect a whole parish with a bitter distaste for country life.

It is hardly necessary to say that the destitute villager, either male or female, is not usually a person to be very greatly pitied. One cannot help regretting that even the country ne'er-do-weels should come to grief, for many of them were pleasant, good-natured "characters," the enemies of none but themselves, who in many ways were clever and entertaining. Yet if they would, despite all good advice, waste their youthful prime in quoit matches at the public-house, or in poaching feats on the river or in the woods, if they would idle away the sunny hours of day when others were labouring in the field, they have no cause to complain if at evening they find themselves without wages. Instead of encouraging their repugnance to work, what should be done is something to force them into useful activity. Poaching used to be a cause for many of them going astray, and doubtless there were occasionally very regrettable cases, in which a promising youth became of bad repute, and branded as a gaol-bird, mostly through a love of sport. Some writers to this day assail the game-laws as a source of rural discontent. They are nothing of the kind; and sympathy with poaching, as it is carried on nowadays, is both foolish and ignorant. Every keeper and game preserver and farmer in the land knows that the village poacher is ceasing to exist. Those who make the calling a regular business are loafers from the small towns, who, in

gangs, systematically raid the best districts. Nor need there be any romance or mystery about their object, which is purely and simply one of theft. A hencoop is far more welcome to them than the best-stocked pheasant preserve, and their methods of slaughter are distinguished by nothing that bears the slightest affinity to sport.

The prevalent type of inmate in a country workhouse is the woman who has had a misfortune. Occasionally one may also find a widow, herself respectable and lately the wife of an industrious man, who assuredly deserves, and ought to receive, a better fate. With her, too, may be seen now and then an aged and friendless field-worker, who, after half-a-century of toil and independence, has been finally obliged to seek this refuge. The pity of it is that they should have to live in the same house with vicious village outcasts. But in general it is the fault of herself far more than of fate when a countrywoman drops so wofully in the scale.

As terror of the workhouse is an undoubted factor among the influences that cause many industrious and honest men and women to seek in town better wages than are procurable in their native place, to develop some plan for alleviating the troubles of old age, in cases where the people are deserving, would be a great strength to any scheme that would in other respects tempt people back to the soil. But it is clear and evident that the pension, relief, or whatever it may be termed, must be in the nature of a free gift without any previous subscription on the part of the recipients; in fact, the arrangements must differ essentially and completely from those which are contemplated for the purpose of creating a general system of old-age pensions.

CHAPTER IX.

NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES.

THAT there are some people who, out of pure shiftlessness, will starve in the midst of plenty, and others who, by their intelligence and thrift, would manage to flourish in a famine, is a statement so manifestly true of human nature in general, that it would hardly be necessary to repeat it, save for the purpose of making a particular application of the lesson to country life. A story, true to the last detail, and of which the hero—though there is nothing particularly heroic about him—is at the time of writing a flourishing healthy middle-aged man, will illustrate the point more effectually than an essay.

He was a cobbler in an English manufacturing town, afflicted with a chest disease, for which the doctor ordered change of air, and had improvidently married a strong servant girl who had come to town from a rural district. The shoemaker of her native village had died, and, very naturally, she suggested to her husband that it might be the saving of his life if he settled there. He did so in the year 1879, but for some time the venture was no success. Customers were not only few in number, but they were addicted to the credit system, and the hard work of making extra stout boots for them, with the continuous stooping it involved, did not conduce to the strengthening of the cobbler's chest. I may say here that the village is one I have visited annually for many years past, and in which there is not an inhabitant with whom I am not on familiar

speaking terms; and thus I got into the habit of hearing every May or June how the new-comer was getting on. "Eh, poor body, he has one foot in the grave," was the earliest description of comment. "Twins again!" became almost a commonplace, too, for his wife was inconveniently generous in the way of filling his quiver full. Now, one spring day, there came riding along the road a farmer with whom the girl had been at service. He is a very astute and close-fisted old fellow, and yet a kind one; and he pursed up his lips most disapprovingly when he looked at the half-waste garden and the empty pigsty, then passed in and found the husband as wan as a corpse, the wife care-stricken before her time, and the kitchen floor alive with crawling babies. "Umph, oddrabbit it sha't ha a pig, lass," he said to his former maid, as he hurried away. He was as good as his word; and down came the pigling from the farm, to the dismay of our city cobbler, whose first and natural impulse was to kill the poor beast and, ere his chest got worse, revel in one glorious feast of roast pork, like the patriarch, Isaac, feasting on savoury meat before he died.

The country-bred wife, however, would not permit anything of the kind. She had made up her mind to fatten it. "But how are we to get food," asked her husband, "since it is weeks since we had a dinner for ourselves?" "You go out and mend the poor thing's house, and I'll take care of that," said his wife. The short and the long of it was, that by one means or another she managed to get plenty of flesh on to its bones. "It will be poor bacon," remarked the neighbours at first when they saw her gathering and boiling nettles and dock leaves for it; but the animal grew amazingly under her treatment, though it looked a trifle lanky and greyhound-like at first. After harvest, however,

she made a most determined effort to get it into condition, and what with gleaning corn and gathering acorns, and one thing and another, managed to cram it so that its skin was as tight as a drum, and the most severe critics admitted it to be a pig that did credit to the village. Eventually it was killed, and half of it kept for household use, the other half sent to market, the proud wife declaring that it was all her doing—the beast had cost nothing.

But this did not represent all the profit. The main thing was that it set the cobbler a-thinking. He began for the first time to work his garden seriously that year, and found the exercise most beneficial to his health. Around him, as he discovered, were wild gardens, and orchards, and fruit-lands, abounding with produce that only required gathering. Above all he learned how to practically apply a love of animals, that before had been expressed only in a tender care of caged larks and bullfinches. He began to breed poultry and to sell eggs; he keeps bees, and reckons that for the last five years they have been worth on an average a pound a week to him; and his latest project has been to take some waste land and use it as a rabbit-warren. He is now a healthy, comfortable householder, and happy as the day is long among his small "bestial," and the cobbler's last has been permanently laid aside, because he says it is cheaper for him to buy boots than to make them. To the surrounding neighbours he is a wonder, and what they call "a rale janus"; and yet though most of them have had better opportunities than fell to his lot, they are continually complaining about the difficulty of making a livelihood, and many of them hope and dream for legislation that will bring back the golden age.

The story has not been told in order that the cobbler

may be taken as a model to be slavishly copied. Very seldom is any man able to bring the conduct of his own life to a successful issue by guiding it exactly according to the example of another. Not only the conditions, but the individual capacities of men vary too much for this to be possible. The moral of the tale is simply this, that the best way to help country people is to teach them how to help themselves. A self-reliant peasantry, depending neither on the charity of the rich nor on grandmotherly legislation, is the object to be aimed at.

They have it in their favour that they are engaged on an industry that never can fail. As long as there are people in England there will be a demand for food, and directly or indirectly all food comes from the land. But it is impossible to wander about our shires without seeing abundant evidence that the best is not being done with the soil. Only here and there, on the premises of the enterprising and energetic few, is there anything to show that the advance in knowledge, which has been so marked in recent years, is beginning to receive practical application. In how many counties is land that might be utilised going to waste? Even in situations eminently suited for the growth and sale of fruit, it is no unusual thing to be told by the shiftless and semi-destitute tenant of some half-cultivated holding, that he cannot make both ends meet, it does not pay to grow corn, and people will not buy his garden produce. A single glance round is enough to demolish any rising surprise that this should be so. Our friend has evidently not recognised that in these days of improved taste, and greater refinement, and keen competition, it is necessary for the producer, not only to bring to market goods of the highest class, but to do so according to the most economical

method. He is unaware of the new light thrown on fruit-growing, and is unable to account for the fact that the stringy woody fruit on his ancient apple and pear and plum trees—that besides are of the bad old-fashioned kinds — is unsalable. His garden might have been laid out by an ancestor of the eighteenth century, his bee-skeps, if he have any, are constructed as if all the valuable improvements of the last twenty years never had been made. The chickens that are about show him not to have the ghost of an idea in regard to modern poultry-farming.

What makes this backwardness appear all the blacker is, that here and there, all over England, in the most remote counties as well as in those close to London, the traveller comes upon model little homesteads and cottages, where it is as clear as day that modern ideas have been grasped and put into practice, where everything that is wanting in the other is to be found. Books, newspapers, and other machinery for the dissemination of ideas, are nowadays so effective, that a cottager in one of the Yorkshire Dales, if he be thoroughly interested in it, may, and in some cases does know (and practise) more about the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, the selection, rearing and care of small animals for the table, than many a suburban market-gardener or Surrey poultry-farmer.

It is not for the purpose of scolding the negligent or discouraging the provision of new facilities that I am pointing this out. Because certain difficulties are surmounted by one man out of a hundred, affords no reason for not removing them out of the way of the other ninety-nine. The secret of wise legislation, however, is also the

secret of wise private action; it is to select and strengthen the beneficial movement that has, so to speak, sprung into existence of its own accord. Within any reasonable distance of a good market, for example, we are learning from the results of private enterprise that a livelihood may be earned on a comparatively small plot of ground. Is it not wise then to use every legitimate means to bring the hiring or purchase of such parcels within the reach of the poorest man, provided only he has given proof of such skill in cultivation and love of the craft as are in themselves, if not guarantees of success, at least attributes without which success is impossible? But it would be correspondingly foolish to attempt any multiplication of small holdings in districts where the consolidation of farms is a practicable demonstration of the failure of small tenancies. In this question local conditions count for nearly everything.

But it may be contended that as legislation is made for the country as a whole, to say that what suits one locality would be hurtful to another, is virtually to be in opposition to Parliamentary action. That is not the case. To succeed is the only criterion of success, somebody has said, and the only sound principle on which "access to the soil" can be properly facilitated is the fitness of the applicant. No English labourer need be without his allotment now if he desire to have it, and wherever he be placed, the one guarantee that should be demanded before he receives any aid towards obtaining more land is, that he has proved himself a skilled husbandman in regard to this portion; and, generally speaking, the surest proof of that will be that he has saved something out of the proceeds. It may be taken as an axiom, that a prudent and frugal man, who

knows the local conditions thoroughly, will not risk his savings without some hope of return, and just as there are districts in which no demand has arisen for allotments, so there are others in which larger tenancies will not be asked for.

A thorough carrying out of this principle would have another signal advantage. It must never be forgotten that there can be neither sense nor expedience in any attempt to fix the present residents in the villages and their offspring wholly and permanently on the soil. Such of them as have talents peculiarly fitted for business or mechanics or artisanship would leave the fields despite of any possible inducements to remain. They care nothing about access to the soil; they want access to the counter, the desk, and the workshop, and, moreover, it is there that we need them. If our great army of industry is to be made thoroughly effective it will be as much by helping the born mechanic as by helping the born farm-labourer into his place.

For this reason it is impossible to repeat too often or too emphatically that education has to play a more useful and important part than it has yet done. It has been recognised in various ways that the country boy is not being fitted for the battle of life by the means that exist, and it requires no prophetic insight to see that very great changes are likely to take place shortly. By the Local Taxation Act of 1891 the County Councils were presented with the pecuniary means of rearranging the teaching in their schools and supplying the pupils with technical education. Several private Members of Parliament have either drawn up bills or spoken of schemes to make agriculture a prominent subject in country schools, while various schoolmasters and

others have printed cut-and-dried plans for effecting the reform. But from any of these sources it is unreasonable to expect a satisfactory solution of the difficulty. The County Councils are for the most part excellent administrative bodies, and may be depended upon to carry out in a business-like manner any scheme presented to them with due authority. It is, however, useless to expect them to originate plans of their own, and, indeed, I have found that their apparently innocent attempts were liable to misrepresentation. "Dairy schools be ——," said an energetic Radical lecturing reformer to me. "What are they if not for farmers' daughters? I maintain that it was for the benefit of the farm-servants that the grant was made, and I'll never rest till they get the benefit of it." It appears that the principles of devolution has its drawbacks as well as its advantages—the smaller the body the more open it is to direct attack. Nevertheless the Radical agitator was right; it is the peasant girls, and not the farmers' daughters, with whom we have to begin. As to the schoolmasters, it is sufficient to say, in an ideal "course for secondary agricultural schools," out of every 102 hours of teaching it is proposed to devote five to the subject of agriculture.

To go to the root of the evil it will be necessary for the matter to be taken in hand by some central authority capable of treating the subject in a broader and more comprehensive spirit than is possible either to a local body or those engaged in carrying out the work. With the class of scholars to be dealt with formal agriculture is, as a matter of course, out of the question as a teaching subject, though it would be well to leave open a way from the village school to the agricultural college. But there are many branches of

knowledge that lead to agriculture rather than form part of it, instruction in which might be usefully blended with the necessary drill in reading and writing. To know the towns of Europe or to be able to draw a map of the county lived in is all very well, but it is as knowledge to a country boy neither so attractive nor so useful as to understand the geography of the meadows and streams, the woods and arable lands of his own parish. English History is a noble study, but it is not more so than Natural History, and when it comes to farming, or even working an allotment, the boy who knows the wayside weeds in the lane that leads to school, and the wild creatures in the hedgeroots, is more than likely to hold his own with him who can run you off the Kings of England and the Great Battles with their dates. The great thing is to have in the curriculum a course of instruction such as cannot possibly be got up from books, that is utterly unattainable save by the direct use of the senses of sight, touch, smell, or hearing; in other words, knowledge the acquisition of which affords a proof that master and pupil alike have been examining nature for themselves.

At present this is utterly impossible, and it is useless to make over funds to the County Council or draw up elaborate time-tables till the main obstacle is removed, that is to say, till the teachers themselves are chosen on account of their familiarity with country life. It is by no means an insuperable difficulty, because, as a matter of fact, a great many teachers are so enamoured of this kind of knowledge, that they devote a great part of their frequent holidays and times of leisure to acquiring it. From one point of view it is unfortunate that these are the more intelligent members of the class, who therefore obtain the fat situations in town, while

their duller brethren are obliged to be content with the lean country schools.

It is surely evident, however, that instruction of this kind is eminently calculated to develop whatever love of country life is latent in the village boy. In point of fact, he is at present grossly ignorant of his surroundings. Ask him the name of the commonest plant, or of any wild bird except perhaps a shufflewing, a chaffinch, or a yellow-hammer, and the chances are very decidedly against your obtaining a correct answer. I do not speak entirely from my own impression on the point, although I do not often miss the chance of talking to a country boy, but inspectors of schools, clergymen, schoolmasters, farmers, and landed proprietors have, when asked, invariably confirmed my belief that mere book knowledge is being crammed into children at a rate so alarming that they really have not time to acquire the much more valuable information that comes from direct observation. Under a system such as I have suggested the village school would act as a sort of sieve, letting those who did not like country life escape from it to the pursuits more suitable to the temperament of the scholar, but holding back those with an inborn taste for rural pursuits. In these days of perfect and general freedom, the only bond that will satisfactorily tie the labourer to the soil is the strongest, and yet under certain circumstances the most fragile, for it is the silken cord of love.

If this feeling be really kindled and revived, it is easy to see that it will act upon the machinery prepared, as fire does when applied to the coals of a steam engine. Without it small holdings and large holdings, co-operative farming and peasant proprietorship will all be instituted or encouraged in vain. We have to face the fact that the present

trouble arises mainly from the peasant's lack of interest in agricultural pursuits. He neglects his opportunities mainly because his attention lies elsewhere. How else can you account for the fact, that in the self-same village you may find an aged woman or a crippled man living in perfect comfort, earning fifteen or twenty, or even thirty shillings a week, it may be from bees, it may be from some other source, and neighbours on either side healthy and in the prime of life complaining that they have not constant work and that their wages are only twelve shillings a week? In the neglected opportunities of the villager lies the condemnation of the method by which he is taught, for they show that his intelligence has not yet been roused into genuine activity. And if, as seems probable, we are about to embark on many new schemes for bettering his material condition, it will be very well to recognise at the outset that these will be of no avail till he has been taught to take full advantage of them.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

In the opinion of just and moderate-minded men it is a cause for regret that the migration of country people to town should have become the subject of keen political controversy. Yet when the country is menaced by the most formidable evil that has ever endangered its strength, it is difficult to believe that anything but good can come out of an agitation that has attracted the attention of the

clearest and most acute intellects in England. The very fact of popular interest being thoroughly roused is a guarantee that the opposing forces will be fairly balanced. Conservatives may be too apathetic, too much inclined to think that all change is injurious, too much given to the why-can't-you-let-it-alone attitude, but they are being progged into greater activity. Radicals, again, though their bark is worse than their bite, are over-disposed to pull down the house merely because the fireplace wants mending, and are more in need of a bridle than a spur.

Both are inclined to make the question a new battle-ground in the secular land war. The former adduce it as an excuse for reconsidering our policy of free trade; the latter, for embarking on a series of novel agrarian experiments. Whoever stands free from the fetters of partisanship will agree that the extremists on either side are entirely wrong. If we can draw any safe inference from what is taking place in other parts of the world, or even in the separate districts of our own richly diversified country, it is as certain as anything can be that neither the re-imposition of Protective duties nor the introduction of any known system of land tenure would check the movement. There does not seem to be a country in the world which does not suffer more or less from the same cause. "Servants for agricultural or domestic work cannot be got for any money," telegraphed the press correspondents in Austria, while in March of the present year the poor of Vienna were scrambling for charitable doles of bread, and that is but one flagrant example of what is going on and is likely to go on in all the great Protectionist States of the Continent. But in America, and more notably still in our own Australian colonies, where land, so to speak, is to be

had for the asking, the rulers are confronted by the same difficult problem.[1]

These considerations make it perfectly plain that no action Parliament can take is at all likely to result in a rural millennium either for workpeople or landlords. Yet they by no means justify the Conservatives in folding their arms and allowing things to take their course. By wise

[1] The following example will make this clear. First take the case of the United States; the following table is from the *Census Bulletin*, No. 52, dated 10th April, 1891:—

Census Years.	Population of United States.	Population of Cities.	Inhabitants of Cities in each 100 of the Total Population.
1830	12,866,020	864,509	6·72
1840	17,069,453	1,453,994	8·52
1850	23,191,876	2,897,586	12·49
1860	31,443,321	5,072,256	16·13
1870	38,558,371	8,071,875	20·93
1880	50,155,783	11,318,547	22·57
1890	62,622,250	18,235,670	29·12

That this state of affairs is occurring in our Colonies also may be shown by the following extract: "In 1881 the urban population (of New South Wales) was 433,391, and the rural population was 314,850. There were also located in ships, boats, etc., 3227. Thus, out of every 10,000 of the population, 5766 resided in towns and villages, and 4192 in the rural parts of the Colony. In 1871 the numbers out of every 10,000 were 4646 in the towns and 5306 in the country. In 1861 the numbers were 4549 in the towns and 5396 in the rural parts of the Colony. . . . From 1861 to 1871 there was only an increase of 97 persons in every 10,000 of the urban population, while in the succeeding period the increase in the towns reached 1120 persons in every 10,000 of the urban population" (*Census of New South Wales, Report*, dated 1883-4). There were, at the last Census, nearly 270 acres to every man, woman and child in the Colony.

and prudent action, a remnant at least may be induced to remain on the soil and cultivate it.

The prime reason for the majority leaving is that of all roads to wealth agriculture is the slowest. It demands ceaseless and severe economy, long waiting for results, and a most saving disposition. Almost farthing by farthing did the old-fashioned farmer fill the stocking-foot that served him for a purse. But a generation which possesses railways and telegraph wires, wonderful ships and electric motive power, will not submit to this long delay. Has any one who never had practical experience of it ever tried to realise the difference between a salary of two pounds a week earned by regular work and an income of one hundred pounds a year obtained by *la petite culture?* In the one case the man has definite well-defined duties and regular hours, with the certainty that he on pay-day will receive a certain sum of money. When work is done for the day he has no more trouble or anxiety about either it or his wages. To make the same sum, the other must toil late and early, never thinking the time of rest has come until he can do no more. He must be anxious and watchful over weather and market. At the end, his money comes in such driblets that, as he says, "he never knows the good of it". Were a man offered his choice between the one situation and the other, that of a cultivator with an elastic but uncertain income, or that of permanent service with a sure but rigid one, he would have a very unusual love of gardening if he hesitated for a second in his choice. Throw into the scale the attractions of town, a greater chance of rising in the world, far more opportunities of placing his children well, a happier and easier existence for his wife, and the rival claims will not stand comparison.

It were greatly to be desired that some one with the necessary *prestige* and authority would expostulate with the Liberals on the course they are taking in a matter bearing upon this—I say Liberals because they are the more active and aggressive, not because Conservatives are a whit wiser. For the revolt *of* labour one may feel sympathy, but it is an unfortunate circumstance that the more foolish propagandists are changing it into a revolt *against* labour. It makes one see that there was far more foresight in Carlyle's exaltation of the nobility of work than his own contemporaries dreamt of. Can labouring men be blamed for inferring from the utterances of their leaders that toil and pleasure exist in perpetual divorce, and that what is taken from the one is added to the other? How many legislative projects of the time are built upon this fallacy, how much stirring oratory has only that for basis! Working men are told day after day in press and newspaper that servitude is intolerable, that toil is intolerable, that the hours they have to remain at it are intolerable. But does any thoughtful man fail to admit, at least in the secrecy of his own heart, that what is really intolerable is this false and misleading claptrap? The only really happy man in this world is he who finds pleasure in the accomplishment of his daily task; and he who cannot do that, be his hours as short, his wages as high, his duties as light as heart could wish, never will be other than miserable.

These observations apply with peculiar force to the calling of agriculture. It is a business in which the returns come in slowly; it necessitates a frugal way of living and the most unwearied industry. Unless a man finds pleasure in the open air and in watching the earth bring forth her increase, unless he love to be amongst growing plants and animals

young and old, the calling must be almost unbearable. In a manufacturing country such as ours, with its mines and factories and workshops, there are innumerable temptations for men to quit husbandry and become tradesmen.

Yet whoever looks to the future must be troubled by just misgivings as to the effect of this wholesale and world-wide abandonment of the most useful of all callings. London, "the great wen" of England, cannot go on growing for ever at its present rate, especially as "the great wens" of other nations are annually becoming more formidable rivals to it. Many politicians affect to view the future with philosophic complacency. Supply and demand, they say, will inevitably adjust the balance. Neither strikes nor any other form of combination can maintain a high rate of wages in town if, simultaneously with the inevitable falling away of profits, the number of workers continues to grow and multiply. In other words, employment will cease altogether for many, and become less profitable for all. The ingenious Socialistic schemes that are rife hardly promise to do more than lengthen out and intensify the misery. Suppose, as is being constantly urged, that in bad times relief works were to be started in London, is it not apparent that they would be attractions for the destitute and lazy throughout the kingdom? How can you permanently raise "the submerged tenth" of a thickly-populated world? The most effective scheme imaginable is no more than a bucket dipped into a pool fed by springs inexhaustible. In addition to that, such plans depend for their support upon either forced or voluntary contributions from capital, and capital in such conditions must be a diminishing quantity. The timid Conservative who would "let things be—they will right themselves," and the Socialist plunging into mad schemes that

are backed only by a thin and superficial philanthropy, are opposing forces that by an apparent paradox are working towards the same fatal result. Non-interference and over-interference when practised by two opposing parties can hardly end otherwise than in disaster.

The practical question then is what can possibly be done to attenuate the dimensions of a movement that it is impossible and even undesirable to arrest, that has gone on since ever there were cities for country people to flock to, and that is going on in every portion of the habitable globe. What all parties are agreed upon is that here in England it has attained abnormal and unhealthy proportions. To say exactly what number of inhabitants ought to be on cultivated land is impossible, because there are so many kinds of cultivation. On a large sheep-farm there are naturally fewer than on an area devoted to market gardening, and in striking an average it is difficult to take fully into account the waste land and water. In parts of Cumberland the population has fallen as low as one inhabitant to twenty-four acres, but in that county, out of a total area of 970,161 acres, only 641,396 acres were returned in 1891 as being under all kinds of crops, bare, fallow, and grass. Taking the counties, however, in which there is comparatively little heath or mountain land, there seems to be a curious tendency for the population to drop to about one inhabitant to every five acres. Herefordshire is a very fair example. It is a very fertile county; famously so, in fact. Of its 532,898 acres of land and water no fewer than 444,581 acres were under crops in 1891. It also compares tolerably, considering its extent, with other counties in respect to the number of allotments and small holdings. Yet these are the figures showing its population and area in districts, with the decrease in each.

District.	Area in Statute Acres.	Inhabited Houses.		Population.		Decrease.
		1881.	1891.	1881.	1891.	
Ledbury.....	48,783	2753	2764	12,691	12,615	76
Ross.....	55,471	3405	3439	16,365	15,708	657
Hereford.....	144,991	8745	8786	42,848	41,889	959
Weobly.....	48,959	1789	1718	8179	7414	765
Bromyard.....	61,659	2400	2363	11,054	10,562	492
Leominster.....	64,416	3181	3044	14,654	13,816	838
Kington.....	94,762	2575	2480	12,197	11,387	810
Totals.....	519,141	24,848	24,594	117,988	113,391	4597

There is, of course, a slight discrepancy between the total area of the divisions and the total area of land and water (532,898 acres) given in the agricultural returns. But it has to be noted that in this purely agricultural county the population has fallen to 113,391 inhabitants to 444,581 *cultivated* acres, or about one inhabitant to 3·8 acres of tilled soil. Take away the towns, and it will be found that every five acres of cultivated land in Herefordshire do not quite carry one inhabitant. It would require a very extended and complete local knowledge to say that over all England this state of affairs is being gradually reached, because the rural districts are honeycombed with industrial communities. All that I have been able to do is to test the rule in those parts of the country with which I am most familiar, and it has been most surprising with how much uniformity the figures have come out to one inhabitant to something between four and five acres of cultivated soil. Now, in 1891 the average number of occupants to each inhabited house was 5·31, and that figure will help us to estimate the number of households on agricultural land. We have already seen that in Herefordshire there were in 1891 a cultivated area of

444,581 acres, and 24,954 inhabited houses. In other words, there was on an average one house standing on every eighteen acres. Allow for the urban population, and it will be seen one household to twenty acres of cultivated land is an estimate that cannot be far wrong. Does any reasonable man consider that to be a healthy state of affairs? Yet it seems likely to grow worse instead of better. It is a noteworthy coincidence, however, that among farmers the opinion is very prevalent that if the ordinary agricultural crops are grown, twenty acres fairly represent the amount of land required for the support of a family; that is to say, that it is hardly possible to earn a livelihood out of any smaller holding.

A great philosopher has pointed out the gross fallacy of the assertion that Parliament makes the laws. It does nothing of the kind. Laws are made in the hearts and minds of the people, whose representatives are only able to translate them into the language of the statute book, to register them, and to see to their administration. Mr. A. J. Balfour found another expression for the same thought, when in a famous rectorial address he pointed out the infinitesimally small influence legislation had exerted upon the destinies of nations. Nearly all progress and development have been a result of individual action. And if that is so, it is perfectly hopeless for a body of men to imagine that they sitting at Westminster can excogitate some kind of plan or political nostrum that will annihilate a great social movement—they might as well attempt to control the irresistible forces of nature, to curb the wind or bridle the tempest. Furthermore, the greatest evil that could befal us would be to allow *doctrinaires* of any kind to make a kind of Roman tortoise of this migration. It will be

remembered that when the legions advanced to battle they sometimes raised all their shields above their heads, making a canopy, to protect themselves from missiles. Under the cover of the rural discontent certain Tories would re-enact the corn dues, certain Socialists would play havoc with private property. But all experience tends to show that neither the one measure nor the other, whatever may be its intrinsic merits, would bring about the result prophesied for it.

What we can do we must be content to achieve slowly and gradually. If a new generation loves country life as this generation dislikes it, the reason will be that with true foresight we begin to instil this affection into them at school. Up to now we have taught the rustic youths as if we had assumed they were going to be clerks, artisans, and mechanics. Yet we affect surprise at their natural predilections! Would it not be well to go on the other tack for a change, and work as if at all events some of them meant to stay on the land?

Secondly, it must be admitted, in practice as well as in theory, that our rural workers are entitled, like all the rest of us, to hope. We have effectually aroused ambitions, which never can and never will be stilled again. Let a man love the land ever so much, when once he is educated, not only by the schoolmaster, but by the wider intercourse that his forefathers never enjoyed, it is utterly impossible that he should drudge and drudge at farmwork with no outlook save that which is bounded by the workhouse. He must see that, provided he have the requisite ability and industry, there is a career before him by which he can at least be assured that the children who follow him will have a more favourable starting-point than fell to his share.

Even here, however, general legislation cannot be of much avail. There is no satisfaction to a man in knowing that he may have help to secure a small holding if he happen to reside in one of those numerous localities that are not suitable for remunerative cultivation in small patches. So the allotment that is useful in one district is useless in another. Little dairy farms may succeed in one county and fail in the adjacent one. Fruit culture will pay in one place and be ruinous in another. Co-operative agriculture is the best solution of the difficulties on some farms, but on many others it is not practicable at all. One man may, by reason of favouring conditions, make a fortune out of rabbits, and another equally skilled, but less fortunate, meet with nothing but failure in attempting to live out of warrening.

The lesson is that the prosperity of the peasants must ultimately depend entirely on themselves. For them, as for others, there is no royal road to fortune, and if they are weak enough to accept the flattery poured into their ears, they will do so only to their own loss. When the spoiling takes place, if ever it does, it will not be they who carry off the plunder. And, indeed, one of the first tasks of those who educate them will be to get rid of a certain shiftlessness that has increased with the growth of their dislike to farmwork. It will be the duty of those who lead the democracy, unless that leadership is resolved into mere time-serving and place-hunting, to explain these and some other disagreeable truths to the farm-servants.

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